

Sibling sexual behaviour is different: towards a conceptual framework of harmful sexual behaviour among siblings

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Abstract

In this “policy and practice” piece, we outline the importance of context in understanding and responding to sexual behaviour between siblings. Specifically, we examine how Hackett’s continuum of sexual behaviour in childhood can be misapplied in cases involving siblings if contextual circumstances are not carefully considered. We believe that without such considerations, the possibility of underestimating the impact of sibling sexual harm exists, with significant negative implications. We offer a new conceptual framework for sibling sexual behaviour that is responsive to the particular harms associated with sibling sexual abuse. The paper contributes a critique of current practices that fail to differentiate harmful sexual behavior between siblings (HSB-S) as a distinct form of child sexual abuse; a reconceptualization of the nature of sibling sexual harm and abuse; and a new framework that balances the needs of a sibling displaying harmful behaviour with those of a harmed sibling.

Practice Impact Statement

This article highlights the importance of recognising sibling sexual abuse as distinct from other forms of harmful sexual behaviour. By introducing a framework specific to sibling sexual behaviours, it supports practitioners to assess risk, understand harm, and respond more effectively to the needs of both siblings who display harmful sexual behaviour and those who have been harmed.

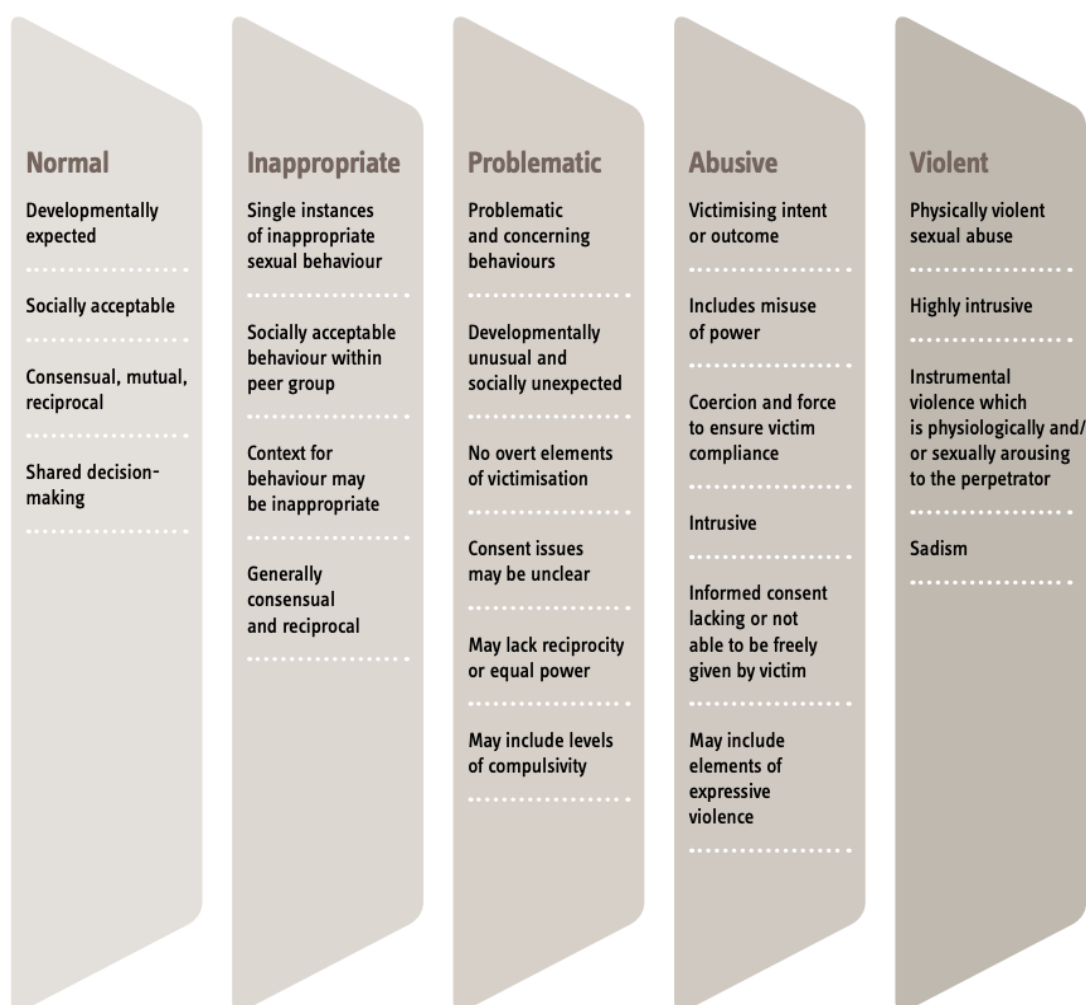
Keywords

Sibling sexual behaviour (SSB), harmful sexual behaviour among siblings (HSB-S), harmful sexual behaviour (HSB), conceptual framework, sibling sexual abuse (SSA), sibling sexual trauma (SST)

Introduction

In 2010, one of us proposed a continuum of children and young people's sexual behaviours (Hackett, 2010), presented here as Figure 1 and referred to henceforth as "the continuum". Numerous uses of this have followed over the years, some in line with its intended purpose, and others straying from its original intent. The goal of this article is to consider the extent to which the continuum has been applied—and misapplied—in the context of sexual behaviours between siblings and to propose a framework specific to sibling sexual behaviours that is responsive to the particular harms associated with sibling sexual abuse.

Figure 1. A Continuum of Children and Young People's Sexual Behaviour (Hackett 2010)



