

Emotional Challenges and Coping Mechanisms Among Adolescent Siblings of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder: An Applied Perspective on Innovative Psychosocial Support

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ABSTRACT: This article examines the emotional challenges and coping mechanisms experienced by adolescent siblings, particularly those aged 11 to 17, of children with autism spectrum disorder and considers applied directions for innovative psychosocial support. Drawing on stress-coping, family-resilience, and social-ecological perspectives, it synthesizes how caregiving demands, unequal parental attention, family stress, perceived inequity, social isolation, and limited access to services may shape siblings' emotional, behavioral, and social adjustment. The article reviews emotion-focused, problem-focused, and help-seeking coping responses and highlights the protective role of parental support, balanced family roles, peer connection, and school and community involvement. It further identifies family-centered interventions, psychoeducation, communication and emotional-regulation skills training, peer-support groups, and flexible school- or community-linked delivery as promising support mechanisms. Attention is also given to cultural sensitivity, ethical practice, scalability, and intervention evaluation across family, school, and community settings. The article concludes that sibling-focused support should be integrated into broader autism services and designed as a multi-level system that strengthens adaptive coping, emotional resilience, family communication, and timely access to psychosocial assistance.

Keywords: Adolescent siblings; Autism spectrum disorder; Coping strategies; Psychosocial support; Family resilience

1. Introduction

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) affects the behaviours, interests, and daily activities of an individual, yet its disruption does not exclusively encompass the afflicted child; it spreads to the environment and affects other family members, such as significant others, parents, and siblings. The elder siblings of children with ASD experience a wide range of emotional challenges. Empirical studies have examined the emotional

difficulties faced by adolescent siblings and found that several types of support among this group are often overlooked or ignored. Generally, these studies have observed other forms of adjustment or emotional concerns, including behaviour and social challenges. Consequently, innovative psychosocial support programmes targeting emotional support for adolescent siblings of children with ASD that are based on an applied perspective are essential.

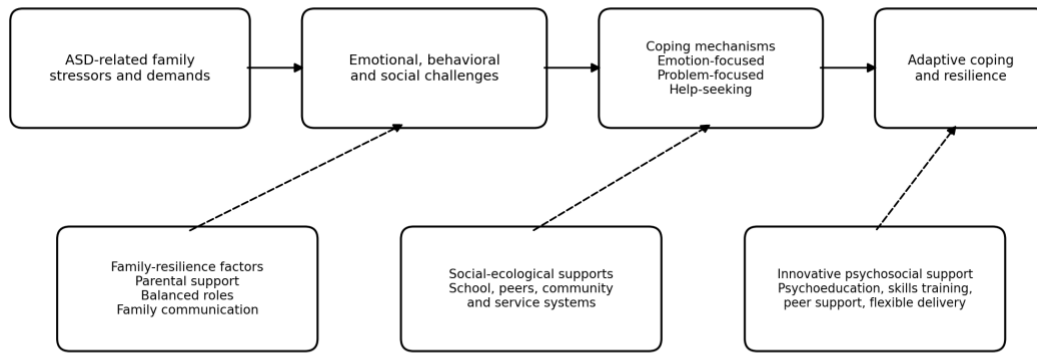
The psychosocial support for adolescent siblings of children with ASD in adolescents aged 11 to 17 is innovative yet deserving of a broader discussion. The psychological and social concerns of adolescent siblings aged 11 to 17 of children with ASD as well as the related support strategies are reviewed. Targeting adolescents is important as the age group marks the onset of extensive psychosocial development. The specific focus on sibling relationships is also crucial because siblings can remain closer to an individual with ASD throughout life compared with other family members. With regard to the family structure, siblings are another significant party possessing a desire and need for intervention. Active psychological difficulties due to the presence of autism in the family have been emphasised, and such problems subsequently raised to an external context of concern.

