

Impact of Perceived Parental Rearing Behaviour on Sibling Bonds: An Indian Perspective

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Abstract: The present study explores how perceived parental-rearing behaviour affects sibling relationships. Data was collected from 90 participants, aged 18-30 years, using the s-EMBU scale and the Adult Sibling Relationship Questionnaire (Very Short Form). Spearman's Rank Order Correlation analysed relationships between perceived parenting and sibling dynamics, while Mann-Whitney U Tests assessed gender differences and differences in sibling gender dyads (same vs. mixed-gender). Results found significant relationships between the subscale Rejection of the s-EMBU and Conflict on the ASRQ-VSF as well as between Emotional Warmth of the s-EMBU and Warmth of the ASRQ-VSF. Significant gender differences were found on the (Over) Protective subscale of the s-EMBU, with female participants reporting higher over-protective behaviours by parents.

Keywords: parental rearing behaviour, sibling bonds, family dynamics, Indian youth

Human society greatly depends on the emotional bonds we form with one another. A fundamental emotional tie comes in the form of family. People are primarily linked to one another by marriage or birth, and they form families, which are the most basic social unit in any community. The makeup and structure of families have changed significantly throughout time, but their essential elements have remained constant (Giddens & Birdsall, 2001). The foundation of the human personality is based on the deep emotional bonds and unparalleled support system this unit offers (Bowlby, 1969). This foundation is a result of family dynamics.

Family dynamics are the relationships or interactions between the members of the family. Every family structure and its dynamics are unique, despite the existence of some basic patterns (Carter & McGoldrick, 1999). Because of these disparate dynamics, some families flourish together, while others may have dysfunctional and maladaptive coping mechanisms for the difficulties their members experience (Walsh, 2012). Family has a significant impact on a person's beliefs, values and behaviour (Harris, 1995).

Given their position of authority within the family, parents create a powerful impression. They are typically the family's breadwinners, helping their

children and the elderly to satisfy their needs. In Indian culture, parents often give fewer privileges to their young ones and exercise greater authority (Kakar, 1981). An authoritarian role is the most assumed traditional parenting style by Indian parents (Barnhart et al., 2013).

Perhaps the next most integral family tie is that with one's siblings. Siblings have received less attention. Regardless of age, siblings do have a significant influence on a person's social, emotional, and psychological growth (Whiteman et al., 2011). They typically have similar parental environments which improves their mutual understanding and can act as a stress-reduction mechanism (Brody, 1998).

Positive sibling relationships may offer emotional support, care, and a sense of security in times of trouble (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985). By preventing open communication in the family, poor parent-child connections can result in psychological issues (Popov & Illesanmi, 2015). However, a healthy sibling bond may prevent severe consequences of such instances and rather help in appropriate ways of dealing with the same (Veenhoven, 2009).

Similar to parents, sibling connections are enduring and may provide a person with a feeling of continuity and stability, which can have an impact on

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their overall well-being (Carrère & Gottman, 1999). They are frequently the person's safe haven where they may confide their deepest secrets. A family can produce more than two children, which results in greater sibling ties within the family. Sibling ties must thus be emphasized as having a major influence on a person's life and growth.

The interaction of various siblings with their parents can differ and can easily seep into the relationship they have with the other siblings (McHale et al., 2012). One sibling's obligations are often distinguished from the other based on the birth order of the children in the household (Zajonc, 2001). Typically, the older child is assigned caregiving responsibilities for the parents and younger sibling or siblings.

In certain situations, the younger ones may be given preference because they are often the ones who have been more protected. Sibling relationships may be influenced by the way parents engage with their children (Portner & Riggs, 2016). Sibling ties are frequently harmed by parental favouritism since it can lead to animosity between siblings (Kowal & Kramer, 1997).

Parents who exhibit warmth, empathy, and consistency can foster more supportive sibling relationships (Milevsky et al., 2011; Popov & Illesanmi, 2015). These sibling ties are characterized by collaboration, compassion, empathy, and support, among other qualities. However, sibling connections characterised by jealousy, resentment, conflict, rage, and insecurity may result from parents who have rigid, controlling, withdrawn, and inconsistent parenting approaches (Ferencz et al., 2023; Webster-Stratton, 2018).

However, current literature largely ignores the link between parental ties and the bonds one forms with one's sibling(s). This study attempts to fill this gap by examining the impact of perceived parental-rearing behaviour on sibling bonds.

Objectives

1. To investigate the relationship between perceived

parental rearing behaviour and sibling relationships.

