

## The sibling postcard exercise – substance and methodology

Rosalind Edwards<sup>1</sup>, Susie Weller<sup>2</sup> & Luisa Weissberg<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Southampton, <sup>2</sup> University of Oxford, <sup>3</sup> University of Zurich

Address correspondence to: Rosalind Edwards, SSPC, University of Southampton, University Road, Southampton SO17 1BJ. Email: r.s.edwards@soton.ac.uk

— Research Note —

---

### Abstract

**Objective:** This research note has both substantive and methodological objectives. It presents an account of undertaking a surface thematic analysis of a data sub-set from a repurposed public engagement written postcard exercise, to consider: (i) the significant non-relationally framed (i.e. factual and not related to the quality of the sibling relationship) information that people across gender and generation think that researchers should know about their siblings, and (ii) the written postcard exercise as a potential research method in family research.

**Background:** Much research on siblings is concerned with outcomes or everyday relational processes. There is less attention to what people themselves regard as significant features of their siblings' circumstances that is not shaped by researcher agendas and interactions.

**Method:** The research note draws on electronic and hard copy written postcard data, submitted in response to the open prompt 'Please tell us about your brothers and sisters', submitted by 795 children and adults. The majority were aged 29-58 and were female. A surface thematic analysis was undertaken to identify the factual, non-relationally framed information provided by postcard writers in a data sub-set in order to identify the issues that they regarded as important.

**Results:** Postcard writers providing factual information about their siblings' circumstances did so largely in the here-and-now of their siblings' lives. They addressed family form, geographical location, and age at which siblings left home, framing this non-relationally as information about their siblings.

**Conclusion:** The analysis of sibling-provided information that is not relationally framed provides an alternative or additional perspective to both developmental outcomes research and studies of sibling perspectives. The postcard exercise offers possibilities as a data generation method that enables an initial co-production design.

**Key words:** Written accounts, gender and age cohort, surface thematic analysis, family structure, geographical location, leaving home, work, postcard research method



---

## 1. Introduction

What do people, across gender and generation, think it is important for researchers to know about their siblings? And how might family researchers establish some sense of this? In this research note we draw on our repurposing of a public engagement written ‘postcard’ exercise, to identify the basic topics postcard writers mention, even if minimally, in response to the open prompt ‘Please tell us about your brothers and sisters’, and where they are able to respond in writing without any direct research presence in the elicitation of accounts. We also describe the written postcard exercise as a potential research method in family research.

Much of the research on sibling relationships is undertaken from a perspective concerned with outcomes, adjustment and which variables cause individualised difficulties (e.g. Azmitia & Hesser, 1993; McHale et al., 2012; van den Broek & Dykstra, 2017) or work with interpretive perspectives on everyday processes and relationality in context (e.g. Brannen et al., 2000; Edwards et al., 2006; Gulløv & Winther, 2021; Punch 2018; Sýkorová 2024). Both of these research endeavours tend to look at discrete phases of the lifecourse – siblings in childhood, siblings in adulthood, siblings in older age – although there are exceptions such as Davies (2023). All make valuable contributions to the research literature. But equally, in terms of our focus in this article on what people across genders and generations themselves regard as a significant feature of their siblings’ circumstances, these accounts are shaped by interaction with researchers. In surveys, it is researchers who pre-determine the questions about self and siblings, and even in in-depth interview research that focuses on sibling perspectives, relationally framed discussions about interdependencies, conflicts, etc. are elicited from participants through interaction with the researcher. In contrast, the written postcard material and thus the particular substantive aspect of it we discuss here was not shaped by ongoing interaction with researchers beyond the initial posed written question.

Below we introduce the public engagement written postcard exercise and our repurposing and analysis of this material as research data. We discuss findings from a specific sub-set of this data that was conveying something descriptively factual about the writers’ siblings as individuals rather than referring to the sibling relationship itself – that is, the postcard entry was not relationally framed. It also tended to focus on the sibling in the ‘here-and-now’. We conclude with the methodological possibilities of postcard exercises as an intentional research practice in family research.

