



Sibling Relationship as Predictor of Emotional Well-Being and Adjustment in Interpersonal Relationships in Young Adults

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Abstract: Sibling relationships have been identified as having the strongest and most stable social relationships. However, there is limited research done to explore the role played by sibling relationships during young adulthood. The current study was done to investigate the role played by sibling warmth and conflict in the prediction of emotional well-being and interpersonal adjustment among young adults. A total of 211 participants took part in the study and answered questionnaires measuring sibling warmth, sibling conflict, emotional well-being, and interpersonal adjustment. Using the Pearson correlation method and regression method, the study established that sibling warmth was a significant predictor of emotional well-being and interpersonal adjustment. However, sibling conflict was also established to be a significant predictor of emotional well-being and interpersonal adjustment.

Keywords: *Sibling Relationship, Sibling Warmth, Sibling Conflict, Emotional Well-Being, Interpersonal Adjustment, Young Adults*

1. Introduction

The family is one of the earliest and most enduring contexts for emotional development. Within it, sibling relationships often last longer than most other interpersonal bonds. Unlike friendships or romantic relationships, which are formed by choice, sibling ties are rooted in shared family experiences and memories. Researchers describe sibling relationships as complex and multidimensional. Dunn (1983) characterized them as a mix of warmth and tension, involving care alongside rivalry. Similarly, Cicirelli (1985) viewed sibling relationships as dynamic processes shaped by communication and ongoing interaction. Thus,

sibling relationships extend beyond biological connections and serve as important contexts for social learning and personality development.

Sibling Relationships Through Development

Sibling relationships evolve across developmental stages. During childhood, they contribute to the development of sharing, empathy, and conflict resolution skills. In adolescence, peer relationships increase in importance, yet sibling closeness may remain stable or strengthen (Kim et al., 2023). In early adulthood, sibling relationships become more voluntary and are often centered on companionship and support.

From a family systems perspective, sibling warmth and conflict are linked to broader family dynamics (McHale et al., 2012). Positive sibling relationships are associated with healthy development, whereas persistent hostility has been linked to emotional difficulties.

Emotional Well-Being in Young Adulthood

Emotional well-being involves more than the absence of illness; it reflects the presence and balance of positive emotional functioning (Keyes, 2017). Emotional regulation plays a central role in maintaining well-being (Gross, 2015). Young adulthood is characterized by identity exploration and increasing independence (Arnett, 2015), which may introduce emotional challenges. Higher self-esteem has been associated with emotional stability (Orth & Robins, 2018), highlighting the importance of supportive relational contexts during this developmental stage.

Interpersonal Adjustment in Young Adulthood

Interpersonal adjustment refers to an individual's ability to build and maintain satisfying relationships through effective communication, empathy, collaboration, and conflict resolution. This is particularly important during young adulthood, especially in friendships, romantic relationships, and work settings (Reis et al., 2017).

Effective emotion regulation is associated with greater relationship satisfaction (English et al., 2017). Family relationships, including sibling relationships, also contribute to interpersonal development as individuals transition into adulthood (Dunn, 2002; McHale et al., 2012).

Sibling Relationships, Emotional Well-Being, and Interpersonal Adjustment

The association between sibling relationships and young adults' emotional functioning can be understood through social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) and family systems theory (Cox & Paley, 2003). These frameworks emphasize how family interactions shape coping patterns, emotional expression, and relational behavior.

Research suggests that supportive sibling relationships are associated with better psychological health, whereas high levels of sibling conflict are linked to emotional distress (Buist et al., 2013; Yeh & Lempers, 2004). However, sibling relationships in young adulthood remain less extensively studied compared to parent–child or peer relationships, particularly within collectivistic cultural contexts.

1.1 Rationale of the Study

Young adulthood is a critical period for identity formation and emotional development. While research has largely focused on parental, peer, and romantic relationships, sibling warmth and conflict have received comparatively less attention. Given the enduring and emotionally significant nature of sibling relationships, it is important to examine the extent to which sibling warmth and conflict contribute to emotional well-being and interpersonal adjustment in young adults.

