

**Comparative Study**

## **Birth Order and Sibling Pairs: A Comparative Study of Older and Younger Siblings' Perceived Sibling Relationship and Differences in Gender Dyads**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This research study aimed to compare the perceived sibling relationship between older and younger siblings, as well as examine the differences among different gender dyads (male-female, female-female, male-male). The sample comprised of 50 older siblings and 51 younger siblings, all of whom were young adults aged between 18 and 30 years and of Indian origin. The Adult Sibling Relationship Questionnaire - Very Short Form (ASRQ-VSF) was used to assess sibling relationships. Data analysis involved conducting t-test to compare older and younger siblings' relationship. One Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine differences between the various sibling gender dyads. The results indicated that both older and younger siblings reported similar sibling relationships characterized by low levels of conflict and average levels of warmth. However, sister pairs exhibited higher levels of warmth compared to brother-sister pairs. Additionally, sister pairs perceived higher levels of parental favoritism compared to brother-sister pairs. These findings suggest that sibling relationships in this sample were generally positive, with some differences depending on the gender composition of the sibling dyads. Further research could explore additional factors that may contribute to these observed differences and expand the investigation to include a broader range of age groups and cultural contexts. Research on siblings can inform interventions, policies, and support systems that recognize and harness the potential of these relationships.

**Keywords:** *Sibling Relationship, Birth Order, Gender Dyads, Young Adults*

Sibling relationships form a fundamental component of the human experience, shaping individuals' lives from early childhood through adulthood. These unique bonds are characterized by a complex interplay of love, rivalry, companionship, and support. Siblings share a common heritage, upbringing, and familial connection, making their relationship distinct from any other. According to Cicirelli (1985), sibling relationships encompass all the interactions, including physical, verbal, and non-verbal communication, that occur between two or more individuals who share knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and feelings towards each other. They are quite possibly the longest and

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enduring relationships one finds themselves in, other than the relationship with oneself (Voorpostel & Van der Lippe, 2007).

The three dimensions of sibling relationship are as follows:

**Warmth** – In the context of sibling relationships, warmth refers to the presence of positive emotions, affection, and a sense of closeness between siblings. It encompasses behaviours and attitudes that demonstrate care, support, and empathy towards one another. Warmth in sibling relationships can be expressed through acts of kindness, verbal expressions of love and appreciation, spending quality time together, and showing emotional support during challenging times. Warmth is an important component of healthy sibling relationships as it contributes to feelings of connectedness, trust, and emotional well-being among siblings. According to Bedford (1995), sibling relationships have the potential to offer support, companionship, solidarity, and overall well-being. As individuals enter adolescence and young adulthood, their sibling relationships take on new dimensions. Siblings often serve as confidants and sources of emotional support during this transitional phase, providing a safe space for sharing experiences, seeking advice, and processing challenges. The sibling bond can act as a buffer against the pressures of external influences, offering a stable foundation of familiarity and understanding. During early adulthood, the affectionate aspects of sibling relationships can vary. While some siblings may offer support and affection to one another during significant life transitions like marriage, starting a family, building a career, and caring for aging parents, all siblings may not exhibit such behaviour. Siblings have a tendency to feel close to one another and be more accepting as they enter middle and late adulthood. (Bedford, 1989; Ciccarelli, 1982; Gold, 1989; Seltzer, 1989).

**Conflict** – Conflict in sibling relationships refers to disagreements, tensions, or disputes that occur between siblings. It involves the presence of negative interactions, hostility, or disagreement over various issues or matters. Research findings regarding the negative aspects of sibling relationships in adulthood have produced mixed results. For instance, in a study involving middle-aged adults (Ciccarelli, 1982), a significant majority (88%) of participants reported rare or no occurrences of arguments with their siblings, and 93% reported rare or no feelings of competitiveness. Similarly, when elderly siblings were interviewed, only 10% of the sample exhibited signs of hostility (Gold, 1989b). However, contrasting these self-report results, small-group discussions with individuals ranging from 22 to 93 years of age revealed that 45% of the participants reported experiencing rivalry with their siblings (Ross & Milgram, 1982). Sibling conflict can arise from differences in perspectives, preferences, needs, or competing for resources or attention. It can manifest through verbal arguments, physical confrontations, or emotional clashes. While sibling conflicts can be intense, they also provide an opportunity for personal growth and the development of emotional resilience. Through navigating disagreements and learning to compromise, siblings acquire essential skills for managing interpersonal relationships beyond their family environment. While some level of conflict is normal and expected in sibling relationships, excessive or unresolved conflict can strain the relationship and impact overall family dynamics. Effective communication, conflict resolution skills, and understanding each other's perspectives are important for managing and reducing conflict in sibling relationships.

