

An Ecological Systems Approach to Risk and Protective Factors of Sibling Conflict for Children in the United Kingdom

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Abstract : This paper presents evidence to better understand the risk and protective factors related to sibling conflict and the patterns of association between sibling conflict and negative adjustment outcomes by incorporating additional familial and societal factors within statistical models of risk and adjustment. It was conducted through the secondary analysis of a large representative cross-sectional dataset of children in the UK. The original study includes proxy interviews for young children and self-report interviews for adolescents. The study applies an ecological systems framework for the analyses. Hierarchical regression models assess risk and protective factors and adjustment outcomes associated with sibling conflict. Interactions reveal differential effect between contextual risk factors and the social context of influence. The general pattern of findings suggested that, although factors affecting likelihood of experiencing sibling conflict were often determined by child age, some remained consistent across childhood. These factors were often conditional on each other, reinforcing the importance of an ecological framework. Across both age-groups, sibling conflict was associated with siblings closer in age; male sibling groups; most advantaged socio-economic group; and exposure to community violence, such as witnessing violent assault or robbery. The study develops the evidence base on the influence of ethnicity and socio-economic group on sibling conflict by exploring interactions between social context. It also identifies key new areas of influence - such as family structure, disability, and community violence in exacerbating or reducing risk of conflict. The study found negative associations between sibling conflict and young children's mental well-being and adolescents' mental well-being and anti-social behaviour, but also more context specific associations - such as sibling conflict moderating the negative impact of adversity and high risk experiences for young children such as parental violence toward the child.

Keywords : adjustment, conflict, ecological systems, family systems, risk and protective factors, sibling

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