

“We study at the same university”: siblingship and its role in exchange of socio-cultural capital among Kazakhstani youth.

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Abstract

Introduction: Well-known assumption that children in the family have little power to influence each other as much or more than their parents seems to be taken for granted, consequently creating a blind point in the examination of interfamilial connections and research of family dynamics. Thus, the current study examines how important siblingship is in connection to changes in individuals' social and cultural capital in Kazakhstan. Precisely this research gives more perspective on how siblingship can be influential in reality and what patterns and shapes it takes in affecting lives in the context of socio-cultural capital. Therefore, the study will try to explore and answer the following research question: How kinship ties influence development and exchange of social and cultural capital among siblings?

Results: After conduction nine semi-structured in-depth interviews, findings show that siblings are able to produce own socio-cultural capital and share it with other children but the process is highly dependent on many factors such as siblings' age gap, geographical proximity among them, gender dynamic imposed by family and outside communities, and presence in certain life stages – all affecting each other from childhood to adulthood.

Conclusion: In order to explore exchange and production of capital among children, it is crucial to look at sibship dynamics and factors that influence their nature, which gives more understanding on why and how capital is created and shared between siblings. Although findings showcase crucial importance of socio-cultural capital production by siblings, relatively homogenous sampling can overlook increasing importance of capital in siblings with lower socio-economic background.

Key words: social capital, cultural capital, Pierre Bourdieu, kinship

Introduction

There is more in a family besides blood ties and shared roof: as a social institution, it can reveal the transaction of crucial resources, predictions of future generations' economic condition and formation of views on social issues, potentially affecting more complex structures and processes in the world. Despite being a multicultural and multinational country, little research was done on kinship structures in Kazakhstan especially horizontally – between children – as the society is more concerned about consanguineous importance of kin. Moreover, because of the lack of outlook on siblings' relations, the assumption that children in the family have little power to influence each other as much or more than their parents seems to be taken for granted, consequently creating a blind point in the examination of interfamilial connections and research of family dynamics. Thus, the current study will try to examine how important siblingship is in connection to changes in individuals' social and cultural capital in Kazakhstan. Precisely this research will give more perspective on how siblingship can be influential in reality and what patterns and shapes it takes in affecting lives in the context of socio-cultural capital. The study will try to explore and answer the following research question: How kinship ties influence development and exchange of social and cultural capital among siblings?

Additionally, the study will shed light on the kinship normative in cultural context from participants' point of view because kinship ties in Kazakhstan are often presented through cultural norms as a collective sentiment not touched by laws or policies, making less contribution to analysis of effects of internal family relations such as sibling hierarchy, family pressure, and even deviant cases as domestic violence, incest, and child neglect. Analyzing findings through the lens of Bourdieu's theories on social and cultural capital as well as revisited cultural transmission theory by Dekker will create refined and rich fundament on grouping themes in relation to their influence and exchange among siblings, guiding on exploring crucial weight on their importance in individuals' lives. Moreover, Dimaggio's model of cultural mobility and cultural reproduction will create a broad framework for discussion about types of social and cultural capital found in the data and how they appear to be relevant for siblings in a long-term.

At first stage, the research will try to understand how participants perceive kinship ties with their siblings and what they consider to be kin. This is a first step to establish narrative before diving into biography of siblings: exploring the history participants share that they believe to be crucial for their values and believes formation. In other words, the study will extract the presence of external factors such as rearing patterns, geographical separation, divorce, involvement in different peer groups and communities participants joined that changed the character and nature of siblingship among participants. By referring to previous stages, the research will explore the ways that individuals perceive sibling ties to be influential for them in making educational choices, planning future family, viewing or siding with certain believes during conflicts, finally analyzing all three stages in relation to each other.

Literature Review

As a primary social institution, family might come off as a less complex entity compared to more compounded, hierarchical and bureaucratic bodies, it still holds its crucial role as a first community that children meet and nurture from. Its complexity, culturally diverse understanding and forms mainly takes root in the concept of kinship. At first, kin ties seem to be associated with solely consanguineal relationships until, as we will further find out, there are more social and cultural processes that defy and modify its definition. The multidimensional nature of kinship becomes even more central when we explain the emergence of cultural and social capital in form of social networks, academic knowledge, learned skills and behaviors

further determining mobility and obtainment of opportunities presented outside family. But how these forms of capital are formed and who decides its distribution? Many scholars have been putting this discussion around parental responsibilities, viewing children as merely receivers, assuming that they are unable to have autonomy over capital and create own. Discourse on socio-cultural capital mostly takes place as a hierarchical process coming down from adults to youth, overlooking inter-sibling relationship and time-dependent versatility of kin ties (*see Theoretic Framework*). Thus, this literature review will try to uncover existing research about family-capital connection and pose the need to research more about sibship autonomy that could potentially cover unanswered questions and broken sequences in research world.

