

The Study on the Career Development of Two-Child Mothers under the Background of the Three-Child Policy

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Abstract: Under the background of the three-child policy, it is of great practical significance to solve the career dilemma of two-child mothers, promote their steady career development, and then enhance the willingness of working women to give birth to three children. The study found that the occupational difficulties faced by mothers with two children include the weakening of occupational motivation, the loss of occupational capital, and the weakening of occupational status, which are mainly caused by the imperfection of the supporting policies, the influence of the motherhood culture, the gendered division of labor in the family, and the influence of physical and mental health. In this regard, it's should adhere to the perspective of holistic development, and put forward countermeasures from five aspects: the state, society, organizations, families and individuals. At the national level, it's should improve the relevant laws and regulations and support for maternity; at the social level, we should create a favorable atmosphere of childbearing friendliness; at the organization level, it's should actively build a childbearing-friendly working environment; at the family level, women should be provided with all-round support and care; and at the individual level, women should make appropriate plans and arrangements for the birth of their children.

1. Introduction

The report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China pointed out that "Chinese path to modernization is a modernization with a huge population." For China, the population issue has always been a strategic issue, which related to the overall situation. The seventh national population census data shows that children aged 0-14 account for 17.95% of the total population in China, while the population aged 60 and above accounts for 18.70% of the total population. This reflects the deepening demographic characteristics of the China's population, which is characterized by "childlessness" and "ageing", and the problem of declining fertility has become a huge obstacle to the country's modernization process.

In order to improve the demographic structure and actively cope with "childlessness" and "aging", the CPC and the State have continuously improved the family planning policy based on the basic national conditions of the population and in accordance with the situation of demographic development and change. On May 31, 2021, the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the CPC convened a meeting to open up the three-child birth policy. On July 20, 2021, the Decision of the CPC Central Committee and State Council on Optimizing Reproductive Policy for Long-term Balanced Development of Population was officially released, making a major decision to implement the three-child policy and supporting measures, which will have an important impact on China's future demographic structure, as well as on the development of the economy to society.

The impact of the three-child policy on different social groups varies, with the most direct impact being on two-child mothers as the main childbearing group, especially women of childbearing age who are in the workplace. They are not only the potential childbearing age group of "three children", but also the role of women who are in the period of career advancement. Working women play multiple roles as daughters, wives, mothers, and laborers, and face the double pressure of taking care of their families and developing their careers. The role conflicts of working women, which caused by the birth of "two children", often occur in real life. In fact, when the two-child policy was implemented, there was already a cold reception, especially when professional women chose to give up giving birth to three children after taking into account factors such as salary, promotion and other career development factors. Therefore, under the background of the three-child policy, analyzing the impact of two-child childbearing on women's career development, exploring the career development dilemma of professional women, and proposing corresponding positive policy suggestions are of great significance to enhance professional women's willingness to give birth to three children, to promote the sound development of their careers, and to further promote the implementation of the three-child policy. Therefore, this paper asks questions about reality, analyzes and researches the pressure on the career development of mothers of "two children" under the background of the three-child policy, and promotes the matching and convergence of the three-child policy and related economic and social policies.

2. Literature Review

With the implementation of the three-child policy, it has triggered a new round of great discussions in the academic world. Issues such as the motivation and effect of the three-child policy^[1], the willingness to have three children^[2], the relationship between the three-child policy and China's low fertility rate^[3], the expected effect^[4], the vision for China's demographic optimization^[5], how to take this opportunity to build a new type of reproductive culture^[6], and the construction of a policy system to support childbearing^[7], etc., have all been widely discussed. Throughout the current heated discussions in the academic and social circles, the focus is on the extent to which the three-child policy, which embodies the inclusiveness of the policy and the diversity of reproduction, can show its actual effect, and the size of the two-child population and the willingness and choice of the three-child population will largely determine the effect of the implementation of the three-child policy. Among all the influencing factors of the three-child policy, women's career development is often overlooked but very important. The implementation of the three-child policy has, to a certain extent, made it possible for mothers of two children to have another child, which, to a certain extent, will affect women's competition in the labor market, and may affect their willingness to have three children, which is not conducive to the implementation of the three-child policy.

