

IMPACT OF INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY ON SIBLING RELATIONSHIPS IN URBAN HOUSEHOLDS: A CASE STUDY OF BHOPAL

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Abstract:

This research paper explores the impact of intellectual disability on sibling relationships within urban households in Bhopal. The study investigates emotional, social, and behavioral dynamics between intellectually disabled children and their neurotypical siblings. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and standardized psychological tools administered to a sample group of 50 families. The findings reveal a spectrum of responses, ranging from empathy and protective instincts to emotional distress and social withdrawal. The study emphasizes the need for psychological support and inclusive programs that address the needs of all family members, especially siblings.

Keywords: Intellectual disability, sibling relationships, urban households, Bhopal, family dynamics, psychological impact

INTRODUCTION

Intellectual disability (ID) is a developmental disorder characterized by significant limitations in both intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior. These limitations affect everyday social and practical skills and typically originate before the age of 18. While much of the existing research and resources focus on the child with the disability, there is growing recognition of the profound impact that intellectual disability has on the family as a whole. Within this family unit, siblings of intellectually disabled children often navigate a unique and complex set of emotional and social experiences that are frequently overlooked in academic and clinical discourse.

In the context of Indian society, and more specifically in urban centers like Bhopal, the dynamics of family life are shaped by a blend of modernity and traditional values. Urban households, although equipped with better access to health and educational facilities, are not immune to the psychological and emotional challenges posed by intellectual disability. The role of siblings in such households becomes particularly significant as they often share caregiving responsibilities, experience altered parental attention, and struggle with the social stigma associated with disability.

Sibling relationships are among the longest-lasting interpersonal connections in an individual's life. These relationships, ideally a source of companionship, emotional support, and identity formation, can be significantly altered when one sibling has an intellectual disability. The neurotypical siblings may experience a range of emotional responses—compassion, protectiveness, resentment, or confusion. They may also face practical challenges such as increased household responsibilities,

reduced parental engagement, and limitations on social activities. These experiences can influence their psychological development, academic performance, and future familial roles.

This study aims to explore how the presence of an intellectually disabled sibling affects the lives of neurotypical siblings in urban households of Bhopal. It seeks to understand the emotional, behavioral, and social consequences of this unique sibling relationship and to identify coping mechanisms and support systems that can help foster healthier family dynamics. By focusing on Bhopal—a rapidly urbanizing city with diverse socio-economic backgrounds—this research provides insights that are both locally grounded and broadly relevant to similar urban contexts in India and beyond.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Previous studies (Stoneman, 2005; Petalas et al., 2009) have highlighted both positive and negative outcomes of having a sibling with an intellectual disability. While some siblings develop increased empathy and maturity, others experience social isolation, academic stress, and emotional burden. In the Indian context, cultural norms, stigma, and family structures further influence these dynamics (Gupta & Singhal, 2004).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To examine the emotional responses of siblings of intellectually disabled children.
- To explore the influence of intellectual disability on sibling social behavior and academic performance.
- To identify coping strategies adopted by siblings.
- To suggest interventions for enhancing sibling relationships and overall family well-being.

