

# 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

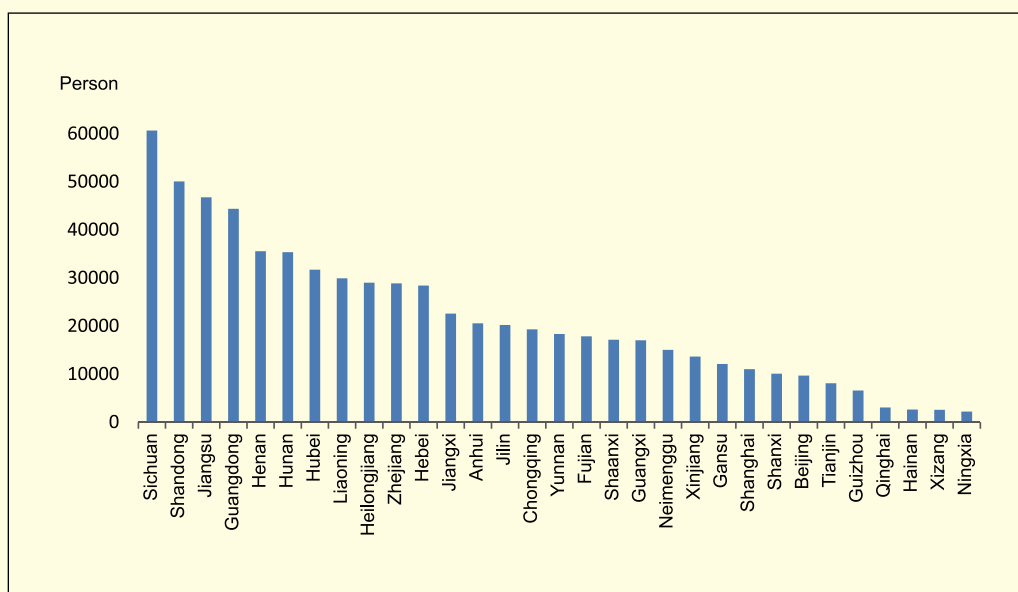
45 to 64 who lost their only child, accounting for 45.49% of the total.

**(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.

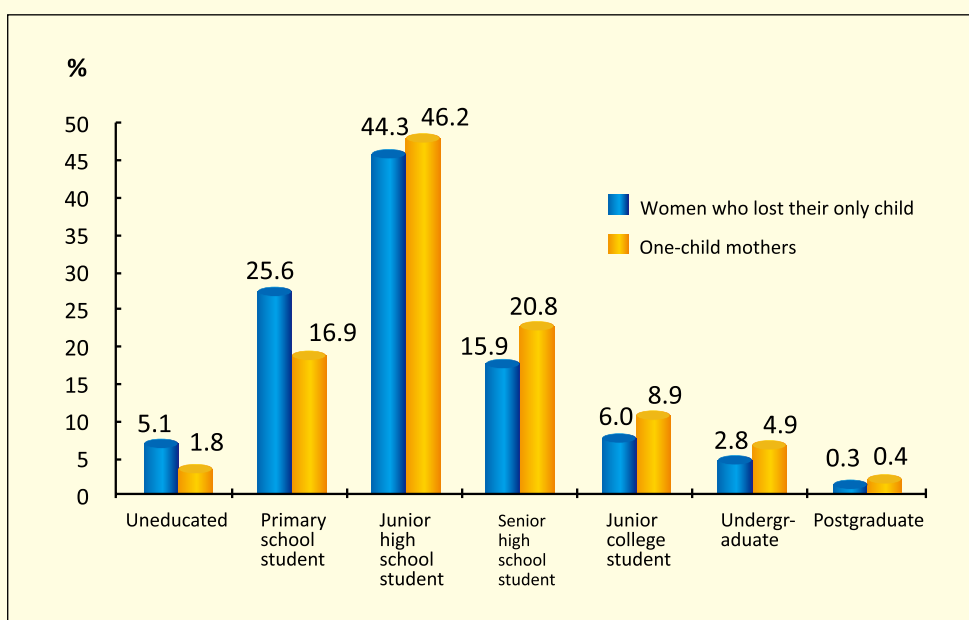


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and senior secondary education (15.9%). Those who completed college education, and university education or above accounted for 6.0% and 3.1% respectively; while those who had no schooling accounted for 5.1%. Compared with mothers with one child, women 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 was 52.6%. The proportions of families of other sizes ranged from 10% to 20%, except for one-person families whose proportion was quite low. In comparison, the proportions of two-person and one-person families in families that lost their only child were higher. The proportion of one-person families in families that lost their only child was two times that of one-child families, and the pro-

