

## Number of Siblings – Does It Have Any Impact on Quality of Sibling Relationship of Mentally Challenged Children?

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**ABSTRACT** The present study compared the sibling relationship of mentally challenged children with their mentally normal siblings across the number of siblings they have. The sample for the present study comprised of 150 mentally challenged children selected from 3 Rehabilitation Council of India recognized special schools of Delhi, their one mentally normal sibling and any of the parent. Sibling relationship was analyzed by administering “Sibling Relationship Scale” to one of the parents and mentally normal siblings of the mentally challenged children. Mentally challenged children with less number of mentally normal siblings reported better warmth/closeness and relative status/power than those having more number of mentally normal siblings. Moreover, presence of more number of mentally normal siblings created a rival and conflicting kind of relationship between them and their mentally challenged sibling.

### INTRODUCTION

According to Hindu mythology, humans are the most unique creation of GOD endowed with numerous distinct capacities viz. mental, social, physical, spiritual etc. Hence, birth of a human child is a time for rejoicing; for pride; for gathering together loved ones and sharing with them in the celebration of a renewal of life. However, for quite a few families, birth of a child may not be as joyful occasion. On the contrary, it may be a time for tears, despair, confusion, fear and turmoil as the new-born arrived is deprived of his unique capabilities, that is, born with disabilities like hearing or speaking impairment, behavioral disorder, mental challenge etc. The human beings born with disabilities like hearing/speaking/visual impairment, behavioral disorder or physical handicap need human support and environmental stimulation to sustain and excel in their life but not to the extent, a mentally challenged child needs. Mental challenge is a new term coined for mental retardation. The American Association on Mental Retardation (2002) defined mental retardation as “A significantly sub-average general intellectual functioning (IQ of 70 or below), resulting or associated with concurrent impairment in adaptive behavior and is manifested during the developmental period before the age of 18.” There are three common

classifications of people with intellectual disability. Mildly disabled individuals have a mental age of 8 to 12 years. They are considered “educable”, and are capable of mastering some academic concepts. Moderately disabled have a mental age of 5 to 8 years and are considered “trainable”. They are not capable of learning academic subjects. Severely intellectually disabled have a very limited capacity to learn and require lifelong care (Martinez 2017).

The birth of a baby normally changes the ethos of the family. Parents have to develop a new routine, siblings have to learn to accept the new addition to the family and often they may discover feelings of loss which comes as a result of parents being so involved with the baby. The presence of a member with mental challenge irrevocably changes the family environment and affects family as a unit. Within the family system itself, subsystems such as; marital, parental, and sibling subsystems exist (Bronfenbrenner 1979). Family subsystems are interrelated; therefore, any event that impacts one subsystem will affect all other subsystems.

The sibling relationship is one of the most enduring relationships throughout a person’s life (Dew et al. 2008). The emotional ties between siblings are often described as second only to the ties between children and parents (Rivers and Stoneman 2003). However, this relationship

can be disrupted when a brother or sister is diagnosed with the disability. Siblings are generally expected to grow up sooner than other children as they may need to learn to look after themselves while their parents are caring for their brother or sister (Strohm 2002). Siblings of the child with a disability may have to cope with changes in family roles, such as structure and activities, feelings of guilt and shame, loss of parental attention and increase in parental stress (Pilowsky et al. 2004). The effects that a child with a disability has on their sibling and other family members can depend on many factors such as the family's socio-economic status, size, religion, the extent of the child's disability, how parents handle the situation, whether the sibling with the disability is older or younger, and the level of caregiving the sibling is expected to provide (McHale et al. 1984; Seligman 1991).

Sibling relationship is a complex and diverse relationship and has now become an area of increased research interest. Siblings of children with mental retardation may be at greater risk for adjustment problems because of family stress related to the needs of the child with mental retardation (Lynch et al. 1993), which thereby may interrupt siblings' relationship. However, researchers also found that siblings of mentally challenged children play an important role in the development of adaptive skills of mentally challenged children as well as lowering of their disturbed behavior (Upreti and Singh 2015).

Mental challenge is one of the most prevalent developmental disabilities of the children globally, thus, quality research and services are needed for them as well as to find out those relationships that closely affect the mentally challenged children. Indeed, having a normal sibling act as a great support for the mentally challenged child and for the parents as well. Hence, the researchers' study is an attempt to examine whether the number of siblings affects sibling relationship between mentally challenged children and their mentally normal siblings. Therefore, some objectives have been planned for the present study.

### Objectives

1. To assess the qualitative level of sibling relationship between mentally challenged

children and their mentally normal siblings across their number of siblings.

