

The Impact of Maternity Protection Welfare Policy on Women's Willingness to Have a Second Child in Lanzhou

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1. THE TOPIC OF THE PROPOSED RESEARCH

1.1 Background

'Since the 1970s, to control excessive population growth, China has implemented a family planning policy, which has been designated as one of its basic national policies' (Wang et al., 2016, p.1305). However, many scholars are concerned that in the decade or so since the implementation of the family planning policy, China has seen an increase in aging, an imbalance in the gender ratio between men and women, and a steady decline in the number of working people (Guo et al., 2002). Therefore, timely adjustment of reproductive policy has become particularly important. 'In October 2015, China decided to fully implement the policy of two children per couple to improve the demographic situation' (Zheng, 2016, p.83).

'The full two-child policy had a significant impact over two years in 2016-2017, but from 2018 onwards the number of births and the birth rate fell, even lower than in 2011. This means that the size of the population has declined to some extent after just over three years of the policy' (Zhang, 2019, p.5). This is mainly due to several practical factors, 'including high employment pressure, financial pressure and high medical costs for women' (Zheng and Zhang, 2020, p.8). The temporary incapacity of women workers during childbirth can have a significant impact on their financial income and can lead to discrimination in employment. In accordance with the provisions of the Lanzhou maternity protection policy, 'under ideal conditions, women are guaranteed medical care by the state and society, as well as maternity benefits and maternity, leave to alleviate the financial and employment pressures' (He et al., 2014, p.7). Therefore, the adequacy of maternity protection policy largely affects whether women can complete the birth process and whether they have a strong desire to have the second children. This paper, therefore, examines the willingness of women in Lanzhou to have a second child under the maternity protection welfare policy, to understand the shortcomings of the policy, and to improve them.

1.2 Research Purpose

By analysing the impact of women's willingness to have a second child in Lanzhou City under the premise of having maternity protection, this paper identifies the shortcomings of the maternity protection policy to improve the relevant policies of the maternity protection system and stimulate the willingness and behaviour to have a child by optimising the maternity protection policy to make the implementation of the comprehensive two-child policy more effective.

1.3 Research Significance

This research is original. Lamont et al. (2004, p.190) believed that 'by using new methods, theories, and data to study a new topic, the research is original'. Merton (1968, p56) proposes that 'originality is the highest value of science'.

This study is innovative. Due to the short implementation cycle of the comprehensive two-child policy, there are even fewer studies analysing the impact of maternity protection policy in this area. This study synthesises aspects of maternity protection measures and maternity benefits in Lanzhou while contextualising the implementation of the two-child policy in Lanzhou to complement and enrich the research data in this area.

This study has practical implications. Firstly, the analysis of the fertility intentions of women of childbearing age advances the depth of research on the comprehensive two-child policy, which is beneficial to both the development

of Lanzhou city and its citizens. Secondly, the study improves the systemic nature of the maternity protection policy and lays the foundation for the ongoing promotion of a comprehensive two-child policy.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Concept of Maternity Protection Policy

At present, maternity protection policy in Lanzhou can be divided into two categories. 'One category is for working women who are employed, providing medical maternity expenses and compensation for interruption of labour, and providing maternity leave. The second category is for peasant and non-working urban women, which provides partial coverage of medical maternity expenses but no compensation for interruption of income' (He et al., 2014, p.7).

2.2 The Concept of Fertility Intentions

Fertility intentions are based on a person's or family's preference for children and consider various limiting conditions, including the number, sex, and time interval between expected children (Gu,2011). People's fertility behaviour is governed by their fertility intentions, which are related to the social context in which they live, and several social factors can influence fertility intentions and therefore fertility behaviour.

2.3 Related Studies

In the existing literature, the impact of the maternity protection policy on women's willingness to have a second child is divided into two areas. On the one hand, there is a positive effect on fertility intentions, and on the other hand, there is a negligible effect of the policy on fertility intentions and an analysis of the reasons why the effect is not significant. Scholars have studied women's fertility intentions from different perspectives and with different methodologies, with similarities and different findings.

Yang (2012) concludes from a literature analysis that the introduction of maternity protection policy can reduce the risks women need to take to have children, thus promoting greater willingness to have children'. He believes that maternity benefits influence fertility decisions and that women will consider whether to have a second child based on their circumstances and will increase their willingness to have a child if the factors of hesitation happen to be factors that can be addressed by a maternity protection policy. However, Hu (2019) through the method of literature research, suggests that China's current maternity protection policy is too general, and its content needs to be improved. Today, there are more and more working women, and the time, energy, and money spent on having a second child are much higher than the compensation provided by the government's maternity protection policy. However, he does not consider the fact that women's fertility intentions may vary according to their physical condition and their area of residence.

