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A qualitative study of the overall psychosocial wellbeing of neurotypical individuals who grew up with a sibling with special needs

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While families are a critical source of support for individuals living with disabilities, even these family members require external support to cope with the various added responsibility that comes with having a family member with a disability. Although support systems and interventions exist for parents of individuals with special needs, limited research has been conducted and little attention has been given towards the support and interventions that the siblings of individuals with special needs require. While parents bear the majority of the responsibility of raising a child with special needs, once they get older or pass away, neurotypical siblings often become their primary caretakers, making this the longest familial relationship. The aim of this paper is to explore the experiences of neurotypical individuals who grew up with a sibling with special needs and determine how, if at all, these experiences affected their psychosocial well-being and overall mental health. The research question that this study seeks to answer is, what psychosocial impact does grow up with a sibling with special needs have on a neurotypical individual? A qualitative study was conducted to explore the experiences of ten individuals who grew up with a sibling with special needs, after which a thematic analysis was conducted. Consistent themes that emerged through this study include recalling happiness, recalling difficult times and stress and anxiety for the future. The participants consistently reflected on past and current experiences as a means to share their current psychosocial state. Results from the study indicated that although participants did not feel their psychosocial well-being was affected by having a sibling with special needs. They nonetheless acknowledged that they did have experiences that affected them negatively, although the effect was often temporarily. The participants' main concerns regarding their siblings with special needs revolved around finding ways to ensure their siblings with special needs are happy, independent and productive.

Biography

Ayukta Thakur is the Co-Founder and the Head of Education/SEN Educator, Integreat Center for Special Needs, UAE. She has completed her Undergraduate studies in Communication and Media Studies from Northeastern University, Boston, United States of America. She has completed her Master's in Science in Mental Health Psychology from the University of Liverpool. She is the Board Member of the Special Olympics UAE organizing committee.

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