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## **Trait Emotional Intelligence, Siblings Relationship, & Interpersonal Difficulties in Young Adults**

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### **Abstract**

Young adulthood (18–25 years) is a critical developmental stage marked by emotional, social, and psychological transitions. This study examines the relationship between trait emotional intelligence, sibling relationships (rivalry and conflict), and interpersonal difficulties among young adults. Using a quantitative correlational design, data was collected from 250 university students in Punjab, Pakistan, through stratified probability sampling with age ranges from 18-25 years ( $M=1.31$ ;  $SD=.464$ ). Participants completed the Adult Sibling Relationship Questionnaire (Stocker et al., 1997), Wong and Law Emotional



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Intelligence Scale (Wong & Law, 2002), and Interpersonal Difficulties Scale (Saleem et al., 2014), along with demographic sheet. Pearson product moment correlation was used to assess the results between variables and it indicated that there is a negative relationship between emotional intelligence and interpersonal difficulties ( $r = -0.186, p < .01$ ), suggesting that higher emotional intelligence reduces social challenges, while a weak but significant positive correlation ( $r = .114, p < .05$ ) between sibling relationships and interpersonal difficulties highlights the impact of sibling rivalry and conflict. However, no significant correlation was found between emotional intelligence and sibling relationships ( $r = .044, p = ns$ ). Multiple regression analysis showed that sibling relationships and emotional intelligence together accounted for 5% of the variance in interpersonal difficulties ( $R^2 = .050, p < .006$ ). These findings emphasize the role of emotional intelligence in reducing interpersonal difficulties and suggest that sibling interactions influence social relationships. Future research should explore additional social and environmental factors affecting interpersonal challenges.

**Keywords:** Emotional intelligence, sibling relationships, interpersonal difficulties, young adulthood.

### Introduction

Young adulthood, commonly characterized as the age range somewhere in the range of 18 and 25 years, is a basic formative stage set apart by investigation, self-revelation, and significant life changes. This period, also termed as "emerging adulthood," fills in as an extension among adolescence and adulthood, is characterized by the quest for freedom and personality development (Arnett, 2023). Individuals at this stage experience key life achievement like finish schooling, entering the practical field, and forming intimate connections. These encounters add to Identity development, self-viability, and a feeling of direction (Swartz, 2009). It is a crucial time for psychological and social growth because it is during this time that people learn to be more independent, decide careers, and engage in a variety of complicated relationships.

As a foundation for social and emotional development in young adulthood, sibling relationships shape people's capacity for trust, conflict resolution, and secure attachment. Positive sibling bonds enhance emotional support, social skills, and collaborative behavior, whereas high levels of sibling rivalry can lead to low self-esteem, insecurity in relationships and difficulties in handling diverse relationships (Whiteman et al., 2011). As per Hollifield and Conger (2015), Sibling Relationships encompass different interactions, ranging from companionship to conflict and rivalry and these elements develop over the course of a person's life. The one-of-a-kind qualities of sibling relations frequently make them an essential figure in molding young adults' interpersonal relations and profound well-being.

Different psychological theories explain frameworks to figure out the dynamics of sibling connections. One such system is Social Learning theory, which postulates that siblings frequently act as role models, with their ways of behaving, attitude, and critical thinking procedures noticed and imitated by each other (Bandura, 1977). *Sibling rivalry* refers to competition, jealousy, and conflict between siblings as they interact in their family, compete for parental attention, and achieve individual success. Sibling rivalry is influenced by factors such as birth



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order, parental favoritism, personality differences, and resource allocation in the family (SuciH, 2023). While mild sibling rivalry can foster resilience, independence, and motivation for self-improvement, excessive or unresolved conflicts may lead to long-term interpersonal difficulties, low self-esteem, and emotional distress (Tucker et al., 2014).

Understanding the current population's emotional intelligence is especially important because it has an impact on their interactions with family, particularly siblings, and their overall social functioning. Petrides and Furnham (2016) have defined *emotional intelligence* as ability for handling emotional information and use it in interpersonal and intrapersonal environments. Trait EI has drawn immense focus in understanding how emotional skills affect diverse mental, behavioral, and social consequences. It sheds light on how a person adapts, and handles interpersonal relationships, and emotional well-being (Perera and DiGiacomo, 2015).

