

# Women Who Lost Their Only Child in China and Their Family Status

## Facts and Figures 2015



China has implemented the family planning policy since the 1980s. Population who followed the policy in early years are now at their middle and old ages and families who lost their only child due to various reasons both in terms of the number and their general status have aroused extensive concerns of the society. Using data from the 2010 National Population Census, this report analyses the status of women who lost their only child and the number and characteristics of their families. Besides, in comparison with the characteristics of one-child families, analysis is also conducted on the causes of formation of families that lost their only child and their difficulties. Countermeasures are proposed correspondingly. It is indicated in the analysis that there were about 670,000 women aged 30 to 64 who lost their only child, of whom 58.09% lived in urban areas and 41.91% lived in rural areas; and there were 660,000 families that lost their only child. Families that lost their only child suffered from economic hardship, lack of support at their old ages, psychological vulnerability and other difficulties. The life was especially difficult for rural families that lost their only child. Therefore, it is of great significance to improve relevant social security policies and provide sufficient support to families that lost their only child. Firstly, the Government should improve reproductive service and policies regarding child adoption and provide psychological counseling to families that lost their only child; secondly, the Government should further improve the medical care system to alleviate such families from heavy medical burdens; thirdly, the Government should strengthen old-age support and security and raise the standard of financial assistance.

### Definitions

**Women who lost their only child:** It refers to women who gave birth to only one child who deceased before the census time point. The sixth National Population Census in 2010 inquired women aged 15 to 64 about their reproductive histories and survival conditions of their children, which generates the number of women who lost their only child during ages of 15 to 64. The results found that women aged 15 to 30 who lost their only child accounted for a rather small proportion in total

women who lost their only child. Considering that women under age 30 who lost their only child were still fertile and were highly likely to give birth to another child, for the purpose of this study, women who lost their only child are restricted to those aged 30 to 64.

**Families that lost their only child:** It generally refers to families that after losing their only child due to various reasons, have not given birth to or do not want to adopt another child. For the purpose of this study, families with women who lost their

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only child are defined as families that lost their only child, regardless of whether this family will give birth to or adopt another child in the future. In some families, there are more than one woman who lost her only child and therefore, the number of families that lost their only child is slightly fewer than that of women who lost their only child.

**One-child families:** In order to ensure consistencies between data sources and definitions in comparisons and considering the information generated from population census data, mothers with one child are defined as women aged 30 to 64 who gave birth to only one child and the child survives, and one-child families refer to families where the mothers have one child.

Considering that comparisons between families that lost their only child and one-child families would help to better understand the impact of losing the only child on families, this report employs comparative analysis on the characteristics of these two types of families.

### Data sources

Unless otherwise specified, data used in this report are from the 2010 National Population Census. This report is based on a study conducted by a team from the Department of Population and Employment Statistics of the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), consisting of Ms. Wu Jie, Ms. Yang Jianchun and Ms. Xiao Ning and headed by Mr. Feng Nailin and Ms. Hu Ying.

## Total number of women who lost their only child and their characteristics

According to the population census of 2010, there were 670,000 women aged 30 to 64 who lost their only child in China, accounting for 0.21% of total women at this age group and 0.53% of women who gave birth to only one child. Of women who lost their only child, 389,200 people lived in urban areas, accounting for 58.09%, and 280,800 people lived in rural areas, accounting for 41.91%.

**(I) There were more than 300,000 women who lost their only child who had passed or were about to pass their reproductive ages.**

Of women who lost their only child in China, 365,200 were aged 30 to 44, accounting for 54.51%; 256,500 aged 45 to 59, accounting for 38.28%, and 48,300 aged 60 to 64, accounting for 7.21%. Women aged 45 or older will gradually pass their reproductive ages and most of them are incapable of giving birth. There were 304,800 women aged

