

Impact of China's One-Child Policy on Individuals:
Viewpoints of Only-children Born in the 1990s

by

Zhenshuang Xu

A Master's Thesis Presented to the Faculty of Osaka Jogakuin University
Graduate School of International Collaboration and Coexistence in the 21st Century,
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

Advisor: Professor Mitsuko Maeda

January 31, 2023

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore the impact of China's one-child policy on the single or only-child. While previous research has found that the policy has had a social impact, it indicates that it may influence five individual aspects: parent-child relationship, health, education, personality, and family responsibility. Through semi-structured interviews with 10 only-children who were born in the 1990s, this research found that only-children viewed the policy as having impacted the parent-child relationship, education, and family responsibility, but not personality and health. This study also found that although family responsibility was regarded as an enormous burden on only-children, they were, in fact, willing to take on this responsibility.

Acknowledgments

Throughout the research and writing process, I have received a great deal of feedback, assistance and support from many people, without whom I would not have been able to complete this research.

First, I would like to express my deep gratitude to Professor Mitsuko Maeda, who expertly and enthusiastically guided me through my research, making this work possible. Without her help, I don't have ability and courage to finish my research.

Moreover, my appreciation goes to Professor Omi Hatashin and Professor Yumiko Enjo, for your valuable suggestions and feedback that helped me make my thesis clearer and more logical.

My appreciation also extends to Osaka Jogakuin University Graduate School. This master's thesis would not have been possible without their financial support. Especially in this coronavirus pandemic, the scholarship greatly eased my financial burden.

I also owe special thanks to all the professors who have taught me in my graduate education and to my graduate school fellows: Phuong Thao Nguyen and Kaori Uekawa. It was an honor for me to spend the past two years with them in Osaka Jogakuin University Graduate School, which was a delightful and valuable experience in my life.

I would like to thank my family and friends who encouraged and supported me in completing this master's thesis. I am also thankful to many Chinese students who responded to the online survey. Some of them spent their precious time doing online survey.

Last but not least, I would like to express my gratitude to my supportive mother who is in China but support me in the last two years. Love you forever.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	I
Acknowledgments.....	II
Table of Contents.....	III
1 Introduction.....	1
2 Literature Review.....	3
2.1 Social Impact of the OCP.....	3
2.1.1 Impacts on population size and structure.....	3
2.1.2 Social impacts on living conditions.....	5
2.1.3 Social impacts on human rights.....	6
2.2 Impacts of the OCP on Individuals.....	7
2.2.1 Impacts of the OCP on parent-child relationships.....	8
2.2.2 Impacts of the OCP on health.....	9
2.2.3 Impacts of the OCP on education.....	9
2.2.4 Impacts of the OCP on personality.....	11
2.2.5 Impacts of the OCP on family responsibility.....	12
3 Methodology.....	14
3.1 Semi-structured interview.....	14
3.2 Participants.....	16
3.3 Ethical consideration.....	16
4 Results & Discussion.....	17
4.1 Impacts of the OCP on the parent-child relationships.....	17

4.2 Impacts of the OCP on health.....	18
4.3 Impacts of the OCP on education.....	20
4.4 Impacts of the OCP on personality.....	24
4.5 Impacts of the OCP on family responsibility.....	26
5 Conclusions.....	28
References.....	30

1 Introduction

From 1979 to 2016, China implemented a “family planning policy” called the one-child policy (OCP). This policy aimed to slow down population growth and relieve social problems such as food shortages and increased crime. Under the OCP, couples were only permitted to have one child but there were exceptions. If both parents were each an only-child or if a couple's first child was disabled, they were allowed to have another child. Additionally, in rural areas, if the first child was a girl, they were allowed to have another child.

I was born in 1995 when the OCP was strictly enforced. Born in the countryside, I was the second daughter in my family. Due to the policy, each rural family could have two children at most. My biological parents could not have a son anymore and longing for a boy, my parents placed me for adoption; I was adopted by an infertile couple. I learned that my adoptive mother was not my biological mother when I was 19 years old and a freshman in college. I felt shocked, helpless, and at a loss, but I gradually accepted that I had two pairs of parents. After this, I tried my best to treat my biological parents as close relatives. As I read books about the only-child, I gradually realized that my situation was not special. This experience led me to conduct this research.

The implementation of the OCP impacted not only China's population and society at that time but also greatly affected only-children like me, who were born under this policy. The influences are likely observable in many aspects, including parent-child relationships, health, education, personality, and family responsibility.

Therefore, based on my own experience, this study attempts to explore only-children's perceptions on how the only-children in the 1990s were affected by the OCP.

Practically, this research will contribute to helping people understand those born under the OCP and the effects of the OCP on them. Academically, it could contribute to various sociology fields including the study of family relationships, education, health, and children's psychology.

This thesis consists of five chapters. Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 reviews literature on the OCP's social and individual effects. In Chapter 3, the research methodology is presented. In Chapter 4, the results and discussion are presented. The last chapter is the conclusion of the research.