## 2. The sibling postcard analysis project

Our discussion here draws on the written text of ‘postcards’ submitted by the public as part of an annual week-long UK-based ‘Festival of Social Science’<sup>1</sup> public engagement series of events. The postcard exercise ran in March 2008, where people were invited to write about their sisters and brothers. They could either complete an electronic postcard via a website (advertised through leaflets, email lists, chat groups, on our email sign-offs, etc.) or a paper postcard (at displays in offices, schools, libraries, care homes).

Both the hard copy and online versions of the postcard had three entry fields: tickbox gender, dates of birth and death, and a free text box for information (see Figure 1). 795 postcard responses were received from both children and adults (see Table 1 below), two-thirds of them via the online portal. The hard copy postcard writers were constrained by space, although a few circumvented this by attaching an additional sheet to their hard copy postcards. Even with unlimited comment space however, online postcard writers might provide minimal information. Other online writers submitted longer descriptions of their siblings, up to 1220 words (No. 577). All hard copy postcards were transcribed.

---

1 <https://www.ukri.org/what-we-do/public-engagement/public-engagement-esrc/festival-of-social-science/>

Figure 1: Example of a completed hard copy postcard

S11

In the first row please tell us about yourself. Then list all your sisters and brothers, including e.g. your step-sister, your half-brother or anyone you think of as a brother or sister. Under 'Dates' enter the year they were born and where appropriate the year they died (e.g. '1913-1994' or '2003-'). Under notes, enter anything you would like us to know.

**Yourself (please tick)**    **Age**

Male     Female     36    I have 2 sisters and 0 brothers

**Your brothers/sisters**    **Dates**    **Notes**

Male <input type="checkbox"/>	Female <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	25/8/69	① Bossy & opinionated but great in times of trouble & providing advice
Male <input type="checkbox"/>	Female <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	30/11/74	② Adventurous & daring - would have nothing of going off on holiday by herself half-way around the world.
Male <input type="checkbox"/>	Female <input type="checkbox"/>		
Male <input type="checkbox"/>	Female <input type="checkbox"/>		

\* I have a close relationship with my sisters, which have changed over the years. Since my mum's death they have been my main support network.

Note: Hard copy postcard submitted as part of the public engagement exercise. See Bytheway et al., 2008.

The postcard public engagement exercise was not intended as a research project, albeit writers knew they were sending material to a research team. The postcard exercise writers consented to future research. The text inviting participation stated: 'We will anonymise your emails and place them in an Archive to be used for research and educational purposes ... in emailing us you are assigning copyright to the researchers as part of the Sibling Postcard research project'.<sup>2</sup> The Sibling Postcard exercise team wrote up a cursory overview of the postcard material (Bytheway et al., 2008). We have subsequently repurposed the postcard exercise submissions for research analysis, aiming to explore and compare the discourses that people of different genders and ages draw on to convey the quality of their sibling relationships. A large proportion of the postcards did indeed contain discursive material about sibling relationships, but some writers provided only factual information about their siblings' circumstances. It is this latter non-relationally framed data sub-set that is the subject of this article.

### 3. Working with the sibling postcard data

We conducted an initial review of the contents of the entire postcard data set. While a large proportion of the submissions contained discursive material about relationships, in the review we also identified postcards where writers had provided only factual information about their siblings that did not relate to the quality of their relationship. What comprises that non-relational information, however, is of interest because it indicates the minimum of knowledge about their siblings as people, whether child or adult, that postcard writers felt was meaningful enough to mention.

In the following sub-sections we present the process of organising the postcard entries into age cohorts and gender categories, and subsequently identifying and analysing those submissions that did not contain relevant discursive material, before moving on to the substantive features of the surface thematic analysis we conducted on the postcards that were not relationally framed.