In the original publication, Hackett (2010) proposed that it is possible to conceptualise sexual behaviours displayed by children and young people on a continuum, ranging from normative and developmentally expected to highly abnormal, abusive, and violent (Hackett, 2010). The original intention was not to develop a *model* as such, nor to suggest a formal *categorisation* of children's sexual behaviours. It was an attempt to demonstrate visually the importance of taking a balanced and nuanced view of *all* children's sexual behaviours and to make critical distinctions between those behaviours that are within what is considered "normal" developmental parameters for children at each age and stage of development, to those that are problematic and potentially harmful, to those which are obviously abusive or violent. The continuum was intended to provide a way of understanding and responding to children and young people's diverse sexual behaviours, with their wide-ranging dynamics, motivations, and meanings. It was meant to avoid lumping all child sexual behaviour together, catastrophising it, or characterising it using a model of adult sexual offending. The continuum has been recommended for use in subsequent reports, such as the 2016 NICE guidelines on harmful sexual behaviour¹ (HSB) (NICE, 2016) and the NSPCC's operational framework (Hackett, Holmes, & Branigan, 2016). It is also frequently referred to in local area guidance on HSB across the UK.

The key success of the continuum has perhaps been in the way that it has led to awareness that it is as important not to pathologize normative, developmentally appropriate and healthy sexual behaviours as it is to identify, recognise, and take seriously behaviours that are potentially harmful or abusive. Thus, the continuum emphasises the importance of practitioners differentiating types and levels of sexual behaviour so as to offer proportionate and appropriate responses. A key implication is that it is not appropriate to conceive of developmentally normative and non-harmful behaviours under the HSB umbrella. As such, it is important to emphasise that Hackett's original (2010) continuum was meant as a way of conceptualising the full spectrum of sexual behaviours in childhood; it was not intended as a categorisation of sexual abuse by children per se, nor should it be misrepresented as a continuum of *harmful* sexual behaviours (Hackett, Holmes & Branigan, 2016; Hackett, Branigan & Holmes, 2019; Yates & Allardyce, 2021; King-Hill, Gilsenan & McCartan, 2023).

This paper presents a collection of observations, arguments, ideas, and conclusions intended to further the field of sibling sexual behaviour based on a collaboration among authors from academia, clinical practice, and lived-experience nonprofit advocacy. The authors have over 90 years of combined experience in the field and have used extant literature in combination with their professional knowledge in what they present here.