Overlooked social and cultural capital: general context and importance in kinship

Before turning to related concepts, it is crucial to shed light at the role of social and cultural capital in a family and how they can be detected in complex human relations. Studies suggest that having a sibling positively affects emotional development of children as they learn social skills (Downey 2001; Downey and Condrón 2004; Goetting 1986). Moreover, older children provide more adaptable environment for younger siblings when they start new academic year or move to another school as they introduce existing networks to find friends and acquaintances (Holland et al. 2007). Thus, Gillies and Lucey's (2006) critique regarding children being "passive" receivers of social and cultural capital becomes more relevant for first-born or older siblings. Siblings also play a crucial role in adulthood, especially as emotional support (Goetting 1986; McHale et al. 2012). Richmond and Stocker (2006) state that children become more actively engaged in family relations when they grow older, which suggests the change in power dynamics possibly making them active agents of capital exchange. But there is little discovered on how such exchange or creation of capital takes place as studies usually refer to these processes as trivial complementary assistance from siblings. Some examples of children's influence on each other could be their reciprocal exchange in advice, frequent engagement, warning younger siblings to avoid impulsive decisions, discussing future plans and personal concerns (Morrongiello and Bradley 1997; Tucker et al. 1997; Whiteman et al. 2007). Long-term effect and practicality of such interactions are mostly overlooked by researchers and hardly classified as instances of socio-cultural capital, which will be taken into consideration as one of the main focuses in this study.

Whom children consider to be a sibling also has own factors because blood ties are not necessarily indicators of sibship. Tanskanen et al (2021) conclude that sharing a roof with others, whether they share consanguinity or not, could prompt children to call co-habitats their brother or sister. Being assisted and constantly interacting with peers or more experienced older individuals can also create siblingship (Cox 2016). Indeed, De Vries et al. (2009) admit that frequency and quality of interactions determine siblingship formation. Although there is a heavy and initial parental influence in capital distribution among children (Willekens and Lievens 2014), Marjoribanks (2005) believes it should be "activated" to be used by siblings, which can be quite dependent on adults' choices and priorities. Thus, households where first-borns and older children are cut from capital because of parental absence or neglect, this responsibility switches to the older sibling, where they take a role of a guardian and caregiver (Denby and Ayala 2013). As it can be concluded, there are varieties of outside influences that affect how siblingship develops. Following sections will disclose such variables with a more detailed discussion about socio-cultural capital in important life events and periods, which puts an important focus on fluctuating and complex nature of siblingship.

Socio-cultural capital and education: educational decision-making and academic performance

The influence of social and cultural capital in educational sphere for siblings was studied by many scholars, revealing their importance for academic performance and overall learning capabilities (Jæger 2011; Gaddis 2012; Xu and Hampden-Thompson 2012). One of the main factors that affects the distribution and activation of the capital seems to stem from

the family background: higher-class families that produce more economic capital can afford extracurricular activities and lessons for their children, exposing them to intellectually stimulated environment, creating more opportunities for a better academic performance compared to lower-class parents (Eirich 2011; Grätz 2018; Hurtado-Ortiz and Gauvain 2007; Horvat et al. 2003; Lareau and Horvat 1999). However, when family is in disadvantaged position and cannot afford parental involvement in children's education, the production of cultural and social capital useful for academic performance switches to other actors – family members and school staff (Lareau 1987).

Although Hurtado-Ortiz and Gauvain (2007) conclude that older siblings do influence academic attainment of younger children, there is little data known about practical effects of siblings' intervention. More importantly, the authors never consider children to be active agents in construction of social and cultural capital for siblings, focusing on parents' economic background. Nevertheless, according to Jæger (2011), more trivial and detail-oriented tasks like assisting in reading and teaching writing seem to be consistent regardless of socio-economic class. Thus, there is a high chance that certain examples of socio-cultural capital can be activated without direct influence of economic capital. What is more interesting, children from lower-class families utilize cultural capital more than those with higher socio-economic background (DiMaggio 1982). Lareau (1987) states that economically disadvantaged parents tend to accumulate and use cultural capital inside family through kinship ties, which might suggest potential higher siblings' influence in helping each other at studying and attending school. Considering that economically disadvantaged children take the most out of existing social and cultural capital, it is possible that their influence can be detected differently across classes.

