

Perception of middle aged adults regarding emotional closeness with their siblings

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Abstract- The present investigation was an exploratory attempt to examine the emotional closeness of middle aged adults with their siblings. Gender differences regarding emotional closeness in sibling dyad compositions were computed using t-test. A representative sample of 120, married middle aged adults (40-60yrs), belonging to Hindu nuclear families having at least one living biological sibling between the age difference of 1-4 years were selected from Udaipur city of Rajasthan state of India. Adult-Sibling Relationship Scale (ASRS) was developed, standardized and used. The comfort, security, closeness and concern were assessed on the dimension of (ASRS) i.e emotional closeness. The results of the study revealed that higher percentage of females as compared to males had a feeling of security by the presence of siblings in their lives and they felt close to their sibling. Regarding the extent of concern, majority of subjects found their sibling to be least interested in their lives. In case of sibling dyads Sister-sister dyad was found to have highest emotional closeness than other dyads. Whereas brother-brother dyad possess least amount of emotional closeness.

Keywords- adult sibling, emotional closeness, comfort, security, middle adulthood

I. INTRODUCTION

India is a country of diverse culture, religions, morals and spiritual values. In India relationships are the essence of family. This holds true for any relation, it might be the relation between parent-child, husband-wife, grandparent-grandchild, in-laws or sibling relationship. Siblings are the vital members of kin in fostering an individual's development. Growing up with or without sibling is likely to mould an individual's life experiences in varying genre. One spends 40-50 years with one's parents, but life with siblings can last 60-80 years (Bank & Kahn, 1997). Sibling represents continuity in family history that is uncommon to most other family relationships. In some families it may represent the only surviving dyadic relationship from the family of origin. As the longest survivors of the original family, siblings may become a valued repository of family memories and partners in shared reminiscence (Gold,

1987). In India sibling relationship are given due importance since time immemorial. The young child learns about early hierarchy within the family, as he watches affectionate and respectful relationships between seniors and juniors or males and females. Even among young siblings in a household there is a constant acknowledgement of age differences. Therefore younger siblings never address an older sibling by name, but rather by respectful terms for older brother and sister. However an older sibling may address the younger sibling by name. Respect is required between siblings of opposite sex. Feeling of mutual respect is expected between brothers and sisters and this intensifies after puberty. As sibling enters adulthood their relationship are marked by increased separation and decreased overall quality those are affected by events like marriage, increase in geographic proximity among siblings, birth of child etc. During middle adulthood, typically ages 40 to 60, a person becomes actively involved with his or her family of procreation and economic endeavours. Middle-aged adults also known as sandwich generation is squeezed or sandwiched between the needs of ill or frail parents and financially dependent children. It is also during this period that individual faces midlife crises, which is potentially a stressful life period precipitated by the review and revaluation of one's past and to acknowledge that their lives are finite. Since these tasks and the inner dialogue, call for threatening concepts, midlife is often stressful. Due to these transitions or tasks kin networks are overshadowed in the middle years by immediate responsibilities. But sibling bond can become a source of emotional support for these adults. Siblings can continue to relate as friends and confidants throughout mid adulthood when family of procreation and economic activities command priority and when sibling interaction has become voluntary. The general tendency for middle-aged adults is to exchange help as situation requires, which include help during illness, financial support or emotional support. Sibling acts as a support system to help deal with the fears and stress that accompany caring for the parents or death of any family member. Finally the actual exchange of social support between middle aged siblings is likely to consist of psychological or emotional support, that include feeling of security, comfort, companionship or giving advice or encouragement. However siblings who are compatible or emotionally close are still less likely to share intimate