It is generally recognized that maternity will have an impact on women's employment and career development, and the negative impact is greater^[8], as it is difficult for women in the workplace to effectively resolve the conflict between work and motherhood during the period of pregnancy and

maternity, which may lead to instability at work and "motherhood punishment" ^[9]. The introduction of the three-child policy may further affect the employment pattern and career development space of professional women, such as women are "forced" to sign a contract that does not allow them to give birth to a child, or after giving birth to a child, they face the "transfer to a new job and lower salary" and other aspects of the dilemma ^[10]. Therefore, under the background of the three-child policy, how to crack the "motherhood penalty" ^[11] and break out of the maternity dilemma, provide employment rights and benefits for working women, and protect their career development has become an urgent and realistic problem. By combing through the existing research literature, we found that academics have conducted valuable discussions on the career development of women of childbearing age, and provided suggestions to alleviate the career development difficulties of mothers with two children through the empirical analysis of occupational groups. However, since the implementation of the three-child birth policy has only been less than three years so far, the research on the impact on women's career development in the context of the three-child policy needs to be improved. Therefore, this paper focuses on how to consider the career development of second-child mothers and the birth costs borne by society in the context of the three-child policy, in order to create a social development environment for the sound career development of women who have given birth to "three children".

3. Career Development Dilemma Faced by Two-Child Mother

3.1. Reduction of Career Motivation

Women's career motivation and career planning are easily affected by childbearing and their expectations for career development increase after childbirth. The results of empirical research show that women's career mindset and motivation change considerably after giving birth, and they are more inclined to favor their families in the balance of "family-work" relationship. For mothers of two children, the birth of two children has already had a certain impact on their career development, and the additional role of motherhood and the resulting increase in family conflicts have, to a certain extent, constrained women's investment of time and energy in work. If they have three more children, it is not intended to affect their career development again. At the same time, under the influence of the traditional concept of "the man is in charge of the outside world and the woman is in charge of the inside world", women will unconsciously shift their focus to the family and center on child rearing, and the emergence of "working mothers" is an important symptom of this. After their children reach school age, some of the "working mothers" will choose to return to the workplace due to economic pressure and other factors, but due to a long period of time away from the workplace as well as experience, age and other factors, most of them no longer have a strong desire for job promotion, which also proves that childbearing has an impact on women's career motivation and career planning. This is also evidence of the impact of childbirth on women's career motivation and career planning.

3.2. Loss of Career Capital

Occupational capital refers to the sum of the occupational competencies that an individual possesses to engage in an occupation, including job skills, professional knowledge, job remuneration, promotion opportunities, working conditions and working relationships, which is also an important basis for career development. The loss of women's career capital has been caused to varying degrees by the birth of "two children", and the loss of women's career capital will be exacerbated to a certain extent by the birth of three children. The interruption of women's careers during pregnancy and childbirth, even before they start kindergarten at the age of 0-3, may lead to the failure of women's vocational skills, the loss of opportunities for career development, and the gradual loss of the vocational capital accumulated during the working life. Mothers of "two children" are in the prime of

their career development, but if they give birth to three children, they will have to spend even more energy to fulfill their jobs and take care of three children, which will result in the loss of career capital accumulated during their working life. For example, in terms of participation in training, the number of training sessions attended by female workers will be affected by the impact of childbirth, and they will miss some on-site training opportunities. Employers, taking into account women's limited energy and ability, are more inclined to invest training resources and promotion opportunities in men when making rational choices.

