

# The reasons behind the low fertility rate of women and corresponding strategies

Dan Wang\*

College of Political Science and Law, University of Jinan, Jinan, Shandong, China

\*Corresponding author: 2396841549@qq.com

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**Abstract:** The population problem has always been a major problem restricting China's comprehensive, coordinated and sustainable development. It is a key factor affecting economic and social development. The phenomenon of low fertility has brought great impact on China's development. Therefore, it is very important to analyze the reasons behind the low fertility rate. Based on the analysis of the data of the seventh census and the relevant national data, this study finds that the significant changes in the concept of marriage and childbearing of women of childbearing age, the decrease in the number of women of childbearing age and the aging of age structure and the dual fertility pressure of economy and environment have caused the current low fertility of women. This paper attempts to provide some suggestions for reference on this basis, actively respond to the low fertility rate and promote the long-term balanced development of the national population.

## 1. Instruction

### 1.1. Proposing the problem

On May 11, 2021, the State Council released the relevant information and main data of the seventh national census data. China's population may enter the era of non-growth or even negative growth of population. This is an important change that needs to be faced on the population issue. It has also become a topic of common concern to all sectors of society and will bring great impact on China's development. Digging deep into the reasons for the slowdown in population growth, the declining fertility rate is an important factor that cannot be ignored. Fertility rate refers to the average number of children born to women of childbearing age (15-44 years old). China's total fertility rate is only 1.3, which is already at a low fertility level, far below the fertility replacement level of 2.1. Low fertility rate is one of the new changes in China's population development. With the continuous decline of female fertility rate, the continuous growth of population has been severely tested, so it is very important to explore the causes of low fertility [1].

### 1.2. Literature review

At present, the academic research on female fertility rate mainly focuses on the following two aspects. On the one hand, the academic circles have explored the factors that cause the low fertility rate of women. From the perspective of women themselves, Zhou Xiaomeng and Pei Xingtong found through quantitative research that women receiving higher education can significantly inhibit their fertility level [2]. The research of Chen Wei, Dong Haoyue and Liu Jinju shows that fertility has a significant negative impact on women's wage rate, and as women grow older, the wage growth rate also slows down [3]. On the other hand, the academic community has put forward some countermeasures at the policy level for the phenomenon of female fertility rate. Qi Jing and Mao Zhuoyan proposed to further establish more systematic and targeted fertility support policies at the national level and strengthen policy support for women's family and work balance [4]. At the same time, combined with the specific reality of each place, we should focus on solving the key and difficult problems related to fertility, and explore new methods and new paths to solve the population problem [5].

The rapid development of economy and society has changed people's lifestyle and fertility

concept. The phenomenon of low fertility and the resulting low birth rate and aging problem have attracted the attention of all sectors of society. In this social context, China's fertility policy has also changed from "two children alone" to "two children in an all-round way" to "three children in an all-round way," and emphasized the need to improve relevant support policies and measures, but it has not had a significant impact on the phenomenon of low fertility. Therefore, this problem is based on the phenomenon of widespread concern, which requires the attention of all sectors of society and the consideration of solutions. The main purpose of this paper is to use the seventh census data and related data, reports, analysis of China's recent low fertility levels and related factors to explore, and put forward the corresponding policy recommendations for the current situation, in order to change the current situation of low fertility, solve the unprecedented population change problems.