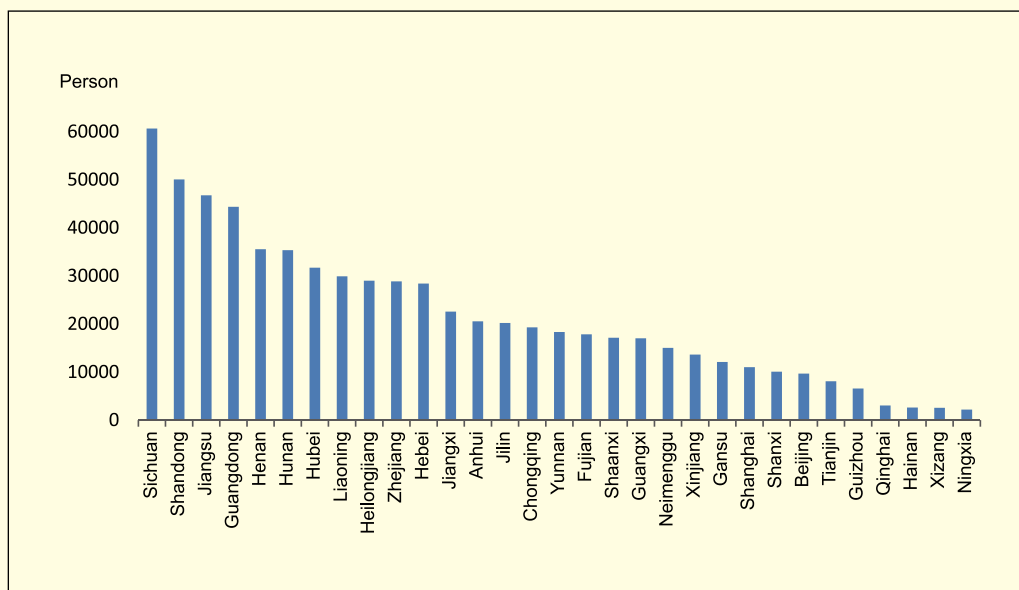
45 to 64 who lost their only child, accounting for 45.49% of the total.

**(II) More than one third of women who lost their only child were located in Eastern China.**

The distribution of women who lost their only child by province (autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the Central Government. Referred to as provinces below) throughout China is correlated to provincial total population. Sichuan, Shandong, Jiangsu and Guangdong ranked the top four provinces in terms of the number of women who lost their only child, which were 60,000, 50,000, 47,000 and 45,000 women respectively. Xizang, Jiangxi and Xinjiang ranked high in terms of the proportion of women who lost their only child in women who gave birth to one child, which were 1.84%, 0.88% and 0.8% respectively.

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**Fig. 1 Number of Women Who Lost Their Only Child by Province, 2010**



Among the four regions of Eastern China, Central China, Western China and Northeastern China\*, Eastern China had the largest number of women who lost their only child, where the number reached 247,700; Northeastern China had the fewest number at 79,100; the numbers were respectively 155,700 and 187,500 in Central China and Western China. The total population of women who lost their only child is also closely related to urbanization level of the region. In Eastern China, Central China, Western China and Northeastern China, the proportion of women who lost their only child lived in urban areas were 64.9%, 53.6%, 52.7% and 58.1% respectively.

### (III) The average age of women who lost their only child was 44.3 years.

The average age of women who lost their only child in China was 44.3 years, 1.9 years more than

that of mothers with one child. Of them, the average ages of women who lost their only child in urban and rural areas were 44.3 and 44.4 respectively, 1.6 and 2.7 years more than those of mothers with one child. In Shanghai, Beijing, Liaoning, Tianjin, Chongqing, Jiangsu and Sichuan, the average age of women who lost their only child exceeded 45 years, especially in Shanghai, Beijing and Liaoning, where 60% of women who lost their only child aged above 45.

### (IV) The proportion of women who lost only child, and had no schooling or completed primary education only was 12 percentage points higher than that of mothers with one child.

Among women who lost their only child, those who completed junior secondary education accounted for 44.3% as the highest, followed by those who finished primary education (25.6%)