Elevated degrees of quality EI are related to upgraded emotional stability, stable interpersonal relations, and better academic performance (Perera and DiGiacomo, 2015). On the other hand, low-quality EI is connected to expanded psychological disturbances, social hardships, and maladaptive ways of behaving (Martins et al., 2010). Aside from this, interpersonal issues typically stem from low TEI and negative sibling experiences and manifest as communication problems, relationship difficulties, and difficulties in building trust. People with low TEI or problematic sibling relationships may have problems with friendships, intimate relationships, and working relationships, which result in greater stress, social isolation, and lower well-being, as stated in Nozaki (2018). Conflict and ineffective communication can obstruct career advancement and overall academic and professional satisfaction (Lopes et al., 2005).

*Interpersonal difficulties* refer to difficulties people face in framing, keeping up with, or in exploring diverse interactions. These difficulties are frequently described by examples of contention, miscommunication, and doubt, affecting individual, academic, and everyday issues. The American Psychiatric Association (APA, 2022) characterizes behavioral problems as disturbances in social elements that impede an individual's social and emotional well-being. Family and Sibling Relationships altogether impact interpersonal dynamics. Parental way of behaving, especially conflicting parenting styles, parental clashes, or neglect, establishes conditions where youngsters battle to foster solid social relationships. Research showed that youngsters presented with such conditions frequently display more significant levels of interpersonal conflict and social insecurity (Stallman & Ohan, 2016). Likewise, sibling rivalry, whenever left unsettled, can encourage long-haul uncertainties and trust issues, further muddling interpersonal relations (Tucker et al., 2014).

A framework for explaining sibling relationships and interpersonal problems and the role that EI plays in them is provided by social learning theory (Bandura, 1977). This theory states that social - emotional growth and social behavior, problem-solving skills, and emotional skills are learned through interactions and observing with their siblings and through interacting with their family. High EI individuals learn from their siblings how to control and manage conflicts and improve social adjustment (Denham et al., 2020). Conversely, as people with low EI have trouble controlling their emotions and communicating, they may engage in dysfunctional behavioral patterns and face more interpersonal challenges.



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The literature emphasizes sibling relationships as being central to building emotional intelligence. According to research, sibling relationships can either help or hurt emotional intelligence, which in turn affects social competence and the success of relationships (Brown & Dunn, 1996). The attachment theory highlights how important early interactions between caregivers and children are in forming emotional intelligence. Effective communication, empathy, and emotional regulation all essential elements of emotional intelligence are fostered by secure attachment (Schoe, 2001).

Plamondon et al. (2021) used 216 French-Canadian university students to investigate sibling bullying as a mediator between young adults' well-being and unfavorable family dynamics. Sibling bullying was significantly predicted by sibling rivalry and interparental hostility, according to structural equation modeling. The study investigated the long-term relationships between adolescents' reactions to both positive and negative affect and the trait emotional intelligence dimensions of emotional attention, clarity, and repair. It measured variables like negative thinking, diversion, and emotional stability and examined aspects like gender differences in EI and coping strategies.

In order to predict adolescents' perceived stress, the study sought to establish the role of personality factors, emotional ability, emotional intelligence, self-efficacy, and self-esteem. It measured such factors as emotional intelligence, stress perception, and self-efficacy in relation to neuroticism, extraversion, and psychoticism. 406 high school students aged 18 to 22 made up the sample. According to research findings, improving self-efficacy and self-esteem could reduce stress, specifically in women and neurotic individuals, highlighting a need for resilience-based interventions (Piekarska, 2020).

A study investigated how college student's emotional intelligence and sibling relationships relate to one another. According to the study's findings, sibling relationships are essential for developing emotional intelligence, highlighting the reciprocal relationship between young adult's social emotional development and emotional bonding (Joseph & Kotian, 2020). The role of sibling relationships in young adult conflict management was investigated in a study carried out by Arora, Dixit, and Sinha (2024). Sibling warmth, rivalry, and conflict management strategies were among the main factors in the research. According to findings in the research, sibling relationships have a crucial role in conflict management among individuals. This highlight fostering positive sibling relationships to promote young adults' adaptive social behavior.

