ВРЪЗКИ МЕЖДУ ДЕЦАТА В СЕМЕЙСТВОТО - ВЛИЯНИЯ НА СИСТЕМАТА

Шарон Бар

Докторант във ВСУ „Черноризец Храбър"

Катедра „Психология"

Резюме: Системата на отношенията между братята и сестрите е една от най-значимите и централни системи на отношения, които има човек. В детството тази система има специфични характеристики и динамика. Редица теории предлагат обяснения на процесите, които протичат в системата на отношенията между братята и сестрите – теорията на привързаността, теорията на Адлер, теорията за социалното сравнение. Взаимоотношенията между здравото дете и неговия /нейния брат/ сестра със затруднения в развитието засягат и двете деца по задълбочен начин.

Ключови думи: Братя и сестри (сиблинги), сиблинги с увреждания, връзки, развитие, комуникация, трудности

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN SIBLINGS – INFLUENCES OF THE SYSTEM

Sharon Bar,

PHD student in Varna Free University "Chernorizets Hrabar"

Department of Psychology

Abstract

The system of relations between siblings is one of the most meaningful and central systems of relations that a person has. The system of relations between siblings in childhood has specific characteristics and dynamics. A number of theories proposed explanations of the processes that occur in the system of relations between siblings – attachment theory, Adler's theory, social comparison theory. Relationships between a healthy child and his/her developmentally disabled sibling affect both siblings in a profound way.

Key words:

Siblings, disabled sibling, relationships, development, communication, difficulties

Children spend a larger percentage of their free time with their siblings than with any one else in their lives (McHale, Updegraff, & Whiteman, 2012). The system of relations between siblings in childhood includes on the one hand mutual and equal interactions (such as play or spending time together), as existing in the relationship with friends, and on the other hand hierarchical interactions, as existing between an adult and a child (for instance, when a child teaches his younger sibling some ability) (Dunn, 2007; Howe & Ricchia, 2005; Slomkowski

et al., 2001). Two additional characteristics of the system of relations between siblings that is different from every other interpersonal situation is that they do not have the possibility to escape from one another or to disconnect from the relationship (at least in childhood) and they share many joint experiences because of the fact that they grow up in the same home (Dirks, Persram, Recchia, & Howe, 2015; Slomkowski et al., 2001). The dynamics of the system of relations between siblings may be influenced by the children's sex, age differences between them, personal psychological characteristics of each one of the siblings, social processes in the relationship between them, the relationship of each one with the parents, the degree of involvement of the parents in the system of relations between the siblings, and broader factors in the family or the close environment (Whiteman, McHale, & Soli, 2011). The quality of the system of relations between siblings is expressed in two independent dimensions: intimacy or support and conflicts (Kim et al., 2007). In the context of gender, it was found that the relationship between two sisters is more intimate and closer, relative to the relationship between a brother and a sister or between two brothers, which is characterized by greater conflict (Cole & Kerns, 2001; Furman & Buhrmester, 1992; Kim, McHale, Osgood, & Crouter, 2007). The temper of one of the siblings was found to be related to a higher level of difficulties between him and the siblings. Conflicts and hostility between the parents (see McHale et al., 2012) or an authoritarian and rigid parenting style were found related to frictions and even violence in the system of relations between siblings (Feinberg, Solmeyer, & McHale, 2012).

A number of theories proposed explanations of the processes that occur in the system of relations between siblings. According to **attachment theory**, the secure attachment of the child with his parents, in other words, when he is secure in their sensitivity to and availability for his needs, will lead him to trust the

system of relations with other people (including siblings), thus enabling the creation of a close and intimate relationship between them. In contrast, the insecure attachment of the child may lead to the creation of conflicts and the retention of a distance from other people and the creation of less satisfactory relations with them (Ainsworth, 1989; Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Bowlby, 1969). Research studies supported this theory in that they found a correlation between the insecure attachment of children to their mother and the frequency of their conflicts and hostility with their sibling at the age of daycare (see Whiteman et al., 2011). In addition, it was found that older siblings can serve as attachment figures for their siblings when they are worried about them or care for them, in addition to their parents, to compensate for the parent who does not provide the child's needs or following the loss of the parent (Ainsworth, 1989). Evidence of this is found in the research of Stewart and Marvin (1984), in which they left two siblings in a laboratory without their mother's presence and saw that about one-half of the children acted to calm their younger sibling, and this sibling in turn used their older sibling as a secure basis to study the unfamiliar environment where they are found. A number of research studies showed that the siblings can serve as a source of emotional security (as attachment figures) in cases of pressure associated with the family (such as a conflict between the parents) or other factors in the different stages of life (Kim et al., 2007; Voorposter & Blieszner, 2008).