Several studies discovered important contribution that siblings exchange among each other, whether it comes from their role as an older child or active involvement in younger siblings' future plans. It appears that older siblings often perform better at school, which suggests the hierarchical distribution of resources from parents to children, where first-borns obtain more than younger ones (Jensen and McHale 2015). Indeed, Hauser and Wong (1989) conclude that assistance and academic involvement between children can hardly be described as "reciprocal" as comparatively major part of assistance comes from first-borns. Thus, suggesting capability of older siblings creating own socio-cultural capital or at least transferring it to the younger children. Jensen and McHale (2015) also conclude that if the older child performs better at school, it consequently affects motivations and academic intentions of younger ones. However, it is not clear whether this phenomenon happens due to rivalry for a capital or its exchange among children, thus there is a need for evaluation of parental influence as well. When it comes to decision-making about further education, children seem to look up to their older siblings that already pursue higher education, especially if they are of the same sex (van der Vleuten et al. 2020; Shahbazian 2021). Although students often consider choosing professional fields their parents work at, they still seek guidance from older siblings, once again highlighting the role of siblingship (Rimmer 2014). Aforementioned studies largely discuss siblingship as a complementary factor contributing to children's success, which overlooks possibility of primary influence. There is an attention given to the within-family autonomy of older or first-born children but little discovered about traces or inter-sibling dynamics and even less known about adult children's perception on their siblings' role, giving most of the credit to parental rearing or peripheral "side-effects" of kin relations.

Besides implicitly suggesting passive agency of siblings in exchange and production of capital, scholars also overlook complexity and diversity of factors tightly connected to siblings: age gap, birth order, consanguinity, and co-residency to name a few. Heath et al. (2010) highlight intersection of different factors such as adoptive and half-/step-status of children and their academic activeness, where children sharing common parents seem to be more likely to continue education. Individuals that live separately from family due to work or education often start grow apart from siblings, seeking guidance and advise from outside influences such as

college friends, neighbors, and colleagues (Yucel and Yuan 2014). Here it is never assumed that social networks could be also shared by socio-economically stable or settled siblings as the life processes and social mobility were not considered besides time periods from childhood to adulthood.

Coping with conflicts in inter-familial context: siblings' role and parents' influence

Emergence of arguments and misunderstandings within a family can heavily affect social development in children, which poses importance to study how siblings cope with conflicts and whether they implement any socio-cultural capital in forms of tactics and ways of interactions to deal with such situations (Borairi et al. 2022; Skopp et al. 2005). Many studies have emphasized how siblings can be a supportive family member during parental disputes and how children resolve similar conflicts among themselves (Caya and Liem 1998; Hetherington 1999). But there is little information about how compromising technics and social tactics to solve conflicts change or modify over time, especially during teenage-adolescence years. There is probability of outside actors' involvement as children grow older and interact with other individuals more but possibility of this ability (to cope in arguments) to affect siblings' further social skills inside and outside kin is blurred and not investigated.

Family conflicts are mostly divided into parent-child and siblings' disputes where the former potentially showcases sibship support (Dunn and Herrera 1997). Conflicts among children seem to be rooted in rivalry for parents' attention (Montemayor and Hanson 1985; Young and Ehrenberg 2007). However, Montemayor and Hanson (1985) also conclude that the nature of conflicts between two groups is quite similar, suggesting the simultaneous appearance of arguments both with parents and siblings. In the latter example the probability of emotional support and closure from a sibling is much lower. On the other hand, it is important to discuss the emergence of mitigation tactics within siblings' conflicts: Recchia and Howe (2009) state that older or first-born children often implement verbal solutions in conflicts and even guide discussion, showing the autonomy children have that does not involve parents or require adults' intervention. What might propose siblings' active agency in the creation of social skills for solving conflicts is their conscious evaluation of sibship quality: misunderstandings with siblings provide a great indicator of how children might perceive each other (Gulløv et al. 2014). Thus, discussing conflicts together seem to become the main area where children gain power and agency. Nevertheless, it is crucial to point out parental influence in this discussion. According to Montemayor and Hanson (1985), conflicts happening between parents and children often lead to similar disputes between siblings. But children, whose family used certain tactics during arguments to solve rather than ignore or withdrawal from it later, are more successful in negotiating and mitigating conflicts with friends (Dunn and Herrera 1997). However, such association lacks the explanation chain of who in the family and how exactly affected children to implement these skills to outside communities. The authors admit a crucial role of children's order that determines power dynamic among siblings, giving more autonomy to older ones (Recchia and Howe 2009b). Nevertheless, just like it assumably works with educational involvement, there is a possibility older or first-born children can pass down social capital to younger sibling in form of certain behavioral and verbal techniques during conflicts that they might have created themselves or adapted from parents. There is little known about long-term effects of conflict-solving skills in adulthood but Allan (1977) states that siblings maintain "solidarity" after separating their ways. In other words, they visit, call, and check up on their family despite having little desire or time (Allan 1977). The study does not specify what poses such determination to keep in touch with a kin circle besides cultural influence but there could be possibility of older siblings' involvement in this tradition.