2 Literature Review

It has been approximately 40 years since the birth of the OCP in China, and much academic research on the policy has been conducted. In this chapter, I review relevant literature on the impacts of the OCP which are divided into two aspects: social and individual impacts.

2.1 Social Impact of the OCP

This section reviews previous studies on the social impacts of the OCP, which mainly focus on impacts on population size and structure, living conditions, and human rights.

2.1.1 Impacts on population size and structure

Previous research found that the OCP has had a significant impact on population size and structure since it started.

On the one hand, research shows that the OCP has controlled the growth rate and quantity of China's population. Festini & Martino (2004) stated that the policy helped the Chinese government achieve its goal and effectively control the population. They conducted a study to explore the problems and prospects of China's OCP and found that 25 years after the implementation of the OCP, 250–300 million Chinese were not born as a result of the policy. They also found that the rate of natural population growth dropped from 11.6 per thousand in 1979 to 8 per thousand in 2001, while the total fertility rate fell from 2.8 in 1979 to 1.8 in 2001. Additionally, they showed that the average size of the family fell from 4.54 in 1980 to 3.36 in 2000.

With a growing number of only-children, the national average of families with only-children is 0.74.

On the other hand, research shows that the OCP had a negative impact on the sex ratio adjustment. Settles et al. (2012) found that the OCP also indirectly led to unbalanced sex ratios. Meanwhile, Zhu & Lu (2009) conducted a quantitative analysis of data from China's 2005 national census to investigate the tendencies and geographical patterns in the sex ratio at birth and found that the sex ratio of China's population has deviated from normal values.

In addition to the shortcoming of an unbalanced sex ratio, disparities in the accelerated aging of the population are beginning to emerge and grow. Ahn (1994) has raised special concerns about the future pension problem of the one-child families in Shanghai. He stated that due to the simultaneous rapid growth of only-children and the proportion of the elderly population, the disparities in the accelerated aging of the population have become a social problem that cannot be ignored. Given this urgent threat, Ahn proposed using socialized pension to supplement the family pension and modify the OCP partially.

Thus, while the OCP controlled the growth rate and quantity of China's population, it led to an unbalanced sex ratio and the accelerated aging of the population.

2.1.2 Social impacts on living conditions

Many studies showed that the OCP also generated profound social impacts on living conditions. It showed that people's living conditions have greatly improved due to the OCP.

Some scholars hold the opinion that the OCP had positive effects on living standards. Festini & Martino (2004) showed that the OCP had many positive influences including the increased availability of natural resources; improvement of people's living standards; the rapid growth of China's economy; increased availability of health services for women; decrease in morbidity and mortality related to pregnancy; and higher likelihood for women to move away from traditionally subordinate roles, gain more chances to receive education, and start working. Song & Wang (2019) also agreed that the OCP had positive effects on people's living conditions. He conducted an investigation on the population and living situation of Yuping Dong Autonomous County in the Guizhou province after the implementation of the OCP. The data showed that due to the OCP, the rate of population growth has decreased significantly, while the overall living standard has improved. In his research, it was shown that social welfare services have developed tremendously since the OCP was implemented. Further, it was discovered that maternity insurance, endowment insurance, medical insurance, and more than 20 other insurance businesses have been expanded to improve people's living conditions.

However, some studies reported that the policy has had negative effects on living conditions. Chen et al. (2022) explored the effects of the OCP on quality of life

and found that the changes brought by the policy have put increased pressure on the social security and public care systems.

In conclusion, the OCP had significant positive effects on living conditions including easing economic and environmental pressures, improving people's living standards, and helping women transform from traditionally subordinate roles. The potential risk of the OCP is the possibility of straining the social security system in the future.

2.1.3 Social impacts on human rights

Previous research indicated that the OCP influences human rights significantly. Scholars' opinions are polarized on the issue of human rights impacts.

Most scholars hold the opinion that the OCP violated human rights. David & Yang (2014) stated the OCP violates human rights because of forced abortions, sex-selective abortions, and female infanticide. They hold the opinion that couples who breach the OCP need to confront punitive and pecuniary penalties when the policy had also violated the couple's right to procreate. Despite differences in Chinese and Western values, people from both societies sometimes expressed similar views on the impact of the OCP on human rights during its implementation. NIE (2014) criticized the OCP for causing massive suffering to Chinese people, especially women, who were victims of state violence.

However, some scholars hold the opposite opinion. Song & Wang (2019) pointed out that the OCP was implemented for the sake of further development of China, which would be conducive to promoting human rights. Song & Wang opined

that one must not only see the present but also consider the future. He stated that if rapid population growth was allowed, China's limited economic growth would be eaten up, and it would be difficult to accumulate the necessary social funds, and China's economy would lag for a long time. In this way, guaranteeing human rights would become more difficult. Therefore, according to Wang, family planning and human rights were dialectically unified and complemented each other.

Meanwhile, Bulte et al. (2010) interpreted the policy from the perspective of human rights. She suggested that the OCP ensured the human rights of Chinese women. Influenced by the traditional idea that women should have more children, most women had to stay at home to raise their children, which caused women to devote their whole life to childrearing. The implementation of the OCP liberated most women from this yoke and allowed them to chase their dreams and fulfil their potential.

