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Perception of confiding among siblings during middle adulthood years

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Abstract

The present investigation was an exploratory attempt to examine the type of confiding among middle aged siblings. Gender differences regarding confiding in sibling dyad compositions were computed using t-test. A representative sample of 120, married middle aged adults (40-60yrs), belonging to Hindu nuclear families having at least one living biological sibling between the age difference of 1-4 years were selected from Udaipur city of Rajasthan state of India. Adult-Sibling Relationship Scale (ASRS) was developed, standardized and used. The results of the study revealed that less than half per cent of subjects confide in their sibling about anything. Middle-aged adults rarely preferred sibling over spouse or children in sharing their inner most feelings. In case of sibling dyads, sister-sister dyad reported to have highest confiding among all other sibling dyadic gender compositions.

Key words: Adult sibling, confiding, middle adulthood.

Introduction

In the daily round of activities that occupy the foreground in adult lives, siblings generally play a minor role. The relationship that any two siblings share is a unique one. It is one of the most interesting to study because it is typically the longest relationship one will have beginning at birth and lasting a lifetime, longer than husband-wife or parent-child relationship. In pattern familiar to other areas of family study a research on sibling relationships tend to focus either on childhood or old age. Although developmentalist stresses the importance of siblings as childhood rival and mentors and family researchers argue that siblings take on a renewed importance during adulthood.

During adulthood the relations among siblings are mediated by marriage, career, parenthood, distances and different other roles where they become actively involved in their own families of procreation. The siblingship tasks of caretaking, nurturance etc. are transformed into tasks addressing adult needs, where they have to care for their spouses, children, in-laws and aging parents. Sibling interaction becomes voluntary during middle adult years. Cross sectional evidences suggest that average adult has contact with sibling once or twice in a year during middle adulthood years (White and Reidman, 1992). Most adult siblings perceive significant reciprocal obligations among each other. Even conflicts arise regarding division of parental property or caring for the aging parents. Various life transitions either bring siblings close or drift them apart.

Siblings continue to relate as friends and confidants throughout mid adulthood when family of procreation and economic activities command priority and when sibling interaction has become voluntary. However siblings who are compatible or emotionally close are still less likely to share intimate personal life details or consult their siblings while making important family decisions. It is the stage when self fulfillment is integrated with launching of their children and caring for their aging parents. However after launching of children or parent death these adults are left all by themselves and call for a strong urge to have a sound social support network. Middle adulthood is a pivotal conflux where adults should reestablish their ties with their siblings and bestow more on their relationship. The understanding of sibling relationship that is present in middle adulthood is needed for the betterment of families in later years. Therefore the present study was planned with the objective to assess type of confiding among siblings and factor affecting confiding of middle aged adults with their siblings with respect to their age and to examine difference of confiding in various sibling dyadic compositions.

Methodology

Sample: The sample for the present investigation comprised of 120 married middle aged adults belonging to the age range of 40-60 years, belonging to Hindu nuclear families of Udaipur city of Rajasthan state of India. The subjects selected had at least one living biological sibling and the age difference of 1-4 years from sibling. if subjects had two or more than two sibling within

the age difference of 1-4 years than random selection technique was opted to select the index sibling with whom subject described his/her relationship with. The age range (40-60yrs) was further subdivided in two age cohorts.

i. 40-50 years
ii. 50-60 years

A sample of 60 was randomly selected from each age cohort making a total sample of 120. From the first age cohort i.e. (40-50 years) 30 males and 30 females were selected. Similarly from the remaining cohort i.e. (50-60 years) 30 males and 30 females were selected. Further the presence of different dyads that were naturally present in selected sample of 120 was found. A detail regarding availability of dyads is given in Table 1.

Table 1. Percentage distribution of sibling dyads

Sibling Dyads	Males (60)	Females (60)
Male subjects with Brother i.e. (Brother-Brother dyad)	55.0%	-
Male subjects with Sister i.e. (Brother-Sister dyad)	45.0%	-
Female subjects with Sister i.e. (Sister-Sister dyad)	-	51.6%
Female subjects with Brother i.e. (Sister-Brother dyad)	-	48.4%

Sample selection: In order to select representative sample from five zones, Collectorate office and UIT (Urban Improvement Trust) office of Udaipur city were contacted to obtain the list of colonies. From the list of colonies, three colonies were selected from each zone, thus total 15 colonies were selected randomly for the research investigation. Door-to door preliminary survey was conducted on identified subjects by using self-structured proforma. The proforma were scrutinized and sample was selected who fulfilled the delimitations of the study.

Tool used for data collection: Data were collected using self-structured Adult Sibling Relationship Scale (ASRS), which was prepared after exhaustive consultation of theoretical and empirical evidences on adult sibling relationship. The third dimension of ASRS is Confiding. The scale was initially standardized by calculating reliability and validity of the scale. Reliability was calculated by split-half technique and using Spearman Brown Prophecy formula. For Confiding it was estimated to be (0.87). Similarly content validity and intrinsic validity was measured. Intrinsic validity score for Confiding was (93 %).

Data analysis: The responses obtained were coded, tabulated and frequency percentages were calculated for each item for the detailed assessment of confiding among siblings. The difference in overall Confiding in sibling dyad compositions was measured by using t-test.

Results and discussion

It is clear from the Figure 1 that less than half per cent of subjects confide in their sibling about anything. Similar scenario was being observed where less than half per cent of subject's sibling shares everything with them. Middle-aged adults rarely preferred sibling over spouse or children in sharing their inner most feelings.

