Better with Siblings?
A Comparison of Only Children and Children with Siblings in Prosocial Behaviors of Korean Preschool Children

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Abstract

The debate between the two perspectives regarding the benefits of growing up with siblings versus growing up alone is ongoing. The current study was conducted to explore how young children’s prosocial skills are influenced by sibling status. Prosocial behaviors of 340 preschool children in South Korea were rated by their teachers and compared between children with siblings versus those who do not. The results showed that growing up with siblings did appear to have a positive influence on younger children, and the birth order and the gender of siblings did not affect prosocial behaviors among those children with siblings. Moreover, a mediation model showed that the difference between the two groups in prosocial behaviors was mediated by age, suggesting that the effect of sibling status on children’s prosocial behaviors diminished as children got older. Further analyses, for possible explanations of other factors playing parts in the relationship between sibling status and prosocial behaviors are discussed.

Keywords: sibling status, only child, prosocial behaviors, social skills, early childhood

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**Introduction**

Early childhood is a crucial phase in human lifespan, during which children first interact with peers and develop new relationships outside the family (Takahashi, Okada, Hoshino, Anme, 2015). Through peer interactions and play, children learn to build on social skills that are required throughout lifetime (Ferreira et al., 2016). Developing adequate social skills and learning to build relationships are not only important milestones as young children but failing to do so may subsequently bring forth more serious consequences. Previous studies show that children with better social functioning have better academic development and attention (Arnold, Kupersmidt, Voegler-Lee, & Marshall, 2012). When children fail to develop adequate social skills as young children, it could yield social maladaptation that could possibly lead to school maladjustment and poor academic performance, suggesting the importance of healthy development of social skills as young children (Veenstra et al., 2008). While this early experience of social interactions may seem similar across all children, children with siblings and only children go through different experiences as they grow up in different family dynamics. Whether growing up with one or more sibling is more beneficial than growing up as only children is yet at debate.

**Resources Dilution Theory**

Some argue that when children grow up with siblings, they are bound to benefit less from their parents’ resources, since there is more than one child for the parents to care for (Downey & Condron, 2004). This theory, called the Resource Dilution model, posits that as the number of children in the household increases, the proportion of parental resources allotted to each child decreases, assuming that the parental resources are finite (Blake, 1981; Downey, 2004). Blake (1981), a leading proponent of the Resource Dilution perspective, proposes that there are three types of parental resources that need to be divided among children: a) physical resources such as basic necessities like homes, books, and pictures, etc., b) personal attention to promote socio-emotional development, and c) specific opportunities to engage with the outside world such as traveling. Proponents of this model argue that since there are less parental resources input to each child when there is more than one child, output is bound to be less favorable than it is for those children with no siblings who benefit from undivided parental resources and attention(Blake, 1981; Downey & Condron, 2004).

Consistent with this claim, there are number of studies that suggest the negative association between sibling group size and educational outcomes (Chen & Liu, 2014; Falbo,