



## Investigating the impact of sibling rivalry on parents in the Oju local Government area of Benue State, Nigeria

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### Abstract

*This study investigated the impact of sibling rivalry on parents in Oju Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria. The objectives of the study were to identify the causes of sibling rivalry among adolescents and identify the impact of adolescents' sibling rivalry on parents. Two research questions guided the study. One hypothesis were formed for this study. Mean and standard deviation was used for answering research questions, while Chi-square was used to analyze the hypothesis. The study employed survey design. The population was 730 parents, the sample size was 71. Purposive sampling technique was used. A questionnaire was used for data collection. The findings revealed that according to parents the most common causes of sibling rivalry were: favouritism (3.23) and jealousy (3.19). The impacts of sibling rivalry on parents were frustration (3.32) and anxiety (3.30). The following were recommended: Marriage counsellors and Home Economics Extension workers should teach parents how to improve parent-child relationships. Family counsellors/therapists should help to provide counselling to both adolescents and parents on how to manage sibling rivalry. It will also prevent frustration and anxiety among parents.*

**Keywords:** Sibling rivalry, parents, causes, impacts, Oju local government area, Benue State, Nigeria.

### Introduction

The relationship between siblings can be sweet or soar, due to how socialization is presented in the home. When sibling relationships become competitive, it can result in sibling rivalry. Siblings seeking the attention of parents or other family members, feel neglected and insulted when they do not get this attention, which causes fights among them. These fights if they are not properly managed can commence from childhood to adulthood without resolve. Sibling relationships could provide an early training ground for children to learn to develop relationships with peers, taking into account the other's perspectives and feelings and learning important skills such as anger management and conflict resolution<sup>1</sup>. It is important that siblings understand the value of family relationships at an early age, before they interact with the wider world. It helps in children's social development. Sibling relationships serve as a major contributor to family harmony and discord, as well as to individual children's development<sup>2</sup>.

**Causes of Sibling Rivalry:** The causes of sibling rivalry can be numerous. Sibling rivalry is an inherent characteristic which can be influenced by several internal and external factors including the following<sup>3</sup>:

**Temperament differences:** Children can be temperamental from early ages, that is they can openly display excessive emotions, irritation, and excitement. In sibling relationships temperaments are important, and it can be influenced by their

personality, social and cognitive skills. Differences in temperament appear in sibling rivalry when one child is naturally compliant and other competitive and aggressive<sup>4</sup>. Some siblings who take things easy are usually treated differently by parents and they are preferred to siblings who are more challenging. This annoys the more challenging siblings leading to rivalry between them. If there are differences in how parents react to their children due to their temperamental differences, this could increase the intensity of the competition between them. Also, depending on each of the siblings' temperaments, they may be more or less likely to get along with each other<sup>5</sup>.

**Birth order:** Birth order has an impact in sibling relationships. Each child has different experiences from the other children. Based on his position the oldest child is given more responsibilities and privileges. The middle children try to avoid competition most times from the older ones, thus tends to be less adaptive of parental values. Younger siblings are sometimes compared with the behaviour of the older sibling causing them to have unrealistic expectations of their behaviours. Parents even now refer to twins by birth order, and the twins will play the role of older versus younger.

The older twin may also feel frustrated, because he doesn't receive special privileges that go with age. Some works also showed that compared to younger siblings, older siblings engage in more physical, property, and psychological aggression<sup>6</sup>.

Because firstborn children mirror their parents in searching for their identity, middle children turn to peers, often adopting some of their values. In contrast to the first-born the middle child may be more friendly, cheerful, placid, and less studious with lower self-esteem<sup>7</sup>.

**Finances from the family:** Technically, children may be raised in the same household; differences in the circumstances can alter their experiences and characteristics which determine the siblings' relationship<sup>8</sup>. This includes such factors as the finances of the family at any given time, which parents worked, and when, who was in charge of the children and where the family lived. All of these can impact on the siblings' relationships<sup>9</sup>. When parents give the older siblings money for school or leave them in charge of a certain amount of money, since they have been given the responsibility of taking care of the younger siblings, sometimes the younger siblings become angry and want to be in possession of their finance. Some parents give the younger children money, instead of the older children, these children feel cheated and slighted.

