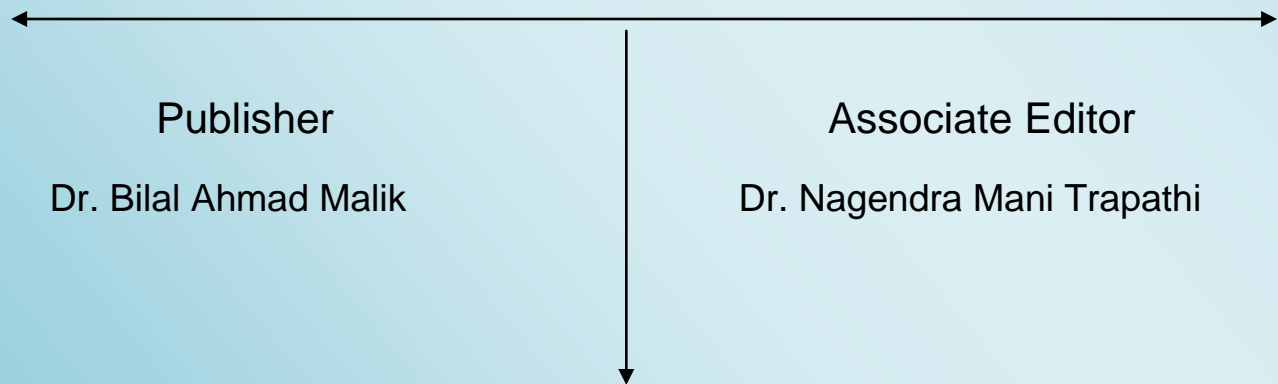


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IMPORTANCE OF SIBLING RELATIONSHIP DURING MIDDLE YEARS

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ABSTRACT

Siblings are very important in fostering an individual's development as it becomes more salient in later life and as a source of emotional support. The family constellation, the relationships within the family, and the characteristics of the individual impacts sibling relationships. The present study aimed at understanding the importance of sibling relationships in middle years through four aspects, Contact, Emotional Closeness, Confiding and Conflict. Through purposive random sampling, 150 (75 males and 75 females) middle aged samples were selected. A standardized tool developed by Shobha Nandwana and Madhur Katoch was used. Data was collected using a survey method. The study revealed that females work towards strengthening family ties and maintain frequent contact with their siblings, have emotional closeness, and are better in the aspect of confiding compared to their male counterparts and for the aspect of conflict, females were better in compromising and handling the situation than males. The study highlights the need for middle aged people to improve the contact and emotional closeness among the siblings, art of confiding to their siblings and avoiding conflicts and to establish a positive sibling relationship.

Key words: Sibling relationship, Emotional closeness, Confiding, Conflict, Middle years.

INTRODUCTION:

Relationship is a pattern of intermittent interaction between two individuals involving interchange of information over an extended period of time (Hinde 1997), and a fundamental source of learning. The quality of the relationship deeply influences the hopefulness required to remain curious, close, open to new experiences and the capacity to see connections and discover meanings.

Relationship in the family is important; the parent-child relationships have the greatest impact on sibling relationships. Individual differences among siblings also impact their relationships. When children are younger, temperament is important in sibling relationships but for older children, relationships are influenced by their personality and social and cognitive skills.

An individual feel "related" only when he/she has concern for another individual. Such a concern can be seen only when relationships are strong as in the case of sibling relationship where they can share knowledge, perceptions, attitudes, beliefs and feelings regarding each other from the time that one sibling becomes aware of the other (Cicirelli, 1985).

An individual spends 40-50 years with one's parents, but life with siblings can last 60-80 years (Bank and Kahn, 1997). The sibling relationship is one in which a sibling is able to express emotions of loving and liking toward their sibling, while simultaneously engaging in aggressive behaviours, competition and rivalry (Ritttenour, Myers & Brann, 2007). But with age, a consistent positive growth pattern is seen in the sibling relationship. The general tendency for middle-aged siblings is of social support and is likely to consist more of psychological support than instrumental support (Cicirelli 1995), sibling interaction and support can improve when the sibling is going through crises. Siblings are typically viewed as potential source of support, a type of "insurance policy" in later life (Hochschild, 1973). According to Goetting (1986), early and middle adulthood is the age during which sibling-ship "tasks of nurturance, caretaking and teaching must be transformed into tasks addressing adult needs as the person becomes spouses, parents, and children of ageing parents".