Conceptualising and defining sibling sexual behaviour

Just as Hackett (2010) intended to differentiate normative sexual behaviour from harmful sexual behaviour in his original continuum model, is it also important to carefully conceptualise terminology and constructs relating to sexual behaviours that occur specifically between siblings, not least because these behaviours are frequently misunderstood (Yates and Allardyce, 2021).

¹ For the purposes of this paper, we define HSB as any non-normative sexual behaviour between young people under the age of 18 that has the potential to cause harm to at least one of the children involved.

The term “sibling sexual behaviour” (SSB) can be used to refer to all sexual behaviours between siblings, whether normative or harmful. By contrast, the terms “sibling sexual abuse” (SSA) and “sibling harmful sexual behaviour” (HSB-S) have been proposed to describe sexual behaviours between siblings that are non-normative and harmful (Yates & Allardyce, 2021; Ibrahim, 2023b). Within this paper, we have chosen to give preference to the term “sibling HSB” (or HSB-S), which may be understood as an umbrella term encompassing any non-normative sexualized behaviour that causes harm or has the potential to cause harm, whether intended or not (Yates & Allardyce, 2023a). Therefore, HSB-S may include mutually initiated behaviours between siblings that are in fact developmentally harmful to the children involved, and which could include any of the non-normative categories of behaviour that Hackett (2010) describes, such as inappropriate, or problematic, as well as those that are abusive and violent.

Given its emotive nature, practitioners working with families where HSB-S has occurred must walk a fine line in using such terms, balancing language that is inclusive, non-stigmatising, and as sensitive as possible, whilst not trivialising or underemphasising the observed or potential harm created by such behaviour (Yates & Allardyce, 2021; Yates & Allardyce, 2023a; Caffaro, 2014; Hackett, Holmes & Branigan, 2016).

While we prefer to use the term HSB-S in this paper, it is important to recognize that this may be with or without victimising intent and is inclusive of other terms such as sibling sexual abuse and sibling sexual trauma. It is also important to recognise that to the many victims who have suffered multiple adverse effects of this trauma and who identify with the word “abuse”, not using that word to describe their experience can be minimising and re-traumatising (Yates, 2017; Sanderson, 2024). On the other hand, the use of “HSB-S” takes care to include victims who otherwise might not identify their trauma as abusive or who may not yet identify as having been traumatised or harmed, as well as those who may initially show no evidence or signs of trauma or harm. Our choice of terminology also helps to avoid labelling a child who caused harm as an “abuser”, as such labelling can be damaging to that child and a barrier to their getting the help they need to change behaviours and reduce the likelihood of recurrence (Hackett, Holmes & Branigan, 2016; Caffaro, 2014). We also recognise that in some such contexts, and to minimise stigma and avoid excluding those victims who may not identify as having been harmed or abused, “sibling sexual trauma” may be appropriate language. We also believe that anyone personally affected should choose the language they prefer. However, if this differs from what is clinically observed, case reports will include alternative language as well. Our working definition of HSB-S should be seen only as a construct for assessing context and circumstances in each case while determining the impacts on the children and the response actions that adults can take.

The continuum and sibling sexual behaviour

As the continuum (Figure 1) has become embedded in practice frameworks and policy documents in the HSB field, it has been used to guide proportionate responses to various types of behaviour presented by children and young people. As such, it has been instrumental in ensuring that the focus is on the welfare of the child who displayed the HSB and on the prevention of future instances of HSB. At the same time, it was not designed to be applied to victims of sexual abuse, either as a way of understanding their behavioural or physiological responses to the abuse, to calibrate the harm caused by the abuse, or to identify their needs. Indeed, the originator of the model has encountered in clinical practice, with alarm, examples where the continuum is misunderstood and misapplied, such as in the case of a fifteen-

year-old who was made pregnant by her abuser in the context of sustained and chronic sexual abuse and where the pregnancy was being viewed as an example of “inappropriate sexual behaviour” on her part. This example demonstrates one of the downsides of any theoretical framework: when used without context, it can be pathologizing and damaging and may lead to responses directly counter to its intent. It is interesting to note that recent work by McKibbin, Kuruppu, Hackett and colleagues has sought to apply the notion of the continuum more explicitly to the experiences of victim-survivors of child sexual abuse (McKibbin, Kuruppu & Hackett, 2025). However, despite such advances, the experiences of victims, including sibling victims, have been absent from discourses on how to respond to HSB.

