



Perspectives about adult sibling relationships: A dyadic analysis of siblings with and without intellectual and developmental disabilities

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ABSTRACT

Most siblings of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) report positive sibling relationships. However, extant research often only examines the perspective of the non-disabled sibling; it is unclear whether siblings with IDD report close sibling relationships. Thus, the aim of this study was to understand adult sibling relationships from the perspectives of both siblings with and without IDD. Using dyadic interviews, we examined the perspectives of eight adult sibling dyads. The study was conducted in the United States. Data were analyzed using constant comparative analysis and cross-case analysis to identify themes within and across dyads. Overall, siblings with and without IDD reported enjoying spending time with one another. However, siblings with and without Down syndrome (versus autism spectrum disorder) reported more reciprocal sibling relationships, more frequent contact, and a greater range of shared activities. Implications for future research and practice are discussed.

1. Introduction

Adult siblings play unique roles in the lives of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) including: friend, advocate, legal representative, leisure planner, and informal service coordinator (Hall and Rossetti, 2018). Many siblings also anticipate having future caregiver roles for their brothers and sisters with IDD, especially those reporting close sibling relationships (Burke et al., 2012; Burbidge & Minnes, 2014). However, most studies have focused on perspectives of nondisabled siblings (Hodapp, Sanderson, Meskis, & Casale, 2017). Given that the sibling relationship is bidirectional, it is insufficient to reflect only the perspective of one sibling (Cuskelly, 2016).

1.1. Reciprocity in the sibling relationship

Sibling relationships are unique by characterizing both hierarchical and reciprocal elements and changes over time (Cicirelli, 1994). Although termed a reciprocal relationship in the normative sibling literature (Howe & Recchia, 2005), less research has examined reciprocity in sibling relationships involving disability (Kramer, Hall, & Heller, 2013). Sibling relationships between

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individuals with and without IDD may be asymmetrical or unidirectional regarding perceived benefits and provision of support (Hall and Rossetti, 2018). However, individuals with IDD are largely absent from sibling research. This study's purpose was to explore sibling relationships from the perspectives of both siblings with and without IDD.

1.2. Dimensions of sibling relationships

Extant research on sibling relationships suggests that adult siblings with and without IDD have close relationships that are similar to relationships among nondisabled siblings (Tomeny, Ellis, Rankin, & Barry, 2017). In one of the few studies that included siblings with IDD, siblings with and without autism spectrum disorder (ASD) described engaging in the range of typical sibling interactions (Petalas, Hastings, Nash, & Duff, 2015). Moderators of the quality of the sibling relationship include gender, age difference, birth order, and the type of disability (Hodapp et al., 2010; Hodapp & Urbano, 2007; Orsmond, Kuo, & Seltzer, 2009).

1.3. Aims of study

Given that siblings have the longest familial relationship (Cicirelli, 1994) and that sibling caregiving is becoming critical to families of individuals with IDD (Hodapp et al., 2017), it is important to examine the bidirectional sibling relationship. The purpose of this study was to investigate the sibling relationship from the perspectives of adult siblings with and without IDD. This study examined the following research question: How do adult siblings with and without IDD describe the context and quality of their sibling relationships?

2. Method

This study utilized qualitative methods due to the exploratory nature of the research questions. Dyadic interviews were conducted with eight adult sibling pairs to allow for a shared narrative of the sibling dyad and analysis of interactions between the participants (Morris, 2001).

2.1. Participants

For both siblings with and without IDD, the inclusion criteria were: (1) be 18 years or older; (2) have a sibling with/without IDD respectively; and (3) be willing to participate in an interview and complete a demographic form. All of the participants with IDD used spoken language as their primary mode of communication.

Eight adult sibling pairs from Illinois, Ohio, and Massachusetts participated in this study (see Table 1). All participants were White. Participants with IDD were primarily male ($n = 6$); those without IDD were predominantly female ($n = 7$). Six siblings with IDD were younger and two were older than their nondisabled siblings were. Of the siblings with IDD, five had Down syndrome (DS) and three had ASD.

Table 1
Participant Demographics.

Sibling Dyad	Age	Gender	State	Education	Employment	Proximity	Frequency of contact	Disability
1. Eli	44	M	OH	Some college	Part-time, menial tasks	–	Daily	DS
1. Nicole	47	F	OH	Some college	–	Within one hour		–
2. Emma	38	F	IL	Some college	20 hrs, grocery store	–	Weekly	DS
2. Anna	41	F	IL	Graduate school	–	Within one hour		–
3. Roy	24	M	IL	Some college	No; College program	–	Weekly	DS
3. Jane	29	F	IL	College	–	Within one hour		–
4. Jason	49	M	OH	High school	15 hrs, restaurant	–	Daily	DS
4. David	55	M	OH	College	–	Within one hour		–
5. Mallory	19	F	OH	High school	No; HS transition	–	Yearly	DS
5. Cara	22	F	OH	Some college	–	Over one hour (at college)		–
6. Aaron	33	M	IL	High school	No; training program	–	Monthly	ASD
6. Rachel	30	F	IL	Graduate School	–	Within one hour		–
7. Cameron	21	M	IL	High school	No; seeking college program	–	Daily	ASD
7. Allison	30	F	IL	College	–	Within one hour (parents' home)		–
8. Anthony	36	M	MA	High school	20 hrs, grocery store	–	Yearly	ASD
8. Sara	30	F	MA	Graduate school	–	Over one hour (works out of state)		–

Note. ASD: Autism spectrum disorder; DS: Down syndrome; IL: Illinois; MA: Massachusetts; OH: Ohio; HS: high school; hrs: hour.

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