

Social Interaction between Siblings in Families Who Have Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder

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ABSTRAK

Individu dengan Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) memiliki ciri khas yakni defisit interaksi sosial seperti dalam memulai, mengembangkan dan mempertahankannya. Hal ini pada akhirnya berdampak pada dinamika interaksi sosial antar saudara kandung. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis dinamika interaksi dan faktor yang berkontribusi. Partisipan terdiri dari 4 orang, yaitu 2 pasang saudara dari 2 keluarga (1 saudara dengan ASD dan 1 saudara tanpa ASD dari setiap keluarga). Metode yang digunakan adalah kualitatif dengan pendekatan fenomenologi. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui wawancara dan observasi kepada semua partisipan dan orang tua. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya tindakan saling mempengaruhi perilaku satu sama lain dalam interaksi sehari-hari dikarenakan berbagai faktor yang berkontribusi termasuk jenis kelamin, urutan kelahiran, usia, perilaku saudara, dan peran orang tua. Interaksi diantara saudara yang salah satunya dengan ASD pada akhirnya tetap terjadi meskipun ditemukan lebih banyak dinamika dan kendala, namun interaksi harmonis maupun konflik yang terjadi dapat diperkuat ataupun dikurangi. Hal ini tergantung bagaimana pendekatan dan dukungan dari orang terdekat dalam membantu anak-anak dengan ASD maupun saudaranya dalam menanggapi dan mengelola situasi dalam interaksi sehari-hari. Temuan ini menunjukkan pentingnya mengeksplorasi peran saudara kandung, yang sering diabaikan, padahal mereka merupakan sosok terdekat. Interaksi antar saudara dapat meningkatkan keterampilan sosial, memperkuat hubungan emosional, dan meningkatkan kesejahteraan bagi anak dengan ASD serta saudaranya. Tinjauan ini menganjurkan untuk lebih mendalami topik serupa, dari berbagai perspektif untuk memperkaya literatur selanjutnya.

ABSTRACT

Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) are characterized by deficits in social interaction such as in initiating, developing, and maintaining it. This ultimately affects the dynamics of social interaction between siblings. This study aims to analyze the dynamics of interaction and contributing factors. Participants consisted of 4 people, namely 2 pairs of siblings from 2 families (1 sibling with ASD and 1 sibling without ASD from each family). The method used was qualitative with a phenomenological approach. Data collection was carried out through interviews and observations of all participants and parents. The results of the study showed that there were actions that influenced each other's behavior in daily interactions due to various contributing factors including gender, birth order, age, sibling behavior, and parental roles. Interactions between siblings, one of whom had ASD, ultimately still occurred even though more dynamics and obstacles were found, but harmonious interactions or conflicts that occurred could be strengthened or reduced. This depends on the approach and support from those closest to them in helping children with ASD and their siblings respond to and manage situations in daily interactions. These findings indicate the importance of exploring the role of siblings, which is often overlooked, even though they are the closest figures. Sibling interactions can improve social skills, strengthen emotional bonds, and enhance well-being for children with ASD and their siblings. This review suggests further exploration of similar topics, from multiple perspectives, to enrich further literature.

1. INTRODUCTION

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a condition characterized by social and communication deficits, and disturbances in repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, and activities. Common behaviors

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seen in children with ASD include destructive actions, hyperactivity, impulsivity, tantrums, and aggression (Guo et al., 2021; Happé & Frith, 2014). These problems are interrelated and significantly affect the deficit of social interaction in children with ASD. The difficulties that arise are in the aspect of involvement in reciprocal social interaction, so this is the main characteristic of social problems faced by children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) (Arnold & Reed, 2019; Lam et al., 2023). Reciprocal social interaction is a major challenge for children with ASD as they actually want it but often have difficulty in initiating, developing, and even maintaining it (Gómez-Marí et al., 2021; Miningrum et al., 2021). Social interaction is a form of exchange between individuals where each person shows their behavior to others when they are present, and each of these behaviors influences each other, which includes all forms of communication, cooperation, competition, status influence, social roles, and actions that influence each other between individuals or groups in the context of social relations (Nurhaidah & Musa, 2015; Tsoraya et al., 2023). So, the definition of social interaction is the way individuals or groups relate, which includes all forms of behavior that involve giving each other stimulation or response and also influencing each other. Social interaction is dynamic, showing the ever-changing relationship between individuals or groups in the context of a particular social situation. Parents have an important role in efforts to develop social interaction skills in children (Sukma et al., 2022; Supriadin, 2019). The existence of problems in social interaction of children with ASD, and the importance of interaction for everyone, ultimately requires parents to realize how important their role is in efforts to improve social interaction skills, especially for children with ASD.

