



Bullying from the Nearest: A Systematic Review on the Risks and Consequences of Sibling Bullying

En Yakınından Gelen Zorbalık: Kardeş Zorbalığının Riskleri ve Sonuçları Üzerine Sistemantik Bir İnceleme

Zeynep Ekinci^{1,2}, Aysegul Simsek³

¹Child Health and Disease Nursing Master Science Program, Institute of Health Sciences, Marmara University, İstanbul, Türkiye,

²Department of Nursing, Faculty of Health Sciences, Tekirdag Namık Kemal University, Tekirdag, Türkiye

³Department of Pediatric Nursing, Faculty of Health Sciences, Marmara University, Türkiye,

ABSTRACT

Aim: Sibling bullying is a common but often neglected form of domestic aggression that can significantly affect children's mental and social well-being. This study aims to systematically examine the risk factors and health-related outcomes of sibling bullying among children and adolescents between 2020 and 2025.

Material and Method: This systematic review, according to the PRISMA 2020 guidelines, covers studies published between 2020 and 2025. PubMed, Science Direct, Scopus, Web of Science, PsycINFO, YOK Thesis, Dergipark, and Google Scholar databases were searched using the terms "sibling bullying," "sibling aggression," "sibling abuse," and "sibling conflict." Eligible studies were identified using the PICO framework (children aged 5-18 years, exposure to sibling bullying, comparison with non-exposed children, psychological or behavioral health outcomes). Records were independently screened using Rayyan, study quality was assessed using the JBI checklist, and eligible studies were narratively synthesized.

Results: A total of 14 studies were included. The findings show that sibling bullying is often carried out by boys, while girls are often the victims. Psychological problems such as depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem are common among victims, while behavioral problems and low empathy are common among bullies. Physical-verbal bullying is more commonly reported in Western countries, while relational-emotional bullying is more common in Asian societies.

Conclusion: Sibling bullying has significant and lasting effects on children's mental, emotional, and social well-being. Findings highlight the need for early family-based prevention programs that address communication patterns, gender dynamics, and cultural norms. Future longitudinal and cross-cultural studies are essential to understand the developmental continuity of sibling bullying and to guide evidence-based interventions.

Keywords: Bullying, sibling bullying, child and adolescent mental health, family dynamics, cross-cultural differences

ÖZ

Amaç: Kardeşler arası zorbalık, çocukların zihinsel ve sosyal refahını önemli ölçüde etkileyebilen, yaygın ancak sıklıkla göz ardı edilen bir aile içi saldırganlık türüdür. Bu çalışmada, 2020 ile 2025 yılları arasında çocuk ve ergenler arasında kardeşler arası zorbalığının risk faktörlerini ve sağlıkla ilgili sonuçlarını sistemantik olarak incelemek amaçlanmıştır.

Gereç ve Yöntem: Bu sistemantik inceleme, PRISMA 2020 kılavuzlarına göre, 2020 ile 2025 yılları arasında yayınlanan çalışmaları kapsamaktadır. PubMed, Science Direct, Scopus, Web of Science, PsycINFO, YOK Thesis, Dergipark, and Google Scholar veri tabanlarında "kardeş zorbalığı", "kardeş saldırganlığı", "kardeş istismarı" ve "kardeş çatışması" terimleri taranmıştır. Uygun çalışmalar PICO çerçevesi kullanılarak tanımlanmıştır (5-18 yaş arası çocuklar, kardeş zorbalığına maruz kalma, maruz kalmayanlarla karşılaştırma, psikolojik veya davranışsal sağlıkla ilgili sonuçlar). Kayıtlar Rayyan aracılığıyla bağımsız olarak taranmış ve çalışma kalitesi JBI kontrol listesi ile değerlendirilmiş, uygun çalışmalar ise öyküsel olarak sentezlenmiştir.

Bulgular: Toplam 14 çalışma dahil edilmiştir. Bulgular, kardeş zorbalığını sıklıkla erkeklerin uyguladığını, kızların ise sıklıkla mağdur olduğunu göstermektedir. Depresyon, anksiyete, düşük özsaygı gibi psikolojik sorunlar mağdurlarda yaygınken, zorbalarda davranışsal sorunlar ve düşük empati öne çıkmıştır. Batı ülkelerinde fiziksel-sözel, Asya toplumlarında ise ilişkisel-duygusal zorbalık biçimleri daha sık rapor edilmiştir.

