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Sibling Violence: The Missing Piece in Family Violence Policy

Nathan H. Perkins
Loyola University Chicago, nperkins2@luc.edu

Susan F. Grossman
Loyola University Chicago, sgrossm@luc.edu

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Sibling Violence: The Missing Piece in Family Violence Policy

Nathan H. Perkins
Susan F. Grossman

Abstract: Social work has played an integral role in the conceptualization and implementation of policy aimed at prevention and intervention of various forms of family violence. Seminal federal policies to address child abuse and neglect (Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act), elder abuse (Elder Justice and Older Americans Acts), and intimate partner violence (Violence Against Women and Family Violence Prevention and Services Acts) all focus on specific types of violence in the family. To date, however, there are no federal policies specifically addressing physical and/or emotional sibling violence (Perkins, Coles, & O'Connor, 2017; Perkins & O'Connor, 2016). This article examines the exclusion of policy addressing physical and emotional sibling violence considering other family violence policies. Along with prevalence, consequences, and associative factors connected to sibling violence, definitional issues that impede the creation of policy to address this form of family violence are highlighted. Children as a marginalized population, deserving the attention of social workers through policy advocacy will be discussed as well as psychoeducation and interprofessional collaboration that may facilitate the creation of policies aimed at addressing this form of family violence.

Keywords: Sibling violence; family violence; policy; policy advocacy; policy research; research

In 1975, Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz (1980) collected data on different types of family violence in the National Family Violence Survey. One of the findings from the analysis of these data is best presented exactly as it appears in a heading from their book on the study, "SIBLING VIOLENCE IS THE MOST FREQUENT TYPE OF FAMILY VIOLENCE" (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980, p. 83). Physical sibling violence was found to be more frequent than parent-to-child violence and interparental violence. Despite consistent research in the four decades since this study underscoring the negative consequences and associations of physical and emotional sibling violence, no federal or state policies address this form of family violence. Although there are policies to address child abuse and neglect, inter-partner violence, and elder abuse, violence between siblings remains substantially neglected and dismissed in terms of the need for policy creation and advocacy.

Recently there has been an increase in research highlighting sibling violence as a problematic phenomenon for children and families, although this literature is substantially less prevalent than works related to other forms of family violence. This increase may be attributed to the association between sibling violence and bullying between peers (Tucker, Finkelhor, Turner, & Shattuck, 2014).

Many terms and definitions of sibling violence exist. For purposes of this discussion, we define physical and emotional sibling violence as the use of physical (e.g. kicking,

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Nathan H. Perkins, PhD, MSW is an Assistant Professor, School of Social Work, Loyola University Chicago, Chicago, IL 60611. Susan F. Grossman, PhD is a Professor, School of Social Work, Loyola University Chicago, Chicago, IL 60611.

slapping, biting, etc.) or emotional behaviors (e.g. manipulating, teasing, name-calling, etc.) directed toward a sibling with the intent to harm (Perkins, Coles, & O'Connor, 2017). The behaviors included here can be synonymous with the behaviors of bullying as well as other terms that are used to describe physical and emotional violence between siblings. As with family violence, state laws and policies addressing peer-related bullying have increased; however, there are no federal or state policies or laws specifically aimed at preventing or intervening to address physical and emotional sibling violence. Nonetheless, there is substantial research providing considerable justification for creating and implementing such policies. This article provides background information on physical and emotional sibling violence including prevalence and ramifications, the connection between sibling violence and other forms of family violence, policies addressing various types of family violence as well as bullying, potential reasons for the lack of policy addressing sibling violence, and future directions that social work needs to take in order to prevent and intervene in sibling violence.

