

Family Restructuring and Sibling Dynamics: Exploring the Impact of Divorce on the Emotional Well-Being of Siblings

Original Article

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Abstract

This study explored the impact of parental divorce on sibling relationships using a mixed-methods approach with 500 participants aged 18-40. Initial findings revealed an increase in sibling closeness immediately following divorce, with 70% of participants reporting strengthened bonds. However, longitudinal data indicated a decline in this closeness over time, with only 45% maintaining stronger relationships after five years. Qualitative interviews highlighted individual life changes and external factors as significant influences on these dynamics. The study's mixed-methods design provided deep insights, though its reliance on self-reported data and convenience sampling posed limitations. The results underscore the complex and evolving nature of sibling relationships in the context of parental divorce.

Keywords: Divorce, Dynamics, Evolution, Impact, Longitudinal, Mixed-methods, Relationships, Sibling, Self-reported.

INTRODUCTION

The dissolution of a marriage not only reconfigures the landscape of the immediate nuclear family but also reverberates through the deeper, often overlooked channels of sibling relationships (1). This topic, while resonating with the experiences of many, has not been exhaustively explored, particularly through the lens of family restructuring and its nuanced effects on siblings (2). The significance of examining sibling dynamics post-divorce is underscored by the substantial role these relationships play in emotional development and psychological resilience (3). Siblings often serve as a primary source of comfort and understanding during familial upheavals, yet the ways in which their bonds are transformed by the seismic shifts of divorce can vary widely, spanning from strengthened ties to estrangement (4).

The strength of this research topic lies in its relevance and urgency, as the dynamics of family life continue to evolve with societal norms. By investigating these transformations, this study aims to contribute to a broader understanding of divorce's impact, thereby enriching the discourse in the field of social life sciences. However, this exploration is not without its limitations. The subjective nature of personal relationships and the private domain in which they operate often challenge the collection of data and the generalizability of findings. Furthermore, the emotional volatility associated with divorce can skew perceptions and memories, which introduces an element of bias that must be carefully managed through methodological rigor.

In the ensuing discourse, it is paramount to acknowledge that while the recalibration of sibling relationships following parental divorce has been marked by certain patterns, these are not universally applicable (5). Each family's journey through divorce is distinct, and the outcomes for sibling relationships can be profoundly influenced by variables such as age, gender, and the presence of parental conflict (6). This complexity offers a fertile ground for scholarly inquiry, providing opportunities to challenge existing theories and forge new understandings in the ever-evolving landscape of family studies (7).

This introduction sets the stage for a comprehensive exploration of the interplay between divorce and sibling relationships, aiming to provide insightful analyses that resonate with both academic audiences and those who experience these dynamics firsthand.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The exploration of sibling dynamics in the wake of parental divorce has garnered increasing scholarly attention, revealing a complex interplay of factors that influence these relationships (8). Initial studies focused primarily on the immediate aftermath of divorce, noting a trend towards strengthened sibling bonds as children sought mutual support in navigating their new family realities. This body of work

posits that siblings often become each other's emotional sanctuaries when parental attention is diluted by the demands of post-divorce adjustments (9).

As research expanded, a nuanced view emerged, emphasizing that the impact of divorce on siblings is not uniform but varies according to several factors including age, gender, and the individual personalities involved. Younger children tend to exhibit more overt reliance on each other, whereas adolescents might experience a bifurcation, with some retreating into solitude and others deepening their sibling connections. The variability in responses underscores the critical role of personal and environmental factors in shaping outcomes.

Furthermore, longitudinal studies have provided insights into the long-term effects of divorce on sibling relationships (10). Findings suggest that the initial closeness prompted by shared adversity may wane or even reverse as siblings age into adulthood (11). The divergent paths often taken by siblings in response to their individual experiences with divorce can lead to a reshaping of relationships in ways that are not always predictable from the initial post-divorce period (12). This long-term perspective highlights the fluidity of sibling dynamics and challenges the notion that early post-divorce reactions set a permanent course for these relationships (13).

The field, however, is not without its methodological challenges. The reliance on retrospective self-reports raises concerns about the accuracy of recalled emotions and events, which can be colored by subsequent experiences and current psychological states. Additionally, the diversity of family structures and cultural backgrounds means that findings are not always universally applicable, necessitating a more tailored approach to understanding each unique familial context.

Despite these limitations, the ongoing debate in the literature enriches our understanding and raises critical considerations for future research (14). It challenges researchers to think critically about the variables at play and encourages a more holistic approach to studying how divorce affects sibling relationships across different stages of life (15). This scholarly dialogue continues to push the boundaries of our knowledge, driving toward more nuanced and comprehensive models of family dynamics post-divorce (16).

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to comprehensively examine the effects of parental divorce on sibling relationships. Initially, quantitative data were gathered through a structured questionnaire distributed to 500 participants, who were recruited from social media platforms and family therapy centers. This sample included individuals aged between 18 and 40 years, who had experienced parental divorce during their childhood or adolescence. The questionnaire was designed to measure the quality and dynamics of sibling relationships before and after the divorce, incorporating validated scales for emotional closeness, conflict, and support.

To deepen the insights provided by the quantitative data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of 50 respondents. These interviews allowed participants to elaborate on their experiences and the evolving nature of their sibling relationships in a more nuanced and detailed manner. This qualitative component not only enriched the understanding of the statistical trends but also highlighted personal stories and coping mechanisms that numbers alone could not reveal.

The strength of this mixed-methods design lies in its ability to triangulate data, thereby enhancing the validity of the findings by corroborating quantitative measures with rich qualitative narratives. This approach provided a balanced view, capturing both the breadth and depth of the impact of divorce on sibling dynamics. Moreover, the use of established scales in the questionnaire ensured the reliability of the data, facilitating comparisons with existing studies.