Intersectional involvement of different variables still holds its role in current discussion. As siblings grow older, parents, especially mothers, become more conscious of their interactions and often get involved as a mediator in negative interactions (Allan 1977; Gulløv et al. 2014). Moreover, there is also distinction in siblings' sex as children of same sex tend argue more and girls seem to be more motivated to solve conflicts (Borairi et al. 2022; Dunn

and Herrera 1997; Recchia and Howe 2009b). Remarriage of parents and co-residence also greatly affect which sibling children consider to be close, as a result influencing exchange of socio-cultural capital through interactions and discussions (Gulløv et al. 2014; Hetherington 1999). Being younger child brings disadvantage in disputes because they lack power over older sibling, leading to even more misunderstandings and coercive behavior to stand up for own opinion (Recchia and Howe 2009). Thus, age gap between children and their birth order can predict how power dynamic will work out among siblings. Although it is challenging to consider all aforementioned variables, the methodological structure of research can still give some advantage to cover them and attempt to explain their role, which will be discussed in the Methodology section.

Theoretical Framework

The inventor of social and cultural capital concepts, Pierre Bourdieu (1986) differentiates them from economic capital, stating that they are consequent to economic capital. The importance of social and cultural capital is determined by their role in education and social mobility, that in turn, facilitates economic capital (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990). Nagel (2009) revisits cultural mobility theory, highlighting the importance of cultural capital and how individuals achieve mobility through cultural participation, which could take different forms like reading books, attending theater, and practicing traditions. Thus, unlike economic capital, socio-cultural capital takes “symbolic” meaning, which explains their diverse indicators in form extracurricular activities, networks, cultural values and views (Bourdieu 1986). Bourdieu (1986) is not specific when explaining transmission of the capital but gives it rather hierarchical nature, which is prevalent in families where capital is shared to children from parents. A similar theory was proposed by Downey (2001), who explains “dilution” of socio-cultural resources from parents to children. Nevertheless, neither Bourdieu, nor Downey considers distribution, exchange, or reciprocity of capital among siblings. The only horizontal exchange that happens between children is suggested by Downey (2001), where distribution of socio-cultural capital becomes a competition among siblings. Although it explains rivalry in childhood, there is a lack of attention to time, versatility of siblingship, and instead extensive focus on parental role, which undermines other possible scenarios where adults are simply absent or not distributing the capital. In cases where the agent who transmits capital is not specified, theory falls on outside factors or institutions such as education that is already dependent on pre-existing capital children acquire (Bourdieu 1986; Bourdieu and Passeron 1990). Lastly, Dekker’s (2001) analysis in favor of cultural transmission in education, if contextualized in sibship and learning, can suggest horizontal capital exchange between children, giving it a reciprocal nature. Thus, it is fair to conclude that presented conceptual framework can hardly predict or explain influence of sibship in the capital creation or exchange unless undertaken through kinship institution. Nevertheless, it still presents fundamental explanations and alternative concepts to this complex process, giving a firm foundation for future research.

Methodology

Despite the abundance of quantitative data analysis in many aforementioned studies, this research poses the need to take on a qualitative approach with narrative-based focus. Since most of literature lacks causal explanations and gives little power to respondents for guidance, upcoming project will conduct in-depth interviews with chronological semi-planned questionnaire: interviews will start with discussion of respondents’ first memories about their siblings and their family relationship. For a more organized flow, interviews will have 4-5 stages with five years’ worth information (for instance, 20-year-old participant will answer to questions for four stages from childhood to adulthood). Further, collected data will be analyzed in a classical qualitative method through coding into themes. To avoid unreliable assumptions or conclusions regarding causal or direct influence of siblingship on respondents’ lives, self-reflective questions will be asked to see how individuals perceive siblings’ role and whether they consider them to be a direct influence in education-based decision making or implementing conflict-solving skills.

One of the main concerns of methodology lies in the researcher-interviewee relationship as sampling audience shares many key identities: young adults, Kazakhstani, could be potentially familiar with each other and most likely college students. Thus, it is important to ensure the quality of data collected on interviews and maintenance of professional distance for comfortable and safe environment. McConnell-Henry et al. (2010) suggests to limit physical distance and emotional labor to avoid turning interview into therapeutic session. Balancing out power dynamic with the respondent is also crucial because the research might bring out unpleasant memories or intimate information: trying to give interviewee guide discussion could potentially make atmosphere more friendly and trusting (Merriam et al. 2001). To avoid uncoordinated interview, following a logical and thematic “sequence” of questions with in-between summary of answers will be prioritized whole interview (Berry 1999). Thus, being to some extent “similar” to participants can give advantage to a researcher in obtaining rich information as long as precautions and reflective environment is maintained.

