



ELSEVIER

 JOURNAL OF
 ADOLESCENT
 HEALTH

www.jahonline.org

Original article

Siblings Are Special: Initial Test of a New Approach for Preventing Youth Behavior Problems

 Mark E. Feinberg, Ph.D., Anna R. Solmeyer, Ph.D., Michelle L. Hostetler, Ph.D. *,
 Kari-Lyn Sakuma, Ph.D., M.P.H., Damon Jones, Ph.D., and Susan M. McHale, Ph.D.

Prevention Research Center, College of Health and Human Development, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania
Article history: Received May 22, 2012; Accepted October 5, 2012

Keywords: Prevention; Siblings; Family; Human development; Middle childhood; Adolescent behavior; Risky behavior; Substance use; Program outcomes; Evaluation studies

 See Related Editorial p. 151

A B S T R A C T

Purpose: A growing body of research documents the significance of siblings and sibling relationships for development, mental health, and behavioral risk across childhood and adolescence. Nonetheless, few well-designed efforts have been undertaken to promote positive and reduce negative youth outcomes by enhancing sibling relationships.

Methods: Based on a theoretical model of sibling influences, we conducted a randomized trial of Siblings Are Special (SIBS), a group-format afterschool program for fifth graders with a younger sibling in second through fourth grades, which entailed 12 weekly afterschool sessions and three Family Nights. We tested program efficacy with a pre- and post-test design with 174 families randomly assigned to condition. In home visits at both time points, we collected data via parent questionnaires, child interviews, and observer-rated videotaped interactions and teachers rated children's behavior at school.

Results: The program enhanced positive sibling relationships, appropriate strategies for parenting siblings, and child self-control, social competence, and academic performance; program exposure was also associated with reduced maternal depression and child internalizing problems. Results were robust across the sample, not qualified by sibling gender, age, family demographics, or baseline risk. No effects were found for sibling conflict, collusion, or child externalizing problems; we will examine follow-up data to determine if short-term impacts lead to reduced negative behaviors over time.

Conclusions: The breadth of the SIBS program's impact is consistent with research suggesting that siblings are an important influence on development and adjustment and supports our argument that a sibling focus should be incorporated into youth and family-oriented prevention programs.

© 2013 Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine. All rights reserved.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONTRIBUTION

This study represents one of the few randomized trials ever conducted to harness the power of sibling relationships to promote youth adjustment. To our knowledge, this is the only sibling relationship-focused prevention trial that has used a universal approach to promote youth adjustment and family relationships in early adolescence.

This study was designed to test a novel approach to promoting youth development and family relationships before adolescence, a period of increased risk. Siblings play a key role in

each other's adjustment [1,2]. Research on children and adolescents reveals concordance between siblings' adjustment [3–5] as well as links between sibling relationship qualities (e.g., warmth, hostility) and adjustment in domains including externalizing and internalizing problems, school adjustment, and peer relationships. Further, studies controlling for parent–child and peer relationships, parental characteristics, and genetic and other

* Address correspondence to: Michelle Hostetler, Ph.D., Prevention Research Center, The Pennsylvania State University, 402 Marion Place, University Park, PA 16802.

E-mail address: mxh14@psu.edu (M.L. Hostetler).

family factors [1,5–7] document unique variance accounted for by sibling characteristics and relationships. And, sibling effects are robust across sociocultural contexts [8,9].

Given that middle childhood–aged siblings spend more of their free time with each other than with parents or friends [10], that sibling relationships are emotionally intense, and that sibling conflict is parents' leading childrearing concern [10,11], findings documenting the scope and strength of sibling influences are not surprising. With a few notable exceptions [12], prevention scientists have not capitalized on sibling influences in efforts to prevent youth behavior problems. Further, although the popular press provides advice to parents on reducing sibling conflict, empirically validated approaches are rare [13]. To address this gap, we describe the conceptual model and curriculum for a sibling-focused prevention program, Siblings are Special (SIBS, previously called SAS), and present the results of a randomized control trial implemented with sibling dyads and their parents.

