



The Relationship Between Children's Sibling Relationship Quality and Social Behavior: A Review of The Research on Chinese Sibling Relationship Quality Questionnaire

Shuyu Li*

School of Arts and Child Education, Yango University, Fuzhou, 350015, China

**Corresponding author. Email:imshuyu_li@163.com*

Abstract. With the implementation of the "Two-Child Policy" in 2016, many families welcomed a second child, which significantly changed the family structure. Sibling relationships highlight significant differences between families with two children and those with only one child. These relationships can be categorized into various types from different perspectives, including warmth, conflict, and coexisting warmth and conflict. In this paper, we review the findings of studies that utilized the Quality of Sibling Relationships Questionnaire (QSRQ), suitable for Chinese children aged 0 to 8 years. We contend that differing family backgrounds, age disparities among siblings, and gender differences significantly impact the types of sibling relationships. The results of numerous studies have found that sibling relationships change with age. At an early age, siblings tend to compete and conflict with each other, and same-sex siblings are more competitive and have more frequent conflicts due to similar roles and interests. Heterosexual siblings, on the other hand, have relatively fewer conflicts due to gender differences, and more implicit conflicts or distributional problems. As they enter adolescence, sibling relationships shift toward cooperation and understanding, sharing life experiences, and providing emotional support. Additionally, family dynamics are an important factor

influencing sibling relationships, with parenting styles affecting the relationships between children and adolescents. These findings further reveal the complexity and diversity of sibling relationships, demonstrating the significant role that different types of relationships play in children's socialization processes and emotional development.

Keywords: China, Compatriot Relations, Quality of Sibling Relationships Questionnaire (QSRQ).

1 Introduction

In response to changes in the socioeconomic landscape, China relaxed its fertility policy in 2013. The initial modification was the introduction of the "selective two-child policy," which permitted couples with at least one only child to have a second child (Zeng Ying, 2015). In 2016, the universal two-child policy was enacted, enabling all couples to have two children to mitigate the issues associated with an aging population and a declining labor force (Zheng Qingling et al., 2020). The comprehensive two-child policy brings new challenges to sibling relations. Differential treatment of different children by parents may lead to disputes over fairness and affect the quality of sibling relationships. In addition, children may face competition and jealousy, intimacy and conflict, and unequal distribution of family resources among themselves. This paper focuses on a discussion of research related to sibling relationships in China's two-child environment, and a comprehensive review of studies using the Quality of Sibling Relationships Questionnaire (QSRQ) after the two-child policy.

1.1 Sibling Relations

Sibling relationships are generally categorized into four types, including sibling warmth, sibling conflict, sibling rivalry, and contrasting sibling rights. Among them, sibling warmth is the positive emotional connection, caring and intimate behaviors exhibited between siblings, which are mainly manifested in mutual support, love, sharing and companionship. Sibling warmth helps to enhance the emotional bond between siblings and has a positive impact on an individual's mental health, promoting emotional stability (Zhang Yanmin, 2021). In addition, sibling warmth

promotes the socialization development of individuals so that they learn to establish and maintain healthy interpersonal relationships.

In addition to warm sibling relationships, sibling conflicts can also arise between siblings. Sibling conflicts are arguments and conflicts between siblings that arise from competition for resources, personality differences, or parental attention. This conflict usually manifests itself as competition for toys, attention, and family resources, and may be accompanied by emotional hostility and tension. Although sibling conflict is a normal family phenomenon, frequent or intense conflict may have a negative impact on an individual's mental health (Han Chong ,2020).

Sibling conflict also arises with sibling rivalry. Sibling rivalry is competition and conflict between siblings over resources, attention, and achievement. This rivalry usually stems from competition for parental attention and family resources and may manifest itself in behaviors such as arguing, jealousy, and confrontation. Moderate competition can stimulate an individual's motivation and sense of achievement and promote competence, but excessive competition may lead to negative emotions and have a destructive effect on sibling relationships (Shen Xinyue , 2022).

Sibling rights encompass the disparities in status, rights, and responsibilities among siblings, serving as a crucial measure of sibling relationships (Zhu Jing, 2020). These differences are typically influenced by factors such as age, gender, and personality. For instance, older siblings often assume greater responsibilities, while younger siblings generally rely on them for support. Although variations in rights can foster competition and conflict, they may also facilitate mutual aid and cooperation.

