

# CHINESE ADOLESCENTS' RELATIONSHIPS WITH MOTHERS, FATHERS, AND SIBLINGS: IMPLICATIONS FOR YOUTH'S INTERNALIZING AND EXTERNALIZING PROBLEMS

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## INTRODUCTION

- Families are critical social contexts that continually shape children's and adolescents' development. Although youth increasingly spend time with peers outside of home during adolescence, the influences of family relations remain salient (Sheeber, Davis, Leve, Hops, & Tildesley, 2007).
- Family relationships often included feelings of closeness, intimacy, and affection concurrent with conflict, controversy, and disagreement. Hence family relationships can serve both as risk and protective factors for youth adjustment. Problems in family relationships have been recognized as a critical risk factor for youth's internalizing and externalizing problems (e.g. Bond, Toumbourou, Thomas, Catalano, & Patton, 2005), whereas positive family relationships could serve to protect adolescents from the risk for malfunctioning, such as inhibiting delinquency and substance use (Mason, Cauce, Gonzales, & Hiraga, 1994; Hawkins et al., 1992).
- To date, there has been a tendency to focus exclusively on parent-offspring relationships—mostly either as a general term referring to both parents or only on the part of mothers. According to family systems theory, however, families are composed of multiple subsystems characterized with interconnectedness (Cox & Paley, 2003).
- The goal of the current study was to examine the implications of multiple relationship qualities across multiple family for adolescents' internalizing and externalizing behaviors in contemporary China. Advancing previous research, we examined positivity and conflict concurrently in the same model, while simultaneously considering relationships with mothers, fathers, and siblings as unique predictors of adolescent adjustment.

## METHOD

- **Participants**
  - Data came from a three year longitudinal study of Chinese adolescents. The current study used data from waves 2 and 3 and only focused on youth with biological siblings.
  - Final sample consisted of 460 participants. On average, these youth were 16.08 years old (SD = 1.81) and included 294 girls and 166 boys.
- **Procedure**
  - At the initial recruitment in 2013, participants were 7th graders or 10th graders from four secondary schools. The second (in 2014) and third (in 2015) wave of data collection occurred at the same schools following the same cohort.
- **Measures**
  - Relationship positivity and conflict: The Network of Relationships Inventory (NRI; Furman & Buhrmester, 2009)
  - Sibling relationship: Sibling relationship inventory and NRI (Blyth & Foster-Clark, 1987; Furman & Buhrmester, 2009).
  - Depressive symptoms: the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale-Revised (CESD-R; Radloff, 1977)
  - Loneliness: the UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell, Peplau, & Ferjusun, 1978).
  - Problem behaviors: a self-reported measure that was developed for the National Youth Survey (Elliott & Ageton, 1980; Elliott, Huizinga, & Ageton, 1985).
- **Analysis**
  - A path analysis model (Figure 1) was developed to explore the associations between father-youth, mother-youth, and sibling relationship quality and adolescents' internalizing symptoms and externalizing behaviors.
  - Multi-group comparison were conducted between low and high age-gap groups in order to test the hypothesized moderating effect of sibling age spacing.