In cases of HSB-S, context is always at the fore. It is impossible to understand the sexual behaviour or its impact outside the nature of the family and the sibling relationship. Practitioners therefore need to work with the whole family, including both the child who has caused harm and the child who has been harmed (Caffaro, 2014; Yates & Allardyce, 2021, 2023a; Ibrahim, 2023b). Simply applying the continuum as the primary framework to guide proportionate responses risks placing too much emphasis on the sexual behaviour itself, while paying insufficient attention to the relational dynamics of the sibling relationship and to the impact of the behaviour. The context of the sibling relationship has the capacity to magnify the impact of the behaviour due to multiple factors including betrayal trauma, expectations of ongoing family contact and therefore continued exposure to the sibling who caused harm, misguided parental responses, violation of cultural norms, and societal stigma and silence surrounding incest, among others (Yates & Allardyce, 2021; Welfare 2013; Rowntree 2007, Ward, 2023).

The 2010 continuum was never designed to categorise HSB-S, yet references to it and its derivatives have gained momentum in recent years in literature on sibling sexual behaviour and abuse (Yates & Allardyce, 2021, 2023a; King-Hill et al., 2023; McCartan & King-Hill, 2024; King-Hill, Gilsenan, & McCartan, 2023; Ibrahim, 2023a; Tucker & Whitworth, 2024; Sanderson, 2024). When addressing sibling sexual behaviour, the existing continuum remains useful to highlight that: (1) there is a limited range of normative sexual behaviours between siblings; (2) there is a larger range of non-normative behaviours requiring varied responses to the child who is responsible; and (3) sibling sexual behaviour by children under 18 should not be conflated with adult sexual abuse of children. However, applying the continuum outside its intended purpose and without sufficient attention to context risks creating a skewed framework for responding to HSB-S, one that overlooks the fundamental differences between sibling sexual behaviour and peer-based sexual behaviour.

Below, we highlight four primary issues that practitioners need to be mindful of when applying the continuum to understanding instances of sibling sexual behaviour and in making distinctions between this and HSB-S.

1. Sibling sexual behaviour is inevitably relational and so cannot be understood outside of the experience of all children involved

As distinct from peer-based HSB, sibling HSB is complicated by relational factors such as family structure, family dynamics, and family history. Yates et al. (2025) report that family characteristics, history, and relationships are important to consider in sibling cases. One of the unique features of HSB-S is that the needs and impacts on both children must be included in all assessments, decision-making, and even in the language used within the family, as all decisions will affect both children. Professional

decisions must be made based on the relational context, such as the implications of removing a sibling from the home, and the need to monitor shared spaces, etc. Given current efforts to create tools and services aimed at helping professionals who work with individuals and families where sibling sexual abuse has occurred, there is a pressing need for a concise visual model of sibling sexual behaviour that incorporates the impacts on a child harmed by a sibling. Such a framework is currently absent from the literature, with existing guidance highlighting the limitations of applying general models to sibling contexts (Yates & Allardyce, 2021, 2023a; Ibrahim, 2023b).

2. Behaviour that is normative among peers may not be among siblings.

The 2010 continuum appropriately makes the distinction that some child sexual behaviours are normal. Yet the continuum was not created to specifically describe sibling sexual behaviour, and it is important not to assume that behaviours that are considered normative among peers are also normative among siblings. By making such an assumption, harmful or abusive behaviours between siblings risk being dismissed as harmless. For example, consensual sexual “fondling” between non-related, similar-aged peers in the context of a romantic relationship is generally regarded as a normative developmental experience. In contrast, being fondled by a sibling carries relational betrayal and intrafamilial trauma and is more appropriately understood as sexual abuse (Kellogg & Menard, 2003; Yates, 2017; Caffaro, 2014; Ballantine, 2012).

