

A study on sibling relationship during late adulthood

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■ **ABSTRACT** : Sibling relationship during late adulthood was studied on subjects belonging to middle income group residing in Udaipur city. The data was collected from 180 respondents comprising of three dyads *i.e.* sister- sister dyad, brother-brother dyad and brother-sister dyad within the age range of 60-75 years. Thirty pairs of each dyad were selected. The results revealed that amongst all the three dyads sister-sister dyad was the strongest, brother-sister dyad and brother-brother dyad maintained a moderate relationship. Majority of the dyads were found to maintain congenial type of relationship. Hence, it is concluded that the relationship amongst various dyads is reasonably good during this phase of life.

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■ **KEY WORDS**: Late adulthood, Sibling relationship, Sister-sister dyad, Brother-brother dyad, Brother-sister dyad

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Siblings represent a kind of continuity in a family's history that cannot be facilitated by other family relationships. In some families, sibling bonds may represent the only surviving dyadic relationship from the family of origin. Towards the later stages of the family's life cycle, as Cicirelli (1985) notes, "the individual's family of procreation expands while the family of origin gradually disintegrates as its members die, only fragments of the original family system remain in the form of sibling dyadic relationship." As the longest survivors of the original family, siblings may become a valued repository of family memories and patterns in shared reminiscence (Gold, 1987).

Sibling relationships during adulthood have gained visibility in scholarship in recent years. There are several reasons for this increased interest in adult siblings. For one, the unique characteristics of the sibling dyad *i.e.* similar family history, belonging to the same peer group, and the long term nature of their relationship, make it a

qualitatively different kin relationship. There are also cultural expectations that a sibling relationship should be emotionally closer, more meaningful and more enduring than other interpersonal association.

Late adulthood years are considered to be an important juncture where adults reestablish their ties with their siblings. Therefore, this study is an endeavor in the direction where an understanding of sibling relationship during late adulthood shall be helpful in the well being of families and maintaining other relationships. Hence, the study was taken up with the following objectives:

Objective of the study :

- To study sibling relationship during late adulthood in terms of type of contact maintained, degree of emotional closeness and existence of conflict.
- To study type of sibling relationship.

RESEARCH METHODS

The study was conducted in the Udaipur city. The sample consisted of 180 respondents of late adulthood years within the age range of 60-75 years. The sample comprised of three dyads *i.e.* sister- sister dyad, brother-brother dyad and brother-sister dyad. Thirty pairs of each dyad were selected. Adult Sibling Relationship Scale developed by Katoch (2008) was modified and used for the present research. The data was obtained through home visits wherein the respondents completed the scale in the presence of the investigator. Percentages were calculated to depict degree of sibling relationship in terms of high, moderate and low across three categories of sibling relationship *i.e.* type of contact maintained, degree of emotional closeness and existence of conflict. Further, overall scores on sibling relationship were utilized to categorize dyads (in %) for the type of relationship maintained *i.e.* Intimate, Congenial, Loyal, Apathetic and Hostile.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the present study as well as relevant discussion have been presented under following heads :

Assessment of sibling relationship amongst: Brother-sister, Sister-sister and Brother-brother dyads :

Brother - sister relationship:

Fig. 1 shows the assessment of brother- sister relationship. The figure indicates three qualities: type of contact maintained, degree of emotional closeness and existence of conflict. These are the crucial parameters in the context of late adulthood sibling relationships. Each quality is split into three levels: low, moderate, high. The bar graph indicates the percentage distribution for each level.

Contact maintained is mostly within the moderate and high range for a brother (with his sister) and a sister (with her brother). 46.67 per cent of brothers and 50 per cent of sisters had maintained moderate type of contact and 43.34 per cent of brother’s as well as sister’s maintained high level of contact. The frequency of low contact is small, thereby indicating that most brother-sister sibling tend to keep in touch with each other on a fairly regular basis.

