

# The Impact of China's Fertility Policy on Women's Employment and Suggestions

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**Abstract.** China's fertility policy is constantly adjusted to different economic, social, and demographic development periods. The fertility policy is conducive to promoting the balanced development of the population and slowing down problems such as population aging. However, the fertility policy has not reached the desired effect. The policy sparked heated debates among the general female population as soon as it was introduced. Peking University Law School published a study on gender discrimination in the Chinese workplace. The report shows that gender-based discrimination in employment is still serious, with one in four female respondents being rejected by employers because of their gender. Women believe that the implementation of the policy will affect their employment. This paper will analyze and study the negative impact of the fertility policy on women and propose solutions in China. Through the analysis, it can be found that the fertility policy has a negative impact on women's employment. Therefore, the government should make efforts to create a new environment suitable for women.

**Keywords:** Fertility Policy, Women's Employment, Gender discrimination.

## 1. Introduction

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC), China's rapid population growth has continued for an extended period. Liu argues that it is because of the natural continuation of the Chinese tradition of being fruitful and multiplying, the development of social construction, the improvement of medical conditions, and people's higher living standards [1].

China has entered the third stage of demographic transition at present. Yang argued that the mortality rate has decreased, and people live much longer. However, the mortality rate is rapidly declining due to increased income and policy interventions. In addition, the population keeps growing but at a significantly slower rate. The aging problem has increased seriously, leading to the GDP growth rate decline [2]. Compared to developed countries, China's demographic transition is faster, and the period is shorter, but the aging problem and the low fertility rate are more severe. It means that China will face more challenges than developed countries.

China's family planning policy was legally included in the country's constitution in 1978. "The country encourages family planning in order to align population growth with the country's economic and social development strategy," The central theme of modern Chinese population strategy is to encourage one child for each marriage. That is when the One-Child Policy was born. The two-child policy was progressively popularized in 2011. China stated in October 2015 that the two-child policy will be completely enforced in order to ensure balanced population growth, to maintain the core state policy of family planning, and to fulfill the population development strategy. Couples may have a second child under the Two-Child Policy. The one-child policy was repealed. The family planning policy was recently revised. The Three-child policy was carried out on 31st May 2021. It allows couples to have three children [3].

Employment is a complex subject that is intertwined with the country's general condition and people's livelihoods. Furthermore, women's employment is more difficult, involving aspects such as social standing and marriage, thus women's employment must be carefully studied. Women are vital components of family life and the primary focus of childbirth. The consequences and outcomes of China's population strategy are strongly tied to women's family situation, lifestyle, developmental level, and knowledge and understanding of delivery. As a result, while addressing population

concerns, women must be included in the policy framework and the impact of the policy on women must be investigated.

The fertility policy aims to improve the demographic structure to cope with the aging population, smooth out the declining trend of the total fertility rate, and free women from heavy household chores to participate in the workforce and maintain their human resource advantage. However, due to social and cultural influences, gender discrimination persists in China's patriarchal society. Women often have to take care of the family in addition to their workload. The liberalization of the two-child policy is equivalent to putting women in chains again [4]. Women have a low status in the labor market. Companies will consider that infertile women will get married and have children in the next few years, during which time they will incur expensive costs. So companies will prefer to recruit men, and gender discrimination in the labor market becomes apparent. Married women have the possibility of having a second child after the implementation of the maternity policy. They will take longer to return to work as they are generally older than women without children. So they are likely to be made redundant because of the birth of their second child. In the face of severe gender discrimination in the workplace, we need to understand women's hardships, supplement and revise existing policies to address the pain points, and adopt more appropriate approaches to alleviate the problems that may arise.

Therefore, there are few research questions will be answered in this study. The first is how fertility policies affect women's employment in China. The second is what policies can address the problems of female employment. Through the former literature and existing data, this research analyzes the impact of fertility policies on women's employment in China and gives suggestions for welfare policies.

## **2. Analysis**

### **2.1 The Reduction in the Employment of Women**

Firstly, when a woman chooses to have a child, she has to take on the whole process of pregnancy, breastfeeding, and even raising the child. For women themselves, the rise in age and the decline in physical function are not conducive to pregnancy, and older women are more likely to suffer miscarriages and face more risks. On the other hand, women with a second child have to take care of the first child and the family, taking care of the elderly and the increasing pressure of work.