<sup>2</sup> The current study received ethical approval from the University of Southampton: Ethics ID ERGO 103249.

### 3.1 Age cohorts and gender

We organized the Sibling Postcard exercise corpus into four age cohort categories as well as by gender. Our choice of age cohort categories was theoretically informed by a Mannheimian notion of collective time-based experience of social change (Gutierrez Muñoz & Brannen, 2021), broadly representing key generational childhood experiences of intensifying social processes over historical time: familialisation, institutionalization and individualization (Brannen & O'Brien, 1995; British Academy, 2019). Only binary choice male/female tickbox categories were provided for gender on the postcards unfortunately, which was common practice at the time. This data management enabled us to take a comparative approach between age cohorts and gender. As Table 1 shows, the Sibling Postcard exercise writers as a whole were likely to be in the 1950-79 cohort (age 29-58) and the majority were female. As others have found, women are far more likely than men to participate in studies concerned with family and intimacy issues (Butera, 2006; Kristensen & Ravn, 2015; Sopcak et al., 2015).

Writers were not asked to provide their race or ethnicity, but 6 percent thought to mention a minority ethnicity or non-UK nationality, with another 4 percent referring to being White or born in the UK. The 6 percent of self-reported cases is only slightly lower than the 7.9 percent minority ethnicity of the UK population in the 2001 census (Owen, undated), shortly before the year in which the postcards were written and indicating a relatively ethnically diverse set of writers. In contrast, where writers mentioned their employment, there was a high proportion of academics, at 9 percent of the writers, while academics comprised approximately 5 percent of the UK workforce in 2008 (HESA, 2010). This is likely related to email sign-off and academic discussion group routes used to publicise the Sibling Postcard exercise. Also at a higher proportion were postcard writers mentioning being a twin or having sibling twins, at 3 percent as against 1.5 percent of the UK general population being twins in 2008 (ONS, 2019). This may be linked to a twins study that was taking place at a hospital located near to one of the research teams involved in the exercise.

Table 1: Age cohort generation and gender: complete postcard dataset

Year of birth	Postcard writers age	Postcard writers (total 795)		% total by gender male : female***
		No.	%**	
1900 – 1920	88 – 108	5	0.6	
1921 – 1949	58 – 87	105	13.2	
1950 – 1979	29 – 58	438	55.1	17.1 : 82.1
1980 – 2005	28 – 3 *	240	30.1	

Note: \* For the very youngest, it was apparent that a parent or older sibling had completed the postcard on their behalf.

\*\* Year of birth or age not provided for 7 postcards

\*\*\* Gender not provided for 6 postcards

### 3.2 Surface thematic analysis of the non-relational, factual postcards

We adopted a rotational and negotiated process for identifying and analysing the postcards. We split the whole corpus described above into three and rotated the tranches between us to identify and agree the postcards that (i) would later form the subject of a discourse analysis (not addressed here), and (ii) those that comprised the data sub-set of non-relational postcard submissions that we discuss here.

The sub-set of non-relational and factual postcard entries amounted to 271 (34.1 per cent of the corpus) and reflected the gender and age cohort profile of the main corpus. Table 2 shows however, that where they did write a postcard, men were more likely to provide non-relationally-framed information. Of 136 writers in the main corpus who ticked the male box, 46 percent submitted minimal and factual postcards, as against 32 percent of female writers.

