



Research on the Effect of Intergenerational Care on Fertility in China

Song Hu^(✉)

School of Public Administration, Southwest Jiaotong University, Chengdu 610031, China
husong8email@163.com

Abstract. In order to cope with an aging population and declining fertility rates, encouraging people of childbearing age to have more children has become a measure in China. From the perspective of intergenerational care, this thesis conducts research on work pressure, nursery industry, traditional culture, retirement system, and the status of fertility, these are concluded that intergenerational care is beneficial for the fertility of the younger generation.

Keywords: Parents · Intergenerational care · Willingness of fertility

1 Introduction

According to the data of the seventh National Census, China's population structure shows a trend of increasing the elderly population and decreasing the new population, and the demographic dividend is gradually disappearing. The elderly population aged 60 and above accounts for 18.70% of the total population, and the elderly population aged 65 and above accounts for 13.50% of the total population, the figures mean that China has entered aging society. Compared with the sixth National Census data, the proportion of the population aged 15–59 and over fell by 6.79%, the elderly population aged 60 and above increased by 5.44%, and the elderly population aged 65 and above increased by 4.63%. China is still in a demographic dividend period, and on this basis, the economy will continue to develop. However, with the deepening of the aging population, the economic growth rate in the future will decline. China's economic development has continued to be strong after its total economic output has reached the second place in the world, and its large population has provided sufficient labor force for continued economic development. Aging population affects economic stability, and it will result in a lack of labor for economic development. And the decline in the proportion of young people leads to insufficient innovation vitality, which further slow down the speed of technological progress and affects the sustainable development of the economy.

Another situation is China's total fertility rate in 2020 has dropped to 1.3, far below the population replacement level of 2.1, and China has entered an extremely low level of fertility. Marriage is the foundation of fertility, and the increase in the number of marriage registrations has a promoting effect on fertility. In recent years, the number of marriage registrations in China has declined year by year, as it shown in Table 1, the

Table 1. Divorce rate from 2008 to 2020

Year	Divorce rate
2020	3.09
2019	3.4
2018	3.2
2017	3.2
2016	3.0
2015	2.79
2014	2.67
2013	2.58
2012	2.29
2011	2.13
2010	2.0
2009	1.85
2008	1.71

Data sources: Sorted out by the author

divorce rate have increased year by year, which confirms the phenomenon of China's declining fertility rate indirectly. Besides, the age of marriage among young people in China is being delayed, and the fertility rate has been significantly reduced.

For many young people, it is necessary to have one child, and for the second child and above, the cost of fertility needs to be considered. The direct cost is the consumption generated during the growth of children. Including daily expenses for children, education expenses and other extra expenses, which are quite a lot for many families. The high-quality requirements of modern society for children make modern parents pay more attention to the growth environment of the next generation. In some big cities, in addition to the school curriculums, parents require students to participate in all-round development extracurricular classes, which is also a part of the expense.

2 Literature Review

Whether the elderly can provide adequate care resources for the next generation of their children will greatly affect the fertility of their children. Parents provide adequate care for their children's fertility and help their children reduce the pressure of raising the next generation, which is particularly evident in balancing occupation and fertility.

Chinese grandparents regard it as a family obligation to care for their grandchildren, which not only strengthens family unity, but also provides childcare services to help children balance occupation and fertility [1]. The provision of intergenerational care by grandparents will have a positive impact on the fertility of working women [2]. In addition to China, the phenomenon that grandparents taking care of grandchildren also exists in some foreign countries.

Foreign scholars have also conducted research on this situation. According to survey in Western countries with better childcare services, grandparents still play an important role in childcare [3]. By investigating the relationship between grandparents' health and caring for grandchildren in 11 European countries, the researchers found that for grandparents, caring for grandchildren may be beneficial to physical health. By taking care of grandchildren, the elderly can increase their physical activity in the process of caring, thus producing the effect of exercising to a certain extent [4]. After studied countries where grandparents have a higher responsibility to care for their grandchildren, it was found that grandparents not provide intergenerational care for grandchildren has a lower quality of life. Providing care to grandchildren is beneficial to grandparents [5]. It illustrates the importance of grandparents in children's lives and provides data that most children are in contact with grandparents at least once a month [6]. Grandparents are primarily responsible for raising their grandchildren, which has been gradually accepted by society [7]. Grandparents help their children look after the next generation [8]. Caring for grandchildren is one of the roles of grandparents, and research on the situation of older adults caring for grandchildren has found that caring responsibilities can have beneficial effects. More than one in five young children in Australia are cared for by grandparents [9]. Grandparents are more likely to provide intergenerational care when mothers are relatively young and work in irregular hours [10]. Most grandparents provided intergenerational care, and a significant number of them chose to live with their grandchildren [11].

