Separating siblings heightens trauma and damages children's mental health.

- Shanta Trivedi, *The Harm of Child Removal*, 43 N.Y.U. Rev. L. & Soc. Change 523 (2019), https://scholarworks.law.ubalt.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2087&context=all_fac

    This article examines the social science research concerning the long-term emotional and psychological consequences of removing children from their parents' care and placing them into foster care. The American Association of Pediatrics noted that family separation "can cause irreparable harm, disrupting a child's brain architecture and affecting his or her short- and long-term health. This type of prolonged exposure to serious stress—known as toxic stress—can carry lifelong consequences for children." *Id.* at 526 (additional citations omitted). As part of this analysis, the article discusses how removal and entry into the foster care system often results in separation of siblings, which heightens the trauma for those children. In particular, the article discusses a study of removed children, which found that "many were reliant on their siblings and upset about being separated from them. One child complained that he had been split up from his brothers and didn't know where they were. Others expressed anger about separation from their absent siblings. While the conversation is usually focused on separating children from their parents, it is important to be cognizant of additional trauma caused by separation from other family members." *Id.* at 533 (internal citations omitted). The author advocates for evaluating the harm of removal as a key part of every child welfare decision and suggests mechanisms to incorporate it as a consideration in existing legal frameworks.

- Adam McCormick, *Siblings in Foster Care: An Overview of Research, Policy, and Practice*, 4 J. of Pub. Child Welfare 198 (2010), https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15548731003799662?scroll=top&needAccess=true

    This article reviews empirical data on siblings in foster care and provides an overview of the policies and practices that are relevant to sibling placements in the child welfare system. The author notes that "[s]eparating siblings who have been removed from their parents only seems to intensify the pain, grief, and trauma that they have already experienced when they were initially removed from their parents" and can be "considered a form of revictimization." *Id.* at 207. For examples, he cites to a study that compared children placed with a least one sibling to completely separated siblings, which found a "strong negative association between sibling separation and the mental health of siblings, specifically females. Co-resident girls had a lower presence of any mental disorder, as well as fewer ''total problems'' and ''externalizing problems." *Id.* at 211-212.

- Adam McCormick, *The Role of the Sibling Relationship in Foster Care: A Comparison of Adults with a History of Childhood Out-of-Home Placement* (2009) (Dissertation, St. Edward's University in Austin, TX)

    This dissertation analyzes the experiences of 50 adults who had out-of-home placements as children (such as a foster care placement), focusing on the correlation between childhood sibling experiences and adult outcomes. In order to assess the strength of childhood sibling relationships and later adult outcomes, the study looked at a number of variables, including age,

gender, number of placements, and age at placement. The study ultimately found that those who had greater access to their siblings during their youth had higher levels of social support, self-esteem, and income as adults. The study describes research about the importance of protective sibling relationships for children in out-of-home care, noting that "siblings can play a critical role in repairing and minimizing the psychological damage of instability, separation, and trauma caused by one's parents." *Id.* at 6. The study further notes that "[s]eparating siblings who have been removed from their parents only seems to intensify the pain, grief, and trauma that they have already experienced when they were initially removed from their parents. Many feel that separating children from their siblings can be considered a form of revictimization." *Id.*

- Susan L. Smith, *Siblings in Foster Care and Adoption: What We Know from Research*, in Deborah N. Silverstein & Susan L. Smith, Eds., *Siblings in Adoption and Foster Care: Traumatic Separations and Honored Connections* (Praeger Pub. 2009), https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2009-11027-000

    This book chapter discusses research about sibling relationships and implications for child-welfare practices. It notes that, when children are entering the foster care system or other adoption processes, being placed with their siblings "promotes a sense of safety and well-being, while being separated from them can trigger grief and anxiety." *Id.* at 20. In contrast, "a foster youth advisory team described separation from siblings as being like an extra punishment, a separate loss, and another pain that is not needed." *Id.* (internal citations omitted). Next, the chapter analyzes outcomes of siblings placed together and apart, finding those placed together have a much more positive adjustment. While acknowledging the frequent challenges of joint placements for siblings in the child welfare system, the author nonetheless stresses the importance of making exceptional efforts to do so.

- Elizabeth Timberlake & Elwood Hamlin, *The Sibling Group: A Neglected Dimension of Placement*, 61 Child Welfare 545 (1982)

    This article discusses the effects of sibling separation on child development as well as how sibling relationships help children in the welfare system cope with losses of parents and familiar surroundings. It examines the specific separation and loss issues that foster children face and how they can be exacerbated when they also lose their siblings: "Given the reciprocal nature of sibling role relationships, [separated siblings] often feel that they have lost a part of themselves, compounding separation and loss issues associated with foster care. Not only are foster children engaged in the grief process over their absent parents and siblings, they are also denied access to a natural support group within which to resolve their grief." *Id.* at 549. The article concludes that keeping sibling groups intact during foster placement can be "viewed as a potential treatment resource for the child welfare worker in helping children cope." *Id.*