

The un-favorite child

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Siblings like Scarlet (left) and Riley Wohlman often have different ways of remembering experiences with parents while growing up. One may feel that parents were harder or more strict on them than on their brothers and sisters. But a study out of Temple University suggests that even a child who feels parents may have favored a sibling will still be generally content later in life. Photo courtesy of Megan Chiplock

(PhysOrg.com) -- “Mom always liked you best.” The Smothers Brothers aside, chances are if you’ve got a sibling, this is something you’ve either heard or said at some point in your life. Many people feel that their parents were harder on them than on their siblings. And many are quick to blame negative outcomes in adulthood on it.

But results from a Temple University study published this month in the *Journals of Gerontology: Social Sciences* suggest that if anything, the opposite is true.

Researchers found that between siblings in the same family, the effects of recalled negative early experiences such as conflict with parents and levels of discipline seem to have little influence over psychological well-being in mid-life.

“Existing research suggests the importance of early childhood parental treatment on later well-being, but respondents in this study who thought they were treated less favorably than their siblings have been found to be just as content in their lives,” said Adam Davey, a developmental psychologist in the College of Health Professions.

Davey’s study looked at data collected from 1,369 siblings between the ages of 26-74 from 498 different families to determine the extent to which perceived differences reach into adulthood and whether these disparities are associated with current-well being.

After accounting for age, gender and personality, each sibling answered a series of questions about their memories of parental affection, discipline and conflict and current well-being.

Davey and his team found that those who remembered parents being more lenient with siblings, or remembered having more conflict with their parents than their siblings, still tended to have generally high levels of well-being in adulthood. Not surprisingly, they also found that happier memories, such as levels of affection and warmth, can exert positive effects.

Older respondents and siblings who were married and had children of their own tended to have a more positive recollection of their childhood. Davey says these findings could suggest that life experience acts as a filter for remembering childhood memories. He adds that personality also plays a role: those who were more extroverted tended to have a better recollection of their childhood.

“Even people who grow up in the same environment can have different ways of recalling the past. And it’s not necessarily what happens in the past, but the way we remember it that makes a difference in our well-being,” said Davey.

Provided by Temple University

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