3. The severity of behaviour does not necessarily equate to the severity of the impact on a child who is harmed.

Research demonstrates that the impacts of HSB-S are equivalent to those of other forms of intrafamilial child sexual abuse and can be severe and long-lasting (Carlson, Maciol, & Schneider, 2006; Yates, 2017; Caffaro, 2014). Even seemingly minor sexual acts among siblings can cause lasting trauma. This is true regardless of intent or whether or not the harmful behaviour has been labelled as “abusive.” For example, a child may show a younger sibling pornography without realising the potential harm to that sibling’s sexual development, or an adolescent may touch a sibling’s genitals out of curiosity without recognising the sexual and betrayal trauma caused. Research has shown that such behaviours can have impacts equivalent to more overtly abusive acts (Carlson, Maciol, & Schneider, 2006; Yates, 2017; Caffaro, 2014).

As discussed above, many factors can amplify trauma. It is also critical to note that a child or adult survivor may experience trauma without recognising or presenting clear signs at the time. Thus, a survivor’s self-evaluation alone is not a reliable indicator of the severity of impact. For siblings, behaviours that might be considered “inappropriate” or “problematic” can cause harm equal to those from more obviously “abusive” behaviours.

4. The risk of minimisation of sibling sexual behaviour is high.

Research has shown that even obviously harmful behaviours between siblings are often minimised by both professionals and parents (Adams, 2025; Allardyce & Yates, 2018; Yates, 2018; Yates, 2020; Ward, 2023). Behaviours that appear short-lived, primarily motivated by curiosity, or less severe are even more easily dismissed as ‘normal’.

Information and awareness surrounding HSB-S remain inadequate. The myth persists that sibling “incest” is usually consensual, leading many to assume prematurely that most sibling sexual behaviour is mutual and not harmful (Yates, 2017; Carlson, Maciol, & Schneider, 2006). Such assumptions not only minimise and delay protective responses but also perpetuate lifelong self-blame and false shame among survivors, whose siblings were in fact responsible for the abuse. Care must therefore be taken not to reinforce the notion that less severe behaviour, not motivated by an intent to harm, is without significant consequences. Particular care is needed when an initial determination of responsibility is unclear, requiring assessment that considers the perspectives and needs of both children.

Furthermore, given the frequency and closeness of sibling contact, opportunities for harmful behaviour to continue or escalate are especially high (Caffaro, 2014; Yates & Allardyce, 2021). Under-reacting to potentially harmful behaviour creates a real risk of inadequate safeguarding and intervention, leaving a child vulnerable to further trauma from their sibling. The continuum was originally developed to avoid conflating all children’s sexual behaviours as deviant and abusive. However, when misapplied, it may inadvertently result in conflating some harmful or abusive sexual behaviours between siblings as normative. This can reinforce wider professional and societal tendencies to minimise and deny the trauma caused by such behaviours, increasing the risk that the harmed child is silenced by shame and secrecy.

There is some empirical evidence that the risk of minimisation is higher in sibling cases compared to peer-based HSB. One controlled study found that parents are likely to choose a lower level of intervention response when presented with evidence of HSB that has happened between two of their biological children, compared to HSB which involved one of their own children and a child from outside the family (Marriage et al., 2017). Initial shock, denial, and minimisation of HSB-S by parents have been documented (Tener et al., 2018, Tener et al., 2021, Yates et al., 2025). Reasons behind parental minimisation may be related to the intrafamilial context: the desire to preserve the family unit, damage to the family’s reputation, fear of criminal justice and social service system involvement, and difficulty in imagining their own child as capable of causing sexual harm (Adams, 2025, Tener et al., 2021). Children themselves may minimise or withhold full disclosure, in order to protect their parents or their sibling, or to keep the family together (Rowntree, 2007; Welfare, 2013).