**Siblings' spacing:** Siblings close in age fight a lot, because they feel there is a little gap in their age difference and the younger ones tend to compare their abilities with the older siblings. The younger siblings feel they should also be in charge, as the older one, which is impossible. Unless if the older ones are quiet and reserved; and they do not want problems from their siblings they allow them to have their way. If not, there is bound to be disagreements between the siblings. Whereas siblings whose age gap is wide have less competition, spend less time together has different interests and activities. Children gain from wide child spacing, due to the spacing parents can give them individual attention.

**Gender:** If a child of the not preferred sex is born, the parents' negative attitude towards that child is sensed by the sibling, either through the way the care for that child or the words that they speak to the child. This attitude can be transferred to the siblings, causing rivalry and a feeling of being unwanted in the family. Gender has been found to be an important factor in the close or the rivalry relationship of the siblings, with the brothers being more rivalrous, followed by cross-sex siblings and finally, less with sisters<sup>10</sup>.

**Parents' negative relationships with children:** When parents have negative relationships with their children, it shows the failure of parents to show love to their children and spend quality time with them. The quality of time parents spends with their children determine the extent of the sibling rivalry. The quality of the relationship between parents and siblings is important, because the sibling relationship can be reinforced as a result of parental support and in the event that there is a poor relationship with one, a positive relationship with the other seems to provide competition<sup>11</sup>.

**Parents' negative relationship with each other:** Intra-parental relationship also affects the sibling relationship. This happens

when couples do not show love to each other or when they have negative attitudes towards each other. The children observe their parents' attitude towards each other and learn from them, whether good or bad. The role of parents is to model effective conflict resolutions in their marriage, praise their children when they get along, and help them resolve conflicts when it arises.

**Types of sibling relationship:** The following types of siblings were identified which could exert pressure on inter sibling relationships: full siblings, half siblings, adoptive siblings, foster siblings. It is very common to experience rivalry that stems from jealousy when combining families. Children are used to one way of life after the parents' divorce or separation. When forming a new family with new siblings it is easy to see why and how children can become jealous of their step brother or step sister. The new step children may become close to their new parent and in turn the biological children of the adult may become jealous of the new found relationship<sup>12</sup>.

**Jealousy:** When parents' attention is given to a particular child's jealousy arises from the other siblings. This occurs when younger siblings are born, or when a sibling is more creative or intelligent than the other siblings. Jealousy arises as a result of "loss of formative attention from the beloved to a rival". Jealousy, then, is an organized complex of emotions, cognitions, and behaviours following the threat to or loss of a beloved relationship to a rival. In the world of siblings, the beloved is one's parent and the rival is one's sibling"<sup>13</sup>.

**Favouritism:** Parental favouritism is the ways in which parents treat a child relative to other siblings. It is the displaying of interest in one child over his or her siblings<sup>14</sup>. Most times the favourite child is shown warmth, intimacy, admiration, and great interest by the parents. The parents usually pick a child who has a particular talent or interest that intrigues the parent. The child usually feels unique and special. The siblings feel inferior to and hostile towards the favourite child and may team up against the favoured child.

**Impact of sibling rivalry on parents:** Sibling rivalry does not affect the siblings alone, parents are also affected in one way or the other. The following are the impacts of sibling rivalry on parents:

**Frustration:** Parents feel their efforts for unity in the family are thwarted when there is sibling rivalry. They become frustrated as they try to handle competitive or hostile children. Parents do not have enough time for themselves and their spouses to meet their own individual needs and their needs as a couple as a result of time spent to settle their children's rivalry<sup>15</sup>.