Adler's theory positioned the dynamics between the siblings at the center of the family life and perceived it as having a significant contribution to the personal development of each one of them. He asserted that the power struggles and competition between the siblings sometimes cause the children to develop abilities and areas of interest different from those of their siblings, so as to enhance the distinction between them in their parents' eyes. Clear differences

between the siblings frequently enabled more harmonious and less conflictual relations between them (Adler, 1927). In this way, the children shape indirectly the characteristics and behaviors of their siblings in that they constitute a source for social comparison to the way in which their parents address them. A number of research studies supported the meaningful contribution of the dynamics of the system of relations between the siblings and the psychological adjustment of each one of the siblings, as Adler asserted (see: Dirks et al., 2015; McHale et al., 2012; Whiteman et al., 2011). For instance, it was found that a different reference of the parents to the children in the family, as expressed in privileges, discipline, parent-child conflict, and affection, are associated with many more conflicts between the siblings and many more internalized and externalized problems of the children who were less preferred by their parents (Buist, Deković, & Prinzie, 2013).

The **social comparison theory** in the field of social psychology is especially relevant to the explanation of the system of relations between siblings (Festinger, 1954).According to this theory, siblings are motivated by the need to strengthen their self-esteem through the identification of characteristics in themselves that are similar to those of older siblings they esteem and abilities in which they are better than their younger siblings (Suls, Martin, & Wheeler, 2002). In addition, learning theories provide common explanations for the dynamics that exist in the system of relations between siblings. According to these theories, each one of the siblings learns new behaviors and develops positions and beliefs through reciprocal reinforcements of positive and negative behaviors, observations, and eventually imitation of other behaviors (Bandura, 1977; Kim et al., 2007; Whiteman et al., 2011). These processes are central in cases in which children adopt the anti-social behaviors of the older siblings, such as risk behaviors or rebellion against the parents' authority (see Feinberg, Sakuma, Hostetler, & McHale, 2013). These processes were found to be especially strong

when the siblings are of the same sex (Rowe & Gulley, 1992). The system of relations between the siblings may serve as a framework for the practice of the training of violence when in a continuous manner one of the siblings behaves negatively and violently towards the other, who submits to his demands (see McHale et al., 2012). The quality of the system of relations between siblings was found to be associated with a broad range of outcomes, including mental health (depression, self-esteem, adjustment), negative behaviors (violence, delinquency), and achievements (Branje, van Lieshout, van Aken, Haselager, 2004; Kim et al., 2007; McHale, Whiteman, Kim & Crouter, 2007; Milevsky & Levitt, 2005; Shortt, Stoolmiller, Smith-Shine, Eddy, & Sheeber, 2010; Stornshak, Bellanti, Biernan, & Group, 1996). Healthy children who grow up with a sibling who suffers from a developmental disability may experience many more adjustment problems and difficulties than children who grow up with healthy siblings. According to the theory of stress and coping (Lazarus & Folkham, 1984), the demands and pressures placed on the healthy sibling in this case may be greater than the resources he has for coping with the situation and may lead to his adjustment difficulties and internalized or externalized problems. In addition, concern and fear about his sibling today or who will provide care for them in the future may cause or exacerbate internalized symptoms such as anxiety in the healthy sibling. Another explanation is that healthy children in a family with a child who has special needs may attempt to conceal their difficulties and distress so as not to increase the burden on their parents, and this may exacerbate the internal symptoms. Conversely, some of the siblings will express their distress in behavior problems in order to externalize their distress and attract their parents' attention to them (Giallo et al., 2012).

The increased risk of siblings of children with special needs to suffer from difficulties can be explained in a number of ways. First, the adjustment difficulties

of healthy children with a sibling who has special needs were found to be associated with a variety of factors connected to their sibling, to their parents, to their family, and to themselves. One of the most significant factors is the specific disorder/disability from which their sibling suffers. For instance, a research of Hastings (2007) found that siblings of children with Down's syndrome report better adjustment than the normative population their age – they express in general behavior problems, hyperactivity, and behavior problems. However, siblings of children who have autism expressed a higher rate of behavior problems than did children from a normative population. In addition, the behavior problems of siblings who suffer from a developmental disability predicted the severity of the behavior problems among their healthy siblings two years later (Hastings, 2007).

References:

Adler, A. (1927). Individual psychology. *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 22(2),* 116-122.

Ainsworth, M.D.S. (1989). Attachments beyond infancy. *American Psychologist, 44(4),* 709-716.

Ainsworth, M. D. S., Blehar, M. C., Waters, E., & Wall, S. (1978). *Patterns of attachment: A psychological study of the strange situation*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Bowlby J. (1969). *Attachment and loss: Vol. 1*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Branje, S. J., Van Lieshout, C. F., Van Aken, M. A., & Haselager, G. J. (2004). Perceived support in sibling relationships and adolescent adjustment. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 45(8),* 1385-1396.