Irfan and Kausar (2020) evaluated 351 adolescents between 15 and 19 years old (172 males and 179 females) from Lahore to investigate adolescent emotional intelligence (EI) and family environment. Care, acceptance, and family cohesion strongly predicted emotional intelligence. Empathy and interpersonal skills were influenced by father's education and siblings. A study carried out by Iftikhar and Sajjad (2023) investigated how perceived parental differential treatment (PDT) influenced sibling relationships in adolescents in Pakistan. Research was centered on important variables like parental control and affection and their effects on sibling conflict, rivalry, and warmth. Sibling relationships in adolescence were highly affected by differential parental treatment in research, highlighting fair parenting in building positive sibling relationships (Iftikhar & Sajjad, 2023).



## Rationale

A literature review critically assesses its contributions to the field, limitations, and implications. It can evaluate how psychological support intelligence influences interaction, resolving conflict, and in sibling relationships by examining a variety of theoretical stances and empirical research. This investigation is essential to determining whether having high emotional intelligence promotes harmonious sibling relationships or only lessens the likelihood of conflict. Further understanding of how these relationships change over time and in various social contexts can also be gained by reviewing longitudinal research and cross-cultural studies. The literature review reinforces the study's foundation by incorporating interdisciplinary perspectives from psychotherapy, social science, and development of human, guaranteeing a comprehensive grasp of young adults' interpersonal difficulties and the function of siblings.

In Pakistan, the complex interplay between emotional intelligence (EI), sibling relationships, and interpersonal difficulties in young adults remains an underexplored area, despite its critical implications for social and emotional well-being. Most studies have focused on Western contexts, leaving a significant gap in understanding how cultural norms, such as familial honor, obedience, and emotional suppression, affect EI development and sibling bonds in indigenous perspective. Additionally, limited research has addressed how interpersonal difficulties stemming from sibling conflicts impact young adults' social competence and emotional regulation in indigenous perspective.

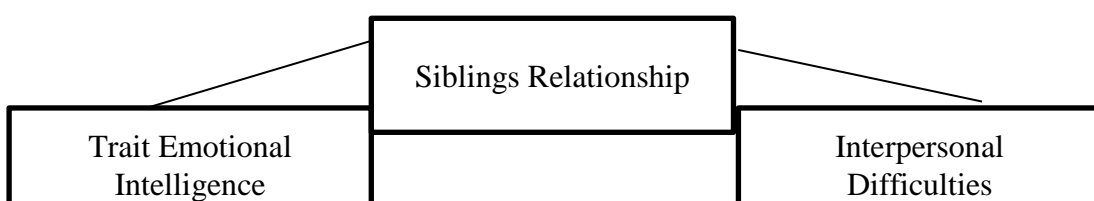
## Objectives

- To explore the relationship between emotional intelligence and sibling relationship quality among young adults.
- To determine the role of sibling relationships in influencing interpersonal difficulties among young adults.
- To examine gender differences in the relationships between emotional intelligence, sibling dynamics, and interpersonal difficulties.

## Hypotheses

- It is hypothesized that interpersonal difficulties, sibling relationships, and emotional intelligence will all be significantly correlated.
- It is hypothesized that the relationship between siblings will differ significantly based on birth order.
- It is hypothesized that sibling relationships and emotional intelligence will be positively correlated.
- It is hypothesized that interpersonal difficulties sibling relationships, and emotional intelligence will all be negatively correlated.

## Conceptual Framework







## Methods

In this study correlational research design was used. The sample size was calculated through G-power analysis, which was consisted of 250 participants. The data was collected through purposive sampling technique included young adults with siblings, older or younger ones, with ages ranging from 18 to 25.

## Inclusion Criteria

To meet the eligibility criteria for the study, participants are required to possess certain characteristics that are predefined as inclusion criteria (Polit & Beck, 2017). These have been established to facilitate the attainment of the objectives of the study with the inclusion of the sample being relevant.

- Participants should be between 18-25 years of age.
- Young adults targeted must have one or more siblings. It could be younger or older.

## Exclusion Criteria

These are the set conditions that restrain certain individuals from taking part in a given research study. They are made to assure integrity, and security while reducing the chances of extraneous influences (Polit & Beck, 2017).

- Participants who were the only child of the family.
- Those having ages above or below the set criteria were not included.
- Individuals having mental health problems which could hinder the ability to respond to the self-report questionnaire.

