INTRODUCTION

A child is the center of family and deserves attention for a healthy and flourishing society. In the present century, the single child family is the fastest growing family throughout the world. There are many fold reasons for moving towards the trend of having small sized families. Population explosion has been the most ferocious devil trying to eat up many systems of the world due to devaluation of the economy and its impinging upon the social structure and the ultimate weight is going to rest upon the smallest unit of the society, that is, the family. In China, the government took the lead in enforcing one child policy on the people with the objective to control population explosion and improve economy. Mandate by the government divided the people sociologically and psychologically on pros and cons of one child policy in order to change their mental set to accept it voluntarily.

As mentioned above, family size changed throughout the world. There are several reasons why the occurrence of one-child families is great and growing. In the first place, having only one child allows the mother more opportunity to work outside the home. Second, many parents fail to have the desired number of two or three children because of premature marital breakup in some countries like the United States. One in three only children in the United States lives in a broken home (Blake, 1981b). Third, infertility sometimes precludes the birth of additional children. The rate of secondary infertility has risen somewhat during the last few decades; e.g., as a result of earlier sexual activity and a delay in birth of first child. China represents a special case, where restriction to one child is more or less mandated by the government in order to limit the population (Veenhoven and Verkuyten, 1989).

Whatever the factors may be which brought the paradigm shift in the size of family, the most important feature of most of the research studies has been the change in thinking about preferring quantity or
quality of children. A comparison can easily be made between the families with single children and families having children with siblings. A very pertinent question has been receiving fluctuating responses as to whether reduction in the number of children in a family would mean enhancing their quality of life. The dilemma which needs to be resolved is whether the balance will be tilted in favour of parental financial resources, parental care and protection towards the single children by ignoring the learning of quality of sharing, mutual love, competitiveness and adjustment in the presence of siblings or the vice versa. On the touchstone of quality, it is significant to see whether peers can be substitute for the sibling relationship as the number of one child family is on the rise.

Yang (2006) reported that without favorable educational policies, the quality of life for children decreases with increase in numbers and with the presence of an older sibling. Results of his study provide evidence to support the idea that restricting family size and promoting sibling equality will necessarily help increase average human capital investment in developing settings. Thus, policy makers who aim to improve adolescents’ educational wellbeing should advocate small family norms.

Li et al. (2008) in their paper tested the theory of quantity-quality trade-off of children by using a representative census data set from China. They found evidence that family size was negatively correlated with children’s education. It was further found that the effect of quantity on quality was not uniform between rural and urban areas. More precisely, the trade-off relationship was more evident in rural China, but the effect diminished or even vanished for urban China. It was also found that the effect differed according to the gender of the child and the mother’s educational level. A recent study by Li and Zhang (2007) which was analysed by Li et al. (2008), showed that children were better off in China with one child policy. Bredenkamp (2009), in a study found a better health status of single children.
The following quotation from Thorpe (1950) seems to describe the general attitude of the public toward the only child and his parents:

“If he fights with others, it's because he never learned to share. If he doesn't fight, it's because he has been dominated by adults and has never learned to stand up for his rights. If he is happy, it's because he has everything. If he cries, it's because he's spoiled and must have his own way. God pity the only child, and have mercy on his parents.”

Psychiatrist Alan Summers once wrote, “if you want a happy life, don’t be an only child. But if you want to achieve, create have interesting experiences, reach your potential, then you should be an only child . . .” (Sifford, 1989). Hou (2009) stated that the name "Me Generation" is the best portraiture of the self-centeredness of the post-1980s generation.

By definition, only children are people who grow up without siblings. Only child is the sole offspring of a two-parent (mother and father) dyad. No other children are in the family apart from this one child (Schiller, 2005).

Only Children Versus Children With Siblings

There are fluctuating opinions about whether the only children are at advantageous or disadvantageous position as compared to the children with siblings. Adler (1964) has stated that single-children have difficulties with every independent activity and sooner or later they become useless in life. Taffel (1977) is of the opinion that the only child is handicapped by the absence of a sibling. According to Falbo (1982, 1987) also one perspective views only child as problematic and disadvantaged. This idea, initially proposed by early psychiatrists and psychologists is very much in line with the popular thinking that only children tend to be overly indulged. Since parents are more inclined to giving in to the demands and expectations of their single-child, only children may turn out to be self-
centered, dependent, temperamental, and maladjusted (Falbo, 1982; Roberts and Blanton, 2001; Mancillas, 2006). Also, since only children do not have siblings to play with, they may lack social skills to interact properly with other children.

Blake (1981b) reported that 76 per cent of the people in the United States of America feel that being an only child has its disadvantages. Such negative stereotyping is prevalent across cultures and is found not only in the United States but also in the Netherlands, (Veenhoven and Verkuyten, 1989), Great Britain (Laybourn, 1990), China (Falbo and Poston, 1993) and Korea (Doh and Falbo, 1999).

Other researchers like Cutts and Moselay (1954), Gewirtz and Gewirtz (1965), Falbo (1982), Claudy (1984), Polit and Falbo (1987), Day et al. (1993), Laybourn (1994), Shelagh (2006) have maintained that prejudices surrounding single children do not have any basis. Falbo and Polit (1986) argue that there is no evidence to support such stereotypes which are based on prejudices in the eyes of the socio-culturally biased beholder.

Thompson (1974) found that only-children were regarded as “generally maladjusted, self-centered and self-willed, attention seeking and dependent on others, temperamental and anxious, generally unhappy and unlikable, and yet somewhat more autonomous than a child with two siblings.”

