



The Impact of Policies on Discriminations against Professional Women

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Abstract. This paper attempts to review the impact of policies on women preparing for pregnancy in the workplace and puts forward some personal suggestions by analyzing and comparing the current status of marriage and childbirth policies in various countries around the world. This paper finds that: 1) the policies of marriage and childbirth are directional to women; 2) Well-intentioned policies such as maternity leave sometimes may cause side effects; 3) Due to different social needs in different countries, the policies cannot be directly compared because of the current needs; 4) Most of the policies in the world currently play a positive role in the issue of discrimination against women in the workplace, and some policies even fight against the inherent prejudice of society. This paper can provide implications for future research to pay attention to gender policies and reduce the gender gap.

Keywords: Policy · Professional women · Discrimination · Role conflict · Cultural value

1 Introduction

A policy refers to ideas or a proposal in particular situations that has been agreed to officially by a group of people, a business organization, a government, or a political party. On the one hand, policy on marriage and childbirth is the main factor that contributes to the discrimination against professional women [1]. On the other hand, some other policies may have indirectly contributed to this discrimination. Besides, the policy itself is not independent, which is based on a country's cultural values and ideological traditions, and therefore reflects the country's inherent discrimination against professional women [2]. Policies lead to discrimination against professional women and also reflect inherent societal perceptions.

In this paper, the author argues that policy plays a relatively complex role in discrimination against professional women. Policies are formulated under the influence of history and culture [2]. This paper mainly discusses the discriminatory impact of marriage and childbearing policies on professional women, and also explains some other policies. Since different countries have different demographic structures and labor needs, even if they are marriage and childbirth policies, their purposes and priorities are not exactly the same. Therefore, it is worth noting that the global policy initiative is having a positive impact on the existing discrimination against professional women. Although

the degree of implementation of this initiative varies from country to country, it is indeed playing a positive role.

2 The Relation Between Policy and Discrimination

Policy, consists of a series of planned and organized actions or activities, involves understanding and formulating possible options, setting an agenda or prioritizing spending, and then choosing actions to take considering their impact, which can function in political, managerial, financial and administrative structures to achieve various goals. Policies in this paper is divided into national policy, local policy and organizational policy, and this classification is based on the definition from the policy.

When talking about the relationship and the discrimination, we should first explore the relation between policy and society. By explaining the definition of policy, Oxford Dictionary divides it into three national policies: local policies and organizational policies.

2.1 National Policy

The purpose of formulating national policies is to effectively solve basic livelihood problems, eliminate unstable factors in society, and reduce the status quo of social differentiation and inequality. It is often aimed at promoting economic development and improving people's living standards [3]. Therefore, economic development is the main consideration and usually has no direct impact on the issue of discrimination against women preparing for pregnancy in the workplace, except for the marriage policy [4, 5].

2.2 Local Policy

Local policies are further supplemented on the basis of national policies and combined with regional characteristics. Due to the different occupational needs and occupational composition of women, in service-oriented cities such as Shanghai, professional women come from all over the country [6]. There is a large demand for talents. Also, there are very attractive policies for talent introduction. However, in some industrial cities with traditional light industry or even heavy industry as the pillar of economic development, they pay more attention to the number of labor force, paying more attention to the number of labor force and tend to encourage women to have children.

2.3 Organizational Policy

In organizational policy, we are mainly talking about company policy here. Decision makers will have certain restrictions on recruitment according to the company's own talent needs and economic interests, and will make adjustments with changes in national and local policies. Sometimes such adjustments are individual companies, sometimes entire industries, and sometimes even large groups of companies.

In general, the relationship between the discrimination of working women who are trying to conceive and the policy is complicated, because the policy itself will make

different decisions due to different perspectives and considerations. These decisions, such as national policies, will be based on the current state the economic development needs to be adjusted to the interests of most citizens, and due to the different economic development structures in different regions, the national policies will be supplemented and explained differently, not to mention organizational policies.

