

# Psychosocial Effects on Siblings of Children with Mental Retardation, Autism and Cerebral Palsy: A Population Based Study



Sandeep Aggarwal<sup>1\*</sup>, Shallu Aggarwal<sup>2</sup>, Manmeet Kaur Sodhi<sup>3</sup> and Abhinav Aggarwal<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor Paediatrics at Government Medical College Amritsar, Punjab, India

<sup>2</sup>HOD Ophthalmology at district hospital Amritsar, Punjab, India

<sup>3</sup>Professor and HOD Paediatrics Government Medical College Amritsar, Punjab, India

<sup>4</sup>Engineering graduate from Southampton University UK and currently serving as software engineer at Bangalore, India

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**\*Corresponding author:** Sandeep Aggarwal, Assistant Professor Paediatrics at Government Medical College Amritsar, Punjab, India

## Introduction

Psychosocial effects including interpersonal relationships, psychological issues, functioning at school on siblings of children with mental retardation, autism and cerebral palsy are needed to be studied as these children may feel neglected because much of the parents' energy including emotions, finances and time is directed toward the child with the disability,

## Aims and Objectives

To study the impact of having a disabled sibling on the normal children who are more likely to show behavioural and emotional problems as compared to normal households.

## Material and Methods

Every Wednesday I was issuing mental handicap certificates to children having mental disability more than 50% or IQ <70 at district hospital Amritsar for enabling them to register in pension schemes for mentally challenged children by Government. I selected 50 families having children of mental handicap. Families having marital disputes, below poverty line and illiterate parents were left out. 50 siblings were interviewed and asked about sibling relationships and about problems concerning their handicapped brothers or sisters and about problems concerning themselves. Parents were also interviewed about the healthy child's behaviour and social adjustment.

## Results

Out of 50, 24 felt their handicapped sibling a burden and felt that it would be better without him/her. 18 said that they still

love them and want them to be alright. Behavioural disturbances in siblings of severe handicap are greater than those of siblings of children with a mild mental handicap. About 42 children were feeling that more money spent on handicapped sibling, and they usually were not able to fulfil their wishes due to financial constraints. 37 children were having academic difficulties and due to handicapped sibling were not able to get required attention from parents (Figure 1).

## Discussion

Mental retardation makes a child incapable of living an independent life. In India, family bears the main burden of caring for such persons unlike in the developed world. Siblings are also affected by the condition. Siblings of handicapped children and especially siblings of children with autism were more concerned about the future. They also felt lonely more often and many of them had peer problems. They often regarded their handicapped siblings as a burden [1]. Significant group differences were found where brothers of handicapped children were rated by their mothers as being more depressed and aggressive than brothers of nonhandicapped control children. Sisters of handicapped children were rated by mothers as being more aggressive than sisters of nonhandicapped children [2]. Distinct psychological predictors exist for children with developmentally disabled siblings, with parental stress and some dimensions of the family social environment being most significant [3]. A Research showed that siblings of autistic boys scored significantly higher on depression than the comparison group, but not on problems of social adjustment [4].



Figure 1: Siblings.

## Conclusion

Having a disabled child affects parents' allocation of time and financial resources to their healthy children and can badly affect healthy siblings' health and development.

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