



Emotional Maturity in Siblings and Single Children: An Exploratory Comparison

¹**Parvathi GS**, *M.Sc. Psychology Student, Department of Psychology and Allied Sciences, JAIN (Deemed-to-be University), Bengaluru, (Karnataka) India. (Corresponding Author)*

gsparvathi29@gmail.com

²**S. Samprathi**, *M.Sc. Psychology Student, Department of Psychology and Allied Sciences, JAIN (Deemed-to-be University), Bengaluru, (Karnataka) India.*

Samprathi02@gmail.com

³**Dr. Hunny Kalra**, *Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology and Allied Sciences, JAIN (Deemed-to-be University), Bengaluru, (Karnataka) India.*

hnykalra.psy@gmail.com

Abstract : Emotional maturity reflects an individual's ability to regulate emotions and adapt to social environments. While sibling relationships may foster emotional regulation and adaptability, single children often develop independence and self-sufficiency. However, the extent to which sibling presence influences emotional maturity remains unclear. This study examines differences in emotional maturity between individuals with siblings and single children using the Emotional Maturity Scale (EMS) (Singh & Bhargava, 1990). A total of 134 young adults (ages 18–45) participated, comprising 78 individuals with siblings and 56 single children, selected through convenience sampling. Descriptive and inferential statistical analysis was conducted, including the Mann-Whitney U test. The findings indicate that individuals with siblings had a slightly higher mean rank ($M = 70.50$) compared to single children ($M = 63.32$). However, the Mann-Whitney U test ($U = 1950$, $Z = -1.208$, $p = .227$) and ANOVA ($F = 2.689$, $p = .103$) both suggest that this difference is not statistically significant. The results suggest that the presence of siblings does not

significantly influence emotional maturity. While a slight trend toward higher emotional maturity scores was observed in individuals with siblings, the differences were not statistically significant. Future research should examine additional factors such as parental influence, peer relationships, and personality traits to gain a more comprehensive understanding of emotional development among young adults.

Keywords: *Emotional maturity, siblings, single children, Emotional Maturity Scale, Mann-Whitney U test.*

1. Introduction

The ability to identify, understand, regulate, and manage emotions in oneself and others is a fundamental aspect of human development, commonly referred to as emotional intelligence (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Emotional maturity, a component of emotional intelligence, plays a crucial role in personal well-being and interpersonal functioning (Bar-On, 2006). One of the influential factors shaping emotional maturity is family structure, particularly whether an individual is an only child or has siblings. Family dynamics influence the development of social skills, emotional regulation, and conflict resolution abilities, key components of emotional maturity (Goleman, 1995).

Siblings often act as a child's first social peers, offering a unique platform for emotional learning through everyday interactions such as sharing, cooperation, rivalry, and negotiation (Whiteman, McHale, & Soli, 2011). According to Dunn (2007), growing up with siblings provides opportunities for individuals to develop empathy, manage interpersonal conflicts, and navigate social relationships. These experiences are believed to foster the development of emotional maturity and resilience. Tucker et al. (1999) further highlighted that sibling relationships offer real-life scenarios for practicing emotional regulation and perspective-taking, essential for long-term socio-emotional competence.

On the other hand, only children experience a unique familial environment marked by undivided parental attention, which may enhance intellectual stimulation and independence (Jiao, Ji, & Jing, 1996). However, the absence of sibling interactions may limit opportunities for peer-like familial exchanges, potentially affecting the development of negotiation skills, emotional adaptability, and conflict resolution (Falbo & Polit, 1986). While some studies suggest only

children benefit from stronger parent-child bonds and greater self-reliance, others caution that they may face increased social isolation or elevated parental expectations (Tao, 2016).

2. Review of Literature

Numerous empirical studies have attempted to analyse the impact of sibling presence on emotional maturity. Patil and Hemanthkumara (2025) found that individuals with biological siblings scored significantly higher in both emotional maturity and psychological well-being compared to single and adopted children, suggesting a strong correlation between sibling presence and emotional development. Edels, Naoufal, and Montreuil (2024), in a scoping review of 23 studies, found that positive sibling interactions serve as protective factors against internalizing and externalizing behaviors, especially during adverse life events. Conversely, negative sibling dynamics, such as conflict or rivalry, can exacerbate psychological distress.