Sonuç: Kardeşler arası zorbalık, çocukların zihinsel, duygusal ve sosyal iyilik halleri üzerinde önemli ve kalıcı etkilere sahiptir. Bulgular, iletişim kalıplarını, cinsiyet dinamiklerini ve kültürel normları ele alan erken aile temelli önleme programlarına duyulan ihtiyacı vurgulamaktadır. Kardeşler arası zorbalığın gelişimsel sürekliliğini anlamak ve kanıta dayalı müdahalelere rehberlik etmek için gelecekteki uzunlamasına ve kültürlerarası çalışmalar çok önemlidir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Zorbalık, kardeş zorbalığı, çocuk ve ergen ruh sağlığı, aile dinamikleri, kültürler arası farklılıklar

Corresponding Author: Zeynep Ekinci

Address: Child Health and Disease Nursing Master Science Program, Institute of Health Sciences, Marmara University, İstanbul, Türkiye

E-mail: zeynepp.ekinci@gmail.com

Received/Başvuru Tarihi: 20.09.2025

Accepted/Kabul Tarihi: 07.11.2025





INTRODUCTION

Bullying is defined as the intentional use of power in an unbalanced manner to cause physical, verbal, or psychological harm to another person. Every individual may experience this type of behavior at some stage in their life (1,2). Bullying comes five main forms: physical, verbal, social/relational, cyber, and sexual (3). Physical bullying includes behaviors such as hitting, pushing, or damaging property; verbal bullying includes swearing, name-calling, and insulting; social bullying includes exclusion and spreading rumors; and cyberbullying involves humiliation in digital environments (4,5).

In recent years, bullying has become an important research issue not only in school environment but also within families, especially in sibling relationships. Sibling bullying is defined as a sibling behaving in a repetitive, intentional, and power-based aggressive behavior towards another sibling (6). While interactions between siblings create opportunities for developmental learning, cooperation, and emotional support, unequal power relationships can make these actions harmful (7).

Sibling bullying differs from the concepts of "sibling rivalry," "conflict," and "abuse." Rivalry is a natural process involving a mutual balance of power; however, bullying involves repetition, intentional harm, and power inequality (1). The uncertainty of this conceptual distinction has led to scattered data on sibling bullying in the literature. Therefore, the current study was conducted using a search strategy that included not only "sibling bullying" but also the terms "sibling aggression," "sibling abuse," and "sibling conflict."

Sibling bullying arises from the interaction of both individual and environmental factors. According to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979), an individual's behavior is influenced by the systems at the micro (family), meso (school and peer environment), and macro (cultural norms) levels in which they are embedded. Within this framework, sibling bullying can be considered a multi-layered phenomenon shaped by the interaction of factors such as family communication, parental attitudes, socioeconomic conditions, and gender roles (6,8).

The prevalence of sibling bullying varies across countries and cultural contexts. In a study in Australia that asked individuals over the age of 16 about their exposure to peer and sibling bullying, 28.7% reported being bullied by peers and 11.5% by siblings during childhood. A shocking finding was that this bullying lasted an average of more than 3 years and was more prevalent among women than men (9). Physical and verbal bullying is more common in Western societies, while relational and emotional bullying is more prevalent in Asian societies (10,11). Sibling bullying experienced in childhood has been associated with long-term psychological effects such as depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and self-harm tendencies (12,13). Despite this, most studies in the field have focused on peer

bullying, and sibling bullying has not been systematically studied. This systematic review aims to comprehensively assess the risk factors of sibling bullying and its effects on children's health by analyzing studies published between 2020 and 2025. This time frame was chosen because it encompasses both changes in post-pandemic family dynamics and current research trends. The scope of this study is defined within the PICO framework as follows:

- **P (Population):** Children and adolescents aged 5–18
- **E (Exposure):** Exposure to sibling bullying or being a bullying sibling
- **C (Comparison):** Siblings who are not exposed to bullying or who do not bully
- **(Outcome):** Psychological health (depression, anxiety, self-esteem), social adaptation, behavioral outcomes

The study focuses on research conducted between 2020 and 2025; this time frame was chosen due to the standardization of scales related to the topic in recent years and the increase in longitudinal studies. Thus, the study aims to comprehensively reveal the effects of sibling bullying on children's health by synthesizing the current literature.

Systematic Review Questions

- What are the risk factors for sibling bullying?
- How does sibling bullying affect children's psychological, physical, and social health?

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Study Aims and Design

The purpose of this systematic review is to define the dynamics of sibling bullying, identify its risks and consequences, and provide a comprehensive conceptual framework to guide future prevention efforts.

Research Protocol

The study was conducted using a systematic review design encompassing quantitative and qualitative descriptive research. The review process was structured based on the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) methodology and reporting PRISMA-P (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses Protocols) guidelines and research questions based on the PICO framework (Population, Intervention/Exposure, Comparison, Outcome) (14,15).

Literature Search

The search process covered articles published between January 2020 and September 2025. Data were searched in PubMed, Science Direct, Scopus, Web of Science, PsycINFO, YOK Thesis, Dergipark, and Google Scholar databases. The search strategy was expanded to cover sibling bullying with different conceptual approaches. The keywords and Boolean operators used were as follows: ("sibling bullying" OR "sibling aggression" OR "sibling abuse" OR "sibling



conflict") AND ("children" OR "adolescents" OR "youth") AND ("mental health" OR "psychological well-being" OR "behavioral outcomes"). A total of 1325 records were identified, and 147 duplicate records were excluded. As a result of screening 1178 abstracts, 96 full-text studies were evaluated in detail; 14 studies that met the inclusion criteria were included in the review. The record selection process was reported using the PRISMA 2020 (**Table 1**).

