

The Influence of Sibling Relationship on Romantic Attachment Styles in Young Adults: A Study Based on Sibling Constellation

Ms. L R Sinchana^{1*}, Ms. Shreya Thomas²

ABSTRACT

Sibling relationships are significant in shaping an individual's development and future relationships. Historically overlooked, recent research highlights their complexity and impact. The aim of this study was to determine the influence of sibling relationship on romantic attachment styles among young adults based on sibling constellations. A total of 136 young adults from India participated. The findings revealed no significant correlation between sibling relationships and romantic attachment styles. Gender differences were observed in sibling relationships, but not in romantic attachment styles. While no significant differences were found in sibling relationships based on the number of siblings or birth order, variations in anxious attachment styles were noted across different numbers of siblings. Additionally, significant differences in sibling relationships were observed based on status of living with siblings and duration of stay with siblings, highlighting the nuanced impact of these variables on sibling dynamics.

Keywords: *Sibling Relationship, Anxious Attachment, Avoidant Attachment, Romantic Attachment*

Sibling Relationship and Romantic attachment

Sibling relationships are significant in shaping an individual's development and future relationships. Historically overlooked, recent research highlights their complexity and impact (Wallace, 2012). Attachment theory, particularly Bowlby's work (1969), and Adler's individual psychology, emphasize the importance of family dynamics, including sibling relationships, in personality development. Sulloway's ideas on sibling competition further contribute to understanding sibling roles.

Attachment theory posits that early attachments influence social relationships, with insecure attachments potentially leading to distant or conflictual relationships. Ainsworth (1989) identified three attachment styles: anxious, secure, and avoidant, which persist into adulthood and affect romantic relationships. Securely attached individuals tend to have more satisfying relationships (Robertson et al., 2014).

¹Student, Kristu Jayanti College, Autonomous, Bangalore, Karnataka, India

²Faculty, Department of Psychology, Kristu Jayanti College, Autonomous, Bangalore, India

*Corresponding Author

Received: March 30, 2024; Revision Received: April 29, 2024; Accepted: May 03, 2024

The Influence of Sibling Relationship on Romantic Attachment Styles in Young Adults: A Study Based on Sibling Constellation

Sibling relationships, lasting throughout life, serve as companions and role models. Factors such as gender, birth order, and living arrangements influence sibling dynamics. Adler's theory underscores the importance of equal treatment among siblings and how sibling rivalry stems from the need to overcome feelings of inferiority.

Sulloway (1996) suggests that siblings differentiate themselves to reduce competition, influencing their personality and life choices. Despite historically being less acknowledged, siblings serve as potential attachment figures, impacting individuals' lives into adulthood. Shared experiences, particularly among twins and sisters, strengthen sibling bonds.

While there wasn't a direct correlation found between the quality of sibling relationships and satisfaction in romantic relationships, researchers did observe an interaction between birth order, romantic relationship length, and satisfaction. This led them to conclude that sibling attachment might be just one of various factors contributing to the quality of romantic relationships. Furthermore, from a clinical perspective, international literature suggests that patterns in sibling relationships can play a crucial role in partner choice and the development of romantic relationships, hinting at a kind of transfer of these patterns from siblings to romantic partners (e.g., Abend, 1984; Sommantico, 2018a, 2018b; Kriss, Steele, & Steele, 2014; Morley, 2006; as cited in Sommantico et al., 2018).

Gender constellation affects sibling intimacy and can provide advantages in navigating romantic relationships. Romantic love parallels attachment processes, with individuals transferring attachment models from sibling to romantic relationships. While sibling attachment contributes to relationship satisfaction, various factors influence the quality of romantic relationships (Jack, 2017).

The present research tries to study relationships between variables that have shown significance in the limited researches conducted before. Sibling relationships, like parent-child relationships, could also become a major influencing factor in an individual's life with respect to his personality and relationships, especially romantic relationships. If a significant relationship is found with this and further research, sibling relationships can be given equal consideration while studying or helping individuals with attachment issues. Hence, studying these aspects becomes necessary.