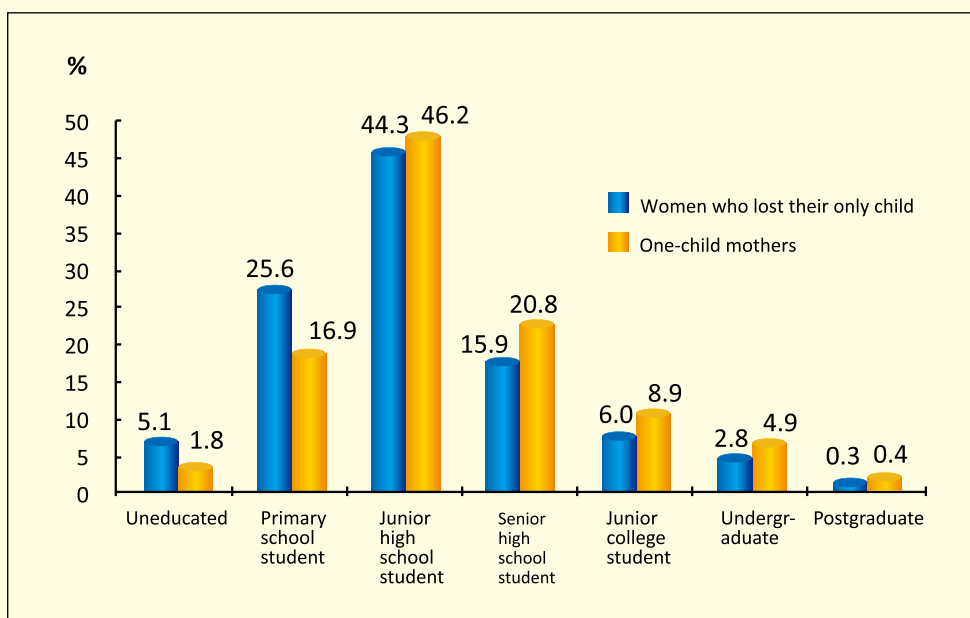
\* The ten provinces in Eastern China include Beijing, Tianjin, Hebei, Shanghai, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Fujian, Shandong, Guangdong and Hainan; the six provinces in Central China include Shanxi, Anhui, Jiangxi, Henan, Hubei and Hunan; the twelve provinces in Western China include Neimenggu, Guangxi, Chongqing, Sichuan, Guizhou, Yunnan, Xizang, Shaanxi, Gansu, Qinghai, Ningxia and Xinjiang; the 3 provinces in Northeastern China include Liaoning, Jilin and Heilongjiang.

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and senior secondary education (15.9%). Those who completed college education, and university education or above accounted for 6.0% and 3.1% respectively; while those who had no schooling accounted for 5.1%. Compared with mothers with one child, women who lost their only child were less educated. Of the women who lost their only child, as many as 30.7% had no schooling or completed primary education only, 12 percentage points higher than that of mothers with one

child. The older the women who lost their only child were, the less they were educated and the wider their differences were with the mothers with one child. As many as 43.0% of women who lost only child and aged above 45 had no schooling or completed primary schools only, 16.9 percentage points higher than that of mothers with one child (26.1%).

**Fig. 2 Level of Education of Women Who Lost Their Only Child and Mothers with One Child in China, 2010**



## Number of families that lost their only child and their structural characteristics

**(I) There were about 660,000 families that lost their only child in China.**

According to the population census of 2010, the number of one-child families with the mothers aged 30 to 64 accounted for 29.7% of the total number of families in China, 69.8% of which were distributed in urban areas while 30.2% in rural areas. There were 120 million families that had given

birth to one child, of which one-child families accounted for 99.46% and the families that had lost their only child accounted for 0.54%. There were 660,000 families that lost their only child in total, accounting for 0.16% of the families in China. Of them, 382,000 families lived in urban areas, accounting for 58.0%, and 276,000 families in rural areas, accounting for 42.0%.

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**Table 1 Number of Families That Lost Their Only Child by Province and Its Distribution by Urban/rural Residence in 2010**

