

Experience of Sibling Relationship: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

Siblings share an intricate; beautiful yet complex relationship by design. Their bond transforms from fighting for attention from parents, rivalries in childhood to deeper understanding of each other's individuality; often coming to rely on each other and becoming each other's support system in adulthood. The study was conducted with an objective to find out the experience of sibling relationship. Qualitative research method was used with full informed consent from participants. In first phase of the study the researcher developed semi-structured interviewed schedule. In second phase the researcher conducted qualitative study was conducted among four young women, of age ranging from 20-25 years. The sample from various North Indian States: Haryana, New Delhi and Uttar Pradesh were purposively selected for the study. The interviews were recorded, all the recordings were listened again and again carefully in order to get a clear sense of participant's explanation and views. They were transcribed into text and analyzed. The data analysis was performed simultaneously with data collection. The meaningful units were extracted from the participants in the form of open codes. After that, the codes were reviewed for several times and those which had similarity were classified into themes and sub-themes. Peer debriefing and member checking were used as strategies of rigor in the study. The findings of the study reported the relationship between siblings. The themes developed such as, Infights during childhood and/or adulthood, parental influences, evolution of sibling relationship in adults, common interests and appreciation and/or grievance. This study also provided insights into contrasting relationships shared by same sex siblings and opposite sex siblings in contemporary North Indian states.

Keywords: Sibling, Relationship, Experience

Introduction

Sibling relationship is filled with joy, mischief, love and wonder. Growing up with sibling plays a key role in development of a child. There has been minimal research available on the relationship among siblings. The major focus of research so far has been on parenting style and sibling birth order. Sibling relationship has been extensively researched in US, Canada, Western Europe (Howe et al., 2022). Analysis on sibling relationship emerged from the West cannot be exclusively contextualized in third world countries. It is, therefore, an emerging research area in India.

Childhood with sibling is filled with endless rough & tumble and collaborative play. It especially fosters social and emotional development in children; they learn to be more patient, empathetic and responsible

for one another (Richmond et al., 2005; Garfinkel et al., 2007). The long-lasting intimate relationship shared by siblings acts as an instrumental support to one another. Besides teaming up for fun and play. Siblings do share challenges while growing up together such as, fighting for same toys/clothes/objects, fighting to be favourite child of their parents and what not (Kolak et al., 2011; Kramer et al., 2019). And as children grow into unique individuals with unique perspectives; they are bound to collide. The collisions often cause friction, fighting and disagreement amongst each other. Nevertheless, the positive influences of sibling relationship often outweigh the negatives (Recchia et al., 2009; Kolak et al., 2011). Hence, the objective of the study is to explore the experience of sibling relationship in young adults.

Methodology

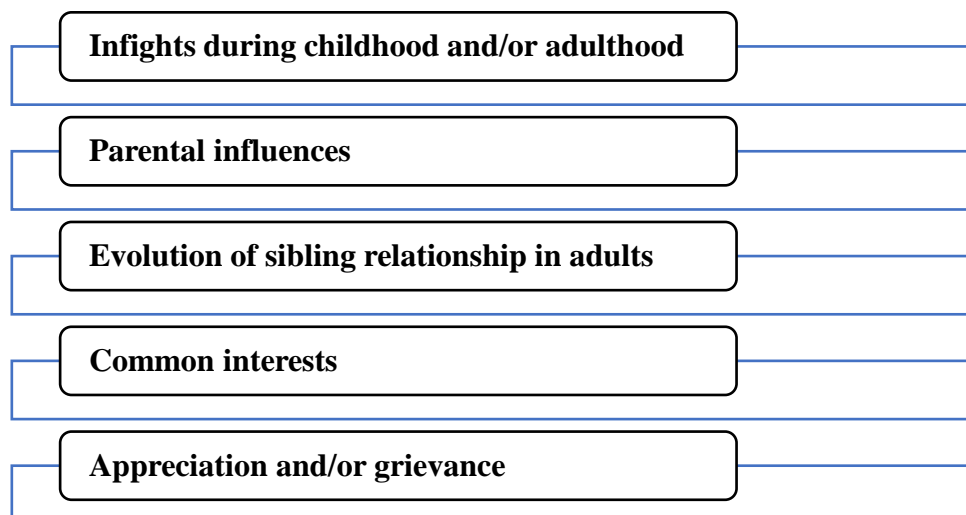
Method

Qualitative research design was used with full informed consent from participants. The study was conducted in two phases as follows:

- In first phase of the study, a semi-structured interviewed schedule was developed to study sibling relationship.
- In the second phase of the study, the interview schedule was conducted among 4 female participants of age group of 20-25 years, picked purposively from Haryana, New Delhi and Uttar Pradesh. The interviews were recorded, and all the recordings were listened again and again carefully during the transcription process. The data was transcribed into text for qualitative data analysis. Recurrent patterns were identified and categorized into themes and sub themes. Peer debriefing and member checking were used as strategies of rigor in the study

Procedure

A semi-structured interview schedule was developed to explore various elements of sibling relationship. The interviews were recorded, all the recordings were listened again and again carefully in order to get a clear sense of participant's explanation and views. They were transcribed into text and analyzed. The data analysis was performed simultaneously with data collection. The meaningful units were extracted from the participants in the form of open codes. After that, the codes were reviewed for several times and those which had similarity were classified into themes and sub-themes. Peer debriefing and member checking were used as strategies of rigor in the study. Finally, five themes emerged from the data as follows,



Findings

The sample was purposively selected from post graduate students of Developmental Sciences, at Delhi University. The participants in the age group of 20-25 years who live with their siblings, hailing from various North Indian States: Haryana, New Delhi and Uttar Pradesh were selected.

Numerous themes emerged through qualitative data analysis. Following are the quotations from the participants under the themes developed:

1. *Infights during childhood and/or adulthood*

“तु पानी पीने गये और मेरे लिये नहीं लाए”, “*she doesn't have to ask for permission, I have to*”, “उसको कोई कुछ नहीं बोलता, मुझे बोलते है”, “*she is always giving me orders*”, “*she create mess of the whole room*”, “*I am older, respect me*”, “उसका *behaviour* ठीक करने की सारी *responsibility* मेरी है”, “*you lock up the gate*”, ““मैं कुत्तों को घुमाने लेके गया, तु उनके पैर धो””, “वह देर रात तक बाहर रह सकता है”, “*he wants me to get a job, instead of doing masters*”, “*she forgets about me at parties*”, “*irritates me sometimes*”, “*don't get space*”, “*you didn't give me my charger*”, “*I share every detail, you dont*”, “*checks my phone in my absence*”, “बहुत *controlling* था”.

Sense of unequal power distribution and frustration. The speaker expresses feelings of being controlled and overlooked, particularly in relation to a female figure who seems to assert authority. The speaker highlights instances where they feel obligated to seek permission while the other person does not, leading to a sense of imbalance. There was a clear sentiment of resentment regarding orders given by the other person, as well as complaints about their disruptive behavior, such as creating a mess in shared spaces. Age was brought into the conversation as a factor demanding respect, and the speaker feels burdened with the responsibility of managing the other person's behavior. There's also a mention of unequal sharing of information, with the speaker feeling overlooked at social events and expressing irritation. Additionally, there are instances of personal boundaries being crossed, such as checking the speaker's phone in their absence. The speaker was evidently frustrated with the perceived controlling nature of the other person. Overall, the statements depict a relationship marked by power struggles, lack of consideration, and a desire for more equal treatment and respect.

2. *Parental influences*

“तुम बड़ी हो, *you take care of her*”, “*you have to help her*”, “*why do you always fight*”, “*you are older, you have to guide them to be on the right path*”, “*you have to be more patient*”, “*what he is allowed, I am allowed*”, “उसको कुछ नहीं बोलते”, “*they were very strict with me*”, “अपने भाई से सीखो”, “*be responsible like your brother*”, “मुझे हर चीज के लिए *blame* किया जाता है, *I make all the mistakes*”

3. *Evolution of sibling relationship in adults*

“we help each other”, “I feel responsible to help her in academics” “she teaches me how to deal in difficult situations”, “ऊसे मर्से ज्यादा पता है”, “कोई नहीं भी होगा, I'll have my sister”, “you meet very late with your life partner but grow with your sibling together”, “we understand each other”, “coddled in childhood, fight over many things now”, “we used to fight when we younger, now we are very close”, “I think sibling relationship is more empowering than romantic relationship”