Objectives

- To explore the relationship between sibling relationship and attachment styles in a romantic relationship.
- To examine the effect of sibling constellation on sibling relationship.
- To examine the effect of sibling constellation on attachment styles in a romantic relationship.

Hypotheses

To explore the relationship between sibling relationship and attachment styles in a romantic relationship:

- H₀₁ - There is no significant relationship between sibling relationship and attachment styles in a romantic relationship among young adults.

The Influence of Sibling Relationship on Romantic Attachment Styles in Young Adults: A Study Based on Sibling Constellation

To examine the influence of sibling constellation on sibling relationship:

- H₀₂ - There is no significant difference in sibling relationship between male and female young adults.
- H₀₃ - There is no significant difference in sibling relationship across the number of siblings among young adults.
- H₀₄ - There is no significant difference in sibling relationship across birth orders among young adults.

To examine the influence of sibling constellation and attachment styles in a romantic relationship:

- H₀₅ - There is no significant difference in romantic attachment styles between male and female individuals.
- H₀₆ - There is no significant difference in romantic attachment styles across the number of siblings among young adults.
- H₀₇ - There is no significant difference in romantic attachment styles across birth orders among young adults.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The sample consisted of adults aged 18-25 years who have at least one sibling and are currently in a committed romantic relationship. 173 participants from India were recruited using stratified random sampling techniques.

Google form (online platform) was used to circulate online forms.

Instruments

Two measures were used in this study,

1. Adult Sibling Relationship Questionnaire- Short (ASRQ-S)

The Adult Sibling Relationship Questionnaire-Short (ASRQ-S) scale by Lanthier, Stocker, and Furman comprises 47 items distributed across eight scales, investigating three main factors: Warmth, Conflict, and Rivalry. Within Warmth, three scales—Intimacy, Emotional Support, and Knowledge—are explored, while Conflict is assessed through Quarrelling, Antagonism, and Dominance. Rivalry includes Maternal and Paternal Rivalry, scored as the "absolute value of deviations from the midpoint of the scale" based on Lanthier et al., (2000; as cited in Wallace, 2012). Respondents use a 3- or 4-point scale (ranging from 1 to 3 or 1 to 4) for their answers, with 20 items contributing to each scale. The reliability of the ASRQ-S is supported by statistically reliable test-retest correlations in the original ASRQ (Stocker et al., 1997). Additionally, the ASRQ-S demonstrates high correlations with the original ASRQ ($r = .95$ for Warmth, $r = .97$ for Conflict) and exhibits strong internal consistency ($\alpha = .96$ for Warmth, $\alpha = .93$ for Conflict, and $\alpha = .91$ for Rivalry) (Wallace, 2012).

2. The Experience in Close Relationship- Short (ECR-S) questionnaire

A 12-item measure of adult attachment style. The ECR-S by Wei, M., Russell, D. W., Mallinckrodt, B., & Vogel, D. L. (2007) measures individuals on two subscales of attachment: Avoidance and Anxiety. In general, Avoidant individuals find discomfort with intimacy and seek independence, whereas Anxious individuals tend to fear rejection and abandonment. ECR-S measures of romantic attachment anxiety and avoidance revealed that they were two distinct dimensions of attachment, ($r = 0.19$). The correlation value was very similar to that of

The Influence of Sibling Relationship on Romantic Attachment Styles in Young Adults: A Study Based on Sibling Constellation

the original 36 item scale ($r = 0.17$) The questionnaire is a reliable and precise measure of romantic attachment (Wei et al., 2007).

Procedure

Responses were collected from the participants via google forms. Scoring was done using Microsoft Excel. SPSS software was used for statistical computation. Spearman's correlation has been used to explore the relationship between sibling attachment styles and attachment styles in a romantic relationship. Kruskal Wallis test has been used for examining the effect of number of siblings and birth order on sibling relationship and on attachment styles in a romantic relationship. Mann Whitney U Test has been employed to examine the difference between both genders on the dependent variables.