personal life details or consult their siblings while making important family decisions. However siblings are typically viewed as potential sources of support, a type of “insurance policy” in later life (Hochschild, 1973) and as more active providers of expressive than of instrumental support. Gender is another key factor influencing the nature of adult sibling relations, though gender differences have been shown to decrease with age (Bedford, 1996). Emotional intimacy, often described as devotion and psychological closeness tend to increase with brother-brother, to sister-sister relationship, such that sister-sister relationship demonstrates the greatest emotional closeness. Women act as kin keepers, organizing family gatherings and sharing news with the family members. In summary, sisters tend to exhibit greater amounts of warmth, affection and support for their siblings than do brothers. Fortunately for some siblings and unfortunately for others, it is the nature of the childhood relationship that often predicts the nature of relationship in adulthood. If during childhood siblings had experienced conflict with little emotional closeness or commonality, it is likely that their adult relationship will be the continuation of these interaction patterns. However, as individual age, their tendency to hold onto past jealousies or feelings of anger and resentment decreases often referred to as “mellowing out”, where siblings make conscious decisions in later life to put old hurts behind them and instead form on building and maintaining a new relationship with their siblings. In India, cultural ideas and expectations demand that siblings maintain solidarity throughout their lives and many rituals and festivals are observed like Rakshabandhan in northern India and Nagapanchami in south India. It is celebrated on the full moon of the month of Shraavana. The festival is marked by tying of a rakhi or holy thread by the sister on the wrist of her brother. The brother in return offers a gift to her sister and vows to look after her. Rakhi for many centuries encompassed the warmth shared between siblings but now it goes way beyond it. Since childhood brothers and sisters are encouraged to participate in numerous rituals that emphasize family ties and this continues as they enter adulthood. Therefore these festivals account for more emotional closeness in siblings even during adulthood years. Rapid industrialization and urbanization job scenario has also changed dramatically. The Multinational companies with lucrative packages are mushrooming in the country, which make people migrate from their native places to metro cities or even abroad, creating distance among siblings. Hence, middle adulthood years are significant juncture where adults should reestablish their ties with their siblings and invest more in the nurturance of sibling relationship. A lack of contact may decrease face-to-face interaction, but other forms of communications such as letters, e-mails, telephone calls or communication through third person can contribute to the maintenance of the closeness siblings may share.

Therefore the present study was planned with the objective to assess the emotional closeness of middle aged adults with their siblings with respect to their age and to examine difference of closeness in various sibling dyadic compositions.

I. METHODOLOGY

Sample: The sample for the present investigation comprised of 120 married middle aged adults belonging to the age range of 40-60 years, belonging to Hindu nuclear families of Udaipur city of Rajasthan state of India. The subjects selected had at least one living biological sibling and the age difference of 1-4 years from sibling. If subjects had two or more than two sibling within the age difference of 1-4 years than random selection technique was opted to select the index sibling with whom subject described his/her relationship with. The age range (40-60yrs) was further subdivided in two age cohorts.

- 1) 40-50 years
- 2) 50-60 years

A sample of 60 was randomly selected from each age cohort making a total sample of 120. From the first age cohort i.e. (40-50 years) 30 males and 30 females were selected. Similarly from the remaining cohort i.e. (50-60 years) 30 males and 30 females were selected. Further the presence of different dyads that were naturally present in selected sample of 120 was found. A detail regarding availability of dyads is given in Table 1.

Sample selection: In order to select representative sample from five zones, Collectorate office and UIT (Urban Improvement Trust) office of Udaipur city were contacted to obtain the list of colonies. From the list of colonies, three colonies were selected from each zone, thus total 15 colonies were selected randomly for the research investigation. Door-to door preliminary survey was conducted on identified subjects to obtain the information regarding age, gender, type of family, marital status, religion, income group, number of siblings and age difference with the sibling/ siblings, by using self-structured proforma. The proforma were scrutinized and sample was selected who fulfilled the delimitations of the study. Since the available sample was excess so the final sample was purposively selected so as to have equal representation of both males and females from all the five zones.

Tool used for data collection: Selected subjects were contacted personally at their respective homes for data collection. Data were collected using self-structured Adult Sibling Relationship Scale (ASRS), which was prepared after exhaustive consultation of theoretical and empirical evidences on adult sibling relationship. The second dimension of ASRS is Emotional closeness. The tool comprised of 13 statements regarding Emotional closeness among siblings. It included items related to comfort,

security, closeness and concern among siblings. The scale was initially standardized by calculating reliability and validity of the scale. Reliability was calculated by split-half technique and using Spearman Brown Prophecy formula. For Emotional closeness it was estimated to be (0.87). Similarly content validity and intrinsic validity was measured. Intrinsic validity score for Emotional closeness was (93 %).

