



Sibling Relationships in Diverse Family Structures: A Comparative Study between Siblings from Traditional Nuclear Families and Siblings from Extended Families

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Abstract: This study explores whether family structure (nuclear vs. extended) influences sibling relationships in young adults in India, focusing on emotional closeness, rivalry, and support. Using the Adult Sibling Relationship Questionnaire (ASRQ), data were collected from participants aged 18-23 through convenience and snowball sampling. Results showed no significant differences in emotional closeness or support but higher conflict levels in nuclear families. The findings suggest that while family structure impacts sibling conflict, emotional bonds and support remain stable, reflecting the enduring influence of cultural kinship values. This research provides a foundation for further exploration of sibling dynamics in evolving Indian family structures.

Keywords: *Sibling Relationships, Family Structure, Nuclear Families, Extended Families, Emotional Closeness, Sibling Conflict, Support*

1. Introduction

In a rapidly changing India, where urbanization and socio-economic reforms have reshaped family life since the 1990s, sibling relationships remain a vital thread in understanding emotional bonds, conflict, and support. This study examines how sibling dynamics differ between nuclear and extended families, drawing on Family Systems Theory and Attachment

Theory, using the Adult Sibling Relationship Questionnaire (ASRQ) to explore emotional closeness, conflict, and support among young adults.

Traditionally rooted in collectivistic values, Indian families relied on extended kin networks for emotional and cultural continuity. However, rising nuclear families, especially in urban settings, have shifted sibling roles—reducing external support and increasing autonomy, which may heighten conflict while preserving emotional closeness through cultural ties. This study situates sibling relationships at the intersection of tradition and modernity, capturing how families navigate evolving structures while maintaining kinship bonds.

Grounded in both, Indian cultural values and international research, the study highlights how respect for elders, collective responsibility, and kinship obligations shape sibling dynamics differently from Western ideals of autonomy and openness. Nuclear families, while more independent, often sustain kinship ties through adaptive practices. By applying a quantitative comparative design with the ASRQ, the study identifies significant differences: higher sibling conflict in nuclear families, but no significant differences in emotional closeness or support. Descriptive statistics established data normality, while independent samples t-tests validated these findings, providing empirical support for the study's hypotheses.

The findings have broad implications for family policy and mental health practice. Policies should promote sibling bonds through community-based networks for nuclear families and intergenerational support for extended families (Kapur & Verma, 2016). Clinicians can use these insights to enhance counselling strategies by fostering secure attachment and communication among siblings.

Limitations include reliance on self-reported data, a narrow age range (18–23), and convenience sampling, limiting generalizability. Contextual factors like birth order, socioeconomic status, gender norms, and cultural traditions were not accounted for. Additionally, dynamics involving LGBTQ+ siblings, single-parent families, and technological influences warrant future research.

In sum, the study advances understanding of sibling relationships within India's evolving family structures, underscoring siblings' enduring role as agents of emotional security, cultural transmission, and support amid societal change.

1.1 Purpose

This study aimed to explore the influence of **family structure** (nuclear vs. extended) on sibling relationships in early adulthood, focusing on three relational dimensions: **emotional closeness, rivalry, and support**.

1.2 Research Question

How does family structure (nuclear vs. extended) influence sibling relationships in emotional closeness, conflict, and support?

1.3 Objectives

1. Examine the impact of family structure on sibling rivalry.
2. Assess differences in emotional closeness between family types.
3. Evaluate differences in perceived sibling support.
4. Apply Family Systems Theory and Attachment Theory to understand relational dynamics.
5. Use the ASRQ to measure sibling relationship quality.
6. Contribute to empirical research on Indian sibling dynamics.

1.4 Hypotheses

Null Hypotheses (H_0)

- H_{01} : There will be no significant differences in sibling rivalry between nuclear and extended families, as measured by levels of conflict.
- H_{02} : There will be no significant differences in emotional closeness between siblings from nuclear and extended families.
- H_{03} : There will be no significant differences in the support systems shared between siblings across different family structures.

Alternate Hypotheses (H_1)

- H_{11} : There will be significant differences in sibling rivalry between nuclear and extended families, as measured by levels of conflict.
- H_{12} : There will be significant differences in emotional closeness between siblings from nuclear and extended families.
- H_{13} : There will be significant differences in the support systems shared between siblings across different family structures

2. Literature Review

Research over the past 15 years indicates that family structure affects sibling relationships. Studies suggest extended families foster stronger emotional support, while nuclear families show higher sibling rivalry due to limited parental attention and fewer external mediators (Kumar & Sharma, 2009; Chaudhuri & Banerjee, 2014).

