

The Impact of One-Child Fertility Support on Fertility Intentions: From the Perspective of Support System Completeness

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Abstract. China currently faces the dual challenges of a low fertility rate and an aging population. Enhancing fertility intentions has become a core issue in promoting balanced population development. Existing researches generally overlook support for one-child fertility. This article approaches the issue of support system completeness through literature research and case analysis, analyzes the impact of family, social, and workplace support on fertility intentions. The research shows that within family support, husband's active involvement in housework and childcare can alleviate women's physical and mental burdens and enhance their sense of security in fertility, making it a core component of family support. Regarding social support, community childcare services can reduce care costs, with a particularly significant impact on the post-90s generation. Furthermore, policies such as paid maternity leave and flexible work schedules can effectively balance fertility and employment. This article concludes that the three dimensions of family, society, and the workplace constitute an integrated fertility support system. Future policies should strive to build a coordinated and integrated fertility support system to provide solid support for balanced population development.

Keywords: One-child support, fertility intention, family support, social support, workplace support.

1. Introduction

At present, China's population development is in a critical transition period, and its situation presents unprecedented complexity and urgency. With the development of the social economy and the adjustment of population-related policies, the demographic dividend accumulated by China, as the world's most populous country, during the "baby boom" period, is gradually declining. Instead, it is facing the dual challenges and cruel reality of a continuous decline in fertility and a deepening aging population [1]. The coexistence of "low fertility" and "rapid aging" has become a significant challenge, affecting the long-term balanced development of China's population. Among the complex issues of population growth, fertility intention, as a key link between national population policy and individual fertility decisions, is the core factor affecting whether the fertility rate can be maintained and rebounded, and plays a decisive role in the long-term trend of population growth and the process

of balanced development. However, previous policy practices and research perspectives often put more energy into the study of the influencing factors of the behavior of having two or more children and the promulgation of incentive measures, but to a certain extent, ignored the support for the birth of one child, which is an indispensable link in the population growth trend. Under the profound traditional cultural background of China, there is a typical "altruistic motivation" within the family, which is mainly manifested in the careful balance between the quantity and quality of the offspring by the parent generation. This concept is deeply reflected in the two typical complexes of "more children, more blessings" and "hoping for one's son to become a successful person" [2]. Therefore, under the current new situation of China's population development, optimizing the birth policy as a starting point and effectively improving the willingness to have children as a path are becoming the key focus of alleviating the structural contradictions of population development and promoting the long-term steady and balanced development of the population.

Up to this day, research on the factors influencing fertility intentions has yielded numerous breakthroughs. However, academia still lacks a systematic and in-depth theoretical explanation of the actual role and potential impact of one-child support, a key component, on fertility intentions. This article, based on the comprehensiveness of the fertility support system, examines the impact of family, society, and the workplace on fertility intentions. It explores the underlying mechanisms by which one-child fertility support influences fertility intentions, enriches the theoretical framework of factors influencing fertility intentions, and provides new research perspectives and analytical approaches for subsequent related studies.

From a realistic perspective, the research results of this article can not only provide important guidance for the optimization direction of fertility policy but also serve as a strong basis for policy adjustments. Building a comprehensive fertility support system is a crucial measure in establishing a fertility-friendly society and a long-term strategy to promote the balanced development of the population over time [3]. If the research shows that the experience of having one child can significantly enhance women's willingness to have children, and the actual economic cost of having children is lower than the expected cost, then the focus of fertility policy should shift from focusing only on the birth of two and three children to focusing on the value of supporting one child and encouraging and guiding the birth of one child. On this basis, the support environment for one child can be optimized by improving policy measures such as fertility subsidies, promoting the completion of the "family support", "social support", and "workplace support" systems, thereby ensuring the long-term steady and balanced development of the population.

By using literature research and case analysis, we can effectively confirm whether there is a causal relationship between support for one-child birth and fertility intention. At the same time, during the analysis process, we explore the limiting factors of family, society, and workplace on women's fertility experience. In China's current low-fertility society, many families' fertility intentions have not been realized due to practical constraints [4]. This article aims to use literature research and case analysis to extract core ideas, sort out the research context, explore the deep logic, and clarify the causal relationship between support for one-child birth and fertility intention.

2. Analysis based on the perspective of support system completeness

Fertility support is a key issue that can enhance fertility intentions, optimize population structure, and promote steady and balanced population development. Previously, rich research results have been produced around the three dimensions of family, society, and workplace. The core results are shown below.

