

PSB in Preschoolers: Distinctions Between Engaging with Siblings & Peers

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About Us

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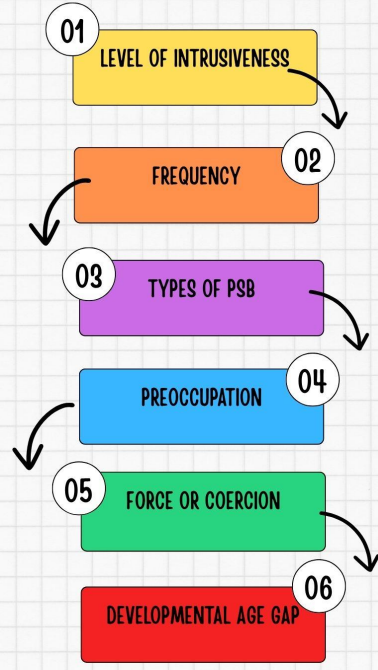
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Overview

- Introduction to PSB with Siblings
- Risk Factors
- Differentiating PSB with Siblings from Peers
- Normative Sexual Behaviors

- Study Measures
- Data Analysis
- Results
- Clinical Considerations

CHARACTERISTICS OF PSB WITH SIBLINGS



Problematic Sexual Behaviors (PSB) with Siblings

- Among older children, PSB may begin as mutually-agreed upon behaviors but may progress to forceful or coercive behaviors (Golan, 2022; Tener et al., 2020).
- May be associated with a lack of consistent parental presence in the home (Golan, 2022), family environments where sexual boundaries are less clearly defined.
- Most commonly seen in sibling pairs in which an age or developmental gap of about 2–3 years is present.
 - This gap is often used to distinguish typical sexual curiosity from more concerning behaviors in siblings.

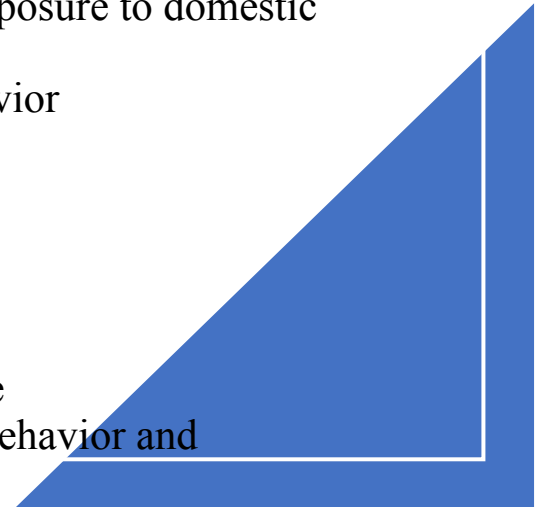
Risk Factors for Engaging in PSB with siblings

Maltreatment

- Child Sexual Abuse
 - 22% of PSB with sibling initiators have a history of child sexual abuse (Tener et al., 2020).
 - Imitating their traumatic experiences
- Domestic violence
 - Preschool-age children with PSB are more likely to have exposure to domestic violence than sexual abuse (Silovsky & Niec, 2002)
 - Model for poor interpersonal boundaries and intrusive behavior
- Emotional abuse, physical abuse, and neglect (Thomsen et al., 2023).
 - Neglect or lack of parental monitoring
- Histories of placement disruptions and legal system involvement

Family Culture and Sexuality

- Cultural norms that stigmatize sex may delay or prevent disclosure
- Ambiguous family practices account for some increase in sexual behavior and confusion regarding family boundaries (Friedrich et al., 2003).