3 Childbirth Policy and Maternity Leave

Fertility rate and labor force participation rate have always been closely related. In this reason, childbirth policy and maternity leave are the policies directly related to discrimination against working women [2, 7]. In 2022, the Special Provisions on Labor Protection for Female Employees in China, the introduction of new maternity leave regulations, maternity leave was extended to 158 days, 60 days more than before.

3.1 Maternity Leave Policy

Women who focus more on their careers are more likely to be removed from core positions after a lengthy maternity leave, and extended maternity leave means an increased likelihood of that. Allowances have a fixed formula. Maternity benefits refer to the actual wages of female employees before maternity leave rather than the minimum company standard within the company. The original purpose of maternity leave is to encourage childbirth through the extension of postpartum leave based on the current social situation of aging society and increase the country's fertility rate.

However, extended maternity leave further exacerbates discrimination against women in the workplace. Based on the national minimum maternity leave setting, local governments have further supplemented maternity leave and extended maternity leave. For example, Qinghai Province has extended maternity leave to 365 days, which means that career women can take a whole year off if they become pregnant. Unfortunately, the side effects of the maternity leave gap in the workplace huge - far outweighing the positive effect of the vacation itself. During this year, the company needs to pay the corresponding salary to the female employee who has given birth in accordance with the state regulations and cannot be dismissed, although the state pays most of the expenses and gives the company corresponding subsidies, it is still necessary for the company to bear part of the cost of childbirth caused by pregnant female employees [8]. In addition, because career women who have returned to the workplace have at least half a year of vacation, their sensitivity to the industry has decreased, and their mastery of technology and knowledge has become unfamiliar, which has virtually increased the cost of technical training for the company [9].

At the meantime, when it comes to the paternity leave for men in China, still taking the example of Qinghai Province mentioned above, which has the longest maternity leave for female employees. Therefore, the paternity leave for men is also the longest, but it is only 30 days. This means that when female employees need more than half a year's rest time, male employees can quickly return to their jobs without additional worries about re-adjustment [9]. This inequality in maternity leave on the one hand exacerbates the seriousness of gender discrimination in recruitment of professional women [10]. On the

other hand, due to the interests of the company, this unequal length of maternity leave exacerbates women's family responsibilities, which negatively affects their possibility of returning to the workplace. Because career women who have just given birth lack the company of their husbands—because they only have a week to a month of paternity leave—these women have to spend a lot of time and energy taking care of their children alone, making it difficult for them to return to work early and take care of their children. There is a lot of time in the process of having children to care about their own industry dynamics, which seems to further strengthen some stereotypes about women in the workplace [11]. The blank period of work brought about by maternity leave will cause professional women to lose their core competitiveness and find it difficult to compete for higher positions. This is what we call the hidden ceiling of professional women.

3.2 Childbirth Policy

In addition to the direct impact of maternity leave on women's workplace discrimination, there is also the country's childbirth policy. During the implementation of the one-child birth policy in China, because a family can only have one child, the status of women has been rising, and the traditional concept of patriarchal preference has been weakened, which provides greater possibilities for women and men to work on an equal footing [8]. However, this has also created hidden dangers in Chinese society with a huge population base. In order to alleviate social pressure, China comprehensively launched the two-child policy in 2011, followed by the three-child policy in 2021. The three-child policy makes employment difficult for young women who are ready to enter the workforce [8, 12].

3.3 Some Supporting Policies

Due to the problem of population aging, marriage and childbirth policies in most countries are based on the perspective of encouraging childbirth, while ignoring the role conflict of professional women [13]. Generally speaking, young ladies in China hold the view of late marriage and childbearing, but it doesn't work. From the perspective of the company recruitment, the company cannot confirm whether each young woman really has no plans to have children in the near future and also cannot confirm whether these women are really unprepared to have three children, which means they can take three maternity leave [8]. Although the national policy encourages childbirth and provides sufficient childbearing conditions for professional women who are ready to give birth, this kind of childbearing benefit has weakened the competitiveness of women in the workplace.

