

# The Dilemma of Chinese Women's Employment and Parenting and Its Solutions

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## ABSTRACT

In the labor market, women often suffer from gender discrimination. This paper discusses the dilemma of female parenting and employment, analyzes the gain and loss of women under the traditional family structure, and explores the reasons and solutions for women's reluctance to have children in China. This dilemma is largely a result of social prejudice, gender discrimination and employment discrimination, in which women are expected to take care of their families and children rather than succeed in their careers. However, working can give women economic power, which enables them to live more independently and achieve their self-worth. Thus, it is important to find a solution to this dilemma. The paper explores seven solutions to improve the situation, including reducing employment and gender discrimination, ensuring equal pay for men and women, introducing shared parental leave, reducing fertility and parenting costs and broadening employment patterns.

**Keywords:** *Feminism, Behavioral Economics, Economics, Gender Inequality, Employment Discrimination.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Women's employment usually benefits in many ways, including realizing their self-worth, increasing family income, rise social human resources, and promoting gender equality. However, "taking care of the family" has always been a problem hindering women's employment and promotion. According to the theory of comparative advantage in family economics, people tend to make women undertake more household duties. The cost of childbirth includes not only the money cost and time cost produced during pregnancy, but also the physical and psychological harm caused to women. At the same time, the time cost and energy cost of raising and taking care of children often need to be paid for by women. Therefore, having children takes a lot of time and energy out of a woman's life, which decreases women's working hours. Thus, women are often in a disadvantaged position in the labor market, especially women who are married and have children.

Some companies and institutions also prefer male applicants because unmarried women may bear the cost of childbirth in the future. The process of giving birth and raising children often takes a lot of energy from mothers. Statistics show that with the increase in the number of young children, the employment opportunities of married

women have decreased by 44.95% [1]. However, the Chinese institution has gradually introduced a "two-child" policy and a "three-child" policy (which means each family can have three children) in recent years to stimulate the fertility rate and reduce the trend of population aging. This makes society's discussion on women's rights in the workplace heated up again. It is believed that these policies are bound to aggravate employment discrimination against women since women bear the greater cost of childbirth. Since China relaxed its birth policy, the fertility rate has not risen as expected. This shows that many women still choose not to have children or to have fewer children.

According to China's 2020 census, 18.70% of the population is aged 60 or above, with 13.50% aged 65 or above [2]. Both of these data have increased compared with the data in 2010, which proves that the population aging trend is further increasing [3]. This paper focuses on employment discrimination against women due to fertility and parenting problems and discusses the balance of work and family from the perspective of female rights and interests via status analysis. Through the analysis and research of the current situation, the ways to help women get rid of the stereotype that women have to take care of their families can be found, so that they can devote more to social development, which can benefit both females and the whole society.

## **2. THE DIFFICULTIES FACED BY WOMEN IN WORKPLACES AND ANALYSIS OF DEEP-SEATED REASONS**

Throughout Chinese history, women were oppressed for a long time in the patriarchal society. Under the order of feudal morality, Chinese women were in a vassal position for a long time: they had no independent personality, no female consciousness, and no political or economic status. Since the Han Dynasty (202 B.C.), women's status in family life is mostly as the subordinate of men due to the traditional Confucian ethics. Under thousands of years of feudal oppression, women were restricted in many areas, including education, marriage, employment and politics. In 1949, the Chinese communist party set up People's Republic of China, and the government began to solve the problem of women's status and roles. There's a sharp contrast between the women before and after 1949. Nowadays, the situation of overt discrimination against women is much better, but some implicit discrimination still exists, especially employment discrimination.

### ***2.1 Employment discrimination – gender discrimination***

Employment discrimination refers to being discriminated against for objective reasons such as gender, race, religion, nationality, color, age and genetic information during job applying and employment. Gender discrimination is one of the most common forms of employment discrimination. It is mainly reflected in that women are considered to be inherently less intelligent than men, women need to be pregnant and take care of children, and women need to take care of families, etc. Due to gender discrimination, some companies only hire male candidates for new employees and give preference to male employees for promotions and raises.

China's female labor force participation rate is about 70 percent, and most of them are 22-25 years old [4]. However, these women usually cannot completely focus on their works due to family affairs. In 2015, the Chinese institution announced a new family planning policy, which is the "two-child" policy. This policy makes women be in a more disadvantage position in the labor market, since companies do not want to bear the cost of the time it takes for women to give birth. According to the statistics from Peng Xian-mei, Wang Jie and Li Gang-wei, the probability of employment and weekly working hours of married women decreased by 16.27% and 12.51 hours for each additional child aged six and under [5]. Therefore, more than half of the companies tend to ask about the family situations of female applicants.

