

Firstborn Asians feel added pressure with family responsibilities

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Credit: George Hodan/public domain

When compared to European Americans, Asian-American firstborns feel the additional burden of being cultural brokers and having to take care of their immigrant parents and young siblings at the same time, says

a University of Michigan researcher.

Kaidi Wu, a U-M doctoral candidate in social psychology, was lead author of a study that explored how both groups—ages 18 to 25—viewed [sibling](#) relationships, their birth order and [family](#) relations.

Several positive themes of siblingship emerged from the study's interviews: feeling supported, appreciated and comforted during interactions with their siblings. Some participants disclosed that siblings alleviate pressure from parents that might otherwise cause conflict.

Along [birth order](#) themes, firstborns from both groups felt motivated to become role models for their younger siblings by having high-achievement levels, confidence and behavior. However, for some Asian-American later-borns, the pressure to measure up also stemmed in part from parents' tendency to compare their children, according to the study.

For firstborn Asian Americans, the sibling caregiving and cultural brokering responsibility—regardless of gender—created dual pressure, the study showed. In Asian cultures, the oldest son traditionally has greater obligations in the family, but more firstborn females are taking on these roles—even when there are young male siblings in the household, Wu said.

Asian-American families may rely more heavily on the [firstborn](#) than their counterparts for various reasons. But the increased family obligations may have an adverse impact on the older Asian-American siblings, such as greater depression and anxiety, the study cautioned.

Nevertheless, Wu said having siblings can be beneficial to Asian-American firstborns, when firstborns struggle with their parents' more traditional cultural perspectives (such as marrying a Chinese person because they are Chinese) and have their [younger siblings](#) to relate to.

This finding contrasts with previous research in which older siblings closely resemble parents' stance on Asian values and differ from later-borns who acculturate more easily into the mainstream American culture.

The findings appear in the *Journal of Family Issues*.

More information: Kaidi Wu et al. Perception of Sibling Relationships and Birth Order Among Asian American and European American Emerging Adults, *Journal of Family Issues* (2018). [DOI: 10.1177/0192513X18783465](https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X18783465)

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