Minimisation of SSA by both parents and professionals can also be driven by larger societal factors, such as misogyny (Rowntree, 2007; Lewin et al., 2023), the assumption that sibling relationships are positive and family environments are safe (Yates, 2018; Yates, 2020), and the pervasive perception that those responsible for sexual abuse of children are adults from outside the family (Yates and Allardyce, 2023b). As two of our authors have previously written, “Sibling sexual abuse simultaneously threatens our stereotypes of those who sexually abuse children, our ideology of family, our ideals of childhood, our archetypes of siblings, and our very constructions of what child sexual abuse is” (Yates and Allardyce, 2023b, p. 3).

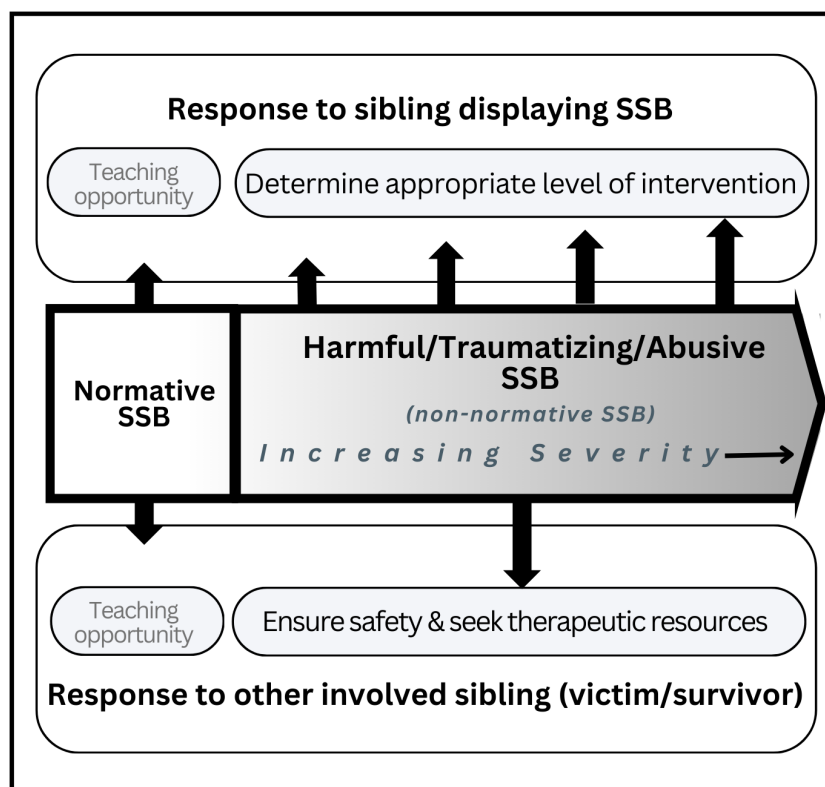
Towards a conceptual framework of harmful sexual behaviour among siblings

As noted above, the original continuum has made significant conceptual advances in the HSB field by encouraging proportionate, balanced responses to children’s sexual behaviours and discouraging a “one size fits all” approach. However, *sibling* sexual behaviour brings with it distinctive relational and contextual dynamics that require explicit consideration when applying the continuum framework.

Recent work has extended the notion of continuums to new areas of practice (Hackett, Holmes, & Branigan, 2016; Yates & Allardyce, 2021; Ibrahim, 2023b; Paton & Bromfield, 2022 & 2025), but there remains no model designed specifically to address the unique features of sibling sexual behaviour. We argue that there is a need for a new conceptual framework that balances two perspectives: that of the sibling displaying harmful behaviour and that of the sibling who has been harmed. Such a model provides a lens through which to understand the overarching concept of sibling sexual harm, which is inclusive of sibling sexual trauma and abuse; and it has the potential to serve as an important new practice tool for professionals working with families.