Unit: 10,000 households, %

Province	Total number of families	Number of families that lost their only child	Proportion of families that lost their only child in total families			Urban/rural distribution of families that lost their only child	
			Total	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
National	40193.4	65.88	0.16	0.19	0.14	58.0	42.0
Beijing	668.1	0.95	0.14	0.14	0.14	87.2	12.8
Tianjin	366.2	0.80	0.22	0.23	0.16	83.6	16.4
Hebei	2039.5	2.74	0.13	0.16	0.11	52.2	47.8
Shanxi	1033.0	0.97	0.09	0.11	0.07	59.7	40.3
Neimenggu	820.5	1.51	0.18	0.20	0.16	61.8	38.2
Liaoning	1499.4	2.93	0.20	0.18	0.23	58.7	41.3
Jilin	899.8	2.08	0.23	0.22	0.25	54.3	45.7
Heilongjiang	1300.0	3.08	0.24	0.24	0.23	60.3	39.7
Shanghai	825.3	1.08	0.13	0.13	0.13	88.8	11.2
Jiangsu	2438.2	4.57	0.19	0.19	0.19	59.0	41.0
Zhejiang	1885.4	2.75	0.15	0.15	0.14	62.6	37.4
Anhui	1886.2	2.19	0.12	0.15	0.09	53.1	46.9
Fujian	1120.6	1.79	0.16	0.19	0.12	67.1	32.9
Jiangxi	1154.3	2.20	0.19	0.26	0.14	59.3	40.7
Shandong	3010.5	4.84	0.16	0.17	0.15	50.6	49.4
Henan	2592.9	3.41	0.13	0.17	0.11	49.1	50.9
Hubei	1669.5	3.16	0.19	0.22	0.16	56.2	43.8
Hunan	1862.6	3.47	0.19	0.22	0.16	50.7	49.3
Guangdong	2863.1	4.48	0.16	0.18	0.10	81.3	18.7
Guangxi	1315.1	1.63	0.12	0.20	0.07	64.0	36.0
Hainan	233.1	0.27	0.12	0.17	0.06	72.1	27.9
Chongqing	1000.1	2.06	0.21	0.26	0.15	64.2	35.8
Sichuan	2579.4	5.59	0.22	0.25	0.19	44.7	55.3
Guizhou	1055.8	0.66	0.06	0.10	0.04	54.0	46.0
Yunnan	1234.0	1.76	0.14	0.19	0.11	51.8	48.2
Xizang	67.1	0.24	0.36	0.32	0.38	28.5	71.5
Shaanxi	1071.9	1.63	0.15	0.16	0.14	50.4	49.6
Gansu	690.0	1.12	0.16	0.21	0.13	49.7	50.3
Qinghai	152.9	0.30	0.20	0.22	0.18	55.6	44.4
Ningxia	188.2	0.22	0.12	0.15	0.08	65.4	34.6
Xinjiang	670.6	1.42	0.21	0.24	0.18	55.9	44.1

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In 2010, there were about 126 million mothers aged 30 to 64 with one child in total and their children aged 0 to 39 years. The annual mortality rate among population at this age group was around 0.69‰ and thus, there would be about 87,000 families that lost their only child every year. With the implementation of two-child policy, families that lost their only child will gradually decrease in both absolute number and proportion.

Since the implementation of family planning policy more than three decades ago, childbearing concept among the general public have changed greatly and fertility level of women at reproductive ages gradually dropped to and maintained at a low level. Even though China started to implement the policy that allows couples with one side being an only child to give two births in 2013, no significant increase has been observed in the fertility level of women at reproductive ages. By the end of 2014, 1,069,000 couples with one side being an only child applied for the quota of another child and 1,012,000 couples were approved. The number of applicants was lower than expected throughout the country. Ten months after implementing the policy in Beijing, there were over 30,000 families that applied for the quota of another child, accounting for only 6.7% of qualified families. The number of applicant families was far fewer than the expected average of 54,200 more newborns every year. This phenomenon was common in other provinces. According to estimates based on the 1% population survey data of 2005, the population of only child aged 0 to 25 had reached 126,000,000. Low fertility level of women at reproductive ages will raise the number of one-child families and increase the risk of more families to lose their only child.

### (II) Average size of families that lost their only child was 3.29 persons.

In China, the average size of families that lost their only child was 3.29 persons. In urban areas, the figure was 3.08 persons, 0.50 persons fewer than that in rural areas, which were 3.58 persons. The average size of families that lost their only child was about 0.19 persons more than that of all families, which was mainly because that families that lost their only child involved only the families with women aged 30 to 64 and excluded small-size families such as two-person families that had not given a birth and one-person families such as single-elderly families. By regions, the average size of families that lost their only child in Central China was 3.55 persons, which was higher than the national average and average size of such families in other regions. The average size in Northeastern China was merely 3.00 persons, as the lowest in the nation, and those in Western China and Eastern China were 3.28 persons and 3.23 persons respectively. Henan, Hainan and Jiangxi ranked the top three provinces in average size of families that lost their only child, which were 3.85 persons, 3.73 persons and 3.73 persons respectively. In Liaoning, Tianjin, Shanghai and Beijing, the average size of such families was fewer than 3 persons, which were 2.89 persons, 2.85 persons, 2.79 persons and 2.72 persons respectively.