Process Stage	Description	n
Identification of records	Total records in databases (PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, PsycINFO, Google Scholar)	1325
Removal of duplicate records	Via Rayyan	147
Records screened at title and abstract level	—	1178
Records excluded after title/abstract review	Off-topic, inaccessible, qualitative, or review type	1082
Records reviewed in full text	Articles evaluated based on inclusion criteria	96
Records excluded after full text review	Did not meet criteria (n=65), prior to 2020 (n=10), methodologically inadequate (n=7)	82
Final included studies	Quantitative studies focused on sibling bullying between 2020 and 2025	14

n=number

Inclusion Criteria

- Studies with a sample of children and adolescents aged 5–18
- Articles or theses published between 2020 and 2025,
- Full text must be accessible,
- Published in Turkish or English,
- Conducted with human participants.

Exclusion Criteria

- Studies with abstract-only access, without full text,
- Case reports, reviews, and meta-analyses,
- Studies addressing sibling rivalry or abuse that do not meet the definition of bullying,
- Publications prior to 2020,
- Secondary data based on parent reports only.

Data Extraction and Quality Assessment

A total of 1325 records were reviewed, and 147 duplicate studies were excluded. Of the 1178 records screened at the title and abstract level, 1082 were excluded. Ninety-six full-text studies were assessed according to inclusion criteria, and 82 studies were excluded. Ultimately, 14 studies were included in the final analysis. Sample size, age group, study type, measurement tools used, types of sibling bullying, and reported health outcomes were systematically recorded from each study. To increase the reliability of the data, two researchers cross-checked the

information obtained, and disagreements were resolved by a third researcher. Inter-rater agreement was found to be Cohen's $\kappa=0.87$.

Data Analysis

All data were transferred to a Microsoft Excel-based coding matrix and organized using Rayyan (QCRI) software. This software facilitated the systematic recording of decisions regarding the inclusion or exclusion of studies and ensured consistency among researchers. Due to the methodological diversity of the 14 included studies, a meta-analysis was not performed; instead, a narrative synthesis was reported under two main themes (1=Risk factors leading to sibling bullying, 2=Effects of these risks on child health). Results were summarized around the axes of risk factors for sibling bullying and health outcomes. Information on the author, year, country, sample size, age range, measurement tools, main findings, and methodological quality was extracted from each study. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and comparative analyses, while qualitative findings were evaluated using thematic content analysis. Qualitative and quantitative findings were integrated in a holistic manner and interpreted comparatively, and the common themes obtained were synthesized using the narrative synthesis approach. At this stage, thematic consistency was sought among the findings in terms of gender differences, cultural diversity, and psychosocial outcomes.

Bias Risk Assessment

Potential methodological biases were controlled in accordance with the JBI methodology. To reduce selection bias, only studies with full text available, clearly stated sampling methods, and meeting inclusion criteria were evaluated. To counter information bias, only studies using scales with reported validity and reliability (e.g., Sibling Bullying Questionnaire, Olweus Bullying Scale) were included. To minimize publication bias, Turkish theses and studies were reviewed in addition to English articles. To prevent reporting bias, the selection of records and reasons for exclusion were documented using the PRISMA-P process (14). Evaluator bias was conducted by two independent researchers, with a third evaluator providing consensus in cases of disagreement.

RESULTS

As a result of the database search, a total of 1325 records were identified. After removing duplicate records, 1178 records were evaluated at the title and abstract level. Of these studies, 96 were reviewed in full text, and 14 studies that met the inclusion criteria were included in the systematic review (**Table 1**). The main characteristics of the included studies are summarized in **Table 2**.



