

# Analysis on the Role of Emotional Communication in the Relationship of Siblings With an Age Gap from Two-Child Families

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## ABSTRACT

China's unique one-child policy and two-child policy have objectively given birth to a large number of two-child families, in which the two children have an age gap. The superimposed changes of parent-child relationship and sibling relationship faced by such families have aroused the attention and extensive discussion on the emotional function of families. Questionnaire survey was conducted on parent-child relationship and relationship of siblings with an age gap from 5 to 28 years old from the two-child families. The results show that the emotional communication has a significant influence on the relationships mentioned above compared with other family functions. Meanwhile, the data show that the decisive effect of parent-child relationship on sibling relationship in ordinary multi-children families is not applicable in two-child families. Finally, this paper demonstrates the importance of emotional communication in two-child families. In addition, suggestions are given from the perspectives of enhancing the sense of participation in the decision-making of the first child, changing the role of parents and cultivating the dependence of the younger child on the older child.

**Keywords:** *sibling relationship, two children family, emotional function*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

According to birth rate data released by the national bureau of statistics (NBS), the birth rate of the second child has surpassed that of the first children in 2017. And the number of the second child accounts for 51.2% of the number of newborns. Due to China's long-term one-child policy and individual family economic conditions, many people born in the 1970s choose to have a second child. As a result, there is a large age gap between the first and the second child. This type of family are called two-child family with a large age gap between the two kids[1]. The studies on two-child family began after the second world war. And now some scholars research on the relation between sibling at home and abroad, focusing on the problems during the growth of the first child after the second child is born [2] or the tension in parent-child relationship[3]. However, there is only scarce researches on the sibling-relationship and its influential factors in two-child families in China. With the unique policies, the sibling relationships is more complex in the mainland of China than in other regions. One of the reasons for that is some parents who have two children grow up in a one-child family, so they themselves lack the fellowship of siblings[4]. However, they have to deal with the parent-child relationship and sibling-relationship that are very different from their families of origin[5]. Therefore, the new type of sibling-relationship in China is studied in this paper. And in this paper, the two-child families are all referred to the families with two children, between whom

the age gap ranges from 5 to 28 years old. The data in this paper are collected through a questionnaire. Besides, the importance of emotional function in two-child families is analyzed. In addition, the author make a comparison between the emotional communication with other factors, namely, the age gap, parent-child relationship, sibling-relationship and gender-age-structure of the two children.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODS

The questionnaire in this study is based on the questionnaire compiled by Furman and Buhrmester, which contains 15 items and is graded by 4-point Friendship Quality Inventory and IPPA Inventory of parent and peer attachment compiled by Armsden and Greenberg. The questionnaire is aimed at the elder children of sibling families who have an age gap of over 5 years old with the younger children, with a total of 110 valid data.

This study considers four variables, including age difference, gender structure, emotional communication and parent-child relationship.

## 3. BASIC DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

In order to verify whether the gender structure of compatriots can affect the sibling relationship in previous studies, this questionnaire classifies the gender structure

statistically. The frequency of gender structure were conducted, and the results are shown in table 1.

Table 1 Frequency of respondents' gender structure

Gender structure	Frequency	Percent(%)
brother-brother	26	23.6
sister-sister	37	33.6
Elder brother- younger sister	13	11.8
Elder sister-younger brother	34	30.9

Although the sample size of the questionnaire is not large, it can also be seen that families whose first child is a girl are more inclined to have a second child, which is related to the traditional Chinese concept of having both sons and daughters and the preference for sons over daughters. The structure of sister-x is almost twice that of brother-x. Brother-sister is the least. Sister -sister is the most.

Basic descriptive statistics were made on age gap, parent-child relationship, emotional communication and sibling relationship, and the results are shown in table 2. It

is worth mentioning that considering the younger age of the second child, the emotional communication here refers to the emotional communication between the first child and the parents. This is also noted in the question design of the questionnaire. The table lists the highest and lowest values, the mean and the variance.

Emotional communication had the highest mean and standard deviation, and age differences had a less significant effect on sibling relationships. The SD of affective interaction is almost twice of sibling relationship.