Methodology

Research Sample, Recruitment and Feasibility

Since the research is narrative-focused, it requires qualitative methodology with semi-structured in-depth interviews in both online and offline format. Research sample is quite broad and flexible: participants are over 18 and since the study is held in Kazakhstan as a framework, participants have to obtain citizenship, meaning they are more likely to be already adapted to the country’s regulations, cultures, and norms. In other words, there are no limitations in race, ethnic group, and age groups as long as they have citizenship. The study used snowball and convenience sampling by recruiting participants through Telegram chats of university. There were 18 potential candidates, where 9 of them were contacted and interviewed. Most of respondents are at least 20 years old with one or more siblings. Although link for registration for the interview was sent to three large chats with more than 100 users, all of interviewees are female students studying at Nazarbayev University.

Prior to meeting participants, online pilot interview was conducted with familiar person. The main purpose of such procedure was to ensure neutrality of questions and convenience of online interviewing. As a result, it was clear that talking on a phone for the duration of more than 30 minutes constrained the interviewee as they were either distracted by other uninvolved parties on the other side or had difficulty to concentrate on the questions. Therefore, all interviews were provisioned offline at university campus or public places near it.

Data Analysis

Gathered data was analyzed through three stages of open, axial, and selective coding: first words and phrases intuitively assessed as important and/or suggested to be crucial by software platform will be categorized into concepts and further refined and grouped on second (axial) and third (selective) stages (Williams and Moser, 2019). First stage of coding was conducted by using ATLAS.ti platform and its AI tool that highlighted key words and primary findings. Later, these modes of code were taken into consideration and were refined further to distinguish quotes and rename themes. Axial coding was conducted manually through transcripts and themes’ locations, and finally grouped into categories for the findings. Nevertheless, to avoid relying completely on AI tools, coding followed “5W-1H” rule mentioned by Williams and Moser (2019), taking into account questions like when, why, and how to provision the quality of analysis.

Ethical Considerations

There was a minimal risk that participants might feel emotional discomfort about some questions because they might recall some unpleasant moments from their childhood or present time related to their siblings or parents. However, questions for interviews are built with caution and consideration that some topics can potentially bring discomfort to the participant.

Thus, the structure of the interview is quite prudent and prioritizes the well-being of respondents. All respondents were eager to answer every question no avoidance was noticed during interviews. Moreover, participants were reminded that they can always choose to not answer questions to avoid triggering unpleasant memories.

The electronic form of consent was sent in advance before the interview, so the respondent was aware of their rights and purpose of the study. In addition, they were informed that any question is welcome before we meet. Afterwards, a printed consent form was signed by participant on the meeting. Before starting our discussion and after we finished the interview, participant was asked if they have any question about research. Oral consent was not used despite it was prepared in advance, since all interviews were online.

Findings

Effect of proximity, age gap, and life stages

All participants in the research come from a family of two to six children, which poses a crucial need to determine fundamental factors that contribute to the development of siblingship. Therefore, before discussing socio-cultural capital, it is important to resolve ambiguousness of the term “nature of the siblingship”. According to findings, there are three main factors that shape the relationship between siblings: geographical proximity, age gap, and life stages. These concepts intertwine throughout years and can explain certain patterns among siblingships noticed during the interviews.

The most noticeable factor that seems to be evident in siblings’ relationship is the age gap. Six out of nine participants have siblings older or younger than them by more than seven years, which most of them admit to be a “big” difference. However, being older/younger by four to six years is perceived to be a “manageable” gap in terms of the nature of siblingship. At first glance age difference serves as a background information until it gets involved with life stages: childhood for participants with much older siblings is associated with loneliness, blurry memories, and isolation from them. As one of the interviewee who has an older sister states:

“As long as I remember myself, I was always alone. I played with Barbies by myself, like, this doll is talking to another doll, except I am the only person playing. My sister was studying abroad and brother went to work, so no one could really play with me.”

According to many participants, such isolation was usually associated with the events and life styles that they were experiencing with other siblings. This is where geographical proximity plays a key role: it either separates siblings more, or reunites them. Although absence of or rare interaction with older siblings in childhood might be associated with weak relationship, the same long proximity seems to be a positive factor later in life, while close geographical location in further life stages puts a strain on siblingship interactions. For instance, when younger sibling moves on to other important individual steps such as high school or university, they might still live in another city as an older sibling but their relationship turn out to be more manageable and relatively closer. One participant who has a younger sister shares:

“Now that she is in high school and is preparing to study abroad, I would say that our relationship got better. We don’t bicker like we did before. Maybe I changed or she did, we are both so stubborn *laughs* I was even surprised that she would want to go out with me and spend some time when I come back to hometown.”

Another participant who has a younger sister and three brothers also states:

“Now I come home once in like three months, she would randomly send me some TikTok videos and photos of herself, though I barely write myself. Sometimes she even asks me how I am, like she knows I am struggling, it’s amazing how she senses that”.

