

A Study on Chinese Women's Fertility Intentions in the New Era: A Literature Review

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Abstract: With the awakening of self-awareness and the pursuit of self-worth in women's groups, women are beginning to value themselves and to go out into society to seek their own development. In the new era, women's willingness to have children has begun to change and their view of fertility is gradually different from previous generations. This paper mainly reviews the research on the fertility intentions of Chinese women in the new era from the characteristics of the new era women group, the current situation, the causes of low fertility intentions, the factors affecting fertility intentions, the progress of the existing research, the complement of the existing research, and the countermeasures to solve the low fertility intentions.

Keywords: New era, Fertility intentions, Fertility values, Female.

1. Introduction

With the increasing aging problem of China, the decreasing birth rate and the negative population growth in developed regions, the willingness of women to have children has also changed, with many women of childbearing age expressing reluctance or low willingness to have children. In this day and age, Chinese women have different attitudes towards childbearing, and the cost of childbearing in different regions has led to a change in women's willingness to have children. Women are beginning to balance the workplace and family at the same time, and as the cost of childbirth increases, financial pressure is becoming a major factor in women's willingness to have children. Women in the new era are seeking their own social status to find their self-worth existence.

This paper focuses on the factors influencing women's fertility intentions in different regions in the new era (born in the 1980s and 1990s), analyzes the fertility attitudes and fertility intentions of various groups of women at different levels, summarizes the research conducted in the past 20 years, analyzes the reasons for the change in fertility intentions of Chinese women in the new era, and gives suggestions and countermeasures from a social psychological perspective.

2. Research Status and Methodology

The research literature was retrieved from China Knowledge Network, and the advanced search was conducted with the subject term "fertility intention", and the time period was set to "2000-2022". In order to ensure the authority and credibility of the selected journals, the source category of the papers was selected as "CSSCI", and a total of 836 papers were retrieved, among which 49 papers were written by Feng Xiaotian. This paper focuses on the literature, interdisciplinary research method, empirical summary method, and descriptive research method, and analyzes the reasons for the influence of relevant factors on the fertility intention of female groups in the new era by summarizing the existing studies.

2.1. Current status of research on fertility intention surveys

The practice of fertility intention surveys for more than 30 years has shown that researchers usually use the "ideal number of children" or "the number of children they would like to have under hypothetical conditions" to measure people's fertility intention. In fact, the "ideal number of children" measures people's perceptions of fertility rather than their willingness to have children, and thus has low validity [1]; therefore, looking at the results of existing surveys, we can see that we actually do not know much about the fertility intentions of contemporary Chinese people based on the available survey data. The survey results are also disturbed by certain factors, and under the influence of relevant investigators, respondents may be reluctant to say their true thoughts due to certain psychological pressure, and the objectivity of the survey data is weak.

Fertility is a phenomenon that is closely related to a person's age, and especially to a woman's age. The essential feature of fertility intentions is people's subjective desire for their future fertility behavior and fertility outcomes. From the results of existing studies, the more appropriate types of survey respondents are the population of reproductive age (whose age range is usually 15-49 years) and the young population, which belongs to the most fertile segment of the population of reproductive age (whose age range is the smallest, usually 15-35 years) [2]. By limiting the age of the survey respondents, the survey data will more accurately reflect the number of people with fertility and fertility conditions at the present time, better obtain data with validity, and be the results of the survey better provide strong support for policy formulation.

2.2. Current status of China's fertility level

Fertility decline is the result of a combination of macro level of socioeconomic development and increased economic burden on micro individuals. Numerous foreign studies have shown that economic fluctuations leading to income instability and rising unemployment, heavy housing burden and the economic cost of raising children are the direct causes of the low fertility dilemma in countries around the world [3].

China is no exception, especially the direct financial burden of raising children and unaffordable housing costs have become important reasons for China's low fertility rate.

2.3. Current status of research on changes in fertility intentions in large cities in China

There are two perspectives of fertility intention research: level research and trend research, the latter of which better reflects the changes in people's perceptions and better predicts the future changes in fertility levels [4]. In this study (taking Shanghai as an example), the fertility intentions of different populations in large Chinese cities changed over a 30-year period, with the number of intended children gradually converging between urban and rural household residents in Shanghai and being lower than two. The fertility intentions of the mobile population and the household population converge gradually as their time in Shanghai increases. There are some differences in the fertility intentions of only children and non-only children between the household population and the mobile population, with the highest fertility intentions among non-only couples in the mobile population, followed by solo couples and the lowest among double-alone couples. The education level also influences the fertility intention of locals to some extent, with higher fertility intention among high-income groups and groups with higher education level, but the average number of willing children for either group in Shanghai is lower than two.

3. A Study On Women's Fertility Intentions in The New Era

With women becoming active in the workplace, the attitudes of women in the new era toward childbirth have gradually begun to change. The fertility attitudes of different groups of women may be influenced by various factors, and this paper summarizes the research on the fertility intentions of women in the new era by taking some representative cities as examples, analyzing the influencing factors and giving relevant countermeasures. In the existing studies, some researchers have interviewed some urban women, but due to the impact of the new crown epidemic, the number of people counted is small and only represents the fertility intention of some urban women.

3.1. A study on the analysis of factors influencing urban women's fertility intentions in the new era

With the awakening of women's self-awareness and the needs of social development, more and more urban women are pursuing the realization of their self-worth.