After one-child policy was implemented in China, approximately 70 percent of families in urban areas were one child families with a fixed “4-2-1” structure representing four grandparents, two parents and one child (Jiao et al., 1996). Since then, the label “spoiled brat” or “little emperor” has been used to describe only children, in particular, only sons (Liu et al. 2005). The Chinese preference for male children, a long term cultural influence of a feudal economic structure, and the one-child policy may exacerbate discrimination against girls (Short et al., 2001). Now that parents can have only one child, some parents are disappointed when they have daughters. Indeed, patterns of abortion and abandonment indicate
that girls are less welcome family members in some Chinese families (Coale and Banister, 1994).

Claudy (1984) claimed that some only children lack sociability and friends and have more mental health problems (Howe and Madgett, 1975). On the contrary, children with siblings are described as more persistent and cooperative, with higher peer prestige and better peer relationships (Claudy, 1984). Jiao et al. (1986) indicated that only children are also found low in behavioural and emotional control and high in frustration proneness. Liu et al. (2005) stated that only children are likely to be overprotected and spoiled, which may lead to their negative perception of themselves psychologically. Bayrakal and Kope (1990) mentioned that only children are often perfectionists.

Wang et al., (1992) expressed that research on the only child in China has led to two opposite views. One view states that only children have severe disadvantages that will create problems for the children themselves in trying to fit into society, as well as causing problems for society. Research along this line views only children as problematic and suggests that they will experience difficulties in life and with their personalities (Jiao et al., 1986; Tseng et al., 1988). The opposing view stresses that as they grow up, only children will learn to cope with any difficulties through interactions with their peers at school and later at work, and that the advantages and disadvantages would “even out” eventually. This line of research suggests there are no significant differences between only children and children with siblings if not advantageous toward the only child (Falbo and Poston, 1993).

Rosenberg and Hyde (1993) predicted that all only children are not the same. They are normal, well-adjusted and impulsive. This ambivalence is relatively easy to understand when one realizes that only children have always existed in an adult world. When they finally get to be adults, they become somewhat more comfortable with their situation. Often articulate and mature, the only child is typically highly ambitious and achievement oriented.
Introduction

Xiaohua (2005) in a survey published in China Daily, reported that more than 60 per cent of Chinese young people growing up without siblings opined that they felt lonely in their childhood. More than 58 per cent of these young people admitted they were lonely, selfish and willful. More than 66 per cent of them expressed disappointment at having no brothers or sisters with whom they can share their happiness or sorrow in life. About 46 per cent of them, who were born in the 1980s, said that they would prefer to have two children themselves.

Researchers further indicated that only-children tend to spend more time alone, or in the presence of adults, than other children do and hence, they may learn how to entertain themselves acquiring preferences for solitary activities (Falbo and Polit, 1986; Polit and Falbo, 1987). Sorensen (2008) suggested that such time alone may also result in only-children acquiring vivid imaginations, possibly due to the fact that they spend more time in solitude than children with siblings. She also mentions that only-children may experience difficulties such as low self-image and a sense of isolation if they do not have anyone to compare themselves to, or exchange opinions about their parental experiences.

According to Roberts and Blanton (2001) some only-children may long for a sibling to share emotionally challenging experiences with. Another view is that only-children do not seem to endure negative effects as a result of their continuous exposure to adult company, nor does their personality seem to be underdeveloped from engaging in increased solitary activities (Koroll, 2008). Roberts and Blanton (2001) opined that being an only-child might be considered to be beneficial in many ways. Researchers seem to agree that only-children’s self-esteem, relations with parents and social competence seems to be at an advantage in comparison to peers with siblings (Blake, 1981b; Falbo and Polit, 1986; Wang et al., 2000; Mottus et al., 2008).

It may be postulated that only-child may prefer the company of adults due to constantly being in their company during their younger years.
According to Blake (1981b) only-children not only imitate the linguistic behaviour of adults, but other behaviour as well. Only-child may also display maturity when compared to their age-mates as a result of these concentrated interactions with adults, and this constant interaction may not pose as a disadvantage to only-children (Rossi, 2010).

Only-children are often perceived as more mature, when compared to sibling children of the same age, due to their constant interaction with adults. Only-children and first-born children tend to receive more parental attention than do later-born children (Roberts and Blanton, 2001). However, as a result, an only-child may also receive excessive attention, mature relatively early, and due to the absence of siblings, possibly become selfish, demanding, dependent and moody, in comparison to children with siblings (Travares et al., 2004). Such findings allude to difficulties only-children supposedly experience in developing relationships with peers, finding it easier to identify and relate to adults (Rossi, 2010). The family situation is deemed important for the social development of children (Louw et al., 1998; Dunn, 2000). A child’s family plays a significant role in his/her development and adjustment, serving as role models for the child and influencing their social development. When a child is born, they are recognised into a world of unique circumstances, which to a great extent are established by their parents, other caregivers as well as siblings within their home environment (Bedwell, 2009). A study by Tong et al., (2010) examined gender differences in the correlations between intelligence and developmental problems as well as social competence and concluded that parenting also influences the development of children in various ways.

In terms of the family structure, where there is only one child, triangulation between the family members namely; mother, father and child tends to be inevitable (Koroll, 2008) and one person is caught in the middle and identified as the person out. Walsh (2003) described triangulation as occurring when two members (usually the parents) entangle a vulnerable third person (usually the child). Most often parents benefit from the support of each other, however, this may lead to their child feeling isolated and
disconnected from the family system. If parents feel that their children are becoming isolated or disconnected parents may compensate for this by becoming attentive and overly involved in their child’s life (Koroll, 2008). Sorensen (2008) suggested that mothers of only-child children seem to put in a lot of effort with regards to arranging friends to visit and organizing exciting things to do for their child. Thus, the mother’s role in an only-child’s life seems to be an important one with regards to encouraging opportunities for friendships to develop.

Only-children realize that their parents are solely dependent on them (Hawke and Knox, 1978). Therefore they may feel burdened and pressured when they are faced with the responsibility of aging parents (Roberts and Blanton, 2001).

