

Relationship between Sibling Status, Parenting Style and Self-efficacy among Indian Adults

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ABSTRACT

Although previous research has established that components of family interaction and structure, like parenting style and sibling order, have a strong influence on aspects of psychological development in adults like the formation of self-concept, behavioural outcomes, personality traits, it has ignored the enmeshed relationship of these predictor variables. Existing research has not sufficiently accounted for how certain components of family environment impact the relationship between other such predictor variables and indicators of individual psychological development like self-concept. The current study explored the relationship between parenting style, sibling status and self-efficacy (a key element of overall self-concept), and whether parenting style plays a mediating role in the relationship between sibling status and self-efficacy. Participants (n=190) were asked to retrospectively appraise their parents' parenting styles and responded to a self-report questionnaire assessing their level of self-efficacy. The results indicated that authoritative parenting is a positive significant predictor of self-efficacy among Indian adults, but that parenting style does not have a significant mediating effect on the relationship between sibling status and self-efficacy. Future studies focussed on retesting similar hypotheses with a larger sample size, or exploring other components of family environment, like psychological sibling status and parental conflict, and their impact on self-efficacy, within a similar mediation framework, could broaden understanding of the factors that contribute to the development of self-concept as adults.

Keywords: *Self-efficacy, Parenting Style, Sibling Status, Self-concept, Adult Psychological Development, Indian Adults*

There has been in place a rich tradition in research of tracing individual psychological development in variables such as family interaction and structure. Research over the years has explored the relationship between components of family environment like parenting style, sibling composition and the development of various individual psychological characteristics like motivation, interest, pro-social behaviour, resilience, etc. The present study aims to understand the impact of family structure and relationships on the

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formation of individual self-concept by exploring the relationship between perceived parenting style, biological sibling status and self-efficacy in Indian adults.

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy, a personal judgment of "how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations"(Bandura, 1982), is an individual's perception of their own ability to cope and adapt to circumstances, and behave in ways necessary to achieve certain desired outcomes. It is an essential element of a person's development from which factors like human motivation, performance accomplishments, and emotional well-being are derived (Bandura, 1997, 2006). Self-efficacy is a crucial indicator and symptom of a person's cognitive development and social competence; it is a key component of an individual's self-concept. Self-efficacy and its relationship with individual behavior and attitude has been studied within a variety of contexts, like its association with academic motivation and performance (Schunk, 2011); the role it plays in social adaptation and adjustment (Maddux and Gosselin, 2012); and self-efficacy as a cognitive factor affecting health, recovery behavior and therapeutic interventions (O'Leary, 1985). Self-efficacy has been seen to be influenced by various factors like social influence (Slater, 1989), mastery experience and vicarious experience (Hasan et al., 2014), learning and instruction strategies (Van Dinther et al., 2011). Family environment has been found to have a positive correlation with perceived self-efficacy (Mishra and Shanwal, 2014), with specific components of family environment like parenting style being a strong predictor of self-efficacy and other individual developmental traits (Chandler, 2006; Hassan et al., 2011; Hoeltje et al., 1996; Yousaf, 2015).

Psychological Development and Parenting Style

Parenting style is understood to be a pattern of informing, responding and reacting; it is the pervasive and consistent environment that is created by a parent for the child, in which ways of behaviour and thought are instilled either explicitly or implicitly. Parenting styles are placed in three categories: Authoritative (High Responsiveness, High Demandingness), Authoritarian (Low Responsiveness, High Demandingness) and Permissive (High Responsiveness, Low Demandingness). Existing research has firmly established the relationship between different parenting styles and the formation of psychological characteristics in individuals, and that parenting has a significant impact on the development of an individual's self-concept (Collins et al., 2000). There exists a strong association between parenting style and socio-cognitive competence, behavioural and developmental outcomes, like cooperation, interpersonal mistrust, self-reliance, social maturity and contentment (Baumrind, 1967; Darling, 1999). Parenting style has been found to be a reliable predictor of levels of self-esteem (Herz and Gullone, 1999). Parenting style exerts a strong influence on academic self-efficacy; there exists a positive correlation between authoritative parenting and student self-efficacy (Chandler, 2006; Shaw, 2008; Tam et al., 2012).