In other words, living apart or seeing each other less frequently during similar or close life stages puts some loose strings into siblingship and creates a space for a safer and free interaction. In alternative, however, living under one roof at the same/similar stage causes frequent conflicts:

“Our relationship was very complicated when I lived with my family. Because I share my room with one of the sisters, it’s difficult to have time alone. And they would annoy me with questions or make me do house chore when I am busy...”

says a participant with five sisters and one younger brother. Several respondents claim that moving out and seeing their sibling less made them handle misunderstandings better, crediting their experiences after living apart from the family and as a result starting “cherishing” their siblingship more. Some participants comment:

“...I started accepting that this person is my dear soul, even though I am not very close to her.”

“I think because I’ve had so many on and off friendships here [university], I started cherishing my siblings more because they are permanent, they won’t abandon me because we will always be siblings.”

Possibility of the older sibling to separate from parents or siblings spending most of their teenage years together highly depend on the age gap, which in turn affects siblings’ dynamic. If big age difference showcases isolated relationship in childhood and foreshadows parental role of the older child later in life, close gap in childhood obtains rival and hostile nature, while turning into friend-like dynamic as years go by. According to these differences, production and exchange of capital among siblings becomes more cohesive and easier to understand.

Older sibling: Educational support

The most evident social capital that older siblings produce is educational support, which involves providing networks, materials, time for sharing knowledge, and advice on learning. At first stages educational involvement of siblings might be initiated by parents or internal “duty”:

“Well, she [mother] was like, ‘don’t refuse a child, help her, ask her’ so of course I had to help her in school work”

“Since they prepared me to his birth since mom was pregnant, it kind of set to me in my brain that I will be like my older brother and sister. So, the best I could do is to help with homework even though I hated it.”

On the other hand, even though it might be guided with parents, in some cases younger children “activate” this capital. This happens mostly in older years when younger siblings are preparing for university entrance exams or are interested in certain professional field.

“He got interested in our university, so he would constantly ask me application details, majors and ask me if I have any old tests left.”

Although educational support seems to be quite unconscious among siblings, it is still the most prominent capital that respondents acknowledge to be “their doing”, especially if they still continue to provide it to their younger siblings.

Exchange of social capital: emotional involvement

Emotional support is the only social capital that was seen to be consciously exchanged. In other words, siblings, no matter what age, are able to provide emotional connection in its absence. According to participants’ answers, production of support comes in return to its absence from parents or any other outside source. However, because parents are perceived to be the first actors involved in emotional involvement, when they fail to provide it, this role switches onto the sibling, especially when it is framed in intrafamilial conflict.

Although most of words of affirmation, regular calls or texts, physical touch and presence come from the older child, in families that respondents describe to be “traditional and strict”, such involvement is also initiated by younger siblings that either protect their sibling from parental mistreatment or support oldest child’s opinion. As was mentioned by one of respondents,

“I also argued with them, I was so angry that they are not thankful to her. She was our bred-winner for some time. And my father can say some very hurtful stuff...She usually just isolated herself in her room, so I hugged her and we sat like that together in silence and then talked later.”

Since oldest child is either choose to avoid confronting parents or fail to do it successfully, younger sibling takes on a role to stand as an “advocator” or moral support for them. In some rare cases, it is the older child that initiates emotional contact with the younger sibling but often this sibling has either sibling older than them or was lucky enough to receive relatively less strict rearing from parents. It is also important to note that a “social capital” status of emotional involvement can be questioned since its benefits on siblings is quite ambiguous and almost secondary: some participants mentioned how it was more reassuring to move in with the sibling after receiving their support or how emotional closure between siblings led to more financial support from the older child. Therefore, although emotional involvement does bring some psychological benefits to children and loses tension with their parents, greater advantages it brings can be described as merely associative with aforementioned benefits but not causal.

Younger sibling: a mediator in the household

As was already mentioned above, older children are often met with conservative or strict parenting, making them act more obediently in relation to family conflicts. Since the parental pressure falls on the oldest, younger siblings obtain opportunity to be more vocal and open about discussions and resolving conflicts, which makes them become a “mediator” between parents and children. Two respondents talked about bullying of their younger brothers at school, which made them get involved in this issue despite living in another city. As one of the interviewee states,

“Well, I talked to my parents carefully, saying that it’s not okay, they pressure him too much and because of that he is not telling them about

bullying. My mother went to school after that and we are solving this problem together with a family.”

Second participant was also able to console younger brothers:

“They cried in front of me, I told them it is okay to cry and show emotions. It’s all because of father making them act masculine like “men” ...I hugged them and talked to them about the bullying. I also involved mother so she could go to school. They study at the different place now.”