But with rapid modernization, globalization and industrialization there has been a radical change in the sibling relationship accounting to the disintegration of the traditional joint families. Further, women are treading in to the world of labour which has also resulted in subsequent practical changes in the family system. Migration to other cities is seen in the younger generation of the family for the purpose of education or jobs, due to which structure of the family is affected. All these changes in a given family and the consequent practical modifications are causing opposing effects on the sibling relationships of middle aged people. The adults in the family are left to themselves and therefore they have greater responsibilities and spend very less time with their siblings. Hence, middle adulthood years are important and a crucial juncture where adults must re-establish their ties with their siblings and invest more in the nurturance of sibling relationship (Nandwana & Katoch, 2009).

Cicirelli (1991) asserted that the sibling helping relationship in adulthood provides not only psychological support but also instrumental help, including sharing household responsibilities, caring for children, and providing transportation. It will boost the self-esteem of the person as well as helps in maintaining the decent behaviour among the siblings (Singh & Sakshi, 2015). According to Folwell, Chung, Nussbaum, Betheas, and Grant (1997) three primary reasons for maintaining sibling relationships in later life is due to family events/hardship, commonality, and age-related problems.

It is therefore important for individual(s) in their middle years to revive their sibling relationship by developing an emotional closeness, learn to create space for themselves and at the same time make an earnest attempt to confide in their siblings in times of difficulty. Sibling relationship bonds with a cordial relationship therefore it is very important for the two individuals to adapt to the win –win situation in order to resolve conflicts and maintain harmony in one’s relationship. Thus the present study was undertaken to understand the importance of sibling relationship during middle years.

METHODOLOGY:

Objective: The study aimed to assess the importance of sibling relationship during middle adulthood years.

Identification of sample: Investigator surveyed the work sectors both Government and private organizations for the purpose of the study. Two organizations one Government (Ramnarayan Chellaram College, Bengaluru) and one private (Contours Club, Bengaluru), that granted permission to the investigator to conduct the study was identified through permission. Further purposive random sampling technique was used to identify the sample for the study. One hundred and fifty samples out of which 75 were men and 75 women in the age range of 40-60 years were identified for the study.

Tool used: A standardized tool developed by Shobha Nandwana and Madhur Katoch (2007) was used to assess the importance of sibling relationship during middle adulthood years. The tool consist a total of 50 items that enabled the assessment of importance of sibling relationship under the following four dimensions-

- i. Contact
- ii. Emotional Closeness
- iii. Confiding
- iv. Conflict

Of the 50 items, 21 were positive statements and 29 items were negative. The options given to the respondents for rating each statement were ‘Always, Most of the time, Sometimes, Hardly ever’. Positive items such as “Presence of sibling in my life gives me the feeling of security” were given a score of 3, 2, 1 and 0 for the above-mentioned options respectively; whereas, negative items such as “My sibling and I are not attached to each other” were reverse scored, 0, 1, 2 and 3 for the above-mentioned options respectively.

Method of data collection: The respondents were given a brief introduction about the area of research and its importance. They were asked to read the instructions given in the tool carefully and they were also informed that there is no right or wrong answer. They were also told to complete all items in the tool. The respondents were instructed not to share or discuss the information with their colleagues regarding the items of the tool. Although there was no time limit they were asked to complete answering the tool within 30 minutes of time duration.

The data was analysed using statistical tests, Chi square and ‘t’ test and is interpreted in the following tables.

The essence in any given relationship is based on the contact one develops and maintains, how closeness one is with expressing his/her achievements and problems, the ability to trust and confide information to others and how to resolve the differences amicably. Table 1 indicates the sibling relationship of the male respondents.