Background Information on Physical and Emotional Sibling Violence

Prevalence

Violence between siblings has been found to be the most common form of family violence (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 2006) with approximately 29.4% of a national representative sample of children younger than 17 having experienced at least one incident of assault by a juvenile sibling (Finkelhor, Turner, Shattuck, & Hamby, 2015). Using data from the National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence, Tucker, Finkelhor, Shattuck, and Turner (2013) found that approximately 23% of children less than one year old, 45% of two- to five-year-olds, 46% of six- to nine-year-olds, 36% of ten- to thirteen- year-olds, and 28% of fourteen- to seventeen-year-olds had experienced at least one form of sibling victimization within the past year. Interestingly, data also indicated that, although preschool and elementary school children experienced the most sibling victimization, adolescents aged 14 to 17 reported the highest rates of injury. Sibling victimization has also been found to be chronic, with roughly 40% of children and adolescents aged 2 to 17 from a national sample reporting chronic victimization by a sibling compared to only 15% who experienced chronic peer victimization (Finkelhor, Turner, & Ormrod, 2006).

In an analysis of the prevalence rates for sibling bullying, Wolke, Tippett, and Dantchev (2015) found "about 15% to 50% for victimization by siblings, and 10% to 40% for perpetrating sibling bullying" (p. 920). In a study examining sibling aggression in a clinic-referred sample of youth, mothers indicated that 93% of youth had perpetrated aggression toward a sibling in the past year, with 82% of youth reporting they had engaged in sibling aggression (Tompsett, Mahoney, & Lackey, 2018). The aforementioned studies highlight the extent of physical and emotional violence between siblings, underscoring the chronicity with which this form of family violence can occur. The following section highlights associations with and consequences of experiencing sibling violence both as a recipient and initiator.

Associations and Consequences

The negative effects of physical and emotional sibling violence are extensive and have been examined in both children and youth and to a lesser extent in adults. Delinquent behaviors (Tucker et al., 2015), including illegal substance use and aggression (Button & Gealt, 2010), family adversity (Tucker, Finkelhor & Turner, 2018), moral disengagement (Tanrikulu & Campbell, 2015), behavioral problems, and impaired peer relations (Stormshak, Bellanti, & Bierman, 1996) have been associated with sibling violence and sibling bullying. Research has also found sibling violence to be connected to mental health issues (Duncan, 1999; Patalay & Fitzsimons, 2016; Phillips, Bowie, Wan, & Yukevich, 2018; Tucker, Finkelhor, Turner, & Shattuck, 2013; van Berkel, Tucker, & Finkelhor, 2018) and problematic psychological adjustment (Graham-Bermann, Cutler, Litzenberger, & Schwartz, 1994). Frequent sibling bullying was found to double of the odds of children experiencing depression, self-harm, and anxiety compared to those who have not been bullied by a sibling (Bowes, Wolke, Joinson, Lereya, & Lewis, 2014). Recent studies have examined sibling violence in more context-specific ways. Tucker, Finkelhor, and Turner (2017) found that children with a physical disability or children who were perceived by their parents as being underweight or overweight were more likely to experience sibling victimization than children without a physical disability or those perceived by parents as having normal weight for their age.

Children who engage in sibling violence, including bullying, as perpetrators also experience consequences of their behavior. In a sample of children aged five to twelve, sibling bullying perpetrators (including cyberbullying perpetrators) were found to have increased anger and moral disengagement (Tanrikulu & Campbell, 2015). Hostility directed toward a sibling has also been found to be significantly correlated with reactive aggression, proactive aggression, and behavioral problems in children in out-of-home placements (Milojevich, Quas, & Adams, 2017).

Experiencing violence by a sibling in childhood has been linked to lasting negative consequences in young and older adulthood. In younger adults, being a victim of sibling hostility (including physical and emotional violence) in childhood was found to be a predictor of current conduct disorder symptoms (King et al., 2018). It was also associated with lifetime aggressive acts in both men and women. Similarly, Dantchev, Zammit, and Wolke (2018) found that those respondents who reported having experienced several instances of sibling violence a week at age 12 were more than three times likely to have a psychotic disorder at age 18 compared to those who never experienced sibling violence. Other adult consequences of sibling conflict in childhood include poor self-esteem (Meyers, 2014), eating disorders (Wiehe, 1997), and marital conflict (Shalash, Wood, & Parker, 2013). In their book focusing on adult sibling relationships, Greif and Woolley (2016) note that unresolved conflict and violence between siblings in childhood has implications for sibling interaction in adulthood and can impact how siblings negotiate and care for elder parents.

