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A SYSTEMIC APPROACH TO SIBLING FUNCTIONING IN CHILDHOOD – A RESEARCH REVIEW

Abstract: The aim of the paper is to review recent literature and introduce a systemic approach to the nature of sibling relationships during the first years of life. A growing body of evidence suggests that siblings play considerable roles in each other's development, and that the quality and the character of the sibling bond may have far-reaching effects. The present review elucidates the interactions between subsystems, particularly the functioning of the sibling subsystem; it also considers influ-

ences from other internal and external factors. It discusses siblinghood between children with regard to three main domains: warmth and support, rivalry and jealousy, and conflict. The final part of the article suggests some implications considering the influence of child siblinghood on adolescent and adult life.

Keywords: siblings, childhood, systemic approach, family system theory.

INTRODUCTION

The family represents as the main resource for satisfying physiological, emotional and social needs. It gives a sense of security and enables its members to develop sustainably and continuously. The intergenerational relations between family members, as well as their psychological functioning, social competence, engagement and role fulfillment, can be analyzed from various theoretical perspectives. These include psychodynamic approaches (Abbass, Rabung, Leichsenring, Refseth, & Midgley, 2013; Josephson, 2013), those based on attachment (Coyl-Shepherd & Newland, 2013; Diamond, Russon, & Levy, 2016) and on social learning (Chavis, 2012; Grusec, 2011). However, the most holistic approach is represented by systemic theories, i.e. those based around the establishment of a hierarchical family structure and the investigation of mutual interactions between its members (Bowen, 2004; Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Minuchin, 1974; Olson, 2000).

The concept that the family can be regarded as a system has its roots in biological General Systems Theory (von Bertalanffy, 1972), which assumes that a simple analysis of single elements, processes and actions does not enable a full description of a living species phenomenon. Hence, as indicated by Minuchin (1974, p.89), “a family is more than the individual biopsychodynamics of its members” and only by considering the nonlinear transactions between, and within, its subsystems can its structure and complexity be fully understood. The family system in general cannot be hence reduced to

the sum of its elements, but should be treated as an organized whole emerging from the relatively stable psychosocial characteristics of its members and the reciprocal interactions that constitute repeatable patterns which maintain the family during different life events. The interactions between members are bi-directional and circular; for example, an action taken by a son can trigger a particular behavior by his father and also affect his mother's thoughts and actions, and their response in turn influences the son's reaction. Concurrently, the relationship between subsystems is hierarchical and non-symmetrical: to ensure the proper development of the entire system, the parent subsystem is placed above that of the children. Due to the flexibility of the system and subsystem borders, and by using efficient internal communication, a family can create new response patterns to react to both normative and non-normative changes (Bornstein & Sawyer, 2006; Cox & Paley, 2003).

Existing systemic studies on family functioning address both the functioning of the entire system (Lindell & Campione-Barr, 2017; Paley, Lester, & Mogil, 2013; Turkdogan, Duru, & Balkis, 2019) and its individual components, i.e. the subsystem of grandparents, parents, spouses, children or siblings (Berryhill, Soloski, Durtschi, & Adams, 2016; Pratt & Skelton, 2018; Prendeville & Kinsella, 2019; Reay, 2015; Stapley & Murdock, 2020; Stob, Slade, Brotnow, Adnopoz, & Woolston, 2019; Trivette, Dunst, & Hamby, 2010). Although the relationship between siblings is one of the most important in human life, it is relatively poorly studied compared to other subsystems, not only regarding data obtained via the systemic approach, but based on all theoretical frameworks (Campione-Barr & Killoren, 2019; Cassinat, Whiteman, & Jensen, 2019; de Bel, Kalmijn, & van Duijn, 2019; Fullerton, Totsika, Hain, & Hastings, 2017; Recchia & Witwit, 2017; Rostowska, 2010; Tanskanen & Danielsbacka, 2020; Voorpostel & Blieszner, 2008; Wałęcka-Matyja, 2016).

