

# Coping Strategies among Siblings of Children with Special Needs

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**Abstract:** *The purpose of our study is to understand the care giving responsibilities of siblings dealing with a brother or sister with disability in relation to their internal and external locus of control they adopt in such a situation and the coping strategies they develop as a result. Hence the present study is an effort to study the effect of internal and external locus of control on coping strategies among siblings of children with special needs. 60 samples were selected of which 37 were girls and 23 were boys from different locations of Goa. The results revealed a significant difference between Siblings of children with special needs having internal locus of control and external locus of control in their coping strategies.*

**Keywords:** Siblings, Locus of control, confronting coping, distancing, self-controlling.

## 1. Introduction

Children who are raised in the shadow of a sibling with significant health problems or disabilities may experience more behavioural and emotional problems [7], compared to siblings who have no disability [14]. Children react toward a sibling with a disability with feelings of love, empathy, pride, guilt, anger, and support; the predominance and prevalence of these reactions have great impact on the levels of stress and coping ability of the sibling with a disability [12]. Some of common concerns expressed by siblings of disabled children are feeling guilty about being “spared” a disability, embarrassment of siblings’ behavior or appearance in front of friends, anger or jealousy over the amount of attention the disabled child is receiving, pressure to “make up” for a sibling’s disability by excelling in school or sports, care giving, especially if it conflicts with social plans [15]. Each child’s reaction to having a sibling with a disability will vary depending on his or her age and developmental level [12]. Children with disabilities are exceptional in their functioning; therefore, they are likely to affect the psychological status and resources of the family [1, 6]. [9] asserted that several shifts in thinking and behaviour must take place within the family to help them make sense of the disability’s implications. One such implication is the possible effect on the typically-developing child in the family. Because school-age siblings spend more time with each other than their parents [11], it is clear that this unique sibling bond can have an immense impact on their lives. For example, siblings have been shown to influence one another’s development [17] and adjustment [2]. In addition, healthy family development depends upon the emotional health of all its members [18]; therefore, the sibling perspective is important to ascertain.

Some studies showed no significant differences between typically-developing siblings and comparison children in self-concept, social competence, and behaviour adjustment [3, 4] while others reported positive effects of having a sibling with special needs [13]. 45% of the siblings believed they had benefited from having a sibling with cognitive disabilities: They reported increased understanding of other

people, more tolerance and compassion, and a greater appreciation of their own good health and intelligence [8]. Positive results have been replicated in more recent studies [13, 16]. Taken together, these studies suggest that having a sibling with a disability may be associated with some positive benefits as well as stress and may require coping strategies for children to adjust to the family dynamics.

Hence the present study is taken up with the following objectives and hypotheses:

## 2. Objective of the Study

To study the effect of internal and external locus of control on coping strategies among siblings of children with special needs.

### Hypothesis

Siblings of children with special needs with internality locus of control will be having significantly higher coping strategies compared to siblings of children with special needs with externality locus of control

### Sample of the study

In the present study purposive sampling technique is adopted to collect data from the siblings of children with special needs. Further for the purpose of the present study a total number of 60 samples were selected of which 37 were girls and 23 were boys from different locations such as Shree Gujarati Samaj School for the Deaf and Dumb, Goa, Sanjay center for special education, Goa, Daddy’s home school for mentally retarded children, Goa, Institute of Psychiatry and Human Behavior (IPHB), Goa, and the investigators also personally visited various houses in their vicinity and collected data from places such as Varca, Fatorda, Borda, Curtorim, Chandor and Benaullim, Goa.

### Instruments Used

#### Personal Data Questionnaire

A personal data sheet was used to collect demographic information of the subjects.

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**Ways of Coping Questionnaire (WOC)**

Ways of Coping Questionnaire (WOC) [5] was used to identify the processes people use in coping with stressful situations. The items of this questionnaire contain a wide range of thoughts and acts that people use to deal with the internal and/or external demands of specific stressful encounters. The questionnaire consists of 66 items and includes 8 coping dimension. WOC consists of 4 alternative response pattern ranging from ‘0-Does not apply or not used’, ‘1-Used somewhat’, ‘2-Used quite a bit’, ‘3-Used a great deal’. There are four possible responses 0, 1, 2 and 3. As far as reliability and validity is concerned Factor analysis on the ways of Coping Questionnaire have been published with a variety of samples, including a community sample of middle-aged married couples [5].