2. To examine gender differences across the three dimensions of perceived parental rearing: emotional warmth, rejection, and overprotection.
3. To examine gender differences across the three dimensions of sibling relationships: warmth, conflict, and rivalry.
4. To explore differences in the three dimensions of perceived parental rearing behaviour based on sibling gender dyads (same-gender vs. mixed-gender siblings).
5. To explore differences in the three dimensions of sibling relationships based on sibling gender dyads.

Hypotheses

1. H1: There will be a significant relationship between perceived parental-rearing behaviour and sibling relationships.
2. H2: There will be significant differences between male and female participants in the three dimensions of perceived parental rearing behaviour.
3. H3: There will be significant differences between male and female participants in the three dimensions of sibling relationships.
4. H4: There will be significant differences in the three dimensions of perceived parental rearing behaviour based on sibling gender dyads (same-gender vs. mixed-gender siblings).
5. H5: There will be significant differences in the three dimensions of sibling relationships based on sibling gender dyads (same-gender vs. mixed-gender siblings).

Method

Design

This study employed a correlational and comparative cross-sectional design to examine the relationship between perceived parental rearing behaviour and sibling relationships. Additionally, it explored group differences in perceived parental rearing behaviour and sibling relationships based on participant gender and sibling gender dyads (same-gender vs. mixed-gender siblings).

Sample

Data was collected from participants aged 18-30 years who have at least one full sibling (i.e., both siblings share the same biological parents). Total data was collected from 95 participants, out of which 5 responses were removed during the data cleaning process. The final analysis was run on a total of 90 responses. The average age of the sample was approximately 23 years. A total of 42 participants identified as female, while 48 participants identified as male.

Regarding the number of siblings, 62 participants reported having one sibling, while 28 participants reported having two siblings. Among the participants with just one other sibling, 35 participants identified with the same gender as their sibling, while 27 participants identified with different genders. Purposive sampling technique was utilized for the data collection process.

Tools

Egna Minnen Beträffande Uppfostran- Short Form (s-EMBU)

The EMBU (Swedish acronym for 'Egna Minnen Beträffande Uppfostran,' translating to 'My memories of upbringing') is among the most widely utilized measures for the assessment of adults' perceptions of their parents' rearing behaviour (Rapee, 1997). The scale provides four factorially-derived subscale measures: Rejection, Emotional Warmth, (Over) Protection and Favouring Subject, and the full scale comprises a total of 81 items.

In the present study, a short form (s-EMBU) consisting of three scales, Rejection, Emotional Warmth, and Protection, with 7, 6, and 9 items, respectively (in addition to 1 unscaled item) was used. The 23-item s-EMBU is recommended as a reliable functional equivalent to the full version. The scale has demonstrated good internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values typically falling above .72 for all subscales and across different national samples (Arrindell et al., 1999). Strong evidence for the convergent and discriminant validity of the s-EMBU

has also been established, supporting its effectiveness in capturing key dimensions of perceived parental rearing (Arrindell et al., 2000).

Adult Sibling Relationship Questionnaire - a very short form (ASRQ-VSF)

The Adult Sibling Relationship Questionnaire - a very short form (Lanthier & Stocker, 2014) was also used. The scale is a reliable and valid 18-item measure used to assess the quality of adult sibling relationships.

This scale evaluates the dimensions of Warmth (6 items), Conflict (6 items), and Rivalry (6 items) 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.

Data Analysis

The data collected in the present study violated the key assumptions of parametric testing, and hence, non-parametric tests have been utilized to run the following analysis for the various objectives and hypotheses laid out for the study:

1. Spearman's Rank Order Correlation: To examine the relationship between Perceived Parental Rearing Behaviour and Sibling Relationships.
2. Mann-Whitney U Test: To perform a comparative analysis between male and female participants on Perceived Parental Rearing Behaviour.
3. Mann-Whitney U Test: To perform a comparative analysis between male and female participants on the three dimensions of sibling relationship.
4. Mann-Whitney U Test: To perform a comparative analysis on Perceived Parental Rearing Behaviour based on sibling gender dyads (same-gender vs. mixed-gender siblings).
5. Mann-Whitney U Test: To perform a comparative analysis on the three dimensions based on sibling gender dyads (same-gender vs. mixed-gender siblings).

Procedure

A Google Form was created, which contained complete and accurate information about the study and ethical practices pertaining to the privacy and confidentiality of the data collected.

Questions collecting participants' demographic information and the items from two scales were also included. The s-EBMU and ASRQ-VSF questionnaires were administered and took about 10-15 minutes for the participants to complete. A section was also included to thank the participants for their time and consideration.