**Parental Favouritism** – Parental favouritism refers to the differential treatment or perceived preference that parents display towards one or more of their children over others. “Theoretical and empirical work from an evolutionary perspective indicates that parents are

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not expected to, and neither do they, express affection for and invest in their children equally” (Daly & Wilson, 1987). It occurs when parents consistently show more attention, affection, resources, or privileges to one child, leading to feelings of inequality and unfairness among siblings. Parental favouritism can take various forms, such as spending more quality time with a particular child, praising or rewarding one child more often, or giving preferential treatment in terms of educational opportunities, financial support, or decision-making. The impact of parental favouritism on sibling relationships can be significant. Siblings who perceive themselves as less favoured may experience feelings of resentment, jealousy, and low self-esteem. It can lead to increased rivalry, competition, and conflicts among siblings. Moreover, it can strain the overall family dynamics, creating tension and a sense of division within the family. Open communication, equal distribution of attention and resources, and fostering individual strengths and interests can help mitigate the negative effects of parental favouritism and promote positive sibling relationships.

Sibling relationships in India have garnered attention in recent years, as researchers have recognized the significance of these bonds in the lives of individuals and families. Sakshi and Singh (2015) shed light on the dynamics of sibling relationships specifically within the Indian context, with a focus on middle-aged adults. This study emphasizes the significance of sibling relationships in India and sheds light on how cultural and gender dynamics influence these bonds. In the Indian context, sibling relationships are often characterized by a strong sense of duty, care, and support. Siblings play essential roles in each other's lives, providing emotional support, advice, and companionship throughout various life stages.

### ***Theories on Sibling Relationship***

#### **1. Psychoanalytic-Evolutionary Perspectives**

Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory and Adler's theory of individual psychology (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956) have been utilized as frameworks to understand the dynamics of sibling relationships. These theories draw inspiration from early psychoanalytic writings in the first half of the 1900s.

**Attachment theory** – Attachment theory, formulated by British psychologist John Bowlby, explains how humans form emotional connections with others, particularly in the context of intimate relationships. The theory posits that infants and young children possess an inherent inclination to seek proximity to their primary caregivers, driven by a need for safety and security. From the viewpoint of attachment theory, it is crucial to recognize that children have the capacity to develop attachments not only with their primary caregivers but also with other familiar individuals in their social environment. Considering the frequent presence of siblings in the lives of children and adolescents, siblings become significant candidates for forming attachment relationships due to their ubiquitous presence in everyday life. In line with the idea that siblings can fulfil attachment roles, Jenkins (1992) discovered that certain siblings seek emotional support from each other when confronted with parental marital conflict. While not explicitly based on attachment frameworks, Jenkins's study and other research (e.g., Kim, McHale, Osgood, & Crouter, 2006; Voorpostel & Blieszner, 2008) provide evidence of siblings serving as providers of emotional security at various stages throughout life. In certain instances, older siblings can assume the role of an attachment figure or a secure base for their younger siblings.

**Birth Order Theory** – Adler's theory emphasized the significance of the family system, including the influence of siblings, in shaping an individual's personality. A crucial concept