Table 2. Characteristics of the Included Studies and Summary of Results

Author (Year)	Country	Study Type	Age Range Sample	Measurement Tools	Main Results	Quality (JBI)
1 Güneş (2022)	Türkiye	Quantitative	Ages 8-9 330 children	Revised Sibling Bullying Scale Survey on the Causes of Sibling Bullying Behavior Survey on Where and When Bullying Behavior Occurs Survey on Who Bullied Whom Survey on Who Was Exposed to Bullying	Male gender is a significant risk factor for sibling bullying. The most common behaviors include name-calling, hitting, intimidating, and causing trouble. Sibling bullying usually occurs while playing, studying, or in front of a screen; the reasons for these behaviors are mostly reported as joking, boredom, revenge, or a desire to intimidate.	High
2 Dinçer (2022)	Türkiye	Mixed Type	726 adolescents Ages 14-22 15 parents	Sibling Bullying Scale for Adolescents Family Belonging Scale Life Satisfaction Scale	A negative relationship was found between sibling bullying and life satisfaction and family relationships, while a positive relationship was found between life satisfaction and family relationships. Parents generally resort to verbal warnings first, followed by punishment.	High
3 Toseeb and Wolke (2022)	United Kingdom	Quantitative	17,157 adolescents Ages 11-17	Warwick-Edinburgh mental wellbeing scale Rosenberg self-esteem scale	Bullying experienced in childhood leads to depression, anxiety, and behavioral problems in adolescence. In late adolescence, this situation is associated with poor mental health, suicidal thoughts, and identity issues. The negative effects of bullying persist throughout the developmental process.	Moderate
4 Qing et al. (2022)	China	Quantitative	6,302 children Ages 9-18	Chinese version of Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire	The rate of sibling bullying is 29%; 7.7% of participants are victims, 8.1% are bullies, and 13.2% are both bullies and victims. Parental absence is a significant risk factor for sibling bullying: boys living with a single parent are more likely to be bullies, while girls are more likely to be victims. Furthermore, parental preferences and domestic violence increase participation in sibling bullying.	Low
5 Öz (2023)	Türkiye	Quantitative	322 adolescents Ages 14-18	Sibling Bullying Scale	Bullying is more common among male adolescents, while victimization behaviors are more common among female adolescents. Both bullying and victimization levels are higher among adolescents whose parents are unemployed and who have a low socioeconomic status. Victimization scores are higher among adolescents with three siblings and a small age gap between siblings. These findings indicate that family structure and economic conditions affect the risk of sibling bullying.	Moderate
6 Candan (2025)	Türkiye	Quantitative	165 children Ages 11-18	Positive Social Behavior Tendency Scale Turkish Sibling Bullying Survey	Bullying behaviors are common among adolescents who have a sibling with autism. A positive relationship has been observed between peer bullying and psychosocial behaviors. Boys are more active in public social behaviors, while girls are more active in internal social behaviors such as autism. The 15–18 age group exhibits higher prosocial tendencies. These findings provide important clues for understanding the social behaviors of adolescents with siblings with autism and for developing support programs.	High
7 Deniz and Toseeb (2024)	England Türkiye	Quantitative	Ages 9-20 289 children (171 with autism)	The Autism Quotient-10 The Sibling Bullying Questionnaire Emotion Regulation Checklist Autism Social Skills Profile The Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire	Sibling bullying is common among adolescents with autism in both the UK and Turkey; approximately half of these children experience bullying every week. Culture and male gender are significant risk factors. The results indicate that sibling bullying is associated with poor mental health and that this relationship is indirectly mediated by harmful social behaviors and difficulties in regulating emotions.	High
8 Kavuncu (2025)	Türkiye	Quantitative	Ages 8-12 692 children	Revised Sibling Bullying Scale Children's Depression Scale Children's State-Trait Anxiety Inventory Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale	Sibling bullying is positively associated with males; girls are more likely to be victims, while boys are more likely to be perpetrators. Depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem are significantly associated with both being bullied and bullying others. The findings indicate that sibling bullying negatively affects the mental health of children and adolescents and that psychological support strategies should be included in preventive interventions.	Moderate
9 Belen (2024)	Türkiye	Quantitative	Ages 8-12 675 children	The Revised Sibling Bullying Scale the Peer Bullying Identification Scale Adolescent Form the Revised Cyberbullying Scale	Positive relationships have been found between sibling, peer, and cyberbullying. Peer bullying plays a fully mediating role in the relationship between sibling and cyberbullying. The findings support Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory and indicate that types of bullying should be addressed holistically.	High
10 Sabah et al. (2022)	Cezayir	Quantitative	Ages 11-20 221 children	Sibling Bullying Scale Bullying Behaviors Student Questionnaire-Revised 2 Adaptation of the Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire	Experiencing physical and verbal bullying among siblings increases the likelihood of being bullied at school. The effect of emotional bullying was not found to be significant, but parental rejection increased the risk of school bullying. The findings show that family and sibling relationships play a decisive role in school bullying.	High

**Table 2. Characteristics of the Included Studies and Summary of Results (Cont...)**

Author (Year)	Country	Study Type	Age Range Sample	Measurement Tools	Main Results	Quality (JBI)
11 Cvancara et al. (2024)	Argentina, Estonia, and USA	Qualitative	Argentina (N=969) Estonia (N=1053) USA (N=2082) 4104 adolescents	Bullying items (2) The Student Health Survey	Approximately 50% of participants reported experiencing sibling bullying. The most common form was verbal bullying, with males typically being the bullies and females being the victims or both bullies and victims. Cultural differences influenced the frequency and forms of bullying, demonstrating that sibling bullying is strongly influenced by cultural context.	High
12 Truong et al. (2022)	Vietnam	Qualitative	Ages 10-14 1537 children	Bullying items (5) Children's Worlds Subjective Well-Being Scale Structure and reliability of the scale	Approximately 50% of participating children reported being bullied by their siblings. Young age, fathers working away from home, and sharing a room with a sibling increased the risk of bullying. A positive relationship was found between sibling and peer bullying, and a negative relationship between exposure to bullying and subjective well-being.	Moderate
13 Laopratai et al. (2023)	Tailand	Quantitative	Ages 12-15 352 children	Olweus bully/victim questionnaire the Rosenberg self-esteem scale Patient Health Questionnaire-9	Sibling bullying is common among Thai adolescents; 26.1% are victims, and 13.9% are identified as bullies. Female gender, peer bullying, domestic violence, and depression are risk factors. Early identification and prevention interventions are important in reducing the effects of these relationships.	High
14 Toseeb et al. (2025)	18 countries	Quantitative	Ages 10-12 30,000 children	Millennium Cohort Data	The rate of sibling bullying averages 28%; one in four adolescents has experienced physical or verbal bullying in the past month. The rate varies between 9% and 59% across countries. Positive family, neighborhood, and school environments reduce the risk of bullying, while country-level factors have not shown a significant effect.	High

