

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Civilian

Family Dynamics and Young Children's Sibling Victimization

Tucker, C. J., Finkelhor, D., Turner, H., & Shattuck, A. M. (2014). Family dynamics and young children's sibling victimization *Journal of Family Psychology*, 28(5), 625-633. doi:10.1037/e557672014-001

SUMMARY: Sibling aggression is a common form of family violence, therefore it is important to examine its risk factors. Caregivers of 2-9 year old children were interviewed in this study about sibling aggression and family dynamics (i.e., interparental conflict, family violence, and parenting quality). Results emphasized the importance of good family dynamics on preventing sibling victimization.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Sibling victimization in general was significantly associated with negative family dynamics.
- Compared with children who experienced common types of sibling victimization, children in the severe group had less parental supervision and warmth, and were exposed to more interparental conflict and family violence.
- Children who were severely assaulted by their siblings were likely to experience low well-being.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Integrate assessment of sibling aggression into their practice when working with military families
- Educate military parents on how to be more sensitive to sibling aggression, and offer them strategies to prevent and intervene

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Design workshops for military families to promote healthy family dynamics (e.g., parental warmth, marital harmony, positive sibling interactions)
- Offer support groups for military parents so that they can communicate parenting issues and marriage problems safely in a supportive environment

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Raise awareness of the deleterious effects of sibling victimization on children's development and well-being
- Recommend integrating assessment of sibling victimization into military children's routine wellness screening

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METHODS

- The present study was part of the National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence which aimed to examine the incidence and prevalence of childhood victimizations.
- The primary caregiver of each participating child was interviewed by telephone, and was asked questions about sibling victimization, interparental conflict, family violence, and parenting quality.
- Sibling victimization was divided into common types (psychological, property, or minor physical aggression) and severe types (physical aggression with a weapon and/or injury).

PARTICIPANTS

- The sample included 1,726 children who had at least one sibling under age 18 years at the time of data collection.
- The average age of the participants was 5.68 years (SD = 2.27, age range = 2-9 years), and 51% of them were male.
- Most of the children were White (58%), followed by Latino (20%), Black (16%), and Other (6%).

LIMITATIONS

- Only one child was examined in each family, so it is impossible to understand both the perpetrator's and victim's experiences.
- Similarly, only one caregiver was interviewed in each family, therefore the examination of family dynamics might be inaccurate
- The definition of sibling victimization was not standardized in the study, so caregivers might define sibling victimization differently based on their own experiences.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Design longitudinal studies to examine the direction of the effects between sibling victimization and family dynamics
- Interview more than one caregivers in the family to have a holistic understanding of the nature of family members' interactions
- Standardize the definition of sibling victimization to eliminate inconsistency across participants

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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