

Sibling ties in modern society: A shift from dense to distant

PAYAL GAUTAM*¹ AND RICHA VERMA²

¹Research Scholar and ²Assistant Professor

Department of Home Science, Faculty of Arts, Dayalbagh Educational Institute,
Deemed University, Agra (U.P.) India

ABSTRACT

Sibling relationship is the most prolific and enduring relationship that runs for an individual's entire life. Yet the efforts to maintain this bond have given the least priority. In earlier times, relationships with siblings were more close, intimate and cooperative. Now-a-days the pattern of relationship, like mode and time of communication, affection and eagerness to help each other physically or emotionally, has been altered. The present paper is an attempt to throw light upon how sibling relationships have been changing over the period of time. It is also designed to uncover the causes of change in relationships and the corrective measures needs to be taken in order to restoring the relationships with siblings.

Key Words : Siblings, Sibling relationships, Interactions, Estrangement

INTRODUCTION

Human relationships play a vital role in deriving happiness, satisfaction, comfort and support in life. An individual develops and maintain various relationships in his or her lifespan. Just after the birth, one starts developing a bond with mother. This bond turns into relationship with the care giver which remains important throughout life. Later he develops relationships with other people significant in his life.

A relationship, in psychological perspective, refers to a particular type of connection, usually an unbroken alliance between two or more individuals which is influenced by each other's feelings, behaviours, and personality traits, physical and mental well-being. There are a number of relationships an individual builds in life; the most important are family relationships where the sibling alliance is the only significant relationship that extends from childhood to old age and remains as the longest lasting relationship in one's life.

A sibling is one of two or more individuals having one or both parents in common. A male sibling is a brother, and a female sibling is a sister. A child spends comparatively more time with his or her sibling than with parents or anyone else. Siblings tend to influence each other in different aspects of life as they are one's guide, friend, competitor, caretaker and

confidants as well.

Importance of siblings :

Sibling relationship is a natural laboratory for young children to learn about their world (Howe and Recchia, 2014). They provide an important context for emotional, moral, cognitive and social world. Interactions with older siblings promote young children's language and cognitive development, their understanding of other people's emotions and perspectives, and, conversely, their development of antisocial behaviour (Brody, 2016).

Siblings know each other well as they spend ample amount of time living and playing together, this long history and intimate knowledge convert into opportunities for providing emotional and instrumental support to each other (Garner *et al.*, 1994 and Howe and Rinaldi, 2004).

Furthermore, siblings shape each other's personalities, model good or bad behaviours, influence lifestyle choices which in turn help to develop an individual's distinctive character. Sooner or later siblings develop relationships of love and support. Children who have trusting relationships with their siblings might feel more secure and supported as they develop into adults.

Siblings also play an important role in strengthening one's communication skills. Although parents are the first model for children to learn linguistic skills, siblings spend a lot of time together so they likely to absorb new information from an older brother or sister in a better way. Even while fighting, siblings used to learn from those mild conflicts or friction about how to interact with peers or significant other.

Causes of change in sibling relationships :

Sibling relationships are influenced by rapidly changing social world. Family relationships today, compared to previous generations, are less duty driven and more focused around personal affection (Lowenstein *et al.*, 2007). Earlier people were more responsible and obligated towards their parents and siblings. They were quite motivated for mutual devotion but now-a-days relationships primarily rely on reciprocation. Reciprocity is required to maintain siblings bond as long as cooperation, efforts, understanding and dedication to each other are present in it, if not, it turns out to be negative reciprocity. In this, a person reacts to his or her sibling with a behaviour that has an equally negative effect as the other ones did.

There are some probable factors accountable for the change in sibling ties:

Social media:

It has completely changed the family environment along with amount and quality of communication. As humans are social by nature, they require connecting, interacting and communicating with others. It is evident that people are more linked with each other through social media but by these the ability to hear and see verbal and non verbal messages in person are seized. Family members are involved on phones to the extent that it took away their time to sit together, having meals, talking about each other's day etc. Children and adolescents spend so much time on social media which increase attachment and friendship with virtual friends but diminish the interpersonal communication with their siblings. Lesser

the amount of interaction; less will be the intimacy and affection which in turn can affect their relationship in the long run also.

Modernization :

The inundation of western culture is undeniably affecting our society. People overlook the traditional practices; their moral and ethical values are degrading as they move towards westernization. People are now more individualistic, they are involved in pursuing and following their personal desires and dreams that has led them to a way where they do not want any intrusion by any of their family member whether parents or siblings. This creates a situation for further breakdown of sibling bonds.

Social expectations:

In Indian society, relationship with parents carries much more weightage than with the siblings. There is a moral imperative to be in touch or live with parents after marriage even if the relations are not pleasing. But for siblings there is no social or ethical rule of being in contact with each other, therefore the ties are becoming weaker and siblings begins to be estranged.

Constant meddling:

The concept of giving space to a person is still a foreign concept in Indian families. The older siblings do not consider their younger siblings to be mature enough to take independent decision. They have diverse personalities, dissimilar interests and varied ideologies yet they interfere and try to force their choice on other sibling whether it is the selection of clothing, career or anything related to their life. As a result, this continuous meddling may have a detrimental effect on the sibling bonds.

