



Sibling Caregiving: A Qualitative Analysis of Adolescents' Conversations



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Abstract

Using focus group data from 17 adolescents, we examined adolescents' perceptions of sibling caregiving and how caregiving was associated with family relationships. We conducted inductive thematic analysis and found that adolescents' views of caregiving were categorized into four themes: definitions of sibling caregiving, contexts and reasons for providing care, attitudes toward caregiving, and outcomes of caregiving.

Introduction

- 1.4 million children and adolescents provide family care (National Alliance for Caregiving, 2005) and 30% of a nationally representative adolescent sample (nearly, 1500 adolescents) reported providing sibling caregiving (Wilke, Jensen, & Hoagland, 2017).
- Family obligation values may play a role in adolescents' family caregiving (Telzer & Fuligni, 2009).
- Adolescent caregiving may be critical to examine due to links to both positive (e.g., maturity, self-reliance, empathy, competence) and negative outcomes (e.g., high stress, academic difficulties, depressive symptoms, risky behaviors; East, 2010).
- The purpose of the current study is to investigate adolescents' perspectives on sibling caregiving.

Method

- Data are from three mixed-gender and one all-male focus groups with 17 adolescents who have younger siblings.
- Participants:
 - Were between the ages 13 and 16 years ($M = 14.88, SD = 1.05$).
 - Had a range of one to three younger siblings ($M = 1.37, SD = 0.62$). Younger siblings ages ranged from 1 to 15 years old ($M = 10.41, SD = 3.74$).
 - The majority of participants were female ($n = 9$) and White ($n = 12$, African American $n = 2$, biracial $n = 1$, Asian American $n = 1$, Hispanic $n = 1$).
 - Majority of participants lived with two biological parents (70.59%).
- Parent consent and adolescent assent were obtained and adolescents were given a ten dollar gift card for participating.
- Once adolescents arrived to the focus group session they completed a short questionnaire, then a White female doctoral student (first author) led the focus groups while another white female undergraduate student or white female graduate student observed the session and took notes.
- All focus groups were audio recorded and lasted approximately one hour.

Findings

- All focus group discussions were transcribed verbatim and data were analyzed using thematic analysis procedures (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Four themes were identified:

- Definitions of sibling caregiving (33% of all codes)
 - Examined what adolescents thought sibling caregiving was including: physical support, supervision, guidance, and emotional support.
- Context and reasons for providing sibling care (23% of all codes)
 - Explored the context and reasons why adolescents would or would not provide care.
 - Teens discussed that context, situations, and family needs were key factors in determining if they provided a specific type of care.
- Attitudes toward sibling caregiving (23% of all codes)
 - Adolescents discussed their views of sibling caregiving including ambivalent, positive, and negative attitudes.
 - They also discussed how sibling caregivers should act.
- Outcomes of sibling caregiving
 - Teens discussed both positive and negative outcomes as a result of providing care.
 - Adolescents noted not only individual positive outcomes, but also how sibling caregiving could lead to positive relationships with siblings and parents.
 - Although participants discussed positive outcomes of sibling caregiving they also discussed that providing care gave opportunities for negative interactions between siblings.

Theme	Quote
Definitions of Sibling Caregiving	<p>“I always help with like making meals, so like making breakfast and dinner. . . I help with like helping them clean their rooms and making sure they take baths, like I help a lot during the school year cause there is a lot going on and my mom is working so she's busy.”</p> <p>“I mean yeah like when you are the oldest sibling it is like an unspoken rule like oh they [the parents] have to do something else you have to watch them [the sibling] now like it just kind of happens.</p>
Context and Reasons for Providing Care	<p>“I mean I do it either way because I don't have a choice, but like when she asked me if I can watch my sibling, it is not really a question, I have to do it.”</p> <p>“with my younger brother. . .he is a little bit older than she is [their sister] so it is kind of just like he wants to watch tv or if he wants a snack or something just kind of get him setup to where he is in a safe space and really can just do what he wants.”</p>
Attitudes Toward Sibling Care	<p>“I'm just okay with it I don't like it.”</p> <p>“I don't really have a problem with that [caregiving] I like babysitting and taking care of people.”</p> <p>“I think that since they look up to you, since they are younger then they kind of admire you, and you have to show that you're responsible and you have to take care of them like a parent.”</p>
Outcomes of Sibling Care	<p>“I definitely think we have a stronger relationship. . . because I know the more time my brother and I spend together, like he vents to me”</p> <p>“It gives me kind of a head start . . .because when I become a parent I'm already going to know these things and how to handle these situations”</p> <p>“not when I take care of him, but like if he is just kind of hanging out and I'm hanging out then we have fun, but if I'm taking care of him we don't have fun.”</p>

Discussion

- Our study provides further evidence that sibling caregiving is an important part of adolescents' lives, even though there have been historic declines in the care adolescents provide to their siblings.
- Our findings add to the limited knowledge about the actions, behaviors, and attitudes related to adolescent sibling caregiving. Examining teens' perspectives directly allowed for a fuller and more nuanced understanding of how caregiving may impact individuals and families.
- Adolescents' perceptions of sibling caregiving underscore how it is a complex family-oriented task that adolescents may engage in depending on their siblings' individual attributes (e.g., independence) and their family contexts (e.g., familial obligations and expectations).
- Our findings reveal that sibling caregiving likely has both positive and negative outcomes for adolescents and their families. Sibling caregiving may be an important behavior within families that gives opportunities to create more positive and negative relationships among family members.