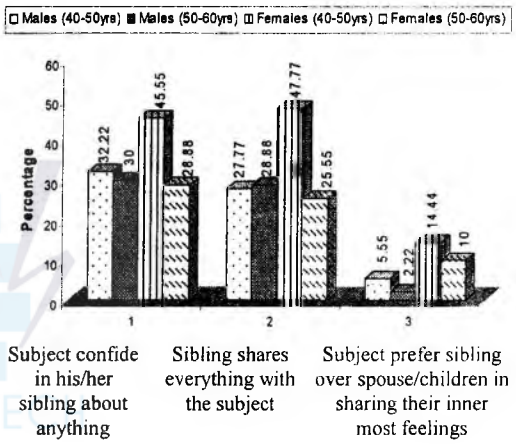


Figure 1. Percentage distribution of middle aged (40-60 yrs) males and females regarding their perception of sharing innermost feelings with their sibling

It might be due to the reason that after marriage, spouse dominates as confidants and companions for both males and females. As middle aged adults who were married for 18-30 years from now and are living with their spouse since then. Their interaction with their sibling gets limited, thereby decreasing their sharing with them. In nuclear family type spouse or children is the primary source of support and hence would be trusted and counted for whenever the need arises. Connidis and Davies (1990) in a research article found that the absence of children and spouse heightens the importance of sibling as confidants, siblings occupy a greater proportion of the confidant networks of the single and childless than of any other married or parent group.

The data generated from the study in figure 2 revealed that comparatively higher

percentage of males than females belonging to both the age cohorts' shares topics of common interest with sibling. Analysis of results highlight that middle aged adults do confide in or share their matters with their sibling. But the sharing is mostly superficial. They share topics of common interests like movies, politics, music, business, current affairs etc. or superficial things like general well-being of sibling, family well-being or the other family members. Revealing or sharing their family matters or their innermost feelings to their siblings undoubtedly was not preferred by majority of the subjects. It may account to the reason that family matters are considered to be a private thing, which is not preferred to be discussed outside the family. According to Cicirelli (1991) siblings who considered themselves compatible and report being emotionally close are still less likely to share intimate personal life details or consult their sibling while making important family decisions.

Table 2 illustrates the gender wise difference in confiding between siblings' dyads. It can be clearly perceived from the table that sister-sister dyad accounted highly significant difference with brother-brother dyad. Whereas significant difference at 5% level of significance was reported between sister- sister and brother-sister dyad regarding confiding. On the other hand statistically significant difference was not reported for sister-brother and brother-brother dyad. A highly significant difference was observed for mixed gender pairs i.e. sister-brother and brother- sister dyad.

It can be seen that sister- sister pairs scored (13.19) mean score, which is highest among other pairs.. It can be analyzed that females involve more in confiding to their sisters than brothers. It can be based on the fact that females being more close to their sister can rely on them in any matter. They confide more in their sisters because they are age peers, understand each other more and have gender specific similarities than males. According to Saxton (1996) women are more socialized to talk about feelings and opinions then men and they more often use conversation to develop or maintain emotional ties and show commitment to and involvement with others. In a study Peters et al. (1987) found that women have richer more intimate relationships than men. In addition women tend to confide in other women, while men generally rely on their spouses for emotional intimacy. On the other hand brothers confide more in their sisters rather than their brothers. It could be attributed to the reason that brothers when close in age develop competitive position in the family, which can lead to hatred or jealousy between them. This aggravates when property inheritance leads to disputes thus lessening the confiding.

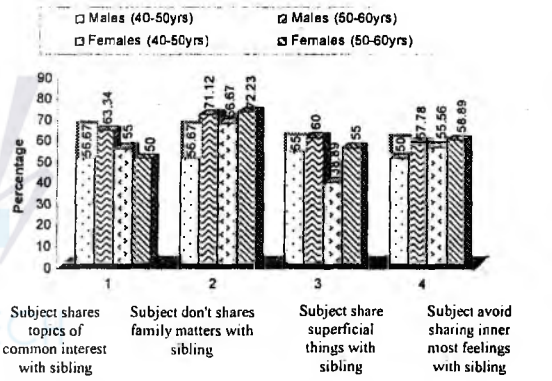


Figure 2. Percentage distribution of middle aged (40-60 yrs) males and females regarding their perception of superficial sharing with their siblings

Table 2. t-test for examining gender wise difference between sibling dyads regarding confiding during middle adulthood years

Dimensions	Mean	S.D	Calculated t-value
Female subjects with Sister i.e. (Sister-Sister dyad)	13.19	3.72	8.18**
Male subjects with Brother i.e. (Brother-Brother dyad	6.55	2.74	
Female subjects with Sister i.e. (Sister-Sister dyad)	13.19	3.72	2.71*
Male subjects with Sister i.e. (Brother-Sister dyad)	10.85	2.70	
Female subjects with Brother i.e. (Sister-Brother dyad)	5.76	3.40	1.01
Male subjects with Brother i.e. (Brother-Brother dyad	6.55	2.74	
Female subjects with Brother i.e. (Sister-Brother dyad)	5.76	3.40	6.18**
Male subjects with Sister i.e. (Brother-Sister dyad)	10.85	2.70	

* represents significant values at 5% level of significance

** represents significant values at 1% level of significance

Conclusion

Sibling relations signify the formality or obligations of social relationships. It can be concluded from the results that sibling relations do not develop to the extent of intimacy. They are impersonal and individualistic and individuals are mainly concerned with the circle of his or her nuclear family or family of procreation. The confiding among sibling is of superficial nature which in turn is influenced by various factors and life transitions.Nowadays with life becoming more and more mechanical with career and money taking highest priority, sibling relations especially in urban context are taking a major turn and are following the similar pattern as it is in the west. Therefore it is important to nurture this unique relationship so its value and importance remain intact.

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