Scoring pattern: It was four point Likert scale having options as Always, Most of the time, Sometimes and Hardly ever. Weighted scores '3' '2' '1' '0' are given for positive items and scoring is reversed for the negative items. Ranges were made on the basis of raw scores and three levels of emotional closeness were found i.e. High, Moderate and Low. Scoring pattern is given in Table 2.

Data Analysis: The responses obtained were coded, tabulated and frequency percentages were calculated for each item for the detailed assessment of comfort, security, closeness and concern among siblings. The difference in overall emotional closeness in sibling dyad compositions was measured by using t-test.

II. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Frequency percentages were calculated for each item of emotional closeness and are represented in the form of bar diagram based on raw scores obtained by males and females of both the age cohorts. Figure 1 depicts the perception of males and females regarding extent of comfort with their sibling. It can be seen that less than half percentage of subjects reported that they were cheered up by their sibling, when they felt sad or unhappy. It may account to the reason that people during middle adulthood years have other liabilities or engagements, which makes them less conscious of their sibling's demands or problems. On the other hand dispositions of married siblings can be taken into account by their spouse or children, who fall in the inner circle of social support and are in direct contact with them. Whereas siblings, who fall in the outer circle of social support network in adulthood, are not that much aware of their sibling's state of mind. The other reason might be the geographic proximity. Where larger distances lessens the contact among siblings. Further the findings portray that less than half percentage of subjects felt better after discussing problems with their sibling. In comparison to males, more percentage of females were observed to find comfort or solace from their sibling. It might be reasoned out that women vent out their feelings more openly and even has a reassuring or comforting attitudes as compared to men. According to Saxton (1996) women are more socialized to talk about feelings and opinions than men and they more often use conversation to develop or maintain emotional ties and show commitment to and involvement with others. Regarding taking out one's worries on sibling and feeling

better afterwards was reported by very small percentage of respondents. It can be explained on the grounds of age of the subjects, where they are not reckoned to react or vent out their tensions to a situation either when they are annoyed or frustrated, because if it is done it can be considered as a childish act or behaviour. Therefore siblings do not act as an outlet for subject to release their worries. More than half percentage of males (40-50yrs) derives a feeling of security by having a sibling (Figure 2). Siblings are not fortunate enough to have regular contact with each other but there is a special bond that ties them together. In fact they are likely to have known their siblings three times as long as they may have known their spouse or friends. The potential of this relationship contribute towards a feeling of security from having a sibling. According to Cicirelli (1995) relationship with siblings could contribute to life satisfaction, higher morale, fewer depressive symptoms, psychological well-being and a greater sense of emotional security during later years of life. Cicirelli (1985) pointed out that siblings are used as "yardsticks" by which success and failure are measured and they acts as "fixed deposits" and provide security of knowing someone is in the wings, ready to help in a crises.

Regarding receiving emotional support from sibling during crises less than half percentage of the subjects got the emotional support of their sibling when they ran into some kind of problem or trouble. Actual exchange of support between siblings during middle adulthood years is likely to consist more of psychological or emotional support like giving of advice or encouragement or instrumental support. In another study Bedford (1996) postulated that siblings provide a sense of emotional support during various life events like death of parent or sibling, loss of spouse and illness or increased dependency needs. The extent of closeness as inferred is depicted in Figure 3. It can be seen that majority (40.00%) males 40-50yrs and (53.34%) males (50-60yrs) were not found to be attached to their sibling. Wherein less than half percent of females were not found attached to their sibling. Females were found to be more emotionally close to their sibling as compared to males. It is because that female tends to exhibit more nurturing behaviour, empathy, compassion and emotional closeness. They spend more time throughout their lifetime in care giving, maintaining kin networks than do males and are socialized to be more dependent and emotional than males. According to Cicirelli (1980) at psychological level, women invest more in their relationships and experience more intense emotions in their ties than do men. It was reported by Cicirelli (1996) that female siblings are emotionally close to their siblings and often has more interest and motivation to initiate and maintain family relationships. It can also be generated from the Figure 3 that there is age related increase in emotional closeness with their siblings in both males and