Specific parenting styles have been linked with positive or negative development in individual behavior and attitudes: authoritative parenting has been found to be correlational with higher psychosocial competence and lesser incidence of dysfunctional psychological and behavioral outcomes; authoritarian parenting is positively associated with obedience and conformity, while being related to poor self-concept among youngsters; permissive parenting is associated with high self-confidence and higher susceptibility to and frequency of substance abuse and school misconduct (Lamborn et al., 1991). Findings across numerous researches indicate authoritative parenting to be the optimal parenting style within diverse

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contexts. Authoritative parenting has been linked to healthy development, providing a balance between affection and support and an appropriate degree of parental control in managing behaviour (Steinberg, 2001). The authoritative atmosphere provides opportunities for the individual to become self-reliant and to develop a healthy sense of autonomy; it balances parental demandingness with emotional responsiveness (Darling, 1999). It has a significant effect on increasing self-efficacy, as compared with permissive style and the authoritarian style (Hassan et al., 2011) and is positively associated with healthy social-emotional adjustment and competence (Kaufmann et al., 2000).

Psychological Development and Sibling Status

The psycho-dynamic approach to understanding personality emphasises on the role of early childhood experiences emerging from family dynamics and family structure (Smith and Vetter, 1991). Adler lay significant weight on the idea of “birth order”, the biological position that a child occupies in the sequence of offspring in the family, and claimed that it has a foundational impact on the development of the personality of a person (Eckstein and Kaufman, 2012); the fact of being born as the eldest child, or the middle child, or a single child, for example, has a formative effect on their personality. Several studies have indicated how a similar component of family dynamics and sibling composition, “sibling status”, has a crucial impact on the development of an individual’s beliefs and attitudes about self and others. Sibling status is the number of biological siblings available to an individual.

The impact of birth order and sibling status on psychological development has been mostly explained in existing research in terms of “parental investment” and “niche picking”. Parental investment refers to the resources, in terms of attention, care, food, clothing, housing, as well as other financial and personal factors, that a parent is able to offer a child, and which in turn has an impact on the development of a child’s self-perception and relationships with others within the context of the family. The level of parental investment is dependent on the structure of the family unit, and is accordingly affected by the number of children a parent has, that is, the number of siblings a child has, and where that child is placed in the hierarchy of siblings (Sulloway, 1996). There exists a relationship between the “quality” of individual psychological development, in terms of various components like self-perception, motivation, resilience, and the number of children in the family unit; the number of siblings is inversely related to the quality of individual development; the higher the number of siblings, the lower the quality of psychological development for an individual child of the family (Blake, 1991).

Sibling composition and individual psychological development are also linked through the phenomenon of “niche picking”. A “niche”, in the context of family systems and dynamics, is the particular role and function an individual comes to adopt within the specific structure and environment of the family unit. This “niche” has a major formative influence on the behaviors and attitudes an individual develops (Sulloway, 2011); the eldest child will adopt an attitude and behavioral pattern towards the family unit and towards themselves that is different than the one adopted by the middle or youngest child in the family. Similarly, an only child’s self-concept and other-concept will vary since they will occupy a very different “niche” within the family structure from the one occupied by a child with siblings.

Research over the years has attempted to draw comparisons between single children and sibling children in terms of specific traits of individual psychological development. Single children have been found to be more egocentric, whereas sibling children seem to possess the qualities of persistence, cooperation, and peer prestige (Jiao et al., 1986). Single children

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surpass all categories of sibling children, except firstborns and people from two-child families, in terms of achievement, adjustment, character, intelligence, parent-child relationships, and sociability (Falbo and Polit, 1986).

Current Study

The present study aimed to explore the relationship between perceived parenting style, biological sibling status and self-efficacy, in terms of its impact on the development of an individual's self-concept, and to understand if, and to what extent, parenting style affects the relationship between sibling status and self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is an essential element of a person's overall self-concept. Understanding what components of family structure and relationships are significant predictors of self concept, via their influence on self-efficacy, can help guide therapy perspectives and interventions targeting individual self-concept within the context of counselling psychology. Previous attempts in research have over-emphasised the role of parenting style by treating it as an all-encompassing influence on self-efficacy (Macobby and Martins, 2003). Though parenting style is a significant contributor to the development of behaviour and attitude, it is not the sole, necessary condition (Baumrind, 1991). Most existing research has attempted to study the impact of either parenting style or birth order/sibling status exclusively, ignoring the enmeshed nature of the relationship between parenting style, sibling status and self-efficacy. The purpose of this study was to address this gap in understanding. The present study treated parenting style as a mediating variable in the relationship between sibling status and self-efficacy.

