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Attitudes towards autism

Morris, Victoria; Wilson, Claire; Gillespie-Smith, Karri; Hendry, Gillian; Ballantyne, Carrie

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Victoria Morris and Carrie Ballantyne*

University of the West of Scotland

*Carrie Ballantyne (presenting author)

Carrie.ballantyne@uws.ac.uk

Division of Psychology

University of West of Scotland

High Street

Paisley

PA1 2BE

01418494018

Title: Attitudes Towards Autism: A Comparison of Attitudes and Knowledge Towards Autism Based on Adult Sibling Experiences

Objective: Previous sibling relationship studies focused on child/adolescent negative attitudes, despite positive attitudes being present when a sibling was knowledgeable of autism. However, little is known the quality of sibling relationships in adulthood and what factors influence it. The present study addressed whether having an autistic sibling could predict attitudes and knowledge towards autism.

Method: 109 participants (18+), 56 (mixed: autistic & non-autistic) & 53 (matched: non – autistic & non-autistic) sibling types took part in a mixed method study. Participants completed The Knowledge about Childhood Autism among Health Workers and Societal Attitudes Toward Autism Questionnaires. Open ended questions were asked about experiences of having an autistic sibling.

Result: Independent t-tests found a non-significant difference of attitudes towards autism however, found a significant difference in total knowledge and Knowledge Domain 3 of autism. Linear regressions found sibling type (mixed)

was the only predictor for Domain 3 and total knowledge of autism. The thematic analysis identified four themes based on sibling experiences: Robbed Childhood, Sibling over Self, The Future and Autism Awareness.

Conclusion: The study has shown having an autistic sibling increases knowledge of specific autistic behaviours but does not change general attitudes towards autism, adding to what we know about autistic sibling relationships from the perspective of the adult population.

Key Words: Autism, Adulthood, Sibling relationships, Attitudes, Knowledge