Emotional closeness is also high between brother and sister pairs. The bar graphs for brothers indicate that brother feel great emotional closeness with their

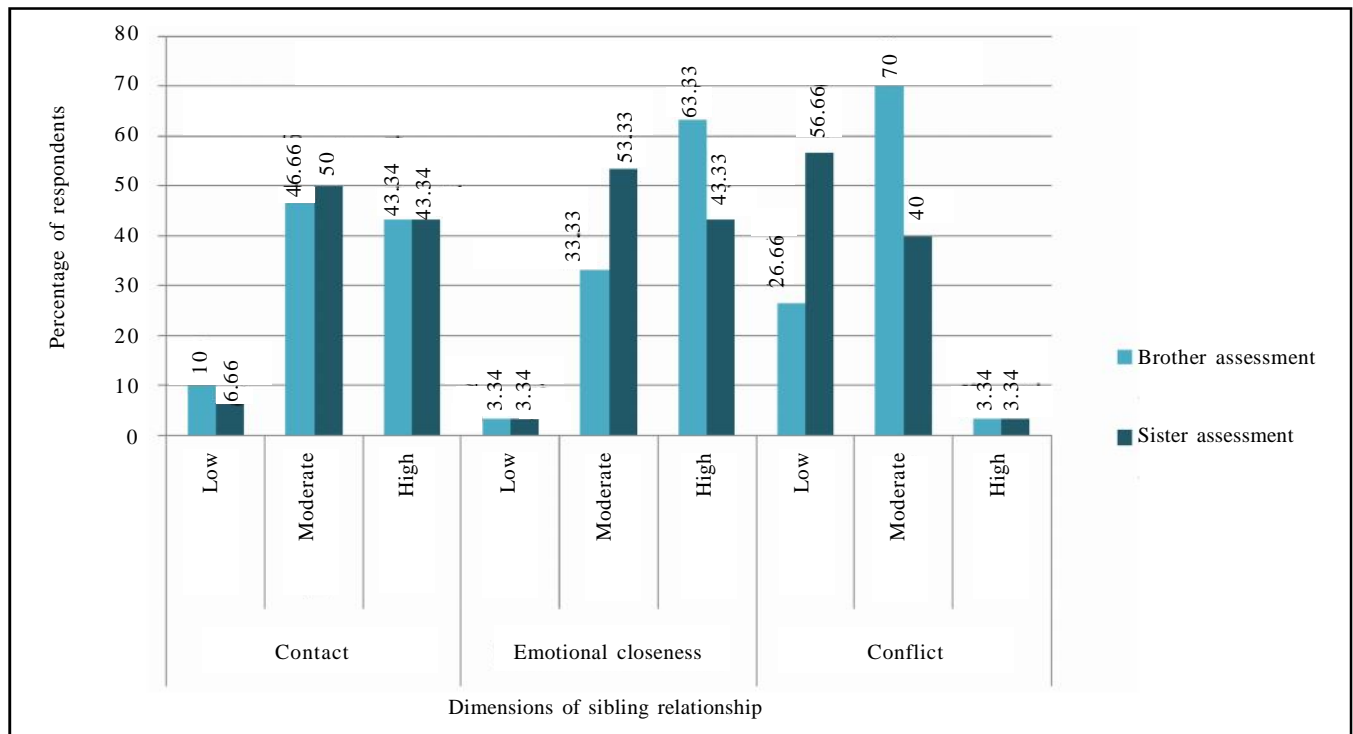


Fig. 1 : Assessment of Brother-sister relationship

sisters, with maximum responses (63.34%) falling in the “high” level. The emotional closeness that a sister feels towards her brother is more evenly spread between the moderate (53.34%) and high (43.34%). Similar numbers were obtained for brothers and sisters mutual emotional closeness. As for conflict, a high margin of brothers among respondents (70%) experience moderate levels of conflict with their sisters. Majority of the sisters (56.67%) expressed that their conflict level was low with their brothers. However 40 per cent expressed that the conflict was moderate. It is worth noting that those amongst brother-sister dyad experiencing high conflict were negligible.