Liu and Zhang (2018) also pointed out many loopholes in the maternity protection policy and found, through a quantitative analysis of 2774 cases of women in the same hospital, that some older women not only choose not to have a second child due to age and health issues but also consider that older materials need to spend more on prenatal check-ups, recover more slowly and spend more in hospital compared to ordinary women in labour. Therefore, there is a need to further improve the cost of healthcare for the older parturient.

Meanwhile, Wang and Peng (2015) analyse women living in rural areas in Site H through quantitative analysis, collecting data from 1991 to 2019 to arrive at the same findings as Liu's study. Women living in rural areas are overburdened financially as they only receive a small amount of compensation for childbirth, reducing women's willingness to have second children. Shao et al. (2016) use quantitative analysis to identify the need for maternity insurance protection not only for female workers of childbearing age but also for other women of childbearing age to improve the quality of the population. Chen's (2017) interviews with 30 married women in the city came to a similar conclusion that the current maternity protection policy cannot fully address the financial pressure on women to have a second child resulting in low fertility intentions.

Many scholars have found that the current maternity protection policy does not fully address women's employment issues, which is one of the reasons why women's willingness to have children is still low even with a maternity protection policy. Li and Sun (2018) analyse the impact of maternity protection policy on fertility intentions from a gender-specific perspective using a comparative approach. His study points out that women's roles as mothers,

housewives and working women at the same time give rise to special welfare needs, including maternity leave and maternity benefits, but the existing maternity protection policy cannot fully meet women's needs. Improving welfare needs will help to achieve gender equality and increase women's willingness to give birth. However, it is not just women's maternity leave that can affect fertility intentions, men's lack of paternity leave can also affect fertility intentions.

Gao (2019) also uses comparative analysis to analyse the impact of maternity protection policy through a gender lens, finding that maternity protection policy neglected men's maternity benefits in terms of maternity leave. This makes it difficult for men to care for women after childbirth, thus increasing the health risks and financial costs for women. Yang and Shi (2018) analyse the impact of women's social status and maternity protection policy on women's willingness to give birth through literature analysis and a questionnaire survey of 17,903 married women in Shanghai. The study found that although 'China stipulated 98 days of maternity leave for women in 2012' (Lu et al., 2019, p.59), but for most working women, they could not really take 98 days off due to their work, which not only caused stress to the health and mental health of pregnant women, but this is also the reason why many working women who have a job are afraid to have a second child.

Zhang and Ru (2016) explore the reasons for working women's low fertility intentions through documentary analysis, which found that second births can hurt harm on women's careers, and that gender discrimination in employment and outright unemployment are still frequent even when maternity leave exists. Through questionnaires and interviews in some areas of Shanghai, Zhao et al. (2017) found that even under the maternity protection policy, having a second child can still have an impact on a working woman's job promotion as well as their salary.

The sources used by Wang for the literature analysis are journals, which are more reliable and scholarly than websites because they have been evaluated academically (Tan et al., 2017). However, only five relevant documents are used in the whole text, and the small number of documents leads to many arguments without theoretical support.

Hu's references are smaller than Wang's, with only three. But Hu's literature analysis is limited to Yichun city, which makes the study more specific and get more direct access to research data. In Zhang's study, he combined the strengths of Wang and Hu, limiting the study to cities and using many literature sources in addition to journals and published books. Nevertheless, for the study of professional women, the author used only one method of literature research, a single approach to research.

Also using questionnaires was Zhao. He combined the field survey with interviews, which enriched the data collected but reduced the number of participants, most of whom were reluctant to be interviewed because the interviews took too long.

Both Liu and Wang used quantitative analysis to examine the reasons affecting fertility intentions. Liu integrated the data for statistical analysis and Wang modelled the data analytically for system analysis. 'Mathematical modelling not only allows for analysis of the system but also for predicting the future state of the it' (Tan, 2021, p.30). Li conducted a quantitative study of 150 working women using comparative analysis, which allows individual cases of bias to be identified and combined with questionnaires to draw more accurate conclusions. However, these 150 women were all from the same district in Hangzhou and were not compared with other districts.