Cultural and contextual factors also appear to moderate the role of sibling relationships. Kim and Patel (2022) noted that the emotional benefits of sibling bonds vary across cultures but consistently contribute to resilience. Kramer et al. (2019) emphasized that sibling roles evolve throughout life and are critical in developing interpersonal understanding, especially in adolescence. Earlier work by Kramer (2014) also showed that sibling interactions in early childhood, particularly during conflict and play foster the development of emotion identification, regulation, and decoding skills.

Additional studies have examined specific sibling configurations and their developmental outcomes. Pant and Singh (2016) reported that students with more siblings had higher self-esteem, although emotional and personality development was present across all configurations. Anderson and Williams (2015), in their meta-analysis, observed that sibling bonds positively influence emotional self-regulation and identity formation during emerging adulthood, although they cautioned against overgeneralizing due to variations in gender and culture. Volling (2003) and Cicirelli (1982) emphasized that sibling relationships, while often seen through the lens of rivalry, are enduring sources of companionship and support that shape emotional development across the lifespan.

These findings collectively underscore the importance of sibling dynamics in fostering emotional growth. However, they also highlight the complexity and variability of sibling influence,

particularly when considering factors such as birth order, family structure, and socio-cultural background.

3. Need for the Study

While extensive literature highlights the role of sibling relationships in emotional development, there remains a gap in systematically comparing emotional maturity between only children and those with siblings, especially across broader age ranges and cultural contexts. Much of the previous research has focused either on childhood or adolescence, leaving a need to explore emotional maturity across emerging and early adulthood. This study aims to address this gap by examining whether sibling presence significantly influences emotional maturity in individuals, using the Emotional Maturity Scale (Singh & Bhargava, 1991). The findings could provide valuable insights for parents, educators, and mental health professionals seeking to understand the developmental impact of family structure on emotional well-being.

4. Materials and Methods

4.1 Research Objectives

The primary objectives of the study were:

- a) To assess the levels of emotional maturity among individuals with siblings and single children.
- b) To compare emotional maturity between individuals who have siblings and those who are single children.
- c) To examine whether sibling status (presence or absence of siblings) significantly influences emotional maturity across various dimensions such as Emotional Instability, Emotional Regression, Social Maladjustment, Personality Disintegration, and Lack of Independence.

4.2 Sample

In the present study, a comparative research design was adopted. Participants were informed about the purpose and procedures of the study, and informed consent was obtained. The participants were recruited using a convenience sampling method. A total of 134 individuals between the ages of 18 and 45 years participated in the study, comprising 78 individuals who reported having siblings and 56 individuals who identified as single children. All participants are residents of urban areas in India.

Inclusion criteria

1. Participants aged between 18 and 45 years.
2. Individuals who identified as either a single child or as having one or more siblings.
3. Individuals able to understand and respond to English-language questionnaires.

Exclusion Criteria

1. Participants with self-reported chronic physical illnesses or psychiatric disorders
2. Participants who failed to complete all components of the data collection procedure.

4.3 Study Tools

Emotional Maturity Scale (EMS): The Emotional Maturity Scale developed by Singh and Bhargava (1991) was employed to assess emotional maturity among participants. The scale consists of 48 items spanning five key domains, Emotional Instability, Emotional Regression, Social Maladjustment, Personality Disintegration, and Lack of Independence. Participants respond using a five-point Likert scale ranging from "Always" to "Never." Lower scores reflect greater emotional maturity. The EMS has been widely used in Indian psychological research and demonstrates high reliability and construct validity.

Demographic Questionnaire: A structured demographic information sheet was developed to collect details about age, gender, Occupation, and sibling status (single child or having siblings). Participants were also asked to specify the number of siblings if applicable.

4.4 Procedure

Participants were approached online through academic networks and social platforms. After a brief introduction, participants were informed about the study's objectives, confidentiality, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Each participant completed the demographic questionnaire followed by the Emotional Maturity Scale. The administration took approximately 15–20 minutes per participant. Data were collected anonymously, and no identifying information was retained. Data entry and analysis were carried out using IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows.

The data distribution was assessed for normality using the Shapiro–Wilk test. As the results indicated non-normal distribution, non-parametric methods were employed for inferential analysis. Descriptive statistics including means and standard deviations were computed, and the Mann–Whitney U test was used to compare emotional maturity scores between the sibling and single-

child groups.

