Siblings as a protective factor against stress caused by the COVID-19 pandemic

BACKGROUND
The COVID-19 pandemic is a large-scale stressor that has brought about a wide array of challenges to almost every family, and exposed children to potentially stressful circumstances. During nationwide lockdowns, family relationships and the home environment became crucial. This study tested whether siblings’ age-gap buffers the effects this large-scale stressor can have on children.

METHODS
• 65 preschoolers participated in this measurement that took place during the October 2020 lockdown in Israel.
• Children’s Cortisol levels were extracted from hair samples; Children’s ‘Dose of Exposure’ (DOE) to objective psychosocial impacts of the pandemic was reported by mothers, using a checklist of objective COVID-related stressors.
• A Curvilinear moderation model was used to test if siblings’ age-gap moderates the association between preschoolers’ exposure to the large-scale stressor and their level of stress-response.

RESULTS
Sibling’s age-gap was found to curvilinearly moderate the association between reported dose of exposure (DOE) and children’s cortisol levels. DOE was found to be positively associated with cortisol level only when siblings are far apart in age; when siblings are closer in age (less than 18 months) no such association was found.

CONCLUSION
Having a sibling who is close in age can protect children from the harmful effects of exposure to the large-scale stressor of Covid-19.

PRESENTER: Gal Levin

#Siblings as a protective factor against stress caused by the COVID-19 pandemic - Testing physiological stress response and its buffers among preschoolers

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