

The Study of Sibship Size and the Likelihood of Marriage Satisfaction in China

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Abstract. According to the Ministry of Civil Affairs, the national divorce rate of China has constantly climbed from 1.85 per 1000 inhabitants in 2009 to 3.36 per 1000 inhabitants in 2019 (Ma, 2020). Growing up under the one-child policy, the younger generation is vulnerable to stress and sensitive to interpersonal problems due to the lack of peer support. Furthermore, the low marriage rate reflects a lower reproduction rate and a higher divorce rate in the future, which will potentially cause social issues in China. It is necessary to consider the issue from different aspects. The study collected people's marital satisfaction in different generations under a specific one-child policy using a questionnaire. Based on the final data, the study showed that married people born before the one-child policy (1969-1979) were significantly more satisfied with their marital happiness than those born after the policy (1980-1990). It confirms that the current low fertility rate, marriage rate, and high divorce rate among young people are inextricably linked to the one-child policy that has been in place for about three decades, given China's unique cultural policies. Although the Chinese government has now officially abolished the policy in 2016, this study can still provide a new way of thinking about the development of society.

Keywords: One-child policy, mental health, interpersonal skills, marital satisfaction.

1. Introduction

Indeed, China's new generations grew up after the One-Child Policy. Lacking accompany with siblings, children have to endure loneliness and deal with growing problems alone. The lack of interpersonal interactions decreases young generations' long-term relationship satisfaction, leading to widely divergent relationship values among the two different generations before and after the One-Child Policy (Chen, 2020). Moreover, an individual's attachment insecurity and emotional sensitivity are also the critical origins of the increasing divorce rate beyond the expensive marriage costs. But, siblings can provide an insight into practicing social skills both through playing and arguing with each other (Sun et al., 2019). Therefore, additional siblings represent more opportunities to develop social and communication skills that potentially predict a long-lasting marital relationship. The research mainly focuses on china's two generations before and after the One-Child Policy in 1979s. These two generations experienced dramatic changes in family format, which can demonstrate a unique relationship between sibling size and marital status. However, most research has been obsessed with the high divorce rates triggered by the socioeconomic sphere. And many older people are equally fond of blaming young people's divorce behavior on mental immaturity, over-pampering by parents and irresponsible personalities. Therefore, to explore the natural and psychological factors behind the high divorce rate among young people, this study is based on two generations before and after the one-child policy. And the difference in the number of siblings in the family between these two generations that have experienced the one-child policy is perhaps the main reason for the difference in divorce rates.

2. Background

In 1979, the government of China published the One-Child policy, which only allows one child in each family. At the same time, the rate of fertility dramatically declined as the policy was successfully executed in every family in China (Chen & Huang, 2020). According to the data in the power of the government ministry: China's Family Planning Leading Group and the fertility decline of the 1970s, the fertility rate had dropped from 5.72 per family in 1969 to 1.6 per family in 1999 (Chen & Huang,

2020). As one of the most populous countries in Asia, China's One-Child Policy successfully achieved the goal of decreasing the population, increasing the economy, and potentially increasing the status of females.

The young generation is in a period of family size shrinking. Most of the children born after the One-Child Policy grew up without siblings. Even though some children could receive more attention and resources from parents as the only child, they miss the chance to develop social skills and responsiveness in their adulthood (Bobbitt-Zeher et al., 2016). Nonetheless, the One-Child policy rooted a long-term negative effect in the development of imitate attachment. The only child usually feels challenged to have a successful social transition from a teenager to an adult. Thus, young people have been attributed a stereotypical characteristic as a "spoiled generation". People always say that they are the beloved ones since birth. As a result, in the future marriage life, they used to develop as ego-centered adults and partners, which is one reason for a short-lasting relationship.

3. Literature Review

According to the German research Early Childhood Longitudinal Study—Kindergarten Cohort of 1998-99, researchers asked teachers to rate their students in class. They found that children with at least one sibling showed more communication skills, higher self-control, and fewer externalizing issues (Merry, 2020). Furthermore, the research team extracted data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (Add Health) and interviewed adults from 24 to 36 years old. They also put other variables such as socioeconomic or mother's education into data analysis. The final result showed that several siblings were negatively related to the divorce rate, which means each of the additional siblings decreased the potentiality of the divorce rate. In the last, Merry (2020) concluded that each extra sibling decreases the probability of divorce by a more considerable 10.4%.³ As the basic needs for marriage, communication and interpersonal skills are related to sibship size predicting a marriage's satisfaction and longitude.

