

# Kids with dogs or siblings more likely to be independent

May 17 2016, by David Stacey

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Credit: University of Western Australia

Children with an older sibling and/or a dog are more likely to be allowed to walk around their neighbourhood on their own, according to new research led by The University of Western Australia.

The study, led by Dr Hayley Christian from UWA's School of Population Health, revealed how sibling age, gender and dog ownership affected children's independent mobility. It was published in the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*.

Researchers analysed data from 181 children aged eight to 15 years and parents reported whether their child was allowed to walk or cycle alone or with other children to or from school, friends' houses and the local

park and shops.

Dr Christian said it was widely accepted that fewer children were being allowed to walk around their local area without adult supervision due to parental concerns over issues such as [stranger danger](#) and traffic.

"Given that stranger danger is one of the most highly cited barriers to children's independent mobility, walking with siblings and/or a family dog may reassure both parents and children by providing them with an increased sense of safety," she said.

"We wanted to find out what the effect of sibling age, gender and [dog ownership](#) had on children's independent mobility and how this varied according to the destination visited."

Travelling with an older sibling was more likely to provide parents with an added sense of safety and perceived protection, Dr Christian said.

"Children may also learn safe routes and how to negotiate traffic situations when travelling with older siblings, which helps build children's and parents' confidence in their ability to travel independently," she said.

The research also revealed children with an older sibling of the same gender were more likely to be allowed to travel independently to local destinations.

"It's possible siblings of the same gender may be more willing to spend time together because they have common interests and mutual friends," Dr Christian said.

The researchers also found owning a dog was linked to children's overall independent mobility.

"This suggests that the family dog is important because it can not only provide company for the child but also give [parents](#) an increased sense of safety," she said.

Dr Christian said it was hoped the research would help identify strategies to encourage more independent mobility for [children](#).

**More information:** Christian, H. E., et al. (2016), The effect of siblings and family dog ownership on children's independent mobility to neighbourhood destinations. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*. doi: 10.1111/1753-6405.12528

Provided by University of Western Australia

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