portion 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 child in both Guizhou and Beijing exceeded 50%, at 52.2% and 52.0% respectively. The proportions in Shanghai, Liaoning, Xizang, Tianjin and Chongqing ranged from 40% to 50%; the proportions in 11 provinces such as Zhejiang ranged from 30% to 40%; and the proportions in 12 provinces such as Shandong ranged from 20% to 30%. Only the proportion in Henan was lower than 20%, at 17.7%.



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**Table 5 Rank of Provinces by the Proportion of Two-person and One-person Families in Families That Lost Their Only Child, 2010**

Unit: %

Rank	Province	Proportion of two-person and one-person families	Rank	Province	Proportion of two-person and one-person families
1	Guizhou	52.2	17	Yunnan	31.1
2	Beijing	52.0	18	Neimenggu	30.6
3	Shanghai	49.3	19	Shandong	29.1
4	Liaoning	45.5	20	Hubei	29.0
5	Xizang	45.4	21	Hunan	27.8
6	Tianjin	42.1	22	Hebei	26.3
7	Chongqing	40.0	23	Gansu	26.2
8	Zhejiang	39.1	24	Shaanxi	25.1
9	Heilongjiang	37.7	25	Anhui	24.7
10	Sichuan	36.5	26	Hainan	24.5
11	Jilin	36.1	27	Fujian	24.4
12	Xinjiang	35.4	28	Shanxi	23.8
13	Ningxia	32.5	29	Guangxi	23.7
14	Jiangsu	32.2	30	Jiangxi	21.3
15	Qinghai	31.6	31	Henan	17.7
16	Guangdong	31.6			

#### (IV) Proportion of one-generation families in families that lost their only child was 14.4 percentage points higher than that in one-child families.

In respect of family structure, two-generation families took the highest proportion in families that lost their only child, which was 44.3%, followed by one-generation families as 34.2%, and three-generation families at 20.8%. Families with four generations or more accounted for only 0.7%.

Families that lost their only child in urban and rural areas showed the same characteristics: two-generation families took the highest proportion, which were 45.7% and 42.5% respectively, followed by one-generation families, whose proportions were 37.3% and 29.8% respectively. In comparison, the proportion of one-generation families in families that lost their only child in urban areas was notably higher than that in rural areas by 7.5 percentage points.

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**Table 6 Proportions of Families That Lost Their Only Child and One-child Families by Family Structure, 2010**

Unit: %

Family type	One-generation family	Two-generation family	Three-generation family	Family with four or more generations
Families that lost their only child	34.2	44.3	20.8	0.7
Urban	37.3	45.7	16.6	0.4
Rural	29.8	42.5	26.5	1.1
One-child families	19.8	58.1	21.4	0.7
Urban	21.1	61.2	17.3	0.4
Rural	16.8	51.0	30.9	1.3

Two-generation families took the highest proportion in both families that lost their only child and one-child families. In comparison, the proportion of two-generation families in families lost their only child was 13.8 percentage points lower than that in one-child families. Two-generation families in families that lost their only child differed greatly from those in one-child families in terms of family structure, even though they both had two-generations. In one-child families, two-generation families that consisted of parents and their only child accounted for 81.2% and families with elderly members aged 60 or above accounted for only 8.7%. In families that lost their only child, two-generation families consisting of parents and an elderly accounted for 71.3% and families with elderly members aged 60 or above accounted for 20.1%, with the proportion of families with elderly members being 11.4 percentage points higher than that in one-child families.

The proportion of one-generation families in families that lost their only child was 14.4 percentage points higher than that in one-child families. This difference was 16.2 percentage points in urban areas and 13.0 percentage points in rural areas. The one-generation families that lost their only child mainly consisted of

one-person families and two-person families. Among them, one-person families in which women who lost their only child lived alone accounted for 15.2% and two-person families consisting of the parents who lost their only child accounted for 68.3%, adding up to 83.5% of the total. This proportion was as high as 86.7% in urban areas and reached 77.9% in rural areas. These families, especially those in which women who lost their only child lived alone, suffered from both material and psychological impacts after loss of their only child. They dared not look back to the past and were fearful for the future. As a result, their living conditions deteriorated, and most families lived in illness and poverty.