However, research into sibling relationships appears to have recently enjoyed a resurgence of interest (Cyron, Schwerdt, & Viarengo, 2017; Davys, Mitchell, & Haigh, 2016; Mathis & Mueller, 2015; Poraj & Poraj-Weder, 2018; Sawai & Kato, 2017; Stocker et al., 2019; Tucker et al., 2013; Wheeler et al., 2016) and a growing number of psychological and sociological tools can be found (Lewandowska-Walter, Połomski, & Peplińska, 2016; Myers, 2011; Riggio, 2000; Sommantico, Donizzetti, De Rosa, & Parrello, 2019; Stewart et al., 2001; Stocker, Furman, & Lanthier, 1997; Szymańska, 2016; Wałęcka-Matyja, 2014). Previous studies have examined groups of both children and adults, with varying degrees of mental and physical health (Griffiths & Sin, 2013; Hallion, Taylor, & Roberts, 2018; Horwitz, 1993; Kramer & Baron, 1995; Mones, 2001; Tanaka, 2011; Voorpostel & Schans, 2011). However, while such attempts have been made to analyze sibling relationships via a range of theoretical approaches (Wałęcka-Matyja, 2018; Whiteman, McHale, & Soli, 2011), no literature review regarding systemic aspects has been published. Given the abovementioned issues, the significance of the relationship and the apparent growth in interest in its study, the present article reviews a selection of studies on sibling functioning in the early years, and gathers them within a theoretical framework based on the principle of the family as a system.

A SYSTEMIC APPROACH TO SIBLING ANALYSIS

In addition to providing a space for analyzing the interactions between siblings and their influences on other family subsystems, the systemic approach to analyzing sib-

ling relationships also allows greater investigation of the internal and external factors, or processes, affecting sibling development and functioning. The nature of the bond is not stable: it typically changes over subsequent developmental stages, moving from being strong and intense during the first years of life, through a more stormy relationship in adolescence, to a weaker but more positive state in adulthood (Cicirelli, 1995; Fowler, 2009; Nitsch, Faurie, & Lummaa, 2013). It also may change according to various life events, forcing the entire family subsystem to adapt.

According to Jenkins, McGowan and Knafo-Noam (2016), the family environment exerts a profound impact on sibling bond quality and the development of affectivity between children. The formation phase of the sibling relationship begins in infancy and early childhood “when one sibling first becomes aware of the existence of the other” (Cicirelli, 1995, p. 42). The emergence of a new family member automatically modifies the existing subsystem hierarchy: the parents need to divide their time and care, whereas children have to share common goods, cooperate and support one another, but also compete for parental attention. However, parents typically try to prepare the older child for the arrival of the new family member by making joint arrangements, including preparing the layette, decorating the room or talking about the changes that will happen after the birth of a brother or a sister. Such emotionally-based conversations focused on the older child may trigger interest and initiate the development of a sibling bond (Song & Volling, 2018).

Some studies indicate the existence of three basic types of siblings during childhood: Buddy, Caretaker or Casual (Murphy, 1992, 1993, as cited in Stewart, Verbrugge, & Beilfuss, 1998). The Buddy relationship is closer to a friendship: in this case, a brother or a sister is a playmate, sometimes trying to convince a younger sibling to take part in preferred activities, or forming a common front and cooperating against parents when needed. The Caretaker relationship is one in which an older sibling provides care for the younger, e.g. by changing or dressing the baby, and who tends to experience many positive emotions and feelings. Finally, the Casual relationship is the least involved: one sibling is not especially interested in daily functioning of the others and seems to be focused rather on own their personal issues than on interacting with younger family members. Similar types were described by Stewart and colleagues (1998), who also added a “None of These” group to account for the previously unclassified participants. According to the classification, each child typically belongs to one type; however, in some circumstances, blended or mixed types, such as Caretaker/Buddies or Buddy/Casuals are possible. Such a distinction indicates that in the early years of life, the siblings are rarely negative and hostile towards each other. However, ambivalence and conflict in the relationship may increase later in life, perhaps as a result of incorrect parental influences or unequal treatment (Stewart et al., 1998; Szymańska, 2019).