In conclusion, there are several different studies about the impacts of the OCP on human rights. Some studies argue that the OCP impinged on women's procreation rights, while other studies focus on how the OCP provided Chinese women with new opportunities to realize their dreams.

2.2 Impacts of the OCP on Individuals

This section reviews previous studies on the impacts of the OCP on individuals, focusing on the impacts on the parent-child relationship, health, education, personality, and family responsibility.

2.2.1 Impacts of the OCP on parent-child relationships

Some scholars found that the OCP had a significant impact on parent-child relationships (Toni, 2011; DeJonckheere, 2019; Ahn, 1994). Most of them are of the view that only-children families have closer parent-child relationships and more frequent interactions.

Research found that the only-child seemed to get more attention from their parents. Settle et al. 's research (2002) clarified that parents with only-children liked to spend more leisure time with their children compared with parents of multiple children. Falbo & Polit (1986) found that from the perspectives of parents, parents of only-children tend to be more anxious than parents of multiple children because they have no other experience with parenting. Falbo & Polit (1986) also showed that in this case, parents of only-children were more cautious and responsible in their parenting activities than those with multiple children, resulting in high-quality parent-child relationships.

Specific surveys about parent-child relationships were also conducted. Chee (2021) compared the parent-child relationships in Hong Kong and Shanghai. Due to the peculiarities of Hong Kong, the OCP had not been implemented. According to the comparison and investigation, Chee found that the parent-child relationships in Shanghai were better than those in Hong Kong, and the communication between parents and children in Hong Kong was less than that in Shanghai. Similar findings have been shown in other studies.

The findings of previous research showed that the OCP had a significant impact on parent-child relationships.

2.2.2 Impacts of the OCP on health

Some studies found that only-children were more likely to suffer from mental health problems (Cheng et al., 2020; Tao et al., 1996).

For instance, Cheng et al. (2019) found that anxiety and depression among only-children college students were more serious. At the end of the 19th century, the famous psychologist G. Stanley Hall put forward the conclusion that "the only-child is a disease in itself" based on research results. Although sensational, it once became a popular concept in Western society.

Besides mental health, there has been research on physical health. Cheng et al. (2020) argued that when fruit and vegetable intake and physical activity were sufficient, there was no significant difference in the height and development grade of only-children.

Previous research showed that being an only-child had no significant effects on physical health but had adverse effects on mental health.

2.2.3 Impacts of the OCP on education

The impacts of the OCP on education was the longest-lasting topic among researchers since the advent of the OCP (Beal-Hodges et al., 2011; Tan, 2012; Huang, 2022). In this section, studies on the impacts of the OCP on education are reviewed.

Some research showed that the OCP was beneficial for children because it reduced the size of the family. Liao & Zhang (2020) showed that a larger family size

had a negative effect on children's education, particularly in areas with poor public education systems. The more family members there were, the fewer educational resources the child received. Similarly, Kadoya & Sano (2018) found that family size negatively influenced children's education.

Except for family size, some scholars reported a positive impact of the OCP on education from the perspective of academic achievement. Tao & Tseng (1996) believed that in China, there were academic theses indicating that only-children tend to gain better scores, higher academic achievements, and more cognitive abilities compared with children who had siblings. Falbo & Polit (1986) asserted that only-children show more advantages than children who had siblings. They stated, "On average, only-children tend to outscore their peers with many siblings in terms of academic abilities and achievement, although this difference is small."

The OCP had a positive influence on women's education. A study organized by Settle et al. (2002) explained that the family planning policy significantly promoted gender equality by improving women's education access. The result of the analysis showed that the relative education level of women in the birth cohort after the birth policy significantly improved, while the gender education gap narrowed. Anderson et al. (2008) found that according to official statistics, the proportion of women entering university had risen sharply over the past two decades, from 23.4% in 1980 to 39.2% in 1999. With the development of society and changes in people's views, the gap in gender education in China has rapidly narrowed, and the proportion of female students who receive higher education has surpassed that of males.

To sum up, previous research showed that the OCP had an impact on only-children's education, which was a positive influence on their educational situation both in terms of education resources and academic achievement. It was also beneficial for women's education.

2.2.4 Impacts of the OCP on personality

The research on the impacts of the OCP on only-children's personalities shows inconsistent findings.

There are mainly two different views about the impacts of the OCP on only-children's personalities. Several scholars investigated the impact of the OCP on children's personalities and found that the personality of the only-child was seen as problematic. However, there were also scholars who thought that there was no significant difference between the only-child and other children. Thus, according to previous studies, it could not be affirmed whether the OCP had either a positive or negative impact on only-children's personalities.