Grandparents and grandchildren can also help each other, especially for older grandparents, grandchildren can also help themselves in daily life. The study of fertility in Germany found that in the context of an aging population and increased life expectancy, grandparents have become an important resource for caring descendants, especially providing intergenerational support for children to care for grandchildren. For the elderly, while taking care of their grandchildren, the growth of the grandchildren will also bring spiritual comfort to their grandparents, which has also become a way for the elderly to enrich their spiritual world [12]. Research in Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam found that many seniors over the age of 60 live with their grandchildren, with grandparents providing day-to-day care for the grandchildren [13]. Grandparents and grandchildren can look after each other, so most grandparents don't see intergenerational care as a burden.

Many domestic and foreign literatures show that the situation of intergenerational care provided by grandparents will still exist for a long time, and it is obviously important for fertility.

3 Necessity of Intergenerational Care

3.1 Pressure of Work

With the rising cost of living, there is a conflict between occupation and fertility. Under the premise that people's energy and time are limited, it means that there is only one choice between occupation and fertility. The various living costs of young people require them to work hard, so that the work pressure of the younger generation is higher. After a

tiring day at work, there is less time to think about fertility, especially for young women, whose pressure of work is heavier.

Work pressure has a negative effect on childbearing willingness. For fertility, couples need to consider whether they have enough time to complete the whole process. There is a conflict between fertility and women's employment. On the one hand, the fertility rate will affect the quality of employment and employment rate. On the other hand, an increase in the employment rate will crowd out the reproductive time of women and reduce the fertility rate. From pregnancy to child rearing, fertility needs a long time to carry out, it not only means that women give up working, but also means that men need to bear the household expenses totally. Parents provide intergenerational care for their children, which can minimize the time women spend on raising offspring. Then women have enough time to develop at work, and young families can earn more income. It can boost fertility desire in young families fundamentally.

Furthermore, the increase in average life expectancy provides a guarantee of good health for the elderly, they can complete many things independently. The care of grandchildren by grandparents not only means guaranteeing the growth of grandchildren, but also means reducing the pressure of raising the younger generation, which can indirectly increase family income and reduce the economic burden for raising fertility rate.

3.2 Lack of Norms in the Nursery Industry

The childcare industry in China is in infancy, and there are still some problems in the childcare industry currently. On the one hand, the quality of practitioners is uneven, and many parents are skeptical of nursery institutions. On the other hand, the overall construction of the nursery industry is not perfect, and the charging standards vary greatly. Private institutions have better conditions but higher fees, which are unaffordable for most families.

Compared with family care, the form of nursery institutions is intensive management. Therefore, Chinese parents are less accepting of sending their children to an unfamiliar environment for early care. The childcare industry in China has not been recognized by most people, family care is still the mainstay for the next generation. And the growth of the next generation after the age of 3 also requires the support of the family. From kindergarten to primary and secondary schools, family support plays a more important role in the growth of the next generation during this period. Intergenerational care will not only bring peace of mind to young generation, but also reduce family expenses.

3.3 Influence of Traditional Chinese Culture

Traditional Chinese families have been responsible for supporting the elderly and raising the next generation for a long period of time. In a traditional family, a stable family has both the functions of caring for the elderly and raising children. Nowadays, with the development of society, the family structure is gradually developing in the direction of the nuclear family form. However, it is only the change in the form of family structure that does not essentially cut off the connection between parents and children. Influenced by traditional culture, parents will urge their children to bear. Meanwhile, parents will try their best to solve a considerable part of the problems, including intergenerational care,

for their children. In modern society, with the work pressure of the younger generation increasing, the task of raising the next generation is largely carried out by the grandparents rather than the children's parents. Family support for childbearing can effectively improve children's willingness to bear next generation, and parents' spiritual support has a greater impact on the childbearing willingness of the younger generation.

3.4 Influence of Current Retirement System

At present, the retirement age stipulated in China's retirement system is 60 years old for men, 55 years old for female cadres, and 50 years old for female workers. In addition, with the improvement of living and medical standards and, the average life expectancy of Chinese is also gradually increasing. Compared with many countries in the world, the statutory retirement age in China is relatively lower. Many elderly people are energetic and have a lot of leisure time after retirement, and they can take on the task of raising the grandchildren.

3.5 Less Stress on Raising Offspring of Only Child

Most people of childbearing age were born in the family planning era. A family only raises one child, and there are no other siblings in the family. An increase in the number of siblings will distract parents from helping to care for their grandchildren. When siblings are of the same age and all have children, the quality and time of care that parents can provide decreases, thereby reducing the willingness of young people to have children. However, after the children of the family planning era get married, there is a higher probability that both husband and wife are only children. On the premise that parents need to provide intergenerational care, there are four parents in total, and only need to take care of the only grandchild born by their single son or daughter. In this case, intergenerational care will be almost stress-free, sufficient human resources can be provided for caring for grandchild, and even more grandchildren can be afforded.