1.2 Quality of Sibling Relationships Questionnaire.

Although there are many different means of measuring sibling relationships, such as the interview method that can be used to gain insight into respondents' subjective feelings and emotional expressions, the sibling relationship questionnaire is a more uniform and commonly used research instrument. Currently, there are two versions of the sibling relationship questionnaires used primarily in Chinese studies. *"The Quality of Early Childhood Sibling Relationships Questionnaire(QECSRQ)"* was first adapted from (Kramer&Baron,1995)' s *"Parental Expectations and Perceptions of Children's Sibling Relationships Questionnaire (PEPC-SRQ)"* , which is suitable for measuring the quality of sibling relationships among children aged 0-8 years.This questionnaire assesses the quality of sibling relationships mainly in three dimensions:

sibling warmth (e.g., protecting each other), sibling conflict (e.g., conflicts due to disagreement), and sibling jealousy/competition (e.g., unpleasant and jealous emotions arise in the second child/first child when the first child/second child is held). In contrast, (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985)'s "*Sibling Relationship Questionnaire (SRQ)*" also includes questions about the rights among siblings (e.g., does the eldest child often order younger siblings around?). While both versions of the questionnaire assess sibling relationships, they have slightly different emphases; the SRQ assesses closeness, conflict, competition, and power contrasts in sibling relationships, focusing on the child's subjective experience, while the PEPC-SRQ explores expectations and perceptions of sibling relationships from the parent's perspective. Although the names used for sibling relationships varied across authors using the questionnaire, this study uniformly named the sibling relationship dimensions as sibling warmth, sibling conflict, sibling competition, and sibling power contrast.

2 Literature Review

A review of the literature revealed several influencing factors related to sibling relationships. First, the quality of sibling relationships is influenced by family factors. The research of Niu Xiaobing (2019) selected the mothers of children from 4 kindergartens in Zhengzhou City, Henan Province, as research subjects. One hundred families with two children were randomly chosen, requiring the age of the first child to be less than eight years old and the age of the second child to be more than one and a half years old, and the "*Questionnaire on Quality of Sibling Relationships in Early Childhood*" and "*The Scale of Socioeconomic Status of Families*" (Shi Baoguo and Shen Jiliang) were distributed and recovered, and 40 mothers of toddlers were telephonically interviewed to find out the status of their siblings in their daily life together. The study found that children from high socioeconomic status families exhibited more friendly and less conflictual behaviors, while children from low-income families exhibited conflictual behaviors more frequently and there was more jealousy and competition. Children from middle-status families showed more balanced and stable sibling relationships. This suggests that family economic status has an impact on the quality of relationships between children, but does not fully determine the degree of friendliness. Despite differences in background, young

children showed relative consistency in friendly behaviors, while conflict behaviors varied by economic status.

The sibling relationship also affects the development of prosocial behaviors in young children. Gong Ying's (2024) study selected 266 second-born children aged 0-8 from some kindergartens in a certain city of Anhui Province (the first-born children were in the middle or senior classes) as the research subjects. The investigation explored the relationship between the quality of the sibling relationship and gender, birth order, and the relationship between the quality of the sibling relationship and prosocial behaviors of young children (using the "*Questionnaire of Prosocial Behaviors of Young Children*" (Deng Shiyong)). The research results show that the quality of sibling relationships is not affected by gender. However, the firstborn has more conflicts and jealousy than the secondborn, and the same-gender combination has a higher frequency of sibling conflicts. When exploring the relationship between the quality of sibling relationships in young children and prosocial behavior, the research shows that sibling warmth is positively correlated with all prosocial behavior factors; sibling conflict and sibling jealousy have significant negative correlations with most prosocial behavior factors. These results indicate that sibling warmth promotes prosocial behavior, while sibling conflict and sibling jealousy have the opposite effect. Moreover, the quality of sibling relationships is not affected by gender but is related to birth order. After the birth of the second child, conflict and jealousy increase, but a positive sibling relationship is beneficial to children's prosocial behavior.