Risk Factors for Engaging in PSB with Siblings

Exposure to Sexually Explicit Materials (SEM)

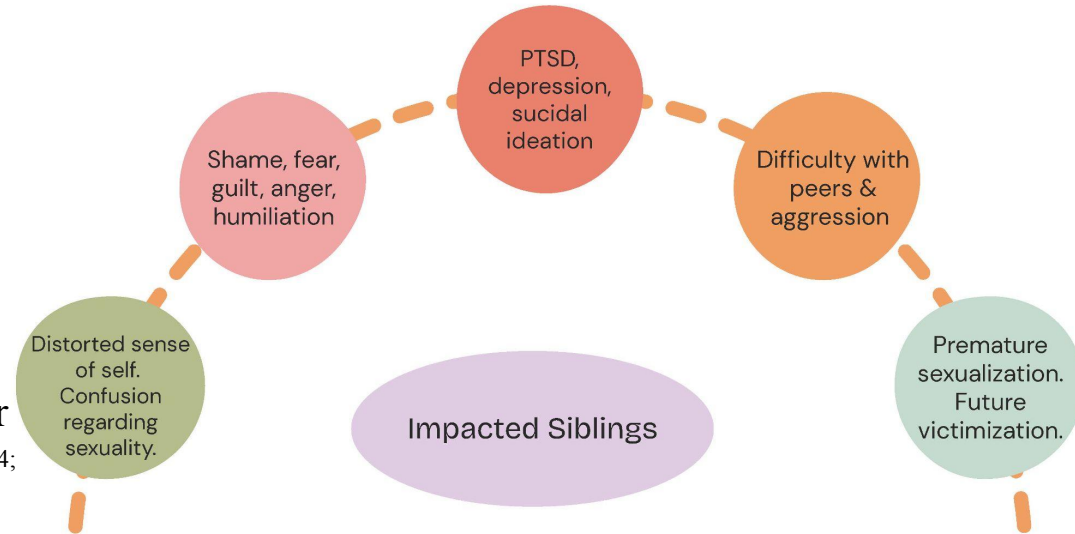
- Early exposure may be associated with a higher likelihood of engaging in PSB (Seto & Lalumière, 2010).
- Preschool children exposed to SEM mimicked with other children the SEM they viewed (Romines et al., 2024).

Sibling Aggression

- Aggressive or coercive behaviors inhibit impacted siblings from disclosing abuse (Tener et al., 2020).
- Coercion may be used to gain the impacted child's compliance

Consequences of PSB with Siblings

- Can have detrimental effects for the whole family, including the impacted and initiating child (Canavan et al., 1992).
- Impacted children may find it hard to recognize this behavior as abusive until later in life (Carlson, 2011).
- May occur twice as often as abuse perpetrated by caregivers and is one of the most underreported types of sexual abuse (Alpert, 1997; Browne & Finkelhor, 1986; Monahan, 2010).
- Use of force or aggression, large age difference, and more explicit sexual behavior may lead to more harmful outcomes (Caffaro, 2014; Finkelhor, 1980).



Differences Between PSB with Siblings and with Non-Siblings

- PSB with siblings disclosures take longer to report or often delayed until multiple incidents have occurred (De Jong, 1989).
- Family members will conceal PSB with siblings to protect both children (Caffaro, 2014).
 - Report higher blame and doubt regarding impacted child
 - Often struggle with their responsibility to protect and intervene on behalf of both children (Walsh et al., 2012; Caffaro & Conn-Caffaro, 2005).
- PSB with sibling cases are significantly more severe to moderately severe (Fisher & McDonald 1998).
 - Longer in duration – multiple incidents over a period of time