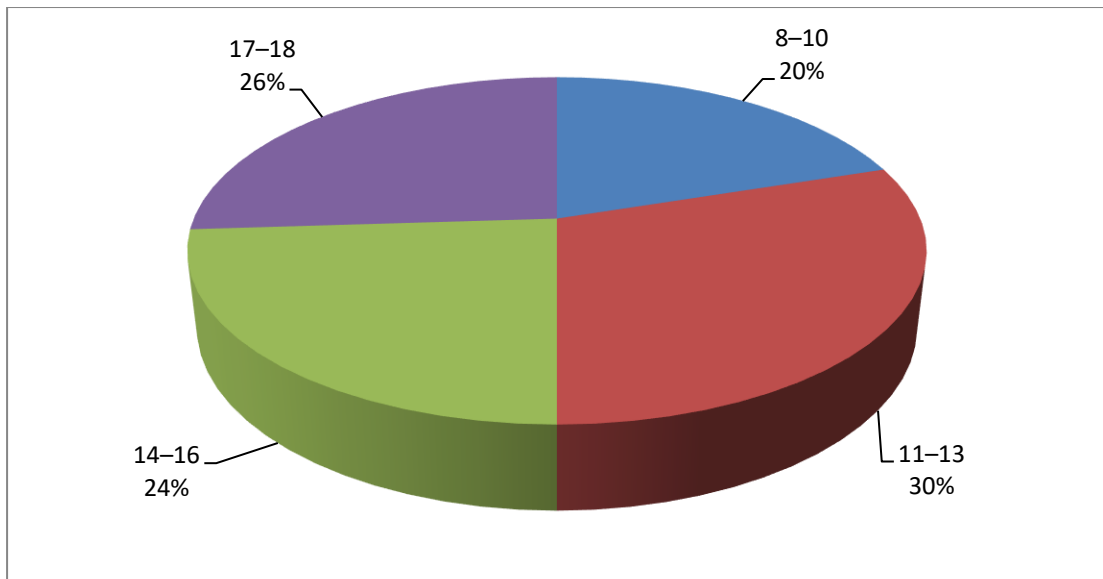
METHODOLOGY

- **Research Design:** Qualitative Case Study
- **Sample Size:** 50 urban households from Bhopal with at least one intellectually disabled child and one neurotypical sibling aged between 8-18 years.
- **Data Collection Tools:** Semi-structured interviews, Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), and Parental Stress Scale (PSS).
- **Data Analysis:** Descriptive statistics for quantitative insights.

DATA ANALYSIS

Table 1: Age Distribution of Siblings (Neurotypical Participants)

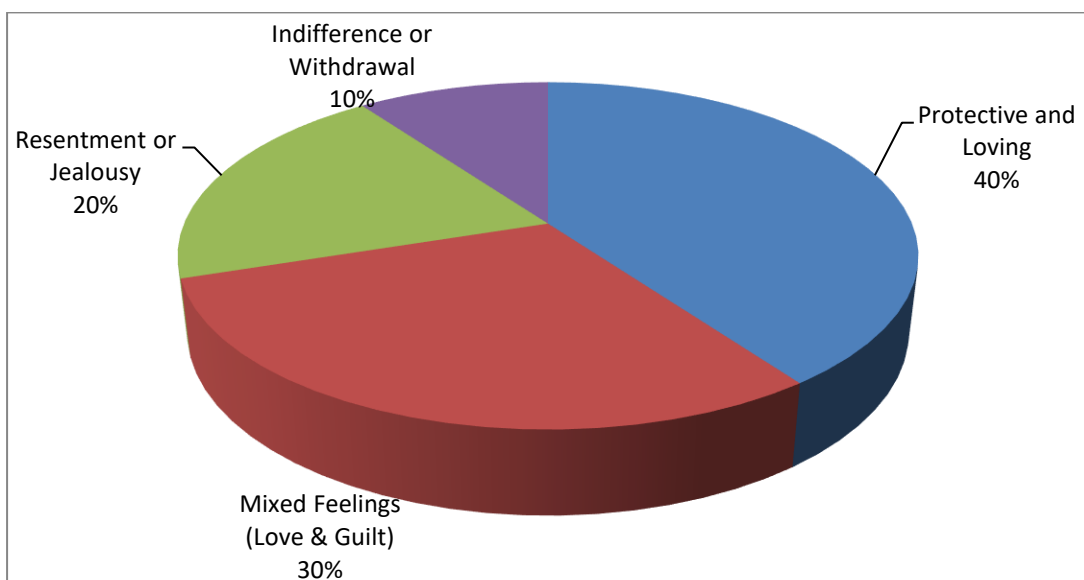
Age Group (Years)	Number of Siblings	Percentage (%)
8–10	10	20%
11–13	15	30%
14–16	12	24%
17–18	13	26%
Total	50	100%



The majority of siblings fall within the 11–18 age range, suggesting that emotional awareness and social comparisons are likely to be significant factors in their experiences with a disabled sibling.