Sibling Violence and Family Violence

The aforementioned research highlights the impact of physical and emotional sibling violence on children as well as adults. Physical and emotional sibling violence has also been connected to other forms of family violence. Violence directed toward a child (Eriksen & Jensen, 2006) and spousal abuse between parents (Hoffman, Kiecolt, & Edwards, 2005) have been found to predict sibling violence. In a study of college students aged 18 and older, sibling violence perpetration and victimization were significantly associated with mother-to-participant, participant-to-mother, participant-to-partner, and partner-to-participant violence (Hendy, Burns, Can, & Scherer, 2012). Data from a national sample of 5- to 17-year-olds indicated that sibling victimization was correlated with parent-to-child physical abuse as well as neglect (van Berkel et al., 2018). Tompsett and colleagues (2018) found that mother-to-child verbal aggression and corporal punishment also predicted both mild and severe sibling aggression.

The occurrence of sibling violence has potential implications for violence outside of the home. Being victimized by a sibling has been found to be a significant predictor of experiencing peer victimization (Tucker et al., 2014). Additionally, an older sibling's use of physical aggression has been found to predict a younger sibling's use of physical aggression with peers (Ostrov, Crick, & Stauffacher, 2006). Compared to adolescents involved in a family violence intervention program who had engaged in child-to-parent violence, youth who perpetrated physical sibling violence were more likely to be involved in fighting in school (Nowakowski-Sims, 2019). Ostrov and colleagues (2006) note that it is likely children learn how to interact with peers through their interactions with siblings; therefore, if violence is a common occurrence within sibling relationships, violence may also be carried out in relationships with peers. Similarly, children may also learn to be violent in their communities due to engaging in violence with their siblings (Perkins & Shadik, 2018). Despite these connections to other forms of family violence, policy to address physical and emotional violence between siblings remains nonexistent.

The Context of Family Violence

The most obvious explanation as to why sibling violence, particularly emotional and physical abuse between siblings, is not seen as a problem requiring legislative action may be because we, as a society, believe that the behavior of siblings toward each other is a private matter to be addressed within the family system. Yet this same argument has been made prior to the passage of legislation governing other forms of violence between family members, particularly between husbands and wives and parents and children.

Child Abuse

As Nelson (1984) notes in her book, *Making an Issue of Child Abuse*, public efforts to address the problem of abuse emerging initially in the late nineteenth century, coincided with a changing view of childhood and the movement away from parents as authority figures. Rather, the parental role was re-conceptualized as one in which parents would serve as teachers and nurturers who would help the child to develop in a positive direction. Jimenez (1990) similarly argues, "One of the major themes in child welfare since the

Progressive Era has been a growing commitment to the emotional, social, and economic dependence of children" (p. 55).

At the same time, both Jimenez (1990) and Nelson (1984) discuss how the period leading up to the passage of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) in 1974 as well as succeeding legislation was characterized by a tension between the role of the family in assuring the child's positive development and the role of the government when the family fails to do so. Despite this tension, CAPTA is a policy response to the problems of child abuse and neglect. In its initial passage, it was fairly modest, authorizing limited government research into child abuse and treatment, creating a national clearinghouse for data on child abuse, and establishing funding incentives to tighten state reporting laws (Jimenez, 1990, p. 61). In its most recent reauthorization in 2010, it expanded to provide federal funding to states to support "prevention, assessment, investigation, prosecution, and treatment of activities related to abused and neglected children" (Harfeld & Marlowe, 2017, pp. 117-118). Of note is that for all its provisions, CAPTA does not directly address violence between siblings. As Perkins and colleagues (2017) point out, under CAPTA, parents could be held accountable for neglect in cases of sibling violence but there is no recourse to directly address the violence.

