

Sibling relationship dimensions: A phenomenological study on identical twin children

Annida Afifatunnisa¹, Ika Febrian Kristiana¹, Yusron Masduki²

¹Universitas Diponegoro Semarang Indonesia

²Universitas Ahmad Dahlan Yogyakarta Indonesia

Email: annidaafi@gmail.com, ika.f.kristiana@gmail.com, yusron.masduki@pai.uad.ac.id

Submitted : 02-02-2024, Revised : 11-02-2024, Accepted : 03-05-2024

Abstract: Sibling relationships have a significant impact on individual development within twin dynamics. A strained sibling relationship between twins can evoke feelings of comparison, discomfort, jealousy, and even hostility, thus either deepening or widening the chasm between them. This study aims to delineate the dimensions of sibling relationships among twins. Employing a qualitative approach with a phenomenological study design, the research enlisted four participants, comprising two sets of identical twins aged 21-25 years. Data collection methods included observation and semi-structured interviews. Descriptive Phenomenological Analysis (DPA) was utilized for data analysis. The study revealed two major themes encapsulating the dimensions of sibling relationships: affection and conflict.

Keywords: Phenomenology; Relationships; Siblings; Twins

Pendahuluan

The sibling relationship within the family is one of the social dynamics that evolve as children grow and develop (McHale et al., 2012). Interaction with siblings constitutes the most intimate bond compared to other family members and external social environments (Fitzpatrick & Badzinski, 1985). This relationship, commonly referred to as the sibling relationship, is influenced by various factors (Dunn, 2017). These include family constellation, such as age gap, birth order, gender, and the number of family members (Lemire, 2001). Additionally, parental treatment towards children, such as preferences or favoritism towards one child, as well as life experiences like marriage events, marital conflicts, relocations, differences in interests, illnesses, and deaths, play significant roles in shaping sibling relationships (Suitor et al., 2022).

Sibling rivalry, a negative form of sibling relationship characterized by competition, jealousy, anger, and resentment, also influences sibling dynamics (Magagna & Amendolagine, 2018). For example, sibling rivalry often arises from competing for parental affection. It encompasses both internal factors, such as temperament, and external factors, such as differing parental attitudes towards children (Brody et al., 1987a).

The sibling relationship encompasses all forms of physical, verbal, and nonverbal communication between two or more individuals who share the same biological parents (Aji et al., 2023). It also includes their knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and feelings towards each other from the time when one sibling first becomes aware of the other (Ajadi & Lateef, 2023) (Brody et al., 1987b). This bond significantly influences the development of individuals with their siblings (Borairi et al., 2023). Siblings have the ability to influence each other's behavior, thoughts, and decision-making in life (Su-Russell & Sanner, 2023). The personality of each individual is shaped by the interactions with their siblings and parents, including the relationship between twins, whether they are Identical Twins (monozygotic), originating from a fertilized egg that splits into two identical replicas genetically, or Fraternal Twins (dizygotic), developing from separate eggs, resulting in slight genetic differences compared to identical twins (Newman et al., 2018).

Based on the provided research findings, there are differences in the relationship between identical twins and regular siblings (Ajadi & Lateef, 2023; Fitzpatrick & Badzinski, 1985). When twin children have strong attachment even since they were in the womb, it can create a bond that is closer than regular siblings (Fortuna et al., 2010a). Sibling rivalry is also an almost unavoidable phenomenon among regular siblings, but parental upbringing patterns and socialization processes can influence the level of competition among them. On the other hand, research on sibling rivalry among adolescent identical twins indicates that competition can occur in academic and non-academic achievements, as well as in appearance. However, this competition can also motivate them to strive for better and support each other in developing their individual potentials. In the context of relationships among siblings with different age gaps, studies show patterns of closeness or warmth among siblings, but also differences in dominance between older and younger siblings and the presence of verbal and nonverbal conflicts. Thus, the relationship between identical twins tends to be more intense and has unique dynamics compared to relationships among regular siblings, although elements of competition and conflict still exist as in other sibling relationships.