4. Results

Table 1: *Descriptive Statistics for Emotional Maturity by Sibling Status*

Group	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Siblings (N = 78)	1.76	1.06	1.18	0.03
Single Children (N = 56)	1.48	0.79	1.93	3.68

Note. M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation.

The final sample consisted of 134 participants aged between 18 and 45 years). Among them, 78 participants (58.2%) reported having one or more siblings, while 56 participants (41.8%) identified as single children. The sample included individuals from diverse occupational backgrounds and both genders, though specific demographic breakdowns (e.g., gender, occupation) were not statistically analyzed for this study. All participants were residents of urban areas in India and were fluent in English.

Descriptive analyses were conducted to summarize emotional maturity scores for both groups. The group of individuals with siblings (N = 78) had a mean score of 1.76 (SD = 1.06), while the single children group (N = 56) had a mean score of 1.48 (SD = 0.79). Skewness and kurtosis values indicated moderate positive skew for both groups, with higher skewness (1.93) and kurtosis (3.68) observed in the single children group, suggesting a distribution with a sharper peak and longer tail (see Table 1 for detailed statistics).

The Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Shapiro–Wilk tests were both statistically significant ($p < .001$) for the sibling and single child groups, indicating a deviation from normal distribution for emotional maturity scores.

Table 2: *Showing Mann–Whitney U Test Results for Emotional Maturity by Sibling Status*

Group	n	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	P
Siblings	78	70.50	5499.00	1950.00	.227
Single Child	56	63.32	3546.00		

Given the violation of assumptions for parametric testing, a Mann–Whitney U Test was performed to compare emotional maturity scores between individuals with siblings and single children. Results showed no statistically significant difference, $U = 1950.00$, $Z = -1.21$, $p = .227$.

The mean rank for individuals with siblings was 70.50, compared to 63.32 for single children. (see Table 2 for detailed statistics).

5. Discussion

The primary objective of the present study was to compare the emotional maturity of individuals with siblings and single children. Emotional maturity, defined as the ability to manage and regulate emotions effectively, is a crucial determinant of psychological well-being and interpersonal functioning. Although the study hypothesized that individuals with siblings would exhibit higher levels of emotional maturity due to greater social exposure and conflict resolution opportunities, the results did not reveal a statistically significant difference between the two groups.

Descriptive analysis showed that the mean emotional maturity score for individuals with siblings ($M = 1.7564$, $SD = 1.0599$) was slightly higher than that of single children ($M = 1.4821$, $SD = 0.7860$). Despite this difference, the Mann–Whitney U test indicated that the variation in emotional maturity between the two groups was not statistically significant ($U = 1950.000$, $Z = -1.208$, $p = 0.227$). Therefore, while the data suggested a trend favoring higher emotional maturity among individuals with siblings, the evidence was insufficient to confirm a meaningful group difference.

However, when analyzed against standardized norms, both groups fell within lower categories of emotional maturity. According to the Emotional Maturity Scale norms (Singh & Bhargava, 1991), scores ranging from 1.0 to 1.99 represent extremely unstable emotional maturity, while scores between 2.0 and 2.99 reflect unstable emotional maturity. With a mean score of 1.7564, the sibling group falls into the "extremely unstable" category, albeit closer to the upper boundary. In contrast, the single children group, with a mean of 1.4821, lies deeper within the "extremely unstable" range. These findings suggest that, while siblings may provide some advantage in developing emotional maturity, both groups show considerable deficits overall.

These results may be understood in light of the changing dynamics of family systems and the increasing psychological stressors experienced by young adults today. Sibling relationships often provide opportunities for emotional expression, regulation, and interpersonal negotiation, which can enhance emotional development (Kramer, 2010)). In contrast, single children may lack this consistent peer-like familial interaction, potentially leading to limited experiences in managing emotional conflicts within a familial context.

The present results are consistent with prior studies that examined similar variables. The study by James and Ranjith (2023), for instance, assessed the effects of birth order on emotional maturity and psychological hardiness among 263 adolescents in Kerala. Using the Emotional Maturity Scale and Kruskal-Wallis H test, they found no significant differences in emotional maturity or psychological hardiness based on birth order. This reinforces the idea that family structure variables like birth order or sibling presence may not have a substantial or consistent impact on emotional maturity outcomes.