3.1 Parental Dilution Model

Sibship size in families has been a controversial question among researchers. The evidence suggests that additional siblings dilute parental resources, such as saved money for education in western countries (Downey, 2004). The parental dilution model indicated that parental resources are limited, so increasing the number of siblings will decrease parents' resource investment in each particular kid. Thus, the research pointed out that children's academic performance and college attendance are negatively associated with the number of siblings (Tanskanen et al., 2016). Admittedly, the resource dilution model is more evident in Chinese families due to the culture and social structure, which provides evidence of the disadvantages of additional offspring. Scarcity of a resource in childhood is also a potential factor in an unhappy marriage and a divorce component. Under China's Patriarchal society, the One-Child Policy attributed more rights and resources to the only child in each family. Thus, the only child could expand their opportunities and rights of being educated and receiving substantial resources. However, the rich resources have not enriched the only child's psychological health or enhanced their marriage satisfaction. In contrast, they grow up and live alone and lose the opportunity of cultivating social responsibilities and skills.

In the 20th century China, children were born in a nuclear era. With the rapid development of the country, High-rise buildings gradually replaced courtyards. When people no longer live together, the social distance between families and neighbors is also getting farther and farther. Besides, even if siblings did not accompany children in the past, they can still grow up with cousins or neighbors' kids. The close relationship among them is also a practice of interpersonal skills. Therefore, they can play the same roles as brothers and sisters, simultaneously stimulating different social roles through play and fighting. This model of growing together can help children build a happy marriage and establish a trusting marriage relationship (Sun et al., 2019). In other words, additional siblings are less influential toward couple relationships for older generations before the One-Child Policy than young

generations after the policy. Accordingly, children in the current nuclear time are more need siblings to develop social responsibilities and cultivate their imitate attachment.

3.2 Sibling Competition Theory

Tanskanen (2016) referred to the sibling competition theory that children usually want to get as many parental resources as possible over other siblings, such as love, money, and time. However, most parents prefer to distribute resources to each child equally. The various perspectives usually make conflicts among them, which can cause severe consequences on children's mental development and personality construction (Tanskanen et al., 2016). Indeed, the extreme contradictions among siblings undeniably make children distrust a relationship, which is more likely to create relationship issues in the future.

However, the responsibility for this sense of mistrust does not lie with siblings but depends on how the parents solve the conflict. When the problem can be reasonably resolved, conflicts and negotiations become necessary content of marriage and a pre-marriage lesson for children. Specifically, siblings are precious gifts for children instead of just resource competitors. Growing up with siblings can improve one's interpersonal skills and develop healthy relationships in the future. Siblings are complimentary with each other and undertake the roles of helpers and learners. When conflicts happen, they can practice communication skills and experience different emotions (Downey, 2004). In getting along with siblings, children are more likely to develop strategies for a good marriage, such as critical thinking, cooperativeness, empathy and tolerance. These skills help them have an early practice of future marriage life in adulthood to establish a harmonious family. Therefore, additional siblings potentially contribute to long-lasting marital relationships.

3.3 Gender Discrimination

The effect of sibling competition is evident in china due to its historical issues. Even though Confucianism has been an old-fashioned ideology in present China, it still plays a significant role in people's minds. The ideology promoted the masculine power of males, which makes people believe that only men can inherit family blood and contributed more to family size than females. Chinese people also stereotyped that girls would join other's families once they married. Therefore, parents prefer to invest in boys for potential future benefits. If there were no constrictions on sibship size, parents would not stop reproduction until having a boy, while girls would be deprived of all of the resources to raise a family of boys. Meanwhile, several articles have shown strong evidence of the negative impact of additional siblings in China. Parental resources have to be shared with additional siblings, which decreases the chance of attaining school, especially for girls in low-income families (Kalmijn & van de Werfhorst, 2016). Therefore, gender discrimination is more likely to decrease Chinese girls' self-esteem while increasing boys' ego-centrism, potentially enhancing the chance of a doomed marriage.

However, on the one hand, most of the researches has been over concentrated on gender inequality instead of people's long-term psychological health development. On the other hand, the Patriarchal social form has become the past, so that gender discrimination and its resource dilution effect are old topics that no longer the main concern point in most Chinese families (Kalmijn & van de Werfhorst, 2016). What is more, China's twelve-year compulsory education system offered free education for children from primary school to high school, thus the effect of educational resource dilution is unnecessary to keep track of it in China.