Prosocial behavior also includes peer interaction. Zhao Xin's (2022) study selected 360 non-only children in the middle and large classes of kindergartens as the research subjects and jointly used the "*Scale of Peer Communication Ability for Young Children*" (Zhang Yuan) to assess the communication ability of children. The results show that sister pairs performed significantly better than brother pairs in terms of warmth among siblings, while brother-sister pairs had stronger sibling jealousy than sister pairs. In addition, the age difference between siblings has a positive correlation with the warmth among siblings and a negative correlation with sibling conflict and jealousy. Particularly, for young siblings with an age gap of 3 years or less, the degree of warmth among siblings is higher. The warmth among siblings promotes the development of social initiative in young children, enhances their verbal and non-verbal communication skills, and encourages prosocial behavior. Conflicts among siblings pose an increased risk of social impairments, and sibling jealousy inhibits the

development of social initiative in young children. These results indicate that a warm atmosphere among siblings positively affects the acquisition of social skills in young children, and promotes peer interaction and socialization development. Frequent conflicts bring psychological pressure to young children and weaken their ability to interact with peers. Young children with harmonious sibling relationships perform better and have better social initiative than those with tense relationships.

At the same time, children's sharing behavior also belongs to pro-social behavior. In a study by Shen Huanyue (2022), the researcher selected 110 children aged 0-8 years (the second child was in the middle class) in three kindergartens in Wuhan City to conduct a survey and simultaneously used an experimental method to explore the developmental characteristics of sharing behaviors of middle-class toddlers in multi-child families. The results of the study showed that sibling relationships of middle class toddlers were not affected by birth order, gender, and age differences, but sharing behaviors were affected by birth order, and sharing behaviors of second-child toddlers were more and positively correlated with sibling warmth. Therefore, middle-class toddlers have higher levels of sibling warmth and lower levels of conflict and jealousy, and the warmer the sibling relationship, the less conflict and jealousy. More conflict was associated with more jealousy, and family economic conditions also had an effect.

Good school readiness promotes the physical and mental health of young children and facilitates their smooth transition to primary school. Wang Yanran (2023) et al. conducted a questionnaire survey involving 517 families with multiple children aged 5 to 6 years in the top classes of 30 kindergartens in Guizhou Province. Additionally, they administered the *"Current Situation Questionnaire on Family Education Preparation Work in H City, Guizhou Province"* to gather family background information and assess parents' implementation of school readiness initiatives for their children and to explore the relationship between the quality of sibling relationship and school readiness in older children. The results of the study showed that yearly grade differences between older children and their first-born siblings were negatively correlated with readiness to learn. Sibling warmth and sibling power comparison are positively correlated with physical and mental readiness, life readiness, social readiness, and learning readiness. Sibling conflict is positively correlated with life readiness in school readiness. These results suggest that the greater the grade difference, the better the children's school readiness, especially when the sibling relationship is harmonious, the children perform better in school readiness.

Finally, the development of empathy in young children is significantly influenced by sibling relationships. In Zhang Rongzhen's study (2019), 150 first-born children aged 5-6 years were randomly selected from three kindergartens in Nanchong City to investigate the quality of the relationship between children and their compatriots with the smallest age gap and to assess the children's empathy ability. The results showed that the age of first-born toddlers was positively correlated with sibling warmth and negatively correlated with age difference. The age and age difference of first-born toddlers were negatively associated with sibling conflict. Empathy was significantly and positively related to sibling warmth, competition, and power contrasts, and negatively related to conflict. These results suggest that siblings with smaller age differences have higher levels of inter-sibling warmth and competition. The performance of 6-year-old first-born children in warmth and competition is better than that of 5-year-old children, and the conflict is less. At the same time, the closer the sibling relationship, the higher the firstborn toddler's empathy; the more competition between siblings, the higher the empathy; and the more conflict between siblings, the lower the level of empathy.

3 Discussion

A comprehensive review of the above six articles examined factors related to sibling relationships in terms of gender, family, birth order, and pro-social behavior.

Four related studies discussed the relationship between sibling relationships and the gender of young children. Three of them found that there was no significant difference in the sibling relationship of young children in terms of gender (Gong Ying (2024); Shen Huanyue (2022); and Zhang Rongzhen (2019)). One found gender differences in sibling warmth and sibling competition (Zhao Xin (2022)). These results may be because the preschool children involved in the study have not yet fully matured in their understanding of gender. Children aged 5 to 6 are at a primary stage in gender cognition and, therefore, have not yet had a profound impact on their social behavior. Older children are more easily influenced by the gender of their peers when it comes to understanding gender differences, as the interests and lifestyles of same-gender peers are more similar, making it easier for them to understand and accept each other, thereby forming closer relationships. Therefore, during early childhood, the influence of gender factors on peer relationships is relatively limited.