According to Wang and Fong (2009), popularly called “little suns” and “little emperors”, single children were lavished with parental attention, luxuries, and opportunities not experienced by any previous Chinese generation. Having one-child leaves parents with one chance to be a parent and this may cause them to bestow unrealistic expectations on their children and pressure their children to excel in areas in which their children may not be interested in (Rossi, 2010).

Literature yields different views on the role of siblings within the family. According to Coles (2003), although only-children seem to have closer relationships with their parents, siblings are viewed as playing an important role in the emotional and sexual development of each other as they assist in the process of distancing from one’s parents. He further stated that the love one shares with siblings is an essential way of learning to relate to others in adult life.

In the past, the pure fact that only-children did not have siblings was reason enough to assume they were at a disadvantage when compared to children with siblings (Polit and Falbo, 1987). Falbo (1977) suggested that because only-children lack sibling rivalry they assume a more trusting style of interaction as they frequently obtain help and nurturance from their
parents, which in turn causes them to perceive these same expectations from others.

Falbo (1977, 1978a, 1978b, 1981, 1983, 1984) has made significant contributions to only-child literature. Early in her research, she found that only children were more likely to be cooperative. She attributed this cooperation to a more trusting style of interaction that developed from a lack of sibling rivalry. Falbo and Polit (1986) conducted a meta-analysis of only-child research that was pivotal to only-child literature. In this review, the authors noted: “Regardless of their theoretical orientation, researchers have often assumed that the absence of siblings has a profound impact on the developmental outcomes of children.” They also acknowledge that investigators tend to test “the popular stereotype of the only-child.”

Falbo and Polit (1986) distinguished two popular theories that have been used to understand the development of only-children: social comparison theory (Zimbardo and Formica, 1963) and the confluence model (Zajone and Markus, 1975). Typically, differences found in only-children are explained in a post hoc fashion, which Falbo and Polit (1986) suggestion has lead to inconsistencies in the research. The three mechanisms Falbo and Polit (1986) used to explain results in research on only children are: 1) the only-child is deprived of the opportunity to learn from siblings, 2) the only-child holds a unique status and 3) the nature of the parent-child relationship is important. In reviewing 115 studies, Falbo and Polit (1986) found that, “Theories related to only-child deprivation and only-child uniqueness were discredited by the results of the six meta-analyses”. In fact, the analyses revealed that, excluding first-borns and people from two child families, only-children surpassed all others in achievement and intelligence. Further, only children surpassed all others in character. Under the category of character, they considered studies that looked at leadership, personal control/autonomy and maturity/cooperativeness/citizenship. The significance of parent-child relationships to child development proved to be a critical factor for children in family of all sizes. Mellor (1990) found results consistent with those of Falbo and Polit (1986).
Another study by Polit et al. (1980) found that only children had higher educational levels, higher occupational status, and smaller families. Female only children were more apt to be working and to have planned their families before marriage. In this same study, the research did not support the concept of only children as emotionally or socially handicapped human beings. After reviewing 141 studies of the personality characteristics of only children, Polit and Falbo (1987) concluded that in most cases only children scored about the same as children with siblings, except in two characteristics where scores were significantly higher—in self-esteem and achievement motivation.

Polit and Falbo (1988) reported that only-children were never disadvantaged. Indeed, only-children had an advantage over later born children and children from large families. They suggested that a high quality of the only-child's relationship with his or her parents contributed to the advantages of the only-child. Only children generally scored slightly better than others on intelligence when they are young. However, during adolescence, the small advantage in intelligence disappeared. Interviewed in 2004 about the robust nature of this finding, Falbo (2004) noted, “These children tend to score slightly higher in verbal ability, go farther in school and have a little bit higher self-esteem.” Blake (1989) also held the view that only children appear to have and maintain an advantage in achievement. Even when the socio-economic characteristics of their parents are controlled, analyses indicated that only children tend to complete more years of education than others and are likely to have more prestigious jobs.

Hawke and Knox (1978) found that the advantages for the only child included more privacy and avoidance of sibling rivalry, so they are generally self-confident, resourceful and are successful students. For parents, advantages include more time for personal development and greater marital happiness.

Brophy (1989) on the basis of his research established that only children seem to have better self-esteem and are higher achievers than
children who have siblings. Only children, being firstborn themselves, tend to exploit traits more similar to those of other firstborn children. Veenhoven and Verkuyten (1989) also found that only-children adolescents appeared to display more life satisfaction than their peers with siblings. Thus only-children’s personalities develop individually, and correlate with the way they interpret and approach social situations. Travares et al. (2004) suggested that only-children have not presented personality problems more frequently than children with siblings. Gee (1992) found that women who are only-children displayed differences in areas of life course characteristics and life course timing variables.

A study by Byrd et al. (1993) suggested that without siblings, it is possible that the only child may have “greater anxiety with aggressive feelings and the increased dependency.” Newman (1994) on the basis of empirical research on sibling relationship proved that friendly relationships with sibling is very important in having social experiences and to maintain such a relationship in a positive manner requires insight into another’s motives and feelings, tolerance, self control and understanding for others’ behavior and incompetence. Spending time with siblings can help maintain positive relationship. Mueller and Vandell (1995) found that children with siblings have an outlet for interaction and are more responsive socially to other children of their own age. Among only children, however, lack of siblings has repercussions for the child’s later social interactions.