By province, the proportion of one-generation families in families that lost their only child in Guizhou, Beijing and Shanghai exceeded 50%, and stood at 57.0%, 53.3% and 52.7% respectively. The proportions in Liaoning, Chongqing, Zhejiang, Xizang and Tianjin ranged from 40% to 50%; the proportions in 12 provinces including Sichuan ranged from 30% to 40%; and the proportions in 10 provinces including Anhui ranged from 20% to 30%. Only that in Henan Province was lower than 20% at 19.9%.

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**Table 7 Rank of Provinces by Proportion of One-generation Families in Families That Lost Their Only Child, 2010**

Unit: %

Rank	Province	Proportion of one-generation families	Rank	Province	Proportion of one-generation families
1	Guizhou	57.0	17	Guangdong	32.9
2	Beijing	53.3	18	Shandong	32.6
3	Shanghai	52.7	19	Yunnan	32.1
4	Liaoning	48.0	20	Hubei	32.1
5	Chongqing	44.6	21	Anhui	29.5
6	Zhejiang	43.1	22	Hunan	28.9
7	Xizang	42.9	23	Fujian	28.4
8	Tianjin	42.7	24	Hebei	27.3
9	Sichuan	39.2	25	Gansu	27.3
10	Heilongjiang	39.1	26	Shaanxi	26.8
11	Jilin	36.8	27	Guangxi	26.7
12	Xinjiang	35.4	28	Shanxi	25.4
13	Jiangsu	35.0	29	Hainan	24.5
14	Neimenggu	34.9	30	Jiangxi	21.3
15	Qinghai	34.0	31	Henan	19.9
16	Ningxia	33.5			

**(V) Proportion of families with elderly members aged 60 or above in families that lost their only child was 6.8 percentage points higher than that in one-child families.**

In families that lost their only child, 29.7% had elderly members aged 60 or above. The proportion was 25.3% in urban areas and 35.7% in rural areas. In families that lost their only child, the proportion of families with elderly members in rural areas was 10.4 percentage points higher than that in urban areas. Old-age support and health care of these elderly deserve more attention.

The proportion of families with elderly members in families that lost their only child was 6.8 per-

centage points higher than that in one-child families. The differences were 5.7 percentage points in urban areas and 5.4 percentage in rural areas. These families were not only afflicted by the pain of losing their only child but also bore the burden of supporting their elderly members. From the aspect of family size, among the families with elderly members that lost their only child, families with one elderly living alone accounted for 11.9%, 7.3 percentage points higher than those in one-child families, with these families mostly being the elderly women who lost their only child; two-person families with elderly members and three-person families with elderly members accounted for 18.8% and 14.2%, respectively 7.5 and 8.0 percentage points higher than those in one-child families.



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**Table 8 Proportions of Families with Elderly Members Aged 60 or above in Families That Lost Their Only Child and One-child Families by Family Type, 2010**

Unit: %

Family Type	Total	One-person family	Two-person family	Three-person family	Four-person family	Five-or-more-person family
Families that lost their only child	29.7	11.9	18.8	14.2	55.7	61.9
Urban	25.3	8.8	17.2	12.3	54.0	62.7
Rural	35.7	21.0	21.6	17.2	57.4	61.4
One-child families	22.9	4.6	11.3	6.2	59.6	61.8
Urban	19.6	4.1	10.8	6.1	56.3	61.7
Rural	30.3	7.4	13.1	6.4	64.7	61.8

In 90% of the provinces, the proportion of families with elderly members in families that lost their only child ranged from 20% to 40%. Among them, the proportion ranged from 30% to 40% in 15 provinces such as Hunan. In Fujian and other 12 prov-

inces, the proportion ranged from 20% to 30%. In Guizhou, the proportion of families with elderly members reached 40.3% and only in Neimenggu and Ningxia, it was below 20%, at 19.6% and 16.7% respectively.