The study hypothesised that:

- **Hypothesis 1:** There exists a relationship between Sibling Status and Self-efficacy.
- **Hypothesis 2:** There exists a relationship between Sibling Status and Parenting Style.
- **Hypothesis 3:** There exists a relationship between Parenting Style and Self-efficacy.
- **Hypothesis 4:** Parenting style acts as a mediator in the relationship between Sibling Status and Self-efficacy.

METHOD

Participants and Procedures

The study collected data through August to October 2020. Using the Google Forms platform, the author collected data from 190 Indian adults aged between 18-25 years. The participants were required to fill an informed consent sheet, the Parental Authority Questionnaire (Buri, 1991), a Participant Information Sheet (PIS) and the Shwarzer-General Self-Efficacy Scale (Schwarzer and Jerusalem, 1995), all made available to them via Google Forms. The informed consent page embedded within the Google Forms interface was the first page the potential participants encountered, providing them appropriate information as to the nature, aims and objectives of the research. Potential participants who declined to take part in the study were directed to another page and were not exposed to any of the questionnaires. The study excluded adults who were adoptive rather than biological wards of their parents, and/or had in the past or were currently seeking psychological treatment or therapy. The study was approved and given ethical clearance by the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Measures

Parenting Style

The Parental Authority Questionnaire (Buri, 1991) was used to assess the participant's perceived parenting style. The PAQ measures permissive, authoritative and authoritarian parental style prototypes. It consists of 30 items and yields permissive, authoritarian and authoritative scores for the parent; each of these scores is derived from the phenomenological appraisals of the parent's authority by the participant. A tab embedded in the Google Forms interface asked the participants to indicate how they interpreted the term "parent" in the questionnaire- as mother or as father. The participants were then presented 30 statements, each describing a certain parental behavior or attitude expressed in a specific situation. The participants were asked to respond to each statement by choosing a position on a Likert scale, 1 denoting "strongly disagree" and 5 denoting "strongly agree", based on how the described behavior or attitude applied to their parent. Based on their responses to the respective sets of questions corresponding with each of the three parenting styles, each participant's scores were categorised under three headings: Permissive Parenting Style (PPS); Authoritarian Parenting Style (APS); Authoritative/Flexible Parenting Style (FPS).

Self-efficacy

The Shwarzer-General Self-Efficacy Scale (Schwarzer and Jerusalem, 1995) was used to assess the participant's level of self-efficacy. The participants were presented with ten statements which all described various behaviors and attitudes in the context of coping and adaptation abilities in both daily activities and isolated stressful events. The participants were asked to respond to each statement by picking a position on a 4 point scale, 1 denoting "not at all true" and 4 denoting "exactly true", based on how much they perceived themselves to espouse the described behavior or attitude.

Sibling Status

Through a participation information sheet embedded in the Google Forms interface, the participants were asked to numerically identify the number of biological siblings they had (i.e., 0, 1, 2, 3, and so on). Based on their responses, the participants were categorised into 3 groups- Only children, 1-2 Siblings, 3 or more siblings.

Statistical Analysis

The study analysed data using mediation analyses. All statistical analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS 26.

RESULTS

Mediation analyses were conducted to test research hypotheses based on a simple mediation model represented in Figures 1, 2 and 3. Analyses were carried out on data derived from the Parental Authority Questionnaire (Buri, 1991), The Shwarzer-General Self-Efficacy Scale (Schwarzer and Jerusalem, 1995), the participant information sheet. Parenting Style had three sub-categories: Permissive, Authoritarian, Authoritative; similarly, Sibling Status also had three sub-categories: single children (no siblings), 1-2 siblings, and 3 or more siblings. Mediation analyses tested the relationship between the different levels of Parenting Style and Sibling Status, and the total Self-efficacy scores of the participants. As the key finding, the mediation analysis indicated that Parenting Style does not have a significant mediating effect on the relationship between Sibling Status and Self-efficacy.