2.1. Family support: deepening research on husbands' involvement in the reproductive process

This article utilizes a literature review method to examine a journal article published by Zhang Shuxian. This article, grounded in the current context of women's social status in China, uses data from the 2020 China Family Panel Studies (CFPS) as a sample [5]. Using a Logit regression model to empirically analyze the causal relationship between husbands' participation in housework and women's desire for more children. Robustness tests are conducted using methods such as changing the research method, modifying the sample range, and replacing explanatory variables. The conclusion is that husbands' full participation in housework significantly increases women's desire for more children, with a significant positive correlation between the two. This conclusion persists after robustness tests.

From a logical perspective, husbands taking on some of the housework and childcare responsibilities can provide women with dual endogenous support for childbirth in terms of "time burden reduction" and "psychological stress relief". At the same time, through the collaboration of joint childcare, it also enhances women's confidence in family care after giving birth again.

Therefore, we can further infer that, compared to indirect support such as external custody and assistance from relatives and friends, the husband's involvement is undoubtedly the most direct and core component of the family support system for women's childbearing. The husband's full involvement in the woman's childbearing process can effectively provide women with a sense of security in their reproductive decision-making, and through "shared responsibility" and "couple collaboration," family support can support women's desire to have children.

2.2. Social support: improvement of community security and service systems

From the perspective of social support, taking the journal article published by Liang Tukun as the core analysis object, this paper systematically sorted out the research logic and core conclusions in the literature on the impact of community support on residents' fertility intentions [6].

This document is based on the realistic background of negative population growth in China, and based on the perspective of "lack of attention to community support perspective" in current research on fertility support. It uses the 2022 residents' livelihood security needs survey data to construct an analytical framework through the Logit regression model, in which community public services bring happiness, and then happiness leads to fertility intentions. At the same time, the robustness of the conclusions is tested with the help of intergenerational regression methods.

After studying this literature, the authors concluded that community childcare services, such as community canteens, can significantly and positively increase residents' fertility intentions, primarily by reducing the cost of post-natal care. Community amenities, such as green spaces and sports and fitness facilities like gyms, have a direct crowding-out effect on residents' fertility intentions, but this indirect crowding-in effect, through improved resident well-being, can offset much of the direct negative impact. In addition, community school resources, such as accessibility to primary and secondary schools and the quality of nearby primary and secondary schools, have a less significant impact on fertility intentions. Furthermore, this effect varies across generations, with those born after 1990 being the most sensitive to community childcare services.

The document suggests that the community is a key influencing factor in the fertility support system. In order to fully play its supporting role in fertility intentions, it is necessary to focus on expanding childcare service content, classifying and managing different age groups, and continuously promoting the construction of happy communities.

2.3. Workplace support: balancing the scales between fertility and employment

Labor force participation lays a critical foundation for the economic costs of raising infants and young children later in life. Workplace support is a core link between family and society. Resolving the conflict between childbearing and employment for women is often directly related to the specific strength and implementation of policies. A comparison of international cases clearly demonstrates this. Among OECD countries, Sweden's core policy is "long-term paid parental leave for both parents": mothers are entitled to 480 days of maternity leave, while fathers are entitled to 90 days of mandatory, non-transferable "exclusive parental leave." This policy has not only significantly increased the return-to-work rate of Swedish women one year after childbirth, but has also contributed to the stabilization of the country's total fertility rate, truly balancing "fertility needs" with "career development." Germany, on the other hand, focuses on bridging childcare services with employment, introducing a monthly childcare subsidy of €150-200 per child for children aged 0-3. Furthermore, legislation requires companies to provide "half-day childcare" services for employees returning to work after childbirth, such as coordinating with childcare providers to extend their hours by one hour to match employees' off-work hours. This policy helps to relieve the worries of working parents who have just given birth. Similarly, relevant policies have also significantly increased the return-to-work rate of working women who have just given birth [7]. By analyzing the perspectives of other countries on workplace support, it can be seen that the policy directions of both countries are based on their own social pain points. Only when workplace support policies are accurately targeted at the corresponding social pain points can the welfare of postpartum working women be truly protected and their willingness to have children be enhanced.

At the same time, China has also established a basic workplace support framework. In terms of maternity leave policies, China has made it clear that female employees are entitled to basic maternity leave and bonus leave. Since 2012, the "Special Provisions on Labor Protection for Female Employees" has clearly stipulated that the basic maternity leave should be no less than 98 days, and most regions have bonus leave ranging from 30 to 90 days on this basis. What is more, some provinces and cities have further refined and set differentiated maternity leave days based on the number of births (such as one child, two children, and three children) [8]. The "Decision on Optimizing Fertility Policies to Promote Long-term Balanced Population Development" proposes to "encourage enterprises to implement flexible work and home office" to create a fertility-friendly and family-friendly working environment. These measures together constitute the overall framework for paid maternity leave and childcare leave currently enjoyed by Chinese women.

3. Current problems and research gaps

Although a large number of studies have explored the impact of fertility support-related aspects on fertility intentions, such as the impact of social support for the quality of early childhood care and the length of maternity leave on fertility intentions, there are still some shortcomings [9,10].