2. Review of Literature

Dimensions of Sibling Relationship Quality

Sibling relationships are among the longest-lasting interpersonal bonds, often continuing from childhood into adulthood. They are typically conceptualized as multidimensional, primarily defined by warmth (closeness, support, communication) and conflict (rivalry, hostility, dominance). Jensen et al. (2022) emphasized that sibling closeness and communication are consistently linked to positive developmental outcomes, whereas high conflict predicts maladjustment and relational difficulties. Structural and dyadic factors also shape relationship quality. Gender composition influences warmth, with same-gender dyads—especially sister–sister pairs—reporting greater emotional closeness than mixed-gender pairs (Law & Imran, 2024; D’Silva et al., 2023). Birth order appears less influential, as most young adults report moderate warmth and low conflict regardless of sibling position (Law & Imran, 2024). Frequent and meaningful communication further predicts perceived closeness (LeBouef & Dworkin, 2021). Overall, sibling relationships represent a distinct relational context contributing uniquely to psychological development.

Sibling Relationships and Emotional Well-Being

Research consistently links sibling relationship quality to emotional well-being in adolescence and young adulthood. Warm, low-conflict relationships are associated with higher self-esteem, greater life satisfaction, and lower loneliness (Sherman et al., 2016; Gilligan et al., 2024), as well as fewer depressive symptoms and greater emotional security (Suitor et al.,

2020). Longitudinal findings highlight siblings as enduring sources of emotional support. Feinberg, Solmeyer, and McHale (2019) found that positive sibling relationships predicted greater emotional stability in adulthood. Similarly, Yu and Gamble (2021) reported that sibling warmth was associated with better emotional adjustment, whereas conflict predicted higher stress and relational strain.

Indian research supports these patterns, with D'Silva et al. (2023) reporting a positive association between sibling relationship quality and psychological well-being. Together, these findings suggest that warm sibling relationships function as protective factors, while chronic conflict may pose risks for emotional functioning in adulthood.

Sibling Relationships and Interpersonal Adjustment

Sibling relationships provide an early environment for learning emotional regulation, empathy, communication, and conflict resolution skills—competencies essential for adult interpersonal adjustment. Campione-Barr et al. (2017) found that sibling intimacy was positively related to empathy and interpersonal competence, while high conflict predicted peer and romantic relationship difficulties.

Dirks et al. (2018) reported that constructive conflict resolution in sibling relationships was linked to better emotional regulation and social skills, whereas unresolved conflict was associated with avoidance and social withdrawal. Doughty et al. (2019) found that low closeness and high control during adolescence predicted insecure attachment styles in young adult romantic relationships. These findings reinforce the idea that sibling relationships function as a developmental “training ground” for broader interpersonal functioning in adulthood.

Moderating and Contextual Influences

While sibling relationship quality predicts psychosocial outcomes, contextual factors may moderate these effects. Research indicates that friendships can compensate for poor sibling relationships, but strong sibling ties do not compensate for poor peer relationships (Sherman et al., 2016; Gilligan et al., 2024). This suggests that different close relationships contribute uniquely to overall well-being. Cultural context also shapes sibling dynamics. Jensen et al. (2022) highlighted that collectivistic societies may place greater emphasis on sibling interdependence and long-term relational bonds.

2.1 Research Gap

Although research links sibling relationship quality with psychological well-being, important gaps remain. Emotional adjustment and interpersonal skills are often studied

separately, and warmth and conflict are rarely examined together within a single predictive model. Additionally, research in culturally diverse student samples is limited. The present study addresses these gaps by examining sibling warmth and conflict as joint predictors of emotional adjustment and interpersonal competence in young adulthood.

3. Methodology

3.1 Aim

This study aimed to investigate the predictive value of sibling relationship qualities (warmth and conflict) regarding emotional well-being and interpersonal competence in young adults.

3.2 Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested:

H1: Sibling relationship qualities (warmth and conflict) are significantly related to emotional well-being.

H2: Sibling relationship qualities (warmth and conflict) are significantly related to interpersonal competence.

