

## **Adult Sibling Relationship in Indian Families: A Study on Middle-Aged Adults**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The present research was done with the objective of comparing Adult Sibling Relationship among middle aged adults (mean age range= 46.5 years) living in extended and nuclear families. 100 adults of Dehradun city were contacted to collect the data, out of which n=50 represented extended families with their siblings living under one roof and n=50 were living in nuclear family. The Adult Sibling Relationship Scale by Nandwana & Katoch was used to study the Variable. The scale is categorized into four dimensions (contact, emotional closeness and conflict, confiding). t- test was applied on the data, the result yielded that adults living in extended families enjoy a high congenial sibling relationship as compared to adults living in nuclear families. Adults living in extended families are not only in frequent contact with their siblings because of proximity but are also more emotionally close with them as compared to adults living in nuclear families.

*Keywords: Adult sibling relationship, Nuclear family, Extended family*

Despite the fact that the longest relationship which an individual shares is probably one with the siblings, the progress of research aimed at understanding sibling relationships has been relatively slow compared to that of research on spousal and parent-child relationships (Cicirelli, 1995). One spends 40-50 years with one's parents, but life with siblings can last 60-80 years (Bank and Kahn, 1997). Sibling relationship yields a positive development as the individual grows. Relationship with siblings, shape an individual's life experiences. The following definition of the sibling relationship is the most accepted one: Sibling relationships are the total of the interactions (physical, verbal and non-verbal communication) of two or more individuals who share

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knowledge, perceptions, attitudes, beliefs and feelings regarding each other from the time that one sibling becomes aware of the other (Cicirelli, 1985).

Various patterns and trends are seen in sibling relationships, as with other relationships. 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 pattern of positive growth in the sibling relationship is seen. 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 is enhanced in the case of various 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” (p.708).

Rapid Modernization, globalization, and industrialization have brought about a change in the Indian family structure. The traditional joint families are getting separated into nuclear families. Female members are stepping into the labour market which again results in consequent practical changes in the family. Younger members of the family are migrating away from home (for higher studies or jobs), due to which the structure of the family is getting affected. The physical distance has caused an undergoing change in the kinship with certain extent of reduction in the expression of love and affection. All these changes in the Indian family structure and the consequent practical modification's are causing adverse effects on the sibling relationships of middle aged people. The adults in the family are left all by themselves and therefore they have more time to spare and spend with their other family members (outside the nuclear ties). Hence, middle adulthood years are important and crucial juncture where adults should re-establish their ties with their siblings and invest more in the nurturance of sibling relationship (Nandwana & Katoch, 2009). This represents a scenario of quintessential Indian nuclear family, whereas in extended families the scenario is different. The middle aged siblings living in extended families share the same roof. Thus, the difference in the family structure provides an opportunity to study the sibling relationship of middle aged adults.

Past researches on adult sibling relationships have found significant gender differences. In general, females have scored higher on sibling relations than males. Females are keen on maintaining family relationships (Nandwana & Katoch, 2009; Sakshi & Singh, 2015; Floyd & Parks, 1995). In another study by Singh & Sakshi (2015), it was revealed that healthy adult sibling relationship boosts the self-esteem of the person as well as helps in maintaining the decent behaviour among the siblings. Nandwana & Katoch (2009), revealed that majority of the middle aged adults siblings i.e. (33.34%) have Loyal type of relationship followed by Apathetic

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(29.17%) Congenial (24.16%) and Intimate (7.50%); only 5.83 percent of respondents depict Hostile style of relationship pattern with their sibling. None of the previous studies focus on the effect of Indian family structure on the adult sibling relationship. This research is among the first few attempts in India to study the phenomenon.

### *Hypothesis*

There will be a significant difference among the middle aged adults living in extended and nuclear families on adult sibling relationship.

### *Sample*

A total of 100 middle aged adults (mean age range = 46.5 years) of Dehradun city were contacted to collect the data, out of which n=50 were living in extended families with their siblings under one roof and n=50 were living in nuclear family.

### *Tool*

The Adult Sibling Relationship Scale by Nandwana & Katoch was used to study the Variable. The scale is categorized into four dimensions (contact, emotional closeness and conflict, confiding). It was initially standardized by calculating reliability (0.80) and validity of the scale by split-half technique and content and intrinsic validity (96%) respectively. Tool comprised 50 statements, each having a four-point Likert scale with options as “Always”, “Most of the time”, “Sometimes” and “Hardly ever”. Positive statements were given scores as (3 for Always), (2 for Most of the time), (1 for Sometimes) and (0 for Hardly ever) and vice versa for negative statements (Nandwana & Katoch, 2009).