Children with ASD are expected to be able to interact socially like children in general. This explains how not only the role of parents is important, but the presence of siblings also plays a crucial role in helping to develop their sibling's abilities as well as playing a role in presenting various dynamics in every interaction they do every day. Collaboration between parents and siblings is considered to have an impact on efforts to influence better adaptation and social function in individuals with ASD which should be directed at improving the ability to communicate and relate to others (Lin et al., 2022; McWilliams et al., 2019). Despite these hopes, in reality many challenges arise in this process. The characteristics of children with ASD often cause difficulties in creating harmonious interactions in interpersonal relationships with siblings, resulting in positive and negative dynamics (Miao et al., 2020; Padmadewi & Artini, 2017). Ultimately, despite the many challenges, families, especially parents and siblings, play a vital role in providing ongoing support for family members with ASD and also play a role in the dynamics of sibling interactions. In reality, interactions between siblings in families with children with ASD are often challenging. Dissociative interactions that often arise, such as conflict, are part of the daily reality of this relationship (Dorji, 2015; Mahoney, 2019). Ultimately, while there is hope that children with ASD can engage in better social interactions, the reality is that their relationships with siblings are often filled with complex and challenging dynamics due to the specific characteristics of the sibling with ASD that ultimately influence each other's daily interactions.

Until now, the theory that is directly and considered most able to explain the interaction between siblings is still minimal. Therefore, the theory of sibling relations and the theory of social interaction are considered the closest and most capable to be used in understanding the dynamics of interaction in children with ASD and their siblings in the family. The theory of sibling relations states that there are four dimensions in sibling relationships such as: warmth/closeness (the presence of an attitude of openness, closeness, and warmth), relative power (the dominant role of one sibling, generally by the older sibling), conflict (hostility and quarrels), and rivalry (the presence of competition or competition due to envy/jealousy) (Amalia & Husna, 2020; Mawarni Purnamasari & Na'imah, 2020). The theory of social interaction explains the definition of social interaction and also discusses several types of interaction in its theory, namely: verbal interaction (2-way/reciprocal communication), and non-verbal such as physical interaction (body movements, touch or physical contact) and emotional expression interaction (sharing feelings with each other through facial expressions) (Dani, 2018; Sulaihah et al., 2019). Ultimately, these two theories are used to review social interactions that are more focused on relationships between siblings (Bernier et al., 2010; Gómez-Marí et al., 2021).

Several studies have specifically explored the relationship between siblings with and without ASD but have only looked at it from the perspective of one sibling, such as a study that focused on siblings of children with ASD where it was found that there was a decline in psychological well-being in siblings of children with ASD (Kurniasari et al., 2022). Meanwhile, other studies involving both siblings, but involving participants with various developmental problems such as Down syndrome and autism who are categorized as siblings with intellectual disabilities, the study did not focus on just one developmental problem (Nurfadhillah et al., 2021). Existing research often only focuses on targeting benefits for only one sibling, while studies targeting both siblings did not focus on the context of the sibling with ASD, which ultimately makes this study something new and important to study.

This study aims to analyze the dynamics of interaction and also the factors that contribute to social interaction between siblings, one of which is with ASD conditions in the family. The novelty of this study focuses on examining social interaction between siblings and the factors that contribute, becoming

something important to study. It is hoped that it can open up opportunities for the development of effective approaches that support the social development of children with ASD and their siblings, especially in their daily interactions.

