

🔒 | REPORT



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

L. CAMERON, N. ERKAL, L. GANGADHARAN, AND X. MENG [Authors Info & Affiliations](#)SCIENCE • 10 Jan 2013 • Vol 339, Issue 6122 • pp. 953-957 • DOI: [10.1126/science.1230221](https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1230221)

CHECK ACCESS

## 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.

## Get full access to this article

View all available purchase options and get full access to this article.

CHECK ACCESS

ALREADY A SUBSCRIBER OR AAAS MEMBER? SIGN IN AS AN [INDIVIDUAL](#) OR VIA YOUR [INSTITUTION](#)

## Supplementary Material

Figs. S1 to S4

Tables S1 to S19

Instructions to Participants

References

Resources

File (1230221.mp3)

[DOWNLOAD](#)

4.83 MB

File (cameron.sm.pdf)

[DOWNLOAD](#)

1.28 MB

References and Notes

1

L. Lee, in *Child Care in Context: Cross Cultural Perspectives*, M. E. Lamb, K. Sternberg, Eds. (Lawrence Erlbaum, Hillsdale, NJ, 1992), pp. 355–392.

[GOOGLE SCHOLAR](#)

2

Fan C., Wan C., Lin G., Jin Q., A comparative study of personality characteristics between only and nononly children in primary schools in Xian. *Psychol. Sci.* **17**, 70 (1994) (in Chinese).

[GOOGLE SCHOLAR](#)

3

Wang Q., Leichtman M. D., White S. H., Childhood memory and self-description in young Chinese adults: The impact of growing up an only child. *Cognition* **69**, 73 (1998).

[CROSSREF](#) • [PUBMED](#) • [WEB OF SCIENCE](#) • [GOOGLE SCHOLAR](#)

4

L. Chang, *Factory Girls: From Village to City in a Changing China* (Spiegel and Grau, New York, 2008).

[GOOGLE SCHOLAR](#)

SHOW ALL REFERENCES

eLetters (0)

eLetters is a forum for ongoing peer review. eLetters are not edited, proofread, or indexed, but they are screened. eLetters should provide substantive and scholarly commentary on the article. Embedded figures cannot be submitted, and we discourage the use of figures within eLetters in general. If a figure is essential, please include a link to the figure within the text of the eLetter. Please read our [Terms of Service](#) before submitting an eLetter.

LOG IN TO SUBMIT A RESPONSE

No eLetters have been published for this article yet.



Diversity and scale: Genetic architecture of 2068 traits in the VA Million Veteran Program

BY ANURAG VERMA, JENNIFER E. HUFFMAN, ET AL.

Multiscale photocatalytic proximity labeling reveals cell surface neighbors on and between cells

BY ZHI LIN, KAITLIN SCHAEFER, ET AL.

TABLE OF CONTENTS >

LATEST NEWS

SCIENCEINSIDER | 20 JUL 2024

Virus spreading in Latin America may cause stillbirths and birth defects

SCIENCEINSIDER | 18 JUL 2024

In a first, botanists vote to remove offensive plant names from hundreds of species

SCIENCEINSIDER | 18 JUL 2024

By killing a lunar rover, NASA puts commercial delivery program on notice

NEWS | 19 JUL 2024

‘Cocaine sharks’ found in waters off Brazil

NEWS | 18 JUL 2024

More than 1 trillion microbes live inside the average tree trunk

NEWS | 18 JUL 2024

News at a glance: A precise atomic clock, a close asteroid flyby, and flood-resistant rebuilding

ADVERTISEMENT

RELATED JOBS

Deputy Director of Science and Technology

Massachusetts Institute of Technology  
Cambridge, Massachusetts (US)

Assistant Professor - SOM

University of Kansas Medical Center  
Kansas City

Research Assistant I - Cancer Biology - Shalapour Laboratory (Immunology / Metabolism)

University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center  
Houston, Texas

MORE JOBS ►

ADVERTISEMENT

[View full text](#) | [Download PDF](#)



GET OUR NEWSLETTER

[NEWS](#)

- [All News](#)
- [ScienceInsider](#)
- [News Features](#)
- [Subscribe to News from Science](#)
- [News from Science FAQ](#)
- [About News from Science](#)
- [Donate to News](#)

[LIBRARIANS](#)

- [Manage Your Institutional Subscription](#)
- [Library Admin Portal](#)
- [Request a Quote](#)
- [Librarian FAQs](#)

[CAREERS](#)

- [Careers Articles](#)
- [Find Jobs](#)
- [Employer Hubs](#)

[ADVERTISERS](#)

- [Advertising Kits](#)
- [Custom Publishing Info](#)
- [Post a Job](#)

[COMMENTARY](#)

- [Opinion](#)
- [Analysis](#)
- [Blogs](#)

[RELATED SITES](#)

- [AAAS.org](#)
- [AAAS Communities](#)
- [EurekAlert!](#)
- [Science in the Classroom](#)

[JOURNALS](#)

- [Science](#)
- [Science Advances](#)
- [Science Immunology](#)
- [Science Robotics](#)
- [Science Signaling](#)
- [Science Translational Medicine](#)
- [Science Partner Journals](#)

[ABOUT US](#)

- [Leadership](#)
- [Work at AAAS](#)
- [Prizes and Awards](#)

[AUTHORS & REVIEWERS](#)

- [Information for Authors](#)
- [Information for Reviewers](#)

[HELP](#)

- [FAQs](#)
- [Access and Subscriptions](#)
- [Order a Single Issue](#)
- [Reprints and Permissions](#)
- [TOC Alerts and RSS Feeds](#)
- [Contact Us](#)



© 2024 American Association for the Advancement of Science. All rights reserved. AAAS is a partner of HINARI, AGORA, OARE, CHORUS, CLOCKSS, CrossRef and COUNTER. Science ISSN 0036-8075.

[Terms of Service](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Accessibility](#)