Domestic Violence

Similar to the issue of child abuse, wife abuse was seen as a private matter essentially until the latter part of the twentieth century (see Siegel, 1996 for an historical overview). Barusch (2002) notes that wife abuse was sanctioned by some early Christian Ecclesiastics who felt that it would save the soul of wives. "No thicker than his thumb" was established as the benchmark for the size of switch that could be used for wife beating (Barusch, 2002, p. 244; see also Bailey, 2010 for a discussion).

Growing out of other rights movements in the late 1960s and 1970s, the battered women's movement emerged in the early 1970s with the dual purpose of raising public awareness of the problem and providing a shelter for victims (Barusch, 2002; Fernandes-Alcantara, 2017; Grossman, Lundy, George, & Crabtree-Nelson, 2010; Sacco, 2014, Siegel, 1996). Barusch (2002, pp. 244-245) and others (e.g., Bailey, 2010) note that, beyond assisting survivors, the battered women's movement, in concert with the feminist movement, sought to challenge male violence and change women's position in society. As researchers began to collect data on family violence and link declines in spousal assault to greater awareness of the issue by both men and the criminal justice system, the criminal justice system and the public started to see family violence as a crime rather than as a private family issue (Sacco, 2014, p. 1).

In response to growing concerns, many states began to pass legislation aimed at addressing domestic violence throughout the 1970s, but it was not until 1984 that the first federal legislation was passed. This legislation, The Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA, 1984), specifically provided funds for shelters and services for survivors as well as establishing a national domestic violence hotline (Fernandes-Alcantara, 2017).

In her analysis of the FVPSA, Fernandes-Alcantara (2017) notes that it is somewhat limited in its definition of violence, focusing primarily on physical violence. Further, it mainly concerns violence between current and former spouses or individuals similar to spouses, cohabitating individuals, and parents of children (Fernandes-Alcantara, 2017). She notes that, "while family violence can encompass child abuse and elder abuse, FVPSA programs focus on individuals abused by their spouse and other intimate partners" (p. 2).

The FVPSA was clearly an important piece of legislation intended to publicly address the problem of domestic violence. Nonetheless, ten years after its passage, and in recognition of the need for a criminal justice response to the problem of domestic violence (Conyers, 2007; Office on Violence Against Women, 2016; Sacco, 2014), Congress passed the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA, 1994) originally as Title IV of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 (1994; Sacco, 2014, p. 1).

The 1994 Violence Against Women Act provided grants to states to improve responses to violent crime against women and children (by adult perpetrators), encouraged the development of coordinated prevention efforts, and created new legal remedies for certain victims of violent crime when the crime was motivated by gender. VAWA increased penalties for domestic offenders and sex abusers, made stalking a crime, and allowed for interstate prosecutions. In addition, it required states to honor orders of protection obtained in different states (Barusch, 2002; Office on Violence Against Women, 2016; Sacco, 2014). The Violence Against Women Act (1994) has subsequently been reauthorized three times, with each reauthorization expanding the groups and types of crimes addressed. Yet VAWA is not a vehicle for addressing sibling violence. Like the FVPSA, its focus is primarily on violence between adult partners. Indeed, the most recent reauthorization, which occurred in 2013, contained a revision of the definition of domestic violence to specifically include "intimate partners," expanding the definition beyond "current and former spouses" (Sacco, 2014, p. 12). It does include provisions to address violence between adults and children, particularly sexual violence, but it does not appear to be a vehicle through which violence between siblings, whether they are children or adults, can be addressed.

Elder Abuse

Although the problem of elder abuse may not seem relevant to the issue of sibling violence, caregivers may be siblings, or as noted in the discussion above regarding the consequences of sibling violence in adulthood, abuse between adult siblings and/or unresolved issues from childhood violence between siblings may affect the well-being of an elderly parent (Perkins, Spira, & Key, 2018). Thus, legislation focused on the issue of elder abuse could potentially be one policy venue for addressing the issue albeit in later life.