2. To investigate qualitative differences in the sibling relationship between mentally challenged children and their mentally normal siblings across number of siblings.

## METHODOLOGY

### Locale

Delhi was purposively selected as it is one of the nearest region that has an appreciable number of Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) recognized special schools meant exclusively for mentally challenged children. Out of the 9 RCI recognized institutes for mentally challenged children in Delhi, only 3 institutes namely National Institute for Mentally Handicapped (NIMH), Manovikas and Chandra Bhushan Singh(C.B.S) Memorial granted permission to use their institute as a research base for the present study.

### Selection of Sample

Firstly, the list of mentally challenged children enrolled in NIMH, Manovikas and CBS Memorial was procured from their Directors. Thereafter 150 mentally challenged children were randomly selected. After this, through them their families were approached and their consent for participation in present study was obtained. The sample for the present study comprised of 150 mentally challenged children, their one mentally normal sibling and any parent making a total of 450 respondents for the present study.

### Research Instruments Administered

#### *a) Self-structured Respondent Profile Questionnaire*

The self-structured questionnaire was administered to gather data about socio-demographic and socio-economic variables of the families with mentally challenged children.

#### *b) Sibling Relationship Scale (Wyndol Furman and Duane Buhrmester 1985)*

Sibling relationship was assessed using Sibling Relationship Scale (SRQ). SRQ is the 48-

item standard version and a self-report questionnaire to assess dimensions of sibling relationships as:

#### *Warmth/Closeness Factor*

It consists of the average of the scale scores for intimacy, prosocial behaviour, companionship, similarity, admiration by sibling, admiration of sibling, and affection.

#### *Relative Status/Power Factor*

It consists of nurturance of sibling, dominance of sibling, minus the scale scores of nurturance by sibling and dominance by sibling.

#### *Conflict Factor*

It consists of the average of the quarrelling, antagonism, and competition.

#### *Rivalry Factor*

It consists of the average of maternal and paternal partiality.

### **Collection of Data**

The researchers formally interacted with the randomly selected families of mentally challenged children in the respective institutes itself. In the meeting, the purpose of the study was explained to the randomly selected parents of the mentally challenged children and assurance was given to them that the information provided by them shall be kept confidential and utilized only for the research purpose. The families were then extensively interviewed in their homes for the study. The self-structured questionnaire was administered to gather data about socio-demographic and socio-economic variables of the families with mentally challenged children. Sibling relationship was analyzed by administering "Sibling Relationship Scale" (Furman and Buhrmester 1985) to one of the parents and one of the mentally normal siblings of the mentally challenged children.

### **Statistical Analysis of Data**

The data collected was classified and tabulated in accordance with the objectives to ar-

rive at meaningful and relevant inferences. The data was analyzed using statistical techniques like mean, standard deviation, and Analysis of Variance.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

A cursory look at Table 1(a) reveals that most(63.75%) of the families with mentally challenged children who had one sibling were found to have high intimacy between mentally challenged children and their mentally normal siblings. Similar picture was seen on the other components of warmth/closeness, viz. prosocial behaviour, companionship, similarity, admiration by sibling, admiration of sibling and affection. On the other hand, fifty-eight percent and sixty percent of the families with mentally challenged children who had two siblings were found to have moderate intimacy and prosocial behavior between mentally challenged children and their mentally normal siblings, whereas, forty-six percent, forty-four percent, fifty-eight percent, forty-six percent and sixty-eight percent of families reported high companionship and admiration of sibling, low similarity, high admiration by sibling, and high affection. It was also observed that forty-five percent of the families with mentally challenged children who had three or more siblings were found to have low intimacy. Quite similar trend was observed on other components of warmth/closeness between mentally challenged children and their mentally normal siblings. Overall view across warmth/closeness factor reveals that lesser the number of siblings in the family, more is the warmth between mentally challenged children and their mentally normal siblings.

Data from the Table 1(a) also reveals that, majority (81.25%, 70%, 48.75% and 40%) of the families with mentally challenged children having one sibling reported high nurturance of sibling, high dominance of sibling, nurturance by sibling and dominance by sibling respectively. On the other hand, it was observed that there is almost equal distribution of families with two siblings on all the three levels of sibling relationship. Whereas, twenty-six percent, twenty-two percent and fifty-two percent of families fall under low, moderate and high level of nurturance of sibling respectively. Similar trend was observed on other components, viz. dominance of sibling, nurturance by sibling and dominance

**Table 1(a): Frequency and percent distribution of mentally challenged children on warmth/closeness and relative status/power in their sibling relationship with mentally normal siblings across number of siblings**