It is important to note that early parental interventions, or the maladaptation of the family system to a life situation, may force changes within the child subsystem, even during childhood. One such event may be the necessity to deal with mental health problems demonstrated by a child. Previous studies suggest that siblings of chronically ill or disabled children can experience various psychosocial problems such as anxiety, loneliness and maladaptive behaviors, as well as a sense of neglect or unequal treatment by parents (Kaplan, Kaal, Bradley, & Alderfer, 2013; King, Alexander, & Seabi, 2016; Truchon & Howe, 2019). Additionally, they often report lower self-esteem and general quality of life (Bansal, Sharma, Bakhshi, & Vatsa, 2014; Bansal, Sharma, Vatsa, & Bakhshi, 2013). Moreover, children with a sibling suffering from

cancer are more likely to experience educational difficulties or engage in absenteeism from school (Donnan et al., 2015).

An interesting study based on a longitudinal model was reported recently by Rodrigues, Binnoon-Erez, Plamondon, and Jenkins (2017); the authors examined whether the presence of psychopathology by an older sibling may be treated as a predictor of emotional, cognitive and behavioral problems in the younger. Assuming that any problem experienced by one child may affect the parental system, as well as the behavior of the other child, the authors propose that the presence of problematic behaviors and mental disorders in the older sibling served as a better predictor of the mental health of the younger child a few years later than indicators such as family socioeconomic status, maternal depression, infant gender or infant temperament. Hence, a knowledge of sibling system functioning at early stages seems to be crucial not only from a scientific, but also practical and therapeutic point of view. Similar findings have been obtained in previous studies (Ma, Roberts, Winefield, & Furber, 2014).

To demonstrate the specificity of the sibling subsystem in childhood, the present article is further divided into three sections relating to the basic aspects discussed in previous studies, the first being warmth, intimacy and support, the second being rivalry and jealousy, and the third being conflict. It should be emphasized that the paper does not serve as an attempt to comprehensively review all the processes related to sibling functioning; however it does nonetheless include a number of papers that offer an insight into the systemic aspect of such analyses.

Sibling warmth, intimacy and support

In one study, 83% of primary school children indicated one of their siblings as the most important person in their lives (Kosonen, 1996). The relationship with a brother or sister is more equal than with older members of the family, and siblings often act as friends, care providers, guardians and comforters. A positively developed sibling bond characterized by intimacy and closeness, has been found to result in the child demonstrating better functioning in social and psychological areas. Siblings provide a possibility to develop social competence and emotional understanding. Lam, Solmeyer and McHale (2012) found increased empathy among both first-borns and second-borns to be associated with higher levels of warmth toward siblings, even after controlling for parental impact. Children reporting a high degree of warmth in their relationship with their brothers or sisters also experienced more positive relationships with peers (Lockwood, Kitzmann, & Cohen, 2001), and manifested increased self-disclosure (Howe, Aquan-Assee, Bukowski, Lehoux, & Rinaldi, 2001), higher levels of expressed emotions (Yelland & Daley, 2009) and better overall pre-school adaptation (Modry-Mandell, Gamble, & Taylor, 2007).

The level of warmth in a relationship between siblings may vary with regard to certain aspects of child temperament, similarity in activity level (Stoneman & Brody, 1993), capability for emotional regulation (Kubose, 2006) or family system reactivity. Mark, Pike, Latham and Oliver, (2017) emphasize the role of maternal expressiveness towards children: the children of mothers who showed more positive family-related emotions and less negative ones were characterized by a warmer and closer relationship. Partial studies suggest that stability and living in a non-chaotic home may strengthen the sibling bond and increase the quality of the relationship, and that this effect may be enhanced by parental warmth and a low level of discipline (Kretschmer & Pike, 2009).