**Marital problems:** Sibling rivalry can also be as a result of disunity among couples. When they disagree, they will not have one voice in the disciplinary action of their children. Couples can experience marital problems, because of this; it can also occur when they both blame each other for the children's

rivalry. When sibling rivalry becomes so extreme it can lead to marital problems for parents<sup>16</sup>. Couple relationship determines the quality of sibling relationships. If couples have a positive and effective relationship, the children will emulate this; if unfortunately there is no peaceful environment in the home, the children will also copy these relationships with their parents. A number of studies have established links between sibling relationship quality and marital and parent-child subsystem problem. Consistent with family systems theory, the links appear to be reciprocal, in that sibling relationship affects other subsystems like marital relationship<sup>17,18</sup>.

**Stress:** Parental stress begins when sibling rivalry is prolonged, this usually happens, when parents are relaxed about rivalry. Parents have negative feelings, when they spend time they would have used productively at work or other businesses to settle crisis at home between their children. Having unmet personal needs, because of time spent in settling their children's rivalry can create emotional stress for parents<sup>19</sup>. However, feelings of stress were also caused by the thought of going back to work and leaving their rivalry children<sup>20</sup>.

**Injury:** Separation of sibling fights by parents can lead to injury of these parents. Children can become very aggressive, and when they lose their temper they can do unimaginable things. Due to the state of anger, adolescents use any weapon they could grasp to fight their siblings. They hit anybody who attempts to hold them, including their parents<sup>21</sup>. Most of the time parents are deeply affected by all that is happening among their children. From physical injury, adolescent siblings could cause emotional injury to their parents if family valuable properties are destroyed by their fighting<sup>22</sup>. Parents are not at peace, they have unrest emotionally. Emotional injury could give rise to excessive thinking that can result to hypertension, which involves the amount of money to put it under control<sup>23</sup>.

**Financial challenges:** Sibling rivalry can become serious, and caused injury for both parents and siblings. The cost of treatment can be small or plenty depending on the extent of the injury. Unexpected spending of money as a result of injury sustained from conflict can give rise to family financial challenges<sup>24</sup>. Apart from spending on siblings' issues, parents spend more of their creative time on resolving sibling rivalry which affects family income<sup>25</sup>.

**Drained and exhaustion:** Excess fighting between siblings can wear out their parents. They spend so much time settling issues. They are entangled in their children's quarrels. The all-consuming nature of caring and handling their rivalry children made parents feel exhausted and drained of physical and emotional energy<sup>26</sup>. Parents feel exhausted from not getting enough sleep, because of being worried about their children's hostile relationship<sup>27</sup>.

**Parent-child relationship problem:** The Parent-child relationship is usually distressed, especially when children feel

their parents take sides with one sibling or the other. They refuse to get close to their parents or communicate with them effectively. They build a wall between themselves and their family members. A number of studies indicated that tensions in the parent and child tie due to sibling rivalry were associated with less regard for the relationship between parent and children<sup>28</sup>.

**Tension:** Tension is the psychological state of being held between two or more forces acting in opposition to each other. Tensions are normative in the parent and adolescent relationship when there is sibling rivalry. Tensions most likely have implications for relationship quality. Parents tend to report greater tension with their offspring as a result of rivalry between them<sup>29</sup>. The demand for greater attention by children of the settlement of their rivalry and demand of attention from parents' daily activities create tension for parents<sup>30</sup>.

**Anxiety:** Parents are anxious and nervous when siblings begin quarrelling or disagreement. They become panicked whenever they are an unrest between siblings. Feeling of anxiety disorders has been identified for parents of children with rivalry. Poor coping of parents with the sibling rivalry result in anxiety, neuroticism resulting from over worried caused by sibling rivalry can cause anxiety<sup>31</sup>.