Theoretical Model of Sibling Effects

Our model (Figure 1) is grounded in developmental and family research that shows how high negativity and low positivity between siblings lead to adjustment problems. The model includes four pathways that begin with sibling relationship quality, particularly warmth and conflict; these parallel pathways link to both proximal and more distal youth outcomes. The first pathway represents a “training ground” for the development of a generalized coercive interpersonal style [14]. Children learn that escalating negative behavior is reinforced by social partners who give into their demands. This coercive cycle occurs with parents and in sibling exchanges. In turn, youth who develop coercive interpersonal styles encounter peer difficulties and are perceived negatively by teachers [15]. They then affiliate with similar peers [16], with mutual reinforcement of antisocial tendencies.

Through path 2, sibling deviance training, siblings collude in opposition to parental authority [7,17,18]. In this “partner in crime” dynamic, siblings reinforce each other's antisocial tendencies and expose each other to risks such as antisocial peers, substance use, and delinquent behaviors [7,19]. Sibling

deviance training may involve positivity between siblings (e.g., shared laughter in response to antisocial talk). As such, enhancing positive sibling relationships might be expected to lead to deviance training. The counterargument is that positive sibling exchanges do not have a causal effect on deviance training but are byproducts of the deviance training process (e.g., [20]). Accordingly, we tested whether involvement in SIBS increased or decreased sibling deviance training.

Path 3 links sibling conflict and low support to depressive symptoms [1,21]. Depression is painful, costly, and a risk factor for externalizing problems by making youth more susceptible to peer pressure or self-medication through substance use. Sibling research has often focused on the negative effects of sibling conflict, but low warmth and support also has negative implications [21,22].

Path 4 concerns the evocative effects of sibling relationships on parenting. Coercive sibling dynamics are a stressor for parents [10] and disrupt competent parenting [23]. Sibling negativity may increase parental stress and depression, reducing parents' capacity for monitoring youths' activities and ability to disrupt peer and sibling deviance training. Stress engendered by sibling conflict also causes parental disengagement, decreased involvement, and inconsistent and harsh parenting, all linked to child adjustment problems [24].

Structural features of sibling relationships (dyad gender composition, birth order, age spacing) may moderate the strength of these paths. Deviance training may be most prominent in brother–brother pairs, and social learning theory holds that youths learn new behaviors and attitudes through exposure to models that are powerful, warm, and similar to themselves such as, older and same-sex siblings, and those with warm relationships [8,20,25].

The SIBS Program

SIBS was based on this framework and aimed at preventing behavior problems by enhancing youths' socioemotional competencies in the context of their sibling relationships—as well as parents' ability to manage sibling relationships. We designed the program and conducted a randomized trial for middle childhood–aged siblings to promote sibling and family

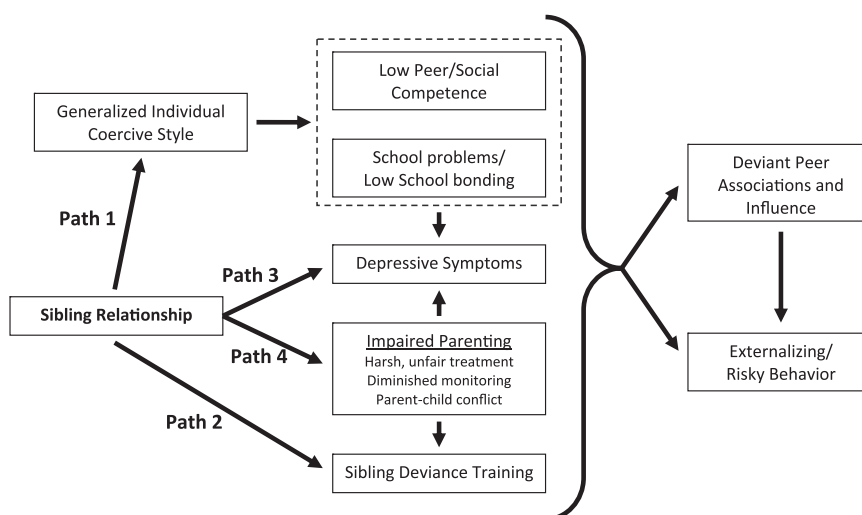


Figure 1. Conceptual model of pathways from sibling relationship to adjustment problems.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/10511562>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/10511562>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)