The relationship between twins is distinct from that between ordinary siblings in several ways. Firstly, the strong bond between twins since they are in the womb makes them have a very close bond compared to ordinary siblings (Andriam & Yati, 2018). This closeness can lead to a deeper understanding and empathy between twins, which can positively influence their relationship. Secondly, the similarity in their experiences and upbringing can create a sense of shared identity and shared experiences, which can strengthen their bond (Rania et al., 2018). This shared identity can also lead to a sense of unity and togetherness, which can be a source of comfort and support for both twins. Thirdly, the rivalry between twins can be more intense and complex compared to that between ordinary siblings. This is because twins are often compared to each other and are expected to be similar, which can lead to feelings of competition and jealousy (Rania et al., 2018). However, this rivalry can also lead to a deeper understanding and appreciation of each other's differences and strengths (Primasari & Kurniawati, 2020). Lastly, the relationship between twins can be influenced by their shared experiences and the way they are treated by their parents. For example, if parents favor one twin over the other, it can create feelings of resentment and jealousy in the less favored twin. On the other hand, if parents treat both twins equally and with love and respect, it can create a strong and positive bond between them. In conclusion, the relationship between twins is unique and complex, influenced by a variety of factors including their shared experiences, their parents' treatment of them, and their own personalities and characteristics.

A poor sibling relationship between them can evoke feelings of comparison, discomfort, jealousy, and even hostility, thus either strengthening or weakening the bond between the twin siblings. Based on the aforementioned issues, researchers are keenly interested and find it necessary to conduct a study to investigate the extent to which the dimensions of sibling relationships among twins will influence their future relationship development.

Methods

The research design employed in this study is qualitative, utilizing a phenomenological approach. According to Creswell (2018) (Creswell, n.d.), phenomenological approach entails the depiction of meaning for several individuals regarding their shared experiences of a concept or phenomenon. The qualitative research utilizing this phenomenological design aims to interpret the phenomenon or occurrences of sibling relationships, especially among individuals with twin siblings. Phenomenology is apt for this research method as it can provide profound data aligned with each subject's experiences.

The research subjects were obtained based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria established by the researcher. The researcher determined several specific criteria to be used in selecting the research subjects, which included: the subjects being a pair of identical twins aged 21-25 years and of the same gender. Based on these criteria, a total of 4 participants, or 2 pairs of identical twins of the same gender, were selected. The selection of subjects was based on observations and monitoring conducted by the researcher over some time. Subsequently, the participants were contacted to inquire about their availability to participate in the study. Below are the identities of the research subjects.

No.	Name	Age	Gender	Status
1.	Mawar	23	Female	Medical student
2.	Melati	23	Female	Medical student
3.	Putri	23	Female	Private employee
4.	Dewi	23	Female	Private employee

The data collection technique employed by the researcher is in-depth interviewing, specifically utilizing semi-structured interviews guided by a predetermined framework provided to the subjects. This interview technique is conducted with the aim of enabling the researcher to elicit information from the research subjects according to the research needs (Suwendra, 2018). Additionally, interviews will be conducted separately to avoid bias between the two, ensuring that each individual can provide information honestly and according to their own perspective without feeling uncomfortable.

The data analysis technique utilized by the researcher is Descriptive Phenomenological Analysis (DFA). DFA involves reading units of meaning, extracting transcripts containing units of meaning, describing these units of meaning using the researcher's language, proceeding to create psychological descriptions, structural descriptions, explicating themes from the structural descriptions, synthesizing themes, and finally, identifying the essence.

Results and Discussion

The results of this study indicate that sibling relationships among twins involve two dimensions: Affection and Conflict. Each of these dimensions still has subthemes to provide a deeper explanation. Here is an explanation of the sibling relationship dimensions:

1. Affection (love language, emotional bond, sacrifice, perception of their twin)

a. Subtheme: love language

The love language is one of the body languages possessed by every human being, including twins. Although they are born into the world at nearly the same time, their love languages may be the same or vastly different from each other. Through their love language, they can understand each other's emotions and treat their twin when they are feeling sad or happy.

My twin's love language is words of affirmation. When given encouragement or feedback, it boosts their confidence and helps them rise from setbacks. They also often receive gifts from their friends, so perhaps receiving gifts is another love language for them. (Dewi)

I tend to fulfill whatever she wants, wherever she wants to go, I always accompany her. If she expresses affection, it's more towards physical touch, like hugging or being close to me. (Putri)

Both of us enjoy spending quality time together, hanging out, exploring new places, and trying out new foods. (Mawar)

Usually, we enjoy hunting for new food spots or cafes together. (Melati)

b. Subtheme: Emotional Bonds

A person's closeness can be observed based on their emotional bonds. Emotional closeness is the emotional connection established within a relationship. This bond is formed from the time we are in the womb and continues to develop until the end of our lives.