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**Table 2 Comparison of Families That Lost Their Only Child with One-child Families, by Family Size, 2010**

Unit: persons

Region	Families that lost their only child			One-child families			Differences (Families that lost their only child minus one-child families)		
	Total	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural
National	3.29	3.08	3.58	3.34	3.19	3.69	-0.05	-0.12	-0.11
Eastern	3.23	3.08	3.50	3.33	3.23	3.61	-0.10	-0.15	-0.11
Central	3.55	3.30	3.84	3.47	3.28	3.89	0.08	0.01	-0.05
Western	3.28	3.03	3.55	3.35	3.17	3.70	-0.08	-0.14	-0.15
Northeastern	3.00	2.77	3.32	3.18	3.01	3.59	-0.18	-0.24	-0.27

In general, the average size of families that lost their only child was smaller than that of one-child families - the former is 0.05 persons fewer than the latter, which was 3.34 persons. The differences were 0.12 persons in urban areas and 0.11 persons in rural areas. The average size of families that lost their only child was respectively 0.18 persons, 0.10 persons and 0.08 persons fewer than that of one-

child families in Northeastern China, Eastern China and Western China, except for Central China. As the size of families that lost their only child was large in central provinces like Henan and Jiangxi, the average size of families that lost their only child there was 0.08 persons more than that of one-child families.

**Table 3 Rank of Provinces by Average Size of Families That Lost Their Only Child, 2010**

Unit: persons

Rank	Province	Average family size	Rank	Province	Average family size
1	Henan	3.85	17	Jiangsu	3.28
2	Hainan	3.73	18	Guizhou	3.22
3	Jiangxi	3.73	19	Xinjiang	3.21
4	Gansu	3.57	20	Shandong	3.19
5	Guangxi	3.57	21	Sichuan	3.18
6	Qinghai	3.55	22	Jilin	3.12
7	Xizang	3.49	23	Ningxia	3.10
8	Anhui	3.45	24	Chongqing	3.06
9	Guangdong	3.44	25	Neimenggu	3.03
10	Yunnan	3.44	26	Heilongjiang	3.03
11	Hunan	3.44	27	Zhejiang	3.01
12	Shaanxi	3.43	28	Liaoning	2.89
13	Fujian	3.41	29	Tianjin	2.85
14	Hebei	3.41	30	Shanghai	2.79
15	Shanxi	3.37	31	Beijing	2.72
16	Hubei	3.33			

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(III) Proportion of two-person or one-person families in families that lost their only child was 13.4 percentage points higher than that in one-child families.

In respect of family size, the proportion of three-person families in families that lost their only child was the highest at 36.3%, followed by that of two-person families at 26.6%, and five-or-more-person families at 18.7%. The proportions of four-person families and one-person families were 13.2% and 5.2% respectively. Families that lost their only child in urban areas showed the same char-

acteristics: the proportion of three-person families was 38.2% as the highest while that of one-person families was 6.7% as the lowest. In rural areas, the proportion of three-person families in families that lost their only child was 33.7% as the highest, followed by that of five-or-more-person families, which was 25.1%, and that of two-person families, which was 22.4%. The high proportion of five-or-more-person families in families that lost their only child in rural areas was also a major reason why the average size of families that lost their only child in rural areas was larger than that in urban areas.

**Table 4 Proportion of Families That Lost Their Only Child and One-child Families  
by Family Size, 2010**

Unit: %

Family size	One-person family	Two-person family	Three-person family	Four-person family	Five-or-more-person family
Families that lost their only child	5.2	26.6	36.3	13.2	18.7
Urban	6.7	29.7	38.2	11.4	14.1
Rural	3.2	22.4	33.7	15.6	25.1
One-child families	2.6	15.8	52.6	12.4	16.7
Urban	3.1	18.2	54.7	11.0	13.0
Rural	1.3	10.0	47.7	15.8	25.2

The proportion of two-person or one-person families in families that lost their only child was 31.8%, 13.4 percentage points higher than that in one-child families, which was 18.4%. Three-person families dominated one-child families, and its

proportion of two-person families was 10.8 percentage points higher than that in one-child families.

By province, the proportion of two-person or one-person families in families that lost their only

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