Most researchers regard the sibling as an important source of support. Jacobs and Sillars (2012) report social support from brothers and sisters increased positive adaptation following a parental divorce, and both siblings gained reinforced resilience through their availability and togetherness. Additionally, support from a sibling allowed healthy grieving after the death of a father during childhood, especially if the mother was emotionally unavailable (Hurd, 2002).

The support offered by siblings extends beyond matters concerning family difficulties. A series of interviews with children in middle and late childhood were carried out by Hadfield, Edwards and Mauthner (2006) to verify whether support from siblings might be conducive to dealing with bullying at school garnered mixed results. On the one hand, most of the participants regarded it as natural for a sibling to provide protection and support, even if their relationship was rather cold and conflictual at home; however, some children preferred to stay emotionally and socially detached from the situation faced by the bullied sibling. In addition, this “engagement rate” was found to depend on the age of both siblings.

The body of work documenting the construction of the support system among siblings with disabilities or mental disorders is steadily growing (Naylor & Prescott, 2004; Simms, Hewitt, & Vevers, 2002; Stoneman, 2005; Tsao, Davenport, & Schmiege, 2012). Currently, two research directions are being followed, with the healthy siblings being investigated as either providers of support or as its recipients. In the first case, it is noteworthy that brothers and sisters are invaluable sources of help and assistance. They reduce tension and reinforce a positive mood in their sibling, while also giving a feeling of relief. Moreover, in addition to providing emotional backing, they can also be supportive in pragmatic and informative ways: for example, they can search for additional data about an illness or change maladaptive beliefs by showing another point of view (Namysłowska & Siewierska, 2009). This hitherto underestimated role of siblings has been confirmed by Sharer, Cluver, Shields and Ahearn (2016) in a study of a large group of African children with HIV or AIDS. They found instrumental support from brothers and sisters, rather than a caregiver, to be associated with lower levels of anxiety, posttraumatic stress and depression. A sibling may also influence the development of social adaptive behavior for a sick sibling, easing the difficulties resulting from various health disorders (Tsao, Davenport, & Schmiege, 2012).

However, being “the healthy one” is not an easy experience and, as mentioned above, may lead to various psychosocial consequences, and these children merit some attention for acting as providers of support. It has been found that participation in child support groups enabled the children to explore their complex relationship with their sick sibling, deepen their understanding of their needs and increase their engagement in family life (Evans, Jones, & Mansell, 2001). Their levels of anxiety and depression were found to decrease, especially among those reporting high levels of depressive symptoms (Salavati et al., 2014). The children also benefitted in the social sphere: they felt less isolated, made friendships more easily and improved their communication skills (Gettings, Franco, & Santosh, 2015).

Competition and jealousy between brothers and sisters

The functioning of the family system changes after the birth of the second child. As an only child typically receives all the attention of the other significant family members,

the emergence of a new person in the family may instinctively trigger some negative emotions, such as jealousy, and release competitive behaviors. The parental subsystem should flexibly adapt to the situation; however, it is often the case that parents feel stressed and overwhelmed, and tend to focus only on one of the children. Additionally, favoritism and unequal reactions may be strengthened by individual differences between the children (Richmond, Stocker, & Rienks, 2005). Such differential parental treatment, if not fully understood by the offspring and if perceived as unreasonable, may increase negativity among siblings and escalate rivalry, and problem behaviors (Browne & Jenkins, 2012; Jensen, Apsley, Rolan, Cassinat, & Whiteman, 2020; Meunier, Bisceglia, & Jenkins, 2012).

In general, jealousy is connected to a sense of negligence or betrayal by a valuable person, or the fear of losing an important relationship, and this may be treated as an inevitable factor in the interaction between siblings; however, siblings who receive presents, admiration or are perceived to experience favoritism from parents may elicit feelings of jealousy (Thompson & Halberstadt, 2008). It is common to observe experiences and expressions of jealousy, and the resulting rivalry, in the sibling subsystem. Most relevant studies have concentrated on their connections with aggression or abuse (Edward, 2013; Meyers, 2014; Tucker & Finkelhor, 2017); however, neither phenomena are unequivocally negative, as they may also derive positive activity and yield improvement (Caspi, 2011): for instance, they can foster social competency or improve emotional control and regulation (Kennedy & Kramer, 2008; Thomas & Roberts, 2009). In the systemic view, despite their ambiguity, in the longer perspective, they stabilize the family functioning and may enhance adaptation to new situations.