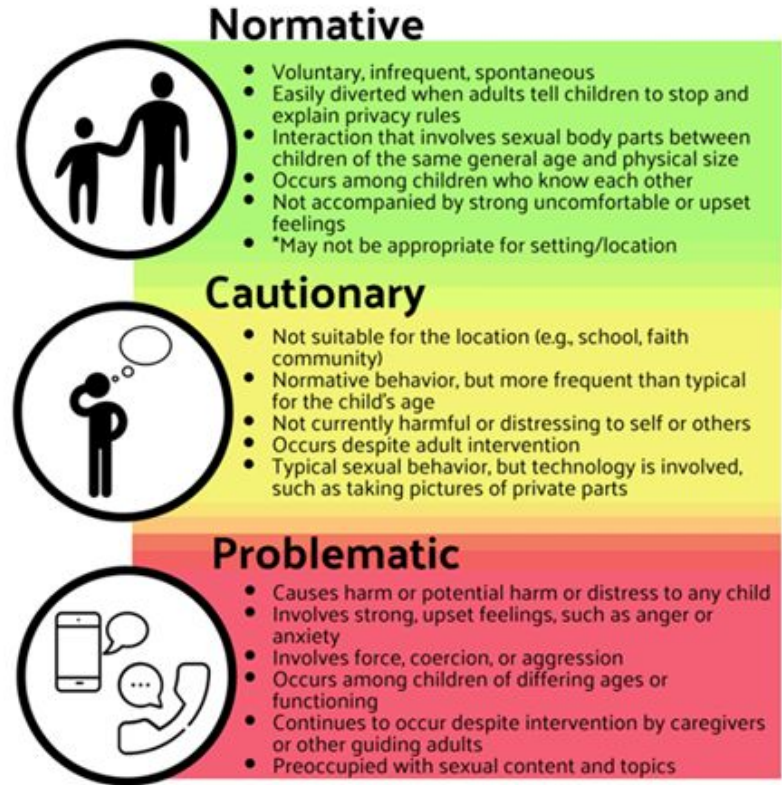
Current Study

- Empirical research has previously focused on parental sexual abuse, however PSB with siblings is more common than another other form of familial sexual abuse (Morrill, 2014).
- PSB with siblings is often overlooked, unrecognized, or not believed by parents and professionals (Ballantine, 2012).
- Most research has focused on school-age and adolescent populations, with a significant gap focused on characteristics of preschoolers who engage in PSB with siblings.

Our study aimed to describe differing characteristics between preschool-age children who engage in PSB with siblings, compared to those who have siblings but engage in PSB with non-siblings.

Normative Sexual Behaviors in Preschoolers (3-6 year olds)

- Problematic sexual behaviors (PSB)
 - Sexual behaviors in children that are developmentally inappropriate and are potentially harmful to other children involved (Silovsky & Bonner, 2003).
- PSB with Siblings
 - Inappropriate sexual interaction carried out by a sibling; these sexual interactions are distinct from developmentally expected behaviors driven by curiosity (Caffaro, 2021).



Initiating Sibling

Impacted Sibling

Sibling Relationship

Relationship between two or more children who share the same caregiver(s)

Biological Siblings

Half-Siblings

Step-Siblings

Adoptive Siblings

Foster Siblings

Informal Siblings

Non-Sibling Relationship

Relationship between two or more children who do not share the same caregiver(s)

Neighbors

Cousins (not in the same household)

Peers at School

Peers at Daycare

Guiding Questions

- Will sibling initiators have higher maltreatment rates than non-sibling initiators, and will they have a higher frequency of coercive behaviors?
- Does exposure to family sexuality have an impact on the rate at which PSB with siblings occurs?

Table 1

Demographics characteristics of preschool sample.

Characteristic	Sibling PSB group (<i>n</i> = 197) (69 %)	Non-sibling PSB group (<i>n</i> = 87) (31 %)	Total (<i>n</i> = 284)
<u>Age M(SD)</u>	4.81 (0.94)	4.89 (0.93)	<u>4.83 (0.94)</u>
<u>Gender <i>n</i> (%)</u>			
Male	94 (47.7)	46 (52.9)	140 (49.3)
Female	103 (52.3)	41 (47.1)	<u>144 (50.7)</u>
Race/Ethnicity (%)			
Black/African American	18.8	14.9	17.6
Native American/Alaskan Native	4.6	4.6	4.6
Asian American	1.0	0	0.4
<u> White/European American</u>	54.3	57.5	<u>55.3</u>
Hispanic/Latinx	8.6	6.9	8.1
Multiracial	12.2	14.9	13.0
Relationship with caregiver (%)*			
Biological mother	30.6	46.5	35.2
Foster mother	48.0	22.1	39.8
Number of children in home M(SD)	3.52 (1.59)	3.23 (1.83)	3.43 (1.67)
Age of impacted child M(SD)	5.39 (3.12)	5.29 (2.35)	5.36 (2.96)
Relationship with impacted child (%)			
Biological siblings	69.8		
Foster siblings	22.1		
Step-siblings	2.8		
Informal siblings	2.8		
Adoptive siblings	2.5		
Non-siblings		100.0	

Note: *Sibling PSB group was more likely to have a foster caregiver than the Non-sibling PSB group (Chi-square 18.43, $p < .001$). No differences in age, gender, race, number of children in the home, or age of impacted child.