Table 2: Age cohort generation and gender: minimal and factual postcard dataset

Year of birth	Postcard writers age	Postcard writers (total 271)		% total by gender male : female**
		No.	%*	
1900 – 1920	88 – 108	2	0.7	
1921 – 1949	58 – 87	28	10.3	
1950 – 1979	29 – 58	160	59.0	23.2 : 76.3
1980 – 2005	28 – 3	76	28.0	

Note: \* Year of birth or age not provided for 5 postcards

\*\* Gender not provided for 1 postcard

We divided the 271 non-relational postcards between us, and each conducted a surface thematic analysis of the topics covered in our tranche. Surface thematic analysis (also called semantic thematic analysis) is concerned with identifying themes that are readily apparent in the data rather than interpretation of meaning (e.g. Goddard, 2011). This analytic approach is all the more appropriate where relational meaning should not be assumed and extrapolated because the information provided is basic, factual and not embedded in contextual interaction with researchers beyond the initial written question. We compared and merged our three separate topic-based thematic analyses, generating one final set of codes through consensual construction, and then each recoded another tranche using our agreed scheme.

While the coded minimal and factual data sub-set contained material about the writer's siblings, it was distinctive in not being relationally-framed. For example, No. 355 (male, age 18) wrote of one older brother '*Gone to university this year*', of another '*Starting work after graduation 2 years ago. currently at home*', and of his sister '*Been working for 6 years, gettin married in summer and moving out*' [sic]. These postcards show the basic information that writers – whether children or adults, thought it was important to convey to researchers about their siblings as people, rather than issues about the relationship with their siblings that family researchers might wish to ask about and elicit from research participants.

#### 4. The substantive postcard information

So, where postcard writers provided minimal information and factual accounts rather than relational quality discourse in response to the 'tell us about your siblings' prompt, what did they regard as significant information that researchers should know about their siblings or would be interested in?

Unsurprisingly information about family was a key feature of the non-relationally framed postcards, with 89.7 percent of writers referring to family structure, form of sibling relatedness (e.g. biological, step, half, social), and/or sibling birth order. The information about family structure was the greater proportion of the broad category of family information (77.3 percent). This information was not necessarily about the siblings' childhood family type (raised by the same parents, their parents separating, etc.). Rather, where postcard writers had adult siblings, 69.3 percent thought it important to provide information about the family form in which their siblings now lived (partnership status and any children), as against 41.4 percent referring to shared or different upbringing. For example No. 66 (female, age 12) confined her description of her older sister to a basic: '*She is mother to a little girl*', while No. 234 (male, age 58) fleshed out the picture of his two younger sisters in a similarly here-and-now descriptive framing focused on the sibling rather than the writer's relationship with them: '*Married and has been living in Australia since 1977, with two grown up children and three grandchildren. Will celebrate her ruby wedding anniversary next year and has recently retired*' and '*Single and living in Australia since 1979, emigrated with my mother, following the death of my father in 1970. She is an accountant*'.

The higher percentage mentioning family structure in the here-and-now for their siblings rather than referring to the past was consistent across the age cohorts and gender. This subject, as one that writers judged important for researchers to know about their siblings' circumstances, provides an interesting counterpoint to the sibling literature which rarely address this topic beyond its meaning in the context of the sibling relationship. It is in some contrast with the prominence given to the immediate or longer term effects of family structures in childhood, or alternatively to a focus on parental care relationships in adulthood (e.g. Mostafa et al., 2018; Savell et al., 2022; Stuijbergen et al., 2008). A focus on the here-and-

now for their siblings was also evident in the next most common feature of the minimal and factual topics conveyed by postcard writers.

Postcard writer No. 234, quoted above, also thought that his sisters' geographical location was noteworthy. Where siblings were born and raised in childhood, where they have lived and are living in adulthood, was regarded as significant across all the cohorts, with the gender distribution reflecting the minimal and factual postcard data sub-set as a whole. As with family structure, this information largely focused on the here-and-now. Adult postcard writers who mentioned geographical location were far more attentive to providing this information for adulthood than in childhood (72 percent or higher) as a feature of their siblings' circumstances. Again, this is as distinct from sibling research focusing on relationally framed outcomes and everyday processes. Writer No. 239 (female, age 59) covered both childhood and adulthood outside of a relational framing, noting about her older brother:

*My brother was brought up with me by both our parents in London. He failed his 11+ but later managed to go to University and became an electrical engineer. He left home at 18 and did a few jobs before deciding he would get a degree. At approx 25 he married and emigrated first to Canada and then to the USA. He started his own business and had 4 children. Sadly he died at the age of 50 from a malignant brain tumour.*

Resonating with geographical location, leaving or remaining in the parental home was a third significant topic for postcard writers. This predominantly involved recording the age at which a sibling left home (72.7 percent), but also mentioned was a sibling returning home again having left (17.3 percent) or having never left home (10 percent). While age is a feature of the much analysed implications of sibling status birth order, and while postcard writers overwhelmingly listed their siblings in age order (see Writer No. 6 below for an exception), the postcard accounts indicate a pivotal significance for siblings' age of leaving or still staying at home that deserves further investigation in terms of what is being conveyed about the sibling as a person. Writer No. 525 (female, age 26) had five older siblings, all of whom bar one she would likely have experienced leaving home before her. She provided a factual account of this that was not relationally framed:

*[Oldest sister] Left home at the age of 26. Has 2 children, and has recently returned to education and is doing a degree in fashion design. Lives in B'ham {Birmingham}. [Older sister] Left home at the age of 27. Is a housewife and has three children. Lives in Leicester. [Older brother] Is a business consultant and left home at the age of 18. Lives in Worcester. [Older sister] Is a Primary school teacher. Left Home at the age of 28. Has two children and lives in B'ham. [Older sister] Is still living at home. Is a Health Psychologist. Lives in B'ham.*

A geography of sibship and how where brothers and sisters live can be significant for each other is a muted feature of sibling research. Where it is addressed, it tends to be preoccupied with sibling conflict or with provision of care to ageing parents (e.g. Hamwey et al., 2019; van den Broek & Dykstra, 2017), albeit some in-depth sociological work has explored place and community as an element in sibling relationships (e.g. Edwards et al., 2006). Why siblings' geographical movements over time and the age of movement is a topic that postcard writers feel should be conveyed to researchers as an important non-relationally framed part of their 'temporal convoy' (Gillis, 1997) requires investigation.

A less significant feature of the postcard writers' ideas about what researchers should know about their siblings concerns the category of 'work'. The information provided by the 45 percent of writers that we gathered into this broad grouping encompassed a sibling being: self-employed or employed, often referencing the job, profession or service; retired; a housewife and caring for children; unemployed; and aspirations for employment. Postcard writers addressing this subject largely reflect the age cohort and gender profile of the data sub-set. Examples are Writers No. 275 (male, age 28) and No. 6 (female, age 86) respectively, each of whom provided basic and minimal 'here-and-now' sibling descriptions:

*[Younger brother] Married, 1 Son. Live in Sheffield. Work as steelwork maintenance manager. Enjoy football & music.*

*[Oldest brother] Worked on a farm [Older brother] Army [Older brother] Worked on a farm/Army [Younger brother] Killed in the Second World War [Younger brother] Labourer [Older sister] Housewife*

Mention of education and qualifications (36.9 percent) often did relate to siblings' childhood of course, but again, where postcard writers and their siblings were adults, this was more often about their adulthood. Sibling education-related circumstances covered types of school, exams, subjects being studied, level of studies, as well as being uneducated.

Other topics were mentioned in around a tenth or less of the postcards. Death of a sibling or in the sibling's own family (11.8 percent) might refer to childhood or adulthood of both the postcard writer and the relevant sibling. Physical and personality characteristics and interests (10.3 per cent) were mainly

mentioned by the two younger generations, and ranged from body height to artistic traits, hobbies and sport. This may reflect generational concerns about peer evaluation either as age or as cohort, or simply the setting for postcard completion (e.g. school). Lesser topics included housing tenure and standard of accommodation, especially in the younger two cohorts' accounts (6.3 percent); siblings' good health or illness (5.1 percent); and the sibling's pets (1.1 percent). A few postcard writers named their siblings (1.8 percent) and where this was the case it was only women who did so, perhaps reflecting gendered intimacy norms.