## Measures

### *Demographics*

Demographic information was collected using the structured form that was developed for the study. The details included the participant's age, gender, family system, educational level, total number of siblings, and the participant's order among them.

### *Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS)*

Trait Emotional Intelligence was assessed using the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale. It had 16 items in total assessing emotional intelligence using ability model of emotional intelligence (Wong & Law, 2002). It consisted of 7 points rating scale starting from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The internal consistency reliability of the four factors in this scale range between 0.83 to 0.93 (Wong & Law, 2002). Cronbach alpha for this scale was .87.

### *Adult Sibling Relationship Questionnaire (ASRQ-S)*

The second scale being used was Adult Sibling Relationship Questionnaire-short form (ASRQ-S) to measure quality of sibling relationships (Lanthier et al., 2000). The ASRQ-S has shown high correlation with the original statistically reliable



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ASRQ measured through test-retest correlations having internal consistency  $\alpha=.93$  for conflict and  $\alpha=.91$  for rivalry (Stocker et al., 1997). It consists of 47 items in total constituting three factors; Warmth, Rivalry, and Conflict. It uses Likert scale which helps in comparing strength of the said perception or behavior (Chapman & McNeill, 2005). This study incorporates only Conflict and Rivalry as the focus of the study was on these behaviors among siblings. The items assessing conflict had 4 points rating scale constituting “never”, “rarely”, “occasionally”, and “regularly”. Whereas, the items assessing rivalry had options that are “I am usually favored/supported”, “I am sometimes favored/supported”, “Equally”, “sibling is usually favored/supported”, “sibling is sometimes favored/supported”, and “neither”. Cronbach alpha for this scale was .72)

### **Interpersonal Difficulties Scale (IDS)**

Interpersonal Difficulties Scale for University students was used to rule out interpersonal problems among young adults. It consisted of 59 items which measured the construct using a 5-point rating scale depending on the intensity of the problem behavior. The rating scale included options that are “never”, “rarely”, “sometimes”, “often”, and “always”. The test-retest reliability scores for the IDS indicated highly significant correlation ( $r=.83$ ,  $p<.001$ ) (Saleem et al., 2014). Cronbach alpha for this scale was .91.

### **Ethical Consideration**

Permission was taken from department graduate committee (DGC) before conducting research. The study followed all ethical requirements to preserve participants rights and well-being. Initially, permission was taken from authors of scales used in current study via e-mail. Moreover, informed consent was obtained prior from participants and confidentiality was ensured to them. Further, they were briefed about the purpose of the research study, and the method to attempt the questionnaires. At the time of research, all participants were aware of their right to withdraw at any time, and the steps taken to protect the confidentiality and privacy of their data. Data was securely saved and utilized only for research purpose. The results reported were factual and based on original data.

### **Results**

This includes an overview of the study's demographics through a descriptive analysis of two kinds of variables: continuous and categorical. Continuous variables were analyzed using frequency and percentage, while mean and standard deviation were employed for analyzing categorical variables. The table below shows the mean of the participant's age 1.31 with .464 standard deviation, which is an average age of the population (18-25 years).

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Participant's Age (N=250)

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Age	1.31	.464

Note. *M*=Mean, *SD*=Standard Deviation.

Table 2: Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient of WLEIS, ASRQ-S, IDS (N=250)

Scales	<i>N</i>	$\alpha$
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WLEIS	16	.870
ASRQ-S	29	.715
IDS	59	.914

*Note.*  $\alpha$ = Alpha Coefficient, WLEIS=Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale, ASRQ-S=Adult Sibling Relationship Questionnaire, IDS=Interpersonal Difficulties Scale

Table 2 presented Cronbach's Alpha values for the study scales. Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale ( $\alpha = .870$ ) showed high reliability, ASRQ-S ( $\alpha = .715$ ) demonstrated acceptable consistency, and Interpersonal Difficulties Scale ( $\alpha = .914$ ) exhibited excellent reliability. These values confirm that the scales are internally consistent and suitable for this study.