Brother-sister relationship is stable, durable, very affectionate and are complex. Love, competition, friendship and jealousy all overlay each other to create complex emotional reactions to family issues and situations.

Sister - sister relationship :

Fig. 2 depicts various levels of sibling relationship amongst sisters.

As can be seen from the Fig. 2, more than sixty per cent of sisters (I) and 40 per cent of sister’s (II)

maintained moderate type of contact. Only 36.67 per cent of sisters (I) and 60 per cent of sister’s (II) maintained high contact. Neither sisters (I) nor did sisters (II) maintain low level of contact. Katoch (2008) reported that respondent’s gender is a significant predictor of telephonic contact. She found that women are in greater contact than men, with their sibling through phone.

Regarding degree of emotional closeness nearly fifty per cent of respondents of both categories reported that they maintained moderate level of emotional closeness and nearly 50 per cent reported that they had high level of emotional closeness.

Existence of conflict was found to be low and nearly sixty per cent of sisters of both categories depicted low level of conflict. However the graph shows that nearly 40 per cent of sisters depicted moderate level of conflict. High level of conflict was not depicted by this dyad.

Sister-sister dyad maintains high contact, emotional closeness and low conflict because they spend more time throughout their life time in care giving, maintaining kin networks than do males. They are ready to sacrifice and for them relationship is more important than arguments or conflicts.