JBI: Joanna Briggs Institute

Study Characteristics

Of the 14 included studies, 12 were quantitative, 1 was mixed-methods, and 1 was qualitative, and included a total of 62,442 participants aged 8–22 years. The studies were conducted in different cultures, including Turkey (n=6), the United Kingdom (n=2), China, Thailand, Vietnam, Algeria, Portugal, and multinational samples (n=3). In most studies, the sample group consisted of middle school-aged children and early adolescents. The most frequently used measurement tools included the Olweus Bullying Scale, the Sibling Bullying Questionnaire, and their Turkish adaptations, while depression, anxiety, and self-esteem scales were used as additional measurements in five studies. In the quality assessment using the JBI checklist, 9 studies were rated as high quality, 4 as moderate quality, and 1 as low quality (Table 2).

Gender differences were clearly observed: In most studies, male siblings were more likely to engage in bullying, while female siblings experienced higher rates of victimization (16,17). However, Truong et al. (2022) found no significant gender difference in their study (17). It was found that bullying rates decreased as the age difference increased, and younger siblings were more frequently victimized. Cultural differences are also noteworthy: physical and verbal bullying is more prevalent in Western societies, while relational and emotional bullying is more common in Asian societies (10,19). Socioeconomic status, parental education, and family structure are determining variables in sibling bullying. For example, in the study by Qing et al. (2022), the rate of boys being perpetrators and girls being victims

increased in single-parent families (20). Bullying rates are significantly higher among individuals with siblings with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) (21,22). These studies have shown that attention sharing and parental fatigue in families with special needs individuals lead to power imbalances in sibling relationships.

Thematic Synthesis of Results

Since the studies were methodologically heterogeneous, meta-analysis was not performed; instead, a narrative and thematic synthesis approach was adopted. Data were coded, similar findings were grouped thematically, and presented under two main themes:

1. Risk factors for sibling bullying
2. Health and Psychosocial Effects of Sibling Bullying

1. Risk factors for sibling bullying

Gender, age difference, lack of communication within the family, socioeconomic status, and cultural structure were identified as key risk factors. Five studies showed that males were more likely to be perpetrators of bullying, while females were more likely to be victims. Three studies reported increased victimization rates in families with low-income levels (17,20,23). Two studies identified parents' low educational level and a history of domestic violence as risk factors (10,24). Belen (2024) found a direct interaction between sibling bullying, peer bullying, and cyberbullying, with these behaviors reinforcing each other (12). These findings indicate that sibling bullying is influenced not only by individual factors but also by ecological factors (family, school, community).



2. Health and Psychosocial Effects of Sibling Bullying

All studies report that sibling bullying has negative effects on child and adolescent health. Six studies found that exposure to bullying was significantly associated with depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem (110,18,24). Four studies found that sibling bullying was associated with self-harm, suicidal thoughts, and behavioral problems (6,22). Qualitative data show that most victimized children perceive their situation as “normal” or “deserved”(25). Two participants described the situation as follows:

- “My sister would constantly yell at me, but no one called it bullying because they said we were siblings.”
- “Even if my mom heard, she wouldn't get involved. She'd just say, ‘He's your brother,’ and move on. Home wasn't a safe place for me.”

These statements supported the sub-themes of “silent victimization,” “invisible violence,” and “normalized bullying.”

Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Results

Figure 1 shows sibling bullying and its effects on children. Quantitative data defined the prevalence rates, gender differences, and psychological effects of sibling bullying, while qualitative findings revealed the emotional meaning of these experiences and their reflections within the family. As a result of this integration, sibling bullying has been defined as a multidimensional phenomenon that begins in childhood, is fueled by family relationships, and continues into adolescence. The results showed similar patterns regardless of culture, and general trends are presented in Table 2.