**Table 9 Rank of Provinces by Proportion of Families with Elderly Members Aged 60 or above in Families That Lost Their Only Child, 2010**

Unit: %

Rank	Province	Proportion of Families with Elderly Members	Rank	Province	Proportion of Families with Elderly Members
1	Guizhou	40.3	17	Fujian	29.2
2	Hunan	35.1	18	Beijing	28.7
3	Sichuan	34.5	19	Guangdong	28.1
4	Guangxi	34.0	20	Qinghai	28.1
5	Shaanxi	33.7	21	Xizang	26.7
6	Chongqing	33.4	22	Shanxi	26.3
7	Henan	33.4	23	Liaoning	25.9
8	Yunnan	33.3	24	Jilin	24.3
9	Gansu	33.2	25	Shandong	24.2
10	Jiangxi	33.0	26	Tianjin	23.9
11	Shanghai	32.5	27	Zhejiang	23.8
12	Hubei	32.3	28	Xinjiang	23.2
13	Hainan	31.8	29	Heilongjiang	23.0
14	Anhui	31.6	30	Neimenggu	19.6
15	Jiangsu	31.4	31	Ningxia	16.7
16	Hebei	30.4			

# Women Who Lost Their Only Child in China and Their Family Status Facts and Figures 2015

## The living conditions of families that lost their only child deserve more attention

(I) The proportion of widowed women who lost their only child was twice that of widowed women with one child.

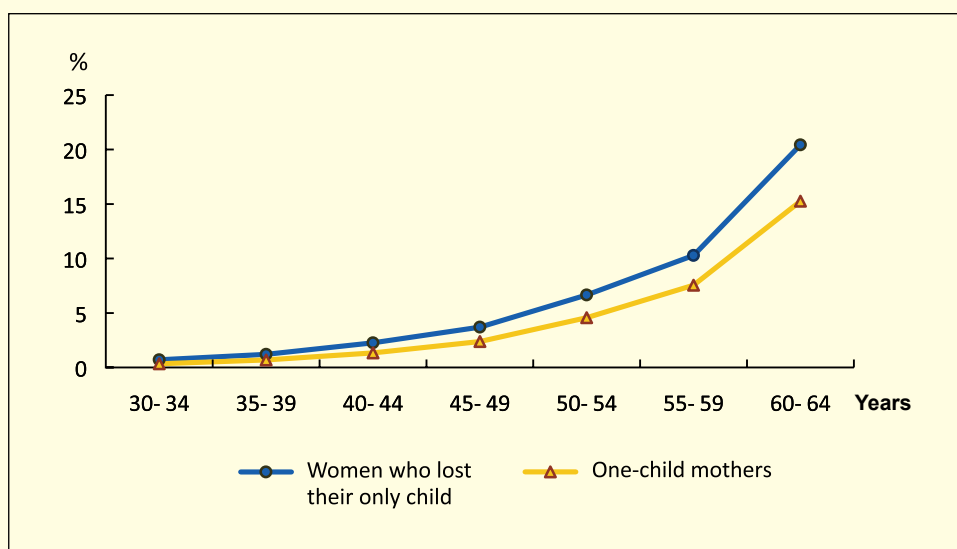
Children are the hope and center of a family. The death of the only child crashes the spiritual pillar for some families and the parents suffer both physical and mental blows, affecting their capacity to perform their duties as a father or mother and resulting in the deterioration of their health. According to a survey on families that lost their only child in Xicheng District of Beijing, 26.2% of the surveyed families reported that losing the only child in the family brought “physical and mental damage to the parents and caused serious deterioration of their health” and “incurable psychological trauma to the parents”. Health decline shortened the lifespan of some parents that lost their only child and increased the proportion of widowhood in spouses that lost their only child.

With respect to the proportion of widows, widowed women who lost their only child accounted for 4.8%. In rural areas, the proportion reached 5.7%, 1.6 percentage points higher than that of 4.1% in urban areas. The older the widows were,

the higher the proportion was: the proportion of widowed women who lost their only child was 0.7% in the age group of 30 to 34, while 20.4% in the age group of 60 to 64. In rural areas, the proportion of widowed women who lost their only child was higher than that of women with one child in all age groups. The proportion of widowed women in all age groups in rural areas was higher than that in urban areas.