Many researchers found that "the only-child is self-centered" (Song & Wang, 2019; Festini, 2004). Festini (2004) found that only-children who do not have siblings to interact with may lack the appropriate interpersonal skills to negotiate relationships with their peers effectively. Falbo & Polit (1986) affirmed that adults in the family are inclined to prioritize the needs of the only-child, which may lead to bad results for the child including dependency, self-centeredness, and coldness. Therefore, after approximately 20 years of the policy, the Chinese popular media usually called the only-children "little emperors". Festini & Martino (2004) proposed that there were

differences in the characteristics of one-child and multiple-child families. They inferred that OCP had a great effect on children born under the implementation of the OCP. Based on psychological arguments, it was suggested that the OCP generation was becoming more self-centered, less trustworthy, less competitive, and more pessimistic.

Meanwhile, there were scholars who held opposing views about the impact of the OCP on an only-child's personality. Kadoya & Sano (2018) conducted a survey on Chinese only-children and other children and found that there were no significant negative personal characteristics that people usually associate with an only-child, and the results also showed that only-children were not less cooperative and did not have more behavioral problems. In the meantime, Feng et al. (2014) believed that the only-child was normal in terms of personality and even better than other children in some aspects.

In conclusion, the studies of the impacts of the OCP on personality remain controversial, and it cannot be definitively stated that the OCP had either a positive or negative impact on only-children's personalities.

2.2.5 Impacts of the OCP on family responsibility

Some scholars found that the OCP influenced children's sense of responsibility to their families.

Francine Yang (2016) examined the impact of the OCP on two traditional aspects of Chinese family life: filial piety and paternity. The only-children seemed to be more responsible for their parents' happiness because of their singleton status.

Zhong (2017) investigated the perspectives on future elder care for parents among Chinese only-children living overseas. Through a deep interview, respondents revealed that they would follow traditional elderly care patterns and viewed it as a positive pattern to care for parents. They defined caring for the elderly as their obligation toward parents. Some respondents planned to bring their parents to live with them, and other participants expressed that they may return to China to take care of their parents. Zhong believed that there may have been dilemmas involving caring for the elderly because there were no siblings to share the task. However, most only-children preferred to make some compromises for their parents, which reflected the larger responsibility only-children have to their parents.

To sum up, previous studies showed that the OCP had an impact on only-children's family responsibilities. The pressure and impacts which the OCP has brought to only-children were mainly embodied in the increasingly serious problem of caring for the elderly and only-children had to bear the pressure of old-age care.

So far, I reviewed the social and individual impacts of the OCP. While previous research found that the OCP had a social impact, it indicated that the policy may influence five individual aspects: parent-child relationships, health, education, personality, and family responsibility. What is largely missing in previous research is an examination of these impacts from the viewpoint of only-children.

Therefore, the question of this research is:

How do the only-children view the impact of the OCP on five individual aspects: parent-child relationships, health, education, personality, and family responsibility?

3 Methodology

This chapter describes the methodology of this study. The first part reports about the method of this research, which is a semi-structured interview. The second part presents the research participants. The last part discusses ethical considerations in this research.

3.1 Semi-structured interview

In this research, I conducted a semi-structured interview, which refers to an informal interview conducted in accordance with a broad outline of the interview. Edward & Holland (2013) explain a semi-structured interview as follows: “Through semi-structured interviews, interviewees can express their deep feelings and opinions, which is conducive to making an in-depth discussion on the research question. Moreover, the semi-structured interview could provide an opportunity for an interviewer to learn reasons behind the answers and allow a respondent time to open up about sensitive issues.”

In the interview, I hoped that the interviewees could express their deep feelings and rethink the reasons why they were or were not influenced by the OCP. Since the impact of the OCP on individuals is a sensitive topic, sufficient time must be provided for respondents to talk.

The questions of the interview involve five aspects: parent-child relationship, health, education, personality, and family responsibility. The detailed questions are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Interview questions

1. Impact on parent-child relationships	1.1 Do you think you spend more time communicating with your parents than your friends who are not only-children? Why?
	1.2 If you have a younger brother or sister, and if you go out with your younger brother or sister, do you think you will get the same attention? Why?
2. Impact on health	2.1 Many studies have shown that the only-child has worse mental health than the non-only-child. What do you think?
	2.2 Do you support the claim that only-children have higher rates of obesity and diabetes?
	2.3 Do you think you are more spoiled than your non-only-child friends? Can you describe it specifically?
3. Impact on education	3.1 Do you think that the only-child families have higher expectations for the only-child under the influence of the one-child policy? What do you think about this problem?
	3.2 As an only-child, have you ever taken a private education course? Do your parents invest more in your education compared with your non only-child friends? What do you think of the higher education investment in the only-child family?
	3.3 Do you think your parents are constantly trying to provide you with a better educational environment than your non-only-child friends?
4. Impact on personality	4.1 What do you think is the difference between the characteristics of an only-child and a non-only-child?
	4.2 Do you feel lonely as an only-child? When do you feel lonely?
5. Impact on responsibility	5.1 As an only-child, do you think you have a greater responsibility for your family? What kind of responsibility?
	5.2 When your parents are old, will you go back home? Why?

