

A Qualitative Study to Assess the Lived Experiences and Perceptions of 30 Eligible Couples from Urban and Rural Areas of Indore on Having a Single Child

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Abstract: *This qualitative study explores the lived experiences and perceptions of 30 eligible couples (15 urban area MR 10, 15 rural area village BHANGARH) from Indore regarding their decision to have only one child. Using a phenomenological approach, in-depth interviews were conducted and thematic analysis was employed to extract key themes. The findings highlight personal, social, cultural, and economic factors shaping family planning decisions.*

Keywords: Lived experiences, Perceptions, Single child, Eligible couples, Urban and rural areas, Indore, Qualitative research, Family planning, Fertility preferences, Reproductive choices

1. Background of the Study

India's demographic profile is changing, marked by a decline in fertility rates and a gradual shift toward nuclear families. According to NFHS-5 (2020-21), the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) in Madhya Pradesh has declined to 2.0 in urban areas and 2.3 in rural areas, reflecting a preference for fewer children. Despite this, the concept of single-child families remains underexplored in the Indian context, particularly in semi-urban and rural populations. In cities like Indore—a tier-2 city with rapid urbanization—the contrast in lifestyle, exposure to education, and economic pressures between urban and rural couples may influence decisions about family size differently. Therefore, assessing the lived experiences and perceptions of such couples can provide valuable insight into the changing dynamics of Indian families.

2. Need for the Study

Most existing research focuses on the statistical aspects of family planning and fertility patterns. However, limited qualitative research exists on how couples perceive their decision to have only one child, the challenges they face, and the benefits they experience. Understand emotional, psychological, and social factors influencing single-child families. Bridge the gap between rural and urban perspectives on modern parenting. Assist healthcare providers, counselors, and policymakers in developing family-centered education and support programs.

Objectives of the Study

- 1) To explore the lived experiences of couples who have opted for a single child.
- 2) To assess the perceptions of couples regarding social, psychological, and economic implications of single-child parenting.
- 3) To compare the experiences and challenges between urban and rural couples.

- 4) To identify influencing factors and social pressures related to the decision of having only one child.

Operational Definitions

- **Eligible Couples:** Married couples of reproductive age (18–45 years) who have only one biological or adopted child.
- **Single Child:** A family having only one child alive at the time of data collection.
- **Urban Area:** Areas within Indore Municipal Corporation limits with access to modern infrastructure and amenities.
- **Rural Area:** Villages and panchayats under Indore district jurisdiction with limited facilities and traditional family structures.
- **Perception:** The beliefs, attitudes, and opinions held by the participants about raising a single child.
- **Lived Experience:** The personal narratives and real-life situations faced by the couples in their decision and practice of raising a single child.

Assumptions

- Couples' decisions are influenced by social, economic, and personal reasons.
- Rural and urban couples may have differing perceptions and experiences.
- Couples may face societal pressure or support related to their decision.

Delimitations

- The study is limited to 30 eligible couples (15 urban, 15 rural) residing in Indore district.
- Only couples with one child will be included.
- Data collection will be limited to in-depth interviews.

3. Review of Literature

- **Liu et al. (2019)** conducted a study in post-one-child policy China and found that many couples, even after the

policy change, continued to have only one child due to economic constraints, educational competition, and lifestyle preferences.

- **OECD (2020)** data showed that in countries like Germany and South Korea, nearly 30% of families opt for a single child due to work-life stress and high cost of living.

4. Methodology

Design:

Qualitative, phenomenological research design.

Sampling Technique:

Purposive sampling.

Sample Size:

30 eligible couples (15 from urban MR-10 Indore and 15 from rural village Bhangarh)

Inclusion Criteria:

- Married couples aged 20–40.
- Have only one living child.
- Residing in Indore district for more than 5 years.
- Willing to participate in the study.

Data Collection Method:

In-depth semi-structured interviews using a validated interview guide.

Data Collection Tool:

Interview guide with open-ended questions focusing on motivations, challenges, societal views, family dynamics, and future expectations.

Demographic Profile of Participants

The socio-demographic details of the participants were analyzed using descriptive statistics and are summarized below:

Variable	Urban (n=15)	Rural (n=15)
Age (Mean Range)	30–40 years	28–38 years
Education (Graduate & above)	12 couples (80%)	5 couples (33%)
Monthly Income (> ₹30,000)	10 couples (67%)	3 couples (20%)
Occupation (Employed)	13 couples (87%)	9 couples (60%)
Duration of Marriage	5–15 years	5–15 years

Thematic Analysis (Based on Colaizzi's Method)

From the qualitative data, **five major themes** and **sub-themes** emerged, reflecting the participants' lived experiences.

