

# Housewives' Stigma and its Resolution: Family Observation Based on Chinese Society

Hanyu Feng

Beijing No.2 Middle School International Division, Beijing, 10010, China

monseliu@Tencent.com

**Abstract.** Stigma carried out by housewives is rarely well-studied. There is a lack of awareness of housewives' stigma in academia. Few kinds of research relate to housewives' stigma. This research focuses on the stigma of housewives, the consequence of experiencing stigma, and how to eliminate the stigma. This research places attention on "How does the stigma influence housewives and how to eliminate the stigma". The study is carried out by a quantitative interview with housewives and the information collected online. The study first talks about the current stigma suffered by housewives and then discuss the impact on housewives. At last, the study also provides some feasible solutions to the problem, including propaganda depending on mass media and recreational works. This study would like to provide the academia with some information about housewife's stigma and try to eliminate the stigma as much as possible to provide housewives with a more comfortable atmosphere.

**Keywords:** Housewives; Stigma; Mental Illness; Social Support.

## 1. Introduction

Based on the data carried out by the seventh National Census of China, there are 6,888,438,768 women inside China, which takes 48.76% of the general population. Women of the 15-59 age group have a population of 804,380,000, which takes 63.35% of the women population. According to incomplete statistics, there are at least 26% of women in China choose to stay at home and be a housewife. From the world's perspective, it seems a safe bet that less than 10% - perhaps even less than 5% of women are purely housewives. Thus, compared to other countries, the animation of housewives in China has a greater effect on the development of a country. Henceforth focusing on Chinese housewives' lifestyles is more typical. However, the attentions to housewives' stigma inside academia are not as much as people thought. During the collecting process, data on the stigma carried by housewives can barely be seen. On the contrary, most research focuses on minority groups such as immigrants, the LGBTQ community, and ethnic minorities. Although the stigma experienced by them is more serious and typical, the stigma suffered by housewives is still worthy to mention.

The lifestyle of housewives is not very ideal. The stigma on housewives even affects their physical and mental well-being. Vicious comments from the outside make housewives lose their passion to be a housewife. Some of them even admit their uselessness and choose to suicide to end this invaluable life. The life quality and self-identity of housewives are badly destroyed by these stigmas. Yet these stigmas are usually not legitimate.

This study aimed at filling in the gap of studies on housewives in academia. During the research progress, information on the stigma that Chinese housewives experienced can barely be found. Academia didn't have lots of information and research about housewives. Housewives are seen as vulnerable groups that don't have enough strength to fight back. The study also would like to show society the value of housewives, to show society the benefits housewives bring to society, and further, society. Moreover, the study wants to eliminate discrimination against housewives as much as possible. Researchers of the study should keep an objective attitude toward the participants. They need to show their respect for the participants and their opinions. All the participants would have to be honest. To protect the privacy of these participants, the study will be carried out by an online interview with each participant separately. The interview will have to be recorded to piece more accurate information. All the voices will be processed, which means that the researcher will use a

technique to cover the participants' real voice and change it to another tone. Participants will wear a mask during the interview to protect their privacy.

## **2. What stigma is suffered by housewives?**

Housewives are often seen as the opposite side of independent women. Since most housewives devoted themselves totally to their families, barely do they have a job. Because people that are not housewives can have a considerable income compared to housewives, many discriminations have been made against housewives. Housewives are often bonded with family. Many think they don't have a critical fertility concept and their thought is numb. It's like they gave all of their body to the family. They are often considered birth machines. For example, if a housewife had three kids and she had quit her job, people would say she had lost her freedom since her whole life is stuck with kids and housework. Despite their huge effort in taking care of the family, they are still being seen with negative impressions.

### **2.1 Inadequate judgment of their independency**

A housewife's lack of highly valued occupational successes makes her especially vulnerable to the comparison effect. [9] People always think housewives are not independent, they are dependent on their husbands. People also think they are lazy and gluttonous because their pocket money is the salary their husbands give for their devotion to taking care of a family. Women's status has often been seen as dependent on their roles as mothers and wives, or their confinement to the domestic realm, but in rural societies, this public-private divide makes little sense. [6] In people's opinion, gradually, housewives will just become even more eager to rely on their husbands, which makes them nothing but a clingy wives. Imagine a housewife quit all her job just for taking care of a family. She had no income from the outside; thus her only income is the money his husband have him. The effort the housewife paid to take good care of a family is equal to the salary of getting a job in society. The efforts she paid are priceless. They cannot be simply defined or discriminated against by the economic success they brought to the family. One of the reasons that they are stigmatized might be the different standards of success in society. People always connect success with money but they neglected the importance of accompany and spiritual success, which is the success a housewife brought to a family. Even though housewives can't go out and benefit the family economically, they still increase the happiness of a family. This is more valuable than money. In the present analyses, wives have been categorized as not employed, employed less than 30 hours per week, and employed more than 30 hours per week. This classification of wives is an imprecise indicator of women's relation to the labor force, however, and undermines the search for attitudinal differences among wives. [1]