Ethical Considerations

During the conduction of this study, due ethical considerations were followed. The participants were properly briefed and were given a fair idea about what the present study revolved around. They were also told that the collected data would be analyzed and narrowed down to suit the needs of the research's aim. Informed consent was taken for voluntary participation of the participants in the study. The participants were assured that all the recorded data would remain highly confidential and would not be disclosed to anyone other than the researchers. It was made sure that the emotional and psychological sentiments of the participants were not harmed by the questions included in the study.

Results

Table 1

Correlational Analysis between Perceived Parental Rearing Behaviour and the Various Dimensions of Sibling Relationship

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. s-EMBU Rejection	-	-	-	-	-	-
2. s-EMBU Emotional Warmth	-0.340**	-	-	-	-	-
3. s-EMBU Over Protection	0.574***	-0.122	-	-	-	-
4. ASRQ-VSF Warmth	-0.146	0.420***	-0.024	-	-	-
5. ASRQ-VSF Conflict	0.222*	0.039	-0.005	-0.12	-	-
6. ASRQ-VSF Parental Favouritism	0.201	-0.017	0.098	-0.044	0.430***	-

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

A significant positive correlation was found between s-EMBU Rejection and ASRQ-VSF Conflict, $r(88) = 0.22$, $p < .05$, indicating that higher perceived parental rejection is associated with increased sibling conflict.

A significant positive correlation was also observed between s-EMBU Emotional Warmth and ASRQ-VSF Warmth, $r(88) = 0.42$, $p < .001$, suggesting that greater perceived parental emotional warmth is associated with increased emotional warmth in sibling relationships.

Within the s-EMBU subscales, Rejection was significantly negatively correlated with Emotional Warmth, $r(88) = -0.340$, $p < .01$, indicating that higher

parental rejection is associated with lower emotional warmth. Additionally, Rejection showed a strong positive correlation with Overprotection, $r(88) = 0.574$, $p < .001$, suggesting that increased perceived rejection is also associated with heightened parental overprotection.

For the ASRQ-VSF subscales, a significant positive correlation was found between Conflict and Parental Favouritism, $r(88) = 0.430$, $p < .001$, suggesting that higher perceived parental favouritism is associated with increased sibling conflict.

Table 2*Comparative Analysis of Perceived Parental Rearing Behaviour Subscales between Genders*

Logistic Parameter	Female (<i>n</i> = 42)			Male (<i>n</i> = 48)			<i>U</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r_{rb}</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SE</i>			
s-EMBU Rejection	11.4	3.94	0.609	9.83	3.29	0.475	749	0.03	0.257
s-EMBU Emotional Warmth	17	4.09	0.631	16.44	16.5	0.514	915	0.453	0.092
s-EMBU Over Protection	22.6	5.43	0.838	18.56	4.73	0.683	581	<0.001	0.423

Comparative analysis showed that for the subscale Emotional Warmth, no statistically significant difference was observed between female and male participants, ($U = 915$, $p = .453$). The effect size, $r_{rb} = 0.092$, indicated a negligible effect.

For the Rejection subscale, a statistically significant difference was found between female and male participants ($U = 749$, $p = .03$), indicating that female participants reported experiencing higher levels of parental rejection compared to male participants.

The effect size, $r_{rb} = 0.257$, indicated a small effect. Similarly, for the Overprotection subscale, female participants reported significantly higher parental overprotection than male participants ($U = 581$, $p < .001$), indicating that female participants reported higher levels of overprotective behaviour displayed by their parents as compared to male participants. The effect size, as measured by rank-biserial correlation, was $r_{rb} = 0.423$, indicating a medium effect.

Table 3*Comparative Analysis of Sibling Relationship Dimensions Between Genders*

Logistic Parameter	Female (<i>n</i> = 42)			Male (<i>n</i> = 48)			<i>U</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r_{rb}</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SE</i>			
ASRQ-VSF Warmth	3.81	1.065	0.164	3.58	1.028	0.148	883	0.29	0.124
ASRQ-VSF Conflict	3.17	0.824	0.127	3.08	1.048	0.151	957	0.664	0.051
ASRQ-VSF Parental Favouritism	2.93	0.677	0.104	2.96	0.683	0.098	997	0.911	0.011

Comparative analysis showed that for the Warmth subscale, no statistically significant difference was observed between female and male participants ($U = 883$, $p = .290$). The effect size, $r_{rb} = 0.124$, indicated a negligible effect. For the Conflict subscale, no statistically significant difference was observed between female and male participants ($U = 957$, $p = .664$). The effect size, $r_{rb} = 0.051$, indicated a negligible

effect. Similarly, for the Parental Favouritism subscale, no statistically significant difference was observed between female and male participants ($U = 997$, $p = .911$). The effect size, $r_{rb} = 0.011$, also indicated a negligible effect. This suggests that both female and male participants report similar sibling relationships with no significant differences.