3.3. Weakening of Professional Status

Compared with men, women's status in the workplace is relatively weak, especially for women with childbearing plans, who are more likely to be invisibly excluded from the workplace, weakening their status in the workplace and reducing their competitiveness in the workplace. As far as employers are concerned, women of childbearing age will have vacancies for a short period of time due to pregnancy and childbirth, and will need to be replaced by other people, which will increase the cost of employment and may also reduce work efficiency and work quality. When they return to work after giving birth, it still takes them some time to adjust themselves to the pace of work, and some of them have difficulty in performing their previous jobs due to the long period of time away from their posts, thus encountering the "difficulties of motherhood". All in all, employers will take into account the impact of the three-child policy on the cost of maternity leave and work arrangements for female workers in their recruitment and development planning, which will also result in unfair arrangements for women and weaken their status in the workplace. In addition, in the same organization, women in lower positions are more likely to perceive the impact of maternity on their work, which is closely related to the high substitutability of occupations. For women who were originally in lower positions, their own jobs and job content are more substitutable, and they are in a marginal position in the unit's production system. The weakening of occupational capital due to childbirth, the reduction of occupational opportunities, and the high economic demand resulting from the high pressure of parenthood have made this group of women value their original jobs even more.

4. Influential Factors on the Career Development of Two-Child Mothers

4.1. Imperfect Supporting Policies

For the population of childbearing age, a perfect legal system and supporting support system is an important influencing factor to promote the transformation of their fertility will into fertility behavior. Although China has formulated a series of laws and regulations to protect the legitimate rights and interests of female workers, most of them are scattered in different laws and regulations, and in practice, the difference in the gender of employers often appears in a hidden way, which makes it difficult for women to fight for their rights and interests through actual and effective evidence, and the infringement of women's rights and interests in the workplace occurs from time to time. At the same time, although the State has formulated and implemented an active system of supporting policies for childbirth in the areas of finance, taxation, employment, and education, providing a better maternity guarantee for three-child births. However, there are still some shortcomings in the existing public services and social security system, such as the relatively limited resources for maternal and child health care in some places, the insufficient development of childcare services, and the need to improve the maternity insurance system, all of which need to be further improved.

4.2. Influence of Motherhood Culture

At present, along with the continuous development of gender mainstreaming in society, the status of women has been greatly enhanced. However, the gender consciousness inherent in traditional society still exists, resulting in people holding different role expectations for different genders, and men still occupy a dominant position in society. In traditional thinking, women are more responsible for reproducing and raising offspring, while men are more responsible for earning money and supporting the family. However, for the family, family care and child rearing is a common family affair between husband and wife. For women in the workplace, the childbearing age also coincides with the golden period of many people's career advancement, but they need to make the choice of temporarily withdrawing from the workplace due to childbearing. At the same time, due to the limited energy of individuals, it is often difficult for women to achieve both family care and career development, and most of them tend to take care of their families, which to a certain extent weakens the willingness of female laborers to be employed, and loses their competitiveness in the fierce competition in the workplace.

4.3. Gendered Division of Labour in The Family

In some families, the traditional gender culture and the tradition of motherhood have led to women taking on a great deal of unpaid work, such as household chores, and to a lack of male child-rearing responsibilities, which further increases the pressure on women's career development and child-rearing. In the process of child-rearing, women and grandparents are often the mainstay of family child-rearing. In many families, there are three generations living together, and grandparents helping to take care of grandchildren has become a realistic option for most families. However, after all, the energy of the elderly is also limited, and at the same time to take care of two children has appeared the situation of energy, often difficult to support the children's desire to give birth to three children. At the same time, in some families, the father's participation in child-rearing is not high, and the degree of participation and effort is relatively limited, mainly by women or grandparents to take the children to participate in various activities. If the problem of insufficient male participation in child-rearing is not effectively solved, women of child-rearing age who have two children will be under too much pressure to raise their children and may give up their plans to have three children.