The conceptual model in Figure 2 distinguishes *normative* sibling sexual behaviour on the one hand, and a continuum of *harmful* sibling sexual behaviours on the other hand. The graphic also demonstrates that the responses to the harmful behaviours will differ for the sibling harmed and for the sibling displaying the behaviour. It underlies how responses should consider the needs of all the children involved and should not be driven solely by an assessment of the behaviour.

Figure 2. Conceptual Model of Sibling Sexual Behaviour (SSB)



Normative sibling sexual behaviour is typically motivated by curiosity, often involving exploration of bodies or gender roles alongside a broader interest in the surrounding world (Johnson, 2015). Such behaviour is mutual, voluntary, infrequent, short-lived, light-hearted and playful. It ceases when an adult intervenes or when one child signals discomfort; and it occurs between *prepubescent* siblings who are close in age and at similar developmental stages (Friedrich, 2007; Kellogg, 2009). When all these criteria are present, the behaviour is generally considered developmentally appropriate and not

associated with harm (Figure 3). Observation by adults provides an important opportunity to reinforce, with both children involved, messages about body autonomy, safety, and personal boundaries.

Figure 3. Normative Sexual Behaviour Among Siblings

Developmentally Normative Sibling Sexual Behavior (<i>All of the following must be true to assume the behavior is not harmful</i>)
Children are: • Prepubescent • Close in age and stage of development Behavior is: • Motivated by curiosity around body or gender roles • Mutually voluntary • Infrequent • Short-lived • Playful or light-hearted Behavior ceases: • Upon request of an adult • When at least one child signals discomfort

Adapted from Johnson (2015).

When behaviours are *not* developmentally appropriate, they should be considered under the umbrella of HSB-S (labelled in Figure 2 as harmful, traumatising, or abusive behaviour for the purpose of language inclusivity). This comes with an understanding that there is a large range of behaviours, and that responses to the behaviours depend on which child is receiving care.

HSB-S varies in severity, and harmful or traumatic effects can span across a large range of behaviors. It follows a continuum that does not meet all the characteristics of normative behaviour, yet it can also have some of the same characteristics, such as siblings being close in age, or the behaviour happening once.

Within the range of HSB-S, there is a matrix of conditions/circumstances that contribute to the level of severity of HSB-S and how adults may respond to the sibling who caused harm. For example, behaviour can range from non-contact behaviour, such as watching a sibling shower, right through to violent contact behaviour, such as rape. The harmful behaviour can span from a one-time incident to years of abuse. It can be sporadic or habitual. The behaviours can be coupled with varying motivations and levels of coercion.

A sibling who causes harm can be wholly unaware that they are causing harm, initially acting out of curiosity, or reenacting something they have seen or been exposed to. Some may be seeking comfort or love if such needs are otherwise unmet in their lives. In some cases, the behaviours may be mutually initiated or appear mutual. Sometimes they then escalate to a more obvious power dynamic where one sibling is clearly the instigator. In other cases, the sibling who has been targeted may think it's mutual because they participated or because their body responded in a way they did not know how to interpret. Some siblings may have been exposed to pornography and act out what they have seen, or they may try to replicate the sensations they felt by experimenting with their sibling. In situations where

a sibling who has caused harm did not initially understand the harm, they may later be apologetic and remorseful. Alternatively, they may be dismissive of or deny the harm they have caused.

Jealousy toward a sibling may cause a child to act out by exerting power over their sibling. In some cases, a sibling acts abusively and intentionally inflicts harm or terror. They may coerce the sibling with bribes or threats. They may entice their sibling by providing love and attention. They may suggest that if the sibling doesn't go along with their wishes, they will get in trouble, or it will cause the family to break up. They may tell their sibling that no one will believe them. There may be power dynamics that allow one child to have greater means to cause harm, such as physical size, developmental advantage, station in the family, or being given childcare responsibilities. Gendered power dynamics within the family or in society can play a role in creating environments where sibling sexual harm or abuse occurs. One sibling may threaten to harm a beloved pet or their sibling's property. Some may have more victimising intent such as threatening or inflicting physical harm.