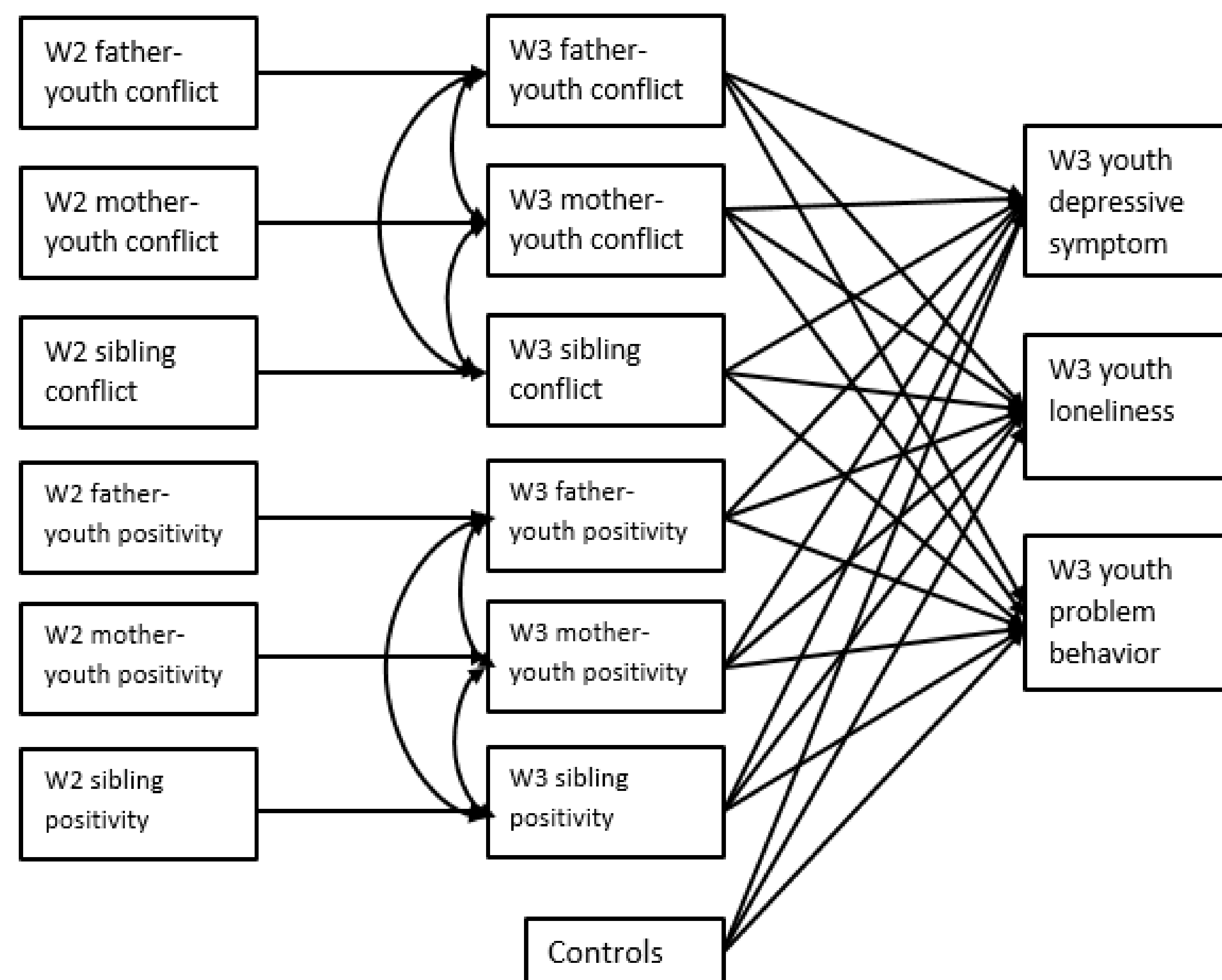


Figure 1. Path model to examine the associations between father-youth, mother-youth and sibling relationship quality and adolescents' internalizing symptoms and externalizing behaviors.

## RESULTS

Table 1  
Direct and Indirect Effects in the Path Model

Predictors	Depression		Loneliness		Problem Behavior	
	$\beta$	SE $\beta$	$\beta$	SE $\beta$	$\beta$	SE $\beta$
<i>Direct Effects</i>						
Parental education	.03	.04	-.04	.04	.01	.04
Youth age (W2)	.02	.04	.03	.04	-.05	.04
Age spacing	.00	.04	.00	.04	-.01	.04
Youth gender <sup>a</sup>	-.08	.04	.02	.04	.47***	.04
Gender composition <sup>b</sup>	-.03	.04	-.02	.04	-.06	.04
Friend positivity (W3)	-.13**	.05	-.07	.05	.12**	.04
Friend conflict (W3)	.06	.05	-.01	.05	.08	.04
Maternal positivity (W3)	.04	.07	-.04	.07	-.03	.06
Paternal positivity (W3)	-.19**	.06	-.14*	.06	-.22***	.06
Sibling intimacy (W3)	-.04	.05	.00	.05	.04	.04
Maternal conflict (W3)	.18**	.06	.08	.06	.10*	.05
Paternal conflict (W3)	.08	.06	.10*	.06	.10*	.05
Sibling conflict (W3)	.17***	.05	.29***	.05	.01	.04
<i>Indirect Effects</i>						
Maternal positivity (W2)	.02	.04	-.03	.04	-.02	.04
Paternal positivity (W2)	-.11**	.04	-.08*	.04	-.13***	.03
Sibling intimacy (W2)	-.02	.03	.00	.03	.02	.02
Maternal conflict (W2)	.10**	.03	.04	.03	.06*	.03
Paternal conflict (W2)	.04	.03	.05*	.03	.05*	.03
Sibling conflict (W2)	.08**	.02	.13***	.02	.01	.02
R <sup>2</sup>	.171		.171		.339	

Note: <sup>a</sup>Youth gender: 0 = female, 1 = male. <sup>b</sup>Gender composition: 0 = same gender, 1 = mixed gender. Root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .07. \*  $p < .10$ . \*\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

## DISCUSSION

- Father-adolescent relationships uniquely contributed to youth's mental health and adjustment above and beyond other family relationships and friendship qualities.
- Results also revealed positive associations between perceived mother-offspring conflict and youth depressive symptoms as well as problem behaviors.
- Above and beyond parent-youth relationships and friendship quality, perceived conflictual sibling relationships predicted higher levels of depressive symptoms and loneliness.



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