Table 1
Sibling relationship of male respondents

No.	Aspects	Statements	Max. Score	Scores			
				Mean	SD	Mean (%)	SD (%)
I	Contact	13	39	21.99	4.7	56.4	11.9
II	Emotional Closeness	13	39	20.79	8.5	53.3	21.7
III	Confiding	8	24	13.60	3.1	56.7	12.8
IV	Conflict	16	48	31.77	8.5	66.2	17.7
Combined		50	150	86.15	20.7	58.8	13.8

In the aspect of contact it can be seen that the mean percentage of the male respondents is 56.4%, while the aspect of emotional closeness among siblings of male respondents indicate the mean percentage as 53.3%. Confiding aspect of the sibling relationship accounts for 56.7%. While, the mean percentage for the aspect of conflict in the

sibling relationship is 66.2%. This shows that there is more of conflict situations among the respondents and very few are close to their siblings. The findings of the study are in concordance with the Leder's study (2001) which has shown that brother/brother pairs are the most rivalrous. Identical male twins tend to be the most conflicted. Their childhood time together tends to be more competitive, and often that competition is carried into adulthood, aggravated, by parental and societal expectations of men.

Table 2 depicts the sibling relationship of the female respondents.

Table 2
Sibling relationship of female respondents

No.	Aspects	Statements	Max. Score	Scores			
				Mean	SD	Mean (%)	SD (%)
I	Contact	13	39	23.75	4.0	60.9	10.2
II	Emotional Closeness	13	39	26.72	9.6	68.5	21.7
III	Confiding	8	24	14.36	3.2	59.8	12.8
IV	Conflict	16	48	37.25	8.4	77.6	17.7
Combined		50	150	102.08	21.6	68.1	13.8

It can be seen with regard to the aspect of contact, the mean percentage of the female respondents is 60.9%, while the aspect of emotional closeness among siblings of female respondents is found to be 68.5%, indicating that the females trust their siblings and are close to them. Confiding aspect of the sibling relationship showed that the mean percentage of the female respondents is 59.8%. According to Leder (2001), sister/sister pairs are the closest. Sisters are the traditional kin keepers in the society and have a real commitment to keeping the relationship going. They are, according to sex-role expectations, more adept at expressing themselves on a personal level and in sharing their intimate feelings.

In the aspect of conflict the mean percentage of the female respondents is 77.6% and this could be attributed to the fact that women are basically self-centered and family centered, when compared their counter parts as seen in table – 1.

Thus, it can be concluded that female respondents make an attempt to maintain good contact with their siblings, by being close wherein they talk about their problems, feelings or share their ideas, opinions, achievements including their weaknesses etc.

Table 3**Adult sibling relationship scores based on Contact, Emotional Closeness, Confiding and Conflict**

Aspects	Sample (n)	Statements	Max. Score	Adult sibling relationship scores				't' Test
				Mean	SD	Mean (%)	SD (%)	
Males	75	50	150	88.15	20.7	58.8	13.8	4.04*
Females	75	50	150	102.08	21.6	68.1	14.4	
Combined	150	50	150	95.11	22.3	63.4	14.8	

* Significant at 5% level, $t(0.05, 148df) = 1.96$

Table 3 reveals the adult sibling relationship. Study shows that female respondents work towards strengthening the family bonds and coordinate with the family members in maintaining contacts unlike the male respondents who are preoccupied with their responsibilities and give less preference to sibling relationship.

The mean percentage of the female respondents for the overall adult sibling relationship is 68.1% in comparison to the male respondents who have the mean score percentage of 58.8%. The difference is found to be significant with the 't' value being 4.04* for the overall adult sibling relationship. Women are more likely than men to be kin keepers (di Leonardo, 1987) and they have more kin ties in their social networks (Moore, 1990).

Table 4 below indicates the aspect wise mean scores of male and female respondents of adult sibling relationship.