Although sociodemographic factors such as gender or birth order are known to influence jealousy and competition between siblings, it is believed that the family structure and its resources may also play a role (Conley, 2005; Lareau, 2003). Although previous studies have examined the role of the father in the emotional socialization, its nature remains unclear: both supportive and non-supportive behaviors expressed by a father toward an older child expressing negative emotions were associated with a higher level of aggression and competition in a sibling pair (Yaremych & Volling, 2020). Interestingly, Poris (1999) notes that the relationship between spouses seems not to be meaningless in this context, i.e. a lack of marital love between parents also predicted a high level of school-aged competition.

An analysis of sibship structure found that in sibling triads, rivalry typically refers not to the whole group, but only to two siblings (Gane, 2005). Miller, Volling and McElwain (2000) describe an experimental study of 62 family triads, consisting of a parent, a toddler and an older sibling. During one of the sessions, the parents were instructed to focus on one child, while the second was encouraged to play in the same room. Although jealousy was demonstrated by the unobserved child, some differences were found: due to their limited emotional competence associated with their developmental level, the toddlers felt less happy than their older brothers and sisters, and were not able to engage in more diverse individual activities during the task. Jealousy may also have a negative impact on the quality of the sibling relationship later on: Kolak and Volling (2011) report that jealousy by the older child triggered during an interaction between father and the infant sibling predicted sibling conflict two and a half years later, as did jealousy by the younger child during interaction between the mother and the older sibling.

Conflicts among siblings

Tension naturally occurs between children in the family as a consequence of their development, and is usually of an adaptive character. More than 97 % of sibling dyads report experiencing conflict during play sessions; however, the intensity and frequency of this conflict is diverse (Howe, Rinaldi, Jennings, & Petrakos, 2002). The perception of conflict depends also on the birth order: later-borns report a decrease of conflict over time, while older children do not (Buhrmester & Furman, 1990). In addition, conflict duration and conclusion also differ, with younger children tending to exaggerate their own impact on the conflict resolution and denying taking negative actions throughout it (Ross, Smith, Spielmacher, & Recchia, 2004).

Pursuant to the systemic approach, an analysis of conflict between siblings should also take into account each member's perception of the given situation, as this perspective allows a broader picture of sibling functioning to be obtained. Family members most commonly ascribe instrumental motivation to both sides of the sibling conflict (Recchia & Witwit, 2017). Regarding the causes of conflict, brothers and sisters mostly fight to protect their own territory, possession or rights, quarrel to achieve the desired effect or just want to gain some attention and care from parents (McGuire, Manke, Eftekhari, & Dunn, 2000; Recchia & Howe, 2010). When investigating the intentions of siblings, friends and peers during a conflict, it was found that children tend to ascribe the least hostile goals to friends, and the most hostile intentions to disliked peers: the feeling towards the sibling rested in the middle of the two extremes (Recchia, Rajput, & Pecchia, 2015). Interestingly, the attribution of hostile goals to their brothers or sisters during a conflict is associated with worse sibling relationship quality and seems to be an important determinant of bond quality (Recchia & Witwit, 2017).

A slightly different approach is taken by studies based on the spillover hypothesis (Kouros, Papp, Goetze-Morey, & Mark Cummings, 2014; Kwok, Cheng, Chow, & Ling, 2015; Stroud, Durbin, Wilson, & Mendelsohn, 2011), suggesting that the emotions resulting from partners/spouses interactions may spill over firstly into parent-child relationships, and secondarily into sibling relationships. Hence, a conflict between brothers and sisters may be linked to low-level parental conflicts or misunderstandings, or to a non-responsive parenting style. Interestingly, the reverse may also be observed: the parents of children existing in a hostile relationship with their siblings feel less competent and more stressed (Yu & Gamble, 2008).