According to Rossi (2010), it appears that conflicting ideas regarding the social development of only- children still exist and there does not seem to be justified empirical evidence to show whether only-children are ‘socially deprived’ or ‘socially well-adjusted’. There are also many factors, which contribute to the social experiences of individuals and therefore there does not seem to be one specific factor, which is the sole determinant as to whether an individual adjust socially or not.
Introduction

Gee (1992) wrote that, “...the bulk of evidence tends not to support the truthfulness of negative beliefs about only-children. Indeed, one wonders why study after study has set out to show if only-children 'really' are disadvantaged...” The way in which much of the historic research was designed perpetuated the stereotype. It explored the stereotype and did not look for disconfirming data. Research that does not support the negative beliefs includes Gee’s own research. Her research showed that adult female only-children were more likely to attain higher levels of education than those women with siblings. Claudy et al. (1979) indicated that only-children were more mature, cognitively superior and socially sensitive than their peers with siblings; it also indicated only children are only somewhat less social. Only children tend to be more like older children in that they enjoy being the center of attention. Because they spend more time in the company of adults, rather than siblings, they tend to mature sooner and to adopt adult like behaviors earlier in life” (Engler, 2009).

The results of a study by Feldman (1978) revealed that only-born women were indeed resourceful, assertive, and confident. The only-born were found to be most conventional, independent, and resourceful of the participant groups. Women with sisters were the most dependent and conventional. The women with brothers were the most responsible as well as more dependent than the only-born women, in addition to having more interest in men. A study by Snell et al. (1986) found that male only children had a low work- high competitiveness profile and female only children have a high work- high competitiveness profile.

Wright (1987) supported the idea that only children are not at a disadvantage as a result of their unique life circumstance. Richards and Goodman (1996), found that only children, when compared to other children in small families, had more similar differences in their psychiatric presentations. In general, the parents of the only children were more likely to seek medical advice.

Kitzman et al. (2002), found that the only child did not differ with regard to the number of close relationships or the quality of those
relationships; however, they were less liked by their classmates as a group. Among the groups of children, no differences were found in the number of mutual friends or the quality of these friendships.

In a within-family study, Beck et al. (2006) found that first-borns score higher on dominance and later-borns on sociability. Being first-born was also found to confer a significant educational as well as earnings advantages, while being last-born to confer none (Kantarevic and Mechoulan 2006).

Lee (2007) discussed that China’s one child policy had minimal influence on the family values of China daughters. She further emphasized that with the limited choice in the gender or number of their children, these parents had learnt to accept their daughters as well. They showered these only-daughters with their unconditional love and affection. Contrary to some existing literature, these Chinese daughters were not excessively selfish and heavily spoiled. They still had filial devotion towards their parents. They planned to live close to and take care of parents in their senior years.

A study was designed by Liang (2007) to understand only children in China in three ways. Firstly, how their parents raised them. Secondly, to reveal the impact of policy and culture on parenting and children’s development. Thirdly, Chinese parents’ high expectations for only children have often been criticized and considered as a negative influence on only children’s development. Current Chinese parents were often described as all wishing their sons and daughters to become “dragons” and “phoenix.” In ancient Chinese legend, dragon and phoenix were mythical animals that had symbolic meanings. The Feudal Chinese society used the dragon as the symbol of an emperor and phoenix as the symbol of a queen. Thus, the Chinese saying “expect a son or a daughter to become a dragon or a phoenix” meant expecting the son or the daughter to be successful since parents were putting such high expectations on their only children. However, from a gender perspective, which might reveal the positive side of high parental expectations, wishing the only children to become
“phoenix” or “dragon” phenomenon would say about Chinese parents’ attitudes toward gender. Since high expectations from parents could be an indication in the sense that parents have the same investment for their children regardless of children’s gender. During the study, positive impacts of having one child were that parents can have high quality investment in the child’s education. There was less gender discrimination.

According to Hou (2009), single children received comprehensive parental attention and support and are widely considered as spoiled “little emperors/empresses”. But at the same time they experienced great pressure to perform with academic excellence in order to be capable to excel in the competition of the global market economy.

In a study by Dogra (2011), the findings were that the most significant aspect of the single child families was that the parents spend high quality time with their child. However, mothers were more closely involved in various activities with their child. About half of the single-child respondents in this present study were overprotected. Strikingly, over vigilant attitude of the parents was appreciated. A majority of the single-children reported that their parents fulfill their demands more easily but they have high academic expectations from them. A majority of the single-child families, reflected a high level of mutual trust. In most of the cases, the children were comfortable while discussing various issues with their parents. However, a majority of them were found to be closer to their mothers. All the single-child respondents admitted that they have a good friendship network and most of them initiated the friendship on their own. A vast majority of the single-child respondents feel happy when people visit their homes. This reflected their interactive and friendly nature. A majority of single-child respondents in this present study had an average to cordial level relationship with their classmates/friends, teachers, relatives and parents. A substantial proportion of the single-child respondents were average in their academic performance and all of them were actively involved in one or more extracurricular activities. The single-children affirmed that they possess both positive and
negative attributes. Only a few single-children expressed a desire to have a sibling for interaction or company, while a vast majority of them rated their family as better or not different from other families.

A study by Li and Lau (2012) confirmed that ‘only child’ status, gender, and household registration matter. The question was that was the ‘only child’ more demanding and difficult to please as they enjoyed statistically significantly more attention and investment but felt less satisfied with his/her relationships with parents and friends? Was it because an ‘only child’ received more attention from parents or even extended family members such as grandparents and was more able to get his/her way, and so had a higher regard for themselves and a greater sense of being able to control situations and events? Furthermore, the study found being an ‘only child’ was associated with better school performance.

Cameron et al. (2013) described how they used techniques from experimental economics to measure behavioral differences between the pre- and post- only child policy (OCP) generations. They investigated the impact of the only child policy (OCP) on altruism, trust, trustworthiness, attitudes toward risk, and competitiveness. They observed only child policy (OCP) could be thought of as a natural experiment that enabled them to separate out the effect of being an only child from the effects of family background. In addition to their experimental results, personality survey questions revealed that the only child policy (OCP) cohorts were also substantially more pessimistic, less conscientious, and possibly more neurotic.

