

Interpersonal Closeness and Self-Confidence: A Comparative Study Between a Single Child and a Child with Siblings

Jannat Kaur Chawla^{1*}, Dr. Poonam Vats²

ABSTRACT

Family and its interaction patterns have a direct influence on an individual's behaviour and personality. Even before forming close bonds with peers and friends outside, a child's first interaction takes place with its family members. This makes the family culture and structure very crucial for a child's development. In such a case, differences in the family structure of a single child family and those with multiple children may lead to differences in the development of these children respectively. The idea of a single child comes with a lot of myths and misconceptions. On the other hand, it is believed that sibling interaction is a very important aspect in the child's overall development. The environment provided at home plays a crucial role in the development of an individual's traits like self confidence and interpersonal closeness. The primary aim of this study is to understand and compare a single child and a child with elder sibling(s) on the basis of interpersonal closeness and self confidence. A sample of 140 participants between the age group of 18-24 was selected across India using Non-Probability sampling techniques like purposive, convenient and snowball sampling. Data was analysed using Welch independent samples t-test and Pearson's correlation. The findings suggest that there is no difference between a single child and a child with sibling(s) in terms of interpersonal closeness and self confidence in today's time. Further, interpersonal closeness and self confidence are negatively correlated. This study is useful in breaking myths around a single child.

Keywords: *Single, Sibling, Self Confidence, Interpersonal Closeness*

Many of the contemporary developmental psychologists and researchers have tried to break the bubble of myths around the concept of a single child like, getting complete attention, getting all their demands fulfilled, being spoiled, lonely, self-centered or selfish, etc. Whereas, on the other side, children with siblings always have a playmate with them or a confidante by their side throughout their lives. This makes it a lot easier for them to share their feelings with others, as compared to a single child. Some characteristics or concepts associated with a single child are emotional imbalance, only child syndrome, self-dependent nature that may be confused as being lonely, being over-pampered by parents, etc (Boodman, 1995). Not all that is said about a single child is backed by

¹Student, Mata Sundri College for Women, University of Delhi, Delhi, India

²Assistant Professor, Mata Sundri College for Women, University of Delhi, Delhi, India

*Corresponding Author

Received: August 12, 2022; Revision Received: December 05, 2022; Accepted: December 12, 2022

Interpersonal Closeness and Self-Confidence: A Comparative Study Between a Single Child and a Child with Siblings

scientific findings. Michael Lewis, professor of pediatrics and psychiatry, explains how associating selfishness with only single children is not completely correct. He reasons this phase of being selfish as influenced by bodily changes and hormones. He further says that both, single children and those with siblings may act selfish at times (Newman, n.d.). However, it can still be said that interaction with siblings largely influences the child's social interactions outside home, social roles and the actions performed as part of those roles. Having a sibling around creates a very protective environment for the child, especially in the case when the sibling is older. It has also been empirically shown that the foundation of interaction set at home and at a young age is a determinant of their social relationships later in life (Mueller and Vandell, 1995). This can also be explained with the help of Piaget's cognitive development theory which emphasises on the importance of socio-dramatic play having a playmate around in the development of a child. The pretend play or make-believe play during the preoperational stage enhances their mental representation and schemas (Berk, 2013; McLeod, 2018). Parents, however, need to also consider the sibling rivalry that comes along with it. At times, a child may not easily adjust to the fact that someone else shares the same set of parents, lives in the same house as them and so on. This results in feelings of bitterness and anger which leads to sibling rivalry that can be seen as daily fights during their childhood days. This may not always be considered in the negative light. It allows the individuals to understand such interactions as well and helps them deal with conflict resolution at an early stage in life. Overall, both sibling relationships and the idea of a single child come with its own positives and negatives, throwing light on the importance of family interaction patterns in a child's personality development, interpersonal interactions, confidence levels, etc. Interpersonal relationships not only define closeness between individuals but also touch upon some dependence on each other. This interpersonal closeness or interaction tends to be more significant in the Indian population owing to the collectivistic nature of the society. It may be understood with regards to strength of interactions, their diversity and also the frequency of interactions (Berscheid, Snyder, and Omoto, 1989) or it may be understood as a perceived imbrication of the self and others cognitively (Aron et al., 1991). The hallmark or foundational definition of interpersonal closeness was given by Kelly et al. (1983) which stresses upon interdependence and interconnectedness between two people involved in the relationship. These relationships develop in the form of stages. Self confidence is defined as a belief in one's own capabilities, judgement and abilities to accomplish a given task (APA, n.d.). Basavanna (1975) defines self confidence as a "perceived ability" to efficiently act in situations which aid in conquering hurdles and getting tasks done right. Therefore, it can be understood that high self confidence means having an optimistic view of one's own capacities and believing in those abilities. It results in a more realistic perception of the self, others and the world. It is this belief in self along with the optimistic perception that leads to successful completion of tasks. Perkins (2018) describes self confidence in terms of outer and inner confidence. He further states that self confidence, as a construct, is affected by three factors namely, self efficacy, esteem and compassion. Studies have also found a relationship between these two variables, interpersonal closeness and self confidence. According to a study conducted by Oktary et al., (2019) there is a significant relationship between self confidence and interpersonal communication.