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a significant public health issue worldwide (E. Angell et al., 2012). The cornerstone of psychosocial support for adolescent siblings lies in clarifying definitions of autism, sibling, and psychosocial support. The contemporary concept of autism encompasses specific conditions such as Asperger syndrome, pervasive developmental disorder (not otherwise specified), and childhood disintegrative disorder (BANCROFT, 2018). The three well-known challenges experienced by these children comprise social communication, sociability, and abnormal patterns of behaviour. Upon clarifying the definition of the disorder, sibling refers solely to children with disability in the family. Siblings' supports address the public systems in serving children with disabilities and, as stated in the above publications, are commonly less active in addressing siblings and family-systems-related variables. Sibling dynamics involve the bond and reciprocity of roles between siblings, thereby acquiring considerable social and emotional connection and, subsequently, underpinning important consideration for intervention. The great variety of age, gender, and relationship types in childhood highlights the importance of resorting to the definition and specified family and autism service systems. Psychosocial support indicates the broadened scope of focused areas, which can greatly and sensibly enhance the multi-varied and great qualified designs and inputs.

2. Theoretical Framework

The present study is grounded in a theoretical framework for understanding coping among adolescent siblings of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and the family dynamics shaping those processes. The framework draws on three relevant theoretical models the stress-coping model, the family-resilience model, and the social-ecological model that together illuminate key factors affecting the well-being of adolescent siblings. Each model identifies boundaries for the mechanisms operationalized in the study: the stress-coping model highlights the link between stressors and coping strategies; the family-resilience model focuses on protective factors that foster positive adaptation in the face of adverse circumstances; and the social-ecological model identifies the multi-layered contexts surrounding individuals that sustain and shape their responses. By examining the emotional challenges faced by adolescent siblings of children with ASD, the coping strategies they employ, and the corresponding family dynamics, the study seeks to inform innovative approaches providing psychosocial support in community settings.

Fig. 1. Integrated framework of emotional challenges, coping mechanisms, and psychosocial support among adolescent siblings of children with ASD



Integrated perspective: stress-coping + family resilience + social-ecological context

Source. Author's elaboration based on the article synthesis.

3. Prevalence and Nature of Emotional Challenges in Adolescent Siblings

Siblings of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) encounter a range of emotional, behavioral, and social challenges. Prevalence rates and composite effects differ according to gender and living arrangements, and certain characteristics such as age, family structure, severity of the child's autism, and service use intensify difficulties. Sibling coping strategies exhibit considerable variability across the life span; yet several general patterns can be identified. Circumstances within the family, including caregiver stress, additional family health concerns, and parental attention to the sibling, influence coping choices.

Broader problems, such as access to services for children with ASD, caregiver burden, and family-centered service provision, significantly affect the emotional well-being of siblings and their ability to cope (Hemming, 2010). However, although the sibling experience of children with other disabilities or at-risk conditions remains better documented, comparable data regarding ASD are scanty. Such information is missing despite implications for siblings' emotional health, supporting mechanisms and pathways that influence child outcomes, and identification of preventive and remedial support approaches.

Table 1. Emotional challenges and contextual influences identified in the article

Challenge / contextual factor	Article-based description	Potential implication for sibling well-being
Emotional, behavioral, and social challenges	Siblings may experience emotional concerns, behavioral difficulties, and social challenges.	Greater risk of adjustment difficulties and emotional strain.
Family stress and caregiver burden	Caregiver stress, additional family health concerns, and the broader burden of ASD influence siblings' coping choices.	Can intensify stress and reduce the availability of supportive family resources.
Parental attention and role imbalance	Differential parental resource allocation and caregiving role commitments can create unbalanced sibling exchanges.	May contribute to guilt, resentment, rivalry, or a sense of inequity.
Service access and support barriers	Limited sibling-focused services, reluctance to burden others, and feelings of isolation can restrict help-seeking.	Can leave emotional needs under-addressed and reduce access to timely support.
Individual and family characteristics	Age, gender, living arrangements, family structure, ASD severity, and service use may shape the intensity of difficulties.	Supports flexible, individualized psychosocial support.

Source. Author's synthesis based on Sections 3 and 7 of the article.