3.3 Research Design

The study employed a quantitative cross-sectional design with a correlational and predictive approach. It examined the relationships between sibling relationship qualities and psychological outcomes. Pearson correlation analyses were conducted to assess associations among variables, and linear regression analyses were performed to determine the predictive value of sibling warmth and conflict on emotional well-being and interpersonal competence.

3.4 Variables

Independent Variables

- Sibling Warmth
- Sibling Conflict

Dependent Variables

- Emotional Well-being
- Interpersonal Competence

3.5 Participants

Participants were young adults aged 18-30 years with at least one sibling. Both males and females participated. Participants were recruited using convenience sampling. Inclusion criteria included (a) age between 18 and 30 years, (b) having at least one sibling, (c) ability to

read and comprehend English, and (d) giving informed consent. Those without siblings or with incomplete data were excluded.

3.6 Measures

a) Sibling Relationship Questionnaire (Modified Version)

This 32-item scale was developed by Furman and Buhrmester (1985). It evaluates sibling relationship quality on two important aspects: warmth and conflict. Items are rated using a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (Hardly at all) to 5 (Extremely much). The scale has shown high reliability and validity in sibling research.

b) Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (SWEMWBS)

Developed by Stewart-Brown et al. (2009), the SWEMWBS is a 7-item scale that evaluates emotional well-being. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale. The scale has shown good internal consistency

c) Interpersonal Competence Questionnaire – Brief Version (ICQ)

The ICQ, a 15-item scale developed by Buhrmester et al. (1988), evaluates interpersonal competence in five areas: relationship initiation, self-disclosure, expression of displeasure, offering emotional support, and dealing with interpersonal conflict. The scale uses a 5-point Likert response format. The ICQ has been found to have high internal consistency and construct validity across different age and cultural samples.

3.7 Procedure

The data were collected through online self-report questionnaires administered via Google Forms. Participants were recruited through online platforms and social networking sites. Prior to participation, they were informed about the study and provided electronic consent. Participation was voluntary, with the option to withdraw at any time without penalty. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured, and the data were used solely for research purposes.

3.8 Statistical Analysis

The data were analyzed using Jamovi statistical software. Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were computed for all study variables. Prior to inferential analyses, the data were screened for accuracy and tested for normality. Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships among sibling warmth, sibling conflict, emotional well-being, and interpersonal competence. Multiple linear regression analysis was performed to assess the predictive validity of sibling warmth and sibling conflict

on emotional well-being and interpersonal competence. The level of statistical significance was set at $p < .05$.

4. Results

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables (N = 210–211)*

Variable	M	SD	Min	Max
Sibling Warmth	27.17	6.63	8	40
Sibling Conflict	17.92	4.61	7	35
Emotional Well-Being	17.90	2.93	7	35
Initiating Relationships (IR)	3.00	—	3	15
Self-Disclosure (SD)	3.20	—	3	15
Asserting Displeasure (AD)	2.88	—	3	15
Emotional Support (ES)	2.79	—	3	15
Managing Conflict (MC)	—	—	3	15

Interpretation

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for sibling relationship dimensions, emotional well-being, and interpersonal competence domains. Participants reported relatively higher levels of sibling warmth compared to conflict. Emotional well-being scores were moderate. The interpersonal competence domains—initiating relationships, self-disclosure, asserting displeasure, providing emotional support, and managing conflict—also reflected moderate levels, suggesting generally adaptive interpersonal functioning among the sample.

Table 2. *Pearson Correlations Among Study Variables*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Warmth	—							
2. Conflict	.258***	—						
3. Emotional Well-Being	.290***	.102	—					
4. IR	.329***	.144*	.318***	—				
5. SD	.326***	.158*	.267***	.644***	—			
6. AD	.302***	.117	.312***	.549***	.489***	—		
7. ES	.400***	.049	.253***	.439***	.470***	.460***	—	
8. MC	.329***	.054	.268***	.495***	.538***	.446***	.644***	—

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

Interpretation

Table 2 presents the Pearson correlation coefficients among sibling relationship dimensions, emotional well-being, and interpersonal competence domains. Sibling warmth was significantly and positively correlated with emotional well-being and all domains of interpersonal competence. The strongest association was observed between sibling warmth and emotional support ($r = .400, p < .001$).