A family's culture may be different for a single child as compared to that of a child with sibling(s). The different family structure may, hence, influence the personality development and interpersonal relationships of the child in their own way. The current study aims at comparing a single child and one with elder sibling(s) on interpersonal closeness and self

Interpersonal Closeness and Self-Confidence: A Comparative Study Between a Single Child and a Child with Siblings

confidence. This study also tries to assess the relationship between the two variables itself, interpersonal closeness and self confidence. This study falls under two subfields of psychology namely, 'developmental psychology' and 'social psychology'.

On the basis of the above discussion, the following objectives were conceptualised:

Objectives

- To study and compare the levels of interpersonal closeness of a single child and a child with elder siblings.
- To study and compare the levels of self confidence of a single child and a child with elder siblings.
- To investigate the relationship between self confidence and interpersonal closeness.

In view of the above mentioned objectives, the following hypotheses were formulated:

Hypothesis

- There is no significant difference in the interpersonal closeness level between a single child and a child with elder siblings.
- There is no significant difference in self confidence level between a single child and a child with elder siblings.
- There is a significant relationship between self confidence and interpersonal closeness.

Design

The aim of this study is to compare a single child and a child with elder siblings on self confidence and interpersonal closeness. Design for this study was conceived as cross-sectional, comparative and quantitative in nature. The two variables being studied are self confidence and interpersonal closeness. The independent variables are being a single child or a child with siblings whereas interpersonal closeness and self confidence are the dependent variables. Data collection will be initiated. Samples for the data will be selected using non-probability sampling techniques including convenient, purposive and snowball sampling. Analysis of data will be done using independent t-test and Pearson's correlation analysis.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The sample size of this study was 140, out of which 80 were children with elder siblings and 60 were the ones without any siblings, i.e., a single child. All the participants were between the age group of 18-24 and the data was collected from all over India. Purposive, Convenience and Snowball sampling techniques were used.

Instruments

Two measures were used in this study,

- **Functional Idiographic Assessment Template Questionnaire:** This questionnaire is a self report tool as a part of the Functional Idiographic Assessment Template system, developed by Callaghan, 2006. It assesses an individual's overall interpersonal functioning. Out of the five classes of behaviour assessed by FIAT-Q, the one used for the current study is Class D (disclosure or interpersonal

Interpersonal Closeness and Self-Confidence: A Comparative Study Between a Single Child and a Child with Siblings

intimacy/closeness). This implies how a person connects with other people. The reliability (Cronbach's alpha) of the entire scale is 0.94 and of the class D individually is 0.80.

- **Internal Self Confidence Scale:** This scale attempts to assess an individual's levels of self confidence in terms of three factors, self efficacy, self esteem and self compassion, formulated by factor analysis. This scale has been developed by Perkins (2018) as a part of their Doctoral dissertation on integrated model of self confidence. The reliability calculated for this scale is 0.924 (Cronbach alpha), which makes it highly reliable.

Procedure

The questionnaire included two linear scale questions as a part of the demographic questions which asked the participants to rate their relationship with their family and their peers, respectively. Next, the questionnaire included items from the tools used. The final questionnaire was used for data collection. APA ethical guidelines were followed throughout the study. Out of the total 140 responses, 80 were the ones with older sibling(s) and 60 were the ones without any sibling, i.e., a single child. The scores were statistically analysed using independent samples t-test and Pearson's correlation.

RESULTS

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics of the Sample

	Variable	N	Mean	Median	SD
Interpersonal Closeness	Sibling	80	-16.4	-16.0	10.8
	Single Child	60	-14.2	-15.5	11.4
Self Confidence	Sibling	80	63.1	65.0	13.5
	Single Child	60	63.1	66.0	12.8

Note. The above table represents the descriptive statistics of the sample in terms of the two variables, interpersonal closeness and self confidence for both single child as well as the child with siblings.

Table 2 Independent Samples t-Test Results

		t-Statistic	df	p	Mean difference	SE difference
Interpersonal Closeness	Welch's t	-1.1749	123	0.242	-2.2333	1.90
	Self Confidence	Welch's t	-0.0112	131	0.991	-0.0250

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 2 represents the independent samples t-test results. On applying Welch t-test, the value of t-statistic for interpersonal closeness was calculated to be -1.175 with a p value of 0.242 indicating no significant differences between a single child and a child with elder siblings in terms of interpersonal closeness. Similarly for self confidence, the t-statistic value was calculated to be -0.011 with a p value of 0.991 further indicating that there is no significant difference between a single child and a child with elder siblings in terms of self confidence.