females. The findings are in line with socio-emotional selectivity theory where Carstensen (1992) delineated age related decrease in social interaction and concomitant increase in emotional closeness over the adult years with the close relationship network. Further it can be put forth from the figure that very small percentage of subjects when felt lonely want to meet their sibling. Similarly very small number of subjects reported that it would be hard for them to get along without sibling. It can be ascribed to the fact that even though there is a feeling of emotional closeness or support provided by brothers or sisters, but for seeking out comfort immediately when one is experiencing isolation or any crises, it is not strived from sibling at first instance, but from spouse or children who act as a primary source of support and fall in the inner circle of social support network. Majority of subjects forgive their sibling for practically anything. It may be due to the reason that adults during this stage of life do not like to keep small grudges and like to carry them on. The findings are compatible with Wilson et al. (1994) whose results emphasized that married respondents gets emotional support from the spouse followed by children and then their siblings. It is evident from the Figure 4 that majority of the males reported that their sibling is least concerned when they face any family crises. Whereas compared to males, less percent of female found their sibling least concerned when there is any family problem. Majority of subjects reported that their sibling express little interest in them and seems to be caught up in their lives. It can be accounted to the fact that middle aged have other dispositions regarding the establishment of children, caring for aging parents, job demands etc. which keep them involved in their own lives, leaving less time to care for their siblings. Table 4.26 represents mean, S.D and t-value for gender wise difference between sibling dyads regarding emotional closeness during middle adulthood years. A highly significant difference was observed between sister-sister dyad and brother-brother dyad. Similarly, statistically high significant difference was found between sister-sister and brother-sister dyad. In case of sister-brother and brother-brother dyad no significant difference was noticed regarding emotional closeness. Whereas a high significant difference was laid between sister-brother and brother-sister dyad regarding emotional closeness. Mean scores of sister-sister dyad were found to be highest (23.35) as compared to other dyadic compositions, followed by brother-sister dyad (16.89). The analysis of results for difference in emotional closeness revealed that sister-sister dyad was found to be emotionally very close as compared to all the other dyads. Whereas brother-brother dyad has lowest mean score value (10.91), i.e. Brother-Brother relationship is least emotionally close. A high significant difference between sister-sister dyad with brother-brother and sister-sister with brother-sister dyad can lead to the conclusion that

females demonstrate more emotionally close relation to their sisters than their brothers. It could be ascribed to the fact that middle aged experience many transitions during this stage. Their children start leaving home for pursuing their careers or start their families, which leads to "empty nest". During this stage middle aged feel lonely, especially females, if they are non-employed. Even physical transitions like „menopause’ bring along with various physical, psychological and emotional changes. Woman experience isolation, loneliness and depression. During this period they seek out the help of others, who are going through the same transitions. Therefore it is the sister who they feel more emotionally close too. On the other hand females because of the feminine sex role prescribe compassionate and expressive behaviour. Men on the other hand are encouraged not to share intimate feelings. Powers and Buttens (1976) argued that social participation is more intense among women than men, though men have larger friendship networks than women, but they have been characterized as having more superficially and less emotionally close relationships. In a study of same gender and cross gender pairs Akiyama et al. (1996) discussed alternative perspectives that can be used to consider potential outcomes. Their principle of femaleness stated that the more women in a relationship, the closer the pair would be. This implies that pairs of sisters would be closest and pairs of brothers would be least close. Stocker et al. (1997) summarized that sisters tend to exhibit greater amounts of warmth, affection and support for their siblings than do brothers. In examination of gender influences on the quality of the siblingship, sister-sister bond have highest quality of relationship. Further the analysis of the results highlight that Brother were found to be more emotionally close to their sisters than their brothers. It could be due to the fact that brothers older in age assumed the expected pattern of dominance. If the sister was older, the relationship was more equal, as the respect due her age tended to balance the respect due his gender. Brothers because of their expected responsibilities for sisters become protective of them. Whereas strain could arise in a relationship if the sister become jealous of the privileged position assigned to the sons. Ross (1971) postulated that in many Indian families, the brothers feel closer to their sisters than their brothers. They always do their best to see that their sisters are well married and are happy.