The whole semi-structured interview lasted for 30 to 60 minutes. For the sake of participants' privacy, the interviews were not recorded except for certain key words and phrases. The impact of the OCP is divided into 5 aspects, and each having 2 to 3 questions related to it. Based on the interviewee's yes or no answers to the questions, the interviewer would continue to ask related questions. During the whole semi-structured interview, the interviewer starts by talking about the interviewee's family background and life experiences and gradually moves into prepared questions,

trying to create a relaxed and reassuring atmosphere so that the interviewee can open up and talk.

3.2 Participants

In the research, I interviewed 10 only-child participants aged 23–26 consisting of 5 males and 5 females. They were of a similar age as me.

3.3 Ethical consideration

Before the interview, I explained the purpose, benefits, what the data would be used for, and that participation was voluntary. Every interviewee was told that if they felt uncomfortable with any question, they were free to refuse to respond or withdraw from the interview. I explained to all participants that all information is only used by the research only and that their specific name is also hidden in the whole passage so that it cannot be linked to other data by anyone else.

4 Results & Discussion

This chapter shows and discusses the results of this research. Based on the interviews, I discuss the impact of the OCP on 5 aspects: parent-child relationship, health, education, personality, and responsibility.

4.1 Impacts of the OCP on the parent-child relationships

This research found that only-children were of the view that the OCP had an impact on the parent-child relationship. The OCP gave parents and children more opportunities to communicate which contributed greatly to building better and healthier parent-child relationships.

Among 10 participants, eight of them thought that they spent more time communicating with their parents than their non-only-child friends. The other two participants said that it was difficult to identify whether this was true for them.

Interviewees hold different views on equal attention if there is more than one child in some cases. Participants 1, 5, and 10 said that the amount and age of children affect the attention they receive.

"My parents need to pay more attention to a younger child, and that means they could not pay the same or equal attention to me." (participant 1)

"Some parents pay more attention to younger children just for praise from others, which is harmful to their relationship with their children." (participant 5)

"If I have a younger brother or sister, when my parents take younger children and me out, they will pay more attention to younger ones. In that way, people may say my

parents are very kind. But I do not like that kind of behavior, which even hurts me somewhat." (participant 10)

In other words, the number of children did affect the attention children receive; when there were more children, parents needed to pay more attention to younger ones. These findings aligned with the "resource dilution" model put forward by Blake (1981), which pointed out that the number of children would influence the resources provided by parents.

Participants 8 and 9 expressed similar concerns, "my parents never take me out with younger children, so I do not know if I would still get the same or equal attention if my parents took younger children and me out together, but I think I could not" (participant 8). Participants 2, 3, and 4 stated, "the age or amount of children will affect the attention I receive. Because parents could not treat us equally." Thus, the only-children were of the view that the OCP had an impact on parents' and children's relationship.

4.2 Impacts of the OCP on health

It can be concluded that only-children considered that the OCP has an impact on health, based on the research. In previous research, Previous researchers found greater impacts on mental health, but less on physical health(Cheng et al., 2020; Cheng et al., 2019). Through the interviews, five participants did not support the opinion that "Only-children have higher rates of mental problems." Participants 1, 6, 7, 8, and 10 believed that it was a one-sided opinion that only-children had higher rates of anxiety

and depression. They mentioned a number of factors that affect a child's health, in addition to being an only-child.

"The material life is similar in today's society, and there are no differences between a one-child family and a non-only-child family. The health problems mainly come from outside pressure rather than family." (participant 6)

Participants 1, 7, 8 and 10 hold a similar opinion to participant 6. Participant 7 expressed that individual mental differences had nothing to do with the only-child family.

"There may have been this situation before. However, most families know the importance of a healthy diet. Therefore, parents tried their best to control harmful food and kept their children healthy both physically and mentally. Thus, this situation should be less common."(participant 7)

Regarding whether you support the question "Do you support the claim that only-children have higher rates of obesity and diabetes?" responses were largely consistent. All interviewees did not support this claim.

"It has nothing to do with being an only-child. The food that people eat today contains many unhealthy ingredients such as additive preservatives, and the probability of over-nutrition among urban residents is higher than in rural areas." (participant 3)

Participant 4 mainly talked about food as well. "Nowadays, there are many kinds of food, and there are also many unhealthy foods, which will lead to the deterioration

of people's health. it has no connection with whether you are an only-child or not."

(participant 4)

Finally, when it comes to whether you are spoiled by your parents compared with your friends who are not an only-child, 6 participants gave affirmative answers 3 participants pointed out that they were not spoiled by their parents and received the same as their friends, and 1 participant did not answer this question.

"The only-child in a family being spoiled is a common phenomenon in China. If a family only has one child, he\she will receive all the attention and love from his\her parents and grandparents. It is easy to be spoiled for the child." (participant 2)

Participants 5, 6, 8, and 9 also expressed that they received all love and attention from their parents and are spoiled. Participant 9 said that there was a phenomenon of son-preference in his family. Therefore he was totally spoiled as the only-child, especially as the son. Participants 3, 4, and 10 said that they were not spoiled by their parents and grandparents.

From the feedback obtained during the interviews, we could conclude that only-children considered that the OCP may have had no impact on both physical and mental health, which was different from the findings of Cheng (2019), but supports Falbo & Polit's (1986) study.