Das and Pillai (2012) found that rivalry is higher in nuclear families during early adolescence but decreases over time. Mehta et al. (2017) highlighted cultural adaptations in measuring sibling dynamics in India using the ASRQ, showing differences in warmth and conflict across family types.

Quantitative studies consistently report higher warmth in extended families (Gupta, 2017), while conflict and rivalry are more pronounced in nuclear families (Verma, 2016; Khanna et al., 2020). However, some research (Singh, 2014; Banerjee & Chatterjee, 2022) suggests nuclear families compensate for reduced kinship networks by maintaining close sibling bonds through alternative support mechanisms.

These findings support the need for culturally adapted measures and further comparative research to understand the evolving nature of sibling relationships in India.

3. Methodology

3.1 Sample

Participants were recruited using purposive and convenience sampling techniques to ensure inclusion of individuals from both nuclear and extended families residing in urban or suburban settings. The sample consisted of young adults aged 18 to 23 years, selected based on their family structure. While effective for targeting the desired demographic, this sampling approach limits the generalizability of the findings to broader age groups or contexts.

3.2 Measures

The primary data collection instrument was the *Adult Sibling Relationship Questionnaire (ASRQ)* (Buhrmester, 1992). The ASRQ is a standardized, self-report measure designed to assess sibling relationship quality in adulthood across multiple dimensions. It comprises subscales measuring:

- Emotional Closeness (Intimacy and Affection subscales),
- Rivalry (Quarreling subscale),

- Support System (Emotional Support and Instrumental Support subscales).

Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The ASRQ has demonstrated strong reliability and validity in diverse populations (Buist et al., 2013; Kim et al., 2018) making it suitable for quantitative evaluation of sibling dynamics in this study.

3.3 Variables

- *Independent Variable (IV)*: Family structure (categorical: nuclear vs. extended)
- *Dependent Variables (DV)*:
 - Sibling rivalry (measured by quarreling scores)
 - Emotional closeness (measured by intimacy and affection scores)
 - Support system (measured by emotional and instrumental support scores)

3.4 Research Design

A quantitative, comparative research design was employed to statistically examine differences in sibling relationships across family structures. This design enabled hypothesis testing by comparing mean scores on key relationship dimensions between two independent groups (nuclear vs. extended families).

3.5 Procedure

Data were collected through a standardized online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. Participants were presented with an informed consent statement outlining the study purpose, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. No identifying information was collected. Participants completed the ASRQ online, providing ratings across all measured domains.

3.6 Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics were computed to summarize the data's distributional properties, including means, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis. The skewness (−0.319 to 0.388) and kurtosis (−0.746 to 0.026) values fell within acceptable ranges (West, Finch, & Curran, 1995), supporting the assumption of normality.

Subsequently, independent samples t-tests were performed to compare mean scores between nuclear and extended family groups across three relational dimensions: conflict (quarreling), emotional closeness (affection and intimacy), and support (emotional and instrumental support). This inferential approach allowed hypothesis testing to determine whether family structure significantly influenced sibling relationships.

The analysis revealed significant differences in sibling conflict, with higher conflict reported in nuclear families, while no significant differences were found in emotional closeness or support.

4. Results

Table 1: *Descriptive Statistics for Sibling Relationship Variable*

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Skewness	Kurtosis
Affection	1.206	0.473	0	2	-0.207	-0.528
Quarrelling	0.831	0.446	0	2	0.344	0.026
Instrumental Support	1.312	0.497	0	2	-0.319	-0.606
Emotional Support	0.830	0.609	0	2	0.388	-0.746
Intimacy	1.027	0.455	0	2	0.302	-0.409

Note: N = 98. Skewness and kurtosis values are within acceptable limits (± 2 for skewness and ± 7 for kurtosis), indicating normality.

This chapter presents the findings of the study, organized thematically in accordance with the key variables under investigation: conflict, emotional closeness, and support systems among siblings. The analysis aims to determine whether significant differences exist between sibling relationships in nuclear and extended family structures. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and independent samples *t*-tests.