Measures

- *Child Sexual Behavior Inventory- Third Edition (CSBI-III)* (Friedrich, 1997).
 - 7 items examined intrusive sexual behavior (e.g., touches another child's private parts after being told not to, forces other children to do sexual acts)
- *Family Sexuality and Beliefs*. Caregivers reported on exposure to family sexuality at home or in the media (e.g., My child has seen naked adults on TV or in a movie, My child has seen their parents having sex) (Friedrich (2002).
- *Maltreatment Histories and Demographic Information* included confirmed sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, exposure to domestic violence, caregiver drug use, and/or failure to protect

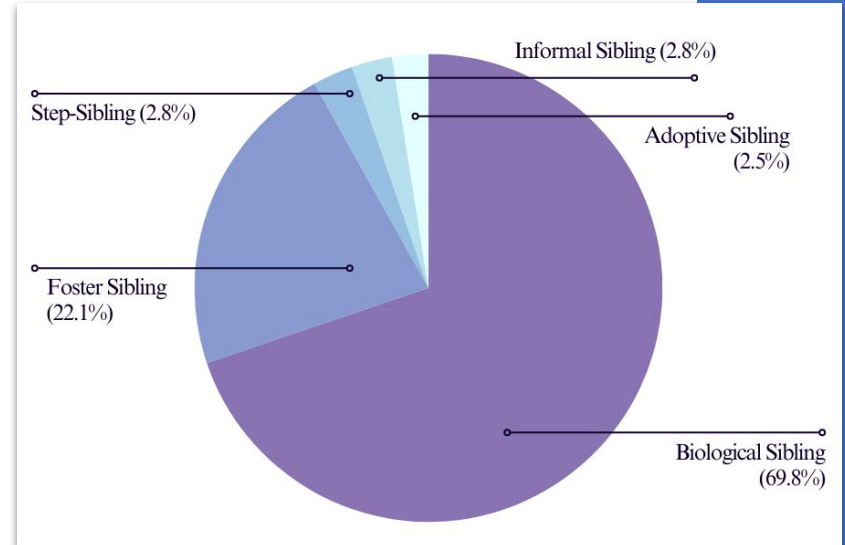
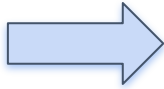
Data Analysis

- Three separate independent-samples t-tests were utilized to assess the differences between sibling initiators and non-sibling initiators:
 - Level of maltreatment histories
 - Exposure to sexual content
 - Frequency of coercive sexual behaviors.
- Descriptive analyses were utilized to examine:
 - The location of PSB,
 - Type of PSB
 - Age differences
- Chi-square tests were utilized to examine group differences for each:
 - Type of maltreatment
 - Exposure items
 - Caregiver attitudes towards sexual behavior

Results - Impacted Children

Engaging in PSB:

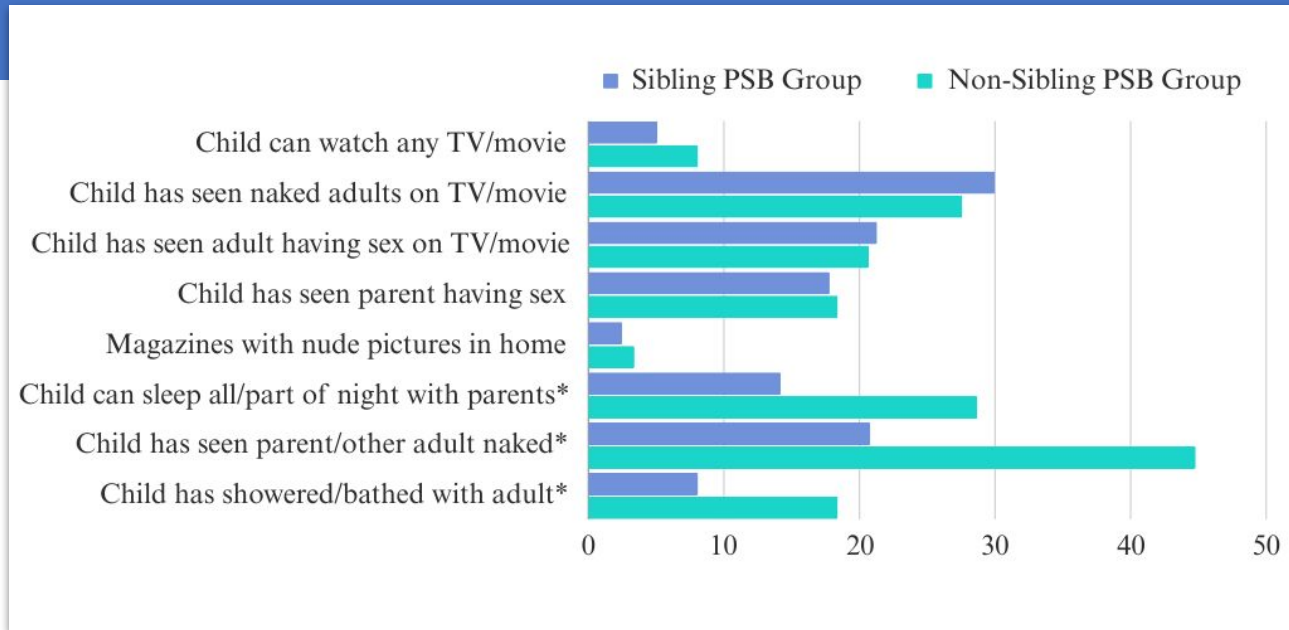
- 194 children (69.4%) initiated sexual behavior with a sibling
- 87 children (30.6%) initiated sexual behavior with non-siblings only
 - Neighbors, cousins, peers



