

Psychological Stress among Siblings of Children with Intellectual Disabilities*

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Abstract: *This study aimed to identify the degree of the psychological stress among siblings of children with intellectual disabilities. To achieve the objectives of the study, a questionnaire was developed and distributed to (60) brothers and sisters of children with intellectual disabilities at Najran, Saudi Arabia. The results indicated that there was a low degree stress related to Fears, anger, and sense of insecurity, on one hand and low – degree stress related to other aspects, on the other hand. Families whose members' were less than five had higher degrees of pressures in the relationship with parents and taking responsibilities aspects. There were no significant differences in accordance to gender.*

Keywords: *psychological stress, siblings, intellectual disabilities.*

I. Introduction

The family is the first social school for the individuals to live normally and it is the main social system that provides the basis for the community's existence; each member needs to understand himself, and identifies life's demands. He needs psychological and social compatibility with himself and with others to achieve an acceptable level of psychological health that enables him to survive normally in life. Hence, the importance of psychological guidance becomes prominent in all life aspects (Al-Khouli, 1982).

The family is an integrative system that involves a group of members where each one affects in and be affected by others. The presence of a handicapped child among them represents a source of pressure for the rest of members. It may critical juncture in the life of that family which will directly affect various aspects such as social, economic, behavioral, and emotional. All of this requires meeting some of the demands that enables the family to encounter the psychological pressures resulting from the child's disability. Creating a good psychologically, socially, and educationally background and knowledge of family members is the most important function of the family. In case of the presence of a disabled child in the family, it begins its struggle to face the pressures imposed by such a presence. Family efforts are exploited negatively because of the needs of its disabled child for medical care and continual supervision (McDonald & Gregoire, 1997).

On intellectual disabilities there were many challenges and various problems depend for the child and his family particularly parents, brothers and sisters. The psychological stress is the most remarkable challenge.

1.1 The Psychological Stress

Stress seen as a harmful emotional status stems from frustrating one or more of the original or acquires motivations. Many definitions were provided for psychological pressure in light of scientific theories. Amongst is "the body's undetermined response towards any required function whether it was a reason or a result of harmful or tragic circumstances" (Al- Ghrair, 1999). Walker (2001) defined it as "problems and difficulties that exceed the individual's capacity of endurance". Caplan defined it, as "the situation which shows considerable variation between the requirements that should be performed by an organism and its ability to respond" (Jamil, 1998). Fontana (1989) mentioned that psychological pressure is a situation that appears when outer demands exceed the organism's abilities and potentials". Rossiter and Sharpe (2001) claim that emphasis to study the relationship between Intellectual Disabilities persons and their brothers and sisters have increased lately. Many studies showed the negative impact of the presence of a mentally child with disabilities among normal brothers and sisters.

Marsh (1992) believed that the presence of a child with intellectual disabilities among the family might be a pushing incident. It creates disturbance for nearly all family members, as it is an unexpected event in the absence of family members who have expertise about the nature of such an event. Turnbull and Turnbull (1997) pointed out that there is a change appeared on the functions of all family members that has child with Intellectual Disabilities. The economic, social, and psychological regimes of the family affected, too. The family needs to adapt with some changes that took place on its roles and functions. Al-Rehani (1985) believed that the existence of intellectual disabilities brother or sister increases the burden of normal brothers and sisters and sisters during their lifetime. It also hinders their social, cultural, sports activities and makes them under intensive pressure, anxiety, and stress especially if the family depends on them to look after its retarded child.

(Yahiya, 1999) showed that there are negative effects in brothers and sisters and sisters' adaptation in society especially at school and college where they study. They are frightened to have a retarded child in future. Simon (1994) indicated that retardation at the families studied did not led to negative effects on parents, brothers and sisters, or even on the other members of the family particularly on family relations with other families and with marital happiness. The study also pointed to the type of retardation determines, to some extent the intense of negative effects on family or the relations among its members. Studying the effects of the retarded on non-retarded brothers and sisters and sisters appeared as a point that needs more attention. Life with a retarded brother or sister, for some people causes adaptation problems

Related literature to the impact of a person with disability inside the family on normal brothers and sisters and sisters like Rolland (1994), South Carolina Department of Disabilities and Special Needs (DDSN) (1994), Marsh (1992), and Lobato (1983) state the followings as resources for pressures on them:

1. Responsibility and parenthood sense: which increases the pressures on the retarded brothers and sisters and sisters, the burden his brothers and sisters have to shoulder, as they are required to take care of him, of the house works, or even other duties they usually do not do because of parents' concern of their retarded brother who needs more care. The responsibility of person with intellectual disability is to great and needs more time and effort and so it can lead to lack of interaction inside the family, psychological loneliness among normal brothers and sisters.
2. Sense of anger and guilt: taking responsibility of the Intellectual Disabilities brother or sister by other normal brothers and sisters leads to the growth of anger, resentment, guilt, and sometimes-psychological disorder. The child with intellectual disability consumes time and money before brothers and sisters be ready for that which may transfer them through life stages earlier.
3. Fears of having similar cases: normal brothers and sisters ordinary share their brother genetic characteristics disabilities, which frightens them of having this fear in the future. They are worried of contagion and being disabled. They fear of it occurrence with their children in the future.
4. Disorder of family relations, social isolation sense, non- marital adjustment or jumbled family relationships, and the deformation of family relationships are the most important sources of pressure among normal brothers and sisters of the retarded one. Granting care by normal brothers and sisters to the retarded one caused a decrease of outdoor activities, touch with friends, and consequently to social isolation.
5. Parents' attitudes: normal brothers and sisters and sisters are affected by their parents' attitudes. Parents who have general acceptance for their child offer responses and attitudes that enables brothers, and sisters to respond similarly to their retarded brother or sister. In return, parents who respond negatively, shyly, and anxiously are unable to positively affect on their normal children.

1.2 Previous studies

Mchale et al (1986) revealed a positive relationship between retarded and normal brothers and sisters. Zetlin, (1986) stresses that there are relationship between retarded and normal brothers and sisters was characterized by warm senses, continuous interaction, and comprehensive incorporation, on one hand and warm senses, continuous interaction, little incorporation, on the other hand. Sisters were more careful of their retarded brothers than brothers, and carry out huge duties towards them. Gath and Gumley (1987) asserted that the retardation type and intense are related factors to the behavioral problems of the retarded child. Stoneman et al (1988) studied the responsibilities of mature brothers and sisters' care of their retarded brothers and sisters, the clear conflict degree of brotherhood relation, and outer activities of mature brothers and sisters. The study showed that elder sisters endured the personal responsibility, self-care and duties preparation. Increasing the care responsibilities of disabled brothers and sisters led to the fratricidal conflict and a lack of activities outside the home and affected the sibling relationship of ordinary brothers and sisters with others. Hanold (1989) studies the family's dynamics in case of the presence of a disabled child and the sufferings of his normal brothers and sisters. The study revealed that non-retarded brothers and sisters were curious about their brothers and sisters' retardation.

Hannah et al (1999) aimed to identify the efficiency of the brothers and sisters of intellectual disabilities children. The study revealed that brothers and sisters have more difficulties in the activities and school homework whereas sisters showed senses of depression. Rimmerman (2001) discovers that intellectual disabilities brothers and sisters had more frequent interaction, this frequency increases when parents are disable to offer help or even in case of their death. Orfus (2008) evaluates the stress and dealing of brothers and sisters of children with special needs. The findings revealed the pressures experienced by those brothers and sisters. The researchers mentioned that most of the brothers and sisters felt embarrassed in front of friends. They also pointed that everyday troubles with their brothers and sisters were the most common. Abdat (2007) tried to identify the psychological and social effects of retardation on the brothers and sisters and sisters of the retarded persons at Sharjah, UAE. Results revealed great stresses in the field of a sense of responsibility whereas little

stress existed in the fields of sense of anger and being guilty, and in the field relationship with society. The level of pressure was moderate in the field of fear and the relationship with parents

Al-Hadidi and Al-Khateeb (1996) studied the impact of the child’s disability on his family. Findings illustrated that the effects of the biggest impact on family was in the brothers and sisters’ relationships, the acceptance of retardation and surviving with resulted pressures, and family members’ social relationships. Madhi (2000) aimed to determine whether or not there were differences in the psychological pressures of the brothers and sisters of retarded children due to gender. Results revealed that normal brothers and sisters who are older than the disabled child are sufficient to psychological stress more than his younger or of same age brothers and sisters. Sisters on the other hand are subjected to these stresses in a higher degree.

II. Method

2.1 Population and Sample

The population consisted of (200) brothers and sisters of intellectual disabilities students who were enrolled in intellectual disabilities programs at Najran, KSA. Furthermore, the sample of the study consisted of (50) brothers and sisters of intellectual disabilities students.

2.2 Instrument

A scale was developed to measure the psychological stress. It included, in its preliminary form four dimensions namely senses, fears, and insecurity sense; social interaction; family relationships; and sense of responsibility dimensions and (35) investigating items of the psychological and social impacts that face the brothers and sisters of children with intellectual disabilities. The scale relied on four dimensions to determine the general rating of each item as follows agree to a great degree, agree to a moderate degree, agree to a little degree, and don’t agree and were given 4, 3, 2, and 1 degrees respectively. The instrument was developed in its preliminary form of (35) items distributed to four dimensions. Shown to (14) faculty members at Najran University were specialists in the fields. After that the instrument was produced in its final version which, this time included (30) items for the four dimensions. Reliability coefficient was calculated in accordance to Cronbach Alpha formula for internal consistency. (0.80) means that the instrument was reliable and suitable for the study aims.

III. Results

3.1 Results related to the first question: “What is the nature of stress that face the brothers and sisters of Intellectual Disabilities children”? Mean and standard deviations for the degree of pressures faced by brothers and sisters of Intellectual Disabilities children. Results are illustrated in table one.