Permissive Parenting as Mediator

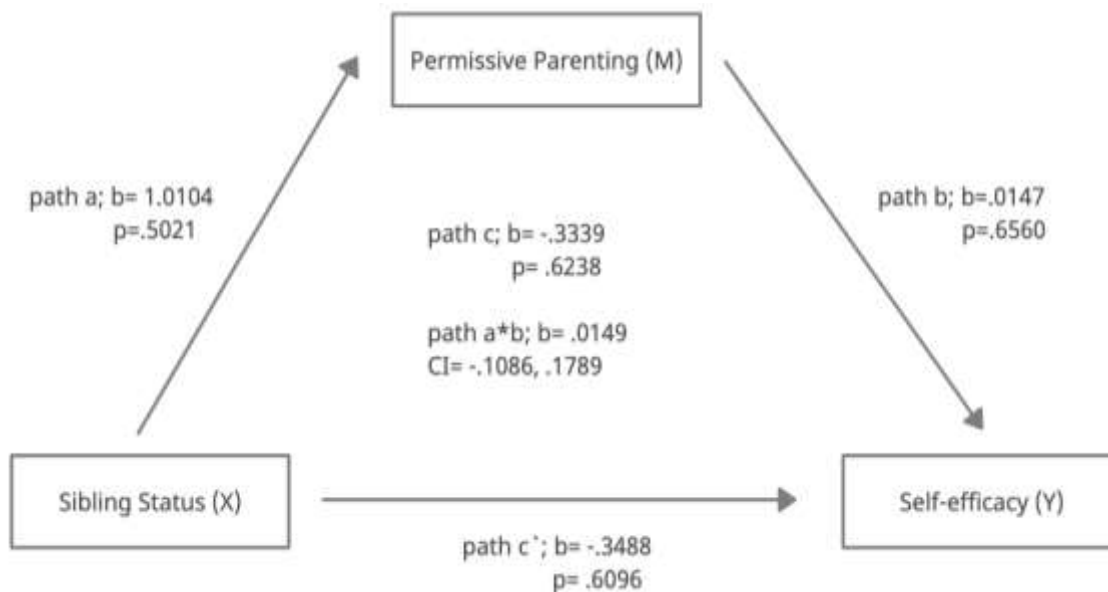


Figure 1

Sibling Status and Permissive Parenting

Sibling status has a positive, although insignificant effect on Permissive Parenting (path a, $b = 1.0104$, $t(188) = .6725$ [<1.96], $p = .5021$ [$>.05$], $CI = -1.9533, 3.9742$).

Permissive Parenting and Self-efficacy

Permissive parenting has a positive, insignificant effect on Self-efficacy (path b, $b = .0147$, $t(187) = .4461$ [<1.96], $p = .6560$, $CI = -.0505, .0800$).

Sibling Status and Self-efficacy (Direct Effect)

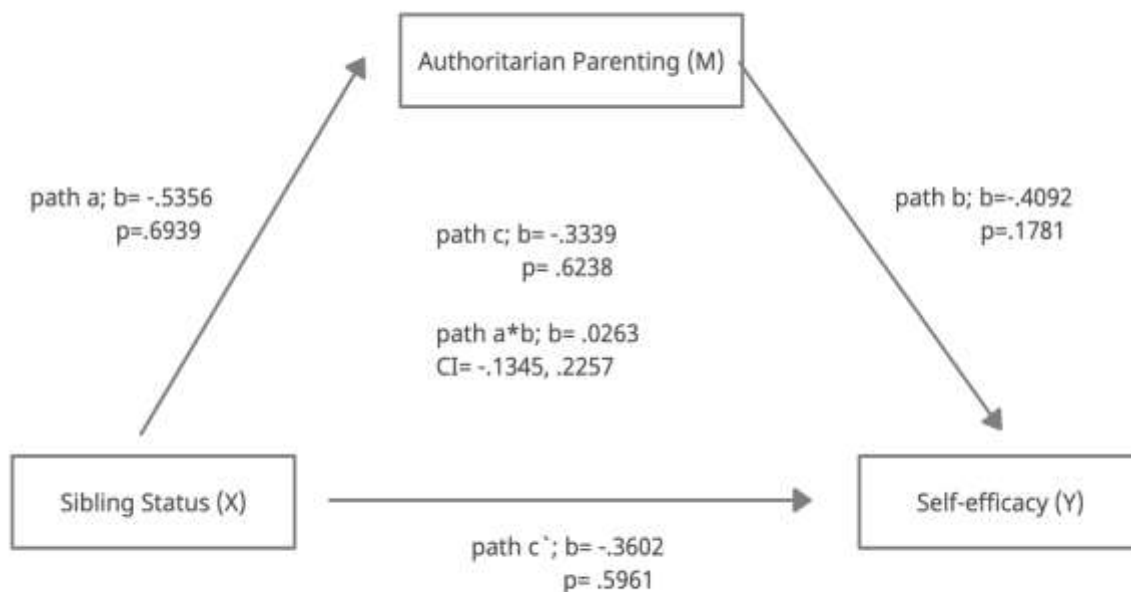
Sibling Status has a negative, insignificant, direct effect on Self-efficacy (path c', $b = -.3488$, $t(187) = -.5115$ [<1.96], $p = .6096$ [$>.05$], $CI = -1.6939, .9964$).