We are emotionally close. Whenever Putri is by my side, I feel happy and comfortable regardless of the situation, whether I'm sad or happy. And even when Putri isn't physically by my side, I believe she is still with me. In my mind, Putri is there, just watching from a distance. (Dewi)

Um, maybe we are emotionally close, but physically not so much because we were in different class buildings from middle school to high school. We also went to different universities, and now she works in Kulon Progo while I am in Jogja. (Putri)

We are closer emotionally because our circles are different. She is friends with the popular kids, while I am friends with more ordinary kids. Sometimes I feel Melati's pain. When Melati has a fever, I often get a brief cold as well. (Mawar)

Maybe we are emotionally close. We often have deep conversations when we're at home together and don't have any campus assignments. (Melati)

c. Subtheme: Compromise/Sacrifice

With so many interactions between them, one of the twins is likely to compromise more than the other. This is done to maintain the harmony in their relationship, but it is not uncommon for them to express their feelings to each other when they both feel tired or frustrated.

She sacrifices more, and I often take advantage. For example, when we want to go somewhere, it's usually more places that I want to visit than my twin, and she just goes along with it. (Dewi)

If there's homework and I don't feel like doing it, Dewi ends up doing it because I refuse. (Putri)

Like I mentioned earlier, if we argue, I prefer to walk away rather than make things worse. (Mawar)

For instance, if Mawar is supposed to do something but doesn't want to, I have to do it. Otherwise, I would also get in trouble. (Melati)

d. Subtheme: Perspectives on their twin.

The perspective between one individual and another greatly influences how someone treats others. The treatment between twins initially is influenced by the perspectives that exist in their minds throughout their years of living. Therefore, the perspective of each other in sibling relationships is crucial in maintaining a harmonious life with their twin.

"He becomes dominant because he is trusted by his parents, maybe"; "The daughter is trusted more by the parents, 100% for the daughter and only 80% for me"; "I always care about her, but sometimes she shows care and sometimes not, depending on the situation and conditions"; "She never admits her mistakes to me." (dewi)

"He becomes dominant because he is trusted by his parents, maybe"; "The daughter is trusted more by the parents, 100% for the daughter and only 80% for me"; "I always care about her, but sometimes she shows care and sometimes not, depending on the situation and conditions"; "She never admits her mistakes to me."

He can be selfish at times, when it comes to giving orders it seems like it's more towards me"; "I can rely on him to fulfill my primary and secondary needs, as well as those of my family. Usually in my family, if there are needs that have run out or items that need to be purchased, he's the one who takes care of it"; "Sometimes he's cunning, he has thoughts that I would never think about. For example, when it comes to monthly shopping, I have to only buy the requested necessities, but when it comes to my twin, she will pick up any items she wants to try or needs for herself." (putri)

"He is a stubborn and proud child. I am also stubborn, but not as stubborn as he is. So when he starts arguing or looking for trouble, I'd rather give in or leave the place." (mawar)

"He is actually good, but what I don't like about him is that when we're having a heated debate, he suddenly walks away from me. That's the only thing I don't like, because it doesn't solve the problem." (melati)

2. Conflict (Comparison & Competition)

a. Subtheme: Comparison

Every sibling surely has differences, including identical twins. Nevertheless, for twins who have a good relationship with each other, they can understand the differences between them, the unique characteristics possessed by each individual.

"What makes me jealous, especially the way our parents treat us. Since primary school until college, our parents' treatment towards me is different, like when it comes to chores, I am always the one being asked to do things like washing, mopping, drying, making drinks, etc. But when our dad comes home with food or gifts, they always call Dewi first, sometimes they don't even call me. That was back when I was in primary school until college. Now, it's more about transportation, if I ask our parents to drive me somewhere, they definitely can't and I have to make my own efforts, but if my twin asks to be taken somewhere, they can do it right away. That's the only thing that bothers me now." (Putri)

"I don't feel jealous of Putri because we are treated according to our portions." (Dewi)

"We are compared more to our friends. Her friends think that I am difficult to socialize with. Well, it's true, I'm not as sociable as my twin." (Mawar)

"When it comes to comparison, she is calmer." (Melati)

b. Subtheme: Competition

Competition is normal among siblings, including twins. Twin competition starts from when they are babies, from breastfeeding to getting their first possessions. Competition that is not properly taught can cause rivalry between them, which can disrupt their mental development.