With the relaxation of the "two-child" policy, enterprises are more worried about the impact of female applicants' family responsibilities on their works – the future fertility costs for unmarried women applicants, and

the possibility that married women applicants would choose to have a second or third child. The disadvantages of job hunting in the labor market of women would lead to weak employment opportunities and economic power, causing a decrease in women independence, and thus increases the inequality between genders.

### ***2.2 Difficulty of promotion***

In the process of promotion in the workplace, in addition to the performance appraisal of employees, the company management often also considers factors such as age and gender. Among these factors, fertility has a great impact on women. For these reasons, there are career ceilings for women.

Because women undertake most of the costs of childbearing and parenting, companies also tend to prioritize male employees for promotion, so companies usually have more men leaders. Some women also give up work voluntarily because of the physical and emotional stress of childbearing and parenting. Meanwhile, some women would find that they become unfamiliar with some work content and personnel changes when they return to work after maternity leave. As a result, women's voice in the workplace is further decreased, and the distribution of family tasks is more uneven. This might lead women to lower economic status, causing women in a more inferior position in society.

### ***2.3 Inequality in male and female birth rates***

According to the data from the National Bureau of Statistics from 1990 to 2015, there has been a marked decline in the female birth rate. In 1990, the male-to-female ratio of first-born babies is 105.2:100 and the ratio of third-born babies is 127:100; in 2015, the male-to-female ratio of first-born babies is 109.8:100 and the ratio of third-born babies is 148.5:100 [6]. However, the normal sex ratio for newborns is 103-107:100, according to the United Nations [7]. One reason for this may be that a long-standing cultural preference for sons over daughters has not been completely changed. This shows that the gender ratio of newborns in China is seriously out of balance, especially for third-born babies. This will increase the gender imbalance, leading to more gender discrimination against women. The imbalance of newborn sex ratio will lead to a far larger proportion of males than females in the population in the future, which will lead to the lack of female voices in all walks of life and the difficulty of expressing women's needs.

## **3. SOLUTIONS TO WOMEN'S COSTS OF CHILDBIRTH AND PARENTING**

The problem for women in the workplace is that companies tend to give preference to men who do not have to bear much of the burdens of childbirth.

Companies worry that women are taking too much time to give birth and raise children. Thus, the main problem is to address the difference in time that men and women need to spend on fertility and childbirth. At the same time, raising and educating children inevitably takes time, which conflicts with work. Because women in traditional family roles are expected to focus more on domestic work, this time cost becomes a stumbling block for women in the workplace. For this reason, some women who want to get ahead in the workplace have had to delay having children, because they are often marginalized by companies once they become pregnant, which can lead to the loss of important job opportunities and promotions.

Therefore, this problem has to be solved if these women want to have more opportunities in the job market. Considering that cultural and traditional issues cannot be changed overnight, it is unrealistic for men in the whole society to share more family affairs in the short term. In view of the above problems, there are four solutions for reference.

### ***3.1 Decreasing discrimination in employment***

Gender discrimination is one of the most common forms of employment discrimination. To eliminate such discrimination, unilateral efforts are not enough. This problem can be basically solved from three aspects: regulation, society and personal consciousness.

#### ***3.1.1 Establish an efficient regulatory and report mechanism***

China's Labor Law and Employment Promotion Law both stipulate that workers shall not be discriminated against in employment on the basis of ethnic group, race, sex or religious belief. To eliminate the situation of gender discrimination in employment, an important point is to establish an efficient regulatory and report mechanism. Reporting websites and applications can be established, and the anonymity of reporting should be guaranteed. Thus, anyone who has been the victim of unfair hiring practices can conveniently, quickly and safely report the enterprises.

Additionally, companies that are reported of hiring discrimination need to be punished vigorously, such as make public apology and impose fines. Under these approaches, employment discrimination may not be completely eliminated, but the situation will certainly get better.

#### ***3.1.2 Effective social appeal***

A very important reason for the discrimination against women is the influence of wrong social morals. Therefore, effective social appeal is necessary. These activities can be roughly divided into two parts: direct

stimulation and indirect promotion. First of all, news, articles, and taglines related to employment discrimination and gender discrimination can be published on various social media to make people pay attention to these problems and appeal to people for eliminating the discriminations. In addition, short video platforms, such as Tik Tok, Facebook Watch, and Instagram Reels, are very popular now. These sort of video platforms can be used for indirect promotion. For example, shooting short plays about job discrimination and posting them on short video platforms can easily make people realize that some stereotypes and discriminatory behaviors towards women are wrong.