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in Adler's theory was the inferiority complex, and he was particularly interested in how these psychological dynamics affected an individual's style of life and management of self-esteem. According to Adler, social comparisons and power dynamics within families played a central role in shaping an individual's sense of self. Adler's ideas regarding the importance of sibling experiences in personality development formed the basis for his exploration of birth order effects on individual development. He believed that sibling rivalry stemmed from each child's desire to overcome potential feelings of inferiority. As a means of reducing competition, siblings often engage in differentiation or "de-identification" by developing distinct personal qualities and pursuing different interests or roles. Sibling differentiation, therefore, emerges as a key dynamic within families and is believed to contribute to the development of more harmonious and less conflict-ridden sibling relationships. Adler's Birth Order Theory is based on the idea that children learn to adapt to their position in the family and that this adaptation shapes their personality. For example, firstborn children are often seen as leaders and are given more responsibility than their younger siblings. This can lead them to develop a sense of self-confidence and a need to be in control. Middle children, on the other hand, often feel like they must compete for attention and may develop a sense of rivalry with their siblings. This can lead them to be more independent and resourceful. Youngest children, meanwhile, often receive a lot of attention from their parents and siblings. This can lead them to develop a sense of entitlement and a need for approval. While psychoanalytic and evolutionary theorists have traditionally attributed sibling conflict to sibling rivalry and its impact on personality development, alternative perspectives have challenged this assumption. Felson (1983), for instance, proposed that during adolescence, conflicts between siblings arise more from disparities in resource access (e.g., television, clothing, tangible goods) and family conditions (e.g., parental intervention, division of labor) rather than from sibling jealousy or rivalry. Additionally, Prochaska and Prochaska (1985) found that most young individuals reported sibling conflicts stemming from personal or dispositional factors (e.g., being in a bad mood, retaliation for a previous transgression by a sibling) rather than deliberate attempts to gain parental attention.

### 2. Social Psychological Processes

Social psychological theories aim to explain how individuals are influenced by others, including their cognitive interpretations of others' characteristics and motivations. **Attribution theory**, for instance, focuses on individuals' explanations of behaviour and events, emphasizing the importance of attributions in shaping their reactions to interpersonal experiences. While these theories have relevance to sibling relationships, they have been underutilized in sibling research. One social psychological perspective that holds relevance to sibling dynamics is **Social Comparison theory**, originally proposed by Festinger. This theory suggests that individuals have an inherent motivation to evaluate themselves by comparing their attributes and achievements with those of others, particularly individuals whom they perceive as similar. Social comparison serves the purpose of self-esteem enhancement, as individuals may enhance their self-perception through upward comparisons with admired others or defensive downward comparisons when they perceive themselves as better off than others. Given their shared family background and experiences, siblings are natural targets for social comparison. The notion of sibling rivalry assumes that siblings frequently engage in social comparisons, particularly regarding parental treatment and differential treatment among siblings.

### **3. Social Learning Theories**

Social learning processes are commonly used to explain the dynamics of sibling relationships, particularly among child and adolescent siblings. Social learning theories propose that individuals acquire new behaviours, including cognitive behaviours like attitudes and beliefs, through two key mechanisms: reinforcement and observation of others' behaviours. Research on sibling relationships in childhood and adolescence focuses on the role of parents as models, such as when they demonstrate effective conflict resolution strategies or provide praise for positive sibling interactions. Siblings also influence their own relationship through reciprocal reinforcement of behaviours and observing and imitating one another. Family contexts offer ample opportunities for these social learning processes to occur. Children acquire social skills through interactions with parents and siblings and by observing their family members' interactions with others. Social learning principles suggest that modelling processes in sibling relationships may vary based on factors such as sibling age and gender constellation. Older and same-gender siblings are more likely to serve as models, and siblings close in age may be imitated due to perceived similarity. Additionally, a significant age gap between siblings can confer power and higher status to the older sibling, promoting modelling.

### **4. Family and Ecological Systems Approaches**

A family systems framework examines the broader context in which sibling relationships develop. This perspective, derived from general systems theory, views families holistically, organized into interdependent subsystems. These subsystems range from individuals to dyads (such as sibling and parent-child relationships), triads, and the entire family system. Flexible boundaries ideally exist between subsystems, allowing for influences without complete determination. Some boundaries, particularly intergenerational ones, are more crucial to maintain than others. Coalitions within families indicate dysfunction and have rigid boundaries. Family systems theory also emphasizes the dynamic nature of family structure and process. Families adapt to internal and external changes, including the development of individual family members. Striking a balance between stability and change is important, as rigid adherence or constant fluctuations in norms, roles, and activities can signify dysfunction. Furthermore, families are open systems and influenced by external factors. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory suggests multiple levels of contextual influence on individual development, which are also relevant to sibling relationships.

#### ***Sibling gender constellation***

Sibling gender constellation is an important factor that influences the dynamics of sibling relationships. It refers to whether siblings are of the same sex or different sexes. Research indicates that same-sex siblings tend to have higher levels of communication and trust compared to opposite-sex siblings (Campion-Barr & Smetana, 2010). On the other hand, conflicts between opposite-sex siblings are found to be less frequent (Stocker et al., 1997). Furthermore, the gender composition of siblings can also impact their personality traits. For instance, studies have shown that males in opposite-sex sibling dyads tend to have lower levels of dominance, while females in opposite-sex dyads tend to exhibit higher levels of sociability (Rosenberg, 1982).

