

Introduction

Literature Review:

- Adolescence is a key time for the development of independence and autonomy (Borg & Willoughby, 2022).
- Solitude in adolescence has been changing as technology becomes more widely used, with their amount of time spend on social media directly affecting their attitudes toward time alone (Coplan et al., 2022).
- Although research has found that social skills do not directly vary between siblings and only children, their time spent in solitude may vary, as well as their attitudes toward time alone (Gherman, 2022).

Current Study and Research Questions:

We investigated the differences in solitude between siblings and only children, including how they spend their time alone, how they feel about this time, and whether they choose to be alone.

- Do siblings and only children vary in how much they choose to be alone?
- How does family structure impact adolescents' attitudes toward solitude?
- Are there any family effects on how participants spend their time alone?

Methods

Participants

- 61 adolescents (36 girls, 26 boys, 1 non-binary) participated in an ongoing longitudinal study of Canadian youth's preferences for solitude.
- Ages ranged from 11-18, with a mean age of 16.14 ± .50
- Participants were mainly English-speakers from Euro-Canadian heritage.

Measures

- 1) Time Spent Alone (based on Coplan et al., 2020) → Frequency, choice, & why
 - 2) Perceptions of Social Preferences (Clifford et al., 2021) → social avoidance, shyness, unsociability
 - 3) Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents (Harter, 2012) → romantic appeal, social competence, behavioral conduct
 - 4) Social Desirability
 - 5) Solitary Preferred Activities (Burger, 1995)
- *Self-reported pencil and paper task.
 † Administered by researcher.

Procedure

- Data taken from a current, ongoing longitudinal study since 2021 on the development of theory of mind in adolescence

Results

Table 1

Analysis of Variance – Siblings x Age

Variable	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Time Spent Alone ¹	1	8.919	.004
Unsociability ²	1	6.221	.017
Romantic Appeal ³	1	4.227	.045

Note. ¹older adolescents with siblings rated themselves higher compared to younger adolescents with sibling, ² younger adolescents with siblings score higher compared to older adolescents with siblings, ³adolescents without siblings scored higher than adolescents with siblings,

Independent Samples T-Tests

Only children rated themselves higher in social competence compared to those with siblings ($t(52) = -1.792, p = .039$).

Only children rated themselves higher in romantic appeal compared to those with siblings ($t(50) = -1.988, p = .026$).

Adolescents with siblings rated themselves higher in behavioral conduct compared to only children ($t(52) = 2.753, p = .007$).

Qualitative Results

Siblings and only children gave similar responses when asked how they choose to spend time alone. Reading was the most popular activity for participants with siblings (10/37, 27.03%), and joint most answered for only children, alongside watching TV (3/15, 20.00%). Notably, the second most common activity for adolescents with siblings was playing video games (7/37, 18.92%), though no only children gave this as their primary activity during solitude. Coding these activities into those using technology or off-screen engagement revealed that approximately half of participants fell into each group, a consistent trend across conditions, as shown in Table 2. Outliers were those that were 'disengaged' without using technology, with one participant 'thinking', and the other 'making scenarios while listening to music'.

Table 2

Percentage Responses for Family Structure

	Technology Use		Off-Screen Engagement		Total Number
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	
Only Children	8	53.33	6	40.00	15
Siblings	18	48.65	18	48.65	37
Total Sample	26	50.00	24	46.15	52

Implications

Our findings suggest that although family structure may not have a direct impact on an individual's attitudes toward time alone, it may affect how adolescents choose to spend their time in solitude.

Implications and Future Directions

By understanding how children and young people view time alone, as well as how they spend it, current interventions could be developed to balance both interpersonal and social skills with reflective, solitude skills. Further research could investigate correlations between attitudes toward solitude and mental health symptoms, in aid of developing such interventions

Limitations

Sampling – participants were from diverse schools and demographics. However, all students are in Ontario and education is under provincial jurisdiction. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic continued to restrict access to schools to reach possible participants, limiting the sample size.