Therefore, some companies directly choose the one-size-fits-all principle, adding the conditions for recruiting only men [7]. In some countries, while encouraging childbearing, they take into account the work problems of career women, in addition to providing women's own maternity benefits, namely maternity leave and maternity allowances, they also provide family care allowances, such as education allowances for children, and medical allowances for supporting the elderly. In addition, some have shortened the inequality in rest time between men and women by extending the length of paternity leave and parental leave for men, which is beneficial to reducing gender discrimination in the workplace and to a certain extent, solving the problem of "widowed education".

4 Other Policies that May Affect Gender Discrimination in the Workplace

4.1 Compulsory Education Policy

If other factors are not considered, the relationship between education and work is positively correlated, and a person's level of education is directly related to his upper limit of work, especially in the context of social development in the world nowadays [4]. The audience of compulsory education is all young people, there is no distinction between men and women, and this equality in education provides the basis for equality in work. In many African countries, there is still no universal compulsory education. This inequality in the right to education prevents women from acquiring sufficient knowledge. Therefore, there are also great restrictions on the choice of work. They can only be engaged in manual labor and mechanical handicraft.

4.2 Gender Quota System

In a broad sense, a quota is the management and allocation of limited resources, a balance of unequal supply and demand, or the different interests of all parties. When the supply of a certain product is in short supply, the implementation of the quota system can adjust the imbalance.

Norway instituted a gender quota system for boards in 2003, requiring 40 percent of corporate board members to be women. Meanwhile, more than a dozen countries like Swede and Malaysia, have quickly implemented similar quotas. The gender quota system uses a coercive method to break through the hidden ceiling of women in the workplace, and the proportion of female employees in the company's leadership has increased. At the same time, this policy is also applicable in the political field of some countries. An increase in the proportion of women can further weaken the problem of gender discrimination in society, thereby playing a positive role in workplace gender issues.

5 Summary

There are various policies among the different countries, in which one policy may cause the positive and the negative effect at the same time. For example, pregnancy leave is aimed to let women take better care of their families, not out of the original meaning of discriminating against professional women, but it does indirectly lead to this result.

The policies promulgated in diverse countries are different. Taking Asian countries as an example, Japan's policy on encouraging childbirth focuses on the welfare of children and the elderly, while China provides pregnant women with longer maternity leave. Due to changes in social structure and the needs of the labor force, some national policies are inclined toward professional women but have not been fully perfected. Some global initiatives and policies are also playing a positive role. Due to the problem of population aging, marriage and childbirth policies in most countries are based on the perspective of encouraging childbirth, while ignoring the role conflict of professional women. Some

welfare policies are well-intentioned. However, as they do not take into account the actual social status quo, they have played an invisible negative role in discriminating against professional women.

Policy affirmation for professional women is the way to break the Glass Ceiling. In summary, policy shows a positive trend on the issue of discrimination against professional women although it still needs to be further improved.

6 Conclusion

Based on the current marriage and childbearing policies, generally speaking, due to the serious phenomenon of social aging, especially the negative population growth in many countries, most countries are actively encouraging childbearing. In the current existing policies, here mainly refers to the national policy, population aging and negative population growth are nearly global issues, which is the reason why the marriage and childbearing policy that encourages childbearing is the current trend. Based on this global policy of encouraging fertility, women, as a special group with reproductive function, will inevitably be affected.

In addition to the protection of labor rights and the necessary pregnancy period for women who are willing to conceive, the more important thing is to improve the problem of discrimination against women that still exists in the society through the formulation of policies. In addition to the protection of labor rights and the necessary pregnancy period for women who are willing to conceive, the more important thing is to improve the problem of discrimination against women that still exists in the society through the formulation of policies.

From the perspective of national policies, it is possible to increase the length of paternity leave for men to reduce the pressure on postpartum women. Furthermore, it can also reduce the burden of support and children's education for working women. Subsidies are provided in various fields such as medical insurance and education.

From the perspective of state policies, more targeted strategies can be formulated according to the local economic development structure. Also, in organizational policies, postpartum re-entry job training can be added. Additionally, respecting for female employees during pregnancy, necessary mother and baby rooms or private spaces should be added in the company. Lastly, regular communication with employees on the status of the industry should be maintained with the advice of female employees on maternity leave, and appropriate and formal psychological counseling should be carried out.

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