## **2. Basic situation of female fertility rate**

The data of the seventh census comprehensively shows the number, structure and distribution of China's population, and grasps the changing trend characteristics of China's population, which is conducive to China's population development strategy and policy system. In order to more objectively evaluate the quality of the national census registration, the Office of the Leading Group organized a unified post-mortem quality spot check. The results showed that the missing rate of the seventh national census population was 0.05 %, and the census results were true and reliable. Therefore, the data analysis of this study mainly uses the seventh census data released by the State Council in May 2021. First of all, since the missing rate of the seventh census data is the lowest in the past, the census data can truly reflect the current fertility rate, so the data analysis results have a strong credibility. Secondly, according to the ten-year data change from 2011 to 2020 in the seventh census data, the trend of China's population change in the past ten years is shown. According to the further analysis of the data, the current population change situation is better reflected. Again, according to the previous large census data to calculate the total fertility rate changes, changes in the number of women of childbearing age, changes in the age structure of women of childbearing age and other trends, better reflect the development of the times and society to show the changes in population structure. Finally, while analyzing the census data, combined with the marriage survey data and the 2022 national workplace women's development insight report, the female fertility situation is better analyzed and the research results are further obtained. Therefore, this study mainly uses the seventh census data and combines the results of other national survey data and reports to have certain credibility, which better reflects the reality of contemporary female fertility rate, and analyzes the factors affecting fertility rate. On this basis, some suggestions are put forward in order to change the current situation of low female fertility rate.

With the implementation of the policy of 'separate two-child' in 2014 and 'full liberalization of two-child' in 2016, people's fertility desire has a small peak, which has a significant increase compared with the previous fertility rate. However, since 2016, the birth rate and birth population in China have been declining year by year. In 2020, China's new birth population is about 12 million. This number is 18 % lower than 2019, and 33 % lower than the first year of the liberalization of the second child in 2016, making it the lowest birth rate in China in history. Even by 2021, the implementation of a couple can have three children policy and supporting measures. However, in 2021, the annual birth population was 10.62 million, and the birth population was 1.38 million less than the previous year. In 2021, the birth rate of China's population was 7.52 %, which fell below 10 % for two consecutive years. Compared with the birth rate and birth population in 2020, it was even lower. It can be seen that the change of policy cannot have a direct impact on the birth rate and birth population.

Demography believes that in order to carry out a normal level of population replacement, it is necessary to maintain a simple reproduction of the population, that is, the basic stability of the upper and lower generations of the population, and the total fertility rate must reach at least 2.1. However, according to the data of the fifth, sixth and seventh censuses, the total fertility rate should be significantly lower than 2.1. China has entered an era of low fertility below this replacement

level, and sustained low fertility has become the norm of the population.

According to the analysis of the relevant data of the seven universals, China has become one of the countries with the lowest fertility rate in the world due to the rapid social transformation and population transformation. China has entered the era of low fertility and is about to face a century of population change. Therefore, it is necessary to explore the causes of low fertility in combination with the current situation, so as to put forward some feasible suggestions on this basis and change the reality of low fertility.

### **3. Causes of low female fertility**

#### **3.1. Significant changes in the concept of marriage and childbearing among women of childbearing age**

Since 2006, the phenomenon of delayed marriage among Chinese women has been very serious. The continuous decline in the proportion of married women has lowered the total fertility rate and the effect has continued to strengthen [6]. At present, the fertility concept of women of childbearing age is undergoing important changes. It is mainly reflected in the delay of the average age of first marriage and the average age of first birth. The average age of first marriage of women of childbearing age in China has been increasing year by year since 2007, from 23.5 years in 2007 to 26.3 years in 2016, and has continued to rise. The average age of first birth increased from 23.4 years to 26.8 years from 1990 to 2017. The improvement of education level, the rise of marriage cost, the increase of employment and workplace competition, and the change of marriage concept are all important reasons for the delay of the age of first marriage. Therefore, the delay of first marriage has become a common social phenomenon.

#### **3.2. The number of women of childbearing age is decreasing and the age structure is aging**

In recent years, the total number of women of childbearing age in China is decreasing on a large scale. According to the census data, the total number of women of childbearing age in 2020 is 58 million less than that in 2010, which will directly affect the current national fertility rate. In 2021, the number of women of childbearing age aged 15-49 decreased by about 5 million compared with the previous year, among which the number of women of childbearing age aged 21-35 decreased by about 3 million. At the same time, the age structure of women of childbearing age is also changing. The average age is from 29.34 years old in 1990 to 32.16 years old in 2000 to 32.73 years old in 2010 to 33.95 years old in 2020. The average age of women of childbearing age is increasing year by year in the process of nearly four censuses, which means that the proportion of older age groups in the group of women of childbearing age is increasing, which also means that the risk of female fertility will increase, thus directly affecting women's reproductive behavior.

