REPORT

Little Emperors: Behavioral Impacts of China's One-Child Policy

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SCIENCE • 10 Jan 2013 • Vol 339, Issue 6122 • pp. 953-957 • DOI: 10.1126/science.1230221

Assessing Singletons

The one-child policy introduced by the government of China in 1979 increased the proportion of urban families with an only child; later referred to as "little emperors" in media reports. In 2010, **Cameron *et al.*** (p. 953, published online 10 January) recruited approximately 400 residents of Beijing who had been born either before the implementation of the policy (1975 and 1978) or after (1980 and 1983). Using economic games to measure trust, risk, and willingness to compete, they found that the post-1979 cohorts were less trusting and less willing to compete and also more risk averse.

Abstract

We document that China's One-Child Policy (OCP), one of the most radical approaches to limiting population growth, has produced significantly less trusting, less trustworthy, more risk-averse, less competitive, more pessimistic, and less conscientious individuals. Our data were collected from economics experiments conducted with 421 individuals born just before and just after the OCP's introduction in 1979. Surveys to elicit personality traits were also used. We used the exogenous imposition of the OCP to identify the causal impact of being an only child, net of family background effects. The OCP thus has significant ramifications for Chinese society.

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References and Notes

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