Understanding Sibling Relationships in Blended Families

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Background
- Joint children from intact families fare better than those from other family structures.
- However, there is growing evidence that this relationship is more nuanced.
- Joint children in complex families do not seem to fit this pattern.

Family Structure
- Intact Families: consist of two biological parents and only their joint children.
- Stepfamilies: consist of two parents and stepchildren. Each child is biologically related to only one parent.
- Blended families: contain two parents and half-siblings. At least one child is biologically related to both parents and the other(s) only to one.

Goals
- To examine how sibling relationship trajectories vary over time and across family structure.
- To analyze how trajectories are influenced by parent-child and parents’ marital relationships.

Data
- The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (ADD Health) in-home Waves 1-3.
- Person period file of N=5445 was used for linear mixed effect growth curve analysis.
- The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (ADD Health) in-home Waves 1-3.
- Analytic sample: adolescents on married parents at Wave 1 (N=12,383).
- Parent-child relationship quality items at each wave (N=1815).
- Parent-child and marital relationship quality positively affect sibling relationship quality.
- These effects, though reduced, remain significant with the inclusion of controls.

Measures
- Sibling relationship quality (0-5; mean = 0-4.5): Scale measuring the following perceived levels: love, support, conflict, competition, closeness and warmth of parents.
- Parent-child relationship quality (0-5, Mean = 0-4.5): One item measuring frequency of arguments.

Controls
- Mother’s education.
- Family income.
- Monitoring.
- Number of activities with parents.
- Number of relationship transitions of parent.
- Parents’ ages of first marriage.
- Birth order.
- Sibling gender overlap.
- Perceived unequal treatment by parents.
- Depression.

Growth Curve Models
- Level 1 Model: Sibling relationship quality = β0 + β1(Time) + (ε) (step) + (Blended) + (Blended*Time) + ε.
- Level 2 Model: β0 + β1 Marital Relationship + β2 Parent-child Relationship + ε.

Findings
- Sibling relationship quality increases over time only for siblings in intact families.
- Marital and parent-child relationship quality positively affect sibling relationship quality.
- These effects, though reduced, remain significant with the inclusion of controls.

Conclusions
- Sibling relationship quality increases over time only for siblings in intact families.
- Step- and half-siblings have lower levels of relationship quality, which decreases with time.
- Family processes may be more important for child well-being than the marital status of parents.

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Figure 1: Percentage Distribution of Families

Figure 2: Sibling Relationship Quality Means at Each Wave by Family Structure

Figure 3: The Effect of Family Structure on Sibling Relationship Quality Over Time

Figure 4 & 5: The Effect of Family Structure on Birth Order and Parent Child Relationship Quality

Figure 6 & 7: The Effect of Family Structure on Intimate and Parent Child Relationship Quality Net of Controls

Figure 8: Parent-Child Relationship Quality Over Time.