#### ***Rationale***

It is important to note that sibling relationships are complex and influenced by various factors, including family size, birth order, age spacing, and gender constellation. A comprehensive understanding of these factors is necessary to fully comprehend the

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background and dynamics of sibling relationships. Previous studies examining adult sibling relationships have identified some gender variations. Typically, females tend to exhibit higher levels of satisfaction and closeness in sibling relationships compared to males. Females often prioritize the maintenance of family ties (Nandwana & Katoch, 2009; Sakshi & Singh, 2015; Floyd & Parks, 1995). Another study conducted by Singh and Sakshi (2015) uncovered that a positive adult sibling relationship enhances an individual's self-esteem and contributes to maintaining respectful behaviour among siblings. By exploring the reciprocal influence between siblings and the effects of their relationships on individual development, we can gain a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics at play. Limited studies have been conducted on birth order in India, and most studies concern themselves with the developmental period and adolescence.

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### *Objectives*

- To study the difference between older and younger siblings' relationship.
- To compare the sibling gender constellations on their relationship quality.

#### *Hypothesis*

- H1 – There will be a significant difference in older and younger siblings' relationship.
- H2 – Female-female sibling pairs will have a better sibling relationship compared to male-female pairs.
- H3 – Male-female siblings and female-female siblings will have a better sibling relationship than male-male sibling pairs.

#### *Sample*

The sample comprised of 101 young adults within the age range of 18 to 30 years. Out of the total participants, 50 were older siblings and 51 were younger siblings. There were 38 brother-sister pairs, 50 sister pairs, and 13 brother pairs among the participants. The participants could read and understand English and were either undergraduate college students or were graduates. The data was collected using convenience sampling.

#### *Instruments*

One measure was used in this study,

**Adult Sibling Relationship Questionnaire – Very Short Form (ASRQ-VSF):** The ASRQ-VSF, developed by Lantheir and Stocker in 2014, is a reliable and valid 18-item measure used to assess the quality of adult sibling relationships. The scale evaluates the dimensions of Warmth (W), Conflict (C), and Rivalry (R) in the relationship between siblings. The Warmth and Conflict items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from hardly at all to extremely much, while the Parental Favouritism items are rated on a 5-point scale from participant usually favoured to sibling usually favoured. The psychometric properties of the ASRQ-VSF are satisfactory, with Cronbach's alpha ranging from .88 to .97. Scale scores are calculated by taking the mean of the 6 items that make up each scale.

#### *Procedure*

A questionnaire was created informing the participants about the study and letting them know that the information disclosed would be kept confidential. If they agreed to take part in the study, they could proceed further. The Adult Sibling Relationship Questionnaire – very

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short was administered to the participants. The participants took 10-15 minutes to fill the questionnaire, any further queries were answered and then they were thanked for their time.

### RESULTS

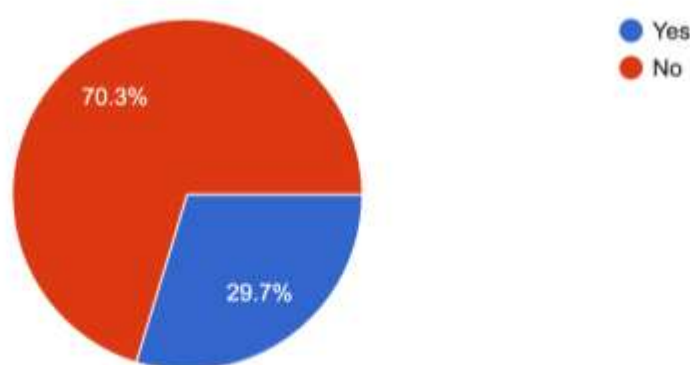
*Table No. 1 Comparison of scores obtained by older (n=50) and younger (n=51) siblings on sibling relationship as measured by ASRQ-VSF.*

Measures	Older		Younger		t(99)	p (2 tailed)
	M	SD	M	SD		
Warmth	3.34	1.12	3.45	1.04	-0.55	0.587
Conflict	2.91	0.90	2.70	0.87	1.16	0.249
Parental Favouritism	3.01	0.87	3.03	0.63	-0.17	0.864
Total (Sibling relationship)	3.08	0.60	3.06	0.49	1.84	0.854

*Figure No. 1 Pie chart showing siblings living together or apart.*

Do you live with your sibling(s)?