The problem of abuse among older adults came onto the public agenda similar to other forms of abuse in that increasing awareness of the problem eventually led to a policy response. However, unlike child and spousal abuse, abuse of older adults did not have the same legacy of tolerance. Kreinert, Walsh, and Turner (2009) note that a pivotal article about "granny bashing" published in 1977 in Great Britain (see Walshe-Brennan, 1977),

as well as a number of studies in the United States "…brought the issue to the center of the American conscience" (Kreinert et al., 2009, p. 328) during the 1970s.

Initially, our understanding of the problem of abuse of older adults was that it resulted from the stress of the caregiver, who was most often an adult child (Lundy & Grossman, 2005). Therefore, the response was to provide respite care and support to the caregiver rather than addressing the problem as a criminal justice issue (Kreinert et al., 2009). By the late 1980s, however, there was increasing evidence to support that "at least some elder abuse is spouse abuse grown old" (Lundy & Grossman, 2005, p. 87; see also, for example, Antley, 2017; Brandl & Raymond, 1997; National Center on Elder Abuse, 1998; Pillemer & Finkelhor, 1988; Podnieks, 1992). It also became clear over time that adult children who abuse elders may not only need respite but they may also have problems of their own that contribute to their abusive behavior (Johannesen & LoGiudice, 2013; Moore & Browne, 2017; Pillemer & Finkelhor, 1988).

Two federal policies relate to the abuse of older adults. The first, the Older Americans Act of 1965, was the culmination of a number of efforts by the Kennedy/Johnson administration to address the needs of this population (Agency for the Elderly, 1966). Not only did this act lead to the creation of the first federal agency whose purpose was to address the needs of the elderly (the Administration on Aging) but it specifically addressed the social service needs of older adults (Administration for Community Living, 2017; O'Shaughnessy, 2012). According to O'Shaughnessy (2012), "its mission is broad: to help older people maintain maximum independence in their homes and communities and to promote a continuum of care for the vulnerable elderly" (p. 1).

Programs specifically intended to address elder abuse were not included in the original act although it might be argued that some of the social services provided under the act addressed the problem of caregiver neglect or need for respite. However, in 1992, when the act was reauthorized, Title VII, otherwise known as the "Vulnerable Elder Rights Protection Law," was added (National Center on Elder Abuse, n.d.). According to the National Health Policy Forum (O'Shaughnessy, 2012), this title authorized a long-term care ombudsmen program to help address complaints of residents in institutional care settings such as nursing homes and adult care homes and provided funds to states to "carry out activities to make the public aware of ways to identify and prevent abuse, neglect, and exploitation and to coordinate activities of area agencies on aging with state adult protective services programs" (p. 8).

The second policy, the Elder Justice Act (2009), was passed in 2010 as part of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA; 2010; Colello, 2017). Colello notes that the act "represents Congress's first attempt at comprehensive legislation to address abuse, neglect and exploitation of the elderly at the federal level" (p. 2). The Elder Justice Act allows the federal government to coordinate responses to elder abuse and neglect and authorizes federal funding for elder abuse prevention services (Kohn, 2012, p. 7). Rather than providing additional services to abuse victims, the act essentially provides additional funds through existing state mechanisms to address the problems of elder abuse including adult protective service programs supported by Title XX and long-term care ombudsmen programs at the state level (Selberg, 2014, p. 54). Further, embedding the act within the

ACA reflects concerns about addressing institutional abuse (Selberg, 2014, p. 54). Finally, the Elder Justice Act does not make elder abuse a federal crime like child abuse and domestic violence (Kohn, 2012, p. 7; see also Colello, 2017). It is likely that decriminalization results from the belief about why abuse occurs. If we believe that caregivers abuse elders because of the stress of caregiving, it is hard to see the abuse as deliberate or necessitating a criminal justice response.

Bullying

Legislation related to bullying began to increase after 1999, in response to both the Columbine shootings and bullying-related suicide (Stuart-Cassel, Bell, & Springer, 2011, p. xi). Although there is no federal bullying legislation, many laws related to discrimination or discriminatory harassment on the basis of race, gender, national origin, age, and ability may apply and federally funded schools (including colleges and universities) must resolve harassment (stopbullying.gov, 2017, para. 1). Legislation related to bullying does exist at the state level. Indeed, Cosgrove and Nickerson (2015) report that 49 states have enacted legislation to address bullying and harassment behaviors as of the date of their publication (p. 521).