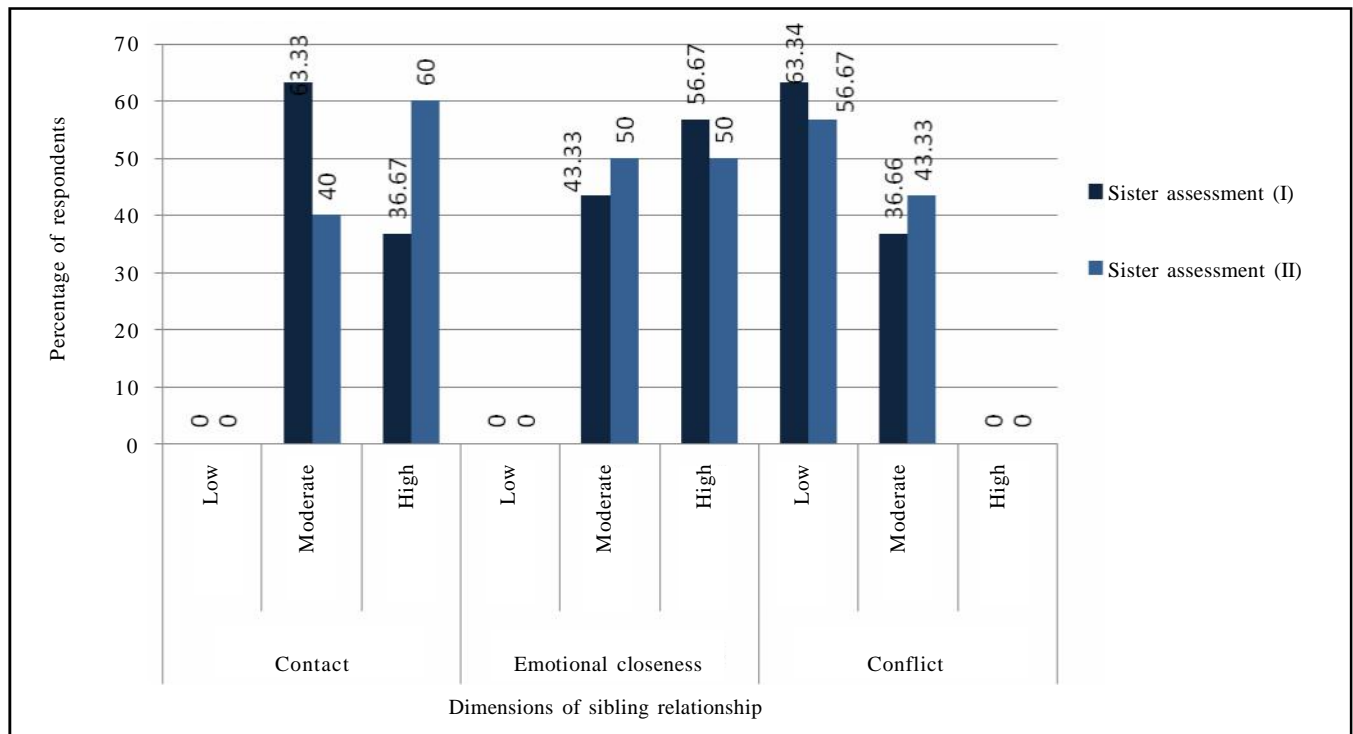


Fig. 2 : Sister-sister assessment of sibling relationship

Brother-Brother relationship :

Fig. 3 depicts the results of brother-brother relationship.

Fig. 3 clearly depicts that in terms of contact maintained majority of brothers (I) and brother (II) maintained moderate level of contact *i.e.* 53.33 per cent and 56.67 per cent. However, high level of contact was depicted by 30 per cent and 26.67 per cent of brothers (I) and brother (II).

In terms degree of emotional closeness 50 per cent and above of the brothers (I) and brothers (II) maintained moderate level of emotional closeness and high level of emotional closeness was depicted by almost one third of the siblings. However almost 13 per cent of both categories of brothers depicted low level of emotional closeness.

Regarding depiction of conflict more than 60 per cent of brothers (II) and 56.67 per cent of brothers (I) maintained moderated level of conflict. High level of conflict was depicted by very few brothers.

It is found that sibling rivalry decreases and feelings of closeness increases with age. Siblings provide

different types of support for each other as they age. As losses increase with age, siblings rely on each other more and more for social support.

The sister-sister dyad is the strongest dyad among the three studied here. The reason for this is that females tend to exhibit more nurturing behaviour, empathy compassion and emotional closeness. They spend more time in maintaining kinship networks than do males. This also implies that sisters interact more closely with each other than with their brothers, and certainly more than brothers interact among themselves.

Type of sibling relationship in late adulthood :

Based on over all scores five types of sibling relationship *i.e.* Intimate, Congenial, Loyal, Apathetic and Hostile were identified. Table 1 shows type of Sibling Relationship among late adults:

In brother-sister dyad, more than 60 per cent of both brothers and sisters have described their relationship as congenial and 26.67 per cent of brother's and 30 per cent of sister's had loyal type of sibling relationship.