101 responses



H1 – There will be a significant difference in older and younger siblings' relationship.

As is evident from table 1, no significant difference was found between older and younger siblings' relationship in the domains of warmth (older: M = 3.34, SD = 1.12) (younger: M = 3.45, SD = 1.04,  $t(99) = -0.55$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), conflict (older: M = 2.91, SD = 0.90) (younger: M = 2.70, SD = 0.87,  $t(99) = 1.16$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), parental favouritism (older: M = 3.01, SD = 0.87) (younger: M = 3.03, SD = 0.63,  $t(99) = -0.17$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), and overall (older: M = 3.08, SD = 0.60) (younger: M = 3.06, SD = 0.49,  $t(99) = 1.84$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) of the sibling relationship scale. Therefore, both older and younger groups of siblings perceive their relationships in very similar ways. The Adult Sibling Relationship Questionnaire (ASRQ) scores are interpreted on a 5-point Likert scale, with a higher score on the warmth subscale indicating a more positive sibling relationship, a high score in conflict indicating a more negative sibling relationship, and a higher score on parental favouritism indicating that sibling is favoured more than the participant. From the results it can be seen that the level of warmth perceived by older and younger siblings in their relationships is average, level of conflict is low, and parental favouritism is average as well which means neither sibling are favoured.

Therefore, first hypothesis (H1) is rejected.

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**Differences between the various sibling gender constellations on their relationship**

*Table No. 2 Descriptives of the different sibling pairs namely male-female (n = 38), female-female (n = 50), and male-male (n = 13) on the correlates of sibling relationship.*

Variable	Male-female		Female-female		Male-male	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Warmth	2.95	1.00	3.81	1.01	3.13	.99
Conflict	2.92	.877	2.74	.86	2.74	1.02
Parental Favouritism	2.79	.59	3.24	.88	2.86	.389
Sibling Relationship	2.89	.57	3.26	.49	2.91	.52

*Table no 3: One-Way Analysis of Variance of the various sibling gender constellations (male-female, female-female, male-male) on the dimension of warmth of sibling relationship.*

Source	df	SS	MS	F	p
Between Groups	2	17.29	8.64	8.55*	<.001
Within Groups	98	99.05	1.01		
Total	100	116.34			

\*. Significant at the 0.05 level.

*Table no 4: Post Hoc Comparison using Tukey's HSD (Honestly Significant Difference) for the sibling pairs of the various sibling gender constellations on the warmth dimension of sibling relationship.*

Dependent Variable	(I) Sibling Pair	(J) Sibling Pair	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	p
Warmth	Male-female	Female-female	-.86*	.22	<.001
	Female-female	Male-male	.69	.31	.08
	Male-male	Male-female	.18	.32	.84

\*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

H2 – Female-female sibling pairs will have a better sibling relationship compared to male-female pairs.

H3 – Male-female siblings and female-female siblings will have a better sibling relationship than male-male sibling pairs.

The different sibling pairs that fall under the sibling gender constellations are male-female, female-female, and male-male. Referring to table 2 and 3, it can be seen that the 38 participants in the male-female sibling group had an average warmth score of 2.95 (SD = 1.00), the 50 participants in the female-female sibling group had an average score of 3.82 (SD = 1.00), and the 13 participants in the male-male sibling group had a mean of 3.13 (SD = 0.99). Therefore, there is a significant difference between or within the groups with respect to the warmth in their sibling relationships  $F(2,98) = 8.55, p < 0.01$ .

Post Hoc Comparison using Tukey's HSD (Honestly Significant Difference) test was carried out to ascertain which sibling pairs are different from each other on the dimensions of sibling relationship. From table 4 it can be seen that a significant difference was found in the



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domain of warmth between male-female ( $M = 2.95$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ) and female-female ( $M = 3.82$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) sibling pairs. With female-female pair of siblings having higher levels of warmth as compared to male-male siblings. No significant difference was found between male-female and male-male pairs of siblings. Results indicated a marginally significant difference between male-male ( $M = 3.13$ ,  $SD = 0.99$ ) and female-female ( $M = 3.82$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ,  $p < 0.1$ ) siblings.