"I never compete because Putri doesn't encourage us to compete with each other, so I'm not triggered to do it." (Dewi)

"No, we never compete in anything because our parents teach us that siblings are not meant to compete. Even if we end up being at the bottom of rankings, it's fine. Our rankings have never been the same. Sometimes I'm in the top 5 and she's in the top 20, or vice versa. We both entered the top 5 if I'm not mistaken, in 8th and 9th grade." (Putri)

"We compete in terms of style. Melati is really stylish. Sometimes, I often ask for her advice when choosing clothes." (Mawar)

"No, I don't feel like I compete in anything. Because I can do more things compared to her." (Melati)

The subjects in this study were twin siblings aged between 21 and 25 years old. This indicates that all participants are in the early adulthood phase. Early adulthood entails several responsibilities, including being task-oriented not only for oneself but also for others, having clear goals, controlling personal emotions, maintaining objectivity in decision-making, accepting criticism and feedback for personal improvement, being flexible in various situations, and being able to handle unpleasant situations while taking responsibility for personal decisions.

The sibling relationship dimension among twins consists of two aspects: warmth and conflict. The warmth dimension in twin relationships involves emotional bonds, love languages, perceptions of their twin, and willingness to sacrifice or compromise with each other. On the other hand, the conflict dimension involves competition and comparisons or differences in treatment by those around them.

Love language is one of the ways individuals express affection. It is a crucial aspect in various relationships, including family, siblings, and friendships. A positive twin relationship is correlated with positive relationships with friends. Thus, caring and supportive twin relationships can assist twins in developing the necessary skills to also build positive relationships with others (Bekkhuis et al., 2016).

There have been many studies on the emotional bond among twins. Twins have a closer emotional relationship with their twin siblings compared to non-twin siblings and they tend to have more frequent interaction with each other throughout their lifespan (Pietilä et al., 2012). Even though they are often separated by distance, twins have a spiritual or emotional bond that is not shared by regular siblings. When one of the twins is sick in a faraway place, the other twin can sense that something is not right with their sibling, and vice versa.

The viewpoints between twin children are crucial in fostering a sibling relationship with their twin. Having positive and negative perspectives about their twin sibling contributes to a dynamic process in their relationship. Even though they may have previously viewed their twin sibling negatively, they are able to accept and understand each other. The perspectives of both twins can either strengthen or strain their sibling relationship. The participants involved in this

study have a pattern of nurturing twin relationship. In this pattern, emotional closeness is experienced as both intimacy and independence (Pietilä et al., 2012).

In every sibling relationship, there is always one party who compromises. This also applies to twin siblings, where one child is usually willing to sacrifice for the sake of maintaining harmony between them. This is done unconsciously because they do not want to have conflicts with their lifelong partner (twin sibling).

The Conflict dimension in twin siblings is in the form of competition and comparison. Because twin siblings grow up in the same environment, it indirectly fosters closeness and dependency between them. In same-gender twins, the competitive spirit is usually stronger compared to different genders (Fortuna et al., 2010b). This is because same-gender twins may have similar needs, which leads to a greater competition for resources. Additionally, parents are interested in making comparisons among their children, especially if they are similar, especially for monozygotic twins of the same gender.

As mentioned above, comparisons are often made by parents with regard to their children. Especially in the case of twins, parents and those around them assume that twins have similar tastes, not much different personalities, and so on. In research related to parenting of twins, it has been found that there are differences in parenting styles (support and control) between twin and non-twin families. Mothers from twin families provide their children with different treatment compared to their non-twin siblings. They have expressed that parents with twins provide more emotional warmth. (Mönkediek dkk., 2020).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the research findings, it is found that the sibling relationship in twin children can be explained through two major dimensions, namely warmth and conflict. The warmth dimension in twin relationships includes emotional bonding, love language, views towards each other as twins, and willingness to sacrifice or give in to one another. On the other hand, the conflict dimension includes competition and comparison or differences in treatment by people around them. This research result is expected to serve as a reference for designing and conducting psychological research related to sibling relationships among twin siblings or siblings in general.

