

Empowering Singleton Girls: An Anthropological Study on the Unintended Consequences of China's One Child Policy

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Abstract

Background: China's One Child Policy, enacted in 1979 under Deng Xiao Ping, was introduced to heavily limit fertility and enact population control. Strict implementation of the One Child Policy (OCP) has provoked unprecedented concern because of the unusually high proportion of males to females in the Chinese population. As daughters born during the One Child Policy without siblings may have been encouraged to pursue different paths in both personal life and careers when compared to those with siblings, it is important to investigate the unintended consequences of the OCP regarding singleton females.

Objective: To investigate the relationship between being a Chinese female singleton, juxtaposed against those with siblings, born under the One Child Policy by measuring satisfaction in both personal life and careers through both quantitative and qualitative lenses.

Results: Key findings suggest that: (1) Chinese women without siblings have higher satisfaction in both personal life and career outcomes; (2) Family composition, emotional stability, and other pressures strongly sway satisfaction rates.

Conclusions: Potential influences on satisfaction rates of personal life and careers in female populations were identified as a result of the OCP; the "unintended consequences" of not having siblings may be positive in terms of career and personal life satisfaction, especially in multigenerational households.

Introduction

- China's One Child Policy resulted in a skewed 1.16 male-female sex ratio¹, new nuclear family dynamics², and prenatal discrimination against female conceptions³ in infant death ratios
- Due to the rise of these alarming trends, the policy was annulled in 2015, allowing for all Chinese couples to have two children
- Specifically, males and females born between the years of 1979 and 2015 may have a wide gap in their life experiences of being only children
- Although China has been considered a patriarchal society that holds males to a higher regard than females both in family culture and in professional settings, the policy may have begun to shift these mentalities
- One notable consequence is the new common trend for older grandparents to move in with the parents to help rear the 3rd generation²
- Daughters born during the OCP without brothers were encouraged to pursue a higher education than those without brothers because they were viewed as the last hope for the families⁴

Literature Review:



Methods

Study Participants: A total of 66 females from WeChat accounts participated in an individual cross-sectional design quantitative study. A total of 9 females participated in the qualitative section of this study.

Data Collection: From June to July of 2021, participants completed an initial Qualtrics survey. Eligible participants were then randomly selected for verbal interviews in August of 2021. "Not applicable" responses were excluded from final data analysis. Responses that did not meet the filtering criteria or had incomplete satisfaction outcome responses were not taken into account in analysis.

Statistical Analysis: SAS 9.4 [SAS Institute Inc. 2015. Cary, NC] was used to assess participants' satisfaction regarding personal life and careers (n=66). Correlation, difference of means t-test, and ANOVA tests were performed for quantitative data analysis. ATLAS.ti 8 Mac [Scientific Software Development. 1997. Germany] was used for performing descriptive and thematic analysis for the qualitative data portion on the verbal interview dataset (n=9).

Table 1. Demographics (Quantitative Section)

Characteristics	Response	Frequency (%)
Gender	male	0 (0%)
	female	66 (100%)
Siblings	one child	42 (36%)
	not one child	24 (64%)
Age	18-22	8 (12.12%)
	23-27	25 (37.88%)
	28-32	10 (15.15%)
	33-37	11 (16.67%)
	38-42	12 (18.18%)
Majority of Life	Yes	62 (94%)
	No	0 (0%)
	Currently under the age of 22	4 (6%)
SES	less than 50,000 yuan	5 (7.58%)
	50,000-100,000 yuan	14 (21.21%)
	100,000-150,000 yuan	9 (13.64%)
	150,000-200,000 yuan	15 (22.73%)
	200,000-500,000 yuan greater than 500,000 yuan	19 (28.79%) 4 (6.06%)
Parent Influence	Very Influential	11 (16.7%)
	Influential	26 (39.4%)
	Indifferent	29 (43.9%)
Grandparents Living With Grandchildren	Yes	29 (43.9%)
	No	37 (56.1%)
Multigenerational Household	Yes	22 (33.3%)
	No	44 (66.7%)