Feng et al. (2013) commented on the China’s one child policy. They opined that it will be added to the other deadly errors in recent Chinese history, including the famine in 1959–61 caused largely by the industrialization and collectivization campaigns of the late 1950s, and the Cultural Revolution of the late 1960s and early 1970s. While those grave mistakes cost tens of millions of lives, the harms done were relatively short-lived and were corrected quickly afterwards. The one-child policy, in contrast, will surpass them in impact by its role in creating a society with a
Introduction

seriously undermined family and kin structure, and a whole generation of future elderly and their children whose well-being will be seriously jeopardized.

Historical Perspective

Research on the only-child phenomenon started in the west. A survey of only-child literature reveals that past research progressed in approximately three stages. **The beginning stage, from 1898 to 1920**, treated the only child as the “problem child.” Feng (1990) found that early research was done primarily by European psychologists who studied only children and the problems they faced while growing up. The characteristics of the only child were found to be overwhelmingly negative, and psychologists believed that there were reasons to treat the only child phenomenon as a disease. It was concluded that only children require special attention in education. Feng (1990) further stated that early interest in only-child research also spread across scholars in the United States, the former Soviet Union, and Japan.

**Hall (1898)** is quoted in a number of articles saying, “Being an only-child is a disease in itself” (Fenton, 1928). Bohannon (1898) completed research under Hall’s guidance at Clark University and his summary of 18 case studies, derived from a review of 100 case studies, reads: “These [only] children are unmistakably below the average in health and vitality.” Brill (1922) stated that “It would be best for the individual and the race that there should be no only children.” Bossard and Boll (1943) wrote of adult only-children: “Often, only- children seem to be retarded when they set out from the family to other circles, where they have to meet strangers as equals and make their way among them.”

**The second stage, from the 1920s to the 1970s**, generally recognised that there was little difference between only children and children with siblings in terms of health condition, intellectual activities, personality characteristics and social life. Leshan (1960), for example, stated that only children were no worse than other children and that they might work out their relationships with other children in setting outside of the home.
Moreover, their loneliness at home might give them the drive to reach out and make friends with more children in school than children with siblings.

In the years thereafter, especially from the late 1970s to the present, research results are equivocal. The variety of findings is due to unsystematic methodologies used in the research. Some found that there were either negative differences against only children or no differences. Others, on the contrary, found advantageous characteristics in favour of the only child. Studies that found differences in negative terms toward the only child were few and relatively early in time. For example, Thompson (1974) asserted that only children were “generally maladjusted, self-centered and self-willed, attention-seeking and dependent on others, temperamental and anxious, generally unhappy, unlikeable, and yet somewhat more autonomous” than children with siblings. Blake (1981b) demonstrated that American only children were significantly “handicapped” in one way: they were less likely to live with both parents through adolescence. The high divorce rate in United States is to blame for many single parent only child families. Perhaps because of this, Falbo (1978b) found that, in terms of social abilities, only children were less affiliating, belonged to fewer organizations, and were reported to have fewer friends. Blake (1981b) also reported that only children visited friends and relatives more than often. Claudy et al. (1979) concluded that only children had less intense social lives than other children.

In current literature, psychologists and psychiatrists (Liu et al., 2005) have portrayed only-children negatively, such as developing abnormally, being associated with psychological disturbances (Jiao et al., 1986; Veenhoven and Verkuyten, 1989; Liu et al., 2005) and acquiring undesirable personality traits such as being egocentric, less affiliative and more maladjusted (Jiao et al., 1986; Wang et al., 2000; Liu et al., 2005). According to Veenhoven and Verkuyten (1989), only-children were also found to express less pleasant affect than sibling children. This may be because of the fact that they experience less deprivation in terms of affection, and therefore, have a lower need for affiliation (Falbo, 1977). Research in the 21st century has centered on the growth and
Introduction

development of only-children, focusing mostly on their personality attributes (Wang et al., 2000).

In China, research on the only child became of interest after 1980, just when the first generation of only children was born. This area of research covers cognitive development, language development, moral development of children and youth, development of self-consciousness, identification and promotion of supernormal children, and mental development of adolescents (Zhu and Lin, 1991). According to Feng (1990), research in China studies the only child in terms of psychological characteristics, educational issues, and relation with society.

Researchers have evaluated only children in terms of five main developmental outcomes: intelligence, achievement, personality, sociability, and psychological adjustment. Intelligence (usually measured in terms of standardized ability tests, such as IQ tests) and achievement (measured typically in terms of the number of years of education attained or the prestige of occupations) are the two most commonly studied outcomes. Studies have investigated the birth order and the influence of siblings on a variety of components such as Achievement Motivation (Snell et al., 1986), Self Esteem (Wright, 1987), Happiness (Veenhoven and Verkuyten, 1989), Psychiatric Referrals (Richards and Goodman, 1996), Peer Related Social Competence (Kitzmann et al., 2002) and willing to take risks perhaps as a result of either parental influence or smaller family networks. Studies of the social and behavioral characteristics of only children in China fail to establish systematic differences from children with siblings, though an advantage in motivation to achieve is also observed (Falbo and Poston, 1993; Shen and Yuan, 1999; Wang et al., 2000 and Liu et al., 2005). Some studies find that children in urban areas exhibit more negative personalities, including being neurotic and more susceptible to depression and anxiety (Falbo and Poston, 1993 and Liu et al., 2005).
Theoretical Perspective on Only Children