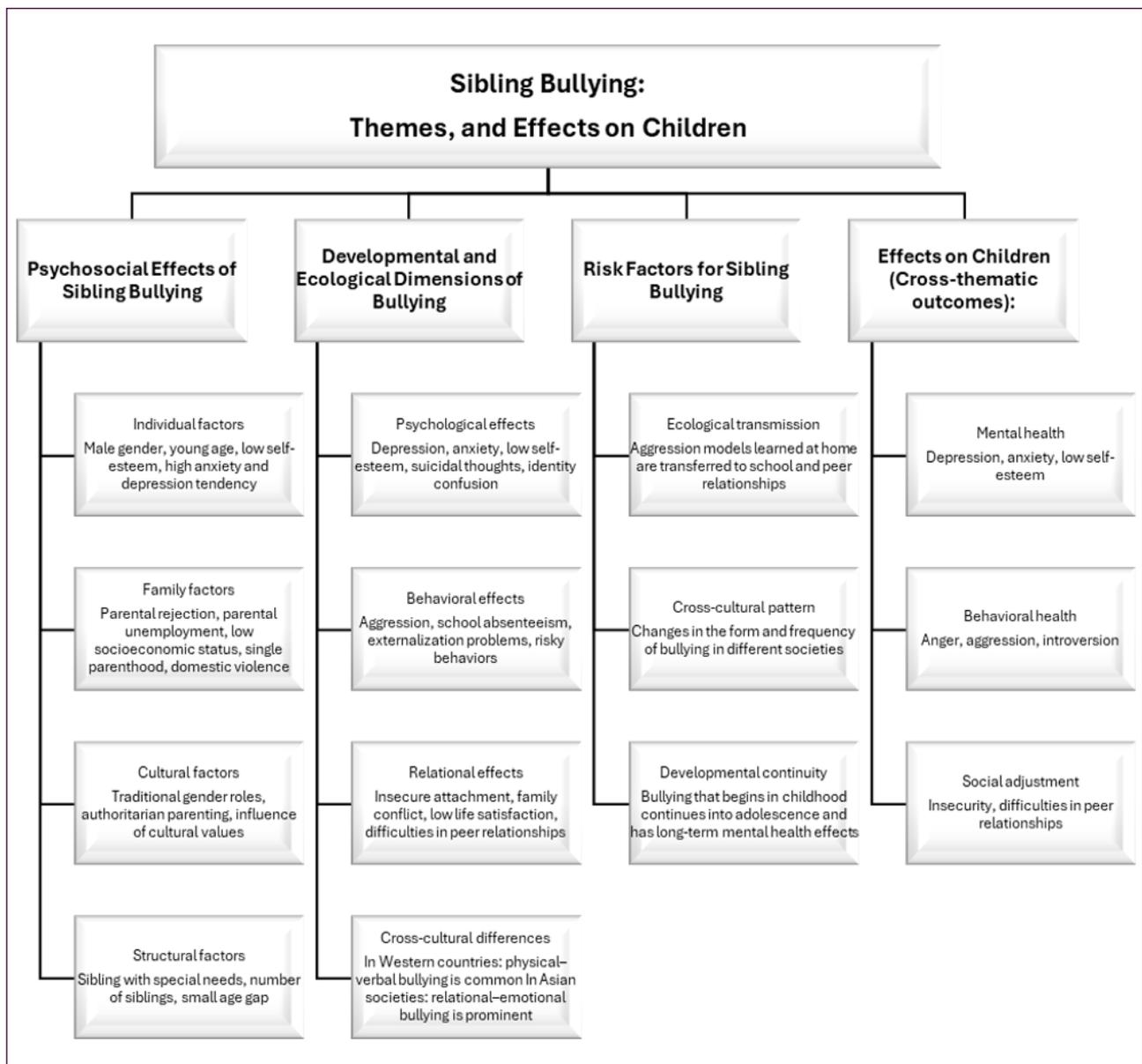


Figure 1. Sibling Bullying: Themes, and Effects on Children



DISCUSSION

The results of this systematic review indicate that sibling bullying has significant and consistent negative effects on the psychosocial health of children and adolescents. The synthesis of the 14 included studies revealed that sibling bullying is not merely an extension of family interaction dynamics but also a persistent form of learning that reflects on an individual's social behavior patterns and peer relationships. The studies included in this review indicate that gender is important in sibling bullying but is not a sole determining factor (8). This suggests that the tendency for brothers to be bullies and sisters to be victims is culturally reinforced (17-19). Findings support that family communication patterns, parental attitudes, and socioeconomic variables influence bullying behavior both directly and indirectly (10,23).

Family structure, parents' educational status, and economic status also affect the frequency of sibling bullying. The four studies included show that victimization is more common in low-income families, while bullying is more common in middle-income families. This suggests that reduced family stress and parental monitoring may indirectly affect children's behavior. Furthermore, it has been reported that children whose mothers have a low level of education are significantly more likely to be exposed to sibling bullying (11,17).

The findings also show that bullying rates are significantly higher in families with a sibling with special needs (especially individuals diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder). This situation can be explained by relational tensions between siblings, such as competition for attention and jealousy (21,22). Studies show that parents struggle to maintain emotional balance during this process, which increases power imbalances in sibling relationships.

As sibling bullying continues, this situation begins to reflect from the home environment to social environments. Two studies confirm this, reporting a strong relationship between sibling bullying and peer bullying, and that aggressive patterns within the family are carried over to the school environment (12,22). When considered from an ecological systems theory perspective (12, 26), this finding indicates that individuals transfer the behavioral patterns they acquire at the micro level (family) to the mesosystem level (school, peer groups). In particular, the studies by Toseeb and Wolke (2022) and Toseeb et al. (2025) show that individuals exposed to sibling bullying experience higher levels of depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem (6,13); these results are consistent with similar trends in the international literature (27,28). The findings indicate that exposure to sibling bullying is associated with negative outcomes such as depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, low life

satisfaction, and suicidal thoughts. Six studies found significant associations with internalized psychological problems, while four studies reported behavioral problems (anger, aggression, school absenteeism). Therefore, sibling bullying should be considered not only as an inter-family problem but also as a factor shaping the social learning process during childhood and adolescence and a traumatic process directly affecting psychological development.