Women face concealed discrimination in the employment market, and employers face additional hidden costs and early retirement costs when hiring female employees. With the introduction of a comprehensive two-child policy, companies are faced with paying for the costs of female childbirth once again and are more inclined to recruit men, thus increasing the discrimination against women in employment and increasing their employment difficulties. According to Xiao, when women return to their careers after maternity leave, their talents may deteriorate, their knowledge base may be sluggish to update, their competitiveness may weaken, and their feeling of professional satisfaction may suffer [5].

### **2.2 Women's Reduced Employability**

When on the one hand, women leave their jobs for longer when they have a child, and during this time, they are almost entirely out of the workforce. However, at the time of the birth of the first child, women are younger, and they can learn more quickly and gradually improve their skills to keep up with the pace of their position in the company. According to Tian's survey, the strongest desire to have a second child is among women of childbearing age in the post-70s [6]. However, not only do their physical functions decline, but their brains also become slower. When they have been away from the workplace for a long time, they do not adapt to the working environment and become more stressed, which makes them less productive.

On the other hand, with the birth of a second child, women have to take care of not only the child but also the older child, as well as household chores. The low level of socialization and high cost of

domestic services force women to focus more on the family and immerse their attention in the home, while their ability to work stays in the same place. As the family's attention increases, the workforce's attention decreases. The lack of knowledge and the fact that women are more backward and do not focus on updating their knowledge structure makes them less capable and competitive.

### **2.3 Women's Desire for Employment Decreases**

When family and work cannot be reconciled, most women make sacrifices. Firstly, the special status of women as childbearing subjects causes many problems for women. When a woman is pregnant, she may not be able to concentrate when she is unwell, and her lack of energy may affect her productivity. Thus, Bao argues that after the two-child policy, companies will face a series of problems, such as reduced work efficiency and high time costs, so many companies prefer men when choosing male and female workers [7]. Furthermore, women already face a barrier in a highly competitive profession, and motherhood will undoubtedly limit women's access to professional growth opportunities, making career development even more difficult.

Secondly, although the traditional ideas of "male superiority and female inferiority" have been erased over time, these gender concepts still influence social life. The family needs women to care for two children and their elderly parents. The heavy household of women also causes fatigue for women and limits their employment, mostly in informal jobs. Yuan argues that informal employment refers to employment that is unstable in terms of income, without social security and with low earnings. In the development of informal employment, the trend towards informal employment is more pronounced for women than for men. Women tend to be more concentrated in low-quality, low-income sectors [8]. Gender discrimination, paired with employment discrimination against women, has prompted some women to prefer their families above their jobs.

### **2.4 Salaries Issues**

The discrimination against women in employment is also reflected in the growing salary gap. According to the China Labour Market Development Report, China's gender income ratio (women/men) was 85.9% in 1995, declined to 84.5% in 2002, and the gender wage gap widened further in 2007, when the gender income ratio fell to 73.9%, and rose to 78.2% in 2013 [9]. According to Tian, 67.27% of women in her survey believed that men are paid more than they are, while 58.97% of men believed that men are paid more than women. In terms of the same job, men are still paid more than women, which has become a common phenomenon in society [10]. Therefore, women do the same amount of work as men but do not receive the same treatment, dramatically reducing women's employment aspirations. A significant proportion of Chinese women are in informal employment. Informal employment is low-paying and insecure, and the income of those in informal employment is much lower than that of those in formal employment. The gender gap in wages is much more significant in informal employment than in formal employment.

## **3. Suggestions**

The government should provide employment protection. The government should define gender discrimination clearly in law, increase its efforts to investigate and punish gender-discriminatory employers and create a friendly market and social environment for women to give birth voluntarily. At the same time, the government can provide enterprises with specific preferential policies and subsidies for childbirth [11]. They should ensure that enterprises can maintain a balance between production efficiency and the interests of their employees.

Economic development is fundamental to the promotion of employment opportunities. Promoting increased employment opportunities for women requires maintaining China economy's rapid and steady growth.