The proportion of widows in women who lost their only child was 2.4 percentage points higher compared with the proportion of 2.4% in women with one child, namely, twice that of women with one child. This difference was 2.9 percentage points in rural areas and 1.9 percentage points in urban areas. The proportions of widows in women who lost their only child in all age groups were higher than that in women with one child. In addition, the difference between the proportions of widows in women who lost their only child and women with one child widened with the increase of age. In the age group of 60 to 64, the proportion of widows in women who lost their only child was 5.1 percentage points higher than that of women with one child.

Fig. 3 Proportion of Widows in Women Who Lost Their Only Child and One-Child Mothers, 2010



# Women Who Lost Their Only Child in China and Their Family Status Facts and Figures 2015

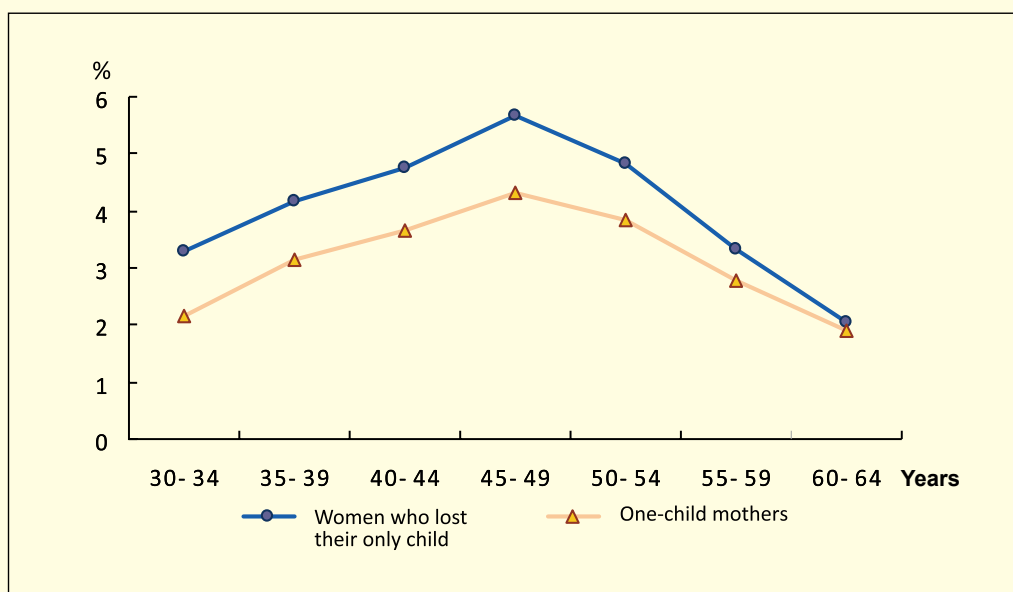
(II) The proportion of divorcees in women who lost their only child was 1 percentage point higher than that of mothers with one child.

Decease of the only child brought mental impact to the parents. When the parents were too depressed to relieve their sufferings, their conflicts would become prominent and the risk of family breakdown increased. According to a survey on families that lost their only child in Xicheng District of Beijing, parents in 20% of the surveyed families suffered from relationship crisis due to the decease of their only child and even got divorced because of loss of affection.

With respect to divorce, more women who lost their only child were divorced than mothers with one child. As many as 4.2% of women who lost their only child were divorced, 1 percentage point higher than that of mothers with one child, which accounted for 3.2%. The proportion of divorcees in women who lost their only child and mothers with one child in all age groups showed the same

characteristics, whose curves were in the shape of a reversed V. The proportion was the highest for the age group of 45 to 49. In comparison, whether the women who lost their only child were younger or older, their divorce rates were higher than that of mothers with one child in the same age group. Among them, 5.7% of the women aged 45 to 49 who lost their only child were divorced, 1.4 percentage points higher than that of mothers at the same age with one child, which was the highest among all age groups. The difference in divorce rates between women who lost their only child and mothers with one child aged 50 or above began to decrease. In the age group of 60 to 64, 2.1% of the women who lost their only child were divorced, only 0.2 percentage points higher than that of mothers with one child. Women aged 45 or above begin to become infertile while their spouses still have fertility. It is possible that their spouses would marry younger women, start new families and raise children. The traditional concept that a man must have heir of his bloodline may speed up the breakdown of marriage.