### **2.2 Criticism of their ability**

People think housewives do not have any ability to support themselves independently. Housewives are stigmatized like vulnerable vases, which will be broken at any time. bout themselves. Many people considered housewives as people without abilities. It's like they are not able to survive in society so they choose to say at home and be a housewife. The decision of being a housewife is considered an act of hiding by the public. The separation of the sphere of work from the privatized sphere of the home under the capitalist mode of production, and the designation of those realms to men and women respectively, has meant that women are at one stage primarily located within the home performing domestic labor and child-care. [10] One of the participants, Mary (alias), used to mention that many people had judged her because of her decision of being a housewife. She didn't graduate from a famous university, and she even didn't go to university at all. People use this lack of academic education to discriminate against her. They commented on her as a vulnerable vase that has nothing useful. This stigma even makes Mary doubt her choice. Thus it is clear that others' illegitimate comments have influenced a housewife's mental well-being. The cause of this stigma might be the discrimination of personal experience, which later leads to the stigma of housewives particularly.

Those who have a higher social status and life experience look down on those who don't have a bountiful experience as they do. They considered housewives as beautiful vases that only stay at home but don't have any value.

### **2.3 Personality Slander**

The public always makes comments saying that housewives have nothing to do every day. The public thinks their life is quite simple and all they have to do is to stay at home and spend the money their husbands gave them to have fun. In the public's opinion, the work done by housewives cannot compare with those working women who devoted themselves to the job market and fight industriously for a place in society. From the outside's perspective, what housewives do is just clean the house and cook some meals. Conversely, the daily work of a housewife is the same as those who go to the job market work. A participant called Fiona (alias) from the interview mentioned her day. When she wakes up in the morning, she needs to cook breakfast for her husband and kids. After sending the kids to school and saying goodbye to their husbands, she has to go to the market to shop for some grocery groceries. It's usually noon after shopping. She just has a simple lunch and then she will devote herself to the housework; she will do the laundry and clean the house. When Fiona finishes her work for the afternoon, she will have to pick up her kids. What is waiting for her is the preparation of dinner and tutorship for her kids. From the case above, it is clear that the housewife doesn't have much spare time every day. She sacrifices her time to make sure the normal life of a family. The participant also mentions that she gets tired after one day's work. The stigma which says they don't work is ridiculous. The cause of this stigma is the underestimating of the work of housewives and the lack of real experience as a housewife.

## **3. What kinds of influence will discrimination bring to housewives?**

Since stigma and discrimination was carried on housewives throughout their daily life, it would bring some negative impacts on their well-being. These negative impacts including prejudice life events, everyday discrimination, expectations of rejection, stigma management, and internalized stigma. Being a housewife and staying at home seems to be a mandatory gender role. Specifically, gender differences in self-perceptions of their abilities may lead females and males to select different educational training programs and to aspire to different occupations. [2] For some housewives with enough social support, these stigmas and discrimination won't have a big impact on them. On the other hand, housewives without enough social support will be deeply influenced by the stigma. Resilience plays an important role in dealing with the stigma. Stigma will affect housewives' mental well-being, causing mental diseases like depression or anxiety disorder. Moreover, some physical well-being might be affected by the stigma too. Extreme examples like suicide might happen if the stigma brought huge effects on the housewife.

### **3.1 Emotional damage**

Imagine being judged by others with bad language usually in daily life. Of course, housewives will be in a bad mood every day. Being stigmatized every day, housewives will gradually lose interest in their lives. They will firstly feel sad and disappointed since they received bad judgments. If housewives kept living in this environment, with those who are sensitive to others' comments, they would gradually have some issues with mental well-being. Depression is the most common symptom. During the research carried out by the author, a participant mentioned that she used to get depressed because of others' discrimination. She couldn't understand why she is discriminated against by others merely because of her role as a housewife. With no social support from the outside, housewives are not able to talk to someone and express their feelings. It may be that employment outside the home may prevent depression in women regardless of their social stratum. [8] Thus they will get depressed with so many negative emotions stuck inside their body. No social response, no resilience. Several authors, then, have indicated that women, particularly women not working outside the home, are more

likely than men to suffer from depression. [3] Most of the evidence, but not all, indicates that married women who work are in somewhat better mental health than married women who do not work. [4]

### **3.2 Internalized Stigma**

Hearing so many people judge themselves, housewives will gradually think of themselves as what they are judged by others. Housewives accept the negative social meaning of housewife as part of their self-concept. Theoretically speaking, this is called internalized stigma. Housewives will judge themselves as a useless person as what they are told by others. They begin to hate themselves and firmly believe that they are in a lower social class which is looked down on by everyone. From the beginning, housewives may have some motivation to change other's opinion and their opinion of themselves. However, if they were discriminated against every day, they would be tired of correcting the misconception of housewives repeatedly. Moreover, they will not treat their life seriously as they used to. They lose their interest in life. They begin to muddle along. Housewives give up on themselves. They admit the rationality of the stigma and the discrimination they experienced as their mistake. At last, they neither carefully cook for their children nor prepare a nice sandwich for her husband. Children and husbands may not accept the attitude of the housewife, and they may make some unsatisfied comments to the housewife. These comments will only make things worse, housewives will only become passive even further. Permanently self-stigmatized will devalue a housewife's ability.