2. METHOD

This research uses a qualitative research type with a phenomenological design (Creswell, 2015). The focus of the study was to explore the experiences of sibling relationships in families with children with ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder) and siblings without developmental disorders. The study participants were determined through the formulated inclusion and exclusion criteria. Four participants, two from each of the two families, were selected based on the following criteria: families with children with ASD and siblings without developmental disorders under the age of 17 years, with a maximum age gap of 4 years, living together (not attending school outside the city), able to communicate in two directions, and not experiencing extreme family conflict. The study was conducted in Towuti District, East Luwu Regency, South Sulawesi, during the period February to April 2024.

Data collection was conducted using a triangulation approach to ensure the credibility of the information. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews and participant observation, covering both children in each family (a child with ASD and a sibling without ASD). Interviews were also conducted with parents to strengthen the validity of the data. Observations were directed at daily interactions between siblings, including communication patterns, emotional expressions, and shared activities. Interview and observation guides were developed based on a review of relevant literature. Data credibility was enhanced through source triangulation and verification of results with participants. Data analysis was conducted using a thematic approach. This process involves several steps, namely data collection, data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusions (Sugiyono, 2016). The collected data were categorized into relevant themes, such as aspects of sibling relationships (warmth, relative power, rivalry, and conflict) and types of social interactions (communication, emotional expression, and physical activity). Data validation was carried out through cross-checking with experts in the field of child development psychology and through the approval of the research ethics committee to obtain ethical approval. The results of the analysis became the basis for drawing in-depth conclusions about the experiences of siblings in families with children with ASD.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

Similarities in Interests Due to the Same Gender Result in Close Relationships and Also the Potential for Conflict.

Gender similarity affects the similarity of interests between siblings, and this similarity of interests can result in positive or negative interactions. As in family 1: both siblings feel that they are often involved in activities together because of their similar interests. Both enjoy playing games together, but are also often involved in conflicts because they are fighting over something, they are both interested in. The same thing happens in family 2: where they are often involved in gaming activities together, but this shared activity also ends in conflict, unlike family 1 who fight over the same item, family 2 actually fights over victory in the game. Where the loser often accuses the winner of cheating, and the winner mocks the loser. In the end, the similarity of gender between the two pairs of siblings influences each other and results in similar interests that have an impact on deep relationships or closeness in daily activities and also has the potential to cause conflict in the competition for something between the two pairs of siblings.

Age Level and Birth Order Influence Roles and Responsibilities.

Birth order plays a role in responsibility, especially for older siblings, but there are also role dynamics due to age levels so that younger siblings often dominate. As in family 1, dominated by younger siblings: Parents sometimes involve older siblings with ASD to look after their younger siblings, only when the parents are going out of the house. This is done by parents so that older siblings can learn to carry out their duties and responsibilities as older siblings to their younger siblings. However, on the other hand, younger siblings are more dominant by always trying to help their older siblings when doing something. Their teenage age makes them able to understand their older siblings' conditions and needs. This is what makes them tend to dominate in roles and responsibilities in the family. Meanwhile, in family 2 which is dominated by older siblings: Older siblings with ASD tend to dominate. The older sibling always helps the younger sibling every night to remind them of the things they need to bring to school, and also every morning helps to re-check every item the younger sibling brings. This is done because of their awareness of their position and duties as an older sibling to help their younger siblings. Age level and birth order factors play dynamics in roles and responsibilities dominated by one sibling. This dynamic shows a situation where the older sibling often performs his/her role and responsibilities as an older sibling due to

parental support and also initiation due to birth order factors. However, the younger sibling can also dominate due to his/her age which is able to understand the conditions and needs of his/her sibling.

Parental Involvement in Efforts to Support the Formation and Establishment of Interactions Between Siblings

Efforts to form interactions between siblings and resolve conflicts cannot be separated from parental involvement. Like in family 1: Parents try to take time to eat together outside the home occasionally, even though the time is uncertain. The narrow car space and the long journey make both siblings not focus on their cellphones, so they are quite involved in the chat together at that time. However, because the efforts made are relatively rare, they are still not optimal enough to increase the intensity of interactions between siblings at home. Meanwhile, in family 2: Every night before going to bed, parents consistently take time for quiet time activities. This is done to discuss each other's activities that day, solve problems if something happens and has not been resolved so that both siblings are used to being involved in discussions or activities together. Ultimately, the results of parents' efforts to support interactions between siblings will depend on the intensity or how often and consistently the efforts are made.