Fig. 4 Proportion of Divorcees in Women Who Lost Their Only Child and One-Child Mothers, 2010

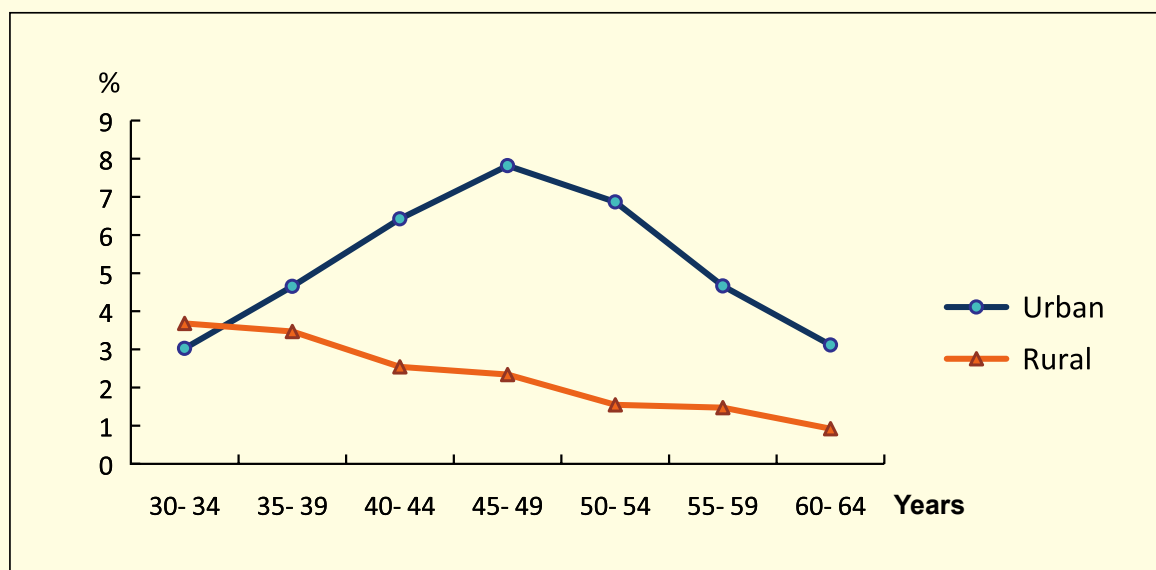


# Women Who Lost Their Only Child in China and Their Family Status Facts and Figures 2015

The divorce rate of women who lost their only child in urban areas and that in rural areas showed different characteristics. In urban areas, as many as 5.3% women who lost their only child were divorced, 2.12 times that of rural areas where the divorce rate was 2.5%. In urban areas, the proportion of divorcees in women who lost their only child was 1.2 percentage points higher than that of widows. Like the curve of the general divorce rate of

women who lost their only child, the curve of the divorce rate of women who lost their only child in urban areas by age group was also in the shape of a reversed V and the highest was 7.8% in the age group of 45 to 49. In rural areas, the divorce rate of women who lost their only child declined with age increasing, from 3.7% in the age group of 30 to 34 to 0.9% in the age group of 60 to 64.

**Fig. 5 Proportion of Divorcees in Women Who Lost Their Only Child in Urban and Rural Areas, 2010**



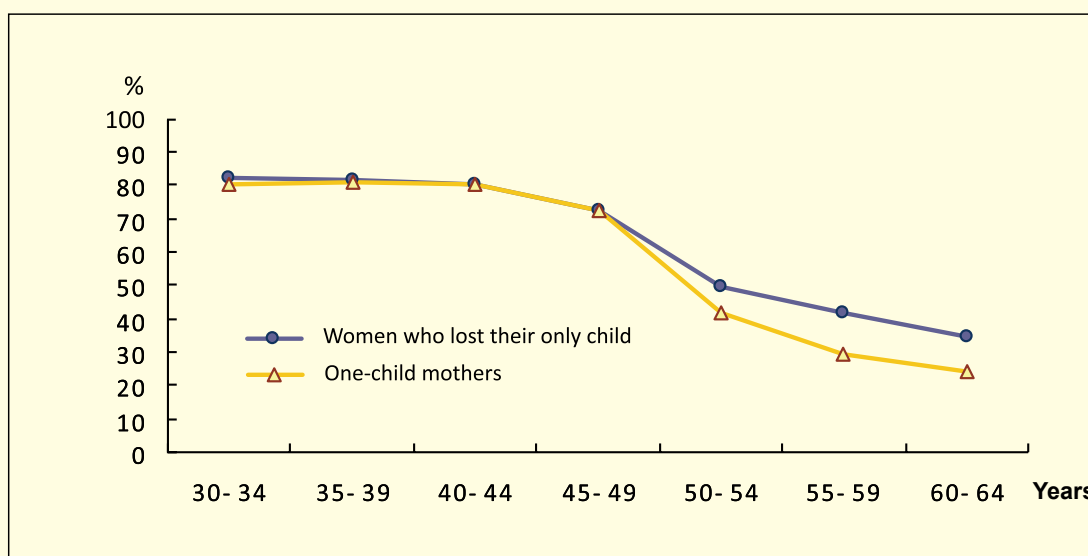
# Women Who Lost Their Only Child in China and Their Family Status Facts and Figures 2015

