A recent study provides fresh insights into the dynamics of sibling relationships in families with a child diagnosed with autism. This research explores the unique perspectives of both mothers and siblings,
unveiling fascinating findings on how these relationships compare to those in families with typical children.

The research was led by Dr. Yonat Rum from the Seymour Fox School of Education at the Hebrew University and the University of Cambridge with Professors Ella Daniel and Esther Dromi along with student Yael Armony from Tel Aviv University and Prof. Ditza A. Zachor, Head of the Autism Center at the Shamir (Assaf Harofeh) Medical Center and Tel Aviv University.

The study included 29 children, with an average age of 8.78 years, who have younger siblings diagnosed with autism, along with their mothers. This group was compared to 46 children, averaging 9.12 years of age, with younger typical siblings, and their mothers.

Utilizing a mixed-methods approach of both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis, both groups completed the Sibling Relationship Questionnaires and participated in interviews, offering a comprehensive view of their sibling dynamics. The work is published in the Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders.

According to the children's reports, sibling relationships across both groups showed remarkable similarities. There were no significant differences in overall warmth, conflict, rivalry, or relative power between siblings, regardless of the presence of autism. This suggests that, from a child's perspective, having a sibling with autism may not drastically alter the fundamental aspects of their relationship.

The mothers' perspectives revealed a different layer of complexity. Mothers of children with autism reported less warmth and closeness between their children and, surprisingly, less conflict compared to mothers of typical children, highlighting nuanced challenges and decreased involvement in these sibling relationships.
Additionally, the study found more disagreement between mothers and children in the autism group than in the typical group. Both mothers and children in the autism group reported less intimacy and fewer quarrels between siblings.

Interestingly, the qualitative analysis showed that siblings tended to focus on their present experiences, while mothers considered the broader processes in sibling relationships. Discussions in the autism group often referenced various specificities without explicitly mentioning "autism."

Dr. Rum emphasizes the importance of these findings, stating, "Our research sheds light on the nuanced experiences of siblings and mothers in families where autism is present. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for providing better support and resources to these families."

Autism spectrum conditions affect a significant portion of the population, with recent estimates indicating that 1 in 36 children in the United States are diagnosed with autism. This translates to millions of families worldwide grappling with the unique challenges that come with raising a child on the autism spectrum.

The impact of autism extends beyond the diagnosed individual, affecting the entire family unit. Studies have shown that parents of autistic children often experience higher levels of parental stress compared to parents with typically developing children and siblings of autistic children were also studied mainly as at risk for various psychological outcomes.

At the same time, research has shown that for autistic children, growing up with typically developing siblings is associated with better social-communicational skills and that growing up as a sibling of an autistic child has a positive effect on the development of cognitive empathy.
For autistic children and their families, siblingship is, thus, an essential and meaningful resource, and it is important to learn about the quality of this meaningful relationship.

This study underscores the understanding of these widespread effects and the need for a holistic approach in supporting families with autistic children, considering the diverse experiences and perspectives within these families. It highlights the importance of understanding both the typical-like experiences of siblings and the unique challenges perceived by mothers, ensuring comprehensive support for these families.

**Methodology**

Data was collected in Israel from Hebrew-speaking participants, and initial findings were published in Hebrew in 2020 as part of graduate and post-graduate works at Tel Aviv University. Further analysis and synthesizing the qualitative and quantitative findings in a mixed methods approach resulted in the current paper published this year.

The mixed methods (quantitative AND qualitative analysis) multi-informant (mothers' reports AND children's reports) examination of what is similar and different in the relationships of autistic children and their siblings compared with typical siblingships has added to the literature by revealing not only differences and similarities in the sibling relationships but also in mothers' and children's perspectives.