Table 2 Basic description statistics of variables

Variable	N	Min	Max	M	SD
Age gap	110	5	28	10.57	4.17
Parent-child relationship	110	4	83	57.56	13.13
Affective interaction	110	74	150	113.16	14.71
Sibling relationship	110	36	75	55.60	8.07

## 4. CORRELATION ANALYSIS

### 4.1. Correlation analysis of gender structure and sibling relationship

SPSS 26.0 software was used to analyze gender structure and sibling relationship differences, combined with one-way analysis of variance.  $P < 0.05$  indicates that the differences are statistically significant. If there is significant difference between gender structure and sibling relationship, it indicates that gender structure is correlated with sibling relationship. The opposite is not relevant.

Table 3 Gender structure and sibling relationship differences analysis

Gender structure	N	M	SD	F	p
brother-brother	26	53.15 a	6.28	4.015	0.009
Elder brother-younger sister	13	52.92 a	7.10		
Sister-sister	37	54.89a	7.69		
Elder sister-younger brother	34	59.26 b	8.96		

Note: a and b represent similar subsets

The significance of one-way anova for sibling of different gender structures is  $p=0.009 < 0.05$ , indicating that there are significant differences between different gender structures in sibling. According to the post-test, the score of elder sister- younger brother in sibling relationship was significantly higher than that of the other gender structures. Therefore, gender structure is correlated with sibling relationship. Using the idea of control variables, siblings of

elder sister- younger brother had the highest average score and elder brother- younger- sister had the lowest, suggesting that it was not the gender structure that affected the results. The average score of sister-brother and sisters is higher than that of brother- sister and brothers. In combination with previous studies on gender preference, it can be speculated that women stronger emotional awareness and communication skills than men play a great

role in maintaining sibling intimacy. At the same time, the standard deviation of sister-brother is much higher than that of other combinations, that is to say, for example, the structure of brothers and sisters, we can think of it as the general relationship is not as good as that of sister- brother. However, the combination of sister-brother is very interesting. With such a large standard deviation, the good is pretty good, but the bad is very bad.

Why this extreme phenomenon is caused is also worth exploring. Of course, this difference is related to the sample size, but there is another possibility that many families with a girl in china as the first child, have the purpose of having a second child will have a preference for boys. So it may be that if the elder sister accepts the idea of son preference and everything goes to the younger brother,

then the sibling relationship may be very good. If the elder sister does not accept the idea of son preference, brother-sister relationship is likely to be bad.

**4.2. Correlation analysis between continuous variables and sibling relationship**

The correlation between continuous variables (age gap, parent-child relationship, emotional communication) and sibling relationship was calculated. Pearson correlation method was used to calculate the correlation.  $P < 0.05$  indicates a significant correlation, and the results are shown in table 4.

Table 4 Correlation analysis results of continuous variables and sibling relationship

Variable	Age gap	Parent-child relationship	Affective interaction	Sibling relationship
Age gap	1			
Parent-child relationship	-0.09	1		
Affective interaction	-0.084	.838**	1	
Sibling relationship	-0.005	-0.099	.460**	1

Note: \*\* means  $p < 0.01$ , \* means  $p < 0.05$

Pearson's significant correlation between age gap and sibling relationship was  $p > 0.05$ , indicating that age gap has no significant correlation with sibling relationship. The age difference has no significant effect on sibling relationship.

Pearson correlation between parent-child relationship and sibling relationship was significant  $p > 0.05$ , indicating no significant correlation with sibling relationship. The score of parent-child relationship has no significant influence on the sibling relationship.

Pearson's significant correlation between affective communication and sibling relationship was  $p < 0.05$ , and the correlation coefficient was  $0.460 >$ , indicating a significant positive correlation between affective communication and sibling relationship. In a word, the better the emotional communication, the better the sibling relationship.

By comparing the correlation coefficient, it can be seen that the continuous variables which influence sibling relationship are emotional communication, parent-child relationship, and age gap. The influence of these factors ranges from large to small.