Engaging in conflicts is a natural part of child development, and may even have a positive impact by forcing them to learn how to deal with complicated situations and train negotiation and problem-solving skills. Surprisingly, involvement in a negative and critical relationship with siblings may also be beneficial during inter-parental conflict as it seems to somehow counterbalance the sense of responsibility for the disharmony in the family system (Iturralde, Margolin, & Spies Shapiro, 2013). While that use of constructive and positive strategies to resolve conflict is connected with greater warmth in a later relationship, the existence of unresolved conflicts may in fact intensify nervousness, aggression and hostility in the siblings (Rinaldi & Howe, 1998). A study of verbal and physical interactions in middle childhood by Vespo (1997) found conflicts between siblings to be more frequent and longer-lasting than those with peers, and to display more physical manifestations. In addition, especially if the parental ability to manage inter-sibling conflict is low, it may result in episodes of emotional and physical abuse between siblings (Meyers, 2014).

Scientific interest in the problem of sibling conflict in childhood has its roots in educational and nurturance practice. Some sources suggest that the conflict is usually ended by direct or indirect parental intervention (Ross & Lazinski, 2014). However, it is important to note that the type of reaction by the parent may have varied short- and long-lasting consequences. For instance, using child-centered or coaching strategies was related to fostering a positive sibling relationship, whereas sanctions based on physical aggression were associated with more intense competition and a greater tendency for conflictual behaviors by the sibling (Milevsky, 2011; Tucker & Kazura, 2013).

A considerable proportion of the research on the negative interactions between siblings has examined the approaches taken to deal with emerging problems; their findings suggest that the choice of conflict management strategy may depend on various factors, including various demographic aspects or the presence, or absence, of a parent (Howe, Fiorentino & Gariépy, 2003). In contrast to previous studies indicating that the most sibling conflicts remain unresolved (Howe et al., 2002), a study of 58 families by Ross, Ross, Stein and Trabasso (2006) based on a combination of observation and interviews found that 65% of fighting siblings reached consent, either compromising or by win-loss agreement, after being encouraged to reattempt to resolve the problem. The choice of negotiation strategy leading to each type of consent were different: compromise was usually reached through the use of limited argumentation and involving planning strategies by both siblings, while win-loss negotiations were associated mainly with the implementation of planning strategies by the older sibling alone. Compromise, however, seems not to be always the ideal resolution option, because it may release negative emotions such as sadness and sorrow (Recchia & Howe, 2010).

A SYSTEMIC VIEW OF THE EARLY RELATIONSHIP INFLUENCES BETWEEN SIBLINGS – IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The aim of the paper was to examine the most important issues associated with sibling childhood relationships by taking a family system approach. As siblings play a major role in the eventual functioning of an individual, it is important to understand the basis of the early developmental stages of this relationship. Both empirical and theoretical studies have underscored the important role played by the sibling bond in child development; however, this tendency has reversed in recent years.

The paper addresses three basic aspects of the sibling bond: warmth and support, sibling rivalry and jealousy, and conflict. Regarding the first aspect, one of the duties of parents is to foster and maintain an intimate and close relationship between their children. Knowing the importance of a strong bond between siblings, and its consequences, in that it enhances the degree of emotional and informative support from a brother or a sister, parents tend to influence the child subsystem during the upbringing process. In addition, the presence of positive interactions within the sibling subsystem help maintain stability when the family system as a whole encounters difficulties (Hurd, 2002; Jacobs & Sillars, 2012). Regarding the second aspect, i.e. competition and jealousy, the necessity to share familial resources after the birth of the next child, may have both positive and negative impacts, despite this being a natural reaction. On the one hand, such sharing allows social competence to be developed, and can strengthen self-control and coping skills in difficult situations; on the other, though, it can also trigger aggressive behavior and encourage the use of physical and psychological pressure on a brother or a sis-

ter. Finally, conflict among children may be based upon competitive tendencies: most literature found sibling disagreements and criticism to be a common problem in the early years of life and is triggered mostly by everyday matters. The impact of the conflict differs according to the type of resolution method employed and its effectiveness, as well as parental influences (Milevsky, 2011; Recchia & Howe, 2010).