RESULTS

The aim of this study was to determine the influence of sibling relationship on romantic attachment styles among young adults based on sibling constellations. Upon testing, the data was not normally distributed and hence non-parametric tests have been used for analysis. A total of 173 young adults had participated in the study initially. This list was again filtered based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Finally, a total of 126 individuals were retained as participants. The pie chart below shows the distribution.

Table 1 Showing the descriptive statistics – Adult Sibling relationship scale and experiences in romantic relationship scale (anxious and avoidant attachment scales)

Variable	N	M	SD
Sibling Scale		124.76	13.59
Anxious Attachment	126	22.56	6.89
Avoidant Attachment		15.12	7.20

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of the variables Sibling Scale, Anxious Attachment and Avoidant Attachment. The mean value for Sibling Scale, Anxious attachment and Avoidant attachment is 124.76, 22.56, and 15.12 respectively. The standard deviation for Sibling Scale, Anxious attachment and Avoidant attachment is 13.59, 6.89, and 7.20 respectively.

Table 2 The table shows the results for Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests of normality for the test variables

Variable	Kolmogorov- Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Sibling Relationship	0.46	126	.200	.993	126	.806
Anxious Attachment	.094	126	.008	.965	126	.003
Avoidant Attachment	.158	126	.000	.915	126	.000

Tests of Normality were conducted on the sample as shown below in table 2. Kolmogorov-Smirnova and Shapiro-Wilk tests revealed a non-parametric distribution. The ASRQ-S scale's significance values for both the tests were greater than 0.05 confidence level, but the significance values for ECR-S were lower than 0.05 confidence level, thereby implying that

The Influence of Sibling Relationship on Romantic Attachment Styles in Young Adults: A Study Based on Sibling Constellation

the is not normally distributed. Hence, Spearman’s correlation and Kruskal-Wallis test will be used for further statistical analysis.

Table 3 Showing the Spearman’s correlation between Sibling relationship and subscales of romantic attachment among young adults

Variable	1
Sibling Relationship	-
Anxious attachment	-.080
Avoidant attachment	-.093

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 shows the Spearman’s correlation between Sibling relationship and subscales of romantic attachment scales. The results show that there is a weak negative correlation ($r_s = -.080$, $p > 0.05$) between sibling relationship and anxious attachment, and a weak negative correlation between sibling relationship and avoidant attachment ($r_s = -.093$, $p > 0.05$). However, the p-values suggest that the values are statistically insignificant. Hence the hypothesis “There is no significant relationship between sibling relationship and attachment styles in a romantic relationship among young adults” is accepted.

The probable explanation for the result could be the influence of several other factors like personality and social environment. An individual’s personality and environment can influence their romantic relationship and attachment, hence nullifying the influence of sibling relationship.

Table 4 Showing the Mann Whitney - U Test results for difference in Sibling relationship and attachment styles between male and female individuals.

Variable	Male Mean Rank	Female Mean Rank	U	p
Sibling Relationship	48.55	68.17	-2.570	.010*
Anxious Attachment	56.38	65.72	-1.225	.221
Avoidant Attachment	68.32	61.99	0.829	.407

* $p < 0.05$

The above table shows the Mann Whitney - U test results run to test gender difference between all the three variables. Sibling relationship values did show a significant difference between males and females. The test statistic value for the variable is -2.570 and the significance value is .010 which is lower than 0.05 and is hence significant. Hence, the null hypothesis stating that “There is no significant difference in sibling relationship between male and female individuals” has been rejected.

This finding is in line with the research conducted by Volkom et al. (2011) to explore the influence of gender, birth order and age spacing on sibling relationships during college years. The findings of this research pointed out that there were significant differences between males

The Influence of Sibling Relationship on Romantic Attachment Styles in Young Adults: A Study Based on Sibling Constellation

and females with respect to different aspects of the relationship. Females were more likely to turn to a sibling during difficulties and males were more likely to compare themselves to a sibling.