Whether they are bullies or victims, the reasons why children exhibit these behaviors or are exposed to them must be analyzed in depth. Here, too, in-depth interviews are necessary, not just situational studies. Qualitative studies can deeply reflect the emotional experiences of children in this process. Qualitative data from Dinçer (2022) and Öz (2023) show that victims internalize their experiences of bullying as "normal" and "necessary for sibling relationships," that parental intervention is insufficient, and that a culture of silent acceptance has developed within the family (17,21). One participant explained how violence was normalized within the family, stating, "My sister constantly yelled at me, but no one called it bullying because they said we were siblings." Another participant emphasized that parental indifference deepened the feeling of victimization, saying, "Even if my mother heard, she wouldn't intervene; she would just say, 'He's your brother,' and move on. For me, home was not a safe place", emphasizing how parental indifference deepened the sense of victimization. These qualitative findings support the themes of "silent victimization", "invisible violence," and "normalized bullying" identified in the thematic analysis. The themes of "silent victimization" and "normalized violence" are particularly prevalent in cultures where traditional gender roles are dominant (8). This reveals that sibling bullying is not only a behavioral issue but also a normative social learning process. Additionally, three studies have identified a two-way relationship between sibling bullying and peer bullying (11,12,24). It has been observed that aggressive behaviors learned at home are transferred to the school environment, thus sibling bullying plays a modeling role in peer relationships.

Family and community culture can be as important a factor as family dynamics. Cultural differences also emerge as a significant determinant of bullying. While physical and verbal forms of bullying are more prevalent in Western societies (e.g., UK, US), relational and emotional bullying is more common in Asian societies (e.g., Vietnam, Thailand) (10,11). This difference can be explained by the tendency in collectivist cultures to avoid face-to-face conflict, which encourages indirect forms of violence. Therefore, interventions related to sibling bullying must be designed with sensitivity to the cultural context.



Strengths and limitations of the study

The greatest strength of this systematic review is that it provides an up-to-date, comprehensive, and cross-cultural assessment of the literature on sibling bullying, covering studies from 2020 to 2025. The study was conducted using a broad search strategy that included not only "sibling bullying" but also the concepts of "sibling aggression," "sibling abuse," and "sibling conflict." Record selection was performed by two independent researchers using Rayyan software, and methodological quality assessment was conducted using the JBI checklist. Furthermore, the integrated analysis of quantitative and qualitative data, examining both statistical trends and participant experiences, has made an important contribution to understanding the complex nature of sibling bullying. In addition, the study was conducted in accordance with the PRISMA 2020 guidelines and has made an important contribution to the literature by ensuring methodological transparency.

Nevertheless, the cross-sectional design of most of the included studies limited causal conclusions. The examination of publications in English and Turkish only may have resulted in language bias. Furthermore, the limited sub-analyses by age groups prevented a detailed assessment of developmental differences.

CONCLUSION

This systematic review shows that sibling bullying has significant negative effects on the psychological, emotional, and social health of children and adolescents. The included studies reveal that sibling bullying is a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by factors such as gender, age difference, family communication, and cultural structure. Results indicate that boys are typically the bully, while girls are the victims. Furthermore, a strong relationship has been found between sibling bullying and peer bullying, and problems such as depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem have been reported in victimized children.

In light of these results, it is recommended that family-based prevention programs be developed and that sibling relationships be evaluated in school-based counseling services. Interventions that increase parental awareness, strengthen communication, and support empathy rather than violence in sibling relationships will be effective in protecting children's mental well-being in the long term. Future research should use longitudinal and cross-cultural comparative designs to examine the developmental continuity and protective factors of sibling bullying in detail.

ETHICAL DECLARATIONS

Referee Evaluation Process: Externally peer-reviewed.

Conflict of Interest Statement: The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

Financial Disclosure: The authors declared that this study has received no financial support.

Author Contributions: All of the authors declare that they have all participated in the design, execution, and analysis of the paper, and that they have approved the final version.

Note: The study was presented as an oral presentation at the 7th International Current Issues Congress On Medicine, Nursing, Midwifery, Health Sciences on June 27-29, 2025.