Aforementioned respondents both have at least one older and younger sibling, making them a middle child that takes on a function of the older protective sibling for the youngest ones. In addition, since they have less constraints in sharing their concerns with parents on behalf of others, they are able to smooth out or facilitate solutions to problems. In other words, because the oldest children take on the “hit” from parents, less pressure falls on siblings that come after them, giving “mediator” sibling opportunity to be more vocal and approachable towards household discussions. On the other hand, however, several respondents stressed “unserious” behavior from their parents when they express family concerns: because parents view younger sibling as “naïve and inexperienced”, they can give little credit to their words or concerns, especially if child still lives with parents or have not reached adulthood. Thus, in a long run siblings can lose their “mediator” status if their role is not acknowledged or fails to help other siblings.

Boy and girl siblings: importance of gender and emergence of the new family

Although most participants had only sisters or youngest brothers, there are several cases where female respondent’s relationship was unique when it involved older male siblings. According to interview answers, oldest male children tend to get separated from family in young age by either moving in with grandparents or studying in another city. Therefore, despite close age gap between second or third female child, relationship between the oldest and younger siblings was strained during childhood. Interestingly, it was usually a rival feeling that came from a male sibling that deteriorated their relationship. However, in later years, this siblingship between oldest brother and sister takes more of “materialistic” character. For instance, participants mention how brothers would often give them money for lunch, cover some part of rent, or offer lending tools for studying such as calculator or textbooks. When asked about emotional aspect of their relationship, respondents struggled to describe them, stating that they are not “that close” or they “rarely talk about such things”. Therefore, it seems older brothers try to compensate emotional closure with economic capital. When brothers (on some occasion sisters) form their own families and start rearing children, their involvement in siblingship seems to fade even more: they become more concerned about own household issues and as respondents say, “leave family behind”, to solve new problems arising from marriage and child rearing. In other words, accumulation and distribution of available capital of married siblings become concentrated on their households and not on siblings.

When it comes to youngest brothers, the emergence heteronormative gender roles turn to be crucial in the nature of siblings’ interactions. For instance, when brothers have not yet reached puberty, they are not viewed as “boys” in the family, so during conflicts parents do not involve topics of masculinity. Subsequently, older sisters have freer and “affectionate” environment with their younger brothers: they are more comfortable in physical interactions such as kisses and hugs and prone to share their concerns to sisters with less prejudice. As time goes on, however, boys start interacting with the world of traditional ideologies of masculinity

at school and with fathers, making them less attached to sisters. Now they are not just siblings or brothers but “boys turning to men” which translates to “no crying and complaining”. Several participants have shared their concerns about mental state of their brothers who avoid talking about personal issues. As a result, their interaction begins to be based on educational and financial support, similarly in older brother-younger sister siblingships.

Discussion

Distribution and obtainment of socio-cultural capital has been viewed to have hierarchical-vertical nature, coming from parent to child (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). As findings showcase, capital exchange can be shared horizontally too, which increases the importance of siblingship. Although this is evident in interviews, there are significant elements that influence who produce capital first, how it is shared or exchanged, in what form capital is transferred among siblings, and when it happens. One of the most evident social capitals that studies suggest to be novel that comes from siblings is educational support, but it is supplementary during childhood and takes on a bigger role when younger siblings reach significant stage of their lives such as application to universities (Jæger, 2011; Rimmer, 2014). Subsequently, sharing knowledge about learning certain topics, offering old tests, and being involved in academia together with siblings is quite relevant in Kazakhstan, especially considering that educational involvement goes through metamorphosis throughout years where it switches from mild tasks in helping with homework to serious discussions about future profession; thus, educational involvement takes on the most prevalent social capital among siblings.

Solving arguments and using tactics to stabilize conflicts in the family was suggested to be social capital for children to further develop their argumentative skills (Borairi et al. 2022; Skopp et al. 2005). This study did not find any particular mechanisms implemented by siblings that helped them to cope with misunderstandings but intrafamilial arguments give opportunity for children to produce and exchange emotional support for each other. In cases when one of siblings is unable to stand up for themselves, what happened to many respondents, others offer sibling in distress emotional closure, which later might improve their relationship, further leading to secondary benefits for either of the sibling. Since familial arguments are usually framed in domestic issues like chores and cooking, conflicts barely have any “solution” to cope with them. Thus, instead of consciously focusing on how to avoid these situations, siblings seek moral support from each other, making emotional involvement reciprocal in nature, unlike educational support that usually comes from older siblings. In terms of advantages, this form social capital seems to live up to its function as a tool for siblings to deal with stress, consequently improving their ties, which brings even more benefits such as secured roof with a sibling, better communication on decision-making, and living through conflicts easier.