Table 1. Means, standard deviations and level of stress

Aspects of the instrument	M	SD	Level of Stress
Fears, anger, and sense of insecurity	1.88	0.550	Average
Social interaction	1.33	0.560	Low
Relationship with parents	1.73	0.456	Low
Responsibility shouldering	1.47	0.717	Low

The above table shows that there were little psychological stresses in the first aspect that is fears, anger, and sense of insecurity. However, they were too low in rest of the aspects.

3.2. Results related to the second question: “Do the psychological pressures differ by the difference in the numbers of family members?” Means standard deviations and and T-test calculated as show in table two.

Table 2: Means, standard deviations, and T-test according to family size

Aspects of the instrument	Family size	Mean	DF	F	Sig
Fears, anger, and sense of insecurity	Small	1.96	36	0.003	.669
	large	1.86			
Social interaction	Small	1.59	36	1.077	.167
	Large	1.28			
Relationship with parents	Small	2.07	36	1.013	.018
	Large	1.63			
Responsibility shouldering	Small	2.42	36	7.077	0.00
	Large	1.25			

Table two revealed significant differences at ($\alpha= 0.05$) with regard to responsibility shouldering aspect, significance was 0.00 respectively.

3.3. Results related to the answers of the third question: “Do the psychological stress vary according to gender”? Means, standard deviations and T-test were calculated in accordance to gender variable. Table three illustrates these findings.

Table 3. Means, standard deviations, and T-test according to gender

Aspects of the instrument	Gender	Mean	DF	F.	Sig
Fears, anger, and sense of insecurity	Male	1.79	38	.394	.255
	Female	2.00			
Social interaction	Male	1.25	38	1.53	.162
	Female	1.41			
Relationship with parents	Male	1.67	38	.341	.126
	Female	1.80			
Responsibility shouldering	Male	1.44	38	.651	.059
	Female	1.50			

Table three shows that there were no statistically significant differences at ($\alpha= 0.05$) for all instrument’s aspects.

IV. Discussion

The main aim of the present study was to identify the nature of the stress that face brothers and sisters of intellectual disabilities children. Furthermore, it aimed to illustrate the relationship between the number of family members and gender. This part discusses the findings that were concluded out of the present study. The results showed that there were low psychological stress in fears, anger, and insecurity sense. There were less psychological stresses in the rest of the instrument’s aspects. In other words, the intellectual disabilities children’s brothers and sisters and sisters have acceptance for their brother or sister’s retardation. They also understand and comprehend his/ her conditions and their family’s status. They also have faith that retardation is caused by God only. They had positive attitudes towards mental retardation that enhanced them to accept their retarded brother or sister with a low level of psychological stresses. In addition, the social and financial circumstances of Saudi families that possess a high level of income incorporate in the satisfaction of the retarded child. This in turn, contributes to the construction of positive attitudes from the part of brothers and sisters and sisters towards their retarded brother or sister. In addition to the facilities provided by the government such teaching, transportation, nutrition, and monthly salary which helps to fulfill some of the retarded child’s needs and reduces stresses on his/ her family including normal brothers and sisters and sisters. The present study was on agreement with Abdat (2007) in accordance to the existence of stresses in the aspects of social relations and anger and sense of being guilty in a low degree. There were other stresses with regard to the aspect of fears that disagreed with the present study in relation to their degree. It also was in agreement with Kingsley (2002) which mentioned that most of the brothers and sisters and sister of the retarded child did not look at his existence in their families of much impact on their private lives.

Results revealed the presence of differences according to the number of family members in the aspect of the relationships with parents and responsibility shouldering. The stresses’ degrees of families that had members ranging from one to five were higher than those, which had six or more individuals. The researchers explained this variance by the fact that the sons’ interaction with parents in smaller families is usually higher than bigger ones. Furthermore, burdens and responsibilities are distributed to sons in big families, whereas they are restricted to a little number of persons in small families. In the result stresses are of higher degrees in small families, but they are of lower degrees in big families. Consequently, one can claim that family size plays a significant role in psychological stresses of normal brothers and sisters and sisters inside families. When the number of persons increases, individuals’ responsibilities decline, and vice versa.

Results related to gender variable revealed no significant differences in psychological pressures existence among the retarded child brothers and sisters and sisters on the four main aspects of study instrument. This might be because of the environment where the study sample lived. This environment is known by its commitment to the religious believes, traditions, and customs. The female’s encounter with the society is limited. This Result is in full agreement with Al-Hadidi and Al-Khateeb (1996) that showed no significant differences related to the degree of the psychological pressures among the brothers and sisters and sisters of the retarded child

V. Recommendations

In light of the previous findings, the study has the following set of recommendation:

1. The necessity to take into consideration the psychological and emotional demands of the brothers and sisters and sisters of the disabled children and work to satisfy them in a way that reduces the psychological pressures on them.

2. The necessity of enrolling brothers and sisters and sisters of disabled children in counseling and psychological programs to decrease their senses of fears and insecurity and provide them with the essential information about their brother's retardation.
3. The necessity to work on constructing group for the support of retarded children's brothers and sisters and sister to benefit from the experiences around.

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