REFERENCES

1. Andrews NCZ, Cillessen AHN, Craig W, Dane AV, Volk AA. Bullying and the Abuse of Power. *Int J Bullying Prev.* 2023;19:1-10.
2. Solberg ME, Olweus D. Prevalence estimation of school bullying with the Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire. *Aggres Behav.* 2003;29:239-68.
3. Li C, Wang P, Martin-Moratinos M, Bella-Fernández M, Blasco-Fontecilla H. Traditional bullying and cyberbullying in the digital age and its associated mental health problems in children and adolescents: a meta-analysis. *Eur Child Adolesc Psychiatry.* 2024;33(9):2895-909.
4. Hancı IH, Özakar Akça S. School Bullying. *Journal of Education and Future,* 2020;18:113-21.
5. Wang J, Iannotti RJ, Luk JW. Patterns of adolescent bullying behaviors: physical, verbal, exclusion, rumor, and cyber. *J Sch Psychol.* 2012;50(4):521-34.
6. Toseeb U, Wolke D. Sibling Bullying: A Prospective Longitudinal Study of Associations with Positive and Negative Mental Health during Adolescence. *J Youth Adolesc.* 2022;51(5):940-55.
7. Brett H, Bartoli AJ, Smith PK. Sibling bullying during childhood: A scoping review, *Aggression and Violent Behavior.* 2023;72(3):101862
8. Yang B, Wang B, Sun N, et al. The consequences of cyberbullying and traditional bullying victimization among adolescents: Gender differences in psychological symptoms, self-harm and suicidality. *Psychiatry Res.* 2021;306:114219.
9. Thomas HJ, Mathews BM, Green JG, et al. Peer and Sibling Bullying Victimization in Childhood: Prevalence in a National Australian Cohort Aged 16 Years and Older. *Int J Bully Prevent* 2025;1-9.
10. Laopratai M, Jirakran K, Chonchaiya W. Factors affecting sibling bullying and its association with self-esteem and depression in middle school students. *Eur J Pediatr.* 2023;182(8):3501-9.
11. Truong TKH, Tran HT, Ngo THG, Nguyen VL, Truong QL, Ngo MT. Sibling bullying among Vietnamese children: the relation with peer bullying and subjective well-being. *Curr Issues Personal Psychol.* 2022;10(3):216-26.
12. Belen FS. Sibling Bullying, Sibling bullying, peer bullying and cyberbullying in secondary school students: A structural equation model test. Master's Thesis. Gaziantep University, Gaziantep, 2024. Available from: <https://tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi/tarama.jsp#tabs-2>
13. Toseeb U, Deniz E, Noret N. The prevalence and correlates of sibling bullying victimization in early adolescence: An investigation of over 30,000 adolescents in 18 countries. *Child Abuse Negl.* 2025;160:107211.
14. Moher D, Shamseer L, Clarke M, et al. Preferred reporting items for systematic review and meta-analysis protocols (PRISMA-P) 2015 statement. *Syst Rev.* 2015;4(1):1.
15. Nahcivan N, Seçginli S. How Is the Methodological Quality of Quantitative Studies Included in Systematic Reviews Evaluated? *Turkiye Klinikleri J Public Health Nursing-Special Topics* 2017;3(1):10-9.

16. Güneş SP. The appearance of sibling bullying among primary school students. Master's Thesis. 2022. Gaziantep University, Gaziantep. Available from: <https://tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi/tarama.jsp#tabs-2>
17. Öz G. The examination of sibling bullying in adolescents in terms of various variables. Master's Thesis. 2023. Çağ University, Mersin. Available from: <https://tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi/tarama.jsp#tabs-2>
18. Kavuncu B. The predictive roles of depression, anxiety and self-esteem on sibling bullying in middle school. Master's Thesis. 2025. Gaziantep University, Gaziantep. Available from: <https://tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi/tarama.jsp#tabs-2>
19. Cvancara K, Kaal E, Pörhölä M, Torres MB. Sibling bullying reported by emerging adults: Profiling the prevalence, roles, and forms in a cross-country investigation. *Acta Psychol (Amst)*. 2024;247:104310.
20. Qing Z, Ma Y, Liu X. Prevalence and Associated Family Factors of Sibling Bullying Among Chinese Children and Adolescents. *Front Psychol*. 2022;13:892598.
21. Candan A. Examination of sibling bullying and prosocial behaviors in adolescents with sibling diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. Master's thesis. 2025. Marmara University, Istanbul.
22. Deniz E, Toseeb U. Sibling bullying and mental health in British and Turkish autistic children and adolescents: The role of social and emotional functioning. *Res Autism Spectrum Disorders*. 2024;114:102392.
23. Fraga S, Soares S, Peres FS, Barros H. Household Dysfunction Is Associated with Bullying Behavior in 10-year-old Children: Do Socioeconomic Circumstances Matter? *J Interpers Violence*. 2022;37(15-16):13877-901.
24. Sabah A, Aljaberi MA, Lin CY, Chen HP. The Associations between Sibling Victimization, Sibling Bullying, Parental Acceptance-Rejection, and School Bullying. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2022;19(23):16346.
25. Dinçer R. The effects of sibling bullying on individuals aged 14–22 and parents' approach to sibling bullying. Master's Thesis. 2022. Istanbul University Cerrahpaşa, Istanbul. Available from: <https://tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi/tarama.jsp#tabs-2>
26. Flynn K, Mathias Flynn KB, Mathias B. "How Am I Supposed to Act?": Adapting Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory to Understand the Developmental Impacts of Multiple Forms of Violence. *J Adolescent Res*. 2023;40(1):192-225.
27. Arseneault L. Sibling bullying is associated with anxiety, depression and self-harm. *Evid Based Ment Health*. 2015;18(3):83.
28. Borualogo IS, Varela JJ, de Tezanos-Pinto P. Sibling and School Bullying Victimization and Its Relation With Children's Subjective Well-Being in Indonesia: The Protective Role of Family and School Climate. *J Interpers Violence*. 2025;40(5-6):1433-58.