**5. DISCUSSION**

The elder sister-younger X gender structure of siblings is easier to have significantly positive cor-relationship with sibling relationship. Due to the developed left brain and strong language expression ability of females, they were suitable for getting along with infants. In addition, the emotional experience and expression of women are more

delicate and abundant. Compared with elder brothers, elder sisters are more likely to show kindness and warmth [7]. Sibling relationship refers to the response of the first child in a two-child family to the quality of sibling relationship. This survey result is closely related to previous studies on sibling-relationship and parent-child relationship in ordinary two-child families, in which the age gap between the first child and the second child is less than five years, and there is a big gap in the cognition of the two-way influence[8]. First, the large age gap makes the eldest child recognize the disadvantaged status of the second child from the bottom of his heart, and such feelings reduce the role collapse caused by the theory of resource dilution[9]. On the contrary, the eldest child will take the responsibility of taking care of the younger child. Second, as the older children become socialized, they are endowed with more rapid learning and adaptation abilities[10]. Their socialization will greatly alleviate the influence of parents on their behaviors and cognition and reduces anger.

**6. SUGGESTION**

Two-child families have a large age gap with their younger siblings, spend less time together, and have less topic to talk about, which objectively reduces conflicts and is indeed easy to lead to the indifference between compatriots .The abundant economic resources and educational resources cannot solve this problem, only effective emotional communication can enable the eldest child to establish the role and integrate into the role of elder brother or sister. The reason why the emotional

function is different from the educational function is that the emotional communication is two-way. Only when the elder child gets enough love from his parents, can he or she dare to show care and tolerance in front of the second child. At the same time, the parents can also get happiness from the family.

Parents of two-child families should use emotional communication to establish a good parent-child relationship and sibling relationship through taking advantage of emotional communication. Firstly, the two-child families have already formed values. Participating in the decision-making about the arrival of the younger brother and sister is conducive to improve the acceptance of younger brother and sister. Also good for elder brother and sister to lay a good psychological foundation. Secondly, parents need to be flexible in changing roles between companions, mentors and good friends[13]. Thirdly, parents should avoid commanding the eldest child to take care of the second child. Parents should pay close attention to the mental state of the eldest child and treat them equally. Only in this way, children can acquire the ability of empathy. Accept the attitude of the big child to the second child, avoid the attitude of the big child to the younger brother and sister of the parents, lead the big child by example, and strive to establish equal feelings of compatriots.

The above results also indicate that the sister-sibling relationship is better than the brother-sibling relationship, which gives us an inspiration in gender education. We cannot control the gender of a child, but we can improve the education of our brothers. Especially in the early days of socialization, schools and families focused on developing boys' empathy and language skills. Both of these abilities are crucial to the development of a man's sense of responsibility, whether or not he becomes a brother.

It is worth thinking that the elder sisters' gender education is worth thinking more. When parents praise their innate ability of empathy and family responsibility, parents should also pay attention to not kill their courage and confidence, so that they can love without being imprisoned, but also have the courage to take risks, and bloom more brilliant.

## 7. CONCLUSION

As to emotional communication, modern family functions are divided into biological functions, psychological functions (emotion and belief), economic functions (production and consumption), political functions, cultural and educational functions, and entertainment functions[11]. When the family structure is more complex, parent-child relationships and fellow relationships become more complicated cases. Only providing food and clothing in the parent-child system and education expenses is not enough. Parents face a second child choice now mostly growing up in a one-child policy period. Parents who face the choice whether to have a second child mostly grow up under the one-child policy/ as the only child. They had no experience

of living with brothers and sisters, and may even be a natural for parents to protect small and weak child[12], blindly demand big child to tolerance the second child, a lot of conflicts is started in the sibling relationship. The best way to improve sibling relationship is to cultivate it from the beginning. Parent-child emotional communication is particularly important, and the eldest child especially needs security and respect. Giving children the ability to feel and give love is the ultimate key to the emotional functioning of a family.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

First and foremost, I would like to show my deepest gratitude to my teachers and professors in my university, who have provided me with valuable guidance in every stage of the writing of this thesis. Further, I would like to thank all my friends and roommates for their encouragement and support. Without all their enlightening instruction and impressive kindness, I could not have completed my thesis.

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