4.3 Impacts of the OCP on education

Based on the research, it could be found that only-children considered that the OCP had an impact on only-children's education. This research mainly investigated the impacts of the OCP on education from the perspective of financial investment in

education, educational expectation, and educational environment. Participants answered affirmatively regarding larger education financial investments, higher educational expectations, and a better educational environment that their parents provided for them.

There seemed to be an overwhelming response to the question of investment in education for only-children. Seven participants said yes to whether only-children carry higher expectations from their parents. Six participants received private lessons, seven participants thought they paid more education fees than their non-only-child friends, and six participants thought their parents tried their best to provide a better educational environment to them when compared with their peers who were not an only-child.

Among six participants who claimed there were higher expectations for an only-child, participants 1, 2 and 5 had similar opinions:

"The only-children receive more aspiration than non-only-children, because as the only one, with the principle of giving a good birth and good care, parents will spend almost all of their free time and energy cultivating the child, so they will have higher expectations correspondingly." (participant 1)

"My parents put so many expectations on me. Their parents usually have more than one child, and parents' expectations are shared by his brothers and sisters. But as their only-child, I had to take on all their expectations." (participant 2)

Participant 5 compared this to gambling and said, "yes, as the only-child in the family. It was a bit like a gamble with only one chance, where parents placed their

hopes on their only-child." Participant 6 thought about the expectations and future responsibility. She said that parents place all their expectations on the only-child, so the higher the demands on them, the greater the pressure on the only-child would be. The only-child faced even more pressure when supporting his or her parents.

Only participant 9 gave a negative answer to this question. He did not feel higher expectations from his parents as the only-child, but he didn't give a further explanation. Participants 5 and 8 believed that it would depend on different families.

Regarding the question on financial investment in education, six participants received private lessons, and seven participants thought they paid more education fees than their non-only-child friends.

Participant 8 said that financial care was all poured into her, followed by high expectations, such as safe, healthy, stable, and decent work, like to be a doctor or teacher. Participants 2 and 10 believed that they had higher education costs compared with their non-only-child friends.

"It depends on the situation. There is also a lot of affection in non-only-child families, such as the emotion between siblings, which to some extent can make up for the parents' concern for a non-only-child. Therefore, it depends on parents' proper education and harmonious relationship between siblings." (participant 8)

"My parents did not go to university and in their time almost all students who went to university got good jobs, so they put all their expectations on me. My mother was only able to spend the family savings when she invested in my education."

(participant 2)

As for educational fees, participants 1, 3,4,6, and 7 had received private lessons to improve their educational level. Some followed small classes for tutoring, while others received one-on-one training, which was more expensive. When answering the question of paying more education fees than their friends, participant 3 said, "We- this wave of people- are basically the only-child, so there were fewer comparable options. Compared with my non-only-child classmates, it costs much more." Participant 5 introduced her experience. "I didn't have a one-on-one class, but I had a tutor class in training institutions. Because all subjects are not good, I have to learn all subjects, which is a huge expense." Participant 6 explained that from the economic perspective, there is less of an economic burden than non-only-child families, so there would be a better investment in education. Participants 7 and 8 said that they had much more educational fees than their friends who were non-only-children. They would receive all kinds of educational attention, such as subscribing to extracurricular books and cultivating other interests and hobbies. Participant 10 explained the reason why he had a higher educational fee: as the Chinese saying goes, "expect one's son to be talented," his parents were eager to cultivate him into a successful person.

"Because of family conditions, I don't have more educational fees than my friend who is a non-only-child. I think there must be higher educational fees if I live in a better family with better economic ability." (participant 5)

The data obtained from the interview indicated that only-children considered that the OCP had an impact on education. This finding supports Yang's (2016) research.

4.4 Impacts of the OCP on personality

According to previous research, the OCP had certain effects on only-children's characteristics, but the effects were not clear. In this study, I further explored how only-children viewed the impacts of the OCP on their characteristics and found that the impact of the OCP on only-children's personality is inconsistent.

When asking about the differences in characteristics from non-only-children, four opinions were mentioned, which can be concluded with key words including "selfish and narcissistic," "weak independent ability," "no differences," "more selfish and narcissistic," and "multifaceted factors."

"I think only-children may be more selfish and narcissistic. For me, maybe because my parents got married quite late and they gave birth to me when they were old, they spoiled me very much. So I don't want to be aggravated in my dealings with other people." (participant 2)

Participants 4 and 6 hold the similar opinion that only-children were more self-centered because they didn't have any siblings, and they didn't know how to share and take care of others. The aforementioned opinions were similar to the research before the 1990s, when researchers held the view that only-children were more selfish, self-centered, and arrogant (Falbo & Polit, 1986).

Furthermore, there may be a difference in ability, especially the ability to be independent, which might be associated with less independent time and space for only-children.