Table 4

Comparative Analysis of Perceived Parental Rearing Behaviour Subscales Between Sibling Gender Dyads (Same-Gender vs. Mixed-Gender Siblings)

Logistic Parameter	Same-Gender (<i>n</i> = 35)			Mix-Gender (<i>n</i> = 27)			<i>U</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r_{rb}</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SE</i>			
s-EMBU Rejection	10.46	3.346	0.566	11.19	4.394	0.846	470	0.977	0.005
s-EMBU Emotional Warmth	17.4	3.875	0.655	16.67	4.438	0.854	427	0.517	0.097
s-EMBU Over Protection	19.91	5.031	0.85	21.63	6.283	1.209	406	0.344	0.141

Comparative analysis showed that for the Rejection subscale, no statistically significant difference was observed between participants with same-gender siblings and those with mixed-gender siblings ($U = 470$, $p = .977$). The effect size, $r_{rb} = 0.005$, indicated a negligible effect. For the subscale Emotional Warmth, no statistically significant difference was observed between sibling gender dyads ($U = 427$, $p = .517$). The effect size, $r_{rb} = 0.097$, indicated a negligible effect.

Similarly, for the subscale Overprotection, no statistically significant difference was found between participants with same-gender and mixed-gender siblings ($U = 406$, $p = .344$). The effect size, $r_{rb} = 0.141$, indicated a small effect. This suggests that for both dyads, parental rearing behaviour is being perceived more or less similarly, without any noticeable differences.

Table 5

Comparative Analysis of Sibling Relationship Dimensions Between Sibling Gender Dyads (Same-Gender vs. Mixed-Gender Siblings)

Logistic Parameter	Same-Gender (<i>n</i> = 35)			Mix-Gender (<i>n</i> = 27)			<i>U</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r_{rb}</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SE</i>			
ASRQ-VS Warmth	3.54	1.197	0.202	3.67	1.109	0.214	445	0.686	0.059
ASRQ-VSF Conflict	3.11	0.9	0.152	3.19	0.962	0.185	449	0.73	0.049
ASRQ-VSF Parental Favouritism	3	0.686	0.116	3.04	0.587	0.113	470	0.97	0.005

Comparative analysis showed that for the Warmth subscale, no statistically significant difference was observed between participants with same-gender and mixed-gender siblings ($U = 445$, $p = .686$). The effect size, $r_{rb} = 0.059$, indicated a negligible effect. For the Conflict subscale, no statistically significant difference was found between sibling gender dyads ($U = 449$, $p = .730$). The effect size, $r_{rb} = 0.049$, indicated a negligible

effect. Similarly, for the Parental Favouritism subscale, no statistically significant difference was observed between participants with same-gender and mixed-gender siblings ($U = 470$, $p = .970$). The effect size, $r_{rb} = 0.005$, also indicated a negligible effect. This suggests that participants from both groups report similar sibling relationships with no significant differences.

Discussion

The present study aimed to understand the impact of the participants' perceived parental-rearing behaviour on their relationship with their sibling(s). Spearman's Rank Order Correlation was conducted to examine the relationship between perceived parental rearing behaviour and sibling relationships. The results showed a significant relationship between the Rejection subscale of the s-EMBU and Conflict on the ASRQ-VSF. This suggests that parents who are perceived as more rejecting may inadvertently contribute to greater conflict between siblings. One possible explanation is that rejection can trigger competition for parental approval or lead to displaced frustration between siblings. According to Kanyas (2008), higher parental rejection, particularly from the mother, predicts increased jealousy and conflict and decreased positivity in sibling relationships. This may be rooted in an evolutionary need to receive love and care from one's primary caregivers. Additionally, when a child perceives a parent as rejecting, it can hinder the development of a positive self-concept, resulting in insecurity in themselves and others (Baradon et al., 2005).

The results also revealed a significant relationship between Emotional Warmth on the s-EMBU and Warmth on the ASRQ-VSF. This finding indicates that emotionally warm parenting may encourage more affectionate and supportive sibling relationships. Parents who model warmth and positive interpersonal behaviour can foster similar qualities between siblings. Research grounded in attachment and social learning perspectives suggests that parental responsiveness serves as an internal working model for children, shaping the way they engage in other relationships, including those with their siblings (Milevsky et al., 2011).