Sibling conflict showed weak and mostly non-significant correlations with emotional well-being and interpersonal competence. Emotional well-being was positively associated with all interpersonal competence domains.

Table 3. *Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Emotional Well-Being and Interpersonal Competence from Sibling Relationship Dimensions*

Outcome Variable	R	R ²	β Warmth	p	β Conflict	p
Emotional Well-Being	.291	.085	.283	<.001	.027	.694
Initiating Relationships	.335	.112	.312	<.001	.064	.349
Self-Disclosure	.335	.112	.306	<.001	.079	.244
Asserting Displeasure	.305	.093	.292	<.001	.042	.542
Emotional Support	.404	.163	.415	<.001	-.058	.378
Managing Conflict	.331	.109	.338	<.001	-.033	.622

Interpretation

Table 3 presents the results of multiple regression analyses examining sibling warmth and conflict as predictors of emotional well-being and interpersonal competence.

For emotional well-being, the overall regression model was significant ($R^2 = .085$). Sibling warmth emerged as a significant positive predictor ($\beta = .283, p < .001$), whereas sibling conflict was not significant.

Across all interpersonal competence domains, sibling warmth was a significant positive predictor. The strongest predictive effect was observed for providing emotional support ($\beta = .415, p < .001$), followed by initiating relationships, managing conflict, self-disclosure, and asserting displeasure. Sibling conflict did not significantly predict any interpersonal competence dimension when warmth was included in the model.

Overall, the regression analyses indicate that sibling warmth, but not conflict, significantly predicts emotional well-being and interpersonal adjustment in young adults.

These findings support the hypothesis that positive aspects of sibling relationships function as important psychological and interpersonal resources during young adulthood.

5. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether two aspects of sibling relationships—warmth and conflict—predict how young adults feel emotionally and how well they handle social interactions. This study revealed that warmth from siblings is a particularly important predictor of young adults' emotional well-being and all aspects of their interpersonal competence, while the contribution of sibling conflict to these outcomes was not significant once warmth was controlled in the model.

The descriptive results showed that the participants reported moderate to high levels of warmth from their siblings, moderate levels of sibling conflict, and adaptive levels of well-being and interpersonal competence. Correlation results revealed that warmth from siblings was positively related to young adults' emotional well-being and several interpersonal competence skills, including the ability to initiate relationships, share personal thoughts, express dissatisfaction, offer emotional support, and handle conflicts. However, the correlations between sibling conflict and these outcomes were not significant.

The regression analyses supported the first hypothesis that warmth from siblings would forecast young adults' emotional well-being. Young adults who reported higher warmth from their siblings had better psychological well-being, which is in line with previous studies (e.g., Feinberg et al., 2019; Suitor et al., 2020). Moreover, warmth from siblings was a significant predictor of all dimensions of interpersonal competence, especially the ability to offer emotional support to others, which supported the second hypothesis and is in line with the literature (Cicirelli, 2004; Campione-Barr et al., 2017).

On the contrary, sibling conflict was not a significant predictor of young adults' outcomes in this study, which may be due to the more emotionally autonomous status of young adults in the late teens/early twenties and the potentially more powerful impact of positive relational experiences than negative ones.

5.1 Limitations And Future Directions

Certain limitations must be considered. The cross-sectional design prevents causal conclusions. The use of self-report measures may have introduced response bias, and future research should include multiple data sources. Additionally, other factors such as birth order, age spacing, family structure, and attachment style were not examined. Exploring these

potential mediators and moderators would help clarify the direction and nature of the relationship between sibling dynamics and young adult outcomes.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between sibling relationship quality, emotional well-being, and interpersonal competence in young adults. The findings indicated that sibling warmth significantly predicted both emotional well-being and interpersonal competence, whereas sibling conflict did not emerge as a significant predictor. Positive aspects of sibling relationships—such as emotional closeness and support—appear to play a stronger developmental role than negative aspects like conflict. Additionally, emotional well-being and interpersonal competence were positively related, suggesting interconnected aspects of personality functioning. Overall, the results highlight that sibling relationships, particularly their warm and supportive dimensions, contribute meaningfully to psychosocial development in young adulthood.

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