At first, gender awareness should be taken into account in policy-making to promote gender equality. Women need to be included in the process of policy-making. There are differences between

men and women in identifying problems; only women can genuinely identify the issues that exist for women. Increasing the proportion of women at the decision-making level will hear women's demands and voices.

Secondly, gender awareness should also be introduced in policy implementation. On the one hand, as the main body of policy implementation, it is necessary to have gender awareness to truly understand the differences between men and women and implement policies in a targeted manner. Otherwise, the various policies formulated by the government to protect women's rights will remain superficial and will not be implemented in depth. On the other hand, it is important to implement policies in collaboration with other policies to achieve coherence [12]. It is also necessary to increase the dissemination of gender awareness in society by breaking the 2,000-year-old traditional concept and making people aware of gender differences. They will be able to coordinate the policy implementation better and achieve better results.

In addition, subsidies should be increased to address the costs of women giving birth to a second child [13]. The government should pay for some expenses for enterprises to reduce the burden on them. Secondly, women who give birth to a second child should be given a certain subsidy, which should be higher than the average wage in the region and for a more extended period. It will reduce the cost of raising a second child and ease the financial pressure on the family. Thirdly, offer bonuses to encourage companies to employ female workers and monitor companies to prohibit gender discrimination. Fourthly, the length of maternity leave should be increased. Extending maternity leave will help change the traditional value of women's unilateral responsibility and emphasize that both men and women share the burden of childcare. The state and society should provide high-quality childcare services for families while the maternity insurance fund covers the various benefits of maternity leave rather than the employer.

According to Chen, countries such as Sweden and Finland have promoted active employment for women while providing a wide range of public services for children [14]. Feminist welfare ideology also advocates a focus on the welfare of children. In a modern world of fast-paced life, stressful work, and smaller families, the welfare of children is a crucial concern. Many families are faced with childcare problems, especially between the end of maternity leave and the child's entry into school. The government could provide a family care allowance for dual-income families until their children start kindergarten, develop childcare services for preschool-age children, and strengthen market regulation to keep the childcare system intact. The government should develop childcare services for pre-school children, strengthen market regulation and transfer some childcare tasks to the market. The government should also enhance the social and economic aspects of kindergarten services to cope with the impact of the two-child policy on school enrolment and balance the relationship between family and work for women to reduce their burden of childbirth. Singapore's policy of encouraging three generations to live together provides a good example of how grandparents can take on some childcare responsibilities. It not only increases the labor force participation rate of women but is also beneficial to the child's upbringing. This is why China can promote three-generation living through preferential home ownership [14].

#### **4. Conclusion**

In conclusion, China's fertility policy has a negative impact on women's employment. Women have many disadvantages in the workplace, making it more challenging to have a stable job. Women are biologically conditioned to go through pregnancy and childbirth, and childbirth can lead to physical discomfort, lack of concentration, and low productivity. After childbirth, the focus of life shifts from work to children. Women spend more energy and time caring for their children and gradually lose enthusiasm for their work, resulting in lower productivity. In addition, women are required to take paid maternity leave once they give birth, which is a relatively difficult decision for employers to make, so they prefer males to females.

After implementing China's fertility policy, various aspects need to be improved, so the construction of supporting measures needs to be strengthened. Firstly, the government can introduce corresponding laws and regulations, appropriately increase the number of days of maternity leave and increase maternity subsidies. Secondly, the government can consider extending compulsory education to childcare institutions and developing childcare services for preschool-aged children. On the other hand, to prevent women from interrupting their careers due to childbirth, the state and employers can actively provide them with services to help them plan their future careers.

Creating a new environment suitable for women's employment requires the concerted efforts of society as a whole. The government can reduce the burden of raising a child by offering tax breaks to families with two children and providing subsidies and grants to enterprises. The government can reduce the burden of raising children by providing tax breaks for families with two children, offering subsidies and incentives to enterprises, improving the environment in childcare facilities, and improving the professionalism of teachers. Companies should give women the same employment opportunities and salaries as men. At the same time, women should keep improving themselves and build a solid foundation for career development.

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