Domains of sibling relationship	Subscales	Levels of Sibling relationship	Mentally challenged children with one sibling ( $n_1=80$ )		Mentally challenged children with two siblings ( $n_2=50$ )		Mentally challenged children with three or more siblings ( $n_3=20$ )		Total	
			f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Warmth/Closeness	Intimacy	Low	4	5.00	8	16.00	9	45.00	21	14.00
		Moderate	25	31.25	29	58.00	6	30.00	60	40.00
		High	51	63.75	13	26.00	5	25.00	69	46.00
	Prosocial behaviour	Low	2	2.50	4	8.00	18	90.00	24	16.00
		Moderate	16	20.00	30	60.00	2	10.00	48	32.00
		High	62	77.50	16	32.00	0	0.00	78	52.00
	Companionship	Low	13	16.25	14	28.00	10	50.00	37	24.67
		Moderate	22	27.50	13	26.00	6	30.00	41	27.33
		High	45	56.25	23	46.00	4	20.00	72	48.00
	Similarity	Low	10	12.50	22	44.00	11	55.00	43	28.67
		Moderate	38	47.50	21	42.00	9	45.00	68	45.33
		High	32	40.00	7	14.00	0	0.00	39	26.00
Admiration by sibling	Low	13	16.25	10	20.00	14	70.00	37	24.67	
	Moderate	25	31.25	11	22.00	6	30.00	42	28.00	
	High	42	52.50	29	58.00	0	0.00	71	47.33	
Admiration of sibling	Low	11	13.75	14	28.00	10	50.00	35	23.33	
	Moderate	31	38.75	13	26.00	6	30.00	50	33.33	
	High	38	47.50	23	46.00	4	20.00	65	43.33	
Affection	Low	4	5.00	3	6.00	0	0.00	7	4.67	
	Moderate	30	37.50	13	26.00	8	40.00	51	34.00	
	High	46	57.50	34	68.00	12	60.00	92	61.33	
Overall Warmth/Closeness	Low	9	11.25	12	24.00	9	45.00	30	20.00	
	Moderate	26	32.50	18	36.00	4	20.00	48	32.00	
	High	45	56.25	20	40.00	7	35.00	72	48.00	
Relative Status/ Nurturance of sibling	Low	0	0.00	13	26.00	4	20.00	17	11.33	
	Moderate	15	18.75	11	22.00	7	35.00	33	22.00	
	High	65	81.25	26	52.00	9	45.00	10	66.67	
Dominance of sibling	Low	3	3.75	26	52.00	10	50.00	39	26.00	
	Moderate	21	26.25	7	14.00	5	25.00	33	22.00	
	High	56	70.00	17	34.00	5	25.00	78	52.00	
Nurturance by sibling	Low	9	11.25	18	36.00	4	20.00	31	20.67	
	Moderate	32	40.00	19	38.00	11	55.00	62	41.33	
	High	39	48.75	13	26.00	5	25.00	57	38.00	
Dominance by sibling	Low	19	23.75	16	32.00	8	40.00	43	28.67	
	Moderate	29	36.25	15	30.00	7	35.00	51	34.00	
	High	32	40.00	19	38.00	5	25.00	56	37.33	
Overall Relative Status/ Power	Low	8	10.00	17	34.00	7	35.00	32	21.33	
	Moderate	24	30.00	14	28.00	7	35.00	45	30.00	
	High	48	60.00	19	38.00	6	30.00	73	48.67	

by sibling. Whereas, forty-five percent, fifty percent, fifty-five percent and forty percent of the families with mentally challenged children who had three or more siblings reported high nurturance of sibling, low dominance of sibling, moderate nurturance by sibling and low dominance by sibling between mentally challenged children and mentally normal siblings. Overall view across relative status/power reveals that families with mentally challenged children who had one sibling showed high relative status/power followed by two siblings and three or more siblings.

The data presented in Table 1(b) clearly represents that majority (61.25%, 47.50% and 53.75%) of the families with mentally challenged children who had one sibling were found to have low quarrelling, low antagonism and low competition respectively between mentally challenged children and mentally normal siblings. It was also observed that in families with two siblings, forty-four percent, forty percent and sixty-four percent reported moderate quarrelling, moderate antagonism and low competition respectively between mentally challenged children and mentally normal siblings. On the other hand, the families with mentally challenged children who had three or more siblings (90%, 75% and 65%) were found to have high quarrelling, high antagonism and high competition respectively between mentally challenged children and mentally normal siblings. Overall view concludes that more the number of siblings in the family, more the conflict between mentally challenged and mentally normal siblings.