The Role of Parents is to Provide an Understanding of the Condition of Siblings with ASD and Help Resolve Conflicts as an Effort to Minimize Conflict.

Efforts to resolve conflicts between siblings cannot be separated from parental support. Like in family 1: The sibling without ASD (younger sibling) is not happy with the specific behavior that appears from his sibling, such as not being able to calm down. However, over time, the younger sibling tries to understand that his sibling looks different in behavior, then seeks definite information from his parents to be able to understand his sibling better. In the past, the younger sibling gave consequences by pinching the older sibling, but until now when a conflict occurs, the younger sibling has begun to continue learning to control himself so that the conflict is minimized. When a conflict occurs, the parents (Mom) are fully involved in communicating to find out who is wrong, directing the wrong person to apologize, and providing solutions to the problem. Meanwhile, in family 2: The sibling without ASD (younger sibling) has not received clear information about his sibling's condition. This is because the parents are still confused about how to communicate it. As a result, the younger sibling still often behaves mischievously, triggering conflict. When a conflict occurs, both parents try to facilitate a discussion space for the child. The quiet time activities that are carried out also provide space for children to independently discuss and solve their problems. Parents' efforts to help each sibling manage conflict are carried out by providing an understanding to the sibling regarding the sibling's diagnosis of ASD and also providing support in resolving the conflict as a communicator and motivator.

Discussion

The sibling relationship that is formed is influenced by various factors as explained in previous studies, including family constellations such as age gap, birth order, gender, number of family members, life experience, parental treatment, parent-child relationships, and child characteristics. The results of this study also found a new variation of factors, namely the age level/chronological age of siblings. So that several factors were found to influence the dynamics of interaction between siblings in this study, namely gender, birth order, age level, sibling behavior, and the role of parents (Mahani et al., 2020; Zahro et al., 2020).

Same gender has been found to contribute to the dynamics of sibling interactions, especially in competition and closeness due to shared interests. Previous studies have suggested that competition often occurs when siblings try to gain attention due to parental unfairness in attention or division of tasks (Rahayu et al., 2021). However, the results of this study did not find a situation where there was unfair behavior from parents. This study actually found that parents did not differentiate between the two in terms of giving tasks and treatment, regardless of their age differences or conditions. However, competitive conflicts between siblings still occur and this is actually caused by the similarity of interests due to the same gender. Competition is often triggered by joint play activities that result in actions to fight over something. Previous studies have explained how same-sex siblings with and without disorders show closeness, compared to opposite-sex siblings who affect similar interests in sibling relationships, and can contribute to improving the quality of relationships (Indrayana, 2017; Mahani et al., 2020).

The second factor is birth order, which explains how the dynamics of the roles between older and younger siblings in everyday interactions. Previous studies have suggested that firstborns often assume more mature roles than their younger siblings because of the expectations placed on them by both parents and younger siblings (Riadil, 2020). This study shows a variation in findings where in one situation the older sibling carries out his duties as a leader, is responsible, helps and takes care of his younger sibling. This pattern is in accordance with findings in previous literature. However, things are different in other situations, where the younger sibling is more dominant in carrying out responsibilities, including providing support and assistance to the older sibling. This difference adds a new perspective that has not

been widely explored and also shows that the dynamics of roles between siblings can vary, depending on the individual and family context.

Third is age level. Chronological age is an important factor in the quality of sibling interactions. The results of this study reveal the existence of age level factors as something that has not been widely revealed in previous studies on sibling social interactions. Previous literature has found that as siblings get older, they will better understand their sibling's condition, this understanding helps them develop greater empathy, become more sensitive to the needs and challenges they face, and understand how to treat their sibling (Sari et al., 2017). The results of this study reveal how age levels are significant to the length of time for siblings to adjust to their sibling with ASD and also influence understanding of their sibling. The findings explain that siblings in middle adolescence tend to be better able to adjust than siblings who are still in early adolescence.