In our Conclusion below, we reflect on the sort of contribution that this data sub-set and its analysis makes to research on siblings, and consider the possibilities of utilising postcard exercises as an intentional data generation method in family research.

## 5. Conclusion

Our discussion above has drawn on our repurposing of postcard entries written about siblings that were submitted to a public engagement exercise. We organised the sibling postcard data by age cohort and gender. We identified two framings of responses in the data set as a whole: the relational and the non-relational. We undertook a surface thematic analysis of the latter, minimal and factual postcard submissions, which is the basis for this research note.

All of the substantive topics in the minimal and factual data sub-set of postcards – those mentioned by large majorities as well as the minority appearances; those by children and adult writers and written about child and adult siblings – were responses to an open written question to 'tell us about your brothers and sisters'. While the majority of postcard writers in the public engagement exercise interpreted their responses to the question as requiring an explanation of the quality of their relationship with their siblings (not addressed here), the non-relationally framed written responses did not. Rather, these latter writers focused on factual information about their siblings' circumstances, largely in the here-and-now of their siblings' lives. This framing of the basic minimum that people think is significant for researchers to know about their siblings as individuals is distinct from the existing sibling literature.

It is a framing that was unshaped by ongoing interaction with researchers beyond the initial, open, written question. This is its strength and contribution to the existing sibling literature, providing an alternative or additional perspective to both developmental outcomes research and studies of sibling views. The contribution is not only substantive; there is also the possibilities of the postcard exercise as an intentional data generation method. This is a distinct approach and one of potential benefit for family research. In our experience, the online postcards facility in particular enables speedy reach and response – even more so with the growth in social media outlets than was available in 2008. We can envisage the use of online postcard submission as an initial 'co-productive' phase in both outcome-based and relational process research projects, bringing people's own ideas of significant knowledge into the research endeavour. Entries to the postcard exercise could inform research perspectives on the substantive topics and framings before designing data generation methods and entry into the field. In our own ongoing research studies, the minimal and factual sibling postcard data sub-set reminds us that research participants may wish to convey to researchers a sense of their siblings and family members as people outside of relationally framed perspectives alone.

## Acknowledgments

The original postcard public engagement exercise was funded by the UK's Economic and Social Research Council's Timescapes Initiative, under grant number RES 437 25 0003. The authors received no funding for the Sibling Postcard analytic exercise reported here. Our thanks to Bill Bytheway and Joanna Bornat, who worked on the public engagement exercise with us, and to the editor and reviewers for their valuable comments, and to Andrea Riepl for help with the German version of our abstract. The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## Data availability statement

The postcard data is available at: Bill Bytheway, Susie Weller, Joanna Bornat, Rosalind Edwards (2026): The Sibling Postcard Exercise. University of Leeds. [Dataset] <https://doi.org/10.23635/17>