4.4. Impact of Physical and Mental Health

Physical and psychological conditions have an impact on women's career development. The physical and mental health of women during pregnancy and childbirth is a key factor in their career development. During pregnancy and childbirth, women will suffer physiological discomfort, and under the influence of certain physiological hormones, women's moods will also change to a certain extent, which will, to a certain extent, affect women's working conditions when they return to work. After giving birth to a child, especially after giving birth to a "second child", the mother has to devote herself to taking care of the child, physical exertion, lack of family care, life and work, and many other factors may trigger women's "postpartum depression". Some women experience mood swings such as depression, confusion, helplessness and lack of family care during pregnancy and childbirth. Postpartum depression can greatly affect women's physical and mental health, and is not conducive to normal work and life. For mothers of two children, the pressure of having three children may affect their future career development plans. Among the same group of postnatal depression sufferers, a larger proportion thought that it would affect their career planning than those who thought it would not.

5. Suggestions for Promoting the Career Development of Two-Child mothers

5.1. National Level

Against the background of the three-child policy, the state should grasp the new trend of fertility, introduce a full range of support policies to provide protection for women of childbearing age in childbirth, improve supporting policies, and enhance the whole process, inclusiveness and foresight of the fertility support policies. Firstly, it is necessary to improve the relevant laws and regulations, especially those promoting gender equality, employment rights and interests, and on-the-job maternity, so as to institutionally safeguard women's career development and legitimate rights and interests during pregnancy and childbearing, and to provide escort for the promotion of gender equality as well as three-child maternity. At the same time, it is necessary to improve the relevant channels for the defence of rights and interests, such as the public welfare support mechanism and legal remedies for women in employment. Secondly, based on the influencing factors and needs of second-child mothers in deciding to have three children, a "state-healthcare institution-workplace-family" programme should be set up from the perspective of the entire process of "giving birth to, raising, and raising children". The State - medical and health institutions - workplaces - families" is an integrated support system for childbirth^[12]. For example, eligible "mothers of two children" and "mothers of three children" can be granted maternity allowances, breastfeeding allowances, and wage subsidies during maternity leave, in order to provide them with adequate social security. The State should actively promote the implementation of inclusive childcare services, increase support for childcare institutions. At the same time, maternity insurance can also be reformed in a "universal" way, with appropriate reforms in terms of the main body, contributions, and treatment standards^[13]. Thirdly, a special anti-discrimination employment supervision and management body can be set up to protect the legitimate rights and interests of women. The establishment of special institutions or associations can help workers who have suffered from unequal employment to safeguard their legitimate rights and interests, reduce the cost of defending their rights and improve the plight of relatively disadvantaged workers in defending their rights, and at the same time monitor the employment of employers and promote the formation of a favorable employment environment..

5.2. Social Level

The career development difficulties encountered by mothers with two children are also related to the current reproductive culture and social environment. Therefore, while solving the practical problems of two-child mothers, it's should also create a favorable and friendly atmosphere for childbearing in the whole society. Firstly, the value and significance of childbearing should be publicised more vigorously, and a good atmosphere for childbearing should be created through extensive publicity, so as to build a marriage and childbearing culture for the new era, and to form a driving demonstration effect, so as to get rid of the idea of childbearing from a utilitarian point of view. Secondly, it is necessary to strengthen education on fertility, improve the knowledge system about fertility in primary and secondary education, and develop popular reading materials, professional teaching materials, and curricula for the whole life cycle, suitable for all age groups. By focusing on fertility education from the earliest age, students are able to understand and master knowledge and skills related to fertility, improve their cognitive ability in relation to fertility culture, and promote a more favorable view of marriage, childbirth and family. Thirdly, it is necessary to strengthen research into the construction of a reproductive culture and gender equality in the workplace, and to encourage and support the active participation of social organizations, so as to form a multi-party synergy for the construction of a childbearing-friendly culture, and to build a childbearing-friendly social consensus.