3.6 Requirements to Increase Fertility Rate

Fertility is the source of labor for a country. China's fertility rate has shown a downward trend in recent years. Compared with other countries in the world in declining fertility, China's fertility decline started late, but extremely fast. Therefore, increasing the fertility rate has become an urgent issue. In order to increase the fertility rate, China has successively introduced some policies. To a certain extent, these policies are conducive to alleviating the status quo of the declining fertility rate. The provision of intergenerational care by grandparents is a response to policies that can effectively encourage young families to consider having more children.

4 Conclusion

The above shows that intergenerational care is beneficial for the fertility of the younger generation. Children's willingness of fertility requires parents to provide intergenerational care, the reasons including work pressure, nursery industry, traditional culture,

retirement system, and the status of fertility. Firstly, the work pressure of children requires parents to help them share the pressure of caring for the next generation. Secondly, family care is still the main care method in society. Thirdly, traditional culture makes grandparents develop the habit of providing intergenerational care. Fourthly, the current retirement age provides ample time and energy for intergenerational care. Fifthly, sufficient human resources for grandparents can take care of more grandchildren. Sixthly, intergenerational care can fill gaps not covered by policies of fertility. These can be concluded that intergenerational care can improve children's fertility willingness.

5 Suggestions

Based on the situations, this research believes that the improvement of fertility willingness can be promoted from the following aspects.

First of all, focusing on the construction of nursery service system. Introducing high-quality talents to the nursery industry and promoting the standardization of charging and service standards. One of the most efficient way is to establish cooperation with relevant colleges and universities to recruit professional talents. Meanwhile, strengthening governmental supervision and providing correct guidance to nursery institutions in the market.

Furthermore, building an employment security system. It can alleviate the conflict between occupation and fertility by reducing the work pressure of people of childbearing age, especially for women.

Finally, strengthening financial support and improving supporting policies for fertility. It is necessary to increase government funds to lessen the cost of fertility for people of childbearing age, which can ease the burden of childbearing. At the same time, ensuring the implementation of the maternity leave system.

Acknowledgments. Thanks to a friend of mine who introduced the topic of fertility in our previous exchange, I found that I was so interested in this topic, which gave me the inspiration for this thesis. After that, I checked a lot of information and learned about the problem of the current declining in China's fertility rate. I hope that I can find the impact of intergenerational care on fertility, so that my own insights and opinions can be contributed to increase the fertility rate.

Authors' Contributions. Under the trend of declining fertility rate in China, in order to alleviate the degree of population aging in China and solve the negative impact of population aging. Comparing the fertility willingness of similarities and differences between domestic and foreign countries. In the context of governmental encouragement of fertility, this thesis aims to analyze the impact of intergenerational care provided by grandparents, so as to put forward suggestions for improving the fertility rate in China.

References

1. Tang F, Xu L, Chi I, et al. Psychological well-being of older Chinese-American grandparents caring for grandchildren[J]. *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*, 2016, 64(11): 2356-2361.
2. Gu H, Bian F, Elahi E. Impact of availability of grandparents' care on birth in working women: An empirical analysis based on data of Chinese dynamic labour force[J]. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 2021, 121: 105859.
3. Sarti R. Who cares for me? Grandparents, nannies and babysitters caring for children in contemporary Italy[J]. *Paedagogica historica*, 2010, 46(6): 789-802.
4. Di Gessa G, Glaser K, Tinker A. The impact of caring for grandchildren on the health of grandparents in Europe: A lifecourse approach[J]. *Social Science & Medicine*, 2016, 152: 166-175.
5. Neuberger F S, Haberkern K. Structured ambivalence in grandchild care and the quality of life among European grandparents[J]. *European Journal of Ageing*, 2014, 11(2): 171-181.
6. Gray M, Misson S, Hayes A. Young children and their grandparents[J]. *Family Matters*, 2005 (72): 10-17.
7. Purcal C, Brennan D, Cass B, et al. Grandparents raising grandchildren: Impacts of lifecourse stage on the experiences and costs of care[J]. *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, 2014, 49(4): 467-488.
8. Jendrek M P. Grandparents who parent their grandchildren: Circumstances and decisions[J]. *The Gerontologist*, 1994, 34(2): 206-216.
9. Goodfellow J, Laverty J. Grandparents supporting working families[J]. *Family Matters*, 2003 (66): 14-19.
10. Vandell D L, McCartney K, Owen M T, et al. Variations in child care by grandparents during the first three years[J]. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 2003, 65(2): 375-381.
11. Luo Y, LaPierre T A, Hughes M E, et al. Grandparents providing care to grandchildren: A population-based study of continuity and change[J]. *Journal of Family Issues*, 2012, 33(9): 1143-1167.
12. Ates M. Does grandchild care influence grandparents' self-rated health? Evidence from a fixed effects approach[J]. *Social Science & Medicine*, 2017, 190: 67-74.
13. Knodel J, Nguyen M D. Grandparents and grandchildren: care and support in Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam[J]. *Ageing & society*, 2015, 35(9): 1960-1988.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

