

Sib-Care and Attachment in Zambia and the Netherlands

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Abstract : Cross-culturally, exclusive maternal care of infants is an exception, rather than a rule. In most traditional non-Western societies, child care is shared within the family while in most middle class Western societies parents tend to rely more on 'hired hands' for support. In both contexts however, a common caregiver is the sibling. Despite this, the phenomenon of sib-care has remained relatively understudied. Cultural and gender differences in sib-care and attachment were explored using a retrospective survey instrument comparing Zambian and Dutch college students. The total study sample (N = 394) comprised of 200 Zambian students from the University of Zambia and 194 Dutch students from Leiden University, the Netherlands. We tested four main hypotheses. Firstly, we hypothesized that the Zambian subjects performed more sib-care than Dutch subjects. Secondly we hypothesized that female participants performed more sib-care than males participants, both among the Zambian and Dutch subjects, especially when parents are not at home. Thirdly, we hypothesized that larger family size was associated with more sib-care. Finally, we hypothesized that securely attached participants performed more sib-care than their less securely attached peers. Results indicated that sib-care was prevalent in both Zambian and Dutch samples. Zambian subjects performed more sib-care than Dutch subjects, with females performing more sib-care than males, both when parents were at home ($F(2, 244) = 62.09, p < .01$) and when parents were not at home ($F(2, 237) = 51.28, p < .01$). We also found that family size and attachment related avoidance and anxiety were not significant predictors of sib-care. It is concluded that sib-care is understudied, not only in Africa but also in Western societies and that females perform more sib-care than males, especially when the parents are not at home. In addition, attachment related avoidance and anxiety appear to be more related to the quality than the quantity of sib-care provided.

Keywords : sibling, sib-care, attachment, Africa, Zambia, the Netherlands

Conference Title : ICSRD 2020 : International Conference on Scientific Research and Development

Conference Location : Chicago, United States

Conference Dates : December 12-13, 2020