Data in Table 1(b) also clearly reveals that majority (65% and 68.75%) of the families with mentally challenged children who had one sibling were found to have high maternal partiality and paternal partiality respectively. Thirty-eight percent of families who had two siblings reported high maternal partiality and paternal partiality. Whereas, eighty-five percent and forty percent of families with three or more siblings were found to have high maternal and paternal partiality between mentally challenged and mentally normal siblings. Overall view across rivalry component reveals that majority of the mentally challenged children having one sibling were found to have high rivalry than families with two and three or more siblings.

Mean differences in sibling relationship between mentally challenged children and their

mentally normal siblings across number of siblings is presented in Table 2. A significant difference was observed in overall warmth/closeness; relative status/power; conflict and rivalry dimensions of sibling relationship. Mentally challenged children with one mentally normal sibling were seen to witness significantly more warmth/closeness and relative status/power when compared with mentally challenged children having two or three or more mentally normal siblings. Similarly, mentally challenged children with two mentally normal siblings experienced significantly more warmth/closeness and relative status/power than those having three or more mentally normal siblings. However, exactly the reverse was seen on the conflict and rivalry component of sibling relationship. This finding is in-line with the findings of Stocker et al. (1997) who reported that the number of children in a family is positively correlated with rivalry and negatively correlated with warmth, which they suggested may be due to the fact that children of larger families may have experienced limited resources in terms of love and attention, thereby increasing their rivalry and reducing the warmth between siblings. In other finding also negative correlations was found between number of siblings in a family and warmth. It means that the more children in a family, the less warmth they will experience (Wallace 2012). In contrary to this, researchers found that the siblings had positive attitude towards their mentally challenged brother/sister and they also responded positively towards the future of their relationship. They stated that it might be because of being in the age group of 5-9 years or they were hiding their real emotions (Hakeem and Subathra 2013). Upreti and Singh (2017) emphasized that sibling relationship should be strengthened to build a strong and natural bond between mentally challenged child and his/her siblings. They stated that emphasis should be given on establishing good peer group among siblings, building more relationships, providing more social support and in increasing socialization among mentally challenged children, which will provide more support, attention, guidance and proper vigilance to the special need children and also promote their inclusion in society.

## CONCLUSION

The overall findings of the study indicate that mentally challenged children with less num-

**Table 1(b): Frequency and percent distribution of mentally challenged children on conflict and rivalry in their sibling relationship with mentally normal siblings across number of siblings**

Domains of sibling relationship	Subscales	Levels of sibling relationship	Mentally challenged children with one sibling ( $n_1=80$ )		Mentally challenged children with two siblings ( $n_2=50$ )		Mentally challenged children with three or three more siblings ( $n_3=20$ )		Total	
			f	%	f	%	f	%		
Conflict	Quarrelling	Low	49	61.25	15	30.00	0	0.00	64	42.67
		Moderate	21	26.25	22	44.00	2	10.00	45	30.00
		High	10	12.50	13	26.00	18	90.00	41	27.33
	Antagonism	Low	38	47.50	18	36.00	2	10.00	58	38.67
		Moderate	25	31.25	20	40.00	3	15.00	48	32.00
		High	17	21.25	12	24.00	15	75.00	44	29.33
	Competition	Low	43	53.75	32	64.00	1	5.00	76	50.67
		Moderate	36	45.00	15	30.00	6	30.00	57	38.00
		High	1	1.25	3	6.00	13	65.00	17	11.33
Overall Conflict	Low	43	53.75	21	42.00	2	10.00	66	44.00	
	Moderate	27	33.75	20	40.00	3	15.00	50	33.33	
	High	10	12.50	9	18.00	15	75.00	34	22.67	
	Low	9	11.25	18	36.00	0	0.00	27	18.00	
	Moderate	19	23.75	13	26.00	3	15.00	35	23.33	
	High	52	65.00	19	38.00	17	85.00	88	58.67	
Rivalry	Maternal partiality	Low	4	5.00	4	8.00	4	20.00	23	15.33
		Moderate	21	26.25	16	32.00	7	35.00	45	30.00
		High	55	68.75	19	38.00	8	40.00	82	54.67
	Paternal partiality	Low	6	7.50	19	38.00	0	0.00	25	16.67
		Moderate	21	26.25	12	24.00	2	10.00	35	23.33
		High	53	66.25	19	38.00	18	90.00	90	60.00

**Table 2: Mean difference in sibling relationship between mentally challenged children and their mentally normal siblings across number of siblings**