Theme 1: Motivation for Having a Single Child

Sub-themes:

- **Planned Parenthood and Personal Choice**
Most urban couples (12/15) cited personal and lifestyle choices as reasons. Rural participants more often mentioned financial reasons or health issues.
- **Medical/Health-Related Constraints**
A few couples (4 in rural, 2 in urban) shared that maternal health concerns prevented further childbirth. "We feel one child is enough. We can give her all the attention and resources this way." – Urban mother

Theme 2: Emotional and Social Experiences

Sub-themes:

- **Emotional Fulfillment and Bonding**
Majority of couples expressed satisfaction and emotional connection with their only child.
- **Loneliness and Parental Guilt**
Some parents (more in rural areas) expressed concern about the child growing up alone. "Sometimes, I worry about who he'll play with. In our village, everyone expects you to have more." – Rural father

Theme 3: Perceptions of Social and Family Pressure

Sub-themes:

- **Societal Expectations and Criticism**
Rural participants reported facing more pressure and judgment for having only one child.
- **Family Reactions: Support vs Resistance**
Urban families were more supportive, while rural couples faced family resistance, especially from older generations. "My in-laws don't understand why we are not having a second child. They say it's unnatural." – Rural mothers.

Theme 4: Parenting Challenges and Advantages

Sub-themes:

- **Financial Security and Better Resource Allocation**
Majority (23/30) agreed that having one child allowed better financial planning and educational investment.
- **Concerns for Future Support**
Some participants worried about the child's future lack of sibling support, especially in rural areas.

Theme 5: Future Outlook and Satisfaction

Sub-themes:

- **Confidence in Decision**
Urban participants expressed strong confidence in their decision, with many recommending the one-child model to others.
- **Mixed Feelings Among Rural Couples**
Rural couples showed more hesitation, with some considering future adoption or second child. "We are content, but still unsure if our son will feel alone when we grow old." – Rural father

Supplementary Insights from Questionnaire Tool

The structured questionnaire (MCQ-based) provided useful patterns:

Question	Notable Response Trends
Q9 (Reason for 1 child)	60% urban – personal choice; 67% rural – financial reasons
Q11 (Social Pressure)	80% rural – experienced pressure; only 20% urban
Q14 (Child feels lonely)	40% rural – yes; 20% urban – yes
Q19 (Financial stability)	73% urban – agreed; only 40% rural – agreed
Q20 (Recommend to others)	12 urban couples – yes; 7 rural couples – yes, 4 – undecided

These responses reinforced the qualitative findings, showing differences in experience between urban and rural couples.

Comparison Between Urban and Rural Participants

Aspect	Urban Couples	Rural Couples
Motivation	Mostly personal choice	Mostly economic/health reasons
Perceived social pressure	Minimal	High
Family support	Mostly supportive	Mixed; often resistant
Parenting experience	Positive and confident	Positive but with some uncertainty
Concern for future	Less concerned	More concerned about child's loneliness

[5] Raj, A., et al. (2014). Family planning and gender equity: a global view. *Reproductive Health*, 11(1), 1–8.

Member Checking and Validation

After thematic analysis, participants were contacted (via phone or in-person) to validate the interpreted themes. The feedback confirmed that the analysis truthfully reflected their experiences, thereby strengthening the credibility of findings.

Inference

- Urban couples are more influenced by lifestyle preferences and economic factors.
- Rural couples often face social pressures and gender-based expectations.
- Across both groups, there is a growing awareness of the benefits of investing in a single child's well-being.
- The one-child decision is deeply personal but often negotiated within social and familial contexts.

5. Discussion

The study reveals contrasting perspectives across urban and rural regions. Urban couples tend to make individualistic, economically rational decisions, while rural couples struggle with societal expectations. The data shows a gradual shift in rural mindsets, influenced by education and exposure to urban lifestyles.

6. Summary

This chapter has presented a comprehensive analysis of the lived experiences and perceptions of 30 eligible couples who have opted to raise only one child. The findings reveal distinct social, emotional, and cultural differences between urban and rural participants. While urban couples emphasized autonomy, financial planning, and lifestyle, rural couples reported social pressure and traditional expectations as more dominant influences. The next chapter will discuss the findings in the context of existing literature

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