Parenting technique:

A feeling or simple perception of unfair treatment between siblings can be a cause of damaging relationship among siblings. When parents, consciously or unconsciously, treat their children in different ways by varying amounts of positive effects, control, responsiveness, discipline and intrusiveness, sibling relations are likely to be more conflictual and less friendly (Brody, 1998; Meunier *et al.*, 2012; Volling, 1997 and Volling and Belsky, 1992). This biasness affects not only children, it also has negative effects even when the children become adults which ultimately results in souring the relationships. The bitterness in relationships is aggravated when a person does not have a successful career and fulfilled personal lives.

Lack of conflict resolving skills:

Every problem needs a solution, likewise when siblings fight or get angry with each other for stealing their toys, eating their chocolates, or sleeping in their place, they need the ability to resolve those conflicts which is also an important developmental achievement. Some children never learn to handle these conflicts in a positive approach; hence when they grow old they are at higher risks for adult sibling estrangement.

Monetary and inheritance issues:

Now-a-days, problem related to money matters and heiring legacy occur often because people are now more money-obsessed. The issues for inheriting legacy arise when either one or both parent die. The opportunity to acquire money takes priority over any moral or ethical behaviour. At times parents decide to leave some valuable asset to one child (the one who live with them, care for them or the one they love most) and other things for another child. This inheritance inequity could give birth to feeling of anger, hurt, and resentment on the part of the other siblings.

Physical proximity:

Proximity is a prime factor in maintaining contact between siblings. As the physical distance increases, they tend to see each other less often, the frequency of communication they keep to be in touch decreases. Having less time together can cause an emotional distance.

Marriage:

Marriage of a sibling may weaken the sibling bond as he or she is more indulge with their life partner. Their attention is distributed, the frequency of communicating with each other declines and priorities are changed with the respective situations. This abrupt change in their pattern of relationship most often results in ruined sibling ties.

Reconciliation :

The collapsing of sibling relationships may happen either gradually or all of a sudden but as the bridge of distance created, it solidifies into estrangement. Often the adult sibling relationships are shaped on the basis of interactions and experiences they had in childhood.

To facilitate better outcomes parents need to build a solid foundation of children's relationship with their siblings from childhood onwards by spending time together, openly communicate their feelings to each other, fostering to resolve conflicts on their own by using constructive strategies, provide equal opportunities to bring out their potential hence they do not feel any biasness. Parents should also work for increasing their children's pro-social connections as it positively affects the quality of sibling relationship and emotion regulation skills (Kramer and Radey, 1997).

Siblings who were unable to learn these skills are at utmost risk of developing estrangement in their adulthood. In that case the restoration of broken relations becomes quite necessary. Some points to be followed by siblings that can be helpful in developing stronger bond between them are as follows:

- Acknowledging conflicts and resolving them would be a crucial thing to reconcile relationship with sibling.
- Allow sibling to talk and present their point of view about the relationship.
- Apologizing to each other about what happened in the past will positively help in mending the relationship.
- Do not repeat old conversations or past behaviours that may harm the restoration of relationship with sibling.

- Try to avoid specific issues that may give rise to disagreements and hostile situations.
- Social media may work as hindering factor but could be used also as medium to connect with siblings living in faraway places.
- Try to meet often, invite siblings on some occasions or sending gifts on their special days will help in rebuilding relations.

REFERENCES

- Brody, G.H. (1998). Sibling relationship quality: Its causes and consequences. *Ann. Rev. Psychol.*, **49**(1): 24.
- Brody, G.H. (2016). Siblings Direct and indirect contributions to child development. *Curr. Directions Psychological Sci.*, **13**(3).
- Garner, P.W., Jones, D.C. and Miner, J.L. (1994). Social competence among low-income preschoolers: Emotion socialization practices and social cognitive correlates. *Child Development*, **65**(2):622-637.
- Howe, N. and Rinaldi, C.M. (2004). ‘You be the big sister’: Maternal-preschooler internal state discourse, perspective-taking, and sibling caretaking. *Infant & Child Development*, **13**(3): 217-234.
- Howe, N. and Recchia, H. (2014). Introduction to special issue on the Sibling Relationship as a Context for Learning and Development. *Early Edu. & Develop.*, **25** :155-159.
- Kramer, L. and Radey C. (1997). Improving sibling relationships among young children: A social skills training model. *Family Relations*, **46** (3): 237-246.
- Lowenstein, A., Katz, R. and Gur-Yaish, N. Reciprocity in parent-child exchange and life satisfaction among the elderly: a cross-national perspective. *J. Soc. Issues*, **63**: 865-883.
- Meunier, J.C., Roskam, I., Stievenart, M., Van, D.M.G., Browne, D.T. and Wade, M. (2012). Parental differential treatment, child’s externalizing behavior and sibling relationships: Bridging links with child’s perception of favoritism and personality, and parents’ self-efficacy. *J. Soc. & Personal Relationships*, **29**: 612-638.
- Volling, B.L. (1997). The family correlates of maternal and paternal perceptions of differential treatment in early childhood. *Family Relations*, **46** :227-236.
- Volling, B.L. and Belsky, J. (1992). The contribution of mother-child and father-child relationships to the quality of sibling interaction: A longitudinal study. *Child Development*, **63** (5):1209-1222.

Websites:

- <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/865609628/How-technology-is-changing-the-way-we-communicate.html>. 2014, August 29
- <https://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/201503/why-siblings-sever-ties>.2015, March 9
- <https://www.quora.com/Family-Relationships-and-Dynamics-Why-do-brothers-change-after-marriage>. 2015, April 4