Additionally, Singh and Pant (2016) observed that while adolescents with more siblings showed greater personal adequacy, emotional progressiveness and personality integration were higher among those with fewer siblings. Their study also concluded that overall emotional maturity did not significantly differ based on sibling status—aligning closely with the current study’s findings.

Future research should consider incorporating qualitative methodologies or longitudinal designs to explore how sibling relationships and only-child experiences shape emotional development over time. It may also be useful to investigate other moderating variables such as parental involvement, peer attachment, and socio-economic background to better understand the nuanced influences on emotional maturity.

6. Conclusion

This study investigated emotional maturity among individuals with siblings and single children, aiming to understand whether sibling presence plays a significant role in emotional development. While descriptive statistics indicated that individuals with siblings had slightly higher emotional maturity scores, the results of the Mann–Whitney U test showed no statistically significant difference between the two groups.

According to the Emotional Maturity Scale (EMS) norms, both groups were found to fall within the unstable to extremely unstable categories of emotional maturity, suggesting a broader concern regarding emotional well-being among young adults regardless of sibling status. The trend of comparatively higher emotional maturity among those with siblings, although not significant, supports previous literature that highlights the potential influence of sibling relationships on emotional growth and interpersonal skills.

These findings suggest that while having siblings may offer some emotional benefits,

emotional maturity is shaped by multiple factors, and the presence or absence of siblings alone does not lead to significant differences. Therefore, interventions to support emotional development should be inclusive of all individuals and consider a broader range of psychosocial influences.

Implications

The findings of this study offer several important implications for educators, mental health professionals, parents, and policy makers concerned with the emotional development of young individuals:

Family Structure and Emotional Development

The study highlights that while emotional maturity levels among both siblings and single children fall within the *extremely unstable* and *unstable* categories, individuals with siblings demonstrate marginally higher emotional maturity. This suggests that sibling relationships may play a protective role in emotional regulation, conflict resolution, and adaptive coping mechanisms during developmental years. Professionals working with children and adolescents may consider exploring family dynamics in their assessments and interventions.

Importance of Early Socialization Experiences

The presence of siblings provides opportunities for shared experiences, emotional exchanges, and early social learning, which are essential for developing empathy, patience, and resilience. This has implications for parenting programs and school-based emotional literacy interventions. For instance, encouraging cooperative peer activities in schools may help replicate some of the socialization experiences that siblings offer.

Guidance for Mental Health Interventions

The finding that both groups show low emotional maturity raises concern and emphasizes the need for targeted emotional development programs. Schools, colleges, and counselling centers should consider implementing group therapy, mindfulness workshops, and emotional regulation training to foster emotional growth in young adults, especially those lacking supportive sibling or peer structures.

Educational and Counselling Practice

The findings can inform school psychologists, counsellors, and educators about the potential challenges faced by single children in managing emotions. Tailored support systems, such as peer mentoring and life-skills training, may be especially beneficial for them.

Limitations

Despite the valuable insights gained, the present study is not without limitations:

Convenience Sampling and Generalizability

The use of convenience sampling limits the generalizability of the findings. Participants were selected based on ease of access rather than random sampling, which may introduce selection bias and limit the applicability of results to the broader population.

Sample Size and Group Imbalance

Although the study collected a reasonable number of responses (N = 134), the group sizes were unequal (78 with siblings and 56 single children), which may have influenced the statistical power of inferential analyses. Future studies should aim for balanced group sizes and larger sample populations.

Cross-Sectional Design

Being a cross-sectional study, it captures emotional maturity at a single point in time. Emotional development is a dynamic process influenced by life events, social context, and age. A longitudinal design would provide deeper insights into how emotional maturity evolves over time in different family structures.

Self-Report Bias

The Emotional Maturity Scale is a self-report instrument, which is subject to social desirability and response bias. Participants may have over- or under-reported their emotional tendencies based on perceived societal expectations. Inclusion of observational data or peer/parent reports could enhance the validity of future findings.

Lack of Control for Confounding Variables

The study does not account for other important factors that may influence emotional maturity such as parenting style, socioeconomic status, peer relationships, birth order, mental health history, or exposure to adverse life events. These could act as confounding variables affecting the outcomes.

Cultural and Regional Limitations

The study may reflect cultural norms and familial patterns specific to the region or community in which the data was collected. Results may not be entirely applicable to other cultural or socio-demographic settings without further replication.

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