

Adult Reflections on Growing Up with a Sibling Who Has Autism

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Introduction

In 2006, when I was 10 years old I went from being an only child to becoming a big sister. My experience of becoming an older sibling has been different from others. When my sibling was three years old for the very first time my family and I heard the word autism. We had no idea what autism was, nor did we realize how much it would impact our lives.

Previous research has focused on the positive and negative impact on parents having children with autism. Very little research has focused on the impact that growing up with a sibling with autism may have on the typically developing sibling. Sibling relationships last more than any other relationships because in most occasions the sibling becomes the lifetime caregiver of the individual with autism (Seltzer et al., 2009). This highlights the importance of further research on how an individual is impacted both in a positive and negative way when growing up with a sibling with autism. This research can help the community understand how to build better support for individuals who have a sibling with autism. This study will benefit the community, individuals with autism, individuals who have a sibling with autism, and the parents of children with autism. Schools, parents and service providers should be encouraged to create better supports for individuals with a sibling with autism.

Research Question

How can communities better support individuals who grow up with a sibling with autism?

Method

Research Design

This study was conducted using a qualitative narrative approach. Mertler defines qualitative research as the collection of data being analyzed to gain knowledge on a specific topic of interest (Mertler, 2022). The purpose of narrative research is that it tells an individual's personal story and experiences (Mertler, 2022). This narrative research design will allow for the stories of lived experiences of participants to provide insight into how communities might better support siblings of individuals with autism as they grow up

Sample

Two participants over the age of 18 years old were interviewed in this study. The first participant was a thirty year old male who does not live at home with his twelve year old brother who has autism. The second participant was a twenty five year old female who lives at home with her eighteen year old brother who has autism. Participants in this study were recruited through an online platform provided through a social media app.

Findings

Emerging Themes

The data collected from the two interviews was analyzed and placed into the following themes: positive impact, challenges, family relationship, sibling relationship, caregiver role, social life, mental health, future, and support group. The following are the themes I would like to focus on.

Positive Impact/ Challenges

Participants in the study shared that having a sibling with autism does come with challenges but over all they have experienced many positive experiences.

Sibling Relationship/ Caregiver Role

Participants in the study shared that they have developed a positive relationship with their sibling along with feeling the need to always be there for them.

Support Group The data showed that participants would have liked someone to talk to growing up and to this day as adults. Both participants would have liked to have someone they could relate to or who understand their experience being a sibling to an individual with autism.

Discussion

In previous research, individuals with a sibling with autism shared that they would have liked to have someone to talk to who could relate to their experience growing up with a sibling with autism (Corsano et al., 2017). The findings discussed in this chapter reveal the similar themes found across two different interviews with individuals who have a sibling with autism. The information collected and analyzed from these interviews support the idea that individuals who have a sibling with autism would benefit from a confidant, relationships with others and support groups within the community.

Most Desired Supports

