

Global Evidence on the Effect of Siblings' Sex on Personality

Jan Feld

Abstract:

Does growing up with a sister compared to a brother affect a person's personality? Previous studies suggest the answer is yes, but their findings contradict each other. These contradictions might be driven by differences in effects across settings, the use of different methodologies, different outcome measures, or small and selective samples. In this paper, we provide a coherent and comprehensive analysis of the effect of a sibling's sex on adults' risk tolerance, trust, patience, the big five personality traits, and locus of control. We use data covering 83,431 people from 12 large representative surveys from nine countries (the United States, Great Britain, Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, Australia, Mexico, China, and Indonesia). This large sample size allows us to identify small effects and test for heterogeneity along relevant dimensions. To identify causal effects, we take advantage of the fact that the next younger sibling's sex is random, allowing us to estimate its effect on the older sibling's personality. We also estimate the correlation between the next older sibling's sex and the younger sibling's personality. For both approaches, we find no meaningful effects. Based on high statistical power and consistent results in the overall sample and relevant subsamples, our results suggest that siblings' sex does not affect personality.