Family structures and relationships during adolescence are decisive factors in shaping their future family relationship and quality. Teenage sibling relationships are the training ground for marriage relationships which share similar characteristics such as companionship, closeness, and role structure. Therefore, children with additional siblings are more likely to develop a social network model and establish imitate relationships (Sun et al., 2019). In other words, the similarity between siblings and marriage is that siblings can learn how to get along with each other and apply the strategy to future

married life. Beyond all the social and interpersonal skills that siblings provide to each other, the relationship attachment also influences people's marriage life.

In the present, the climbing divorce rate of young generations, decreasing marriage rate, and the low fertility rate are more serious questions that should be focused on. Economic and social factors have received too much researchers' attention, while the psychological development of the new generation of young people as the protagonist should have more attention. It is also an essential element in solving the high divorce rate and population ageing. Therefore, we should start from the psychological perspective of the younger generation and explore the reasons that troubled their couple relationships. In addition, few studies have directly examined the correlation between the number of siblings and marital satisfaction in China under the one-child policy. Most studies have focused on the social and economic impact of marriage rates. For example, the most relevant social issue is China's ageing population. Indeed, researchers should explore the underlying causes of unhappy marriages and high divorce rates rather than simply encouraging young people to change their attitudes toward marital relationships. Thus, unlike Western countries, China's specific political system and cultural traditions have contributed to the variability of the findings. The marriages attitude of two generations growing up before and after the one-child policy are clear evidence that siblings play a decisive role in growing up.

4. Method

To better understand and compare the impact of siblings under China's one-child policy, the study focused on Chinese married (ever-married) adults born from 1979-to 1990. A 16-item Couples Satisfaction Index (CSI) was used for questionnaire collection and analysis, and participants ranked their satisfaction on the CSI on questions reflecting their overall satisfaction with their relationship, the extent to which their relationship was rewarding, and the emotions their relationship elicited (Funk & Rogge, 2007). Finally, the 16 items were summed to produce a total score. The questionnaire was focused on the Beijing region of China, and the questionnaire was distributed to the married population only. In order to obtain a sufficient valid sample, a random sampling method was used, and 300 questionnaires were distributed. 259 valid questionnaires were returned after eliminating invalid questionnaires, with an effective rate of 86.3%.

4.1 Independent Variables:

Whether the participant grew up in a one-child household was the primary independent variable to be measured. Respondents reported the size of their siblings in the measure. In addition, a person's development from childhood to adulthood can be influenced by many different variables, so the study also measures other variables to avoid confounding variables. Therefore, we included factors regarding the participants' educational background, gender, and current marital status in the CSI. Thus, first, our main measurement direction lies in whether people who grew up with siblings in the family before and after the one-child policy have higher satisfaction with marriage. The second point is that the different perspectives and ways of thinking of men and women may influence their perceptions of whether they are happy in their marriages. The third point is that people with different levels of education may have different effects on the criteria of marital satisfaction; in other words, different life circumstances and cognitive levels may also lead to the measurement of marital satisfaction. Finally, whether the current marital status affects subjects' perceptions of whether they are satisfied with their marriage influences the final measure.

4.2 Dependent Variables

The dependent variable is the score of the Couple Satisfaction Index (CSI). The total score can range from 0 to 81. A score above 51.5 means that participants are more satisfied with their marriage and vice versa. Higher scores imply more relationship satisfaction, while lower scores indicate significant relationship dissatisfaction.

Table 1: Do the only child feel more satisfied in marriage than the non-only child.

	The Only Child	Birth Year	Cases	Mean	Standard Deviation	T	P
Marriage Satisfaction	YES	1980-1990	76	4.454	0.960	-2.523	0.012
	NO	1969-1979	183	4.732	0.737		

Table 2: Do gender affects marital satisfaction.

	Gender	Cases	Mean	Standard Deviation	T	P
Marriage Satisfaction	Male	125	4.11	1.413	2.509	0.070
	Female	134	3.84	1.480		

Table 3: Do education degrees affect marital satisfaction.

Education	Mean	Standard Deviation	F	P
Junior high school and below	3.540	1.244	1.365	0.247
High School Technical School	3.280	1.161		
College	3.460	1.239		
Undergraduate	3.320	1.090		
Master or above	4.080	1.240		

Table 4: Do current marital status affect marital satisfaction.