Table 2: Emotional Responses Toward Intellectually Disabled Sibling

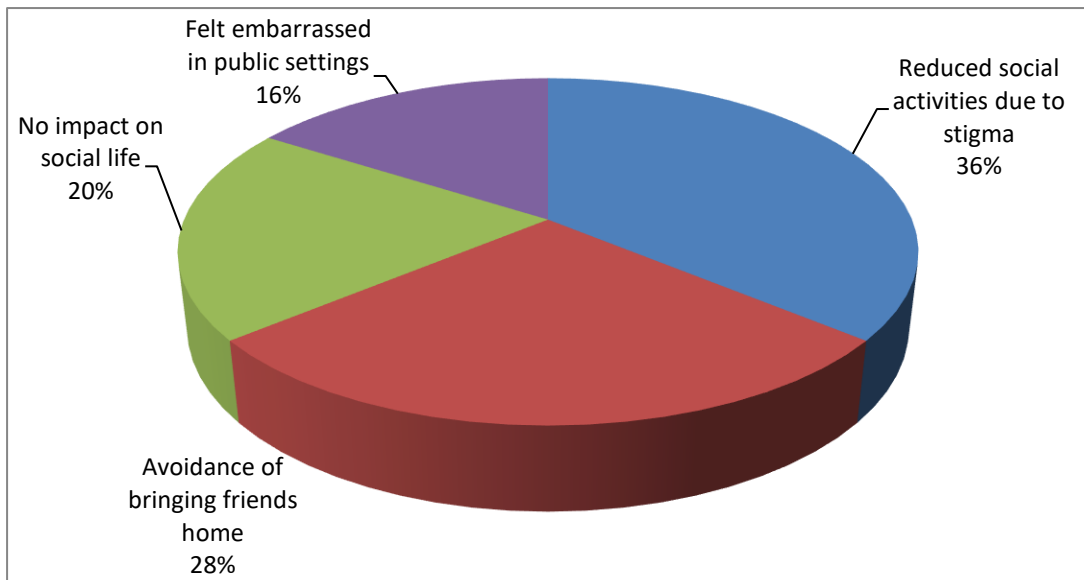
Emotional Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Protective and Loving	20	40%
Mixed Feelings (Love & Guilt)	15	30%
Resentment or Jealousy	10	20%
Indifference or Withdrawal	5	10%
Total	50	100%



While a significant portion of siblings (40%) exhibit strong protective instincts, a notable number (30%) express complex emotions, indicating a need for emotional support mechanisms. Feelings of jealousy or withdrawal, though fewer, still suggest psychological stress.

Table 3: Impact on Social Life of Siblings

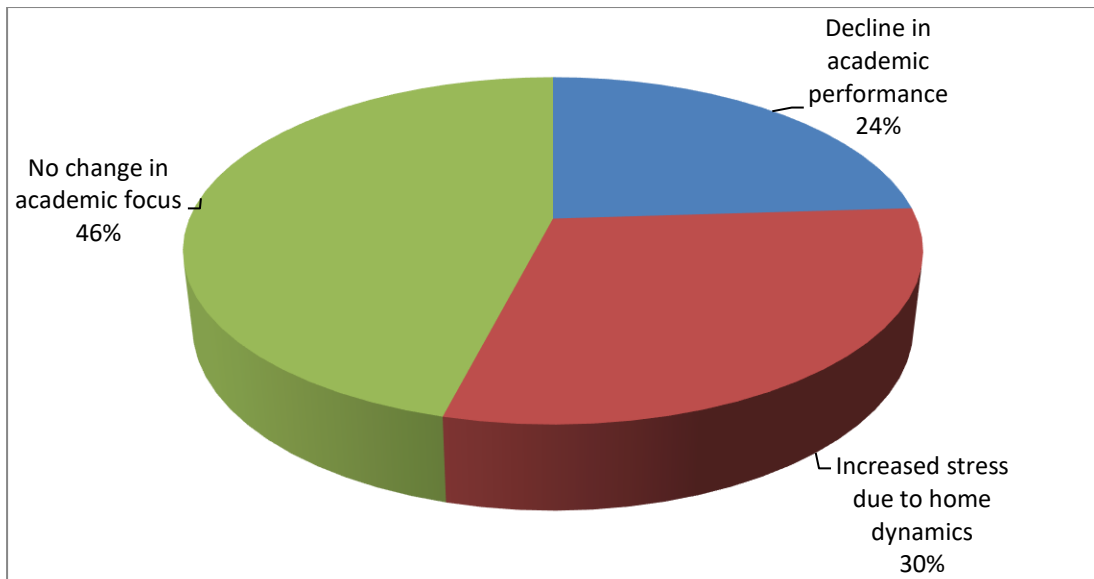
Response Category	Number of Siblings	Percentage (%)
Reduced social activities due to stigma	18	36%
Avoidance of bringing friends home	14	28%
No impact on social life	10	20%
Felt embarrassed in public settings	8	16%
Total	50	100%



A significant number of siblings (64%) experienced social discomfort or reduced interactions, showing that stigma associated with intellectual disability still prevails in urban settings like Bhopal.