4. Coping Strategies and Resilience Among Siblings

Siblings of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) cope with emotional and practical challenges by employing various strategies with differing degrees of success. Coping classifications based on the individual focus of various coping efforts whether aimed at modifying emotional or problem-related aspects of the situation or at enlisting assistance from others prove helpful. Emotion-focused coping involves strategies like seeking support or escape, limiting interaction with the affected child, distracting oneself with other activities, or talking about thoughts and feelings. Problem-focused coping encompasses efforts directed toward solutions, such as seeking assistance with the care of the affected child, gathering information about resources, or finding auxiliary aids like scented candles to reduce problematic behavior. Help-seeking consists of reaching out to parents, teachers, or peers for support. These three types of coping have different relationships with family stress and difficulties, indicating that they influence the likelihood of emotional and behavioral adjustment. Siblings describe a range of accessible social, emotional, and practical supports but also note various barriers to receiving assistance, including feelings of isolation, reluctance to burden others, and formulations of care responsibilities as “fair” or “unfair.” Resilience among siblings materializes when they receive desirable adaptive coping (E. Angell et al., 2012) rather than maladaptive (emotion-focused) coping and when they engage in the adaptation strategy of seeking external help. Resilience is bolstered further when they enjoy parental support and when their childlike roles and responsibilities are maintained.

5. Psychosocial Support Models: Foundations and Innovations

A wide variety of psychosocial support models exist to alleviate the emotional challenges associated with having a sibling with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Traditionally, the prevailing approach has been family-centered intervention, in which professionals work with the entire family unit to ensure that all siblings receive the necessary psychosocial support. More recently, however, emerging models have adopted a broader focus on siblings of children with ASD and incorporate innovations such as digital delivery, community-based programs, and school-linked services. These models often take the form of stand-alone programs directed specifically at adolescent siblings. They seek to meet the need for increased, effective support that is scalable in order to reach a larger population of helper children. Programs in this category include The Sibling Support Project (Institute for Educational Empowerment), Sibling Connections (Family Action Network), and programs at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Addressing the psychosocial needs of the adolescent sibling of a child with ASD fosters emotional well-being while preventing the onset of more serious problems. The proposed approach accommodates a variety of settings and formats, including one-on-one, small group, or larger gatherings with multiple siblings. Variables such as group size, duration, and timing are adaptable, allowing implementation in homes, schools, community centers, or other appropriate locations. Content can be alternated to keep the sessions engaging; prepackaged materials are available for many of these options.

The provision of psychosocial support acts as protection for the emotional well-being of adolescent siblings, counterbalancing the stressors linked to having a brother or sister with ASD. Program implementation can occur through multiple channels, including mental health organizations, state departments of health, community-based organizations, schools, or a combination of these. Multi-component programs that integrate psychoeducation, skills training, and peer support enhance outcomes across a range of domains, including child and family well-being, and provide added credibility to organizations such as the collaborating community entity or mental health agency. Potential indicators for tracking the effectiveness of these approaches include expressive or predictive outcomes. Facilitators require competencies in both group leadership and knowledge about siblings of children with disabilities; training materials and accompanying checklists are available to assist in training development, promoting implementation fidelity.

6. Applied Approaches to Intervention

Applied approaches to intervention aim to provide psychosocial support for adolescent siblings of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Programs designed around participation, outreach, and facilitation

are proposed. A multi-component intervention framework focuses on parental psychoeducation, skill development (communication, stress management, emotional regulation, and self-advocacy), coping strategy exploration, and peer support. These steps remain adaptable to diverse contexts, enabling delivery as school-linked workshops, community-based sessions, or home-based visits. Culturally sensitive delivery methods, along with guidance and resources for practitioner training, are pivotal to the intervention's implementation.

The proposed approach offers flexibility, scope for local adaptation, and alignment with selected psychosocial support principles (BANCROFT, 2018). In addition to ASD-related challenges, adolescent siblings commonly navigate issues associated with their developmental stage and environmental pressures. A multi-component program that incorporates psychoeducation, skills training, and peer support can therefore facilitate peer-to-peer exchanges and open dialogues within families, fostering better safeguarding of their well-being. To enhance relevance and effectiveness, the approach should prioritise options already established in related interventions for family members of autistic individuals.