Current Marital Status	Mean	Standard Deviation	F	P
Married	3.50	1.209	1.556	0.213
Divorced	3.11	1.188		
Bereaved Spouse	3.27	1.041		

4.3 Data Analysis

We collected data from the Chinese version of CSI and then related the sum of CSI scores to their respective variables. If other variables such as gender, educational background, and current marital status were more significant than the value of sibship size, then this study was invalid. In addition, the mean Cronbach's alpha coefficient for CSI-16 was 0.98, demonstrating solid internal consistency of the data.

First, the sample sizes of the only child group and the non-only child group were 76 and 183, respectively. The mean CSI score for the only child group was 4.454 with a standard deviation of 0.960, while the mean score for the non-only child group was 4.732 with a standard deviation of 0.737 (Table 1). Thus, the final CSI test showed that those born in non-one-child families before the one-child policy (1969-1979) had a higher marital happiness index than those born in the one-child group after the policy (1980-1990). To further confirm the significance of the data, the Levene test was used to determine the variance of the two overall groups, also known as the F-test. The results ($p=0.012<0.05$) indicated that the variance of the data was the same for both groups, satisfying the hypothesis that marital satisfaction ($t=-2.523$, $p<0.05$) was significantly different between the two groups, with higher scores for non-only children. This suggests that non-only children after the one-child policy are more satisfied with marriage than only children, who are more likely to be dissatisfied.

Second, to exclude other factors and determine whether there is an effect on the above results, for example, whether gender differences affect the validity of the marital satisfaction questionnaire (Table II). We used the same method to test the significance of gender. The results showed that marital satisfaction ($t=2.509$, $p=0.070>0.05$) was not significantly different between the two groups. This indicates that gender did not significantly affect marital satisfaction in this study. In addition, Table 3 shows that the significance of marriage judgment criteria for different education levels is greater than 0.05, indicating no significant difference in education. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the effect of (IV) education level on (DV) marital satisfaction under the conditions of junior

high school and below, high school, technical school, college, bachelor's degree, master's degree and above. The results showed no significant effect of educational background on marital satisfaction ($F=1.365$, $p=0.247>0.05$). Similarly, using the method in Table 4, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the effect of marital status on married, divorced, and widowed individuals. At the $p>0.05$ level, the final results indicated that marital status had no significant effect on marital satisfaction in the three cases ($F=1.556$, $p=0.213$). Thus, the marital satisfaction of only children under the one-child policy is higher than that of those who were not only children before the policy. It can be further judged that the importance of siblings in childhood development is highly significant.

5. Discussion

By integrating and analyzing the experimental data, the results showed that those who grew up under the one-child policy, i.e., as an only child in a family, had significantly lower marital satisfaction than those who grew up in a large family before the policy was introduced. Other factors that may affect the validity of the data, such as gender differences, educational background, and current marital status, had no significant effect on the CSI scores. In other words, these factors are not significantly related to the marital satisfaction of the tested population.

It is indisputable that current marital relationships of young people are equally influenced by other factors, such as economic status, family-of-origin construction, etc. As mentioned by Bobbitt-Zeher et al. (2016), siblings are much less critical for developing interpersonal skills than the expectations of family formation. Individuals from extended families may appreciate the unique social bonds of such families and attempt to recreate these close relationships by marrying and starting their own families. Once married, their family sibling network is more extensive, meaning they have more sisters and brothers-in-law than their peers in smaller families. While divorce primarily affects relationships between couples, it also affects the broader family network, so this connection may make divorce less attractive. And in the Chinese context, the two generations before and after the one-child policy have vastly different circumstances. So this may similarly affect young people's marital satisfaction.

Although this study only addresses the impact of siblings on individual, marital satisfaction in China, there is, in fact, a large body of research that shows that growing up with additional siblings helps people develop positive interpersonal relationships with their partners, as well as positive intimate relationships with parents, friends, colleagues, and even neighbors. Therefore, sibling companionship is a valuable gift and resource on the road to development in any country. Especially in today's Chinese society, due to the one-child policy, most young people are the only child in the family and receive all the love and affection and suffer from tremendous pressure in life, which indirectly leads to mental health problems. Marital relationships, too, negatively impact growing up alone among today's youth.

This survey still has many limitations, such as the fact that the questionnaire was only distributed in one region, and the results may vary in other provinces of China. Suppose other factors, such as mental health, social development, emotional health, and interpersonal and social relationships, are added to the questionnaire in future studies. In that case, a more accurate and in-depth understanding of the importance of siblings in children's social development during adolescence can be gained. Educational ideas can be provided to government policymakers and parents.

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