Attachment Style values did not show a significant difference between males and females. The test statistic value for anxious attachment is -1.225 and the significance value is .221. Similarly, the test statistic value for avoidant attachment is 0.829 and the significance value is .407. The values are above 0.05 and are hence not significant. Hence, the null hypothesis stating that “There is no significant difference in attachment styles in a romantic relationship between male and female individuals” has been accepted.

A research conducted by Wongpakaran et al. (2012) tried to explore gender differences in attachment styles and self esteem in a Thailand population. The results showed that in romantic relationships, the avoidant attachment style did not show any gender difference.

Table 5 Showing the Kruskal Wallis Test results for finding difference in variables across the number of siblings

Variable	1 Mean Rank	2 Mean Rank	3 Mean Rank	5 Mean Rank	Kruskal- Wallis H	df	p
Sibling Relationship	65.60	52.55	54.67	115.00	4.381	3	.223
Anxious Attachment	59.94	77.82	86.50	10.00	8.423	3	.038*
Avoidant Attachment	62.37	60.45	98.00	27.50	6.582	3	.086

*p<0.05

Table 5 shows the test results for finding differences in variables across different number of siblings i.e.,1,2,3,4 and 5. The mean ranks for the sibling relationship variable are 65.60, 52.55, 54.67, and 115.00 for groups 1, 2, 3, and 5, respectively. The Kruskal-Wallis H statistic is 4.381 with 3 degrees of freedom (df), and the p-value is .223. Since the p-value is greater than the significance level of .05, we fail to reject the null hypothesis.

Similarly, the mean ranks for avoidant attachment are 62.37, 60.45, 98.00, and 27.50 for groups 1, 2, 3, and 5, respectively. The Kruskal-Wallis H statistic is 6.582 with 3 degrees of freedom (df), and the p-value is .086. The p-value is greater than the significance level of .05, indicating that there is not enough evidence to conclude that there are significant differences in avoidant attachment across different numbers of siblings.

The mean ranks for anxious attachment are 59.94, 77.82, 86.50, and 10.00 for groups 1, 2, 3, and 5, respectively. The Kruskal-Wallis H statistic is 8.423 with 3 degrees of freedom (df), and the p-value is .038. The p-value is less than the significance level of .05, indicating that there are significant differences in anxious attachment across the groups. Additionally, on pairwise comparison, the significance was observed between the scores of individuals with 1 and 2 siblings(.050), and between scores of individuals with 3 and 5 siblings (.050). The

The Influence of Sibling Relationship on Romantic Attachment Styles in Young Adults: A Study Based on Sibling Constellation

groups with 2 and 3 siblings have higher mean ranks indicating higher anxious attachment in these individuals in comparison to the individuals with 1 and 5 siblings, which points out that anxious attachment to a romantic partner differs significantly based on the number of siblings the individual has. Therefore, the hypothesis “There is no significant difference in romantic attachment styles across the number of siblings among young adults” has been rejected.

Table 6 Showing the Kruskal Wallis Test results for finding difference in variables across birth orders

Variable	1 Mean Rank	2 Mean Rank	3 Mean Rank	6 Mean Rank	Kruskal- Wallis H	df	p
Sibling Relationship	73.16	56.25	47.00	115.00	10.282	3	.016*
Anxious Attachment	66.38	58.47	82.35	10.00	6.295	3	.096
Avoidant Attachment	61.66	65.66	65.60	27.50	1.329	3	.722

*p<0.05

Table 6 shows the test results for finding differences in variables across different birth order i.e., 1,2,3, and 6. The mean ranks for sibling relationship are 73.16, 56.25, 47.00, and 115.00 for birth orders 1, 2, 3, and 6, respectively. The Kruskal-Wallis H statistic is 10.282 with 3 degrees of freedom (df). The p-value is .016. Since the p-value is less than the significance level of .05, we reject the null hypothesis. This suggests that there are significant differences in sibling relationships across different birth orders. Upon pairwise comparison, the significant difference in sibling relationship was observed between first and second born individuals (p=.013) and between first and third born individuals (.037). The first borns have higher mean ranks compared to second and third borns, indicating higher scores. Therefore, the hypothesis “There is no significant difference in sibling relationship across birth orders among young adults” is rejected.