I. Psychoanalytic Theory

Freud (1949) the father of Psychoanalytic Theory created the theoretical structures id, ego and superego. Freud posited that the Ego serves as a mediator between the superego and the Id. According to Freud it is the Ego that organizes the individual’s mental processes and controls his/her motility (Strachey, 1964). The Superego represents authority and morality and assists in making socially appropriate decisions. The Id serves as a keeper of all instinctual drives and impulses and consists primarily of aggressive and libidinal energy. Borden (2000) discussed how classical psychoanalytical tradition underscores the primacy of sexual and aggressive drives and their ability to motivate their thoughts and feelings thereby causing motility. He also lends credence to the role of unconscious process, conflict, and defenses, and the importance of these constructs to the individual’s life experience. Freud’s theory brings into question whether or not the sibling experience serves as an integral part of the process when successfully diffusing drive energy for use in the Ego. This theory mainly rests upon the premise that individuals negotiate internal and external realities with the help of the Ego. The Ego mediates between the authoritarian Superego and the instinctual, primitive impulses of the Id. The impulses revolve mainly around the principle that humans are inherently aggressive and sexual in nature. This Id driven aggression provides an unfocussed energy, which the Ego helps balance with the Superego. A milestone in the development of the autonomous Ego occurs during the Pre-Oedipal and Oedipal stages of development when a triad is created between the child and the parents. This triad and subsequent lack of individualism could ultimately result in a lack of autonomy (Byrd et al., 1993). Narcissism (Arlow, 1972) and feelings of guilt (Hoffman and Weiss, 1987). According to Byrd et al. (1993) this unique triadic configuration can be prolonged for the child without siblings and this prolongation could result in a fixated and dependent relationship. Extensive triangulation with the parents, in absence of siblings, may impede the development of the autonomous Ego. The autonomous Ego is critical in mediating the aggressive drives put forth by
Introduction
the Id. A singleton that has not successfully achieved full autonomy may experience anger differently than those who developed appropriately as a result of having had siblings.

Psychoanalytic theory distinguishes “effects” from “drives” in that effects are considered to be “drive derivatives.” Accordingly, the effect “love” derives from libidinal energy and effect “anger” derives from aggressive energy. During a child’s first few years of life when a child’s relationship with its father helps it to loosen its symbiotic tie to its mother, the child is vulnerable to powerful affect states within the context of triangular relationships of the mother-father-child triad. The presence with siblings can serve to diffuse strong effects. The only child does not have the opportunity to benefit from such an affect/mitigating environmental factor (Parens, 1988, 2007).

Freud’s famous work influenced a number of other psychoanalysts, including Erikson. Although, Erikson’s (1950) psychosocial theory shared some similarities with Freud’s theory; it is considerably different in many ways. Rather than focusing on sexual interest as a driving force in development, Erikson believed that social interaction and experience played a crucial role. His eight-stage theory of human development described this process from infancy through death. During each stage, individuals are faced with a developmental conflict that impacts later functioning and further growth if not resolved.

II. Birth Order Research

Adler (1928, 1962, 1964, 1992) is one of the few psychoanalysts who pioneered interest in the area of birth order. He moved away from Freud’s emphasis on biological drives, believing human beings are primarily social. He advocated that the social environment and birth order were one of the major childhood influences from which the individual creates a style of life. There is potentially a favourable or unfavourable outcome from each birth order place and the only-child state is seen as less favourable and he states: “An only child is pampered by his mother. She is afraid of losing him and wants to keep him under her attention. He develops what is called a ‘mother
complex'; he is tied to his mother's apron strings and wishes to push his father out of the family picture" (Adler, 1962). He also felt that the rival for the only-child is not a sibling but a parent and the continual attention only-children receive causes problems in later life. He believed that only-children dislikes the prospect of another sibling. If they are unfortunate to have parents of a timid and pessimistic disposition, they will grow up over-anxious. Adler was also concerned whether parents raise a child for their own gratification and that the only-child would be particularly pampered and will not be given learning opportunities. As a consequence, these children would later discover that they were truly inferior, leading to problems in being a good, contributory member of society.

He further explained that parents of only children treat them in an exaggerated way, which in turn causes the child to see the world as a hostile place. The child may become habitually fearful and have problems with independent activities. Adler often emphasized one's birth order as having an influence on the style of life and the strengths and weaknesses in one's psychological make up. Birth order referred to the placement of siblings within the family. Adler believed that the firstborn child would be loved and nurtured by the family until the arrival of a second child. The second child would cause the first born to suffer feelings of dethronement, no longer being the center of attention. Recently, this has been developed further by Mitchell (2000, 2003) and Coles (2003).

Zajonc and Markus (1975) were one of the few birth order researchers that studied only-children. Only children presented anomalous data in Belmont and Marolla's (1973) research. Belmont and Marolla (1973) found a relationship between family size and intellectual performance and birth order and intellectual performance. The smaller the family, the greater the intellectual performances, and first-borns scored highest while last-borns scored the lowest. Only-children, however, scored below first-borns. Zajonc and Markus (1975) used a confluence model to understand these results. They developed confluence model that explained the effects of birth order and family size on intelligence. Intellectual development within the family context was conceived of as

21
depending on the cumulative effects of the intellectual environment, which, for the purposes of the model, consisted primarily of the siblings' and parents' intelligence. The confluence model predicted positive as well as negative effects of birth order, a necessarily negative effect of family size, and a handicap for the last born and the only child. They emphasized the experience of the individual as relevant to part of his or her environment. Zajonc and Markus (1975) attributed the depressed scores of the only-child to the lack of opportunity to act as an intellectual resource to younger siblings.

In a study, Forer (1976) concluded that only-children tend to be perfectionists, dominant and have highly developed verbal skills. She determined that while only-children could operate independently, they were always eager to please the authority figure. She also found only children to be generally more optimistic and self-sufficient. They were highly socially accepted but did not readily volunteer for group activities. Ernst and Angst (1983) devoted an entire book to demonstrating how research in the area of birth order effects is largely inconclusive and unreliable. They call for the development of coherent theories and explicit hypothesis, which is Falbo and Polit's (1986) approach to studying only-children.

