

4th World Conference on Psychology, Counselling and Guidance WCPCG-2013
Comparison of Siblings Relationships in Families with Mentally
Retarded, Deaf and Nondisabled Children

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Abstract

The relationship between people with disabilities and their siblings appears as an important issue because of the important implications that it has in child development. It attracted the attention of many researchers to itself. The purpose of this study was to study the relationship between siblings of mentally retarded, deaf and nondisabled children. The method is a causal-comparative. Statistical population was including all mentally retarded, deaf and nondisabled students' mothers in Rasht in 2012. The subject was consisted of parents that were selected by cluster sampling method. Shaffer and Edgerton's behavioural indexes of siblings scale was used in this study. Results of one-way analysis of variance showed that there is no significant difference in Siblings Relationships in any of the groups. It can be concluded by the finding of this study that probably growing up with a disabled sibling cannot explain the reason of psychiatric and behavioural problems.

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Selection and peer-review under responsibility of Academic World Education and Research Center.

Keywords: Sibling Relationship, Mentally Retarded, Deaf;

1. Introduction

The literature on disability in families with children can be distilled into four areas: family stress, parent-child interaction, the role of siblings, and young carers. Children with disabled siblings can experience anxiety for a number of reasons. For example, they may react to parents' grief over the identification of impairment. Some feel guilty about not being "good" siblings or progressing beyond an older disabled sibling. Brothers and sisters are one of the family retail systems that consisted of first group of matched children (Minuchin & Fishman, 1996). Existing intimate and supporting relationships of siblings has a positive effect on individual reconciliation of siblings (Noller, 2005). Interactions with siblings can lead to language development, cognitive development and understanding sentiment and feelings. But if there is no interaction can cause bad behavior in children adolescence (Brody, 2004).

The presence of a mental retarded child can be a stress source for family (Jefferson, 2007) and affects deeply on Siblings Relationships. The situation of a mental retarded child requires the most money, attention and support of

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the family. Presence of brother or sister with disability can have a profound impact on siblings by creating a source of tension in family (Jefferson, 2007). In nondisabled siblings of these children, self-esteem and confidence is low. In these families, nondisabled siblings have been described as a forgotten people whom their duty is care and maintenance of their disabled siblings (Mikami & Pfiffner, 2008).

Numerous studies have shown that siblings of children with chronic illnesses or disabled children are at risk for behavioral disorders and mental health problems 1.6 to 2 times more than nondisabled student population (Dosen, 1989). Interaction of disabled people with their siblings is an important subject that has attracted the attention of many researchers. Research results obtained in this area can be organized in arrange of negative, neutral and positive relationship. As some studies refers to the negative effects such as fear, anger, anxiety, shame, guilt, jealousy, resentment, feelings of stress, loss, isolation and fear for the future of these relations. Studies of Fisman, Wolf, Ellison, Gillis, Freeman& Szatmari (1996) and Manor-Binyamin Abu-Ajaj (2012) have shown that brothers and sisters of disabled children are at compatibility problems and have low self-esteem than nondisabled children. Faber (2010) has been demonstrated adaptability problems in brother and sisters of disabled children. Various studies have found that when social support is provided, siblings of children with disabilities show higher self-concept and more positive family relationships particularly when there is a low level of parental stress.

Overall, the available literature has produced contradictory findings and conclusions on the potential effects of a disabled family member on a child. Much of this contradiction can be attributed to differences in the populations sampled, methods used and research questions, and to lack of comparison groups. Studies are affected by the contexts and assumptions of a particular time and place. Broader social, physical and economic influences have rarely been examined. Little is available on variations by geography (rural, urban etc.), family types, socio-economic status or ethnic background. The results of some other researches show positive results of these relationships. As some research result indicate that having disabled siblings can have family's empathy and sensitivity to each other, independence, altruism and compassion, better understanding individual differences, high confidence, high responsibility, more patient, leadership skills and more coherence of family (Pit-ten & Loots 2000; Dyson, Edgard 1996; Johensy 2000).

Other researchers have also reported that there is a slight difference in interaction between having disabled and nondisabled siblings. And in other words they showed the effects of existing disabled child in neutralized sibling relationships (Bischoff & Tingstrom, 1991; Cuskelly & Gunn, 2006; Verte, Hebbrecht & Roeyers, 2006).

It is clear that establishing and maintaining positive relationships of siblings are sustainable to specialists as an affective factor in reducing stress. So in order to reducing pressures and accommodating properly disabled children's family, these families especially are need to a special intervention program. In this regard experts are required to provide information about the relationship between brothers and sisters, so can offered appropriate intervention programs for these families. The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship of siblings in families with mental retarded, deaf and nondisabled children.

2. Methodology

The method of this study is a causal-comparative. Statistical population was including all mentally retarded, deaf and nondisabled students' mothers in Rasht in 2012. The sample of the study was the 106 mothers (33 mentally retarded, 33 deaf, and 40 nondisabled), that was selected by cluster sampling method.

2.1. Tools

Shaffer and Edgerton's (1981) behavioral indexes of siblings: This scale designed by Shaffer and Edgerton and revised by Hetherington, Henderson, & Reiss (1999). Revised form of the scale used for this research. This 32 –item

scale attempts to measure the negative and positive aspects of relationships between sisters and brothers. Positive aspects measured by three sub-scales include Companionship, Empathy, Teach/Manage, and negative ones measured by Rivalry, Aggression /Conflict, & Avoidance.