Buist, K. L., Deković, M., & Prinzie, P. (2013). Sibling relationship quality and psychopathology of children and adolescents: A meta-analysis. *Clinical Psychology Review, 33(1)*, 97-106.

Cole, A., & Kerns, K. A. (2001). Perceptions of sibling qualities and activities of early adolescents. *The Journal of Early Adolescence, 21(2),* 204-227.

Dirks, M.A., Persram, R., Recchia, H.E., Howe, N. (2015). Sibling relationships as sources of risk and resilience in the development and maintenance of internalizing and externalizing problems during childhood and adolescence. *Clinical Psychology Review, 42,* 145-155.

Dunn J. (2007). Siblings and socialization. In: J.E. Grusec, P.D. Hastings (Eds.), *Handbook of socialization: Theory and research* (pp. 309-327). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Feinberg, M.E., Sakuma, K.L., Hostetler, M., & McHale, S.M. (2013). Enhancing sibling relationships to prevent adolescent problem behaviors: Theory, design and feasibility of Siblings Are Special. *Evaluative Program Planning, 36(1),* 97-106.

Feinberg, M.E., Solmeyer, A.R., & McHale, S.M. (2012). The third rail of family systems: Sibling relationships, mental and behavioral health and preventive intervention in childhood and adolescence. *Clinical Child Family Psychology Review, 15(1),* 43-57.

Festinger, L. (1954). A theory of social comparison processes. *Human relations, 7(2),* 117-140.

Furman, W., & Buhrmester, D. (1992). Age and sex differences in perceptions of networks of personal relationships. *Child Development, 63(1),* 103-115.

Giallo, R., Gavidia-Payne, S., Minett, B., & Kapoor, A. (2012). Sibling voices: The self reported mental health of siblings of children with disability. *Child Psychologist, 16,* 36-43.

Hastings, R.P. (2007). Longitudinal relationships between sibling behavioral adjustment and behavior problems of children with developmental disabilities. *Journal of Autism Developmental Disorders, 37,* 1485-1492.

Howe, N. & Recchia, H. (2005). Playmates and teachers: Reciprocal and complementary interactions between siblings. *Journal of Family Psychology, 19,* 497-502.

Kim, J.L., McHale, S.M., Crouter, A.C., & Osgood, D.W. (2007). Longitudinal linkages between sibling relationships and adjustment from middle childhood through adolescence. *Developmental Psychology, 43(4),* 960-973.

Lazarus, R. S., & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, appraisal, and coping.* New york, NY: Springer Publishing.

McHale, S.M., Updegraff, K.A., & Whiteman, S.D. (2012). Sibling relationships and influences in childhood and adolescence. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 74(5),* 913-930.

McHale, S.M., Whiteman, S.D., Kim, J., & Crouter, A.C. (2007). Characteristics and correlates of sibling relationships in two-parent African American families. *Journal of Family Psychology, 21,* 227–235

Milevsky, A., & Levitt, M. J. (2005). Sibling support in early adolescence: Buffering and compensation across relationships. *European Journal of Developmental Psychology, 2(3),* 299-320.

Rowe, D. C., & Gulley, B. L. (1992). Sibling effects on substance use and delinquency. *Criminology, 30(2*), 217-234.

Shortt, J. W., Stoolmiller, M., Smith-Shine, J. N., Mark Eddy, J., & Sheeber, L. (2010). Maternal emotion coaching, adolescent anger regulation, and siblings' externalizing symptoms. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 51(7),* 799-808.

Slomkowski, C., Rende, R., Conger, K.J., Simons, R.L., Conger, R.D. (2001). Sisters, brothers, and delinquency: Evaluating social influence during early and middle adolescence. *Child Development, 72*, 271–283.

Stewart, R.B., & Marvin, R.S. (1984). Sibling relations: The role of conceptual perspective-taking in the ontogeny of sibling caregiving. *Child Development, 55,* 1322–1332.

Stormshak, E., Bellanti, C., & Bierman, K. (1996). The Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group The quality of sibling relationships and the development of social competence and behavioral control in aggressive children. *Developmental Psychology, 32*, 79-89.

Suls, J., Martin, R., & Wheeler, L. (2002). Social comparison: Why, with whom, and with what effect?. *Current directions in psychological science, 11(5),* 159-163.

Voorpostel, M., & Blieszner, R. (2008). Intergenerational solidarity and support between adult siblings. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 70(1),* 157-167.

Whiteman, S.D., McHale, S.M., & Soli, A. (2011). Theoretical perspectives on sibling relationships. *Journal of Family Theory Review, 3(2),* 124-139.