



Study on the influencing factors of female teachers' fertility intention in shanghai universities

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Abstract

In recent years, Shanghai's population growth has been waning. Staggering fertility rate is one of the key reasons. In order to find out the obstacles, we analyze the group of female teachers in Shanghai universities, examine the current situation of female teachers' fertility and study the important influencing factors behind it, and provide corresponding countermeasures and suggestions for these factors. The purpose of this study is to provide inspiration for the solution of the fertility issues of female teachers at the Shanghai universities, as well as to give some reference to the improvement of China's demographic structure.

Keywords: Shanghai Universities; Female Teachers; Fertility Intention

1. Introduction

Population growth in Shanghai has been low in recent years. According to the "Shanghai 2022 Annual Demographic Surveillance Statistics" released by the Shanghai Health and Wellness Commission, the total fertility rate in Shanghai in 2022 remains at 0.7. This city's total fertility rate has been at this level for the past five years, which is well below the "alert" level of 1.5. Specifically, the one-child rate, two-child rate, and three-child rate of Shanghai's resident population in 2022 are 66.01%, 29.46%, and 4.53%, respectively. Shanghai city is in an extremely severe "low fertility trap" ^[1]. In addition, according to the forum on "Female College Teachers' Willingness to Give Birth and Social Support under the Three-Child Policy" organized by the Shanghai University of Political Science and Law in 2021, female teachers from various disciplines expressed their opinions on giving birth under the country's new birth call. They have reported that the dual role of "teacher" and "mother" has exacerbated the role conflict and seriously affected their willingness to have children in the future. At the conference, Yang Liu, a female teacher of government management, applied the "cultural abortion theory" to analyze the negative emotions of the public facing the "three-child policy" under the current fertility culture in China, and indicated that a low desire to have children is becoming a common choice for Chinese women. As a whole, the fertility intentions of female teachers in Shanghai's higher education institutions are not positive, in contrast to the "comprehensive two-child" and "three-child" policies promoted by the Chinese government. It is not conducive to the resolution of China's aging problem or the improvement of the demographic structure of China's society, and the reasons for this should be explored in depth.

Therefore, this paper takes female teachers in universities as the research object, clarifies the factors affecting the fertility intention of female teachers in universities through literature research and data collection, and puts forward countermeasures to improve the fertility intention of female teachers in universities accordingly. The intention of this paper is to provide a reference for the country's population growth as well as the improvement of the quality of its population.

2. Factors Influencing Female Teachers' Fertility Intention in Shanghai Universities

A higher education teacher is one of the most intelligent and advanced groups in the society today. Shanghai's female university teachers are still not responding actively to the national fertility policy, and the fertility rate remains stagnant.

In order to reverse this unfavorable situation as soon as possible and suit the remedy to the case, it is necessary to explore the reasons in depth. Through the organization of the literature, it was found that the factors affecting female teachers' fertility intentions are mainly as follows:

2.1. Age factor

From the current academic qualifications of teachers in Shanghai's colleges and universities, the vast majority of those engaged in teaching posts have a master's degree or above. Young teachers are almost doctoral degrees. Based on the statistics of the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China in 2022, 35-39 year old women account for the largest percentage of the total number of female teachers in higher education, followed by those between 30 and 34 years old (19.96%). While the optimal age for women to give birth is between 25 and 30 years old, women who give birth at a non-optimal age will be at a higher risk of giving birth or causing more damage to the mother ^[2]. Therefore, from their own point of view, many female teachers in colleges and universities often choose to give birth to only one child at the optimal childbearing age and then no longer have children ^[3], and some young female teachers even give up the birth of one child directly.

2.2. Cost factor

In addition to the pressures of pregnancy and childbirth, an even greater challenge for female university teachers, and for Chinese women in general, is the cost of childcare. After receiving higher education, female teachers in higher education have a unique and clear understanding of childbearing, and they have higher requirements for the cultivation of their own child than previous generations. In such a large, modern city like Shanghai, it undoubtedly means huge childcare costs to parents. The cost of parenting can be divided into two areas - financial and emotional. First, financial costs include short-term economic expenditures (e.g., formula, diapers, toys, etc.), long-term economic expenditures (e.g., educational inputs, housing, daily expenses, etc.), and occupational impacts (difficulty in promotion, leaving a job, etc.) ^[4]. These economic pressures place a great burden on the families of Shanghai's university teachers. Secondly, the mental cost refers to the energy invested by women in childcare after they become "mothers", such as education in basic life skills for young children, knowledge education, family companionship and so on. These demands make it necessary for women teachers in higher education to devote time and energy to their role as "mothers". A recent study of parents in some provinces of China showed that most Chinese parents have moderate parenting stress and that this stress is positively correlated with the number of children they have ^[5]. The huge cost of childcare has become another "mountain" for female teachers in Shanghai's colleges and universities to implement birth plans.