Most state policies focus on bullying in educational institutions and direct their laws at school districts, requiring them to adopt anti-bullying policies (Stuart-Cassel et al., 2011). In response to this growing body of legislation, the Department of Education adopted a framework for states that they outlined in a "Dear Colleague" letter in December of 2010 (Stuart-Cassel et al., 2011). This framework includes a number of elements: definition of bullying behavior and protected groups; development and implementation of district policy; parameters for applying policies, including policy communication and record-keeping; and monitoring of policies, procedures, actions and interventions that may be employed to prevent bullying (Cosgrove & Nickerson, 2015; Stuart-Cassel et al., 2011). In a study looking at the extent to which states implemented these suggested components, Stuart-Cassel and colleagues (2011) noted that only two states include all of the identified features. Furthermore, states differ substantially in terms of the number of components covered by their legislation as well as the ways in which they address each component (Stuart-Cassel et al., 2011, pp. xiii-xiv).

Considering the connection between sibling violence at home and bullying behavior at school, school policies regarding intervention in bullying behaviors may be particularly relevant to addressing the problem of sibling violence. Although we can presume that schools provide supports to families in the context of addressing school bullying, bullying laws and policies focus on behavior in the schools and the actions schools must take to prevent and address bullying. They are not designed to directly support parents in the home. Further, in their analysis of the components contained within state policies, Stuart-Cassel and colleagues (2011) reported that only thirteen states have specific provisions related to responding to the mental health needs of victims, and not all of these thirteen require that services be made available (p. 39). Only five state policies "contain explicit language related to providing student support to both victims and bullies" (Stuart-Cassel et al., 2011, p. 39). In contrast, the Children's Act, which was enacted in the United Kingdom in 1989 (legislation.gov.uk, n.d.), considers bullying as a child protection concern and allows

schools access to a range of services to address the problem (Sims-Schouten & Edwards, 2016).

Potential Reasons for Lack of Sibling Violence Policy

As noted throughout this article, despite the clearly negative consequences of sibling violence and its chronicity (Finkelhor et al., 2006), there are no policies to address, intervene in, and ameliorate this form of family violence. The following sections consider possible reasons for the lack of policy addressing sibling violence. Some of these issues are not new, having impeded the creation of other policies related to family violence. However, they need to be considered again in the context of sibling violence if social workers are to be successful in their policy creation efforts.

Definitions and Labels of Violence Between Siblings

Labeling and definitional issues may impede the creation of sibling violence policy. Deleterious behaviors between siblings have been conceptualized, labeled, and defined in a multitude of ways. For example, sibling abuse, sibling aggression, sibling assault, sibling conflict, sibling hostility, sibling maltreatment, sibling negativity, sibling rivalry, sibling violence, and many other labels have been used to refer to physically and emotionally violent behaviors between siblings (see Perkins, 2014). *Sibling bullying* is also a recent term used that can encompass violent behaviors (Skinner & Kowalski, 2013). The use of this term can likely be attributed to the research and literature on bullying between peers as well as familial and societal recognition of this form of interpersonal violence. Sibling violence is substantially more abundant than literature, research, and family and society recognize. The vast number of labels used to refer to sibling violence (Kettrey & Emery, 2006) likely makes it difficult to collectively conceptualize violence between siblings as a problematic phenomenon. The lack of one term, or even a few terms, used consistently to refer to sibling violence impedes the process of policy creation. Multiple labels make it much harder to reach a consensus as to what behaviors policies should address.

Confounding the issue of having multiple labels, a variety of definitions have been used to refer to sibling violence. Although no overarching definition of sibling violence currently exists, this construct has been defined as physical behaviors directed toward a sibling with an intent to harm and that are reproduced over time (Caffaro, 2014). Perkins and colleagues (2017) extend Caffaro's definition to include emotional/psychological behaviors. The lack of a clear-cut comprehensive definition prohibits the creation of policy addressing sibling violence. Without a precise definition, sibling violence policy cannot be targeted toward particular behaviors; this would lead to an inadequate policy that is likely unenforceable due to ambiguity.