Table 4**Aspect wise Mean Adult sibling relationship scores of Male and Female Respondents**

No.	Aspects	Statements	Max. Score	Scores			
				Mean	SD	Mean (%)	SD (%)
I	Contact	13	39	22.87	4.4	58.6	11.3
II	Emotional Closeness	13	39	23.75	9.5	60.9	24.4
III	Confiding	8	24	13.98	3.2	58.3	13.1
IV	Conflict	16	48	35.51	8.9	71.9	18.5
	Combined	50	150	95.11	22.3	63.4	14.8

According to Volling, & Avioli, 2000, Schulman, 1999; Bedford, 1998; Verbrugge, & Beilfuss, 1998; Cicirelli, 1991, adult sibling relationship has as much significance as does childhood sibling relationship. It is very

important to maintain and sustain the relationship not only during middle years but in the late adult years also. The data of the above table indicates that in the aspect of contact of the respondents (male and female) it is 58.6%. While for emotional closeness it is 60.9%. Confiding aspect of the sibling relationship showed that the mean percentage of the respondents is 58.3%. Whereas, the mean percentage for the aspect of conflict in the adult sibling relationship is 71.9%. The art of sustaining a sibling relationship lies in how an individual tries to work on psychosocial aspect and coordinate in the smooth functioning of the ties. Siblings should learn the art of forgiveness as it vital for both emotional and spiritual health. A conflict often leads only to miseries and becomes an arena for animosity. While, Bedford, Volling, and Avioli (2000) found that conflicts originating both from childhood and from adulthood benefited in improving parenting skills, social competence, open and honest interchanges, and sense of self.

Thus, it can be concluded that women at large can work towards in strengthening not only the family ties but also in sustaining relationship through contacts in the form of family get together, festivals, party, concern for elder, visiting the ill family member/s etc. Nandwana and Katoch (2007) found males to have regular phone contact with their siblings but it was not frequent, whereas females maintained frequent contact with their siblings. According to White (1994) and White and Reidman (1992) those with siblings, parental divorce may create a less cohesive family environment with weaker sibling, but according to (Cicirelli, 1995) and White (1994) it could also cause siblings to bond more closely for support.

Table 5 below indicates the level of sibling relationship of both male and female respondents.

Table 5
Level of Adult sibling relationship

Level	Category	Respondents						χ^2 Test
		Male		Female		Combined		
		N	%	N	%	N	%	
Inadequate	≤ 50 % Score	34	45.3	17	22.7	51	34.0	22.67*
Moderate	51-75 % Score	41	54.7	41	54.6	82	56.7	
Adequate	> 75 % Score	0	0.0	17	22.7	17	11.3	
Total		75	100.0	75	100.0	150	100.0	

*Significant at 5% level, $\chi^2 (0.05, 2df) = 5.991$

According to Myers (2009) interpersonal solidarity was the largest predictor of sibling communication, satisfaction, individualised trust and self-disclosure. The results of table 5 show that 54.7% of male and 54.6% of female respondents have a moderate (51-75% score) level of sibling relationship among them, while, 45.3% of the male and 22.7% female respondents show inadequate (<50% score) level of sibling relationship. Whereas, only 22.7% of the females show adequate (>75% score) level of sibling relationship. There is a significant difference in the Chi Square value (22.67*) with regard to the male and female respondents' level of adult sibling relationship. Thus, the level in the relationships could be attributed to the educational qualification, occupation, standard of living, child rearing practices, migration, working hours of the respondents and family commitments etc.

Connidis and Campbell (1995) found three major factors affecting sibling ties. The first factor was gender, with women tending to have closer relationships with their brothers and sisters. The second factor was marital status, with single and widowed siblings reporting closer relationships. The third factor was parental status; the childless reported closer relationships with their siblings.

CONCLUSION:

The study on 'Importance of Sibling relationship during Middle years', revealed that female respondents work to strengthen their relationship with siblings and keep in contact, while the male respondents who are busy with fulfilling their responsibilities gives less importance to the sibling relationship. It was also seen that females maintain good contact, emotional closeness with their siblings and in the area of confiding they are comparatively better than males. Majority of the females also opt for win-win settlement when conflict arises between the siblings, while male respondents give in and face the challenges of the conflict. Hence it can be concluded that maintaining sibling relationship during middle years is very helpful and the men and women must work towards strengthening the ties with their siblings.

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