The speaker found themselves in a position of responsibility within the family dynamic, often being urged to take care of their younger sibling due to their age and presumed maturity. The speaker was expected to guide and assist their sibling, with an emphasis on fostering a harmonious atmosphere by avoiding unnecessary conflicts. The parental influence on the speaker's upbringing was characterized by strictness, setting a tone for the relationship with their sibling. Comparisons with a more accomplished brother were common, leading to a feeling of being consistently blamed for mistakes. Over time, however, the sibling

relationship evolved into a more collaborative and supportive dynamic in adulthood. The speaker and their sibling began to help each other, with the speaker feeling a sense of responsibility for their sibling's academic well-being. The exchange of knowledge and support became reciprocal, as the sibling, in turn, taught the speaker valuable skills for navigating challenging situations. Despite past conflicts and fights during their younger years, the relationship transformed into one of mutual understanding and closeness. The speaker acknowledged the unique strength of sibling bonds, describing it as more empowering than romantic relationships. The evolution of their relationship reflected a journey from imposed responsibilities to a mature, supportive connection characterized by shared experiences and understanding.

4. *Common Interests*

“we listen to music and watch cricket together”, “humor”, “we share cynical point of view”, “we like same music”, “taste in music”, “साथ में टीवी सीरीज देखते हैं, गाने सुनते हैं” “watching tv together”, “sharing memes”, “discussing romantic relationships”

The bond between the speaker and their companion was richly textured with shared interests and activities, providing a strong foundation for their relationship. They engage in various forms of entertainment together, such as listening to music and watching cricket, indicating a shared passion for sports and an appreciation for the arts. Humor plays a significant role, with the duo enjoying a shared cynical perspective, fostering a lighthearted and enjoyable connection. Their musical tastes align, creating a common ground that enhances their shared experiences. Television series become a shared source of entertainment, allowing them to bond over common interests and stories. Beyond passive activities, the pair actively engages in discussions, from dissecting romantic relationships to sharing memes that add an element of humor to their interactions. The speaker and their companion find joy in the simple yet meaningful act of spending time together, creating a connection built on shared laughter, mutual interests, and an understanding that goes beyond the surface level.

5. *Appreciation and/or grievance*

“we used to not talk at all (until adulthood)”, “I am more supportive”, “my brother is considered ideal by my friends”, “we have open communication”, “मैं अपने relationships के बारे में ज्यादा share साझा करती हूँ, वो उतना नहीं”, “coddled in childhood, अब हर बात पर लड़ाई होती है”, “he expects me to do what he thinks is right for me”, “when we sit together even her husband feels left out”, “my brother is patriarchal in a family of feminists”, “now we are bestfriends जब से उसने कॉलेज started किया है”, “हमेशा मैं ही सब चीज share करती हूँ”

The relationship between the speaker and their brother has undergone a notable transformation from a lack of communication in their earlier years to a close and supportive bond in adulthood. While the speaker perceives themselves as more supportive, their brother was viewed as an ideal figure by the speaker's friends. Open communication has become a key element of their dynamic, yet the speaker finds that they tend to share more about their own relationships than their brother does. Childhood experiences of being coddled have evolved into frequent disagreements on various matters. The brother is described as having expectations about what was right for the speaker, adding a layer of complexity to their relationship. Interestingly, even in the presence of the brother's spouse, there was a sense of exclusion, suggesting a strong, exclusive connection between the siblings. Despite the family being characterized by feminist values, the brother was described as holding patriarchal views. However, with the commencement of college, their relationship has transformed into a best-friendship, and the speaker takes on the role of the primary sharer, highlighting the evolving and intricate nature of their sibling connection.

On the whole, the findings reflected generational gap, comparison by parent and or teachers & other family members gave birth to sibling rivalries, cause of friction and resentment in childhood and adulthood. Some participants (2) who had opposite sex siblings reported the negative influence of patriarchy and gender roles whereas some participants (2) reported they did not feel any impact of patriarchy in their relationship and shared that house chores were not assigned to them based on gender by sibling or parents. All the participants shared similar interests with their siblings i.e. watching tv series together, listening to same music and sharing memes on social media.

The study concluded that sibling relationships are emotionally charged, filled with strong uninhibited emotions, intimacy, acknowledging each other's perspectives and emotions. Sibling relationship is filled with intrigue, at one moment siblings can be laughing and playing together and at another they might be in a disagreement with a flip of a coin. The findings draw out common experiences of fighting over small things to strong bonding. We have also found role of patriarchy in opposite sex siblings, which has often led to friction and misunderstandings during their adulthood. The age difference between siblings often leads to issues of power and control, sibling rivalry and jealousy. These maybe the issues that do not have any quick fixes, nevertheless, sibling(s) model positive behaviour, such as helping, guiding, mentoring, looking after one another and prosocial behaviour. Indubitably, sibling(s) act as strong role model and support system in an individual's life.

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