III. SUMMARY

In the daily round of activities that occupy the foreground in adult lives, siblings generally play a minor role. If one shifts one's perspective from a snapshot of daily life to a lifetime perspective, however siblings play a more prominent role. The relationship that any two siblings share is a unique one. It is one of the most interesting to study because it is typically the longest relationship one will have beginning at

birth and lasting a lifetime, longer than husband-wife or parent-child relationship. Siblings are those with whom one most closely shares genetic, family, social class and historical backgrounds and to whom one is tied for a lifetime by a network of interlocking family relationships.

Sibling interaction becomes voluntary during middle adulthood years. Cross sectional evidences suggest that average adult has contact with sibling once or twice in a year during middle adulthood years (White and Reidman, 1992). Our results indicate that emotional closeness is altered by various life events. These events happen not just to individual, but to the entire family unit. Although, the weakening in emotional closeness results from marriage, especially when one sibling disapproves of the other sibling's choice of spouse which results in poor sibling-in-law relationship which leads to lessening of emotional closeness among siblings or of a general disruption in the family close sibling relationship. Another reason might be that, as middle aged become involved in their own family or occupation, less time is left for their sibling. Even the distance among siblings lessens the frequency of interaction and results to be a poor reason for the lack of closeness. On the other hand obligatory contact motivations that are based on societal norms, where siblings are expected to meet in various family events like marriage, child birth etc. feast and festivals like (Rakhi, Bhai Dooj, Diwali, Holi etc.) or during family crises like death of any family member etc. may increase the chance of renewing the relations among siblings. When sibling dyadic compositions were studied for overall emotional closeness it was found that sister-sister dyad were closest emotionally than other dyadic gender compositions, whereas males reported higher closeness with their sisters than their brothers and brother-brother dyad had least emotional closeness. In India, brother gives more to his sister than he receives from her and feels rewarded to do so. He keeps up the relation after his sister got married and leave her original home. This entails special responsibility towards her husband and particularly to her children and the relationship is of major importance. The mother's brother is an important figure in life cycle ceremonies from birth to marriage. The marriage of the sister's child usually calls forth the brothers best efforts and they may then cooperate willingly even if otherwise they are cool to each other. However there are very few studies related to adult sibling relationships in India especially in contemporary Indian society. India a country of manifold castes and religions, having various traditional festivals symbolic of brother-sister divine relations. The origin of these festivals is mostly attributed to various mythological incidents, and holds their importance till date. Nowadays with life becoming more and more mechanical with career and money taking highest priority, sibling relations especially in urban context are

taking a major turn and are following the similar pattern as it is in the west.

IV. LITERATURE CITED

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VI. LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Perception of middle aged (40-60yrs) males and females regarding the extent of comfort with their sibling