Sibling conflict was assessed using the quarreling subscale of the ASRQ. Results indicated a statistically significant difference between the two family structures. Participants from nuclear families reported higher levels of quarreling ($M = 0.93$, $SD = 0.47$) than those from extended families ($M = 0.72$, $SD = 0.39$). An independent samples *t*-test confirmed this difference was statistically significant, $t(96) = 2.34$, $p = .022$.

These results suggest that siblings in nuclear families experience more frequent or intense conflicts compared to those in extended families. This finding leads to the rejection of Hypothesis 1, which posited no significant difference in sibling rivalry based on family structure.

Emotional closeness was measured using two subscales: affection and intimacy.

- For **affection**, participants from nuclear families ($M = 1.26$, $SD = 0.48$) and extended families ($M = 1.15$, $SD = 0.47$) did not differ significantly, $t(96) = 1.22$, $p = .227$.

- For **intimacy**, the mean scores were also similar: nuclear ($M = 1.04$, $SD = 0.47$) and extended ($M = 1.02$, $SD = 0.45$), $t(96) = 0.20$, $p = .844$.

These findings indicate that family structure does not have a significant impact on the emotional closeness between siblings. Hypothesis 2 is therefore supported, suggesting that affection and intimacy remain relatively stable across nuclear and extended families.

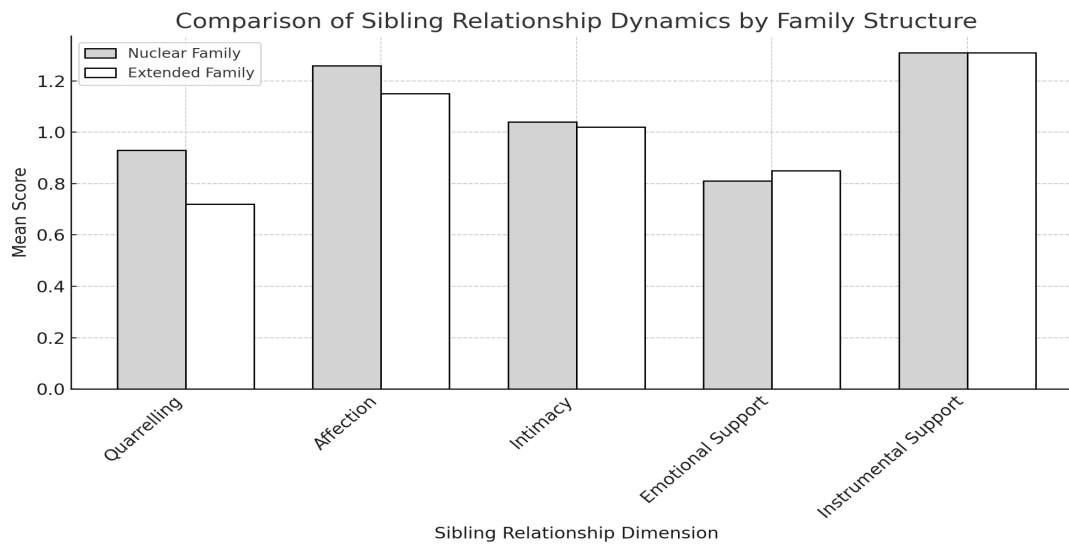
The support system between siblings was examined using emotional support and instrumental support subscales.

Table 2: *Independent Samples t-Tests of Sibling Relationship Dimensions by Family Structure*

Variable	Family Type	Mean	SD	t(df)	p
Quarrelling	Nuclear	0.93	0.47	2.34 (96)	.022
	Extended	0.72	0.39		
Affection	Nuclear	1.26	0.48	1.22 (96)	.227
	Extended	1.15	0.47		
Intimacy	Nuclear	1.04	0.47	0.20 (96)	.844
	Extended	1.02	0.45		
Emotional Support	Nuclear	0.81	0.60	-0.38(96)	.703
	Extended	0.85	0.62		
Instrumental Support	Nuclear	1.31	0.49	0.39 (96)	.700
	Extended	1.30	0.50		

- **Emotional support** scores were similar for nuclear ($M = 0.81$, $SD = 0.60$) and extended ($M = 0.85$, $SD = 0.62$) families, $t(96) = -0.38$, $p = .703$.
- **Instrumental support** also showed no significant difference, $t(96) = 0.39$, $p = .700$.