## (III) Employment rate of women who lost their only child was higher than that of mothers with one child.

The employment rate of women who lost their only child in all age groups was higher than that of mothers with one child. The employment rates of women who lost their only child and mothers with one child aged 50 or below were both high as being above 70%, with women who lost their only child having a slightly higher proportion. The employment proportion of women who lost their only child aged 50 or above was far higher than that of mothers with one child in the same age group. Among women who lost their only child, the employment proportions of the age groups of 50 to 54, 55 to 59 and 60 to 64 were 49.3%, 41.8% and 34.3% respectively, 7.7, 12.2 and 9.9 percentage points higher than that of mothers with one child in the same age group.

In addition, diseases were the major cause of losing the only child. According to a survey conducted by the Family Planning Commission and Statistical Bureau of Sichuan Province, most of the only child died of diseases: 57.1% of the minor died of diseases while the percentage for the adult only child was 47.6%. Some families that lost their only child depleted all of their financial resources and were even heavily in debts in order to cure their child, rendering them in economic woes. Under the current circumstance of inadequate social security system, on one hand, families that lost their only child had to work more and earn more to pay their debt as early as possible, and on the other hand, they had to work more as there would be no offspring to support them when they grow old.

Fig. 6 Employment Proportion of Women Who Lost Their Only Child and One-child Mothers by Age, 2010





# Women Who Lost Their Only Child in China and Their Family Status Facts and Figures 2015

With respect to the reasons for unemployment, more women who lost their only child were not employed because they were incapable of working while fewer of them were unemployed due to retirement than mothers with one child. Among unemployed women who lost their only child, 45.3% were out of work due to housekeeping, 33.0% due to retirement, 7.5% due to incapacity and 14.2% due to other reasons. Among women who lost their only child, the proportion of those who became unemployed because of incapacity was 5.1 percentage points higher than that of mothers with one child, and the proportion of those who were unemployed due to retirement was 2.5 percentage points lower than that of mothers with one child. In the age group of 50 and older, fewer women who lost their only child were employed because of retirement, and more because of incapacity than mothers with one child. In urban areas, 68.7% of

women who lost their only child in the age group of 50 to 64 were unemployed due to retirement, 9.3 percentage points lower than that of mothers with one child. In rural areas, 26.2% of women who lost their only child in the age group of 50 to 64 were unemployed due to incapacity, 10.8 percentage points higher than that of mothers with one child.

In comparison with women who lost their only child in urban areas, those in rural areas faced larger economic risks. In rural areas, more women who lost their only child were unemployed due to incapacity. The proportion of such women amounted to 19.8%, 16 percentage points higher than those in urban areas; in rural areas, 6.0% of women who lost their only child were unemployed due to retirement, 35.1 percentage points lower than that of unemployed women who lost their only child in urban areas.

**Table 10 Reasons for Unemployment, 2010**

Unit: %

Reasons	Total	Housekeeping	Retirement	Incapacity	Others
Women who lost their only child					
National	100.0	45.3	33.0	7.5	14.2
Urban	100.0	39.9	41.1	3.8	15.2
Rural	100.0	63.0	6.0	19.8	11.2
Mothers with one child					
National	100.0	47.1	35.5	2.4	15.0
Urban	100.0	42.8	40.1	1.5	15.6
Rural	100.0	74.5	5.8	8.8	10.9

# Women Who Lost Their Only Child in China and Their Family Status Facts and Figures 2015

## **(IV) Old-age support for families that lost their only child deserves attention.**

In terms of financial sources, 67.5% of women who lost their only child in China relied on labor incomes, 16.7% on support of other family members, 10.5% on pension, 2.2% on minimum living standard allowance and 3.1% on other sources. With age increasing, women became less capable of working and gradually withdrew from employment, and the proportion of women who lost their only child and lived on labor incomes dropped while the proportion of those living on pension, support of other family members and minimum living standard allowance rose. In the age group of 50 to 64, the proportion of women who lost their only child and lived on labor incomes decreased to 41.9% while the proportion of those living on pension climbed to 31.7%, the proportion of those living on support of other family members went up to 19.5% and the proportion of those living on minimum living standard allowance increased to 3.9%.