## References

- Azmitia, M. & Hesser, J. (1993). Why siblings are important agents of cognitive development: a comparison of siblings and peers. *Child Development* 64(2), 430-444. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.1993.tb02919.x>
- Brannen, J. & O'Brien, M. (1995). Childhood and the sociological gaze: paradigms and paradoxes. *Sociology* 29(4), 729-737. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038595029004011>
- Brannen, J., Bhopal, K. & Heptinstall, E. (2000). Connecting children: Care and family life in later childhood. Routledge/Falmer. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203996355>
- British Academy (2019). Reframing childhood past and present: Chronologies. <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/childhood-reframing-past-and-present-chronologies/#:~:text=The%20chronologies%20cover%20the%20following,and%20culture%2C%20media%20and%20technology.> [last retrieved: March 24, 2026]
- Butera, K.J. (2016). Manhunt: the challenge of enticing men to participate in a study on friendship. *Qualitative Enquiry* 12(6), 1262-1282. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800406288634>
- Bytheway, B., Weller, S., Bornat, J. & Edwards, R. (2008). Sisters and brothers: Results of a UK-wide postcard exercise: ESRC Festival of Social Science 2008. <https://timescapes-archive.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/47/2020/07/Sister-and-Brothers-Report.pdf> [last retrieved: March 24, 2026]
- Davies, K. (2023). Siblings and sociology. Manchester University Press. <https://doi.org/10.7765/9781526142184>
- Edwards, R., Hadfield, L., Lucey, H. & Mauthner, M. (2006). Sibling identity and relationships: Sisters and brothers. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203448809>
- Gillis, J. (1997). A world of their own making. Harvard University Press.
- Goddard, C. (2011). Semantic analysis: A practical introduction. Oxford University Press.
- Gulløv, E. & Winther, I.W. (2021). Sibling relationships: being connected and related. In A-M. Castrén et al. (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of family sociology in Europe* (pp. 301-321). Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-73306-3>
- Gutierrez Muñoz, C. & Brannen, J. (2021). The concept of generations. *Oxford Bibliographies*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/obo/9780199791231-0237>
- Hamwey, M.K., Rolan, E.P., Jensen, A.C., Whiteman, S.D. & Jackson, H.M. (2019). "Absence makes the heart grow fonder": A qualitative examination of sibling relationships during emerging adulthood. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 36(8), 2487-2506. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407518789514>
- HESA (2010). Staff at Higher Education institutions in the United Kingdom 2008/09. <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/21-01-2010/sfr143-staff> [last retrieved: March 24, 2026]
- Kristensen, G.K. & Ravn, M.N. (2015). The voices heard and the voices silenced: recruitment processes in qualitative interview studies. *Qualitative Research*, 15(6), 722-737. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794114567496>
- McHale, S.M., Updegraff, K.A. & Whiteman, S.D. (2012). Sibling relationships and influences in childhood and adolescence. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 74(5), 913-930. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2012.01011.x>
- Mostafa, T., Gambará, L., & Joshi, H. (2018). The impact of complex family structure on child well-being: evidence from siblings. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 80(4), 902-918. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12456>
- Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2019). Birth characteristics in England and Wales: 2017. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/livebirths/bulletins/birthcharacteristicsinenglandandwales/2017#:~:text=In%202017%2C%20there%20were%2010%2C%20462,occur%20because%20of%20fertility%20treatment.> [last retrieved: March 24, 2026]
- Owen, D. (undated). Profile of Black and Minority ethnic groups in the UK. [https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross\\_fac/healthatwarwick/publications/occasional/ethnicprofile.pdf](https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/healthatwarwick/publications/occasional/ethnicprofile.pdf) [last retrieved: March 24, 2026]
- Punch, S. (2018). Negotiating sibling relationships and birth order hierarchies. In S. Punch, R. Vanderback & T. Skelton (Eds.), *Families, Intergenerationally and Peer Group Relations: Geographies of Children and Young People* (pp. 107-128). Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-287-026-1>
- Savell, S.M., Saini, R., Ramos, M., Wilson, M.N., Lemery-Chalfant, K. & Shaw, D.S. (2022). Family processes and structure: longitudinal influences on adolescent disruptive and internalising behaviours.