Sibling Status and Self-efficacy, through Permissive Parenting (Indirect Effect)

Sibling Status has a positive, although insignificant, indirect effect on Self-efficacy through Permissive Parenting (path a*b, $b = .0149$, $SE = .0677$, $CI = [-.1086, .1789]$). Permissive Parenting does not have a significant mediating effect on the relationship between Sibling Status and Self-efficacy.

Authoritarian Parenting as Mediator

Figure 2



Sibling Status and Authoritarian Parenting

Sibling status has a negative, although insignificant effect on Authoritarian Parenting (path a, $b = -.5356$, $t(188) = -.3942$ [<1.96], $p = .6939$ [$>.05$], $CI = -3.2162, 2.1450$).

Authoritarian Parenting and Self-efficacy

Authoritarian parenting has a negative, insignificant effect on Self-efficacy (path b, $b = -.4092$, $t(187) = -1.3516$ [<1.96], $p = .1781$ [$>.05$], $CI = -.1210, .0226$).

Sibling Status and Self-efficacy (Direct Effect)

Sibling Status has a negative, insignificant, direct effect on Self-efficacy (path c', $b = -.3602$, $t(187) = -.5310$ [<1.96], $p = .5961$ [$>.05$], $CI = -1.6985, .9781$).

Sibling Status and Self-efficacy, through Authoritarian Parenting (Indirect Effect)

Sibling Status has a positive, although insignificant, indirect effect on Self-efficacy through Authoritarian Parenting (path a*b, $b = .0263$, $SE = .0824$, $CI = -.1345, .2257$). Authoritarian Parenting does not have a significant mediating effect on the relationship between Sibling Status and Self-efficacy.

Authoritative Parenting as Mediator

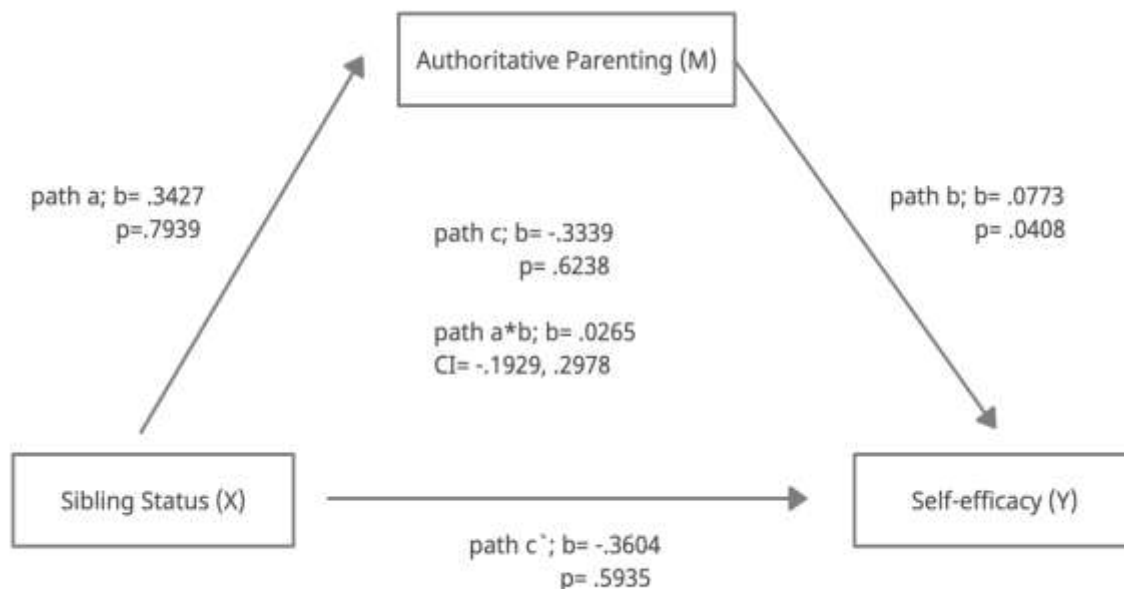


Figure 3

Sibling Status and Authoritative Parenting

Sibling status has a positive, although insignificant effect on Authoritative Parenting (path a, $b = .3427$, $t(188) = .2617$ [<1.96], $p = .7939$ [$>.05$], $CI = -2.2406, 2.9259$).