5.3. Unit level

Along with the implementation of the three-child policy, employing units should also assume the corresponding responsibilities and obligations, and should not lower or dismiss female workers for failing to take the pending birth or maternity leave of a two-child female worker, but should actively eliminate the dilemma of penalising motherhood. On the one hand, we should guide employers to establish the concept of gender equality in employment, and actively build a maternity-friendly working environment in the unit. For example, employers can formulate job training and promotion programmes that differ from one person to another, specify the proportion of female employees of different age groups, and set a certain percentage of female executives. On the other hand, employers should improve the welfare benefits and maternity protection system for female workers during pregnancy and childbirth, for example, they can implement flexible work schedules, telecommuting, regular maternity subsidies, reimbursement of part of the medical expenses, and set up a humanised appraisal system for women during pregnancy and childbirth during the performance appraisal, etc., so as to alleviate the anxiety of childcare of professional women through these means. For units with the necessary conditions, childcare facilities can be set up within the unit, mainly for the 0-3 year-old children of working employees, to share the pressure of childcare for employees and enhance their work efficiency.

5.4. Family level

In the family division of labour in childcare, women tend to take on more childcare duties. Families should provide all-round support and care for female workers. On the one hand, it's should reshape the family values, advocate gender equality in the division of labour in the family, and encourage men to participate more in child-rearing and household activities, and pay more attention to women's mental health problems, and give them more care and encouragement to avoid women taking care of their children in their maternity. During the period of pregnancy and childbirth, we should pay more attention to women's mental health, and give them more care and encouragement, so as to prevent women from becoming anxious or even depressed due to childbearing. Especially for families with two children, more attention should be paid to the physical and mental health of the mother. Nurturing two children requires a lot of energy, and the mother of the second child also shoulders the burden of career development, through the care of men, it can constantly reduce the pressure of women's care, and provide support to resolve the pressure between women's childbearing and the workplace. On the other hand, families should also formulate appropriate development plans and maternity protection programmes. For families, childbirth is a major event, and how to make scientific and reasonable arrangements for childbirth and career development is also a question that must be considered and answered. For families with two children, the willingness to give birth to three children is determined by many factors, but the childbearing plan of three children should be compatible with the development plan of the whole family, so as to form a reasonable division of labour in the family in terms of career development, household management, children's education, etc., and avoid many problems caused by the lack of a plan.

5.5. Individual Level

For two-child mothers, in order to avoid difficulties in career development as a result of raising children or giving birth to three children, they should also make appropriate planning arrangements. Firstly, we should make a birth plan, especially for women who are in the upward or bottleneck period of the workplace, we should do the psychological pre-setting and preparation work in advance with a positive attitude, learn the corresponding knowledge of parenting, and maintain a good state of mind.

At the same time, it is also necessary to do a good job of career development planning, in advance of the work of the difficulties and dilemmas, and take the initiative to seek the unit and the neighborhood of help and support, to be able to timely relief of occupational stress. Secondly, women during pregnancy and childbirth should be encouraged to turn their childcare experience into vocational skills, so as to increase their career choices when they return to the workplace. During pregnancy and childbirth, women should be encouraged to change their thinking, turn their "disadvantages" into "advantages", and actively summarise their experiences in childcare. At the same time, during pregnancy and childbirth, they should keep learning through online training and other means to continuously improve their professional skills, so as to prepare for their return to the workplace in the future and minimise the negative impact of childbirth on women's career development. Thirdly, they should enhance their self-regulation ability by participating in some activities or social organisations such as "mothers' mutual aid societies" to give full play to the power of social support, so as to alleviate their own discomfort and avoid professional maladjustment during the period of absence from the workplace and after returning to the workplace.

6. Conclusion

Along with the implementation of the three-child policy, two-child families are faced with the choice of whether or not to have three children, and the career development of two-child mothers has become an important factor that restricts their willingness to have three children. This study examines the career development dilemma of two-child mothers from a holistic perspective at the level of gender perspective, the factors influencing career development, and puts forward all-around suggestions at five levels, including the state, society, unit, family and individual. At present, China is developing towards the childbearing friendly society, and the construction of the maternity security system and supporting measures are becoming increasingly sound, especially in the protection of women's labor rights and interests. This is a positive thing for the career development of two-child mothers. Always, the career development dilemma faced by two-child mothers is not only a personal reality, but also a structural dilemma faced by society, and it requires the efforts of the whole society to solve this problem, to continue to build the childbearing friendly society, and to help the implementation of the three-children birth policy.

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