**Depression:** Depression is a persistent experience of sad or irritable mood and a loss of ability to experience pleasure in nearly all activities. Nearly more than half of parents are suffering from depression as a result of their children's sibling rivalry. A lot of parents feel ashamed, sad and hopeless when there is conflict between their children. This perpetual sadness and hopelessness result of depression<sup>32</sup>. Generally, mothers feel more depressed as a result of children's sibling rivalry than fathers because they more close to children and interact with them at this stage more than a father. Women develop a depressive disorder thrice the men. It was reported that women who suffer depression exhibited risk factors like anxiety disorder and family conflict<sup>33</sup>.

Based on this background of study, the researcher was motivated to find out the causes and impacts of sibling rivalry on parents in Oju Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria.

**Major Objectives:** The major objectives of this study were to: i. examine the causes of sibling rivalry among adolescents within families in Oju L.G.A., ii. identify the impact of adolescents' sibling rivalry on parents in Oju L.G.A.

**Research Questions:** i. What are the causes of sibling rivalry among families in Oju L.G.A.? ii. What are the impacts of adolescents' sibling rivalry on parents in Oju L.G.A.?

**Research Hypothesis:** There is no significant relationship between the causes of adolescent sibling rivalry and the impact of adolescent sibling rivalry on parents.

## Methodology

**Research Design:** This study used survey research design aimed at finding out the impact of sibling rivalry on parents' using a case study of parents of five highly populated secondary schools in Oju Local Government Area of Benue State. Survey research design was used, because the study gathered generalized information from a representative population.

**Population of the study:** The population of the study comprised of parents of five highly populated secondary schools in Oju L.G.A. with a total population of 730 parents.

**Sample and Sampling Technique:** The sample size was 71. This was selected using R. V. Krejcie and D. W. Morgan table of sampling size for research activities. Then proportionate sampling technique was used for the distribution.

**Instrument for Data Collection:** The instruments for data collection were a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed based on the review of the related literature. The questionnaire was structured in four-point Likert scale with weighted marks of: Strongly agreed (SA) = 4, Agreed (A) = 3, Strongly Disagreed (SD) = 2, Disagreed (D) = 1.

**Validation of Instrument:** The instrument was validated by statistician and two experts from the field. They scrutinized the items on the questionnaire to ensure that those that were not clear were eliminated and required items that were not included were added. Only suitable items were included in the questionnaire.

**Data collection technique:** A total of 71 copies of structured questionnaires were distributed to the respondents by the researcher and four research assistants. The direct contact approach was used to collect data from parents within three days.

**Data Analysis Technique:** The collected data were analyzed. Research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation. Items with mean scores of 2.50 and above were accepted, while items with a mean score below 2.50 were rejected. Chi-square was used to test the null hypothesis at 0.05, level of significance.

## Results and discussion

**Question-1:** What are the causes of sibling rivalry among families?

Table-1 showed parents' responses to the causes of sibling rivalry. The result showed that all the items were accepted, except item 2 and 5.

**Research question-2:** What are the impacts of sibling rivalry on parents?

**Table-1:** Mean Rating of Parents' Responses on the Causes of Adolescents' Sibling Rivalry.

Item	Mean	Std. Dev	Remarks
Temperament differences	2.83	0.88	Accepted
Birth order	2.38	0.76	Rejected
Finances of the family	2.82	0.85	Accepted
Siblings spacing	3.15	1.90	Accepted
Gender (same sex children compete with each other)	2.29	0.73	Rejected
Negative relationship between children and parents	3.07	1.85	Accepted
Physical influence (proximity, hunger and illness)	2.84	1.88	Accepted
Jealousy	3.19	1.84	Accepted
Favouritism	3.23	1.93	Accepted
Children with less age difference	2.87	0.87	Accepted
Parents' negative relationship with each other	3.08	1.86	Accepted

**Table-2:** Mean Rating of Parents' Responses' on the Impact of Sibling Rivalry on Parents.

Items	Mean	Std. Dev.	Remarks
Frustration	3.32	1.88	Accepted
Anxiety	3.31	1.87	Accepted
Stress	3.29	1.84	Accepted
Depression	3.06	1.73	Accepted
Marital problem	3.00	1.73	Accepted
Injury	2.90	0.94	Accepted
Drained and exhaustion	2.65	0.86	Accepted
Parent-child relationship problem	2.59	0.74	Accepted
Tension	2.55	0.72	Accepted

Table-2 showed the responses of parents to impact of sibling rivalry on parents. The result indicated that all the items in the Table were accepted.