#### ***3.1.3 Individual consciousness***

Besides the regulations and social appeal, individual consciousness is also important. If women do not have the self-awareness to fight for rights, then other changes are likely to be ineffective. It is meaningless to set up a reporting system if there are no women actively reporting the injustices they have suffered. Thus, it is important to make sure that women are aware of their rights so that they can report and fight for them.

Firstly, pamphlets could be given to female students in primary schools. These booklets can be filled with interesting short stories and comics that can build a confident sense of themselves from an early age. Secondly, successful female alumni can be invited to give speeches, so that those female students can clearly realize that women can achieve success and should protect their rights. Finally, there should be more images of strong, independent and confident women in films and television. These female images should be of all races, colors, and looks, instead always with beautiful faces and bodies. These more diverse independent images of women show girls that they can also be those women.

### ***3.2 Make sure men and women get equal pay for equal work***

Article 46 of the Labor Law of China clearly requires men and women to receive equal pay for equal work. Enterprises that do not comply with this law should be punished and ordered to rectify. An effective reporting system is still needed. Through the public report to quickly find the problem enterprises, and ordered them to rectify. This kind of social supervision can play a great role Human resources and Social Security bureaus, procuratorates and courts should punish enterprises and institutions in accordance with the law for hiring discrimination in violation of the labor law, such as equal pay for equal work.

### ***3.3 Maternity leave and parental leave***

One of the biggest concerns that companies have about not hiring or promoting female employees is that

women may spend too much time giving birth and raising children, which hurts their work efficiency. In order to eliminate the gender gap in this time cost, the option of both parents taking maternity leave and parental leave could be adopted. Such an approach can not only effectively control gender discrimination in hiring and promotion, but also solve the problem of fathers being less involved in family and child rearing. It is of great help to promote gender equality. In order to achieve this, the government should not only strengthen the sense of social responsibility of the company, but also ensure the operation of the company by providing appropriate support such as rewards, tax reduction and public subsidies according to the situation of the companies.

### ***3.4 Decrease the cost of parenting***

In the process of educating children, parents inevitably need to spend a lot of time and energy. However, spending too much time on parenting means parents have to give up some of their job opportunities. This sacrifice is often borne by women. To solve this problem, the government can establish child-care centers for children under three years old. These child-care centers can ease the pressure of parenting, helping parents get back to work as soon as possible.

Sexism has long been an issue of widespread concern. Women always encounter some unfair treatment in their daily life and work. The change of the status quo needs people to change their ideas, which cannot be completely solved only by relying on some external supervision. The real solution to women's employment-parenting dilemma is for parenting to be completely split equally between the two parents. Meanwhile, people need to be aware of the sacrifices women make in pregnancy, childbirth and raising children, and understand and respect their efforts.

### ***3.5 Diversification of employment forms***

In addition to the above methods, women can also increase their adaptability and expand their career pathways instead of applying for jobs at firms. Under the current COVID-19 epidemic, many enterprises have to reduce costs through layoffs and other methods. Many small, medium and micro enterprises failed to survive and eventually closed down. As a result, employment is much tougher than in previous years. It is also harder for women to find works under such circumstances. Therefore, broader approaches to employment opening are needful. Livestream Marketing and online shopping are very popular due to the epidemic. Women can take this opportunity to launch their own career and find self-value through network broadcasts. Additionally, the various social media platforms are also great places to start a career. Women can share skills and objects they are good at or interested in on these platforms and monetize after gaining fans.

## **4. CONCLUSION**

Women are the main body of social reproduction, but also the important human resources in social development. Because of the reactions and changes women have to overcome during pregnancy, they are bound to reduce their valuable contribution to the business. Therefore, women giving birth tend to have a negative impact on their employment. For this reason, many companies are reluctant to recruit female employees from the recruitment stage, and this will also reduce the job opportunities of pregnant female employees. After these women give birth, it is difficult for them to fully return to work and have the same promotion and job opportunities as before. As a result of these situations, women rarely appear in the leadership of various industries, which leads to the lack of opportunities for women to express and create more value in society. This leads to the lack of diversity of human resources, logical thinking patterns and decisions at all levels, which is very detrimental to social development. At the same time, for women themselves, their chances of achieving economic independence and visual self-worth will also be reduced, which is detrimental to achieving gender equality in our society.

This paper has mentioned seven solutions to decreasing discrimination in employment, including establish regulatory and report mechanism, enhance social group awareness, strengthen individual consciousness, make sure equal pay for equal work, increase male maternity leave, decrease the cost of parenting and increase forms of employment. These solutions mentioned in the paper are still not detailed enough. Future research will put forward more fully and concretely solutions combining with the changing social reality. Social development and reproduction are essential to human development, so the dilemmas women face in employment and parenting are needed to be resolved.

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