



Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development

**SIBLING RELATIONSHIP WITH AUTISTIC SPECTRUM
DISORDER AND EMOTIONAL & HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**

Khaleeda Nurshaheera Binti Masri

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Final Year Project Report

Masters

PhD

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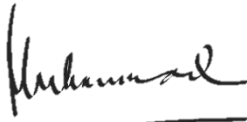
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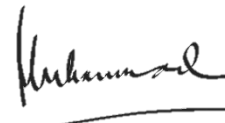
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**SIBLING RELATIONSHIP WITH AUTISTIC SPECTRUM DISORDER AND
EMOTIONAL & BEHAVIORAL DEVELOPMENT**

KHALEEDA NURSHAHEERA BINTI MASRI

This project is submitted
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a
Bachelor of Psychology with Honours

Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SARAWAK
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The project entitled ‘**Sibling Relationship With Autistic Spectrum Disorder and Emotional & Behavioral Development**’ was prepared by **Khaleeda Nurshaheera Binti Masri, 70080** and submitted to the Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Bachelor of Psychology with Honours

Received for examination by:



(Dr Muhamad Sophian Nazaruddin Sutan Saidi)

Date:

July 2022

Gred

A

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ABSTRACT

This study focused on the sibling relationship with autism and the emotional and behavioral development of the typically developed sibling and how the strength of the sibling relationship give impacts towards the emotional and behavioral development. A total of 64 respondents of sibling with autism across Sabah had participated in this study by using the purposive sampling. In this study, siblings with autism across Sabah completed self-reported questionnaires which is the Sibling Relationship Questionnaire and Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire. The Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation and Multiple Linear Regression were conducted to analyse the collected data. The results showed that emotional and behavioral difficulties such as internalization and externalization were significantly correlated with strength of the sibling relationships (both positive and negative relationship). In addition, negative relationship of the sibling also shown to be more dominant in giving impact on the emotional and behavioral development of the typically developed sibling. It is recommended that this study is to be conducted using a qualitative method and added more variables to enhance the findings of this study.

Keywords: Siblings with autism, Sibling relationships, Emotional and behavioral development

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini memberi tumpuan kepada hubungan adik-beradik yang mempunyai adik-beradik autisme dan perkembangan emosi dan tingkah laku mereka dan bagaimana kekuatan hubungan adik-beradik memberi kesan terhadap perkembangan emosi dan tingkah laku mereka. Seramai 64 orang responden adik-beradik yang mempunyai adik-beradik autisme bertempat di seluruh Sabah telah menyertai kajian ini dengan menggunakan persampelan bertujuan. Dalam kajian ini, adik-beradik yang mempunyai adik-beradik autisme telah menjawab dan melengkapkan soal selidik laporan sendiri iaitu Soal Selidik Hubungan Adik-beradik dan Soal Selidik Kekuatan dan Kesukaran. Kolerasi Spearman dan Regresi Linear Berganda telah dijalankan untuk menganalisis data yang telah dikumpul. Keputusan menunjukkan bahawa kesukaran emosi dan tingkah laku seperti internalisasi dan eksternalisasi mempunyai korelasi yang signifikan dengan kekuatan hubungan adik-beradik (perhubungan positif dan negatif). Tambahan lagi, hubungan negatif adik-beradik juga menunjukkan lebih dominan dalam memberi impak kepada perkembangan emosi dan tingkah laku adik-beradik yang mempunyai adik-beradik autisme. Dicadangkan kajian ini untuk menjalankan kajian secara kualitatif dan menambah lebih banyak pembolehubah bagi meningkatkan dapatan kajian ini.

Kata kunci: Adik beradik autisme, Hubungan adik-beradik, Perkembangan emosi dan tingkah laku.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This study was conducted to investigate the relationship between strength of sibling relationship and emotional and behavioral development of the typically developed (TD) sibling. Other than that, background of study, problem statement, objectives of study, research hypothesis, significance of study, and definitions of terms were discussed in this chapter.

