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# Examining the Psychological Adjustments of Neurotypical Siblings of Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Determining the Efficiency of Support Groups

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"To the outside world we all grow old. But not to brothers and sisters. We know each other as we always were. We know each other's hearts... We live outside the touch of time." -Clara Ortega

## Introduction

The diagnosis of autism in the family typically has a significant impact on the family. Little emphasis is placed on the perspective of siblings, as they are the children who will spend most, if not entirety, of their lives with their autistic siblings. Therefore, grouping their psychological adjustments to be that of grown is an unfair and a tilted judgment.

Many researchers have yet to fully explore the mindsets of these neurotypical individuals; for this reason, most disagree on the level of complexity in the sibling psychological adjustments. In addition, most researchers merely mention support groups of stabilizing the psychological adjustments, but do not delve into the true effectiveness and possible advantage they may do for the neurotypical siblings

It is hypothesized that there are increased number of complications in the adjustments compared to normative data, but the professional support groups will lessen or at least monitor the psychology of the neurotypical individuals.

## Methods/Design

- ◆ Determine the presence of complications in the psychological adjustments of neurotypical sibling of individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD).
- ◆ Place an emphasis towards the uncontrollable socio-demographic factors in the analysis.
- ◆ Analyze the potential effectiveness of support groups/formal social support to lessen the implications of potential complications.

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations on the Group Evaluation Measures (Smith and Perry, 2005).

| Sibling Outcome  | Pre-test |      | Post-test |      | t     | df | p    |
|------------------|----------|------|-----------|------|-------|----|------|
|                  | M        | SD   | M         | SD   |       |    |      |
| Piers-Harris     | 54.35    | 8.56 | 58.77     | 8.92 | -2.84 | 25 | .005 |
| Knowledge        | 11.40    | 3.49 | 13.20     | 3.04 | -2.45 | 24 | .01  |
| Anger/Resentment | 8.00     | 2.62 | 7.62      | 2.32 | .95   | 25 | .18  |

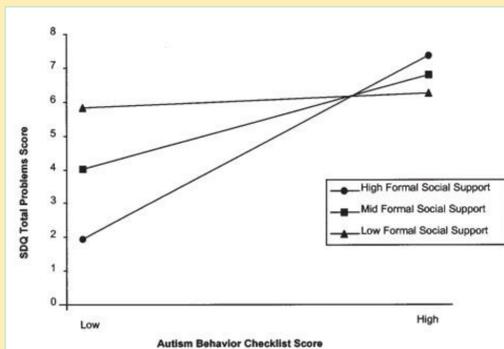


Fig. 1. Interpretation of the moderating effect of family formal social support on the relationship between the autism severity and sibling problem behavior (Hastings, 2003).

## Results

The final results indicate that the neurotypical siblings of children with ASD are at increased risk for behavioral/emotional problems and difficulties in social skills compared to siblings of typically developing children<sup>4</sup> due to the increased number of complications compared to the normative data; these complications range from aggression<sup>6</sup>, mixed feelings, internalization/externalization of emotions<sup>2</sup>, and overall feelings of responsibility and concern for their autistic siblings<sup>6,7</sup>(see Table 2). This conclusion stands despite varying socio-demographic factors like age and gender, as individuals with neurotypical siblings statistically do not have the above complications when compared to siblings of autistic individuals<sup>5</sup>.

Hastings specifically stated that siblings are "at a lesser risk for psychosocial adjustment and well-being when the family received high levels of formal social support"<sup>3</sup>. He later analyzed that the siblings of children of lower severity of autism only required lower level of formal support to have a stabilized adjustments (see Fig. 1). Overall, providing a formal therapy-like means improves the sibling dynamic by increasing the neurotypical sibling's knowledge of the disorder<sup>7</sup> (see Table 1); it also allows for the neurotypical siblings that display early signs of internalizing/externalizing problems or abnormal behaviors to have interventions<sup>7</sup> (see Table 1). The techniques used in the support groups ranged from brief isolation, extending support, calming strategies, and problem-solving<sup>1</sup> (see Fig. 2).

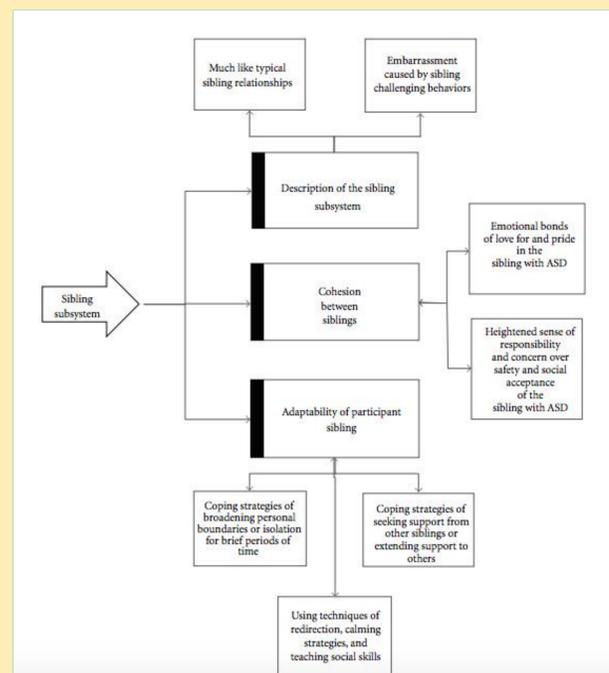


Fig. 2. Graphic representation of the sibling subsystem (Angell, Meadan, and Stoner, 2012)

## Discussion/Conclusion

After determining the presence of the complications in the psychological adjustments of the neurotypical siblings and the efficiency of the facilitated support groups, it was concluded that nearly all the neurotypical individuals have a definite amount of complications in their psychological adjustments proving to be conflicting in their thought processes and overall well-being due to their sibling(s) with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) even despite the significantly varying socio-demographic factors studied. However, through the utilization of professional support groups or increased social support, the implications in their adjustments proved to lessen and become more stabilized allowing proper life developments and healthier relationships with their autistic sibling(s).

This indicates that it is important to track and monitor the development of the neurotypical children when autism is diagnosed in the family as their psychological adjustments need to be stable and healthy allowing for better relationships and overall well-being.

Future research can delve more into the specific socio-demographic factors like class and income and inspect methods of informal social support from teachers, friends, and etc. In addition, the sibling impact of other behavioral disorders like Down's Syndrome can also be researched.

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