#### **3.3. Economic and environmental double birth pressure**

Economic factors and social environment have become the main factors affecting the fertility of women of childbearing age. On the one hand, the economic situation determines the level of family happiness and the growth environment of children. Women's fertility will affect the growth of their wage income. At the same time, because fertility will bring about an increase in family expenditure, economic factors will directly affect women's fertility behavior. It is often identified as the first factor affecting fertility; on the other hand, the social environment will affect women's fertility desire, the social policy system will affect women's fertility choices, the workplace will bring some discrimination because of women's fertility, and the social security system does not meet the needs of people's lives.

### **4. Related recommendations to deal with low fertility**

#### **4.1. Eliminating gender discrimination and creating a favourable reproductive environment**

First of all, eliminate the phenomenon of discrimination between men and women in reality and

create a realistic environment for the true equality of men and women. In society, we should eliminate the concept of female discrimination caused by fertility and further create a good environment for female fertility. Secondly, improve the enterprise system and strengthen humanistic care. Finally, the society should create a good fertility environment, really change the fertility concept of people of childbearing age, establish people's correct fertility concept and values, enhance people's fertility desire, and effectively improve the fertility rate.

#### **4.2. Strengthen supervision and management, improve maternity protection services**

The state has put forward the "three-child policy" and related supporting measures at the policy level to deal with the current effective measures of China's national conditions. This fertility policy adjustment is not only to allow the birth of three children, more importantly, it emphasizes supporting support measures to reduce the burden of family fertility. Therefore, the policy level should not only issue measures and policies conducive to women's fertility, but also strengthen the supervision and management of the implementation of women's related policies, so as to further enhance the fertility desire of women.

#### **4.3. Pay attention to the economic pressure of education and alleviate the problem of parenting difficulties.**

At present, an important reason for the continued low fertility rate lies in parent-child communication and educational economic problems. At present, the cost of children's education is increasing day by day. Fertility will reduce the family's income to a certain extent, but it will increase the family's expenditure. The increasing economic pressure has become a new factor to restrain women's fertility level. Reducing the economic pressure of parenting is a key to improving women's fertility desire. Therefore, we should improve the social and economic supporting measures of fertility support at the institutional level and build a positive fertility support policy system as soon as possible.

### **5. Conclusions**

The census is an important survey on national conditions and national strength once a decade. The seventh census data released in May 2021 has received unprecedented attention. After the release of the seventh census, we can make a more comprehensive and clear judgment on the current situation of China's population. Although China's total population is still growing, the growth rate has slowed. From 2010 to 2020, the average annual growth rate of China's population was 0.53 %. Compared with the average annual growth rate of 0.57 % in 2000-2010, the growth rate has slowed down. China's population situation has reached a very urgent critical juncture. Since the beginning of the 21st century, due to the influence of many practical factors, the number of women of childbearing age has decreased, and the fertility desire of women of childbearing age is low. Based on the analysis of the seventh census data and relevant national survey data, this paper finds that the main reasons for the low fertility rate of women are the significant changes in the concept of marriage and childbearing of women of childbearing age, the decrease in the number of women of childbearing age and the aging of the age structure, and the dual fertility pressure of economy and environment. The above factors have caused serious low fertility in China. Although fertility or non-fertility seems to be a family problem, the enlightenment makes it an important issue related to national development and social progress. Therefore, this paper puts forward some suggestions for the current phenomenon of low fertility among women: eliminating the concept of discrimination between men and women and creating a good reproductive environment; strengthen supervision and management, improve maternity protection services; pay attention to the economic pressure of education and alleviate the problem of parenting difficulties. Through the above suggestions, we hope to alleviate the current phenomenon of low fertility of women and promote the development of China's population.

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