1.1 Background of the study

Sibling is one of the earliest relationships that can be formed through someone's life. Sibling relationships are special because it has its own standards for the consequences throughout everyone's growth and development (McHale et al., 2012). Sibling relationship can also be classified as one of the factors that can describe the existence of social dynamic between the siblings as they can both influence each other directly and indirectly, such as becoming companions or playmates and at the same time providing support and care for each other (McHale et al., 2012). As siblings can be a source of support and companionship, they also can provide competitions and conflict among each other (Connidis, 2007). It is common for siblings to quarrel since fighting may be considered as affection given to each other, but it is not normal when the fighting and conflict became irreconcilable.

Several studies have shown that having a family member consist of a minimum one with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) can be strained by the characteristics of the disorder (Diener et al., 2015) and can have the implication on the other siblings' development and adjustment in life (McHale et al., 2016). According to The World Health Organisation (WHO), approximately one in every 160 children worldwide are diagnosed with ASD (2021) and the prevalence keeps increasing every year. Although there are no epidemiological data on the prevalence of autism in Malaysia are currently available, a smaller scale study conducted by the Ministry of Health estimated that children aged 18 to 26 months were diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder at a rate of 1.6 in 1000 children, or approximately 1 in every 625 children (2014). Due to the rising number globally, sibling relationships have emerged as one of the most important topics to study.

Autism Spectrum Disorder can broadly be defined as a condition related to the brain which impacts individuals to have a hard time in perceiving and socializing with others, resulting in impairment with social interaction and communication (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). ASD is characterized by impaired verbal and nonverbal communication, as well as trouble sustaining friendships. It is because children with ASD have a restricted repertoire of social skills, play behavior and impaired communication and social response skills. Ultimately, these issues might provide obstacles and become a barrier to both parties' interpersonal relationships, which in the context of this study is the sibling relationship. As the issues has grown in the prominence of the current studies, the siblings of children with ASD also called as typically developed (TD) siblings are more at risk of developing psychosocial adjustment problems compared to those with non-ASD siblings (Petalas et al., 2015).

Questions have been raised concerning of how the lack of communication and social skills of the ASD child threatened the quality of the sibling relationship. Behavior difficulties in autistic children, in particular, have been demonstrated to be one of the indicators of poorer sibling outcomes and lower positive sibling relationship quality (Hastings, 2007). Thus, there are numerous difficulties that became the contributing factor faced by the TD siblings such as internalization and externalization of problems (Petalas et al., 2009), receiving less parental attention (Kaminsky & Dewey, 2001), and enduring higher parental pressure (parents mainly depends on them). These challenges are shared by TD siblings with different disorders, although some features and characteristics are exclusive only to siblings with ASD (McHale et al., 2016). For example, TD siblings often experience embarrassment through others reaction due to the social stigma, afraid to be isolated by their peers and sometimes they are suffering more violent behavior from strangers or peers such as constantly bullied or mocked (Macedo Costa & Pereira, 2019). This quality of sibling relationships would impact the development well-being of the TD siblings.

However, not all TD siblings are characterized by negative or difficult experiences as well as having poor outcomes with their ASD sibling as mentioned above (Meadan et al., 2010). There is ample proof of the outcome of positive sibling relationship with ASD child. Sometimes that, because of the situation where they have siblings that needed more attention and care from them, their relationship become stronger and their quality of their relationship are more positive than any other normal siblings. This is consistent with the earlier study which there are positive outcomes among TD siblings, such as higher tolerance and compassion (Kaminsky & Dewey, 2001). Studies by Begun (1989) found that even though siblings with ASD had difficulty with their ASD sibling throughout adolescence, acceptance of siblings with impairments increased with maturity. Studies

by Diener et al. (2015) also shows TD siblings enjoyed spending time with their ASD sibling, and reported that they gained pleasure in helping them and valued the importance of their relationship. Thus far, the study aims to see if the siblings of children with ASD are more likely to experience psychosocial adjustment difficulties such as emotional and behavioral development related to their sibling relationship.