Familial and Societal Normalization of Sibling Violence

In addition to the many labels and lack of an accepted definition of sibling violence, policy creation is impeded by family and societal views of sibling violence. Caspi (2012) notes that problematic interactions between siblings can include aggressive behaviors that are often dismissed. Caspi also states however, that "the mistaken belief that sibling

violence is not harmful further minimizes it" (p. 11) when families do not register highly conflictual sibling interactions as warranting concern and attention. In a study of sibling abuse survivors, Wiehe (1997) found that some parents of survivors denied, disbelieved, minimized, ignored, showed indifference, viewed as sibling rivalry, and normalized sibling abuse. In some cases, parents even joined in the abuse as well as blamed the victim and ridiculed the survivor for the abuse. Parents may dismiss violent behaviors that they view as normative due to experiencing similar behaviors with their own siblings in childhood. Parents may also have a schema about sibling relationships that allows for more violent behaviors between their children. This may be reinforced by societal dismissal of violent behaviors between siblings as problematic.

Phillips, Phillips, Grupp, and Trigg (2009) argue that, along with parents, mental health professionals, teachers, and other adults should know that physical and emotional violence between siblings can have negative consequences. They argue that often these individuals do not stop negative behaviors because they view sibling violence as "a natural and normal part of sibling relationships" (p. E13). Phillips and colleagues (2009) also note that parents, professionals, and even children and adolescents may dismiss violence between siblings due to its lack of inclusion as a component of family violence as determined by the U.S. Department of Justice. Parents and professionals are individuals in positions of power who dictate the discourse on sibling violence and therefore, if they ignore or dismiss violent experiences between siblings, children and adolescents likely will too (Kettrey & Emery, 2006).

The Role of Social Work

Social work has a responsibility to help children, a group often viewed as marginalized, by addressing physical and emotional sibling violence. Arguably, four of the six core ethical principles of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW, 2018) are directly related to why social work should be involved in addressing physical and emotional sibling violence:

- Social workers' primary goal is to help people in need and to address social problems (NASW, Ethical Principles, 2018, par. 2): Children victimized by a sibling are in need of assistance, and given the prevalence of this form of violence, this is clearly a social problem.
- Social workers challenge social injustice (NASW, Ethical Principles, 2018, par. 3): Social workers need to be advocates for change in helping children, as a vulnerable group, in prevention and intervention efforts to address sibling violence given the societal normalization of this form of family violence.
- Social workers respect the inherent dignity and worth of the person (NASW, Ethical Principles, 2018, par. 4): For social work to ignore sibling violence is to disregard a child's efforts for self-determination while subsequently failing to help protect a child's physical and emotional development.
- Social workers recognize the central importance of human relationships (NASW, Ethical Principles, 2018, par. 5): If social workers are going to be "partners in the helping process" and use their relationships with children to change the course of sibling violence, then social work needs to be present at

the table in creating relationships with individuals, families, communities, organizations, and the state in combating physical and emotional sibling violence (NASW, Ethical Principles, 2018, par. 5). The recognition of violence between siblings through policy promotion and advocacy in social work is meant to be a step toward helping families function in ways that promote positive interactions between all members.

Dismissing, ignoring, and devaluing sibling violence can have significant consequences for children and adults (Wiehe, 1997). It is critical that social workers interacting with clients in any capacity acknowledge and listen when confronted with instances of sibling violence. It is imperative that social workers respect this form of family violence as a valid instance of violence so as not to exacerbate harm and trauma for those who have already experienced it. To dismiss this type of violence is to neglect the experiences of others, as many families and society already do; this is not the role social work should take. We also need to include information about physical and emotional sibling violence in our practice classes so that students are aware of and prepared to respond to this problem appropriately in their work with clients and family systems.

