

- **Name of the study:** Sense of coherence, optimism, emotions, and social support of emerging adult siblings as predictor of acceptance of their siblings with Down Syndrome
- **Year:** 2024
- **Type of research:** study
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- **Research Authority:** Michlalah Jerusalem College, The Department of Special Education.

### Abstract

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**Background:** Sibling relations can be the longest- lasting of an individual's life, and can influence their development, behavior, and well-being throughout their life. Siblings of individuals with Down Syndrome (DS) cope with challenges stemming from the nature of their sibling's disability. Research on siblings generally focuses on the younger ages, with few studies exploring ages beyond adolescence. Positive sibling relations are related to greater involvement of the typically - developing sibling in the care of individuals with DS throughout their life. Sibling involvement is an important element of the relationship, as individuals with DS often need substantial support throughout their lives. A significant element in the sibling relationship is the acceptance of the sibling with DS by the sibling without the disability, which can impact both the current and future sibling relationship.

**Study aims:** The study aimed to expand the limited research on emerging adult siblings of individuals with DS. The study focused on sibling acceptance. The study was conducted using a mixed-methods approach, with a dominant portion relying on quantitative methods. The study examined a model predicting sibling acceptance by optimism and sense of coherence, with social support and negative emotions serving as mediating variables, and the independent functionality of the sibling with DS serving as a moderating variable. The interviews aimed to expand the quantitative findings regarding acceptance, the role of social support, and the emotions towards the sibling with DS.

**Sample:** Participants were 304 siblings (201 sisters, 103 brothers) of individuals with DS, aged 18-27 ( $M=21.54$ ,  $SD=2.5$ ). The youngest sibling with DS was 5-years-old and the oldest was 38-years-old ( $M=14.86$ ,  $SD=7.17$ ). According to sibling-reported functionality, 38% of the siblings with DS were independent, while 62% had partial independent functionality or not independent at all. The participants completed six self-report questionnaires. In the qualitative portion, 15 semi-structured

interviews were conducted with a separate sample (12 sisters, 3 brothers). Their average age was 22.86 years ( $SD=2.64$ ).

**Results:** Social support and negative emotions mediated the relations between sense of coherence and optimism with acceptance of the sibling with DS, moderated by the independent functionality of the sibling with DS. The themes that emerged from the interviews related to descriptions of acceptance, the emotions towards the sibling with DS, and society's attitudes towards people with DS and how this influences the emotions and experiences of the participating siblings.

Understanding the relationship between siblings with Down syndrome has long-term implications for the nature of sibling relationships and the future care of the sibling with Down syndrome. The study's results provide a comprehensive and rich view of acceptance of individuals with DS by their emerging adult siblings.

### **Keywords**

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independent functionality, sense of coherence, optimism, social support, negative emotions, sibling acceptance.

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