Mann-Whitney's U test was run to compare gender differences and differences in sibling gender dyads (same vs. mixed-gender) for both perceived parental rearing behaviour and sibling relationship. No statistically significant differences were found on any of the sibling relationship subscales when comparisons

were made based on the gender of the participants, indicating that male and female participants reported similar experiences within their sibling relationships. In terms of perceived parental rearing behaviour, no significant gender differences were observed for Emotional Warmth. However, significant differences were found for the Overprotection and Rejection subscales, with female participants reporting higher levels of both overprotective and rejecting parental behaviours compared to male participants.

These findings can be largely attributed to gender differences, especially when it comes to Indian homes, where such gender differences are often noted, owing to the differential social roles assigned to both the genders (Datta, 2023). The higher scores for overprotection reported by females may be attributed to the strong emphasis placed on a daughter's sexual purity, which is closely tied to the family's honour and social status (Kallivayalil, 2004). Fearing any compromise of this purity, Indian parents tend to be more controlling of their daughters, placing greater restrictions on dating and socialisation (Dasgupta, 1998; Segal, 1991).

The difference in perceived rejection may be linked to the longstanding cultural preference for sons in India. Sons are typically seen as future providers and custodians of the family name, while daughters, expected to marry out, are viewed as less economically valuable (Ahlawat, 2013). This son preference, rooted in socio-cultural and economic factors, may contribute to subtle or overt forms of daughter discrimination, potentially leading to higher perceptions of rejection among female participants. However, since the gender difference in rejection had a small effect size, this finding warrants further investigation in future research.

No statistically significant differences were found in perceived parental rearing behaviour or sibling relationship based on sibling gender dyads. The small sample size of the current study may have limited its ability to detect subtle differences, potentially contributing to these non-significant findings. While some previous studies have reported differences based on sibling gender composition, many of them have

relied on small or demographically limited samples, making it difficult to draw generalizable conclusions. Moreover, the literature on sibling attachment in adolescence and adulthood remains relatively sparse. However, studies have speculated that during early adulthood, due to all the life changes associated with adulthood, siblings may develop stronger bonds and that having a good relationship with one's sibling in this period can become a supportive relationship which can prove to be beneficial during this time of change (Conger et al., 2004).

Overall, the findings of this study provide an insight into the ways in which parent-child relationships can interact with and affect the relationship between siblings. Further studies in this area can help gain further insight into this interaction.

Future Directions

The present findings contribute to existing literature by reinforcing the link between parental rearing styles and sibling relationship quality. The significant gender differences in perceived overprotection and rejection, with female participants reporting higher levels, point to continued gendered parenting practices in Indian households. Since such parenting behaviours are linked to negative psychological outcomes like anxiety, low self-esteem, and maladaptive attitudes (Dash & Sriranjana, 2014; Dwairy, 2010), the findings highlight the need for culturally sensitive parent education efforts that promote autonomy and emotional support across genders.

The lack of statistically significant gender differences observed in sibling relationship quality, either by participant gender or sibling gender dyads, raises the possibility that factors beyond parenting, such as shared experiences, personality traits, and mutual support during transitions, may play a stronger role in shaping sibling dynamics (Abbey & Dallos, 2004; Brody, 1998; Conger et al., 2004). These aspects warrant greater investigation in future studies.

Finally, the prevalence of non-significant findings, especially regarding sibling gender dyads, may partially

reflect the study's small sample size. Replicating the study with larger and more diverse samples could provide clearer insights into how gender and family structure interact to shape relational dynamics within Indian families.

Future studies can also address the limitations of this study and include participants from all genders and from non-normative family structures to gain a more holistic understanding.

Conclusion

The present study examined how perceived parental rearing behaviours shape the nature of sibling relationships in Indian families. Findings suggest that when parents' behaviour is perceived to be warm, the sibling relationship is also found to be emotionally warm. On the other hand, it was found that perceived parental favouritism is associated with increased levels of conflict between siblings. These patterns suggest that the quality of sibling relationships may, in part, mirror the emotional environment created by parents.

Comparative analysis also found that female participants reported higher over-protective behaviours and rejection from parents as compared to male participants. These findings likely reflect persistent gendered parenting norms within Indian households, where daughters may be subject to stricter controls and less affirmation. However, no notable differences were found in sibling relationship quality across participant gender or sibling gender dyads, suggesting that sibling bonds may be shaped by other factors such as shared experiences and mutual support.

While the findings offer insight into the influence of parenting on sibling dynamics, they are limited by sample size and scope. Future research with larger and diverse samples and broader family structures could provide a deeper understanding of these relationships. Deepening our understanding of how parenting shapes sibling relationships, especially within the unique sociocultural context of India, can help inform family-centred psychological practices aimed at creating healthier and more supportive home environments.

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