In sister-sister dyad, nearly two third of both

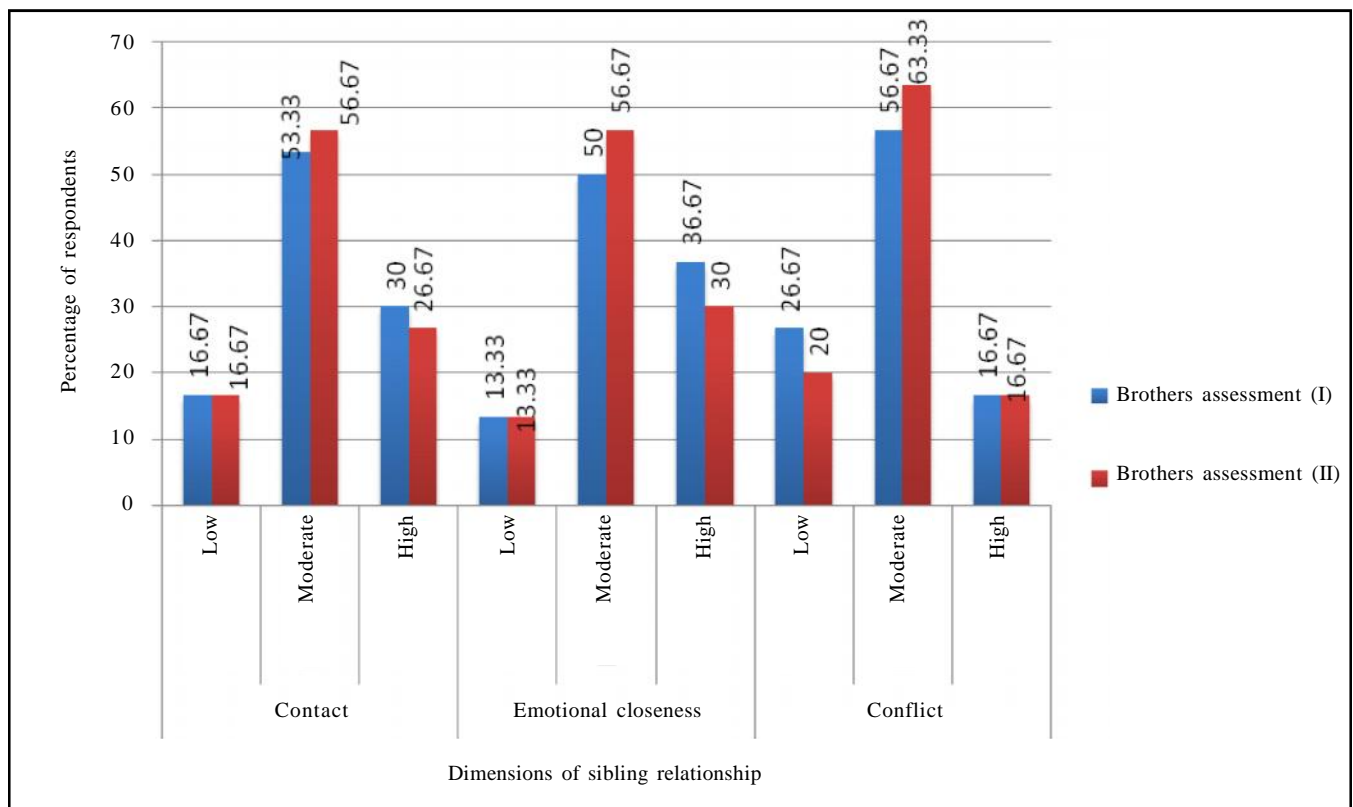


Fig. 3 : Brother-brother assessment of sibling relationship

Table 1: Percentage distribution by type of sibling relationship

Sr. No.	Type of sibling relationship	Brother – sister dyad (n=60)		Sister – sister dyad (n=60)		Brother – brother dyad (n=60)	
		Brother's assessment n=30	Sister's assessment n=30	Sisters (I) assessment n=30	Sisters (II) assessment n=30	Brothers(I) assessment n=30	Brothers(II) assessment n=30
1.	Intimate	6.67	6.67	10	13.33	3.33	6.67
2.	Congenial	63.33	63.33	66.67	60	46.33	43.33
3.	Loyal	26.67	30	23.33	26.67	36.67	40
4.	Apathetic	3.33	0	0	0	13.33	10
5.	Hostile	0	0	0	0	0	0

categories of sister expressed congenial relationship. However a quarter reported loyal type of relationship. Nearly 10 per cent expressed that their relationship was very intimate.

Brother–brother relationship was found to be distributed across four types of sibling relationship thus differing from the other two dyads. Relationship was found to fall between congenial to loyal and a few cares even apathetic. None of the brothers were found to have hostile type of relationship. However, intimate relationship surprisingly was also expressed in rare cases. Thus overall it can be seen that most of the dyads maintained congenial relationship followed by being loyal type. Apathetic relationship was expressed by few but only brothers. None of the dyads expressed hostile relationship. Thus it seems that in late adulthood after having encountered so many challenges in life people tame down and become more accommodative towards each other. Sibling rivalry/jealousy which could ruin

relationships also gets minimized and people start understanding the purpose of relationships more deeply. It seems as if late adults re-live their childhood, family of origin and attachments.

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