**3. Method of Data Collection**

In the present study primary data has been collected from 60 siblings of children with special needs. The investigator personally visited various houses in their vicinity and schools for specially-abled children after obtaining permission for an appointment, and met the teachers of the concerned classes. The purpose and the nature of the visit were made known to them. The investigator revealed the purpose of the study to them and requested them to hand over the questionnaires to their children (normal child). Since some siblings were also present at the same time the investigators directly handed the questionnaires to them. After completing the test the investigator collected the questionnaire from the sample and thanked them for their participation.

**Scrutinizing**

The responses given by each participant are carefully scrutinized for wrong markings, omissions and commissions. And answer sheets, which were complete in all respects, were retained and the rest were rejected.

**Data Analysis/Statistic**

The obtained data was analyzed using (SPSS 17<sup>th</sup> version). t-test is applied to verify  $H_0$  to determine the significance of difference between the scores of siblings with Internal and External Locus of Control.

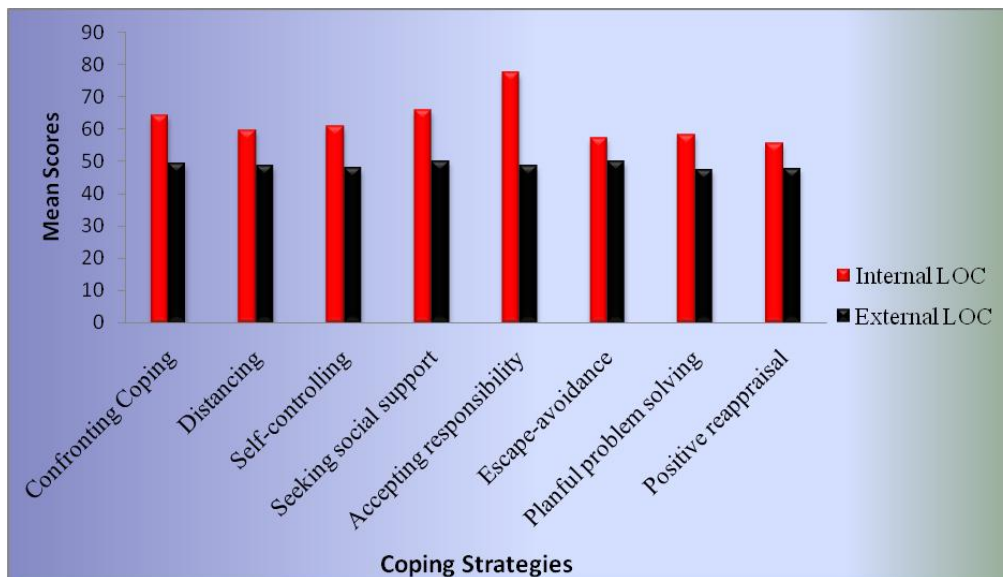
**4. Results and discussions**

**Table 1:** Table Showing the Mean, SD’s and ‘t’-Values for the Scores of Coping Strategies among Siblings (Internal Locus of Control and External) of Children With Special Needs

Variable (Locus of Control Group)	Groups				t-value
	Siblings with Internal Locus of Control		Siblings with External Locus of Control		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Confronting Coping	64.38	7.22	49.35	09.57	06.89***
Distancing	59.77	3.76	48.64	09.29	06.08***
Self-controlling	61.05	5.57	47.98	08.59	06.99***
Seeking social support	65.96	5.15	50.10	10.25	07.56***
Accepting responsibility	77.56	5.87	48.69	09.24	14.43***
Escape avoidance	57.20	4.08	50.00	10.06	03.63**
Planful problem solving	58.35	6.52	47.44	08.26	05.67***
Positive reappraisal	55.67	7.77	47.75	08.45	03.77***

\*\*\*p<0.001; Very highly significant;

\*\*p<0.01; highly significant



**Figure 1:** Bar Graph for the dimensions of Coping Strategies in Relation to Locus of Control of Siblings of children With Special Needs

Table 1, and Figure 1 shows Mean, SD’s and ‘t’-values for the scores of internal and external locus of control of siblings of children with special needs across the various dimensions of coping strategies.