Table 2. Coping and innovative psychosocial support mechanisms discussed in the article

Mechanism / support component	Core elements described in the article	Possible delivery setting	Intended contribution
Emotion-focused coping	Seeking support or escape, limiting interaction, distraction, and talking about thoughts and feelings.	Home, peer contexts, individual support	Helps manage emotional reactions, although some forms may become avoidant or maladaptive.
Problem-focused coping	Seeking assistance with care, gathering information about resources, and identifying practical aids.	Family and service settings	Addresses practical demands and supports more active problem management.
Help-seeking	Reaching out to parents, teachers, peers, or other trusted adults.	Home, school, community	Strengthens access to external support and may reinforce resilience.
Psychoeducation and skills training	Communication, stress management, emotional regulation, self-advocacy, and coping-strategy exploration.	School-linked workshops, community sessions, home visits	Builds coping knowledge and practical emotional-management skills.
Peer and family-centered support	Peer groups, open family dialogue, family-centered intervention, and coordinated support.	Small groups, family sessions, community or school programs	Promotes connection, emotional well-being, family communication, and adaptive coping.

Source. Author's synthesis based on Sections 4-6 of the article.

7. Family Dynamics and Sibling Relationships

The sibling relationships of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) have received limited empirical investigation, particularly concerning how the presence of a child with ASD interacts with family dynamics and the perceptions of siblings without the disorder. Research has identified a burgeoning need for psychosocial interventions targeting typical siblings of children with ASD. Sibling bonds are a vital and often lifelong connection that can exert a powerful influence on an individual's life trajectory, including developmental pathways, mental health, and psychosocial adjustment. Yet autism-related caregiving can disrupt sibling relationships through differential parental resource allocation, the substitution of informational support with practical assistance, and the imposition of role commitments, leading to unbalanced exchanges that heighten sibling rivalry, sense of inequity, and guilt (E. Angell et al., 2012).

The younger the age at which a child with an impairment is added to a family, the more likely it becomes that the first-born typically developing child will be perceived as a second-class citizen, resulting in resentment and rivalry (Swomley Harden, 1994). Interventions should capitalize on existing sibling resources by providing access to at least two types of aid not readily available within the sibling relationship, thereby steering sibling interactions toward a more positive developmental course. Research has moved

beyond investigating the emotional-cognitive, behavioral, and social challenges of adolescent siblings of children with ASD to shed light on the strategies siblings employ to cope with those difficulties.

8. School and Community Involvement

Adolescents often reach out to various community members, including school staff and youth workers, for advice and support regarding their sibling's autism-related challenges. Collaborating with educators, guidance counselors, youth workers, and after-school program leaders can facilitate the promotion of supportive strategies in school clubs and community programs for adolescents with ASD. Innovative outreach strategies include staff training, information dissemination in schools and recreational facilities, and the provision of access to information manuals and resource lists regarding ASD and sibling experiences (E. Angell et al., 2012). Emerging community-based initiatives include the delivery of psychoeducational and skills-training modules to adolescents with ASD, which could also be extended to their siblings in parallel community sessions. School-linked models offer further opportunities to promote and implement psychosocial support programs for both adolescents with and without autism.

9. Ethical Considerations and Cultural Sensitivity

Siblings of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) may experience not only emotional difficulties but also adaptive coping and resilient development, indicating a need for effective and contextually appropriate interventions. Adolescent siblings encounter a unique transition characterized by a shift away from family toward peers, and the effects of ASD on family dynamics and caregiving responsibilities can significantly influence their coping and resilience. Psychosocial support can enhance these positive adaptive processes, helping siblings navigate the dual challenge of adolescence and the demands of supporting a brother or sister with ASD. The provision of such support to these siblings remains a priority in contemporary education and health policy (Swomley Harden, 1994).

Research has recognized the importance of addressing the needs of siblings of children with ASD in order to support psychological and social wellbeing. The requisite social competencies, peer integration, and acceptance shared by families, schools, and community services all serve to encourage positive developmental trajectories for siblings of children with ASD. Siblings experience strengthened resilience, coping skills, and emotional wellbeing through the promotion of supportive relationships and the exploration of self-awareness regarding their thoughts, feelings, and aspirations. Multidimensional family engagement and participation are required to enhance the psychosocial quality of life and developmental progression of siblings of children with ASD (BANCROFT, 2018). Addressing issues such as these through interventions delivered in formal or informal settings (e.g., schools, community centers, during meetings with social and health service professionals) remains critical and timely.