Fourth, the behavioral characteristics of each sibling also influence each other and produce dynamics in interactions between siblings. Previous research from describing how relationships between siblings without a diagnosis and siblings with ASD tend to experience more conflict, especially due to behavioral problems because children with ASD often make their siblings the target of aggression (McWilliams et al., 2019). This is different from the findings, where the behavioral characteristics of each sibling contribute equally to creating dynamics, which means it is not only caused by one sibling. Excessive and repetitive behavioral characteristics in siblings with ASD such as screaming, running here and there, crying and laughing for no reason that makes the sibling feel disturbed and uncomfortable. Other studies are in line with this study, which explains how the relationship between neurotypical (NT) children and their siblings with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) can be complicated and cause stress and strained relationships so that they have difficulty in building satisfying relationships (Krishnan et al., 2016).

The fifth is the role of parents. Based on the results of the study, 2 forms of parental roles were found in supporting interactions between siblings, including efforts to form interactions between siblings and conflict resolution. Other studies explain how positive interactions between siblings that are formed are inseparable from intention, where parents often ask siblings to look after siblings with ASD and also clearly explain the condition of siblings with ASD to facilitate understanding and adaptation of siblings (Gómez-Marí et al., 2021). This study also found similar things in certain situations, where parents tried to provide opportunities for older siblings to take care of their siblings amidst their limitations with the ASD condition they have. Parents also tried to provide information related to the condition of the sibling with ASD to facilitate the adaptation of the sibling without ASD, but in other situations it was also found that parents felt confused about how to properly provide information to siblings about the condition of the sibling with ASD (Marshall & Myers, 2021). In addition, parents also try to facilitate family time with the aim of improving relationships within the family.

In addition to the role in forming interactions between siblings, parents also play a role in efforts to resolve conflicts between siblings. The results of this study revealed 2 forms of conflict resolution efforts, namely as communicators and motivators. Communicators such as providing high emotional support by fully involving themselves and not providing opportunities for each sibling to develop independent problem-solving skills, which ultimately inhibits the initiation of independent problem solving. Previous literature discusses similar things where excessive parental involvement can affect the level of executive function and low self-regulation in children, including problem solving (Ekawati & Iriani, 2020). This finding strengthens the understanding of the role of parents in supporting interactions between siblings. It was found that parents' efforts as motivators such as playing a role in consistently providing discussion space to support each sibling in solving their problems independently, which resulted in increasing problem-solving initiations between siblings. Other researchers explain that parents who actively manage sibling conflict in an appropriate and consistent manner can help develop conflict resolution skills in their children (Junianto & Wagiran., 2013). The variation of these 2 forms of conflict resolution efforts revealed new findings that have not been revealed in previous research. These findings provide new contributions to the understanding of the role of parents in supporting sibling interactions, especially in the context of one sibling with ASD.

Previous literature explains that children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) experience the biggest problem, namely social interaction disorders, where individuals cannot communicate expressively. On the other hand, social interaction is an important and inseparable part of human life (Nurhaidah & Musa, 2015; Sigarlaki & Nurvinkania, 2022). However, in reality, this study found a new variation that social interaction between siblings can be established even more than that, it can develop into a wider environment. Parental involvement has a major impact on social interaction that occurs between siblings. The involvement of only one parent in supporting interaction shows that social interaction between siblings still occurs but is limited, especially in terms of communication. Siblings can still communicate sporadically and do activities they enjoy together. On the other hand, the active role of both parents was found to have a significant impact on the quality of social relationships between siblings. Children with ASD are not only able to communicate and do activities with their siblings, more than that,

they also show an increase in their ability to interact with a wider social environment, such as neighbors, schools, and people they have just met. This shows that there is variation, where more maximum efforts will also greatly affect the results in improving interaction between siblings.

4. CONCLUSION

Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) often have difficulty in social interactions, but interactions between siblings still occur with various challenges and uniqueness. Support from those closest to them can help children with ASD develop social skills, both with siblings, the family as a whole and the wider environment. There are role dynamics, where generally the older sibling plays the role of leader, but in certain conditions, this role is often taken over by the younger sibling. As for the similarity of interests between siblings, it can strengthen the relationship, but also increase the potential for conflict/competition. In addition to competition, the behavioral characteristics of each other also play a role. The behavior of the sibling with ASD influences the response of the sibling without ASD, and vice versa. The involvement of both parents in supporting interaction and conflict resolution has been shown to be effective, but it depends on the approach.

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