First, about family support, existing research has largely focused on the impact of husbands' support on women's fertility intentions, while insufficient attention has been paid to support from other family members (such as parents-in-law). This has led to a lack of comprehensive understanding of the overall structure of family support and its impact on fertility intentions. Second, few studies have examined the interplay between social support and workplace support, such as whether social support effectively promotes workplace support and whether social support and workplace support mutually constrain each other. Last but not least, insufficient research has examined whether working parents in specific industries (such as pilots and medical personnel)

receive relevant workplace support, suggesting that the impact on fertility intentions may vary, a fact that existing research has not fully explored.

4. Future outlook and suggestions

In response to the above deficiencies and gaps, in-depth research can be conducted in the future according to the following methods.

Regarding family support, a mixed-method approach combining in-depth interviews and network questionnaires can be used to achieve both qualitative and quantitative analysis. Furthermore, community outreach can be used to strengthen awareness of kinship support, explore differentiated childcare subsidies, and move beyond the focus solely on husbands' support. Research can include diverse family members, such as parents-in-law and grandparents, to analyze their differential roles in financial, caregiving, and emotional support. This approach can construct a "whole-family support network" framework and refine the understanding of the impact of family support on fertility intentions. Regarding the synergy between social and workplace support, cross-lagged models or multi-case comparisons can be used to explore causal relationships and mechanisms. Furthermore, linking community childcare with flexible work arrangements in enterprises can be established to build a policy synergy mechanism, focusing on the synergistic and restrictive relationships between social and workplace support, providing a theoretical basis for the development and improvement of support systems. Finally, for working parents in specialized industries, such as pilots and medical personnel, precise analysis of differences should be conducted, and personalized policies, such as fragmented vacation, should be designed to promote the implementation of relevant industry-specific support policies. Additionally, the adaptability of existing workplace support (such as maternity leave and flexible work arrangements) can be studied, comparing these with differences in fertility intentions in general industries to capture the heterogeneous impacts of this group.

5. Conclusion

From the perspective of support system completeness, this article systematically explores the mechanisms by which support for one-child births influences fertility intentions, grounded in the current context of China's aging population and declining fertility rates. This analysis focuses on three dimensions: family support, social support, and workplace support, utilizing a comprehensive literature review and case analysis approach. The study finds that these three dimensions of support systems not only play unique roles in enhancing fertility intentions but also closely synergize, forming a key support system influencing fertility intentions and decision-making.

When it comes to family support, the husband's involvement throughout the entire childbearing process is crucial. Research shows that a husband's active participation in housework and childcare can effectively reduce women's time burden and psychological stress, and enhance their confidence and willingness to have another child. Furthermore, family support should not be limited to the collaboration of spouses but should be expanded to include a broader network of family members, such as parents-in-law and grandparents, to form a "whole-family support" system, providing more comprehensive support at the financial, caregiving, and emotional levels.

In terms of social support, communities, as crucial vehicles for fertility support, its childcare services, public facilities, and educational resources significantly impact the increase in fertility intentions. Young people born after 1990 are particularly sensitive to community childcare services, highlighting the importance of implementing policies based on intergenerational differences.

Therefore, building a community-based social support service system is a key path to enhancing residents' fertility intentions.

In terms of workplace support, both international examples (Sweden's long-term paid maternity leave for both parents and Germany's childcare subsidies) and domestic policies (extended maternity leave and encouragement of flexible work schedules) demonstrate that policies such as paid maternity leave, flexible work schedules, and childcare integration can effectively alleviate the conflict between motherhood and career development. Workplace support that precisely addresses the pain points of mothers struggling with balancing career development and childbearing needs can not only increase the return-to-work rate of working mothers after childbirth but also significantly boost their desire to have children, serving as a critical link between family fertility and employment.

In summary, building a comprehensive support system for one-child births requires focusing on "building a support network for all family members," "coordinating social and workplace support," and "accurately targeting policies for working parents in special groups." By establishing a comprehensive support system encompassing family, society, and the workplace, we can truly reduce the practical constraints on one-child births, fully unleash fertility potential, accelerate fertility intentions, and provide a solid foundation for the long-term balanced development of China's population.

This study also has certain limitations. This paper primarily relies on existing literature to demonstrate theoretical and mechanistic insights, lacking empirical testing and analysis of the causal relationship between fertility support and fertility intentions. Future research could incorporate relevant survey data and employ econometric models to further demonstrate the structure and proportion of the impact of these three aspects of fertility support on fertility intentions, providing more precise quantitative evidence. Furthermore, the generalizability of the research conclusions requires further verification, as the impact may vary across regions, urban and rural areas, and income groups.

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