The research on birth order and its effect on the development of aspects of personality, for example, intelligence, sociability, emotional stability and self-esteem are comparative studies containing the underlying assumption that these aspects of personality are measurable. These studies are often viewed as problematic because of the huge number of variables involved, but Sulloway (1996) reviewing the existing birth order research believed birth order is significant, although he stated the findings are often contradictory and easily dismissed. He employed evolutionary theory to understand how family dynamics affect personality development and how they are the primary source for historical change. He argued siblings raised together have more differences than people outside the family, because in evolutionary terms divergence maximizes competition for scarce resources. He sees only-children as less predictable psychologically and freer to develop aspects of their personality.
III. Theory of Mind

The Theory of Mind (TOM) paves the way for important co-lateral understandings like the ability to engage in pretend play, distinguish between see-know, appearance-reality and lies and deceptions which help in the understanding of others (empathy) and successful social adaptation (sociability). An Indian study by Das and Babu (2004) compared only children and children with sibling acquisition of a ‘Theory of Mind’ (TOM). They concluded that the presence of siblings was found to have a significant positive effect in all theory of mind tasks as well as free play. Perner et al. (1994) also concluded that children, who have intense relationships with their siblings, have a larger database for developing a theory of mind. A further study by Nelson et al. (1998) found that the larger the family the greater the potential for sibling social interaction which led to an increased efficiency in social and reasoning activities.

Conflict may give rise to negative emotions that call forth instructive mentalistic explanations (Lagatutta and Wellman, 2002) and sibling conflicts, together with team and competitive games, might also foster executive functioning skills like planning or inhibition of impulsiveness (Cole and Mitchell, 2000). In sharing in pretend play with siblings, or while talking about it, children are likely to gain exposure to imaginary ideas, skills for negotiating the sharing of fantasies, and rich role-taking experience (Harris, 2005). According to McAlister and Peterson (2007) all of these could conceivably assist ToM development in a manner not so readily available to an only-child.

Research by Farhadian et al. (2010) investigated whether the number of siblings in the family facilitates the development of theory of mind (ToM) in pre-school children and found that the children in the only child situation had the lower performance in ToM scores, compared to the children who had one sibling or who had two or more siblings. These results were consistent with several studies (Peterson, 2000; Peterson and McAlister, 2007).
IV. Rosenberg and Hyde’s (1993) Perspective

An article from Genetic Psychology by Rosenberg and Hyde (1993) addressed one of the problems encountered in only child research. Looking at the research on only-children over several decades, Rosenberg and Hyde (1993) have attempted to account for the conflicting data by suggesting that the only-children are not a homogeneous group. After summarizing the inconsistencies in the previous research, they suggested there are two opposing theoretical views. The first view stated only children suffered deprivation from lack of siblings and the learning experiences they offer and thereby are disadvantaged. The second view emphasised the uniqueness of only children who are never dethroned and have all the parental attention. Rosenberg and Hyde’s (1993) research suggested that there were ‘three distinct types of female only children’. Type 1 were labeled ‘normal, and well adjusted.’ Type 2 were labelled ‘impulsive, and acting out’ and Type 3 were labelled ‘first-bornish’. They claimed that these three types remain consistent over the lifespan from early adolescence to late middle age. Rosenberg and Hyde (1993) concluded that the qualities associated with the three ‘types’ of only-child emerging in their study were understandable. They believed one type of only-child research reflected the outcomes and views of the ‘disadvantaged category’ whilst other types of research reflected only-children in the ‘advantaged category’. Rosenberg and Hyde’s (1993) Type 1 is similar to a description of secure attachment that is normal and well adjusted. Type 2 and Type 3 similarly showed some insecure organized attachment patterns. It could mean that only-children do show a higher pattern of insecure attachment, Rosenberg and Hyde end their research cautioning against seeing only-children as one distinct category.

V. Only Child Matrix (Sorenson, 2008)

According to Sorenson (2008), at the centre of the only-child matrix is the intra-psychic, the private world of the only-child with two themes juxtaposed: that of the only child’s feeling of specialness coupled with a feeling of aloneness and lack of connection to others. This is a result of never having been dethroned by a sibling and at the same time missing out on the
social and emotional learning a sibling provides. Without the ‘rough and tumble’ of sibling interaction, opportunities for dealing with jealousy, anger, envy and conflict in the relatively safe environment of the home are lost. This can leave the only-child longing to remain in the specialness of their youth, without the essential emotional and social development required to make good relationships. Having spent a great deal of time in their own company, only-children develop ways of being alone which can be difficult to integrate in later relationships, resulting in them feeling of a greater tension between the human needs to have both space and intimacy. The intra-psychic world is surrounded by the inter-personal, for we are always inter-connected with other people.

![Figure 1 The Only-child matrix](image)

**Sorenson (2008)** stated that for the only-child the inter-personal world might bring particular problems originating in the family. Difficulties in separation and family enmeshment, although by no means inevitable, do challenge the only-child in a way people who have siblings may be more able to avoid. Feeling responsible for parents’ happiness, whether real or imagined, can have a detrimental effect on a developing sense of self. Feeling responsible for fulfilling parental expectations meant only-children carry a greater burden as the living testimony of parental achievement. Letting go of this responsibility is a challenge often unmet until the death of the parents. Lack of separation and enmeshment and continually being the centre of attention also affects other relationships causing friction and tension, exacerbated by the only-child’s attempts to avoid conflict by trying to placate and please or withdraw and isolate themselves. Finally, the extra-psychic or public world impacts on the other two worlds. The negative only-child stereotype has a detrimental affect on the only-child’s sense of self.

**VI. Attachment Theory**

*Bowlby (1988) and Ainsworth (1983)* introduced themselves to security theory *(Blatz, 1940)*, which both reformulated and challenged Freudian ideas, though Blatz chose not to recognise his debt to Freud because of the anti-Freudian climate that pervaded the University of Toronto at that time *(Blatz, 1966; Ainsworth, 1983).*

One of the major tenets of security theory was that infants and young children need to develop a secure dependence on parents before launching out into unfamiliar situations. *Salter (1940)* stated it this way:

> “Familial security in the early stages is of a dependent type and forms a basis from which the individual in other fields. Where familial security is lacking, the individual is handicapped by the lack of what might be called a secure base [italics added] from which to work.”
Having discussed the place of attachment within the more general framework of relationships, Bowlby's (1988) conceptualization of attachment can be considered as a goal-corrected control system (Waters and Deane, 1982).