They are not willing to devote too much time and energy to family life and are more eager to become excellent and independent professional urban ladies. The overall fertility intention of urban women in the contemporary social environment is low, which can directly affect the change in China's population size and have an important impact on China's population structure [5]. In this study (taking Nanjing city as an example), the researchers found the following four factors influenced the fertility intentions of women in this city. First, family factors, women working in developed cities are affected by high work pressure and fast pace of life, and most of them give their children to their parents after childbirth to reduce the pressure of childcare. There is no shortage of factors such as mother-in-law-daughter-in-law conflicts, their

own fathers' expectations for their grandchildren, and the influence of their families of origin. Second, economic factors, urban women's income and expenditure and the pursuit of quality of life affect the group's willingness to have children. Most women said that high prices and high housing prices discourage them from having children, so at the economic level, the economic environment in which the women's group lives is not ideal. Thirdly, personal factors, the study analyzed three factors, such as physical conditions, personal preferences, and career pressure, respectively. Physical health is one of the most important factors affecting urban women's willingness to have children, and most women say that their physical condition is the first priority before deciding whether to have children. However, many women believe that "childbirth = unemployment", and due to the pressure of life, many women have a fear of childbirth. Fourth, social factors, in the city, many women have higher requirements for educational resources, and whether their children can receive better education is one of the important factors affecting this group's willingness to have children. Because of regional differences, even in the same city, there are three or six or nine different educational resources, the distribution of teachers is uneven, so the quality of education received by children in different areas is also the most concerned about the city's women of childbearing age.

3.2. Relevant studies on women's fertility values in the new era

New-age women's fertility values are knots with multiple dimensions and levels, specifically six dimensions including family emotional values, internal preferences, pursuit of utilitarianism, participation in judgment, readiness to commit, and responsibility orientation [6]. While the definition of fertility values varies among researchers, as this study has summarized the previous studies, so no detailed explanation will be given within this paper.

The study defines new-age women as those who were born in the 1980s and 1990s, who have experienced the one-child policy and reform and opening up, and who are now facing the "comprehensive two-child" policy. As the main subject of fertility, women make fertility decisions based on their own cognitive evaluation of their fertility behaviors combined with their upbringing and policy guidance. This researcher developed the questionnaire "Women's Fertility Values" which has good reliability and validity and meets the psychometric criteria.

3.3. Research on traditional gender concepts, information dissemination and female fertility intentions

In the media era, various social communication methods (e.g., mass communication, interpersonal communication) have important effects on people's perceptions, perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors [7], but the exact effects on traditional gender perceptions and fertility intentions specifically have not received sufficient attention from scholars [8]. It was found that although women's news attention on traditional media platforms did not present a direct relationship with their fertility intentions, the moderating effect analysis revealed an interaction between traditional gender perceptions and news attention on traditional media on women's fertility intentions. Specifically, for women with low traditional media news attention, traditional gender perceptions had a smaller effect on their fertility intentions;

while for women with high traditional media news attention, traditional gender perceptions had a larger effect on their fertility intentions.

4. Analysis on the Factors Influencing Fertility Intention

There are three major factors that influence fertility intention. The first is social factors such as national population policy, economic situation, traditional culture, production methods, social security system, employment situation and employment level. The second is family factors such as family customs and traditions, the cost of raising children and the income they provide to the family, and whether or not they are only children. The third is personal factors such as the nature of household registration, gender, age, occupation, education level, fertility and marital status, number of existing children and gender of existing children, health status, and whether or not they work outside the home [9]. Fertility intentions include three aspects: first, the number of desired children, which refers to people's expectation of the number of children they want to have in their lifetime under the influence of certain social, economic and cultural factors; second, the timing of desired children, which refers to the age at which people want to have children; and third, the sex of desired children, which refers to the sex ratio of children people want to have [10,11]. Macroscopic fertility intentions reflect the fertility culture of a society, and microscopic fertility intentions reflect the rational choices of individual actors [12].

4.1. Current status of research on factors influencing fertility intention

People's fertility intention is closely related to the change of population fertility level and future population development trend, which makes the factors influencing fertility intention and fertility behavior increasingly diversified and complicated. At present, most of the factors influencing fertility intention that we have studied are national population policy, economic situation, family customs and traditions, whether or not to have only one child, gender, age, occupation, education level, etc. There is less research on the influence of social security system, employment situation and level, whether to work outside the home, and the cost of raising children on fertility intention. Most of the research subjects are normal and healthy people, and there is less research on the fertility intention of special people with certain diseases or certain characteristics, more research on people with fertility, and less research on people who can influence people with fertility but no longer have fertility. Therefore, in future studies, it is necessary to study the factors influencing fertility intention in a more comprehensive and in-depth manner, and to further broaden the scope of the research subjects.

4.2. Studies on the influence of personal factors on fertility intentions

The health status of residents has a significant impact on fertility intentions, which is something that less attention has been paid to in previous studies. Some policies and programs that are being promoted in China to improve residents' diet and encourage exercise to promote their health may have a positive effect on increasing residents' fertility intentions; besides physical health, mental health status also deserves

attention, and strengthening spiritual security is of great significance to increase fertility intentions [13].

5. Conclusion

In summary, the life pressure of women in the new era is increasing, and the willingness to have children is low, and many women choose to marry late or not to have children. In the current situation, one of the goals is to increase the willingness of women to have children, and the second goal is to promote an even and reasonable distribution of educational resources to ensure equal quality of education. To promote the social understanding of women's fertility, so that women can have the courage to have children and reduce the pressure of women in the workplace. Since different groups of women have different levels of education and different attitudes and values toward childbirth, it is also necessary to develop local policies and provide different maternity benefits, respect women's willingness to have children, and provide psychological counseling for women who have concerns about childbirth.

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