CHAPTER - 3

RATIONALE, AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY
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One child family system is growing very fast. The traditionally prevailing negative view about single child forces many couples to have more children against their resources and wishes. It may have impact on parent-child relationship. Presently, some couples opt for single child to have “higher quality offspring” or “perfect one child” (Hou, 2009). In this light, it is worth knowing whether children without siblings are in an advantageous or disadvantageous position as compared to children with siblings. In India also, having single child only is fast becoming a norm with urban working couples. Parents need to know whether their decision to have one child family norm can affect the psychological well being of the only child.

According to the traditional Chinese culture, family and the ancestral lineage are extremely important (Ebrey, 1991). Historically, in China, children have been regarded as assets, and couples have tried to have several children, particularly sons, who were expected to support their parents in their old age (Freedman, 1979). Same thinking is prevalent in India also. Consequently, only children and their parents have been regarded as disadvantaged. More recently, with China’s implementation of the one child policy since 1979 to curb population, fertility has declined (Ching, 1982). A new parent-child interaction pattern that is reflected in the ‘4-2-1’ syndrome has been created (Tobin et al., 1989; Lee 1992). The syndrome refers to the focus of six adults, a child’s parents and grand-parents, pouring their attention onto one child. The image of the ‘Little Emperor’ has emerged. Specifically, Little Emperors are only children who are presumed to be spoiled by the overindulgence of their parents and grandparents (Chandler et al., 2004; Clark, 2008). They are regarded as selfish, lonely, and maladjusted, ending up incapable of leading a confident future life.

Negative stereotypes about only children can also be found in western societies. According to Gallup (1988), poll conducted by Blake (1981a), Americans believed that only children were disadvantaged, had personality defects and lonely childhoods. In some surveys about the ideal number of
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children for a family (Glenn and Hoppe 1984; Gallup 1988) very negligible proportions of respondents preferred ‘one’. The negative views about only child have been shared by some earlier psychologists like Adler (1964) and Falbo (1984). Claudy (1984) showed that only child tended to have a lack of sociability. Howe and Madgett (1975) and Makihara et al., (1998) found higher prevalence of mental health problems among only children.

Empirical research has been conducted comparing only-children to children with siblings. Many researchers aimed to disprove Hall (1898, as cited in Falbo and Polit, 1986) and many others who viewed only-children in a negative light (Blake, 1981b; Baskett, 1985; Jiao et al., 1986; Veenhoven and Verkuyten, 1989; Gee, 1992; Mancillas, 2006). Review of literature reveals that generally, only-children have been labeled as having certain character traits and, even though many of these traits have no empirical basis, they still seem to prevail in influencing preconceptions of only-children. These traits include adjectives such as negatively self-centered, selfish, spoiled, alone, maladjusted, immature, unfriendly and dependent (Falbo, 1977; Blake, 1981b; Falbo and Polit, 1986; Polit and Falbo, 1987; Roberts and Blanton, 2001; Mancillas, 2006; Mottus et al., 2008).

It is a strongly held belief that children without siblings are spoiled, selfish, lonely, and socially estranged. Psychoanalytically oriented theorists have speculated about family influence on personality development, insisting that the absence of siblings is detrimental to social adjustment and development of character (Adler, 1964). The frequently quoted Hall’s (1898) remark that “being an only child is disease in itself” (cited in Fenton, 1928; Campbell, 1934) aptly illustrates psychologists’ concern about children raised without the benefit of siblings. Likewise, lay persons generally believe that parents of only children are inclined to overindulge and pamper their offspring which results in producing unhappy, selfish and disturbed individuals. Many studies have shown that people think of only children as being self-centered and dislikeable (Miller, 1993). The negative stereotype of only children is pervasive and prevalent across different cultures (Mancillas, 2006), including United States, (Blake, 1981b), the Netherlands (Veenhoven and Verkuyten, 1989) and China (Falbo and Poston, 1993).
According to Mottus et al., (2008), the fact that stereotypes often do not reflect actual group differences does not necessarily mean that they lack any cognitive or social functions. Stereotypes, consensually held perceptions of typical only children among them, may serve functions that are beneficial for maintenance of human society. From evolutionary perspective the fear of childlessness and the desire for a second child as an insurance against childlessness may play an adaptive role (Solomon et al., 1982). Passing one’s genes to next generations is a central purpose of the human species and the number of children one has is clearly related to the probability of achieving this goal. Both individuals and the society as a whole are interested in creating mechanisms for motivating people to have more than one child. The need to have children is also recognized by culture and is expressed in beliefs and values. Therefore, we hypothesize that stereotypes as social constructions that can affect the ways people behave, (Bargh et al., 1996) may be one sort of these mechanisms. Results of a study by Mottus et al., (2008) showed that children from multiple children families were generally perceived to have socially more desirable and typical personality traits than only children. It is possible that the function of the socially less desirable stereotype about only children is to encourage people not to have such less positively portrayed children. In other words, beliefs that only children are lonely, selfish and maladjusted may serve the role of a motivator for having more children (Falbo, 1982). There are some indirect evidences consistent with this hypothesis: most commonly stated reason in the United States for having a second child is to prevent the first from remaining the only child (Solomon et al., 1982). In the same way, women in the age from 18 to 45 mentioned that they wish to have a second child in order to provide company for the first one. However, the idea about the functions of the only children stereotype is a hypothesis that needs further empirical support.

Recent research, however, provides evidence that challenges these largely negative views of only child. Falbo (1981, 1984); Falbo and Polit (1986) conducted a comprehensive examination of all the existing research findings and
concluded that there was very little difference between children with siblings and only children in terms of adjustment, sociability, and most personality characteristics. On the other hand, the only children tended to outperform those with siblings in intelligence and academic achievement (Polit and Falbo 1987). Gee (1992) traced differences in development into adulthood between women who were only children and women who grew up with siblings, and found that female adult only children tended to have large families, to marry and have their first child at older ages, and to achieve higher educational level.

In the Netherlands, Veenhoven and Verkuyten (1989) found that the cultural beliefs about the only children’s disadvantages were unfounded. Relative to children with siblings, only children had similar levels of life satisfaction, mood level and global esteem. The Attachment theory and Resource Dilution theory may explain these results.

In view of the equivocal findings, it was felt imperative to have a fresh look at the psychological profile of single children versus children with siblings. There seems to be research evidence slightly favouring the single child. The objectives and hypotheses of the study are being framed in the same light.

The main objectives of the study are the following:

1. To compare only children with children with siblings on Emotional Intelligence, Stress Dimensions, Coping Styles, State-Trait Anxiety, Self Efficacy, Parental bonding, Academic Achievement, Perceived Health Status and Perceived Happiness.

2. To compare only male child with only female child on Emotional intelligence, Stress Dimensions, Coping Styles, State-Trait Anxiety, Self Efficacy, Parental bonding and Academic Achievement, Perceived Health Status and Perceived Happiness.

3. To compare only children of working mothers with only children of housewives on Emotional intelligence, Stress Dimensions, Coping Styles, State-Trait Anxiety, Self Efficacy, Parental bonding and Academic Achievement, Perceived Health Status and Perceived Happiness.