Childhood Factors and Marital Stability - An Empirical Study Based on CGSS

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Abstract. In recent years, China's divorce rate has been rising and the fertility rate has been declining. Unsatisfactory family marital relationships have seriously hindered the development of the productive value of human capital, and indirectly brought negative effects on economic growth and social progress. Children, as an indivisible human asset derived from the economic relationship of marriage, have a double impact on the costs and benefits of marriage, not only by increasing the cost of divorce, but also by affecting the quality of marriage during the lifetime of the relationship. This paper uses a logit model to analyse the impact of child factors on marital stability.

Keywords: marital relationship · child factor · marital stability

1 Purpose of the Study

The decline in marital stability and the rise in divorce rates have become a common phenomenon worldwide (Zhang Minjie, 1997) [3]. Along with China's economic and social development, the divorce rate is also rising. The persistently high number of divorces and divorce rates have seriously affected the happiness and health of divorced parties and their family members, reduced marital stability and marital functioning, and highlighted the enormous challenges to marital families in contemporary China.

This paper adopts a logit model to explore the relationship between child factors and marital stability, based on the results of the 2017 and 2018 CGSS surveys as data support.

2 Literature Review and Research Hypothesis

(I) Review of the literature on marital stability

Marital stability actually reflects the attitudes of the parties to a marriage or their confidence in the continuity of the marriage, such as whether or not they have entertained thoughts of divorce. As long as one spouse has such an intention to divorce, then the

marriage is in an unstable state (Ye, Wenzhen and Xu, 1999). Research on marital stability is an important way of predicting divorce rates, while helping families with poor marital stability can also provide timely help and adjustment to eliminate the risk of divorce.

Becker (1977) proposed the theory of "specific marital capital" from the perspective of microeconomics, i.e. the higher the socio-economic capital associated with marriage (e.g. children, couple's income, years of education, professional status), the higher the marital stability of the family [1]. Barham et al. (2009) used an intra-household game model to analyse divorce and found that couples with similar preferences, similar productive capacity and a more even distribution within the household were less likely to divorce [2]. Nye (1969) and others found that three factors, namely the positive influence of marriage on the parties, the socially binding nature of divorce and unattractive alternatives, were positively related to marital stability; Lewis (1979) and others directly linked marital stability to marital quality, arguing that the higher the quality of the marriage, the more stable it was.

Chinese scholars' research on marital stability has mainly focused on the analysis of influencing factors. Zheng and Fangming (2019) explore the influencing factors of marital stability from the perspective of marriage matching [4]; Ma Zhongdong and Shi Zhilai (2017) construct an analytical framework of marital stability of the migrant population from three dimensions: mobility mode, mobility time and mobility space [5]; Zhang Jun (2016) explores the relationship between women's marriage age and marital stability from the perspective of women [6].

(II) Children's factors and marital stability

Fei Xiaotong said, "Marriage is the means by which society identifies parents for children, and the couple relationship formed from marriage occurs from the parent-child relationship. The couple relationship presupposes the parent-child relationship and the parent-child relationship presupposes the couple relationship as a necessary condition" [7]. From the perspective of social solidarity, Durkheim (2000) argues that couples establish a dependency relationship through the division of labour in the process of raising children together, and this organic solidarity formed based on the division of labour relationship has the attention to maintain the stability of marriage [8]. Based on the 2010 CFPS, Xu Qi et al. (2013) concluded that the higher the number of children, the higher the marital stability, but there is a diminishing marginal effect of the number of children on the protection of marriage [9].

Synthesising the above literature, we find that domestic and international scholars' research on marital stability has mostly focused on the analysis of influencing factors, including the matching degree of the couple, such as education level, age difference, the impact of mobility on marital stability, the age of women at marriage, etc., and the children factor.

Therefore, based on the above theories, this paper proposes the following research hypotheses.

1. families with children have higher marital stability compared to those without children.