1.2 Problem Statement

Numerous studies have attempted to examine the effects of disabled children on families by focusing on parents, particularly mothers (Roquette Viana et al., 2021; Papadopoulos, 2021; Giallo et al., 2012). However, as sibling relationships can also become one of the permanent relationships of an individual's life, therefore they also can influence their adaptation and their well-being throughout the developmental period. Previous study showed that siblings with ASD children are at risk of behavioral and emotional difficulties compared to the general population (Griffith et al., 2014; Shivers et al., 2013). However, only a small group of TD siblings falls in the clinically significant range (Ross & Cuskelly, 2006). Having an autistic sibling does not necessarily result in negative outcomes, but certain subgroups of siblings may be prone to the negative of emotional and behavioral development. Even though there has been a lot of study done in this area for the last several years, there is still room for development in order to encourage positive sibling relationships and to manage any conflict situations in the future.

Past extensive research devoted to understand the possible factors of sibling relationship adjustments in terms of the strength, gender, order of birth, family size, as well as level of the

autistic type. However, the majority of studies on these issues was mainly conducted within the Western countries (Chu et al., 2021). According to Cicirelli (1995), there are clear differences of the sibling relationship in different cultural context. In Malaysia, limited studies have been conducted to determine the challenges or issues faced by families of children with ASD, and although studies have been conducted in Western countries, few were focused on adolescent TD siblings. This statement also being supported by Chu et al. (2021), where studies about the sibling relationship have been done across the United Kingdom, the United States and even in Australia but the challenges and impacts of having siblings diagnosed with ASD conducted in Malaysia are still low. It is necessary to investigate this topic within the Malaysian context given the differences of multicultural differences between the Western and Malaysian setting (Sumari et al., 2019). Thus, knowing the needs of the ASD siblings might help with the development of a more extensive support structure for the TD siblings.

Plentiful research has been conducted related to the sibling relationship with the adjustments, emotional and behavioral development (e.g. Rixon et al., 2021; Longobardi et al., 2019; Jones et al., 2019). However, these research needs improvement in terms of variability of the siblings. According to Rixon et al. (2021), the studies conducted are focusing on only one sibling in the family. This is also followed by study conducted by Jones et al. (2019), where the studies conducted removed multiple sibling participants and only take in consideration of only one sibling perspective within the family system. Thus, this study focuses on the variability of the siblings where multiple siblings within the same family is taken in consideration to provide a deeper understanding of the impact of autism on both individuals and the whole-family dynamic.

Studies of siblings of individuals with an ASD have focused on the sibling relationship in varied life stages such as childhood, adolescent and adulthood. In some studies, adolescent TD siblings are reported to have more conflicts and less satisfaction in terms of their sibling relationship (Begun, 1989). However, in some studies, during adulthood, the siblings became more closer because of acceptance. In other studies, conducted by Kovshoff et al. (2017), results shows that there are mix experiences of each sibling relationship through adolescences to adulthood. Some of the participants experience in positive relationship while others reported to have positive and balanced sibling relationship. Thus, we have limited knowledge about the sibling relationship at specific points during the life course and how the sibling relationship changes over time in this population as the results of previous studies also varies.

Understanding developmental differences in the sibling relationship in adolescence in this population is important because adolescence is a phase of the lifespan associated with widespread changes in emotional behavior thought to reflect both changing environments and stressors, and psychological and neurobiological development (McLaughlin, Garrad & Somerville, 2015). Hence, the current study extends previous research by examining siblings in the specific age of groups adolescence to scrutinize and give more information about how sibling relationship in adolescent range may affect the development of emotional and behavioral development. It is hoped that this study will gain deeper understanding of the challenges faced by TD siblings to endorse healthy family functioning and preventing the negative development of emotional and behavior of the TD sibling.