"Although there are no differences in characteristics of only-children and non-only-children, only-children have worse ability to be autonomous and independent than non-only-children." (participant 3)

"As an only-child, I don't feel any different from non-only-children in terms of my personality. And I feel that only-children show a great advantage in terms of concentration, independence, and other aspects of their personality." (participant 6)

This was consistent with the research of Feng & Wang (2014). He conducted a survey on China's first-generation only-children in urban areas and found that there are some differences in independent ability between only-children and non-only-children and no obvious differences in work, love, marriage, interpersonal relationships, self-cognition, etc. However, participants 9 and 10 said that only-children had better characteristics, including independent ability, working competence, and thinking ability, etc. This was in line with Yang's (2016) research. After investigating, she found that only-children were more easy-going and active than non-only-children.

Moreover, the other four participants said that the number of children is just one of the affecting factors while personality was formed under the influence of different kinds of factors. "It cannot be generalized, there are also many affecting factors such as parenting styles and attitudes" (participant 7). Feng & Wang (2014) explored the influence of parenting educational styles on only-children's personalities and made the conclusion that parents' different educational thoughts breed different parenting methods, which had a great influence on the formation of children's pathological

personalities. He also stressed that doting and indulgent parenting may easily cause children's pathological personalities.

When asked whether they feel lonely, most participants say yes. They were sometimes very envious of the non-only-child, who was accompanied by siblings. Only participants 9 and 10 stated that they don't feel lonely.

From the interview, it cannot be denied that only-children considered that the OCP did have some effects on only-children's personalities. However, they are also of the view that personality is formed by multiple factors. From the interview, I found that the OCP may have impacted people's personalities due to the inconsistent answers from the participants. These findings are the same as the previous research, which says that the impact of the OCP on individual only-children's personalities is inconsistent.

4.5 Impacts of the OCP on family responsibility

The research found that the OCP had an impact on the only-child's responsibility. The OCP played a significant role in increasing the responsibility of only-children. By looking through relevant research, it could be concluded that the impact of OCP on responsibility is mainly reflected in the issue of caring for the elderly.

Through the interview, the research further verified that the responsibility of only-children under the OCP showed no signs of abating. Only-children had a clear understanding of what they would face in the future and had mentally prepared for it. Therefore, they were willing and glad that they could take care of their parents and even grandparents, which also demonstrated that only-children felt a strong sense of

responsibility for their families. This was not consistent with the research of Yang (2014). He believed that the younger generation pursues individual rights and happiness, often neglecting their responsibility to support the elderly.

Compared with non-only-children families, only-children did take on more responsibility. Children with siblings could share the responsibility of caring for parents and implement a rotation system that could not only reduce children's burden but also ensure that parents receive better care.

"Although non-only-children should take on the same responsibility of caring for the elderly, it will be easier both financially and mentally because they have siblings." (participant 8)

"I will take care of them when they are old. Maybe I will give them financial support for them to do what they want." (participant 6)

"I'll support my parents financially what they want to do." (participant 4)

Thus, the data obtained from the interview indicated that only-children considered that the OCP had an impact on family responsibility. They did not regard it as an enormous burden but were willing to take on this responsibility.

5 Conclusions

This research explored how only-children view the impact of the OCP on five individual aspects: parent-child relationships, health, education, personality and family responsibility. Based on the interview, it could be concluded the opinion of 10 only-children and made a contrast with previous research. The conclusions are as follows:

This research found that the only-children considers that OCP had an impact on parents' and children's relationship in increasing their communication opportunities. The only-children viewed that the policy had no impact on only-children's mental or physical health. The only-children hold the opinion that the OCP to have had an impact on education by increasing children's access to educational resources, enhancing academic outcomes, and promoting women's education. The only one child stated that the OCP to have had no impact on personality. They considered the OCP to have increased their family responsibility, but interestingly they were willing to take on this responsibility.

There are some limitations of this research. First, there was inadequate preparation of questions when conducting interviews. Specifically, more precise questions should have been asked about each aspect.

Second, regarding the aspect of personality, an initial definition of personality was lacking. An important reason for the lack of clarity in the conclusions drawn from the interviews was the lack of definition, which prevented the interviewer from getting to the point and made the interviewee's answers unfocused. It would be more

helpful to conduct another interview on whether OCP affects the personality of an individual, using a more precise definition of personality.

Third, due to the influence of Covid-19 pandemic, I did not back to China to interview participants face to face. Online semi-structure interview prevented participants from speaking their minds completely.

Although this research has such limitations, this research would complement previous research on the OCP. It explores the views and perceptions of only-children on this policy from a practical point of view. This study has gone some way to changing the social perception of only children and has led to a better perception of only children by the social group. Future research could focus on more detailed definitions of and more specific influences of the OCP on family responsibilities.

