



Maternal and Child Perceptions of Latino Children's Sibling Relationship

Natalia Figueroa, Carly Mendoza, Cecibell Montalban, Scarlet Nunez, Sanny Peralta, & Ganie B. DeHart, PhD.



Abstract

We explored Latina mothers' and their children's perceptions of the children's sibling relationships and compared them to past results with Anglo families. The more intimacy the mothers perceived the children to have, the more harmonious and less conflicted relationships the children reported. Overall, mothers and children showed greater concordance in their perceptions of the sibling relationship than has been the case in past research on Anglo families.

Introduction

Research conducted on Latino children's family relationships is extremely limited, despite the fact that the Latino population is the fastest growing minority group in the United States. Consequently, there is very little research on Latino children's sibling relationships and no research at all on how mothers and children perceive those relationships. The present study examined Latino family members' perceptions of the children's sibling relationships. Because of the importance placed on family obligations in Latino culture, we expected that sibling relationships might be perceived somewhat differently and perhaps more positively than in Anglo families. We also expected that Latina mothers might have more intimate knowledge of their children's sibling relationships than Anglo mothers typically do; thus, we expected greater agreement between mothers and children than in Anglo families.

Method

Participants:

- Study participants were 39 middle- and lower-class Latino sibling pairs from the Rochester, NY, and New York City areas.
- Researchers recruited families via social networks, such as Latino community organizations, church groups, day cares, and schools.
- The majority of the sibling pairs were same sex (n=22).
- The sample was fairly heterogeneous in age (siblings ranged from 2 to 10 years old), ethnicity (Chilean, Guatemalan, Dominican, Mexican, and Puerto Rican), and acculturation status (recent immigrants, and first through third-generation U.S. residents).

Materials and Procedure:

- During home visits, mothers completed questionnaires assessing the degree of asymmetry, conflict, harmony, and intimacy in their children's sibling relationship using a 5-point rating scale.
- Both children were interviewed about their sibling relationship, using questions that paralleled those in the mother's questionnaire.

Analyses

- Pearson bivariate correlations were used for the mothers and children's questionnaires.

Results

Comparisons Between Mothers and Children's Ratings (Table 1)

- Mothers rated their children's sibling relationships as more asymmetrical and more intimate than the children did (p = .05).
- There were no significant differences between mothers', target children's, and siblings' ratings of the degree of harmony or conflict in the sibling relationship.

Correlations Among Mothers' and Children's Ratings (Table 2)

Maternal Intercorrelations:

- Mothers' ratings of sibling relationship asymmetry were positively correlated with the ratings of sibling intimacy and harmony.

Table 1. Mean Values of Mothers', Target Children's, and Siblings' Questionnaire Ratings

	Mothers	Target Children	Siblings
Asymmetry	2.05	1.34	1.45
Intimacy	4.02	3.27	3.68
Harmony	3.98	3.62	3.67
Conflict	2.98	3.14	3.14

Table 2. Correlations Among Mothers', Target Children's, and Siblings' Questionnaire Ratings

Table 2 Key		
1. Mothers' Asymmetry Ratings	5. Target Children's Asymmetry Ratings	9. Siblings' Asymmetry Ratings
2. Mothers' Intimacy Ratings	6. Target Children's Intimacy Ratings	10. Siblings' Intimacy Ratings
3. Mothers' Harmony Ratings	7. Target Children's Harmony Ratings	11. Siblings' Harmony Ratings
4. Mothers' Conflict Ratings	8. Target Children's Conflict Ratings	12. Siblings' Conflict Rating

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1	-	5.23***	4.37**	.151	.217	.274	.301	.217	.199	.260	.418*	.468**
2		-	.852***	-.441**	4.61**	.301	.278	-.439**	-.219	.293	.314	-.280
3			-	-.474**	4.05*	.155	.164	-.406*	-.264	.315	.249	-.481**
4				-	.089	-.305	-.204	.308	.226	-.114	-.151	.287
5					-	-.079	.356*	.220	-.243	.159	.208	.166
6						-	.695**	-.340*	-.135	.364	.447**	-.171
7							-	-.284	-.325	.364	.436*	-.152
8								-	.126	-.124	-.199	.229
9									-	-.123	-.211	.222
10										-	.648**	-.256
11											-	-.157
12												-

*** p < .001, ** p < .01, * p < .05

Results (cont.)

Maternal Intercorrelations (cont.):

- Mothers' ratings of sibling intimacy were positively correlated with their ratings of sibling conflict.
- Mothers' ratings of sibling harmony were negatively correlated with their ratings of sibling conflict.

Target Child Intercorrelations:

- Target children's ratings of sibling relationship asymmetry were positively correlated with their ratings of sibling harmony.
- Target children's ratings of sibling intimacy were positively correlated with their ratings of sibling harmony and negatively correlated with their ratings of sibling conflict.

Results (cont.)

Sibling Intercorrelations:

- Siblings' ratings of sibling intimacy were positively correlated with their ratings of sibling harmony.

Mothers-Target Children:

- Mothers' ratings of sibling intimacy were positively correlated with target children's ratings of siblings relationship asymmetry and negatively correlated with sibling conflict.
- Mothers' ratings of sibling harmony were also positively correlated with target children's ratings of sibling relationship asymmetry and negatively correlated with sibling conflict.
- Mothers' ratings of sibling relationship asymmetry and sibling conflict were unrelated to target children's ratings of sibling relationship qualities.

Mothers-Siblings

- Mothers' ratings of sibling relationship asymmetry were positively correlated with siblings' ratings of both harmony and conflict.
- Mothers' ratings of sibling harmony were negatively correlated with siblings' ratings of conflicts.
- Mothers' ratings of sibling intimacy and conflict were unrelated to siblings' ratings of sibling relationship qualities.

Target Children-Siblings

- Target children's ratings of sibling intimacy and harmony were both positively correlated with siblings' ratings of sibling harmony.
- Target children's ratings of sibling asymmetry and conflict were unrelated to siblings' ratings of sibling relationship qualities.

Discussion

Overall, mothers and children showed greater concordance in their perceptions of the siblings relationship than has been the case in past research on Anglo families; In particular, mothers and children were in general agreement about the degree of harmony and conflict in the sibling relationship. The similarity of ratings between mothers and children may show Latina mothers' degree of awareness and involvement in their children's relationships. Furthermore, it can even be said that such similarities of ratings can be attributed to how close the relationship between the mother and children actually is.

However, mothers appeared to overestimate the degree of sibling asymmetry and intimacy at least compared to children's view of things. This overestimation may reflect mothers' ideals about sibling relationship - for example, expectations that older siblings should take care of younger siblings and that siblings should be emotionally close to each other.

Correlations among various relationship dimensions may also reflect mothers' and children's perceptions of relationship ideals. For example, mothers and children appeared to have different views about the connections between asymmetry and other relationship qualities, with mothers viewing asymmetry in a generally positive light (associated with harmony and intimacy) and children's views apparently more mixed.