A research conducted by Pollet et al.(2009) studied birth order and adult family relationships. The results of the study were in line with our current study stating that individuals who are firstborns exhibited a higher likelihood of reporting good sibling relationships and favouring a sibling over a friend.

The mean ranks for anxious attachment are 66.38, 58.47, 82.35, and 10.00 for birth orders 1, 2, 3, and 6, respectively. The Kruskal-Wallis H statistic is 6.295 with 3 degrees of freedom (df). The p-value is .096. Since the p-value is greater than the significance level of .05, we fail to reject the null hypothesis. This suggests that there is not enough evidence to conclude that there are significant differences in anxious attachment across different birth orders.

The mean ranks for avoidant attachment are 61.66, 65.66, 65.60, and 27.50 for birth orders 1, 2, 3, and 6, respectively. The Kruskal-Wallis H statistic is 1.329 with 3 degrees of freedom (df). The p-value is .722. Since the p-value is greater than the significance level of .05, we fail

The Influence of Sibling Relationship on Romantic Attachment Styles in Young Adults: A Study Based on Sibling Constellation

to reject the null hypothesis. This suggests that there is not enough evidence to conclude that there are significant differences in avoidant attachment across different birth orders.

Hence the hypothesis “There is no significant difference in romantic attachment styles across birth orders among young adults” is accepted.

Other than the variables mentioned in the hypotheses, other independent variables like age gap between siblings, whether or not the individual is living with the sibling and for how long the individual is living with the sibling were also analyzed. Although age gap did not show any significant difference in the dependent variables, the status of living with siblings and duration of living with siblings significantly influenced the sibling relationship scores.

DISCUSSION

The results showed that there was no correlation between sibling relationship and romantic attachment styles. The study found out that there were significant gender differences in sibling relationships. However, there was no significant gender difference in romantic attachment styles. The study also found out that there was no significant difference in sibling relationship across the different number of siblings. However, in one of the romantic attachment styles that is anxious attachment, there were significant differences across the number of siblings though there was no significant difference seen in avoidant attachment styles.

The study found out that sibling relationships were significantly different across different birth orders of the individual. However, there was no difference seen in romantic attachment styles.

The study also analyzed the influence of other variables such as age gap, status of living with siblings and duration of living with the sibling. Interestingly, significant differences were seen in sibling relationships based on whether or not the sibling lived with the sibling and based on the duration of how long the sibling lived with the sibling.

Implication

The findings of this study have added new knowledge to the existing understanding of sibling relationship and romantic attachment. The study indicated that an individual’s sibling relationship differs based on their birth order. This knowledge can help clinicians and psychologists look at each individual differently based on their sibling history.

Limitations

- The study was limited to a small sample of 126 participants. A larger sample size would help yield more reliable results.
- The study focused only on romantic attachment and not on other aspects of romantic relationships.
- The study did not take into account sibling attachment.

Future Scope for further studies

The study paves way for future research in this arena. Since it is a less studied area, understanding and exploring other dimensions like romantic relationships, sibling attachment, personality traits etc. can add to the literature and help make it rich and resourceful. More narrowed studies could focus on particular birth orders and study the dynamics. The primary aim of this study was to understand if sibling dynamics influence the relationship with a

The Influence of Sibling Relationship on Romantic Attachment Styles in Young Adults: A Study Based on Sibling Constellation

romantic partner. Studies can experiment with dynamics like choice of partner and interests as well based on sibling relationship.