Table 3: Summary of Inter Scale Correlation, Mean and Standard Deviation of Study Variables (N=250)

Variables	EI	Conflict	Rivalry	SR	ID
EI	---	.028	.035	.044	-.186**
Conflict	---	---	.022	.713**	.084
Rivalry	---	---	---	.717**	.080
SR	---	---	---	---	.114*
ID	---	---	---	---	---
M	59.69	23.33	20.03	43.57	97.44
SD	17.27	7.64	7.67	10.97	30.38

*Note.* M=Mean, SD=Standard Deviation, WLEIS=Emotional Intelligence, SR=Sibling Relationship, ID=Interpersonal Difficulties

Pearson product moment correlation was used to look for the relationship between Trait Emotional Intelligence, Sibling Relationships, and Interpersonal Difficulties in Young Adults. The results showed that Emotional Intelligence negatively correlated with Interpersonal Difficulties ( $r = -0.186^{**}$ ,  $p < .01$ ), indicating that higher emotional intelligence reduces interpersonal difficulties. Sibling Relationships (rivalry and conflict) showed a weak positive correlation with Interpersonal Difficulties ( $r = .114^{*}$ ,  $p < .05$ ), suggesting sibling relationships slightly influence interpersonal challenges. No significant correlation was found between Emotional Intelligence and Sibling Relationship ( $r = .044$ , ns) this means that there is no significant effect on Siblings Conflicts ( $r = .02$ ; ns), Siblings Conflicts ( $r = .03$ ; ns). The mean scores and standard deviations reflect variability, with Interpersonal Difficulties showing the highest dispersion.

Table 4: Multiple Linear Regression of Predictors of Interpersonal Difficulties in Young Adults (N=250)

Variables	B	95% of CI		SEB	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
		LL	UL				
Model 1						.050	.050*
EI	-.339	-.555	-.112	.110	-.191		
Conflict	.014	-.681	.710	.353	.004		
Rivalry	.322	-.160	.804	.245	.081		
SR	.334	-.152	.819	.246	.120		

*Note.* B= Unstandardized Coefficient, LL=Lower Limit, UL=Upper Limit,  $\beta$ =Standardized Coefficient,  $\Delta R^2$  =Change in Variance,  $R^2$  = Variance,  $p < 0.001$ =





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Multiple linear regression was used to determine the predictive effect of Trait Emotional Intelligence and Sibling Relationships on Interpersonal Difficulties in Young Adults. The table indicates the overall significance of the model,  $F(3,246) = 4.287$ ,  $p < .006$  with  $R^2$  of .050. This value reached statistical significance suggesting that this model is a good fit in explaining the predictive effect of Emotional Intelligence and Sibling Relationships on Interpersonal Difficulties in Young Adults. The model showed 5% variance in Interpersonal Difficulties as contributed by Trait Emotional Intelligence and Sibling Relationships.

## Discussion

The present study was conducted to investigate the relationship among young adults' Trait Emotional Intelligence, Sibling Relationships (particularly focusing on conflict and rivalry), and Interpersonal Difficulties. To test the proposed hypotheses, the study incorporated Correlation and Regression analysis. The findings showed a significant negative correlation between Trait Emotional Intelligence and Interpersonal Difficulties. This suggests that people with higher emotional intelligence are less likely to encounter interpersonal difficulties. This finding is consistent with previous research such as that by Nozaki (2018), which suggested that people who have high emotional intelligence show better interpersonal skills, have better conflict-resolving skills, and overall social competence. This finding is further supported by Mayer and Salovey's (1997) ability model of emotional intelligence, which emphasizes that emotionally intelligent people are more capable of regulating and controlling their emotions effectively and navigating social interactions, thereby reducing potential misunderstandings and conflicts in relationships.

In the case of Sibling Relationships, the findings highlighted a weak but significant positive correlation, between interpersonal difficulties and sibling relationships. This highlights that during young adulthood, sibling interactions (especially rivalry and conflict), play a significant role in shaping interpersonal challenges. Prior studies have underscored those challenges in social interactions later on in life can be exacerbated by conflicted relationships between siblings in early developmental years (Whiteman et al., 2020). This could be due to the fact that people who grow up with rivalry, experience a lack of support from their siblings, or competition may have trouble building trust, working along with others, and expressing their emotions in other relations throughout life.