In contrast to Li, Gao used comparative analysis to conduct an in-depth study of a single case, which is representative but prone to bias. Shao used the sampling method to randomly select clinical data from 600 pregnant women in Yulin city for a quantitative study. A larger number of surveys could lead to more generalized findings, but all the information was derived from case notes.

All these authors have used different research methods to find out the impact of maternity protection policies on women's willingness to have children. According to these scholars, there are two main reasons why women are reluctant to have a second child even with a maternity protection policy.

The first reason is that maternity benefits do not fully cover people's standard of living, and in some cases the costs far exceed the number of benefits. Studies have found that there is more than one aspect to having a child, including food, clothing, and other expenses in addition to medical care (Jiang and Zhang, 2011). Even families in

good circumstances do not want to overburden themselves with children and choose not to have a second child.

For older women and rural women, the cost of medical care is higher for older women than for ordinary women, and rural women, who receive less in benefits than working women and whose already difficult lives are made more difficult by having a second child, do not have a second child even if they have a maternity protection policy. However, these few did not consider the fact that according to the maternity insurance regulations, women with different jobs receive different maternity allowances due to the different social insurance payments, which has a very significant impact on the willingness to have a second child (Zhu,2007).

Another reason is that having a second child affects a woman's employment. Even when a woman is unmarried, if she interviews with a company, the employer will consider whether she will be pregnant soon and thus affect her job, resulting in a failed interview. Even though the maternity protection policy provides for maternity leave for the birth of a second child, for companies, not only will the position be vacant for a period during maternity leave, but it will also affect the company's profitability. So, many inequalities arise when it comes to women's employment.

While many scholars have studied the issue of women's fertility intentions, there has been no specific study of the fertility intentions of women with disabilities or underlying medical conditions, and the ability of fertility protection policies to ensure that women with disabilities or their medical conditions maintain their standard of living when they have a second child is an influential factor to consider. This is a very small group, but one that could be useful for improving fertility protection policies.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

All the data in this paper are secondary research, through China Knowledge Network, journals, books, google scholar to obtain the relevant data needed, and to minimize the frequency of information appearing on websites, photocopied materials, etc. Theoretical research and case study methods were used to obtain information on the implementation of maternity protection and women's willingness to have children in Lanzhou City, and to integrate the information collected and analysis the reasons for the low willingness to have a second child under the maternity protection policy.

3.1 Theoretical Research Method

By manually consulting the relevant information released by Lanzhou City Bureau of Statistics, major hospitals and some literature related to this study for collection as well as computer search to collate the relevant literature, and in the process of excerpting the authors of the literature as well as the relevant theories were recorded on time. After the integration is completed all the information will be reprocessed and the essential issues reflected by the theories will be analysed in depth.

3.2 The Justification of the Theoretical Research Method

‘Unlike other research methods, the theoretical approach rejects theories that are overly ambitious and detached from reality. The researcher cannot reason about pre-determined hypotheses, but rather inductively analyses them directly from the data so that they can stand up to the test of facts and guide people's practice in concrete life’ (Huang, 2004, p.122). Exploring the willingness of women in Lanzhou to have a second child under the Maternity Protection Policy requires a practical approach to draw reliable conclusions. Grant and Osanloo (2014) believed that the theoretical approach is one of the most important aspects of the research process and provides strong evidence for academic standards. ‘While empirical research supports the theoretical methodology, its key feature is that it abstracts novel principles and theories from empirical data and discovers new experiences.’ (Chen,1999, p.59). The use of theoretical research provides a theoretical basis for improving maternity protection policy and improving the two-child policy, and the combination of theory and practical examples allows for complete and accurate conclusions to be drawn.

3.3 Case study Method

By reading magazines, news, and relevant reports related to the willingness to have a second child in Lanzhou, some cases were screened, and two representative cases were finally selected for the study.

3.4 The Justification of the Case Study Method

As a research method, case studies can be used to describe contemporary information and draw generalised conclusions from it (Gee,1950). This has immediate implications for exploring the impact of maternity protection policy on women's fertility intentions. Barton (1990) believed that there is a great diversity of sources for case studies, including direct observation, systematic interviews, etc. Case studies are good options for researchers who are unable to conduct interview studies for several complex reasons. At the same time, real-life phenomena are described in detail through typical cases, analysing why they occur and discovering patterns from them (Ouyang, 2004, p.102). This is very helpful for the topic of this study.

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