Domains of sibling relationship	Subscales	Mentally challenged children with one sibling (n <sub>1</sub> =80)	Mentally challenged children with two siblings (n <sub>2</sub> =50)	Mentally challenged children with three or more siblings (n <sub>3</sub> =20)	F
		Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	
Warmth/Closeness	Intimacy	4.78 <sup>a</sup> (0.73)	2.97 <sup>b</sup> (0.74)	1.22 <sup>c</sup> (0.87)	3.89*
	Prosocialbehaviour	4.27 <sup>a</sup> (0.47)	3.02 <sup>b</sup> (0.58)	1.28 <sup>c</sup> (0.78)	3.94*
	Companionship	4.19 <sup>a</sup> (0.31)	3.19 <sup>b</sup> (0.73)	1.18 <sup>c</sup> (0.38)	3.59*
	Similarity	4.72 <sup>a</sup> (0.65)	3.03 <sup>b</sup> (0.77)	2.17 <sup>c</sup> (0.92)	3.13*
	Admiration by sibling	0.81 (0.64)	0.77 (0.82)	0.82 (0.88)	0.96
	Admiration of sibling	3.48 <sup>a</sup> (0.71)	2.11 <sup>b</sup> (0.78)	1.16 <sup>c</sup> (0.91)	3.21*
	Affection	4.30 <sup>a</sup> (0.43)	2.54 <sup>b</sup> (0.26)	0.96 <sup>c</sup> (0.32)	3.52*
Overall Warmth/Closeness		3.79 <sup>a</sup> (0.23)	2.52 <sup>b</sup> (0.64)	1.25 <sup>c</sup> (1.06)	3.09*
Relative Status/Power	Nurturance of sibling	0.22 (0.67)	0.18 (0.48)	0.24 (0.51)	0.49
	Dominance of sibling	0.29 (0.52)	0.26 (0.40)	0.31 (0.28)	0.62
	Nurturance by sibling	3.92 <sup>a</sup> (0.38)	2.26 <sup>b</sup> (0.65)	1.13 <sup>c</sup> (0.33)	3.89*
	Dominance by sibling	3.50 <sup>a</sup> (0.69)	2.35 <sup>b</sup> (0.53)	1.00 <sup>c</sup> (0.34)	3.92*
Overall Relative Status/Power		2.13 <sup>a</sup> (0.62)	1.26 <sup>b</sup> (0.66)	0.67 <sup>c</sup> (0.74)	3.74*
Conflict	Quarreling	1.57 <sup>a</sup> (0.90)	2.89 <sup>b</sup> (0.91)	3.99 <sup>c</sup> (1.00)	3.67*
	Antagonism	1.27 <sup>a</sup> (0.36)	2.61 <sup>b</sup> (0.44)	3.72 <sup>c</sup> (0.87)	3.85*
	Competition	1.69 <sup>a</sup> (0.61)	2.79 <sup>b</sup> (0.77)	3.99 <sup>c</sup> (0.82)	3.43*
Overall Conflict		1.51 <sup>a</sup> (0.63)	2.76 <sup>b</sup> (0.68)	3.90 <sup>c</sup> (0.77)	3.92*
Rivalry	Maternal partiality	0.31 <sup>a</sup> (0.61)	1.13 <sup>b</sup> (0.35)	2.53 <sup>c</sup> (0.38)	3.25*
	Paternal partiality	0.14 <sup>a</sup> (0.65)	1.90 <sup>b</sup> (0.31)	2.99 <sup>c</sup> (0.43)	3.45*
Overall Rivalry		0.22 <sup>a</sup> (0.58)	1.51 <sup>b</sup> (0.66)	2.76 <sup>c</sup> (0.91)	4.32*

Note: \*Significant at  $p < 0.05$ ; Means with different superscripts are significant at  $p < 0.05$

ber of mentally normal siblings reported better warmth/closeness and relative status/power than having more number of mentally normal siblings. Moreover, more number of mentally normal siblings found to create rival and conflicting kind of relationships in the present study. It's a fact that nature and nurture together plays an important role in the development of the child and no one can manipulate the nature, likewise, after the birth of children family size cannot be reduced. Therefore, families can work towards manipulating the overall environment for the mentally challenged children.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Emphasis should be given to strengthen the child's learning ability and in making positive and healthy environment at home.
2. Efforts to be made by parents to become loving and resourceful parent who can provide a stimulating and happy home environment, which finally build a strong bond between fami-

ly and the child and thereby leads to improvement in child's condition.

3. It is recommended that the schools have to recruit qualified counselors for providing guidance and counseling sessions to the families.
4. It is recommended that mentally normal siblings should support, guide and be vigilant on the activities of mentally challenged sibling to improve their condition. Building a positive sibling relationship could provide a natural environment for learning.
5. In future, similar study can be replicated to study the quality of sibling relationship among the children with other type of disabilities viz., cerebral palsy and autism.

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