An inspection of the table 1, reveals that siblings of children with special needs having internality locus of control are above average across all the dimensions of coping strategies namely confronting coping (64.38), distancing (59.77), self-controlling (61.05), seeking social support (65.96),

accepting responsibility (77.56), escape-avoidance (57.20), planful problem solving (58.35) and positive-reappraisal (55.67) compared to the mean scores of siblings with externality locus of control. In other words, siblings with externality locus of control show below average coping strategies in all dimensions namely, confronting coping (49.35), distancing (48.64), self-controlling (47.98), seeking social support (50.10), accepting responsibility (48.69), escape-avoidance (50.00), planful problem solving (47.44), positive-reappraisal (47.75) compared to the mean scores of siblings with Internality locus of control.

Further, siblings with internality locus of control and externality locus of control differ significantly from each other in all dimensions of coping strategies. Coping strategies in siblings with internality locus of control are found to be significantly very high in the dimensions of confronting coping ( $t=6.89$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), distancing ( $t=6.08$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), self-controlling ( $t=6.99$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), seeking social support ( $t=7.56$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), accepting responsibility ( $t=14.43$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), planful problem solving ( $t=5.67$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) and positive-reappraisal ( $t=3.77$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) compared to coping strategies in siblings with externality locus of control. Further, in case of Avoidance, the coping strategies are found to be significantly high in siblings with internality locus of control ( $t=3.63$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) compared to siblings with externality locus of control.

Coping strategies in siblings with internal locus of control are found to be significantly very high due to the fact that, these siblings with internal locus of control feel that their success and failure is a result of their own actions. Whenever faced with a problem or a challenge these siblings try to analyze the situation and find appropriate solutions. They also adopt a plan of action for dealing with difficult situations, Whereas externals on the other hand attribute their success and failure to external factors like chance, fate, luck and therefore they engage in risk-taking activities like drinking, smoking and consuming drugs when faced with challenges/ problems which may have negative implication on their health and whenever their stressed they expect constant sympathy from others and hope for a miracle to make the situation better. Internal locus of control is found to be high in the entire dimension of coping strategies such as confrontive coping, distancing, self-controlling, seeking social support, accepting responsibility, planful problem solving and positive reappraisal as compared to the siblings with external locus of control. A supporting study by [10] found that externals, in contrast to internals, are more anxious, more dogmatic, more suspicious of others, less trustful, less confident and less insightful.

Further having high internal Locus of Control helps non disabled siblings accept the fact about their disabled brother or sister and though this fact is stressful and not easy to accept but being high in internality they are able to accept the fact and this serves as a basis for them to cope better in different stressful situation.

## 5. Conclusions

Siblings of children with special needs having internal locus of control have shown significantly high level of coping strategies in terms of confrontive coping, distancing, self-

controlling, seeking social support, accepting responsibility, planful problem solving and positive reappraisal compared to siblings of children with special needs having external locus of control.

## 6. Future Recommendation/Limitation

Most of the sample for the present study was taken from south Goa, Hence, future study can be extended to wider geographical area and cultural diversities so that the studies may highlight the similarities or the differences, if any and the study can be generalized.

## 7. Social Implication

- 1) The findings of the study reflect fairly well the prevailing state of sibling of children with special needs with internal locus of control as far as their coping strategies are concerned. This calls for special attention of the researchers to understand the benefits of being internal locus of control to help sibling of children with special needs as well as others to balance their life.
- 2) The results of the study also indicated the need for proper and timely counseling for the sibling of children with special needs with external locus of control to balance their burden and develop good coping strategies.

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