References

- Ahn, N. (1994). Effects of the one-child family policy on second and third births in Hebei, Shaanxi and Shanghai. *Journal of Population Economics*, 7(1), 63–78.
- Anderson, E., Burger, S., Cook, B., Ebersold, S., Enders, J., Kim, T., Bras, H. L., Manley-Casimir, S., Marmolejo, F., & Yonezawa, A. (2008). The Reversal of gender inequalities in higher education. *Demography*, 3(6), 21-22.
- Beal-Hodges, M., Loh, C. P., & Stranahan, H. (2011). The impact of China's 'one-child' policy on the educational attainment of adolescents. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Economics*, 23(2), 201–221.
- Bulte, E., Heerink, N., & Zhang, X. (2010). China's one-child policy and 'The mystery of missing women': Ethnic minorities and male-biased sex ratios. *Oxford Bulletin of Economics and Statistics*, 73(1), 21–39.
- Chee, W. (2021). How family policies redefine families: The case of Mainland China–Hong Kong cross - border families. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 30(4), 478–489.
- Chen, H., Wei, T., Wang, H., Zhou, Y., Chen, H., Sun, L., Xiao, S., Ma, W., Zhao, H., Chen, G., Liang, X., Zhang, D., Zheng, W., Zhou, Y., & Yu, Z. (2022). Association of China's two-child policy with changes in number of births and birth defects rate, 2008–2017. *BMC Public Health*, 22(1).
- Cheng, S., Jia, C., & Wang, Y. (2020). Only children were associated with anxiety and depressive symptoms among college students in China. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(11).

- Cheng, Y., Gietel-Basten, S., & Han, X. (2019). Assessing the impact of the "one-child policy" in China: *A Synthetic Control Approach*. *14* (11)
- David, H & Zhou, Y. (2014). China's one-child policy. *Some Unintended Consequences*. *Economic Affairs*. *34*(1).
- DeJonckheere, M., & Vaughn, L. M. (2019). Semistructured interviewing in primary care research: A balance of relationship and rigour. *Family Medicine and Community Health*, *7*(2).
- Falbo, T., & Polit, D. F. (1986). Quantitative review of the only child literature: Research evidence and theory development. *Psychological Bulletin*, *100*(2), 176–189.
- Festini, F. (2004). Twenty five years of the one child family policy in China. *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health*, *58*(5), 358–360.
- Gietel-Basten, S., Han, X., & Cheng, Y. (2019). Assessing the impact of the “one-child policy” in China: A synthetic control approach. *PLOS ONE*, *14*(11).
- Howden, D., & Zhou, Y. (2014). China's one-child policy: Some unintended consequences. *Economic Affairs*, *34*(3), 353–369.
- Howden, D., & Zhou, Y. (2014). China's one-child policy: Some unintended consequences. *Economic Affairs*, *34*(3), 353–369.
- Huang, Y. (2021). Family size and children's education: Evidence from the one-child policy in China. *Population Research and Policy Review*, *41*(1), 317–342.
- Kadoya, Y., & Sano, Y. (2018). Effects of China's one-child policy on group

- cooperation: Survey evidence. *Journal of the Asia Pacific Economy*, 23(3), 327–339.
- Liao L, P., & Zhang C, L. (2020). Does the son preference harm girls' health? evidence from China family panel studies. *Economic Review*.31(2), 14-15.
- Mary, B. (2011). The impact of China's 'one-child' policy on the educational attainment of adolescents. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Economics*, 23(2), 201–221.
- Nie, J. (2014). China's one-child policy, a policy without a future: Pitfalls of the "Common Good" argument and the authoritarian model. *Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics*, 23(3), 272-287.
- Settles, B. H., Sheng, X., Zang, Y., & Zhao, J. (2012). The one-child policy and its impact on Chinese families. *International Handbook of Chinese Families*, 627–646.
- Song, S., & Wang, W. (2019). Testing the only-child advantage in cognitive development in the context of China's one-child policy. *Population Research and Policy Review*, 38(6), 841–867.
- Tan, G. (2012). *The one-child policy and privatization of education in China*. TRACE. Retrieved February 25, 2012, from <https://trace.tennessee.edu/internationaleducation/vol42/iss1/3>
- Tao, G., Qiu, J., Li, B., & Tseng, W. (1996). Comparison of behavior development between only children and children with siblings: *Chinese Mental Health Journal*, 10, 1-5.

- Toni F. (2011). Mental health and interpersonal relationships of the college students with no siblings---Also on the "Stereotype" of the only children. *Journal of Guangxi University for Nationalities*.33(5)
- Wang, H., Kim, K., Burr, J. A., & Wu, B. (2020). Parent-child relationships and aging parents' sleep quality: A comparison of one-child and multiple-children families in China. *Journal of Aging and Health*, 32(10), 1602-1613.
- Wang, W, & Song, S. (2019). Testing the only-child advantage in cognitive development in the context of China's one-child policy. *Population Research and Policy Review*, 38(6), 841-867.
- Wang, X., Feng, X., & Poston, D. L. (2014). China's one-child policy and the changing family. *Handbook on the Family and Marriage in China*, 175-186.
- Yang, Q. (2016). Ten years after. *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, 16, 113-118.
- Zhong, H. (2017). The effect of sibling size on children's health and education: Is there a quantity-quality trade-off? *Journal of Development Studies* 53 (8): 1194-1206.
- Zhu, W. X.; Lu, L., & Hesketh, T. (2009). China's excess males, sex-selective abortion, and one child policy: *Analysis of Data from 2005 National Intercensus Survey*. *BMJ*, 338(2), b1211-b1211.