**Table no 5: One-Way Analysis of Variance of the various sibling gender constellations (male-female, female-female, male-male) on the dimension of conflict of sibling relationship.**

Source	df	SS	MS	F	p
Between Groups	2	.81	.40	.51	.602
Within Groups	98	77.58	.792		
Total	100	78.391			

In the dimension of conflict in sibling relationship, referring to table 5, the male-female sibling pairs had an average score of 2.93 ( $SD = 0.88$ ), the female-female pair group scored a mean of 2.74 ( $SD = 0.86$ ), and the male-male siblings also had a mean of 2.74 ( $SD = 1.01$ ). No significant difference was found between and within the groups  $F(2,98) = 5.11$ ,  $p > 0.05$ .

**Table no 6: One-Way Analysis of Variance of the various sibling gender constellations (male-female, female-female, male-male) on the dimension of parental favouritism of sibling relationship.**

Source	df	SS	MS	F	p
Between Groups	2	4.69	2.35	4.38*	.015
Within Groups	98	52.58	.54		
Total	100	57.28			

\*. Significant at the 0.05 level.

**Table no 7: Post Hoc Comparison using Tukey's HSD (Honestly Significant Difference) for the sibling pairs of the various sibling gender constellations on the parental favouritism dimension of sibling relationship.**

Dependent Variable	(I) Sibling Pair	(J) Sibling Pair	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	p
Warmth	Male-female	Female-female	-.44*	.16	.01
	Female-female	Male-male	.38	.23	.22
	Male-male	Male-female	-.06	.23	.96

\*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

From table 6 it is seen that the male-female sibling group scored an average of 2.79 ( $SD = 0.59$ ) in the domain of parental favouritism, whereas the female-female pair scored a mean of 3.24 ( $SD = 0.87$ ), and the male-male sibling pair had a mean of 2.86 ( $SD = 0.39$ ). Therefore, a significant difference was found for parental favouritism  $F(2,98) = 4.38$ ,  $p < 0.05$ .

For parental favouritism, referring to table 7, a significant difference was found between male-female ( $M = 2.79$ ,  $SD = 0.59$ ) and female-female ( $M = 3.24$ ,  $SD = 0.87$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) sibling pairs. Female-female sibling pair scored higher on parental favouritism as compared

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to male-female pairs. A marginally significant difference was found between male-female ( $M = 2.79$ ,  $SD = 0.59$ ) and male-male ( $M = 2.86$ ,  $SD = 0.39$ ,  $p < 0.1$ ) pairs of siblings, and female-female ( $M = 3.24$ ,  $SD = 0.87$ ) and male-male ( $M = 2.86$ ,  $SD = 0.39$ ,  $p < 0.1$ ) siblings.

**Table no 8: One-Way Analysis of Variance of the various sibling gender constellations (male-female, female-female, male-male) on total sibling relationship.**

Source	df	SS	MS	F	p
Between Groups	2	4.69	2.35	4.38	.015
Within Groups	98	52.58	.54		
Total	100	57.28			

\*. Significant at the 0.05 level.

**Table no 9: Post Hoc Comparison using Tukey's HSD (Honestly Significant Difference) for the sibling pairs of the various sibling gender constellations on the parental favouritism dimension of sibling relationship.**

Dependent Variable	(I) Sibling Pair	(J) Sibling Pair	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	p
Warmth	Male-female	Female-female	-.37*	.11	.003
	Female-female	Male-male	.35	.16	.08
	Male-male	Male-female	-.02	.17	.99

\*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

In the total score of the sibling relationship scale as seen in table 8, the male-female sibling pairs had an average score of 2.89 ( $SD = 0.57$ ), the female-female pair group scored a mean of 3.26 ( $SD = 0.49$ ), and the male-male siblings had a mean of 2.91 ( $SD = 0.51$ ). Therefore, significant difference was found in sibling relationships  $F(2,98) = 6.32$ ,  $p < 0.01$

Overall, referring to table 9, a significant difference was found between male-female ( $M = 2.89$ ,  $SD = 0.57$ ), and female-female ( $M = 3.26$ ,  $SD = 0.49$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) siblings' relationships. Therefore, female-female sibling pairs have a better perception of their relationship with their siblings as compared to male-female siblings.