The term “attachment behavioral system” refers to a psychological organization hypothesized to exist within a person. This system is so constituted that feelings of security and actual conditions of safety are highly correlated, although the correlation is by no means perfect. Seen from an outside observer's viewpoint the system's set-goal is to regulate behaviors designed to maintain the attachment figure(s). From the psychological vantage point of the attached person, however, the system's set-goal is felt security (Bischof, 1975). Both the external and the internal perspectives are useful and necessary, but the distinction should be kept clearly in mind. Attachment behavior tends to be most obvious when the attached person is frightened, fatigued, or sick and is assuaged when the attachment figure provides protection, help, and soothing. The mere knowledge that an attachment figure is available and responsive provides a strong and pervasive feeling of security and so encourages the person to value and continue the relationship (Bowlby, 1988).

One theoretical reasoning regarding children’s development is the attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988), which is based on parent-infant relations and views security as a central dimension in influencing children’s healthy development. The theory posits that the primary goal of an infant attachment system is to obtain and keep the caregiver at the time of need. Infants’ repeated interactions with caregivers lead to a development of an ‘‘internal model’’, which includes the images of the self and others as well as the expectations for interaction in close relationships. A child’s confidence grows from his/her felt security, which is a fundamental feeling of the environment as safe, others as loving, and self as valuable (Cox and Harter, 2003).

Attachment theory contends that the early relationship with caregivers is critical to children’s healthy development. Parents of only
children (as well as the first born) are reportedly more responsive and attentive at their first experience of parenthood (Schachter, 1959). The higher levels of parental responsiveness, attention, and concern for their only children are expected to lead to a greater sense of security, which facilitates children’s development of intellectual competence, psychological confidence, and mature behavioural patterns.

VII. Resource Dilution Theory Perspective of Only Children

Liu et al., (2010) put forth resource dissolution theory. This theory assumed that family resources are finite. Blake (1981b) described three types of finite family resources: (1) settings, which refer to “types of homes, necessities of life, and cultural objects (like books, pictures, music)”. (2) opportunities, which include “specific chances to engage the outside world”; and (3) treatments, which include “personal attention, intervention, and teaching.” Dilution theory asserts that these resources are divided by the number of children in a family and the quality of their life drops as the family expands. Researchers on only children have concurred that since only child does not compete with siblings for scarce economic and interpersonal resources, their status as the only recipient of family assets is conducive to their education opportunities, physical health, as well as their general well-being (Falbo and Polit, 1986; Falbo, 1987).

The resource dilution hypothesis argued that family structure in some but not necessarily all situations constrains the flow of valuable resources to children that in turn affect educational and other status outcomes. Still, there are opportunities for improvement of this model. In line with Downey’s (1995) recommendations, one should explore the differences in the magnitude and forms of the relationship among sibship structure, discrete resources, and various educational outcomes, as well as changes in these relationships as children age. Moreover, no one has followed up on Downey’s intriguing proposition regarding negative resources. And despite considerable progress, scholars still need to assess more comprehensively how other features of the family, especially
parental age and wealth, mediate the relationship between sibship structure and resource allocation (Steelman et al., 2002).

Steelman et al. (2002) also pointed out that one also should continue to expand inquiries into the impact of family structure across cultures and societies. One lesson learned from international studies is that the impact of sibling structure may vary depending on cultural context and the types of outcomes investigated. It is apparent that sibship size is not always negatively linked to children’s academic prospects. If governments assist childrearing or if extended families invest in children, then the immediate family may not matter as much, at least in terms of resource allocation. Governmental policies that discourage and encourage fertility by compensating families for incurred costs or that offer alternative venues for childrearing may alter how sibling configuration matters.

Resource Dilution and Peer World

According to Roberts and Blanton (2001) the negative view on only children assumes that absence of siblings deprives singletons of interactive opportunities with other children and thus hinders their normal development. Sibling interaction may not always be constructive. Qualitative research reports that only children view sibling fights negatively and they feel grateful for not having to live through these conflicts during their growing up years (Roberts and Blanton, 2001). Absence of siblings does not necessarily translate into a deprivation of the social world. Cousins, friends and playmates provide ample opportunities for children’s interaction. Finally, as children enter adolescence, there has been a growing focus on peer relations (Brown, 1990). Susceptibility to peer pressure has been found to increase in prosocial, neutral or antisocial situations (Berndt, 1979). Thus, which peer groups are adolescents affiliated with becomes increasingly important for their outcomes. Research has provided mounting evidence on parents as gatekeepers in their management of children’s peer world, such as by initiating, arranging, monitoring, and facilitating their children’s contacts with potential friends (Ladd, 1992). Consistent with resource dilution model,
parents of singletons, with their undivided parental resources such as attention, time and energy devoted to their only children, are likely to be in a better position to influence their children’s choice of conventional friends than parents of many children.

The aforementioned theoretical models point out that parental availability, attentiveness, and responsiveness coupled with undivided economic resources for only children is expected to benefit them more than children with siblings. Some researchers disagree.

All these different theoretical perspectives on only children create controversies regarding psychological status of only children vs. children with sibling. Hence, the present study was envisaged to compare only children and children with siblings.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The present study compared only children with children with siblings on Psycho-social characteristics viz. Emotional Intelligence, Stress Dimensions, Coping Styles, State- Trait Anxiety, Self Efficacy, Parental Bonding, Academic Achievement, Perceived Health Status and Perceived Happiness.