For the child who caused harm, the level of intervention will differ based on such factors as the severity of the behaviours, motivation, accountability, understanding of the impact on the victim, and recognition that serious harm still may have occurred, regardless of where on the continuum the harmful actions fall. For example, a sibling who knowingly coerced their sibling to engage in advanced sexual behaviour will be managed differently from one who was not aware that showing their sibling pornography was damaging. An assessment of the severity of the behaviour and the family context would inform the level of assessment that is required to understand the behaviour and the nature of a proportionate response. The more concerning the overall situation, the more likely a comprehensive assessment is indicated (Yates & Allardyce 2021; 2023a).

Considering the *effects* of HSB-S, the trauma of non-normative sexual behaviour on the child harmed can occur across all levels of severity and across a matrix of conditions within a continuum of HSB-S. These effects could include sexual, psychological, physical, developmental, betrayal, and relational harm or trauma, keeping in mind that the consequences of sibling sexual abuse have been found to be of equal seriousness to those of parent-child abuse and other forms of child sexual abuse (Yates et al., 2025; Cyr et al., 2002; Rudd & Herzberger, 1999).

For the child who was harmed, any non-normative sexual behaviour in a sibling context needs to be believed, taken seriously, and requires taking practical steps to promote safety (Yates & Allardyce, 2021). This is especially true given that these behaviours are often minimised by families (Adams, 2025; Yates et al., 2025) and professionals (King-Hill, Gilsenan, & McCartan, 2023; Yates & Allardyce, 2021; Ward, 2023; Yates et al., 2025). Such situations need to be addressed carefully, as would be done in any case of potential sexual abuse. This is to ensure the physical and emotional health and safety of the harmed child and to seek appropriate therapeutic or other resources for them, as warranted. However, this does not mean over-reacting.

It must be noted, too, that impacts may not be obvious or immediately apparent, adding to the challenges of identifying harm. If there is any uncertainty as to whether the behaviour has caused harm, it is important for adults to remain curious, build trust, encourage children to keep talking, and keep listening to further understand what happened, how it may have happened, how it has affected all children involved, and how their parents are comprehending and reacting.

If harm is not initially recognised and treated, trauma can snowball throughout a child's life. Immediate responses to disclosure in childhood involve keeping the child safe and providing therapeutic or other resources. Yet a child's understanding of what happened changes as they mature into adulthood and as they encounter new relationships and circumstances that could trigger reminders of their trauma. Considering follow-up as children grow into adulthood is also important when harm is not immediately apparent, when fear of disclosure or dissociative amnesia delays disclosure, and because sibling relationships last a lifetime. Similarly, the child who caused harm may also be silently suffering with shame and guilt and may require future support.

Incorporating the conceptual framework of sibling sexual behaviour (Figure 2) into one's understanding of sibling sexual harm is intended to provide a foundation with a balanced perspective from which to approach this family trauma. It does not negate the value of existing guidance documents and tools designed to help practitioners address these cases. It is also not intended to be an assessment tool, but rather a broad framework that takes into account the needs of both children. It fits well into a whole-family approach, and it highlights that coordination and awareness of the needs and welfare of all involved children are vital.

Conclusion

As we have outlined in this paper, harmful sexual behaviour among siblings (HSB-S) presents distinctive relational and contextual challenges that cannot be fully understood or addressed through existing frameworks. While Hackett's (2010) continuum has advanced the field by promoting proportionate and balanced responses to children's sexual behaviours, its misapplication in sibling contexts risks minimising harm and overlooking the lived realities of survivors. By proposing a conceptual framework specific to sibling sexual behaviour, we highlight the need for practice that simultaneously recognises normative exploration, attends to the significant potential for harm, and balances the needs of both the child who has caused harm and the child who has been harmed. Our framework aims to support practitioners to make more accurate assessments, deliver proportionate interventions, and ultimately provide more effective safeguarding and therapeutic responses to families affected by sibling sexual abuse.

Declaration of Interest Statement

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare and no funding sources.

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