In accordance to elements influencing production and exchange of socio-cultural capital, siblings develop relationships that could be described as mentor-, friend-, and parent-sibship over time depending on factors. Mentor-sibship usually comes from families where older sibling separates from family in early stage and offers wisdom and useful networks to younger children who either want to follow mentor’s steps or is willing to know more. Interestingly, such dynamics usually seem to happen between same-sex siblingships, where brothers look up to older brother and sisters towards older sisters. Parent-sibship involves economic capital as complementary to social and cultural ones: children with big age gap (more than 7 years) tend to develop this relationship due to initial independence of the oldest sibling who ensures same “success” of the younger ones by taking them under own wing, especially if younger siblings plan to move out or attend same school/university. In addition, they often

offer financial support too. Mentor- and parent-sibships are not necessarily mutually exclusive but obtain certain peculiarities, such as mentor-sibship does not require big age gap but can be easier developed when both siblings are of the same sex. Finally, friend-sibship is associated with close age gap and negative relationship in childhood, most likely due to the absence of hierarchy or authority between children that go through relatively same life stages: together graduating, applying to jobs, and submitting applications. Therefore, their siblingship most likely turns to companionship and mutual support during first years of adulthood. This type of relationship is the most dependent on age gap and geographical proximity as children that spend their life stages together under one roof are more likely to have similar struggles and views unlike those that get separated.

Age gap is the main factor that sets hierarchy within siblingship: who gets to become first to produce and share socio-cultural capital. Therefore, it is no surprise that oldest siblings tend to take on parental role and provide children especially if their guardians fail or unable to do so. It is important to note, however, that extremely big age gaps such as 15-20 years difference often means the oldest children create own families, shifting their distribution of capital on their children and married life. Thus, younger siblings are expected to receive benefits from parents or create own. Moreover, the greater the age gap, the more capital is shared with younger children unless oldest gets married: big difference indicates at certain separated time and engagement with external world outside familial advantages, making them experienced and full of new information for young siblings. Life stages also directly relate to age gap since the greater age gap means longer distance between their life standings: the older child in university has already gone through difficulties of applications and the younger sibling in elementary school just started learning multiplication table. Certainly, it is not guaranteed that elementary student will attend university like the older sibling, which binds this factor with the effect of proximity. Spending time like driving to school, having lunch, or study sessions “expose” siblings to each other, which might either motivate them to live differently or follow mutual lead. In many cases where age gap is bigger than six-seven years, geographical proximity separates siblings as the oldest moves out or starts a new family. In other words, proximity is a factor that depends on age gap while simultaneously affects and depends on life stages.

Besides aforementioned themes, the parental influence cannot be ignored in this discussion as they play fundamental role in creating environment for siblings to produce capital. However, they do not serve “mediator” role per se (Allan 1977; Gulløv et al. 2014) but as mitigators of conflicts between siblings; thus, arguments between siblings are not resolved but become more private out of parents’ sight. As was mentioned in *Findings*, it is middle children that serve as a “bridge” between siblings and parents, mediating and softening edges. Finally, parents’ inability or unwillingness to provide certain capital also positively relates to children’s utilization of own sources, while close attention to their talents and education at early stages sets foundation for later years when siblings use knowledge and interests to produce own socio-cultural capital. In such cases, younger siblings receive significant amount of capital both from parents and siblings.

Limitations of the study

Although study shares crucial insights on kinship in Kazakhstan, it still retains significant limitations important for discussion. One of the most prominent issues in the research lies within sampling: no male participant was interviewed and in case of individual recruitment, potential male respondents disagreed to participate. Therefore, there is a need for further investigation into first-person narrative of male siblings. Another factor that contributes

to the limitation is the pool of participants' socio-economic status: all respondents are able to afford dorm, apartment, study at prestigious university, and used to be exposed to many cultural and social opportunities since childhood such as exploring hobbies and getting tutors for extra lessons. As was mentioned in literature review, families with disadvantaged background tend to accumulate socio-cultural capital on other kin members or outside actors and utilize it better than those with higher socio-economic status. Therefore, researching how socio-cultural capital flows among siblings from different families can potentially show novel findings in how capital is produced, used, and exchanged throughout years.

Concluding Remarks

Concepts and issues related to families in Kazakhstan are often described to be private and out of public reach, which hides away potential to discover and research kinship in relation to more complex institutions such as education, economy, justice system, and so on. Therefore, understanding internal peculiarities of familial relationships could explain many trends and patterns seen outside primary institution such as siblings studying at the same university. This capstone project tried to explore “hows” and “whys” of sibling relations and their role in exchange of socio-cultural capital that can possibly affect future educational achievement of siblings, their choices regarding employment, moving out, and separating from family. Since it was widely assumed that capital distribution happens only in parent-to-child style, looking into horizontal exchange gives more perspective on how siblings cope with stressful situations, respond to influence of external factors, and how these themes affect their relationship with each other in a long-term, subsequently intertwining with the production of socio-cultural capital.

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