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

For analysis of the data t- test was used. The computed data is shown in Table 1 divided into the various dimensions of Adult Sibling Relationship scale. As seen in the table, the total adult sibling relationship mean score is significantly different for adults living in Extended and Nuclear families  $t(98) = 3.80, p < .01$ . Therefore the alternate hypothesis that there will be a significant difference among the middle aged adults living in extended and nuclear families on adult sibling relationship is accepted. The mean score of total ASR for adults living in extended families is  $M = 103.4$  with  $SD = 3.78$  and that of Adults living in nuclear families is  $M = 100.3$  with  $SD = 4.35$ . Thus, it is safe to say that adults living in extended families enjoy more congenial relationship with their siblings as compared to adults living in nuclear families. Two dimensions of Adult Sibling Relationship are significantly different among adults living in extended and nuclear families. On Contact and Emotional Closeness dimensions adults living in extended families scored significantly higher mean than adults living in nuclear families. This reveals that adults living in extended families are more in frequent contact with their siblings and are more emotionally close among themselves than adults living in nuclear families.

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**Table 1: Mean, SD and t-value of various dimensions of Adult Sibling Relationship (ASR) of middle aged adults living in Extended and Nuclear families (N=100)**

Dimensions of ASR	Extended Families (n=50)		Nuclear Families (n=50)		t- Value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
<b>Contact</b>	28.18	4.1	25.38	4.5	3.25**
<b>Emotional Closeness</b>	26.90	3.07	25.04	4.41	2.44*
<b>Confiding</b>	44.06	2.12	42.91	3.9	1.83
<b>Conflict</b>	35.56	4.78	36.56	5.86	0.93
<b>Total ASR</b>	103.4	3.78	100.3	4.35	3.80**

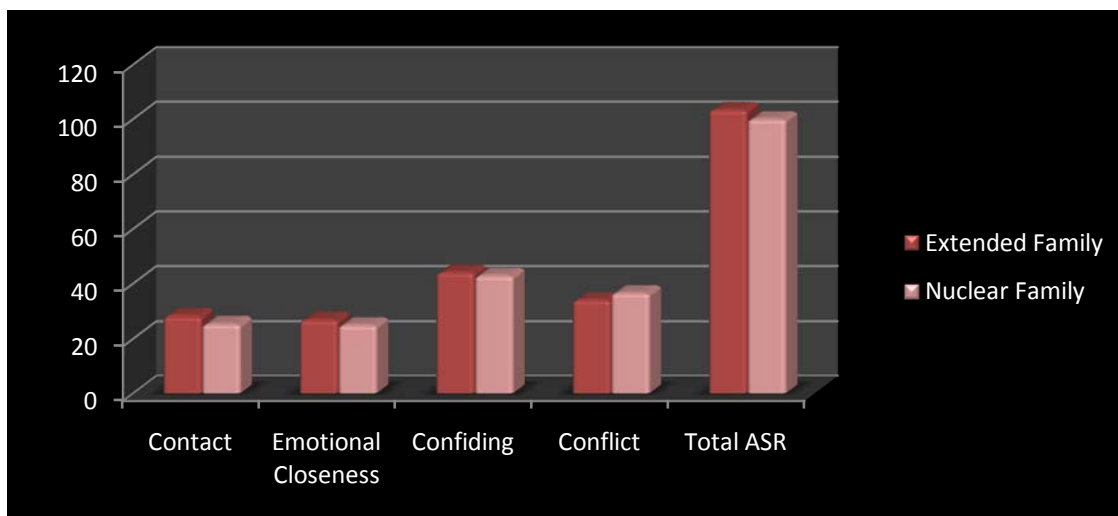
\*\* (Significant at 0.01 level)

\* (significant at 0.05 level)

The reason behind this finding may be that nuclear families have created physical distance between adult siblings; they are more concerned about their immediate family. Blau (1981) has observed that nuclear family ties tend to be more important during middle years. As middle-aged adults' deals with the launching or settlement of their children, they don't get enough time to get together, especially if they are living in a Nuclear family. Waite and Harrison (1992) found that siblings with other relatives in the household (perhaps their own parents) saw siblings often, but those with children saw less of their siblings. To put this in other words, adults who are living in extended families, (such as with other relatives or parents or siblings) make out time to get in touch with their siblings, but those adults who are in nuclear setting and have no one else to look after their children, don't contact their siblings often.

In extended families, the adult siblings are living under one roof. Thus they have a direct face-to-face contact which is not frequent in case of nuclear families. The frequent contact and proximity with the sibling act as a base for strong sibling relationship. Trent (2006) found that siblings are central to the lives of adults; most sibling relationships involve frequent contact and positive feelings. Howe et al. (2001) hypothesized that feelings of closeness and warmth in sibling relationships would encourage siblings to share information and look towards siblings for emotional support. In extended families, every individual stand together with each other in their ups and downs, lows and highs and support each other emotionally and financially. Siblings who feel close emotionally to their siblings have a tendency to communicate more frequently and intimately with them.

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**Graph1: Mean score on various dimensions of Adult Sibling Relationship (ASR) of middle aged adults living in Extended and Nuclear families**

### CONCLUSION

The middle aged adults living in extended families enjoy a high congenial sibling relationship as compared to middle aged adults living in nuclear families. The difference in the sibling relationship was found significant on two dimensions (Contact and Emotional Closeness). Adults living in extended families are not only in frequent contact with their siblings because of proximity but are also more emotionally close with them as compared to adults living in nuclear families.

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### Conflict of Interests

The author declared no conflict of interests.

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