Moreover, the findings of the current study suggest that emotional intelligence and sibling relationships did not significantly correlate which indicates that the conflict and rivalry aspects of sibling relationships are not being influenced by the emotional intelligence trait in siblings. This is contrary to previous research that showed that people who are emotionally intelligent have better relationships with siblings (Hughes et al., 2019). Sibling relationships, which are influenced by a range of factors such as differences in families, cultures, and individuals, could be a reason for this insignificance. Sibling relationships can be influenced by family factors such as parental biasness and differential treatment regardless of an individual's level of emotional intelligence, as noted in Teti and Ablard's (2019) research.

Likewise, research on cultural expectations indicates that relationships between siblings in collectivist cultures are more determined by familial responsibilities



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than an individual's emotional intelligence, which can override direct influence from emotional intelligence (Kağitçibaşı, 2017). Research carried out by Volling et al. (2020) focuses on the relationship with a spotlight on individual differences, e.g., differences in attachment and temperament, which influence siblings in interacting with one another. For example, direct influence from emotional intelligence on sibling relationships can be overridden in collectivistic cultures in which siblings can have high attachment levels and high levels of rivalry. Moreover, differences in parental style, personality, and in-home environments could mediate this relationship, and thus more research is required.

Further, regression analysis indicated a small but significant predictive effect, this implies that interpersonal difficulties can be due to factors other than siblings' conflict or rivalry and emotional intelligence and can be explored further. Social developmental theories like Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979) indicate that interpersonal skills are shaped by a variety of factors ranging from peers and cultural expectations to individual experience.

The model's comparatively low explanation of variance, suggests searching for other social and environmental variables that may be contributing to interpersonal issues. Young adult interpersonal issues may be strongly determined by parental attachment, academic pressures, and work interactions. Research shows that people with anxious or avoidant attachment styles are usually burdened with relationship difficulties in forming and maintaining intimate relationships due to difficulties with regulating emotions and trusting others (Mikulencer & Shaver, 2019).

Thus, the study adds to the exponentially growing literature on research on interpersonal difficulties, siblings, and emotional intelligence in an important stage in young adulthood. Apart from emphasizing the multi-faceted role of siblings, research further emphasizes developing emotional intelligence in a move to reduce interpersonal difficulties. To give a more integrated explanation for interpersonal difficulties in young adults, future research can explore other variables like personality, peers, and parental style. Sibling communication and building programs for emotional intelligence can also be utilized to improve social relationships later in life.

### Conclusion

The current research provided an extensive understanding of how trait emotional intelligence is linked to sibling relationships and interpersonal difficulties in young adults. Results were interpreted in terms of previous literature and theory. Significant correlation was seen between trait emotional intelligence, sibling relationships and interpersonal difficulties which was backed by prior literature and there were also some distinct variations which underscored the complexity of these concepts. Interpersonal difficulties and emotional intelligence were seen as negatively correlated, supporting the notion that individuals with high emotional intelligence are better able to understand and handle social challenges. The insignificant correlation between emotional intelligence and sibling relationship, however, raises the understanding of some outside factors intervening the association. Essentially, this study adds meaningful data to the relationship between sibling relationships, emotional intelligence, and interpersonal problems during young adulthood. Future research should address different



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populations and include other psychological and social constructs, in order to develop a more comprehensive model to understand interpersonal interactions in young adulthood.

### Limitations and Recommendations

- Majority of the sample consisted of students, which cannot be generalized to a larger population of young adults. Participants from diverse, geographical, educational, and professional backgrounds should be considered for future studies.
- Secondly, overreliance on self-report measures could instill social desirability bias. Further studies should incorporate diverse assessment tools such as observational reports to improve validity.
- Cultural and contextual elements that may play a role in sibling relationships and trait emotional intelligence were not widely considered. To create an in-depth understanding, future researches should consider cross-cultural comparisons.

### Implications

- The study emphasizes on the intricate links between sibling interactions and social functioning, the results of the study add up to the existing body of knowledge, available on interpersonal relations and emotional intelligence.
- Since interpersonal difficulties correlated negatively with emotional intelligence, mental health professionals can include emotional intelligence training as part of the interventions for individuals having issues in communication, anxiety and interpersonal relations.
- The findings showed the importance of siblings in the context of social interactions. Through psycho education about creating conditions that foster positive bonds within siblings, parents can reduce sibling rivalry and improve interpersonal development of children.

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