



# Society for Research in Child Development

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### **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **Aggression in Adolescents Is Influenced by Siblings**

Children who have older brothers become more aggressive over time, on average, than those who have older sisters. Older siblings with younger sisters become less aggressive.

Children with older sisters who are very aggressive become more aggressive and older siblings with younger brothers showed fairly stable levels of aggression over time.

In sum, the presence of both older and younger siblings influences the development of aggressive behavior in adolescence. Having a brother or a highly aggressive sibling of either gender can lead to greater increases in aggression over time.

These findings are from researchers at the University of California, Davis, and are published in the September/October 2007 issue of the journal *Child Development*.

Researchers looked at 451 sibling pairs, ages 9 through 18, and their parents. The adolescent siblings each rated their own aggressive behaviors, and parents described economic pressures on the family, such as difficulty paying bills. Trained observers assessed the hostility the parents directed toward each adolescent during family interactions. In their work, the researchers took into consideration the age difference between the siblings as well as such factors as parenting styles and family economics.

The study also found that older siblings who were aggressive tended to have younger siblings who were also aggressive, and vice versa. This association was found for sibling pairs with two boys, two girls, and one boy and one girl. Aggression in younger siblings also predicted increases in aggression in older siblings over time, and vice versa, though the extent varied according to each sibling's gender.

Parents' hostility also played a role in the development of aggression in their children. Family economic pressure predicted increased aggression indirectly, through its association with parental hostility.

"Understanding the factors associated with the development of aggression is essential to the design and implementation of effective intervention efforts aimed at decreasing aggression and its negative consequences," notes Shannon Tierney Williams, a researcher at the University of California, Davis, and the study's lead author. "These findings suggest that such interventions may benefit from including both siblings and parents in these efforts."

The study was supported by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, the National Institute on Drug Abuse, and the National Institute of Mental Health.

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Summarized from Child Development, Vol. 78, Issue 5, *The Development of Interpersonal Aggression during Adolescence: The Importance of Parents, Siblings, and Family Economics* by Williams, ST, Conger, KJ, and Blozis, SA (University of California, Davis). Copyright 2007 The Society for Research in Child Development, Inc. All rights reserved.