- Family Relations: *Interdisciplinary Journal of Applied Family Science*, 2(1), 361-382. <https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12728>
- Sopcak, N., Mayan, M. & Skrypnek, B.J. (2015). Engaging young fathers in research through photo-interviewing. *The Qualitative Report*, 20(11), 1871-1880. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2015.2396>
- Stuifbergen, M.C., van Delden, J.J.M. & Dykstra, P.A. (2008). The implications of today's family structures for support giving to older parents. *Ageing and Society*, 28(3), 413-434. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0144686X07006666>
- Sýkorová, D. (2024). Siblinghood amongst older adults: what being a sibling or having siblings means. *Journal of Family Issues* 45(2), 419-446. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X221150974>
- van den Broek, T. & Dykstra, P.A. (2017). The impact of siblings on the geographic distance between adult children and their ageing parents. Does parental need matter? *Population, Space and Place*, 23 (6), e2048. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/psp.2048>

---

# Information in German

## Deutscher Titel

Die Geschwister-Postkartenübung – Gegenstand und Methodologie

## Zusammenfassung

**Fragestellung:** Diese Forschungsnotiz präsentiert sowohl gegenstandsbezogene als auch methodologische Ziele. Dargestellt wird die Durchführung einer deskriptiven thematischen Analyse eines Teils des Datensets aus einer für Forschungszwecke weiterverwendeten schriftlichen Postkartenaktion im Kontext der Öffentlichkeitsbeteiligung, mit Fokus auf: (i) die relevanten nicht relational gerahmten (d.h. sachlichen und nicht auf die Geschwisterbeziehung bezogenen) Informationen, von denen Teilnehmende verschiedener Geschlechter und Generationen glauben, dass Forschende sie über ihre Geschwister wissen sollten, und (ii) die schriftliche Postkartenaktion als potenzielle Forschungsmethode in der Familienforschung.

**Hintergrund:** Ein Großteil der Forschung über Geschwister befasst sich mit Entwicklungen oder alltäglichen relationalen Prozessen. Weniger Aufmerksamkeit richtet sich hingegen darauf, was Kinder und Erwachsene selbst als wesentliche Merkmale der Lebensumstände ihrer Geschwister betrachten, die nicht durch Forschungsagenden oder Interaktionen mit Forschenden geprägt sind.

**Methode:** Diese Forschungsnotiz stützt sich auf digitale und gedruckte Postkartendaten, die von 795 Kindern und Erwachsenen als Antwort auf die offene Aufforderung «Bitte erzählen Sie uns etwas über Ihre Geschwister» verfasst wurden. Die Mehrheit der Teilnehmenden war zwischen 29 und 58 Jahre alt und weiblich. Es wurde eine deskriptive thematische Analyse durchgeführt, um die sachlichen, nicht relational gerahmten Informationen zu identifizieren, die von den Verfasser:innen der Postkarten als die wichtig erachteten Themen betrachtet wurden.

**Ergebnisse:** Die Verfasser:innen der Postkarten, die sachliche Informationen über die Lebensumstände ihrer Geschwister lieferten, äußerten dies größtenteils für deren gegenwärtige Situation. Sie gingen auf die Familienform, den geografischen Wohnort und das Alter, in welchem die Geschwister das Elternhaus verlassen hatten, ein und rahmten dies nicht relational als Informationen über ihre Geschwister.

**Schlussfolgerung:** Die Analyse der Informationen über Geschwister, die nicht relational gerahmt wurden, bietet eine alternative und zusätzliche Perspektive sowohl für die Forschung zu Entwicklungsergebnissen als auch für Studien zu Geschwisterperspektiven. Die Postkartenaktion ist eine Möglichkeit der Datenerfassung, die ein initiales Co-Produktionsdesign erlaubt.

**Schlagwörter:** Schriftliche Berichte, Geschlechter- und Alterskohorte, deskriptive thematische Analyse, Familienstruktur, geografische Lage, Auszug aus dem Elternhaus, Arbeit, Postkarten als Forschungsmethode

JFR – Journal of Family Research, 2026, vol. 38, pp. 148–158.

doi: <https://doi.org/10.20377/jfr-1345>

Section: Research note

Submitted: July 21, 2025

Accepted: April 18, 2026

Published online: March 30, 2026

Rosalind Edwards: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3512-9029>

Susie Weller: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6839-876X>

Luisa Weissberg: <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-7847-1441>



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).