Developers of the scale reported the alpha coefficient (0/81) and, internal consistency coefficient of sub-scale in range of 0/90 – 0/34 and internal consistency coefficient of positive and negative aspects as 0/56 and 0/91, respectively (Hetherington & et al, 1999). In current research Test-retest reliability over a three-week period (0/86) and alpha coefficient (0/89) was also satisfactorily high.

3. Tables

The findings of the present research were analyzed using one-way analysis of variance. Descriptive indicators of the variable quality of sibling relationships and its dimensions are reported in Table 1.

Table 1. Mean and standard deviation of quality of sibling relationships and its dimensions in 3 groups

Group Dimension	Nondisabled		Deaf		Mental Retarded	
	Mean	Sd	Mean	Sd	Mean	Sd
companionship	14.87	2.20	15.12	2.04	13.64	2.99
empathy	13.87	2.03	14.24	0.87	13.57	2.52
Teach/Manage	10.22	2.28	10.39	1.50	10.06	1.98
Rivalry	17.97	2.93	17.97	2.35	17.18	3.34
Aggression/Conflict	13.02	2.42	13.06	1.89	12.42	2.99
Avoidance	14.12	1.46	14.27	1.86	13.27	3.01
total	84.10	10.51	85.06	5.63	80.15	13.94

According to table 1, highest average quality of siblings' relationship is 14.27 that were observed in deaf groups. Mentally retarded group with 13.27 is the lowest average in quality of sibling relationship. By analysing dimensions of these variables in three groups, the highest and lowest mean was observed in aggression and competition dimension.

In order to study whether there is a significant difference between sibling's relationships in three groups, ANOVA test was used (table 2).

Table 2. ANOVA test results to comparison sibling relationships of nondisabled, deaf and mentally retarded children

	Sum of squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Between Group	453.222	2	226.611	2.022	0.138
Within Group	11545.721	103	112.094		

P< *0/05

According to the results of ANOVA test (F= 2.022, P< 0.138), observed differences is not statistically significant among means of groups

4. Discussion and conclusion

The siblings of children with developmental disabilities can have an effect on the child with disability as well as sibling's social competence. There is some evidence that children with siblings with developmental disabilities may be at risk for developing behavioral difficulties. The purpose of this study was to study the relationship between siblings in families with mentally retarded, deaf and nondisabled children. ANOVA test showed that there was not a significant difference in sibling relationships of nondisabled, deaf and mentally retarded children. These findings are

consistent with studies that are referred to ineffective or even positive effects of disabled person to their healthy brothers and sisters at home. In a study on children and adolescent with disabilities in family, it was found that the children have enjoyed high confidence and ability to express, so nice to be able to raise theirs. They did not report concern about maintenance of disabled individual at home. In general behavioral problems of these children are reported a little (Blacher & Hofton, 1993).

This finding is not consistent with research results of Manor Benjamin & Abo Ajad (2012) that showed siblings of mentally retarded children have low self-esteem and high stress. Research results of Farber (2010) will reveal as an opposite finding in brothers and sisters of autistic children. Results of Faber (2010) showed that there is positive relationship between conflict and competition with high activity, anger, anxiety and depression in interactions of children's autistic siblings. According to the parents, depression and high activity in children's autistic siblings is more than non-autistic siblings.

In explaining these findings, we can say that having disabled siblings may generally have a positive effect on the lives of these citizens, as numerous studies have shown that disabled sibling can be followed by empathy and sensitivity of family towards each other, independence, altruism and compassion, better understanding of individual differences, high confidence, high responsibility, more patience, leadership skills and more coherent of family (Pitten Cate & Loots ,2000; Dyson & Edgard,1996 ; Johensy, 2000). Also many siblings have a spiritual look at this situation. These siblings can be a good source for their brother or sister. These siblings can have a significant role in the emotional, social and intellectual development of their disabled brother or sister.

In fact it can be argue that psychological impact of a disabled brother or sister on their siblings can be modified or intensified by some factors such as parental care, environmental factors and social supports. As these children have an opportunity to express self-esteem or could state problems that have about their disabled siblings such as social problems arising from presence of this sibling, feeling of shame and embarrassment, can see moderating in psychological effects. If you do not provide adjusted terms, these children will develop psychological and behavioral disorders that can greatly affect their future. So help to raise awareness of children to the situation of their disabled brother or sister will be effective in promoting their reconciliation level and would result in increasing social adjustment and improving of their behavioral problems (Dyson & Edgard, 1989 ; Lobato & Kao, 2002).

The stress and coping difficulties of parents having children with developmental disabilities have been studied from both positive and negative points of view. Unfortunately, numerous studies tend to highlight the negative aspects of having a child with disability. These negative factors include: affecting the family's self-esteem, burdening the family's emotional resources and coping strategies, interrupting the nondisabled routine of the family, and depriving personal growth opportunities. All these negative impacts may lead parents to adopt maladaptive coping skills including feelings of guilt, pessimism, hostility, aggression and avoidance. Considering findings of the present research and other similar research, it can be conclude that growing with a disabled sibling cannot explain the presence of psychiatric and behavioral problems. It appears that factors such as parental psychiatric status, family socioeconomic status, age differences, family size, interactions and data on disability, behavioral and social support, all can have an important role in psychological impact arising by presence of disabled children (Nancy, 2003) that proposed to investigate in subsequent studies. And also regarding to the maternal instinct in girls and back marking of maternal behavior, it seems that sisters likely to have more success in establishing positive relationship with disabled children than brothers. So it is proposed that broader research should be carried out considering this issue.

Acknowledgements

We appreciate all who helped us in this research.

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