1.3 Research Objectives

1.3.1 General Objective

To determine the quality of sibling relationship and the development of emotional and behavioral of typical developed (TD) sibling.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

In the specific objective, the study aimed to address the following research objectives:

1. To investigate the correlation of the strength of sibling relationship and the development of emotional and behavioral of typically developed siblings.
2. To analyze the impact of the strength of sibling relationship towards the development of emotional and behavioral of typically developed siblings in the presence of ASD sibling.

1.4 Research Questions

1. Is there a relationship between the quality of sibling relationship and the development of emotional and behavioral differences of typically developed sibling?
2. Which strength of the sibling relationship give more impact on the emotional and behavioral development of the typically developed siblings.

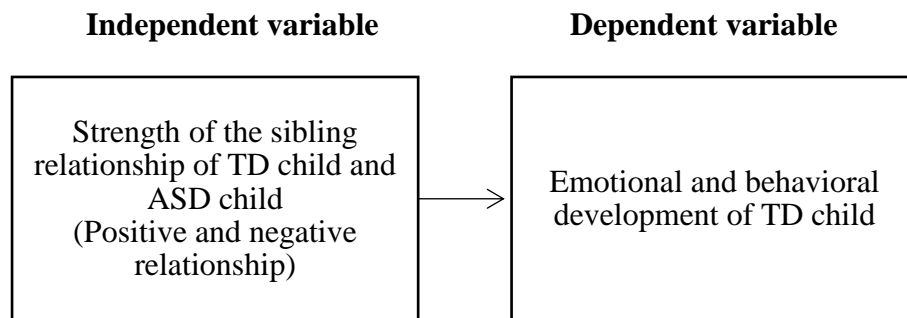
1.5 Research Hypothesis

1. There is a significant relationship between the strength of the sibling relationship and the development of emotional and behavioral development of typically developed sibling.
2. There is a moderating impact negative sibling relationship and emotional and behavioral development of typically developed sibling.

1.6 Conceptual Framework

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework



1.7 Significance of Study

The significance of this study is to improve the current body of knowledge on the sibling relationships in presence of Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and how the strength of the relationship impacts the development of emotional and behavioral differences of TD siblings in Malaysian perspectives.

In addition, this current study wanted to highlight the importance of understanding the family system in dealing with person with disabilities within the family of Autistic Spectrum

Disorder (ASD), in aspects of emotional and behavioral of the TD siblings. This is because knowing more about the relationship's strength may offer to promote empathy for the struggles encountered by the TD siblings, therefore decreasing any potentially consequences of ASD-related stresses. Thus, an understanding of their experiences is critical because it provides an overview of daily family realities and how ASD can impact the entire family.

Moreover, the study also offers some important insights into the risk factors that may help to identify children with ASD sibling in need of treatment and to recommend suitable treatment methods in any case of severe sibling relationship. This study will help to create awareness and give better perspective to the family where the parents also need to give more attention to their TD child. Lastly, it is hoped that this study could offer insights to all parties, especially the professionals and with this study, it is hoped that some practical application could be derived and used to develop more studies and intervention program not only focused on the parents of the ASD child, but also the siblings of the ASD child.

1.8 Operational Definition

1.8.1 Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Conceptual Definition: Deficits or impairments of social and communicative ability and repetitive stereotypic behaviors or narrow, restricted interests (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Operational Definition: A permanent neurological illness that affects social impairment in children, such as repetitive behaviour and communication difficulties.

1.8.2 Typically Developed (TD) child

Conceptual Definition: A normal developmental process in which children change as they get older by naturally gaining and refining information, actions, and abilities (Kaur & Rani, 2020).

Operational Definition: Generic progress of child compared to peers of the same age.

1.9 Summary

In order to identify the relationship between the strength of the sibling relationship and the emotional and behavioral development of the TD child, the background of the study, problem statement, research purpose, research hypotheses, conceptual framework, significance of the research, and definition of components to the studies were all written out and have been explained in Chapter 1. The following chapter will go over more details of the literature review of this study.