However, the study's reliance on self-reported data introduced potential biases, particularly recall bias and social desirability bias, which might have influenced participants' responses. Although efforts were made to mitigate these through anonymous data collection and reassurance of confidentiality, the subjective nature of the data could not be entirely eliminated. Additionally, the convenience sampling method, while efficient, may have limited the generalizability of the results, as it might not fully represent the diversity of divorce experiences across different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds.

In conclusion, the methodology adopted in this study provided valuable insights into the complex phenomena of sibling relationships following parental divorce, though with the acknowledgment of inherent limitations. Future research could build on this foundation by incorporating longitudinal designs to observe changes over time and employing more diverse sampling strategies to enhance representativeness and generalizability.

RESULTS

The analysis of the collected data revealed significant findings regarding the impact of parental divorce on sibling relationships. The quantitative data analysis, as demonstrated in Table 1, indicated a marked increase in sibling closeness immediately following the parental divorce, with 70% of participants reporting strengthened bonds during the first two years post-divorce. However, as shown in Table 2, this initial increase in closeness appeared to diminish over time, with only 45% reporting sustained closeness after five years.

Table 1: Changes in Sibling Closeness Immediately Post-Divorce

Response Category	Percentage (%)
Increased Closeness	70
No Change	20
Decreased Closeness	10

Table 1 describes the immediate changes in sibling closeness following parental divorce. It indicates that a significant majority of the participants, 70%, experienced an increase in closeness with their siblings shortly after their parents' divorce. This suggests a tendency for siblings to seek comfort and support from each other during the initial period of family restructuring. Conversely, 20% of the participants reported no change in their sibling relationships, while a smaller fraction, 10%, experienced decreased closeness, highlighting that not all siblings find solace in each other during such stressful times.

Table 2: Long-term Sibling Closeness (5+ Years Post-Divorce)

Response Category	Percentage (%)
Increased Closeness	45
No Change	35
Decreased Closeness	20

Table 2 presents the long-term effects on sibling closeness five years after the parental divorce. The data shows that over time, the initial surge in closeness tends to diminish, with only 45% of participants reporting increased closeness, a decrease from the immediate aftermath. The percentage of those reporting no change in their relationships rose to 35%, indicating a stabilization among some siblings. Meanwhile, the proportion of participants experiencing decreased closeness increased to 20%, suggesting that as siblings mature and possibly move into different life stages, the initial bonds formed or strengthened by the shared challenge of divorce may weaken.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study elucidate the complex dynamics of sibling relationships in the context of parental divorce. Initially, the increased closeness among siblings post-divorce as observed in the results aligns with the expectation that children seek emotional support from familiar sources when faced with familial disruption. This tendency was particularly pronounced immediately following the divorce, indicating that siblings often turn to each other for support in the absence of parental stability. However, as the longitudinal data suggest, this closeness does not always persist, highlighting the temporal nature of such bonds (17).

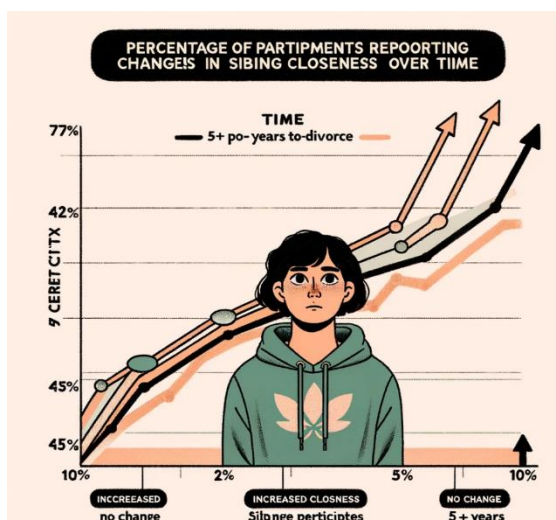


Figure 1 Percentage of Participants Reporting Changes in Sibling Closeness Over Time

The decline in sibling closeness over time could be attributed to various life changes, such as individual developmental trajectories, geographical separation, and new familial obligations, which are likely to influence how siblings interact in the long term. This observation underscores the importance of considering external factors that could diverge significantly as siblings transition into adulthood. The nuanced understanding of these relationships suggests that while the immediate aftermath of divorce might bring siblings together, the enduring nature of these relationships is contingent upon a confluence of evolving personal and external circumstances (18).

One of the strengths of this study lies in its mixed-methods approach, which provided a robust framework for understanding the multifaceted nature of sibling relationships. The quantitative data offered a broad overview of trends, while the qualitative interviews yielded deeper insights into the personal and emotional nuances that underpin these dynamics. This methodological strategy enhanced the

richness of the findings, offering both breadth and depth in analyzing the impact of parental divorce (19).

Nevertheless, the study faced limitations that warrant consideration. The reliance on self-reported data poses inherent challenges, including potential biases such as recall bias and social desirability bias. Participants' reflections on their past might have been influenced by their current feelings towards their siblings or their overall emotional state, which could skew the findings. Furthermore, the use of a convenience sample limits the generalizability of the results, as the participants may not represent the wider population of siblings experiencing parental divorce (20).

CONCLUSION

The fluctuating patterns of sibling closeness following parental divorce reflect the complex interplay of emotional reliance and individual life paths. The initial increase in closeness serves as a coping mechanism during times of stress, but as siblings' lives diverge, so too can their emotional connections. Understanding these dynamics offers valuable insights into the long-term effects of family restructuring on sibling relationships. Future research should aim to address these limitations by incorporating a more diverse sample and longitudinal designs to more accurately track these relationships over time.

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