Interpersonal Closeness and Self-Confidence: A Comparative Study Between a Single Child and a Child with Siblings

Table 3 Pearson's Correlation

		Interpersonal Closeness	Self Confidence
Interpersonal Closeness	Pearson's r	-	
	p-value	-	
Self Confidence	Pearson's r	-0.370***	-
	p-value	<.001	-

Note. *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Table 3 represents the results of Pearson's Correlation for Interpersonal Closeness and Self Confidence for the entire sample. The correlation was found to be -0.370, representing a low negative correlation. It was also found to be statistically significant as it is less than 0.001 p value.

Table 4 Pearson's Correlation for Children with Siblings

		Interpersonal Closeness	Self Confidence
Interpersonal Closeness	Pearson's r	-	
	p-value	-	
Self Confidence	Pearson's r	-0.337**	-
	p-value	0.002	-

Note. *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Table 4 represents the results of Pearson's Correlation for Interpersonal Closeness and Self Confidence for responses of children with elder siblings. The correlation was found to be -0.337, representing a low negative correlation. It was also found to be statistically significant as it is less than 0.001 p value.

Table 5 Pearson's Correlation for Single Children

		Interpersonal Closeness	Self Confidence
Interpersonal Closeness	Pearson's r	-	
	p-value	-	
Self Confidence	Pearson's r	-0.420***	-
	p-value	<.001	-

Note. *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Table 5 represents the results of Pearson's Correlation for Interpersonal Closeness and Self Confidence for single child responses. The correlation was found to be -0.420, representing a low to medium negative correlation. It was also found to be statistically significant as it is less than 0.001 p value.

In our country, there has been a trend of having multiple children which is now seeing a transition towards preference for a single child. Further, being more of a collectivistic culture, it promotes the idea of multi-generational families, family bond, values, interaction and living together. A shift in preference of having a single child has been observed in the new-age parents in the current times. This requires studying whether there are any similarities or differences in these two family structures, allowing parents to make an

Interpersonal Closeness and Self-Confidence: A Comparative Study Between a Single Child and a Child with Siblings

informed decision. For both interpersonal closeness and self confidence, no significant differences have been found for both categories of children. This can be attributed to changing times where schools and neighbourhoods encourage children to interact with others and create opportunities for play and interpersonal interactions. Our results for interpersonal closeness are in line with another study conducted by Tavares et al (2004) on adolescents of Porto Alegre, Brazil which concluded that there were no detectable differences between only children, first born children and no-first born children in terms of relationship with parents and peers. Another study conducted by Trent and Spitze (2011) shows that in terms of adult sociability behaviour, there are very minor differences between individuals who grew up with siblings and those who grew up as a single child. Another factor for such minor differences can also be parents' undivided attention, in terms of a single child, which may play a role in compensating for the absence of a sibling. The two variables, interpersonal closeness and self confidence, are found to be negatively correlated. This trend can be observed for the entire sample as well as individually for single child and sibling responses. Our results can hence be interpreted as when an individual has a high and positive evaluation of themselves, they are sure of their own feelings, thoughts and actions, resulting in confidence in themselves. They may, hence, not feel the need to actively share with others or seek their opinions since they are so sure of themselves. It may also be said that when individuals do not share everything with others (low interpersonal closeness), they may perceive themselves to be self-sufficient and feel that they don't need others' support and hence feel more confident within themselves. From the results of our study, we may interpret that the current generation is moving towards an individualistic cultural orientation. People are becoming more independent and not relying upon external validation or social relationships as much as earlier. The strength of correlation for single children is slightly more or higher than those of children with siblings. This may be attributed to the fact that children without siblings grow up in an environment where they don't have a playmate, making them self-sufficient as a part of their development and are able to find activities to keep themselves busy, which don't actively involve the presence of another individual. Hence, a high self confidence adds on to this scenario and the child feels sufficient in itself and confident from within which reduces the chances of disclosing to others. Whereas in the case of a child with siblings, during the developmental phases, the presence of another individual (sibling) creates situations that encourage the child to share its feelings with their sibling, which may result in a lower negative relationship. In terms of moving towards an individualistic orientation, it can also be said that this trend is seen more in children without siblings. As mentioned earlier, they are more familiar with an environment that does not have other children of their age and hence, more used to having their own space. This makes it much easier for them to be independent and confident of themselves. For children with siblings, it can be a little easier to form close bonds and share feelings with others even at high self confidence since they have grown up in an environment that encourages this. However, this can only be said in comparison to a single child since the correlation for all three categories of the sample is found to be negative.