Research involving younger members of families dealing with ASD and other associated behavioral challenges suggests that the introduction of structured activities that promote self-reflection, sharing, discussion, and the delivery of information about the condition enhances psychosocial wellbeing. Information acquisition about the disability, coupled with time spent with parents, encourages the development of positive coping strategies. Participation in support groups facilitates the expression of emotions and strengthens emotional and behavioral regulation, leading towards increased development of positive coping skills, social skills, and the encouragement of positive thoughts regarding the future.

10. Evaluation of Interventions: Metrics and Evidence

The concern for the emotional well-being of siblings of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is increasingly addressed by researchers and practitioners. Evidence suggests that adolescents in this role may routinely grapple with significant emotional challenges as a result of their family context. Reports from the United Kingdom indicate that these difficulties are pervasive and that they occur across a range of ages, boys and girls, and degrees of severity of ASD symptomatology (McKenzie Smith et al., 2018). Research therefore aims to inform the development and evaluation of innovative psychosocial support models that promote effective coping with the challenges associated with being a sibling of a child with ASD. Such an

applied perspective is warranted by the state of existing knowledge and resources and by the growing recognition of the need for timely, practical assistance.

The overall goal is to enhance the emotional health of these siblings through the acquisition of coping skills and access to individual and peer support. Specific objectives include increasing the reliability and validity of the evidence base concerning the psychological experiences of these siblings, improving understanding of the influence of family factors on sibling well-being, and identifying opportunities for intervention at the family, school, and community levels. The work also seeks to encourage the continued adaptation of established psychosocial and educational support models to the context of siblings of children with disabilities (Davis, 2010).

11. Policy Implications and Resource Allocation

Providing support for siblings of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is an ongoing interest and priority at the national level. Research reveals that siblings of individuals with disabilities are at greater risk of experiencing psychosocial difficulties as compared to their peers and that this is particularly true for siblings of people with ASD. This is partially due to the widespread misconception that siblings of children with disabilities do not need assistance because they are often seen as having larger support networks than other groups of siblings. Yet, the evidence suggests that existing support services for these siblings remain limited. The need for additional funding and the further integration of research and practice in the area of ASD support remain both clear and pressing (BANCROFT, 2018).

12. Future Directions in Research and Practice

The topic of emotional challenges and coping strategies among adolescent siblings of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) warrants ongoing research and practice in several needs-based areas. The sibling experience of living with a child with autism has been shown to be emotionally challenging for many adolescent siblings, and the application of family systems theory illuminates numerous emotional and co-occurring challenges that arise during this period of development. Research examining coping strategies remains limited, particularly the influence of stress-related and resilience-based family factors and the broad range of coping strategies employed by this population. Furthermore, innovative approaches to scalable and proactive psychosocial support interventions are critically needed to address the increase in siblings' emotional challenges. Prior research underscores the potential for programs integrating peer support, information dissemination, coping skills training, and shared activities to foster emotional resilience and psychosocial wellbeing; however, applied programming refinement and scalability remain key obstacles to establishing systemic supports for this vulnerable cohort on the ground.

The existing literature review provides a theoretical grounding for continued investigation of emotional challenges, coping strategies, and corresponding family factors among adolescent siblings of children with ASD. The application of stress-coping theory clarifies the direct relationship between sibling caregiving stress and the emotional challenges reported by adolescent siblings. Likewise, resilience theory highlights the crucial protective role of family dynamics and the extended social-ecological system of family, school, and community in moderating emotional challenges and facilitating adaptive coping. Advances in theory-driven intervention innovation and programming refinement are urgently needed to promote peer-related, socially connected, and emotion-focused coping strategies and mitigate withdrawal, avoidance, and fellow-sibling-support-seeking coping strategies in early adolescence among siblings of children with ASD, thereby enhancing emotional resilience and alleviating the cycle of personal, family, and social distress (BANCROFT, 2018).

13. Conclusion

Research underscores the substantial emotional challenges experienced by many adolescent siblings of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). A review of the literature on coping reveals the broad range of strategies employed by siblings to deal with stress resulting from the presence of a child with ASD. Attention to sibling relations within families in which one child is diagnosed with ASD is crucial to ensuring

psychosocial support that assists these children and adolescents. From an applied perspective, intervention approaches that build directly on the existing knowledge base concerning the emotional difficulties faced by adolescent siblings of children with ASD and the coping practices that they adopt could be implemented.

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