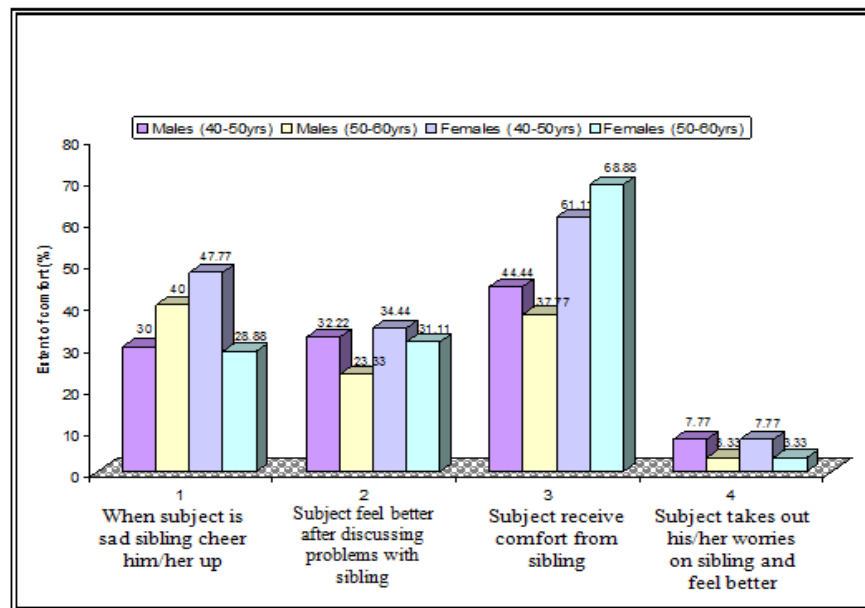


Figure 2 Perception of middle aged (40-60yrs) males and females regarding the extent of security with their sibling

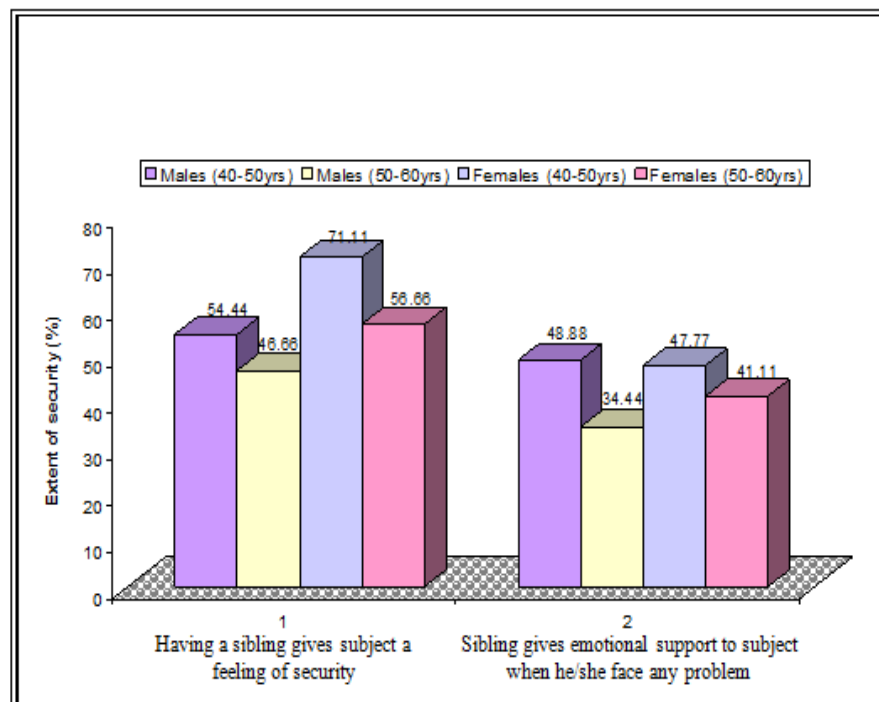


Figure 3 Perception of middle aged (40-60yrs) males and females regarding the extent of closeness with their sibling