As children grow older, in certain specific dimensions, gender and gender combinations may have some impact on peer relationships.

There are five studies discussing the relationship between sibling relationships and birth order. Gong Ying (2024) and Shen Huanyue (2022) found that birth order has no significant impact on sibling relationships in young children. However, Zhao Xin's (2022) research found that sibling relationships with an age gap of three years or less are characterized by a high coexistence of warmth, conflict, and jealousy, and these dynamics increase with age. Wang Yanyan (2023) found that the higher the grade the sibling attended, the poorer the academic readiness in school readiness for older children. Zhang Rongzhen (2019) found that siblings with small age differences showed more pronounced warmth and competition. These studies indicate that siblings with a smaller age gap are more likely to have frequent interactions, resulting in relationships that are both warm and complex. As they grow older, conflicts tend to decrease while intimacy increases. The increasing number of sibling grades has led to an increase in the school workload and a reduction in the amount of time spent outside of the classroom, which in turn has increased young children's anxiety about entering the elementary school years. Sibling relationships with smaller age gaps tend to be closer but are accompanied by higher levels of competition and conflict. Although the effect of birth order on sibling relationships was not significant, age differences largely influenced the relationships and the strength of interactions. This suggests that age difference may be more critical than birth order in the study of sibling relationships.

In addition, four articles studied the relationship between sibling relationships and prosocial behavior. Gong Ying (2024) and Shen Huanyue (2022) emphasized the positive effect of sibling warmth on children's social development. Gong Ying (2024) found that sibling conflict weakens children's performance in helping behavior and public morality behavior. Zhang Rongzhen's (2019) study found that sibling conflict weakens children's empathy ability. Zhao Xin's (2022) study revealed that in families with better sibling relationships, parents usually create a good interactive environment for children and cultivate children's social initiative. These phenomena are related to the quality of interactions between siblings but are also influenced by the family environment and parenting styles. Long-term disputes make it more difficult for children to perceive the emotional state of others, limiting their ability to understand and respond to others emotionally. However, in a highly competitive environment, the empathetic abilities of first-born children have

improved. This may be due to the fact that, in the face of fierce competition, children are motivated to view problems from their parents' perspectives in order to gain their attention. This, in turn, inadvertently fosters the development of their empathy skills. Warm relationships promote social development in young children, while conflict and competition may inhibit the development of these abilities. Thus, the complexity of sibling relationships allows them to play multiple roles in young children's social development. Positive interactions help to develop emotional stability and social competence in young children, while moderate conflict and competition may stimulate their ability to understand the emotions of others under certain conditions.

Finally, two discuss the relationship between sibling relationships and family-related factors. Niu Xiaobing (2019) Sibling relationship may be affected by the family's economic resources and social status. Middle and high-income families can promote the intimacy of siblings and improve the quality of interaction between siblings. This may be because middle-to-high-income families can provide richer educational resources and material conditions, reducing resource competition among siblings. Parents are also more likely to offer better emotional support and communication training for their children, enhancing sibling harmony. Wang Yanran (2023) also found that sibling-friendly behaviors and sibling-relative status can aid in the preparatory work for family education for preschool children in their final year. It may be because older siblings help younger children adapt to rules, learn social skills, and establish basic learning habits. Therefore, the circumstances of the family have an impact on sibling relationships and the preparation for other socialization behaviors among siblings. Parents should focus more on fostering emotional support between siblings and reducing conflicts to improve sibling relationships, thereby enhancing preschool readiness for young children.

4 Conclusion

In summary, a review of six articles using the Sibling Relationship Quality Questionnaire revealed a complex interaction between sibling relationships and young children's gender, family factors, and birth order. Although most studies have found that there is no significant gender difference in sibling relationships. However, gender differences may be related to children's initial understanding of gender and change with age. The economic resources and social status of the family influence the

closeness of siblings and the quality of their interactions. Birth order had a smaller effect on sibling relationships, but siblings with smaller age gaps were more closely related, with increased closeness and less conflict developing over time. Finally, good sibling relationships contribute to the social and emotional development of young children. In conclusion, good sibling relationships are important contributors to children's overall development, including the enhancement of social skills and emotional regulation. However, the establishment and maintenance of such relationships requires a concerted effort by the family, and parents need to help children grow up healthy by creating a supportive environment.

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