### **3.3 The insecurity in a marriage**

The construction of the 'feminine' position for women is contradictory in a mode different from that of 'masculinity' and men. [7] Women sometimes are in a lower position in marriage. Being discriminated against by others usually, housewives will feel like there is a gap between them and their husbands. Continually being stigmatized by others will lower the self-esteem of housewives, regardless of their self-esteem in the marriage. Housewives will feel that they are not compatible with their husbands. It's like she doesn't fit her husband's social status and ability. They will feel insecure. When housewives felt insecure, they would behave abnormally cautiously and suspiciously. Emotionally, housewives will be fretted and over-scrupulous. With the outbreak of sentiment, housewives might argue with their husband husbands. They forwardly think their husbands look down on them. Even a small unintentional behavior can irritate the housewife to start an oral fight. Physically, housewives will behave nervously and meticulously. Extremely, housewives will keep questioning every act and move. For example, if the husband flipped over the phone quickly when the housewife came, the housewife might think he is hiding something. The housewife might think the husband cheats on her and suspiciously forces him to tell the truth. Of course, think kind of behavior would drive the husband crazy. Sometimes husbands even look down on their wives for their incomprehensible behaviors. Many marriages end up in divorce in this way

## **4. How to eliminate the stigma carried out by housewives?**

Many people still don't realize how crucial housewives are to maintain a normal life of a family. Some malicious stigma about housewives has influenced the normal physical and mental well-being of housewives. Without eliminating them on time, these stigmas will bring bad consequences for housewives. Hence it is very important to provide housewives with some solutions.

To start, the government can theoretically make the public affirm the value of housewives. The government can broadcast some positive propaganda about housewives describing their hard work. It is important to let more people acknowledge the toil of housewives. Firstly, the government can spread information through the mass media. Articles about housewives can be published in newspapers. Besides, some public service advertising can be shoot and played on the screen located in a crowded square. Secondly, some recreational work can be carried out too. The government should

encourage the development of female-theme films and teleplays. These TV shows are more likely to attract people's attention.

Moreover, the government or some organizations can also hold some social or community activities to improve housewives' social engagement. Activities can enrich housewives' life. Gradually, joining an activity would be their routine. These activities and engagements provide housewives with social support, while social support can reduce housewives' stress. Enough social support and social contact are important. A researcher once suspects that substantial differences may exist between students and housewives in terms of the frequency of informal social contacts, the intensity of peer pressure on one's choice behavior, the visibility of social approval in a group, and the rigidity of the group structure in which they interact. [5]

Housewives will be able to gain hope and optimism by focusing on delicate handcrafts. Furthermore, housewives will find a group they can depend on while having a bad time. Activities like this can also help build housewives' resilience, which is also good for facing discrimination and stigma. For example, a book-reading club can benefit housewives a lot. During their spare time, housewives can choose a book to read. With a round-table conference in a book-reading club twice a month, housewives will find literature interesting and can keep this habit. They can also enlarge their field of vision and learn new things during the conference. Also, handcraft courses like sewing can be applied to the activity. Under this circumstance, housewives can use their spare time to knit delicate jerseys for people they love. Not only do they show their care for the people they love, but also do they learn a new skill.

## 5. Conclusion

Stigma experienced by housewives includes inadequate judgment of their hard work, devaluation of their values, and biased opinion of their independence. These stigmas can affect housewives' well-being physically and mentally, causing the loss of passion, internalized stigma, and insecurity in a marriage. To solve the problem at full steam, the government should promote people to affirm the value of housewives and provide housewives with social support. This study aimed at filling in the gap of studies on housewives in academia. People merely notice the discrimination suffered by housewives. During the research progress, information on the stigma that housewives have experienced can barely be found. Academia didn't have lots of information and research about the stigma experienced by housewives. Thus, there is a gap in this area. The study also would like to show society the value of housewives and eliminate the discrimination against housewives as much as possible. To eliminate the stigma of housewives as much as possible, the author decided to start this research. This research also has some shortcomings. The inadequacy of this research is that because of the particularity of housewives, many deeper interviews and quantitative research can't be carried out. Many housewives do not want to share their feelings during the research.

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