REFERENCES

- Brumbaugh, C. C. (2017). Transferring connections: Friend and sibling attachments' importance in the lives of singles. *Personal Relationships*, 24(3), 534-549.
- Doughty, S. E., Lam, C. B., Stanik, C. E., & McHale, S. M. (2015). Links between sibling experiences and romantic competence from adolescence through young adulthood. *Journal of youth and adolescence*, 44, 2054-2066.
- Doughty, S. E., McHale, S. M., & Feinberg, M. E. (2015). Sibling Experiences as Predictors of Romantic Relationship Qualities in Adolescence. *Journal of Family Issues*, 36(5), 589-608. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X13495397>
- Fihn, G. (2018). *Parental Conflict and Young Adult Romantic Relationships: The Role of Sibling Relationship Quality* (Doctoral dissertation, Colorado State University).
- Jack, E. (2017). The Adolescent Sibling Relationship as a Predictor of Romantic Relationship Quality in Emerging Adulthood.
- Kaur, R. (2022). *Does Parental Attachment or Sibling Attachment Influence the Quality of Later Life Romantic Relationships?* (Doctoral dissertation, Auckland University of Technology).
- McGuirk, E. M., & Pettijohn II, T. F. (2008). Birth order and romantic relationship styles and attitudes in college students. *North American Journal of Psychology*, 10(1).
- Pollet, T. V., & Nettle, D. (2009). Birth order and adult family relationships: Firstborns have better sibling relationships than laterborns. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 26(8), 1029-1046.
- Robertson, R., Shepherd, D., & Goedeke, S. (2014). Fighting like brother and sister: Sibling relationships and future adult romantic relationship quality. *Australian Psychologist*, 49(1), 37-43.
- Schwarz, S., Mustafić, M., & Junker, S. (2015). Attachment to the romantic partner and sibling: Attachment hierarchies of twins and non-twin siblings. *Interpersona: An International Journal on Personal Relationships*, 9(2), 169-183.
- Shalash, F. M., Wood, N. D., & Parker, T. S. (2013). Our problems are your sibling's fault: Exploring the connections between conflict styles of siblings during adolescence and later adult committed relationships. *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, 41(4), 288-298.
- Sommantico, M., Donizzetti, A. R., De Rosa, B., & Parrello, S. (2018). Attitudes Toward Sibling Relationships and Adult Attachment Styles Predicting Young Adults Romantic Ties.
- Sommantico, M., Donizzetti, A. R., Parrello, S., & De Rosa, B. (2019). Predicting young adults' Romantic relationship quality: Sibling ties and adult attachment styles. *Journal of Family Issues*, 40(5), 662-688.
- Stern, A. (2011). *Sibling Relationship Quality, Parent-Child Relationship Quality, and their Effects on Adult Romantic Relationships*. Pace University.
- Sun, X., McHale, S. M., & Updegraff, K. A. (2019). Sibling dynamics in adolescence predict young adult orientations to couple relationships: A dyadic approach. *Journal of adolescence*, 77, 129-138.
- Van Volkom, M., Machiz, C., & Reich, A. E. (2011). Sibling relationships in the college years: Do gender, birth order, and age spacing matter?. *North American Journal of Psychology*, 13(1).
- Wallace, E. (2012). The Sibling Relationship: Friendship or Rivalry?.

The Influence of Sibling Relationship on Romantic Attachment Styles in Young Adults: A Study Based on Sibling Constellation

- Wei, M., Russell, D. W., Mallinckrodt, B., & Vogel, D. L. (2007). The Experiences in Close Relationship Scale (ECR)-short form: Reliability, validity, and factor structure. *Journal of personality assessment*, 88(2), 187-204.
- Williams, A. (2019). The relationship between sibling and peer attachment strength.
- Wongpakaran, T., Wongpakaran, N., & Wedding, D. (2012). Gender differences, attachment styles, self-esteem and romantic relationships in Thailand. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 36(3), 409-417.

Acknowledgment

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Sinchana, L.R. & Thomas, S. (2024). The Influence of Sibling Relationship on Romantic Attachment Styles in Young Adults: A Study Based on Sibling Constellation. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 12(2), 799-808. DIP:18.01.078.20241202, DOI:10.25215/1202.078