Table 1: Covariate Demographics for Qualtrics Survey Complete Responses

Figure 1. Quantitative Results

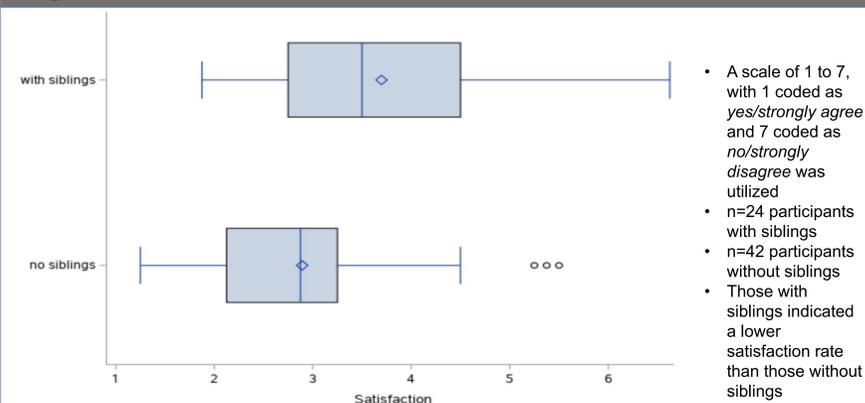


Figure 1: Side-by-Side Boxplots of Satisfaction Rates by Sibling Strata

Figure 2. DAG with Potential Confounders

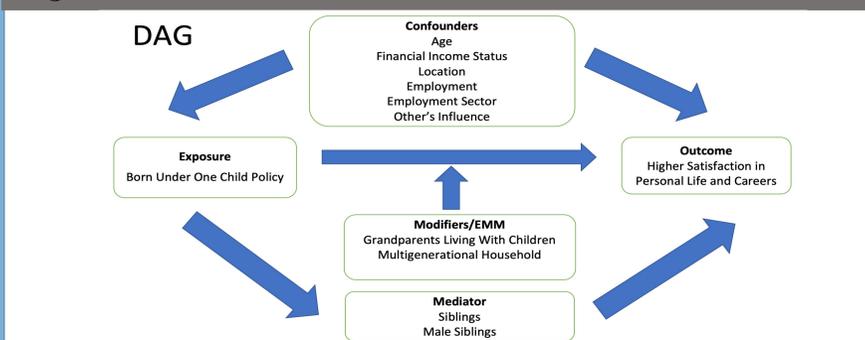


Figure 2: Directed Acyclic Graphic (DAG) with Potential Confounders for Association Between Being Born Under OCP and Satisfaction Outcomes

Figure 3. Qualitative Themes

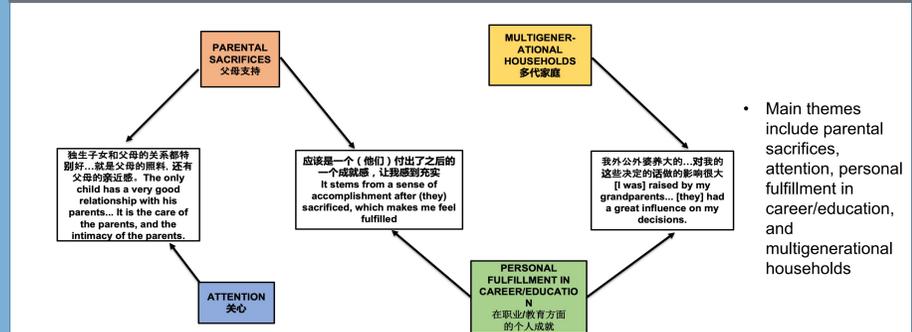


Figure 3: Themes From Qualitative Interviews With Only Children (n=9)
* Originally conducted in Mandarin Chinese

Discussion and Future Directions

- This study suggests that being an only child born under the One Child Policy is associated with higher satisfaction rates in personal life and careers
- No previous anthropological studies on the "unintended consequences" of being born under the OCP and satisfaction rates were found to be published in American journals
- Research on satisfaction rates in Chinese female singletons may help the development of future population planning initiatives
- An examination of vital factors driving professional and personal successes may increase job satisfaction, and therefore may result in a highly effective workforce⁵

Resources

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Pitfalls

The small sample size indicates that it is difficult to infer back to all Chinese women born under the One Child Policy

Many responses were non-responses or incomplete

There was only sufficient time to conduct verbal interviews with singleton participants, and focus on a few subtopics

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