Currently, the support of family members, especially support from offspring, is still the major financial source of the elderly. According to the population census of 2010, among women aged 60 or above, 52.6% lived on support of family members, only 19.6% on pension and 3.7% on minimum living standard allowance. Among the women aged 60 or above in rural areas, 59.8% lived on support of

family members. When women who lost their only child become old and incapable of working, they will be faced with a serious challenge in receiving family support.

## **(V) The number of women who lost their only child in rural areas was 1.68 times that of urban areas.**

In rural areas that are economically underdeveloped, women are exposed to large risk of losing their only child as they are notably disadvantaged in daily care, medical conditions and family incomes. Of every 10,000 women who delivered one child in rural areas, 74 women lost their only child, 30 women more than those in urban areas. The risk of losing one child in rural areas was 1.68 times that of urban areas. Women were exposed to higher risk of losing their only child particularly in rural areas of Central and Western China. Of the eight provinces where there were more than 100 women who lost their only child per 10,000 women delivered one child in rural areas, five were in Western China, two in Central China and one in Eastern China. In Qinghai, of every 10,000 women who delivered one child, 133 lost their only child, which was 3.66 times that of Shanghai. According to another survey, respectively 48.5% and 51.7% of families bereft of their only child in urban areas and rural areas lost their only children due to diseases and 25.9% of the families bereft of their only child in rural areas lost their only child due to accidents.

# Women Who Lost Their Only Child in China and Their Family Status Facts and Figures 2015

## Recommended countermeasures

Implementation of the policy that allows couples with one side being the only child to give birth to a second child proposed on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Plenary Session of the 18<sup>th</sup> Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee as well as the universal two-child policy proposed on the 5<sup>th</sup> Plenary Session of the 18<sup>th</sup> Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, are expected to mitigate the families' risk of losing the only child. In 2014, there were 16.87 million newborns in China, 470,000 births more than those in 2013 and the policy began to show its effect. Under this circumstance, it remains of great significance to improve related social security policies and provide sufficient support to the 660,000 families that lost their only child.

Improving the reproductive services and adoption policy, and providing psychological counseling. Technical reproductive services and financial supports should be provided to families that lost their only child and intend to raise another child. Supportive measures should be offered to encourage families that lost their only child to adopt another child and facilitate them in handling all required formalities. Timely interventions should be conducted to facilitate psychological adjustment and provide psychotherapy to families that lost their only child. Free and catered psychological counseling should be provided to parents that lost their only child on a voluntary basis when necessary.

Improving the medical insurance system to reduce medical burdens. Coverage of medical insurance should be expanded and the reimbursement proportion of medical expenses should be increased so as to reduce the risk of impoverishment due to diseases for families that lost their only child. Medical assistance should be provided to families that lost their only child to reduce their medical burdens. Medical subsidies and compensations should be offered to cover some expenses incurred to cure serious diseases for the families that lost their only child and became impoverished due to the diseases.

Old-age support should be strengthened and subsidy standards should be enhanced. Financial input should be enhanced and minimum living standard allowance should be increased for families that lost their only child. The elderly who lost their only child should have the priority to be covered by the minimum living standard allowance scheme. Priorities should also be given to satisfy needs of the elderly who lost their only child for daily caring, subsidies for serious diseases and mental support, etc. The elderly who lost their only child should be granted priority in enrollment in senior's apartment and in receiving old-age allowance every year. The nursing allowance should be provided to the elderly who lost their only child and are incapable of looking after themselves in daily lives for a long time. Diversified support models should be developed to cater to the primary needs of families that lost their only child in urban and rural areas.

# Women Who Lost Their Only Child in China and Their Family Status Facts and Figures 2015

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