References

- Ajadi, T. O., & Lateef, M. A. (2023). Knowledge, Attitude, and Infringement of Tort Law Among Public Secondary Principle on Students in Osun State, Nigeria. *Journal of Education and Teaching (JET)*, 4(3), 339–356.
- Aji, R., Aji, S. R., Noorma, N., & Suratman, S. (2023). *Interpersonal communication*. Lambert Academic Publishin.
- Andrieam, M. D., & Yati, D. (2018). Hubungan jumlah saudara dengan perilaku bullying remaja di SMPN 3 Gamping Sleman. *Menara Medika*, 1(1).
- Bekkhush, M., Brendgen, M., Czajkowski, N. O., Vitaro, F., Dionne, G., & Boivin, M. (2016). Associations between sibling relationship quality and friendship quality in early adolescence: looking at the case of twins. *Twin Research and Human Genetics*, 19(2), 125–135.

- Borairi, S., Plamondon, A., Rodrigues, M., Sokolovic, N., Perlman, M., & Jenkins, J. (2023). Do siblings influence one another? Unpacking processes that occur during sibling conflict. *Child Development, 94*(1), 110–125.
- Brody, G. H., Stoneman, Z., & Burke, M. (1987a). Child temperaments, maternal differential behavior, and sibling relationships. *Developmental Psychology, 23*(3), 354.
- Brody, G. H., Stoneman, Z., & Burke, M. (1987b). Child temperaments, maternal differential behavior, and sibling relationships. *Developmental Psychology, 23*(3), 354.
- Creswell, J. W. (n.d.). *CJD (2018). Research Design Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches (5th Editio)*. SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Dunn, J. (2017). Sibling relationships in early childhood. *Interpersonal Development, 39*–415.
- Fitzpatrick, M. A. T., & Badzinski, D. M. (1985). *All in the family: Interpersonal communication in kin relationships*.
- Fortuna, K., Goldner, I., & Knafo, A. (2010a). Twin relationships: A comparison across monozygotic twins, dizygotic twins, and nontwin siblings in early childhood. *Family Science, 1*(3–4), 205–211. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19424620.2010.569367>
- Fortuna, K., Goldner, I., & Knafo, A. (2010b). Twin relationships: A comparison across monozygotic twins, dizygotic twins, and nontwin siblings in early childhood. *Family Science, 1*(3–4), 205–211. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19424620.2010.569367>
- Lemire, D. (2001). *The Family Constellation Scale*.
- Magagna, J., & Amendolagine, A. (2018). Envy, jealousy, love, and generosity in sibling relations: The impact of sibling relations on future family relations. In *Siblings* (pp. 195–217). Routledge.
- McHale, S. M., Updegraff, K. A., & Whiteman, S. D. (2012). Sibling relationships and influences in childhood and adolescence. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 74*(5), 913–930.
- Mönkediek, B., Schulz, W., Eichhorn, H., & Diewald, M. (2020). Is there something special about twin families? A comparison of parenting styles in twin and non-twin families. *Social Science Research, 90*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2020.102441>
- Newman, H. H., Freeman, F. N., & Holzinger, K. J. (2018). *Twins a Study of Heredity and Environment*. Creative Media Partners, LLC.
- Pietilä, S., Björklund, A., & Bülow, P. (2012). Older twins' experiences of the relationship with their co-twin over the life-course. *Journal of Aging Studies, 26*(2). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaging.2011.10.002>

- Primasari, P. P., & Kurniawati, F. (2020). Kualitas Kehidupan Saudara Kandung Dari Individu Penyandang Disabilitas Intelektual. *INQUIRY: Jurnal Ilmiah Psikologi*, 11(2), 98–114.
- Rania, N., Kusuma, N., & Murniwati, M. (2018). Perbedaan Bentuk dan Ukuran Rugae Palatina Antara Ayah dan Anak Kandung Laki-Laki Suku Minangkabau di Wilayah Luhak Nan Tigo. *Andalas Dental Journal*, 6(1), 49–61.
- Suitor, J. J., Gilligan, M., Kincaid, R., Hou, Y., Stepniak, C., & Peng, S. (2022). How widowhood and gender shape the impact of maternal favoritism on adult children's psychological well-being. *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B*, 77(1), 224–236.
- Su-Russell, C., & Sanner, C. (2023). Chinese childbearing decision-making in mainland China in the post-one-child-policy era. *Family Process*, 62(1), 302–318.