Therefore, the second hypothesis (H2) is accepted. Female-female sibling pairs have a better relationship as compared to male-female sibling pairs. While the third hypothesis (H3) is rejected. No significant difference was found in the perceived sibling relationship between male-male and male-female, as well as between male-male and female-female sibling dyads.

## DISCUSSION

H1 – There will be a significant difference in older and younger siblings' relationship.

H2 – Female-female sibling pairs will have a better sibling relationship compared to male-female pairs.

H3 – Male-female siblings and female-female siblings will have a better sibling relationship than male-male sibling pairs.

The aim of the present research was to study the difference in sibling relationship in older ( $n = 50$ ) and younger siblings ( $n = 51$ ), as well the differences in sibling pairs (male-female, female-female, male-male). The measure administered was the Adult Sibling Relationship

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Questionnaire – very short form (ASRQ-VSF). From the results it can be seen that no significant difference was found between older and younger siblings with regards to sibling relationship. This is inconsistent with the findings of Polette & Nettle (2009) who found that older siblings perceive their sibling relationship as more positive as compared to younger siblings. Therefore, the first hypothesis is rejected, it can be said that both sibling groups in the present study perceive a similar sibling relationship. The age bracket considered in this study was 18 to 30 years, these years comprise the emerging adulthood and young adulthood stages (Van Volkom, Machiz, & Reich, 2011). This time is defined by monumental changes in an individual's life. It is the period when people focus on themselves, their careers, becoming independent, and enriching their lives. Mitra et al (2021) found that the priorities of emerging adults of India according to importance are as follows:

- Responsibility toward family
- Independence/autonomy
- Financial security
- Education/career
- Parental expectations
- Romantic relationships
- Community and faith
- Societal norms.

Nandwana & Katoch (2009) found that “majority of the middle-aged adults siblings i.e. (33.34%) have Loyal type of relationship followed by Apathetic (29.17%) Congenial (24.16%) and Intimate (7.50%); only 5.83 percent of respondents depict Hostile style of relationship pattern with their sibling.” Consequently, the sibling relationship for both older and younger siblings is characterised by low conflict and average level of warmth. Five life events that occur during emerging adulthood and stimulate changes in sibling relationships were identified by Conger and Little (2010): moving out of the childhood home, receiving higher education, becoming employed, marriage, and childbirth. Studies have found that when siblings who have had conflicts in the past live apart from each other, the distance and time apart can help to improve their relationship. This may be due to reduced competition and the ability to form independent identities. For example, Goetting (1986) found that siblings who had previously experienced conflict reported increased contact and improved relationships after one sibling moved out of the family home. Similarly, Lindell, Campione-Barr, and Greer (2013) found that college students reported improved sibling relationships after moving away from home. These findings suggest that some distance and independence may be beneficial for improving sibling relationships. In the sample obtained for this study, 71 participants reported living away from their siblings. This could be a reason behind why siblings in this age group perceive their sibling relationship as ‘average’ as interpreted from the results. This means that the relationship they share with their siblings is a cordial one. Young adults admitted that they spend less time with siblings during emerging adulthood than during childhood and adolescence (Scharf, Shulman, & Avigad-Spitz, 2005). This improves the quality of sibling relationships because it decreases the likelihood of conflict occurring. The findings of the present study are consistent with this, as level of conflict in both the groups was found to be low.

### ***Differences among sibling gender constellations***

From the results it was seen that a significant difference was found between male-female and female-female sibling pairs in the domain of warmth in sibling relationship, with

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female-female siblings having higher levels of perceived warmth. This finding suggests that gender may play a role in the quality of sibling relationships. Previous studies on adult sibling relationships have identified significant disparities between genders. Typically, women tend to report higher levels of satisfaction and closeness in sibling relationships compared to men. Research has indicated that women tend to place more importance on maintaining familial ties (Nandwana & Katoch, 2009; Sakshi & Singh, 2015; Floyd & Parks, 1995). Probable reasons for this could be that females may be more likely to engage in activities that promote emotional closeness, such as sharing feelings and personal experiences. Additionally, socialization processes and gender roles may also contribute to differences in sibling relationships, with females being socialized to be more nurturing and expressive.