Further, physical and emotional sibling violence is a social justice issue (Perkins et al., 2017; Phillips et al., 2009), and efforts by the profession of social work to address this issue are essential. If we wish to help children who are marginalized, unable to speak up regarding their experience of physical and/or emotional violence from a sibling, and involved in a system that oppresses them by discounting the violence they experience, then social work needs to advocate for policy creation. To neglect the creation of policy to address physical and emotional sibling violence for children, adolescents, and adults is to neglect the occurrence of this form of family violence just as the current societal discourse does.

Future Directions Toward Sibling Violence Policy

It is evident that physical and emotional sibling violence warrants policy consideration due to its substantial prevalence, negative consequences for both children and adults, connection to other forms of familial and societal violence, and misconstrued normalization by families and society. Although the various labels and lack of a global definition may pose challenges to policy creation and advocacy, many children and adults deal with the ramifications of sibling violence. Further, such challenges existed and were overcome in the creation of policies related to other forms of family violence.

There are several ways in which social work can begin efforts toward policy creation to address sibling violence. Psychoeducation and family violence interventions that work with parents and families to increase the attention on sibling violence are likely to be beneficial (Shadik, Perkins, & Kovacs, 2013). However, these programs alone are not sufficient to increase the visibility of sibling violence as a problematic issue within families and society. Outreach to agencies, organizations, communities, politicians, schools, and others involved in helping to shape and create policies is critical. Adults who provide services to children or who influence the programs and policies that affect them need to be aware that physical and emotional sibling violence is a problematic occurrence for millions

of children and subsequently adults. It is also critical to include the voices of survivors of sibling violence in education and advocacy efforts. This not only empowers survivors but may also help others to understand the impact sibling violence can have on mental and physical health. Large-scale efforts, like public service campaigns to educate the public on sibling violence, are likely to increase the knowledge and understanding of various stakeholders as well. Once increased recognition of this issue is achieved though advocacy, addressing this form of family violence is likely to be met with less resistance.

Another avenue in helping social work to create policies to address sibling violence is interprofessional collaboration and advocacy with other professions. If familial and societal discourse egregiously neglects physical and emotional sibling violence as normative (Kettrey & Emery, 2006; Phillips et al., 2009), then collaboration among various professions is not only warranted but essential in creating change through policy creation and advocacy. Much of the research related to understanding aspects of sibling violence has been done in sociology, psychology, family science, and to a lesser extent social work. Interestingly, however, interventions directly aimed at addressing sibling violence are scant (Tucker & Finkelhor, 2017). Not only can social work build upon these research studies and collaborative efforts to create interventions, but it can take an active part in leading interprofessional collaboration to advocate for, create, and implement sibling violence policies. Social work needs to be at the table and leading the call for action to address sibling violence given its determination to challenge systems that oppress and marginalize individuals. Unfortunately, the current societal system and discourse oppress and marginalize children and adults who have experienced physical and emotional sibling violence, and that must change. Creating policies to address violence between siblings is a step in the right direction toward correcting the current lens of injustice. Using the childcare policy perspectives (Fox-Harding, 1997), Perkins and colleagues (2017) also argue that, in addressing and responding to sibling violence, efforts to include children, parents, and the government in creating policies are essential.

As evidenced by the policies and laws that directly address child abuse and neglect, interpartner violence, elder abuse, and even bullying between peers, policies can and are created to address violence in a variety of contexts. Policy to address physical and emotional sibling violence should not be an exception to this rule. Advocates for change have been essential for drawing attention to other types of family violence and leading efforts to enact relevant policies and fighting to ensure gains that have been made are not lost. Typically these efforts have not included social workers in the forefront. In addressing the problem of physical and emotional sibling violence, social workers can lead the way. Drawing attention to the problem and advocating for such policies provides us with an opportunity to act in accordance with the principles of our profession while having an impact on the lives of countless children, youth, and adults.

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Author note: Address correspondence to: Nathan H. Perkins, PhD, MSW, School of Social Work, Loyola University Chicago, 820 N. Michigan Ave, Chicago, IL 60611, nperkins2@luc.edu