Table 4: Academic Performance and Stress Levels

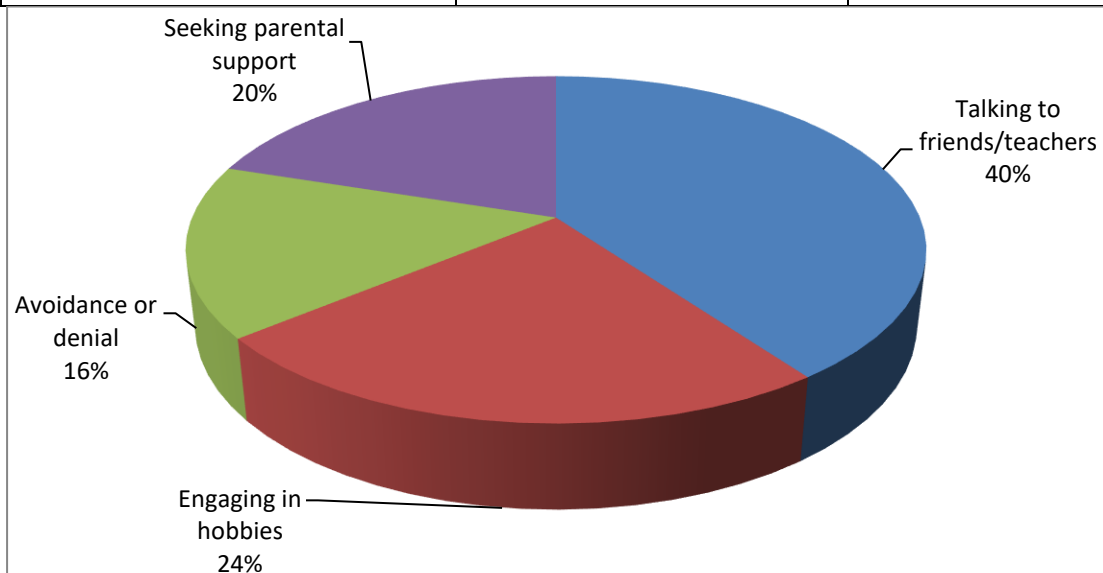
Experience	Number of Siblings	Percentage (%)
Decline in academic performance	12	24%
Increased stress due to home dynamics	15	30%
No change in academic focus	23	46%
Total	50	100%



Nearly one-third of the siblings reported academic stress, while a resilient 46% maintained their performance, indicating that individual coping mechanisms vary widely.

Table 5: Coping Mechanisms Adopted by Siblings

Coping Strategy	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Talking to friends/teachers	20	40%
Engaging in hobbies	12	24%
Avoidance or denial	8	16%
Seeking parental support	10	20%
Total	50	100%



The most common coping mechanism was peer communication (40%), followed by creative or solitary activities. This indicates that external social environments play a crucial role in sibling emotional adjustment.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

- **Emotional Responses:** Most siblings expressed a mix of affection and frustration. Older siblings tended to be more understanding, while younger ones showed signs of confusion and emotional withdrawal.
- **Social Behavior:** A significant number of siblings reported difficulty in making friends or participating in social activities due to embarrassment or increased responsibilities at home.
- **Academic Performance:** Some siblings reported declining academic interest due to stress or perceived parental neglect.
- **Coping Mechanisms:** Common strategies included talking to friends or teachers, engaging in hobbies, and seeking emotional distance.
- **Parental Role:** Families that maintained open communication and involved siblings in caregiving in age-appropriate ways reported healthier sibling relationships.

CONCLUSION

The presence of an intellectually disabled sibling significantly impacts the emotional and social world of neurotypical children. While some adapt positively, many struggle with unaddressed emotional challenges. Support systems within the family and community play a crucial role in shaping these outcomes. Interventions such as sibling support groups, counseling, and inclusive education can enhance sibling well-being and foster harmonious family environments.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Establishment of sibling support programs in schools and communities.
- Counseling services for siblings and parents.
- Inclusion of sibling needs in individualized family service plans (IFSPs).
- Awareness campaigns to reduce stigma and promote inclusion.

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