

JOINT EVENT

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Parenting in single-child families in UK**Ameerah Khadaroo**

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Objective: Nearly half of British families are classified as single-child families showing a gradual but steady increase in this family type from the 1990s onwards. Despite this, research on only children/single-child families is scant. The aim of this paper is to explore parenting in single-child families in depth through qualitative interviews.

Design: This study used qualitative semi-structured interviews to explore both parents' and only-children's perceptions of the parent-adolescent relationship.

Methods: Fifteen families with an only child and 15 families with multiple children were interviewed, where the children were aged 11–14 years. Families were recruited using advertising, convenience and snowballing sampling. Interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis.

Results: The two family types were similar on many of the themes reported such as practising authoritative parenting, levels of child-centeredness, parental behavioural control and the absence of parental overindulgence. However, whilst parents of an only-child reported high one-on-one parental involvement with their child, parents with multiple children reported less so. Overprotective parenting was also more prevalent in single-child families. Moreover, mothers and fathers of only-children reported using different parenting approaches from each other, while their counterparts reported using mostly a similar parenting approach to each other. Some family-type specific themes were also identified. It was found that single-child families engaged in permissive parenting and pampering of the child as well as pushy parenting. By contrast, a parental perception of parent-child conflict was a theme identified only in multiple-children families.

Conclusion: This study concludes that parenting in single-child families is similar to parenting in multiple-children families on many dimensions but those differences do exist. On a positive side, only children seem to be more at an advantage than non-only children as they benefit from higher parental involvement. Nevertheless, only children are also the ones who are more likely to experience overprotection and permissiveness from their parents. Findings suggest that there are both similarities and differences in the parenting of only-children in China, Brazil and those in UK. Insight in parenting of single-child families has valuable implications in light of the growing number of single-child families.

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