The quality of the childhood sibling relationship influences both intra- and interpersonal functioning in adolescence and adulthood. Feinberg, Solmeyer and McHale (2012) found that negativity in the relationship is indirectly connected with externalizing and internalizing problem behaviors, and that it influences both family dynamics and personal adjustment. Similarly, a qualitative study on various social aspects by Bedford, Volling and Avioli (2000) found that engaging in quarrels and disagreements with a sibling allowed the development of greater conflict management competence, including both negotiation and listening skills, increased sensitiveness to other people and strengthened compassion. On the contrary, a more positive bond with a sibling was associated with high level of sociability later on (Clark Culpepper, 2007).

The relationship with a sibling during early childhood may have also an impact on mental disorders: a negative experience with a brother or a sister may increase the possibility of major depression disclosure by the age of 50 (Waldinger, Vaillant and Orav, 2007), whereas a positive bond is associated with a lower level of depressive symptoms (Palmer, 2017). A longitudinal analysis of the transition from childhood to adolescence found that the worsening of the relationship with a sibling was associated with a greater depressive mood (Richmond et al., 2005). A significant relationship has been noted between sibling aggression during the first years of life and a tendency towards violence as an adult or emotional difficulties later in life. Mathis and Mueller (2015) found that experiencing or engaging in aggressive behaviors toward, or with, a sibling during late childhood was associated with perpetrating aggression in adulthood or suffering from different emotional problems.

Changes in family subsystems, both sudden and long-term ones, potentiate the activity of the family system as a whole: each member of the family system influences the others bidirectionally based on its capability, level of consistency and flexibility. Considering that the relationship with brothers and sisters is one of the most enduring in human life (Cicirelli, 1995), it may be especially beneficial to enhance its positive character from an early age. Although the nature of the bond changes throughout life, building a close, intimate and warm sibling relationship based on support, constructive criticism and a dose of competition may strengthen inter- and intrapersonal competence, such as social and communication skills, shape cognitive abilities and develop emotional competence; it may also ensure the durability of the family system and increase its adaptability (Brody, 2004; Cyron et al., 2017; Jonas-Simpson, Steele, Granek, Davies, & O’Leary, 2015).

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FUNKCJONOWANIE RODZEŃSTWA W DZIECIŃSTWIE W UJĘCIU SYSTEMOWYM – PRZEGLĄD BADAŃ

Streszczenie: Głównym celem artykułu jest przedstawienie przeglądu najnowszej literatury dotyczącej natury relacji między rodzeństwem w dzieciństwie w ujęciu systemowym. Rosnąca liczba badań empirycznych i doświadczeń praktyków sugeruje, że rodzeństwo odgrywa znaczącą rolę w procesie rozwoju człowieka, a jakość i charakter więzi z braćmi i siostrami mogą mieć dalekosiężne skutki. Przegląd jest próbą ukazania wzajemnych interakcji w ramach podsystemu rodzeństwa oraz wpływających na niego zróżnicowanych czynników wewnętrznych i zewnętrz-

nych. Omówiono w nim problematykę więzi między rodzeństwem w dzieciństwie w odniesieniu do trzech głównych sfer: ciepła, bliskości i wsparcia, rywalizacji i zazdrości oraz konfliktu. W końcowej części artykułu opisano możliwe konsekwencje pozytywnej i negatywnej więzi z rodzeństwem w późniejszych latach życia oraz omówiono podstawowe implikacje praktyczne.

Słowa kluczowe: rodzeństwo, dzieciństwo, podejście systemowe, systemowe ujęcie rodziny.