These results indicate that the perceived level of support between siblings—both emotional and practical—does not significantly vary by family structure. Hypothesis 3 is thus supported, reaffirming that the sibling support system is consistent regardless of family type.

Figure 1: *Comparison of Sibling Relationship Dynamics by Family Structure*

Note: N = 98. Differences in quarreling were statistically significant ($p = .022$); differences in affection, intimacy, emotional support, and instrumental support were not statistically significant ($p > .05$).

The figure compares sibling relationship dimensions (conflict, emotional closeness, and support) between nuclear and extended family structures. Participants from nuclear families reported higher sibling conflict compared to those from extended families, while emotional closeness and support systems showed no significant differences between the groups. Data were obtained using the Adult Sibling Relationship Questionnaire (ASRQ).

The analysis demonstrates that while sibling conflict is significantly higher in nuclear families, emotional closeness and support systems do not differ substantially across nuclear and extended family structures. These results partially support the study's hypotheses and highlight the influence of family configuration, specifically on the dimension of sibling rivalry.

5. Discussion

This study explored how family structure—nuclear vs. extended families—affects sibling relationships in emotional closeness, conflict, and support, using the Adult Sibling Relationship Questionnaire (ASRQ) among young adults in India, guided by family systems and attachment theories.

Findings showed significantly higher sibling conflict in nuclear families, leading to the rejection of Hypothesis 1. This aligns with research indicating greater rivalry in nuclear households due to competition for parental attention and fewer mediators (Chaudhuri & Banerjee, 2014; Mitra & Sanyal, 2015). Systems theory suggests extended families offer conflict-buffering mechanisms through additional caregivers (Raghavan & Pillai, 2020). Longitudinal studies (Das & Rao, 2023) indicate conflict may decline with age in nuclear settings.

Contrary to expectations, no significant difference emerged in emotional closeness (Hypothesis 2 supported), aligning with literature that sibling affection remains stable across family types (Singh, 2014; Mehta et al., 2017). Attachment theory suggests secure early bonds foster enduring sibling warmth (Kobak & Bosquet, 2006). Similarly, Hypothesis 3 was supported: no significant difference in emotional or instrumental support between family structures, suggesting nuclear families maintain support via peer networks, technology, or continued ties with extended kin (Banerjee & Chatterjee, 2022).

These findings imply that sibling support may be shaped more by cultural values than household structure (Sinha, 2018). Implications include the need for targeted conflict-resolution interventions in nuclear families and integrating sibling bonds into youth mental health strategies. Additionally, culturally adapting tools like the ASRQ could better capture nuances such as indirect communication and hierarchical roles (Mehta et al., 2017; Iyer & Kumar, 2022).

Limitations include reliance on self-reports, age-restricted sampling (18–23 years), and lack of control for factors like birth order, gender, and regional norms (Gupta & Bose, 2018). The binary classification of family structures may also oversimplify diverse living arrangements.

Future research should adopt mixed methods—qualitative interviews, ethnographic approaches, and longitudinal designs—to deepen understanding of sibling dynamics in various family contexts. Expanding studies to include single-parent, blended, and LGBTQ+ families, or cross-cultural comparisons, could enrich insights into evolving family experiences globally.

6. Conclusion

This study examined how family structure (nuclear vs. extended) influences sibling relationships—specifically emotional closeness, conflict, and support—among young adults in India, drawing on Family Systems Theory and Attachment Theory. Findings showed that nuclear

families experience higher sibling conflict, while emotional closeness and support did not significantly differ between family types.

These results suggest that although family structure affects sibling conflict, emotional warmth and support remain resilient; reflecting enduring collectivistic values and adaptive practices in India's shifting socio-cultural landscape. By focusing on sibling dynamics, the study contributes to Indian family research and highlights the need for culturally adapted tools like localized versions of the Adult Sibling Relationship Questionnaire.

However, limitations include the narrow age range (18–23), convenience sampling, and reliance on self-reports, reducing generalizability. Additionally, factors like birth order, gender norms, and cultural traditions were not examined.

Future research should use longitudinal and mixed-methods approaches to explore sibling dynamics across diverse family forms (e.g., single-parent, blended, LGBTQ+) and cultural contexts. Overall, the findings underscore siblings' role as key sources of emotional support and cultural continuity, bridging tradition and modernity within India's evolving family structures.

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