2. there is a U-shaped relationship between the number of children and marital stability, with both too few children and too many children having a negative impact on marital stability
3. of all families with children, those with male offspring have greater marital stability than those without male offspring
4. in rural areas, male offspring are more protective of marriage than in urban areas.

3   Data and Variables

(i) Data sources

The data for this study comes from the Chinese General Social Survey (CGSS) of Renmin University of China, which systematically and comprehensively collects data from society, communities, families and individuals at multiple levels. Based on the research topic and the questionnaire, the author chose to combine the data from two years, 2017 and 2018, in view of the small amount of data from a single year. Duplicate values, missing values, uncertain values, and extreme outliers were removed, leaving a total of 28 provinces on the mainland with data. Meanwhile, the author controlled for age and selected a sample of women aged 18–70 years. And as there were very few women with age at first marriage older than 5 and younger than 18, they were also removed. Also the number of those with more than 5 children was also very small and they were removed. Finally, the valid sample sizes for 2017 and 2018 were: 4343 and 4345 respectively, for a total of 8688.

(ii) Variable selection

The dependent variable is the risk of divorce, which the author will measure by whether an individual is divorced, expressed as a dichotomous variable (not divorced vs. divorced). The core independent variables for this study include the presence of children, the number of children, the gender of children, and the interaction term between the gender of children and urban and rural areas.

4   Results and Analysis

4.1   Results of the Logit Nested Model of Having Children and Marital Stability

The model of having children and the risk of divorce included models one to four. Model 1 controls for variables of individual background, including urban and rural household registration, educational attainment, and party membership status. Model two controls for variables of individual social income based on model one, including individual self-rated social status and total annual personal income in the last year. Model three controls for age at first marriage on the basis of model two. Model four adds the independent variable (presence of children).

From the binary logit analysis, the presence or absence of children is significant for marital stability at the 95% confidence level. The odds of marital stability are higher with children than without children $\exp(-0.546) = 57.9\%$. Hypothesis 1 holds.

4.2 Logit Model of Number of Children and Risk of Divorce

The number of children and risk of divorce model consists of models one to four. Model I controls for variables of personal background, including urban and rural household registration, education level, and whether one is a party member. Model two controls for variables of individual social income based on model one, including individual self-rated social status and total annual personal income in the last year. Model three controls for age at first marriage on the basis of model two. Model four adds the independent variable (number of children).

4.3 Logit Model of CHildren's Gender and Divorce Risk

The model of child gender and divorce risk consists of models one to four. Model I controls for variables of personal background, including urban and rural household registration, education level, and whether or not one is a party member. Model two controls for variables of individual social income based on model one, including individual self-rated social status and total annual personal income in the last year. Model three controls for age at first marriage on the basis of model two. Model four adds the independent variable (gender of children). The author treated the child gender variable by excluding all childless households in order to examine the effect of the presence or absence of males in offspring on marital stability in households with children.

4.4 Logit Model of the Presence or Absence of Male Children on the Risk of Divorce Between Urban and Rural Areas

Gender of children and risk of divorce between urban and rural areas includes models one to five. Model one controls for variables of personal background, including urban-rural household registration, educational attainment, and whether or not one is a party member. Model two controls for individual social income variables on the basis of model one, including individual self-rated social status and total annual personal income in the last year. Model three controls for age at first marriage on the basis of model two. Model four adds the gender of the child. Model 5 adds the interaction term between urban and rural areas and gender of children to model 4.

5 Summary and Reflection

This study found a significant effect of the above core variables on the risk of divorce for women in China. Specifically, the presence of children has a protective effect on marital stability, and the greater the number of children, the greater the marital stability, with no U-shaped relationship as hypothesised. At the same time, families with boys had higher marital stability than families without boys, but the presence or absence of boys did not have a significant effect on marital stability between urban and rural areas, partly due to the small number of divorces in the sample itself, and partly due to the trend towards emancipation in rural areas. The above findings are a good indication that children, as a bond between couples, have an extremely important influence on stabilising marital relationships and resolving family conflicts.

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