A few limitations of the study can be considered. Sample size was not large enough for generalisability and to draw appropriate conclusions for the target population. Understanding gender differences in this study could have led to a more clear perspective, especially in the Indian culture because of gender preferences given by parents when they decide on having children.

Interpersonal Closeness and Self-Confidence: A Comparative Study Between a Single Child and a Child with Siblings

The findings of this study add to the body of knowledge of family, interaction patterns, self confidence and single child v/s sibling theories. They have helped better understand the extent to which family environment and sibling interaction influences perception of one's own self and interaction patterns outside the family setting. One of the most critical implications of this study is that it helps break the bubble of myths surrounding a single child and the assumptions people have about younger siblings. This further can help couples in their family planning and decide how many children they wish to have regardless of any misconceptions. Moreover, there are not many studies assessing similarities and differences of a single child and one with siblings in Indian culture specifically. Anyone who wishes to explore this area can benefit from this research.

For further studies, establishing a healthy rapport between the researcher and the participants may reduce the influence of social desirability in the responses of the participants. Secondly, the large sample size can result in a higher chance for generalisability of the findings to the entire population. Additionally, randomly drawn samples may be selected which acts as a truer representation of the population. The results may lead to better generalisability of the findings. To understand the nuances of family interaction patterns, sibling interaction and its influence on an individual, qualitative mode may be combined with quantitative mode of study. This will help in understanding various themes and concepts that quantitative alone may skip. Furthermore, future studies may also opt for region wise comparison across different cultures in the Indian context owing to the diversity of Indian culture.

CONCLUSION

To conclude our findings and discussions, it may be said that there are no significant differences between a single child and a child with elder sibling(s) in terms of interpersonal closeness and self confidence. Furthermore, the relationship between interpersonal closeness and self confidence has been found such that, as one of the variables increases, the other decreases, suggesting a negative correlation of low to moderate strength. As compared to a child with a sibling, a single child is more likely to not share feelings with or disclose to others when self confidence is high or vice-a-versa.

REFERENCES

- Aron, A., Aron, E.N., Tudor, M., & Nelson, G. (1991). Close relationships as including other in the self. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 60(2), 241-253. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.60.2.241>
- Basavanna, M. (1975). *Manual for the self-Confidence Inventory*, Varanasi: Rupa psychological centre.
- Berk, L. E. (2013). *Child development, 9th edition*. Pearson.
- Berscheid, E., Snyder, M., & Omoto, A.M. (1989). The Relationship Closeness Inventory: Assessing the closeness of interpersonal relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 57(5), 792-807. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.57.5.792>
- Boodman, G. (1995). The only child: Lonely or Lucky?. *The Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/wellness/1995/10/24/the-only-child-lonely-or-lucky/ec6eedc4-d198-4770-abcc-66da9005af27/>
- Kelly, H. H., Berscheid, E., Christensen, A., Harvey, J. H., Huston, T. L., Levinger, G., McClintock, E., Peplau, L. A., & Peterson, D. R. (1983). *Close relationships*. New York: Freeman.

Interpersonal Closeness and Self-Confidence: A Comparative Study Between a Single Child and a Child with Siblings

- Mueller, E. C., & Vandell, D. L. (1995). Peer play and friendships during the first two years. In H. C. Foot, A. J. Chapman, & J. R. Smith (Eds.), *Friendship and social relations in children* (pp. 181-208). New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.
- Newman, S. (n.d.). Only child stereotypes: Fact vs fiction. Susan Newman Ph.D. <https://www.susanne Newmanphd.com/blog/2017/05/16/only-child-stereotypes/>
- Perkins, K. E. (2018). *The integrated model of self-confidence: Defining and operationalizing self-confidence in organizational settings* (Doctoral dissertation, Florida institute of Technology).
- Tavares, M. B., Fuchs, F. C., Diligenti, F., Abreu, J. R. P. D., Rohde, L. A., & Fuchs, S. C. (2004). Behavioral characteristics of the only child vs first-born and children with siblings. *Brazilian Journal of Psychiatry*, 26, 17-23. <https://doi.org/10.1590/S1516-44462004000100007>
- Trent, K., & Spitze, G. (2011). Growing up without siblings and adult sociability behaviors. *Journal of Family Issues*, 32(9), 1178-1204. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X11398945>

Acknowledgement

The research paper would not have been possible without the kind support and help of my supervisor, Dr. Poonam Vats. Right from the beginning to the final completion, her valuable assistance was present throughout.

Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Jannat, K. C. & Poonam, V. (2022). Interpersonal Closeness and Self-Confidence: A Comparative Study Between a Single Child and a Child with Siblings. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 10(4), 1353-1360. DIP:18.01.127.20221004, DOI:10.25215/1004.127