Authoritative Parenting and Self-efficacy

Authoritative Parenting has a positive, significant effect on Self-efficacy (path b, $b = .0773$, $t(187) = 2.0594$ [>1.96], $p = .0408$ [$<.05$], $CI = .0033, .1513$). The finding that Authoritative parenting alone has a significant effect on Self-efficacy levels is congruent with the findings of preceding studies.

Sibling Status and Self-efficacy (Direct Effect)

Sibling Status has a negative, insignificant, direct effect on Self-efficacy (path c, $b = -.3604$, $t(187) = -.5347$ [<1.96], $p = .5935$ [$>.05$], $CI = -1.6899, .9692$).

Sibling Status and Self-efficacy, through Authoritative Parenting (Indirect Effect)

Sibling Status has a positive, although insignificant, indirect effect on Self-efficacy through Authoritative Parenting (path a*b, $b = .0265$, $SE = .1173$, $CI = -.1929, .2978$). Authoritative Parenting does not have a significant mediating effect on the relationship between Sibling Status and Self-efficacy.

Sibling Status and Self-efficacy (Total Effect)

Sibling Status has a negative, although insignificant, total effect on Self-efficacy (path c, $b = -.3339$, $t(188) = -.4913$ [<1.96], $p = .6238$ [$>.05$], $CI = -1.6745, 1.0068$), consistent with all three parenting styles as mediators.

DISCUSSION

In concurrence with previous studies on the relationship between parenting style and self-efficacy (Anjum and Kausar, 2009; Chandler, 2006; Hassan et al., 2011; Lopez, 2002; Shaw, 2008; Tam et al., 2012), the results of the present study indicate that Authoritative parenting is a significant, positive predictor of individual self-efficacy in Indian adults ($b = .0773$, $p = .0408$). Authoritarian and Permissive parenting were found to have an insignificant impact on self-efficacy ($b = -.4092$, $p = .1781$ [$>.05$]; $b = .0147$, $p = .6560$). The statistically insignificant nature of these findings may be due to a restricted sample size ($n=190$); a larger sample size could perhaps provide statistical significance to the trend, 'negative' impact of Authoritarian parenting and 'positive' impact of Permissive parenting on self-efficacy, indicated in the results of this study and confirmed in the findings of several others (Dehyadegary et al., 2014; Lopez, 2002).

The findings of the mediation analyses suggest that Parenting Style does not play a significant mediating role in the relationship between Sibling Status and Self-efficacy. Future research should focus on other components of family relationships and structure, like the quality of sibling relationships, continuity of sibling relationships, parental conflict, etc. as potential mediators in the relationship between Sibling Status and Self-efficacy.

Certain limitations of the present research must be noted as considerations for future research. The smaller sample size of 190 participants, in the context of the population being Indian adults aged 18-25, may be the chief reason behind the inconclusive and non-predictive nature of many of the findings of the research. The research could not establish a statistically significant relationship: between Sibling Status and Self-efficacy; between Sibling Status and Parenting Style; between Authoritarian/Permissive parenting and Self-efficacy. The corresponding hypotheses should be retested by a study with a more proportionate sample size. Secondly, the present research restricted itself to biological sibling status as a potential predictor of self-efficacy, and did not explore the relationship of self-efficacy with psychological sibling status i.e. relationships with close peers (friends, cousins), which might have a similar impact on self-concept as relationship with a biological sibling. Future research could focus on the number of perceived psychological siblings, the quality and continuity of such relationships, and explore psychological sibling status as an independent predictor of self-efficacy, or as a mediator in the relationship between biological sibling status and self-efficacy.

The current study, despite these limitations, serves recent literature by reaffirming the link between parenting style and self-efficacy, with regards to the finding that authoritative parenting has a positive, significant impact on an individual's sense of self-efficacy. Moreover, future studies operating with a larger sample size could draw statistically significant findings based on the theoretical premise provided by the present research. Such findings could broaden theoretical understanding of the factors contributing to the formation of an individual's self-concept, and could have practical implications by way of informing counselling perspectives and models in terms of formulation and treatment planning.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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