**Research hypothesis-1:** There is no significant relationship between the causes of adolescent sibling rivalry and the impact of adolescent sibling rivalry on parents.

**Table-3:** Chi-square Test for causes and the Impacts of Sibling Rivalry on Parents.

Variable	Mean	X <sup>2</sup> -Cal	X <sup>2</sup> -tab	Df	Sig	Remarks
Causes	2.90	51.68	12.59	6	0.05	Significant
Impact	2.39					

Result from Table-1 showed that parents indicated that the causes of sibling rivalry from the highest to the lowest were favouritism, jealousy, sibling spacing, parent negative relationship with each other, parent negative relationship with children, sibling with less age spacing, physical influence, temperament, family finances, birth order and the same sex siblings (3.23, 3.19, 3.15, 3.08, 3.07, 2.87, 2.84, 2.83, 2.82 2.38, 2.29 respectively). The result showed that the parents agreed with favouritism and jealousy with the highest mean rating of 3.23 and 3.19 as the most common causes of sibling rivalry. This is in line with Yahav who stated that parental favouritism was the way in which parents treated children relative to other siblings.

It is the displaying of interest in one child over his or her siblings. The parents show warmth, intimacy, admiration, and great interest toward the favourite child. The parents usually pick a child who has a particular talent or interest that intrigues the parent, which makes the child feels uniqueness and grandiosity among his or her siblings<sup>14</sup>. Also McElwain, Miller, and Volling, who stated that jealousy, is a driving force behind sibling rivalry<sup>13</sup>.

Result in table 2 showed that, parents indicated that the impacts of sibling rivalry on parents from the highest to the lowest were Frustration, anxiety, stress, depression, marital problem, injury, drained and exhausted, parent-child relationship problem and tension (3.32, 3.30, 3.29, 3.05, 3.00, 2.90, 2.64, 2.59, and 2.54 respectively). This result indicated according to the parents that, frustration and anxiety with the highest mean rating of 3.32 and 3.30 were the highest impacts of sibling rivalry on parents. This is in accordance with Hall, who stated that parents experienced frustration at having less time for themselves and being less free as individuals because of continue thinking of their children hostile relationship<sup>15</sup>. Schoevers et al. stated that feeling of anxiety disorders has been identified for parents of children with rivalry. Poor coping of parents with the sibling rivalry result in anxiety, neuroticism resulting from over worry caused by sibling rivalry can cause anxiety<sup>31</sup>.

Results in table 3 showed that the chi-square calculated value of 51.68 and chi-square tabulated value of 12.59. The chi-square calculated is greater than the chi-square tabulated ( $p=X^2\text{-Cal}>X^2\text{-tab}$ ). This means that the result is significant. This implied that the null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant relationship between the causes of adolescent sibling rivalry and the impact of adolescent sibling rivalry on parents was rejected.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the major causes of sibling rivalry were found to be favouritism and jealousy. When children perceive parental partiality or favouritism, it increased feelings of competition, conflict, and rivalry among siblings. Jealousy between siblings' reflected a competition for resources, attention, etc. If it is not put under control, it could give rise to rivalry in adulthood and among future families. The major impacts of sibling rivalry on parents were found to be frustration and anxiety. When there was disunity, especially among their children, they had no peace of mind; settling quarrels and not knowing what to expect at the end of these disagreements (whether it will end up in physical or verbal abuse).

**Recommendation:** Based on the findings the following were recommended: i. Marriage counsellors and Home Economics Extension workers should teach parents how to improve parent-child relationships. ii. Family counsellors/ therapists should help to provide counselling to both adolescents and parents on how to manage sibling rivalry. It will also prevent frustration and anxiety among parents.

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