A significant difference was also found between male-female and female-female sibling pairs on parental favouritism. The female-female sibling pair group perceived that the sibling is favoured more. This finding is an interesting one. The result could be attributed to several factors. First, cultural expectations and gender norms may play a role in shaping perceptions of favouritism. In Indian culture, daughters are expected to be more nurturing and involved in family affairs, which could lead to parents showing more favouritism towards them. Additionally, sibling dynamics and family relationships may play a role in shaping perceptions of favouritism. For example, female siblings may be more likely to compete for attention and resources within the family, which could lead to perceptions of favouritism. On the other hand, male-female sibling pairs may be less likely to perceive favouritism due to different gender roles and expectations within the family. Studies have shown that sibling relationships in Indian families are often influenced by factors such as birth order, age gap, and family structure (Singh & Sharma, 2021; Singh & Gupta, 2018). For instance, Singh and Sharma (2021) found that first-born siblings reported greater levels of sibling rivalry compared to later-born siblings, while a study by Singh and Gupta (2018) found that sibling warmth was higher in joint families compared to nuclear families. These findings suggest that the cultural context in which sibling relationships develop is an important factor to consider in understanding sibling dynamics.

Overall, the female-female sibling pair had a better perception of the quality of their sibling relationship as compared to male-female pairs. Therefore, the second hypothesis is retained. Studies examining sibling relationships during childhood and adolescence have found that the gender constellation of siblings can have an impact on the nature of their relationship. Specifically, same-sex sibling pairs tend to have higher levels of intimacy and less hostility compared to opposite-sex pairs (Buhrmester & Furman, 1990). Among same-sex pairs, sister-sister dyads have been found to have the strongest bonds, with higher levels of warmth, intimacy, and closeness (Buhrmester & Furman, 1990; Dunn et al., 1994; Riggio, 2000). This is in congruence with the findings of the present study. In fact, research has shown that sisters often feel the most similar to each other and serve as close companions (Buhrmester & Furman, 1990). In contrast, brother-brother pairs report less caring, intimacy, and problem-solving compared to sister-sister pairs (Cole & Kerns, 2001). This could be due to the fact that sisters share a common gender identity which may lead to a stronger bond and understanding between them. Additionally, Indian culture places a strong emphasis on the importance of familial relationships, especially between siblings. This cultural value may contribute to the development of strong and supportive relationships between siblings, particularly in sister-sister pairs. Studies conducted in India also support this idea, with findings indicating that Indian siblings perceive themselves as having a strong bond and

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high levels of emotional support (Chakraborty & Chakraborty, 2020; Nandwana & Katoch, 2009).

### **CONCLUSION**

This study aimed to compare the sibling relationship in older and younger siblings and explore the differences in the gender dyads. The results showed that both older and younger siblings had similar sibling relationships characterized by low conflict and average levels of warmth. The findings suggest that the dynamics of sibling relationships change as individuals transition into emerging adulthood and that life events such as moving out of the childhood home can contribute to the changes in sibling relationships. Sister pairs were found to have higher levels of warmth as compared to brother-sister pairs. Sisters may feel a stronger bond and connection based on their shared experiences as females within the family. This shared gender identity might contribute to a greater sense of understanding, empathy, and emotional support among sisters, resulting in higher levels of warmth in their perceived sibling relationship. An interesting finding was that sister pairs perceived more parental favouritism compared to brother-sister pairs. It is possible that parents may have different expectations or biases based on gender, which may inadvertently lead to differential treatment. Alternatively, it could be a result of the sisters' heightened awareness and sensitivity to interpersonal dynamics within the family, making them more attuned to subtle differences in parental treatment. The findings of this study hold practical implications for families and professionals working with families. Recognizing the nuances of sibling relationships, particularly in terms of birth order and gender, can inform interventions, counselling, and support programs aimed at strengthening sibling bonds and improving overall family dynamics. The knowledge gained from this research can contribute to the development of effective strategies to promote healthy sibling relationships and enhance family well-being. Moreover, this comparative study expands the existing knowledge base on sibling dynamics, providing a comprehensive understanding of how birth order and gender interact to shape perceived sibling relationships.

### ***Limitations***

- Despite the researcher's instruction to give honest answers, some of the participants may have given socially desirable responses rather than what they believed.
- The sample belonged to a highly urbanized population.
- The study was a quantitative one only, which makes it less robust.

### ***Suggestions for further research***

- A larger sample could be obtained for better generalizability.
- A longitudinal study could be carried out to track the changes in sibling relationship over the years.
- Further research could include a qualitative study to explore the individual differences of siblings.

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***Conflict of Interest***

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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