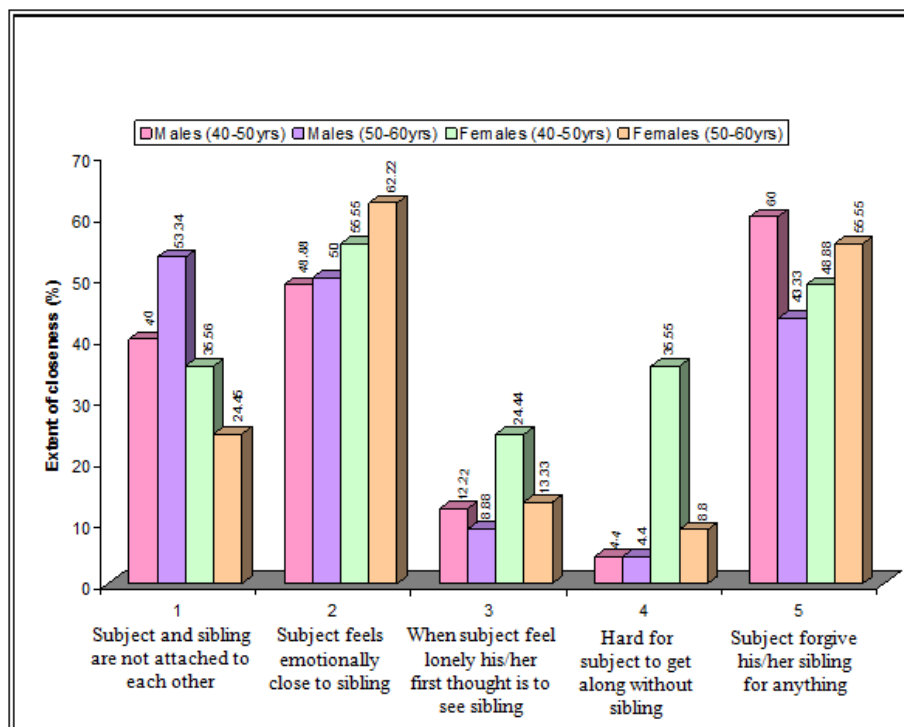
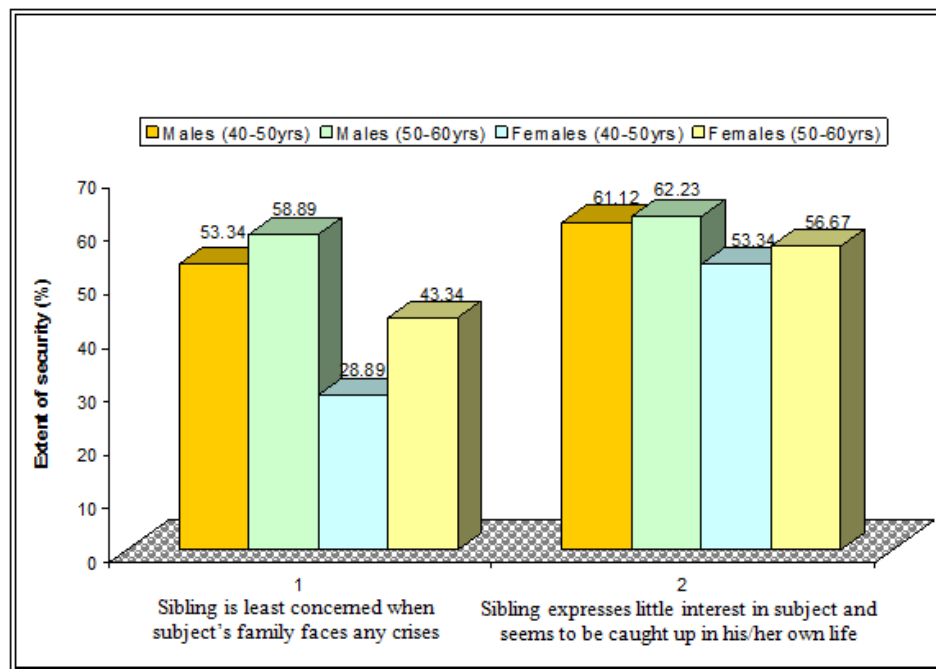


Figure 4 Perception of middle aged (40-60yrs) males and females regarding the extent of concern with their sibling



V. LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Percentage distribution of sibling dyads

Sibling Dyads	Males (60)	Females (60)
Male subjects with Brother i.e. (Brother-Brother dyad)	55.0%	-
Male subjects with Sister i.e. (Brother-Sister dyad)	45.0%	-
Female subjects with Sister i.e. (Sister-Sister dyad)	-	51.6%
Female subjects with Brother i.e. (Sister-Brother dyad)	-	48.4%

Table 2 Interpretation regarding specific scores and levels of Contact

Dimension	Scores	Interpretations
Emotional closeness	39-27	High emotional closeness
	26-14	Moderate emotional closeness
	13-0	Low emotional closeness