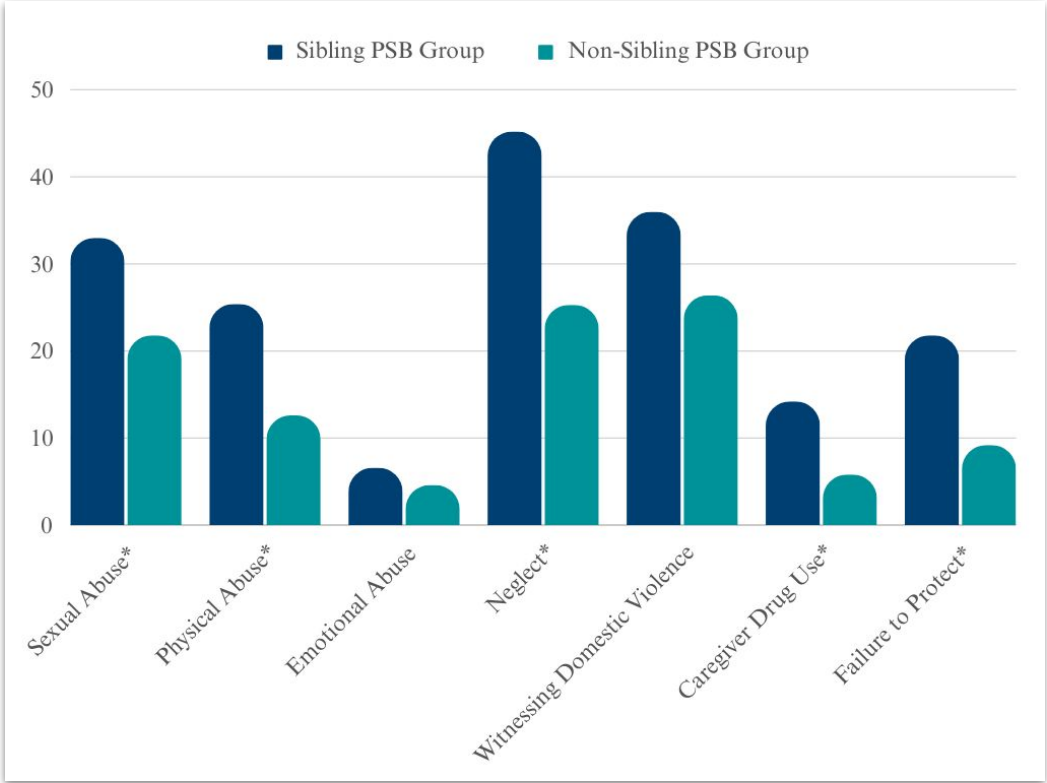
Results – Group Differences

<i>Characteristic</i>	<i>Sibling PSB Group (n = 196)</i>	<i>Non-Sibling PSB Group (n =87)</i>
CSBI-III Total Score <i>M(SD)</i>	20.17(14.65)	20.49(14.81)
At least 1 coercive sexual behavior (%)	54.3	48.3
Boundary issues (%)	55.3	52.9
Shows private parts to others (%)	42.6	48.3
Self-touch in front of others (%)	51.8	41.4
PSB in the home (%)	88.9	46.4
PSB at school, daycare, and/or playground (%)	11.1	29.9
Exposed to at least 1 sexual content (%)	55.3	81.6

Results – Exposure To Sexuality



Results – Maltreatment



Our Findings

- **Maltreatment history** was significant between the sibling PSB ($M = 1.93$, $SD = 1.52$) and non-sibling PSB ($M = 1.24$, $SD = 1.40$) initiator groups; $t(258) = -3.36$, $p < .001$
- **Exposure to family sexuality** was significant with non-sibling initiators demonstrating greater exposure ($M = 1.70$, $SD = 1.59$) than the sibling group ($M = 1.20$, $SD = 1.41$); $t(282) = 2.66$, $p = .008$.
- There was no significant difference between groups for frequency of PSB, including use of coercion.
 - CSBI-III – Sibling PSB ($M = 20.17$, $SD = 14.65$) and non-sibling PSB ($M = 20.49$, $SD = 14.81$)

Conclusion

- Sibling initiators were more likely to have experienced maltreatment
- Non-sibling initiators had greater exposure to family sexuality
- Common PSBs found among **both groups** were:
 - Boundary issues
 - Self-touch in front of others
 - Showing private parts to others
- Half of the children in the sample engaged in at least one intrusive or coercive sexual behavior
- The majority of caregivers agreed it was normal for children to have sexual feelings and curiosity (74%). However, the sample was evenly split when asked if it was wrong for children to masturbate.

Clinical Considerations

- PSB does not equally affect everyone involved
 - Consider nature and duration of abuse, attitudes, needs of caregivers, and protective and vulnerability factors
- Adequately assess who the child engages in PSB with, and if there are siblings in the home
- Families often believe PSB is a taboo topic, which may increase secrecy of the situation



Clinical Considerations



- Educate the Caregivers:
 - Promote healthy boundaries within the family unit
 - Learn developmentally appropriate behaviors
 - Increase supervision and monitoring access to electronic devices
 - Open-communication with their children
 - Encourage positive coping skills when dealing with emotions
 - Identify a support system

Clinical Considerations

- Educate the Child:
 - Evidence-based child safety programs (e.g., ROAR Program)
 - Teach adaptive coping skills
 - Importance on a positive self-concept
 - Teach developmentally appropriate empathy



Future Research



- Replication studies focused on preschool age populations
- Conduct longitudinal studies
 - Involve multiple sources of data
 - Direct observations
- Explore the effects on impacted children as well as siblings not involved in any PSB
- The role that family sexuality plays on engaging in PSB with peers rather than siblings

Thank you for joining us!
Questions?



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