2.3 Institutional factors

At present, most of Shanghai universities have adopted an assessment system originated in the United States, that is, the "promotion or departure" system. Under this assessment system, young teachers have to face one severe assessment after another in order to be able to renew their appointments, increase their salaries, promote their positions, and so on. According to a report co-authored by academics at Shanghai

Jiao Tong University and the University of New South Wales in Australia, 61 percent of all female university teachers who signed "promotion-or-retirement" agreements were under particular stress. 60% of female teachers on "promotion-or-retirement" contracts who had not yet given birth were reluctant to do so because of the enormous pressure of work ^[6]. Behind this seemingly reasonable assessment system is the suppression of female university teachers' desire to have children. Many colleges and universities grant maternity leave to female teachers without extending the assessment period accordingly, forcing female teachers during pregnancy to continue insisting on completing the assessment targets in order to meet the assessment standards in spite of their discomfort. In addition, career discrimination is exacerbated by the "promotion-or-retirement" system. Many universities tend to prioritize resources or projects for male teachers, in large part due to the fact that male teachers don't have fertility pressure. No matter how rigid a policy is put in place to maintain this unfair treatment, the conflict between male and female teachers will be transferred to recruitment as a result. This has caused many women to give up childbearing by focusing on their future career prospects when it comes to the leverage between work and childbearing.

3. Responses and vision

3.1 Establishment of proprietary safeguard mechanisms

In the face of the current high proportion of female teachers in colleges and universities who are not of childbearing age, and the embarrassing situation of young female teachers who are "afraid to give birth", it is necessary to solve this problem at the source. Essentially, fertility risks and postpartum health issues are one of the key factors preventing female college teachers from having children. In this regard, it is necessary for the government and universities to establish a mechanism to guarantee the maternity of female teachers. For example, the State should establish additional maternal health-care departments to provide high-quality reproductive health-care services to all types of working women, including female teachers, and to improve the physical and psychological quality of pregnant women in the prenatal period ^[7]. In addition, the Government should also join hands with universities and hospitals to introduce supporting maternity medical insurance for young female teachers. This will provide one-stop services for female teachers in universities from the preparation for pregnancy, gestation, delivery to the postpartum period. Helping them (especially those who are not of the right age to give birth) to complete the whole birth process in a scientific and safe manner, and to minimize the risks of giving birth and postnatal health problems ^[8].

3.2 Provision of Comprehensive Reproductive Support

At present, the supportive policies for childbearing women by governments around China are not yet perfect, characterized by fragmentation and singularity; in order to further reduce the burden of childbearing on women, it is necessary to put in place an integrated and comprehensive set of supportive policies ^[9]. In terms of economic support, providing economic incentives for the rising economic costs of childbearing is a necessary action to encourage women to have children, such as maternity allowances, tax incentives or subsidies ^[10]. But it is important to note that these measures should not be just "patchwork". In this day and age, especially in a big international city like Shanghai, the financial cost of raising a newborn child is enormous. Therefore, the

Government should provide real "financial support" in order to alleviate the financial burden of families and increase the attractiveness of childbearing. In terms of moral support, a comprehensive family support system should be established, including the provision of childcare knowledge and skills training. Also, it should be aimed at encouraging family members to share childcare responsibility, alleviating the psychological burden of mothers and childcare pressures, and strengthening the family's cohesiveness and support.

3.3 Optimizing assessment policies in universities

It is recommended that the "promotion-or-retirement" policy for university teachers be appropriately optimized. First of all, universities should actively carry out seminars on the theme of fertility of female teachers and increase the voice of female teachers in the revision of policies, so that female teachers' aspirations and demands can be seriously and practically reflected in the plans for the improvement of assessment policies[11]. In terms of policy optimization, the assessment criteria should be appropriate relaxed or extended according to the maternity needs of women, and attention should also be paid to gender equity in the workplace, so that resources are not overly biased in favor of male teachers as a result of women's maternity difficulties. Provide more humanized assessment standards for female teachers in higher education, so that female teachers in higher education can really "dare to give birth and have children".

4. Summary

This paper takes female teachers in Shanghai universities as the research object. We extensively collected information about the current situation of the fertility intention of female teachers in Shanghai universities by means of literature integration. Then we summarized the three major influencing factors in this area - the age factor, the cost factor and the institutional factor. Finally, we proposed corresponding policies based on the above factors. The purpose of this study is to aid readers in understanding the fertility problems faced by female teachers at Shanghai universities and to provide valuable references for scholars and policymakers.

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