

Overview of Research on Policies to Extend Maternity and Parental Leave

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Abstract:

This study provides a systematic review of the role of Beijing's extended maternity and parental leave policies in addressing the challenges of population aging and low fertility. Based on the analysis of 15 core papers, the study finds that although the current policy has tried to alleviate women's burden of childcare and promote gender equality by extending maternity leave and adding parental leave for fathers, the actual effect has been limited. Fertility rates have only shown a slight marginal increase (household birth rate is still below 6 per 1,000), and men's participation in parental leave is low due to non-compulsory design and socio-cultural barriers; the implementation of the policy has revealed problems such as corporate evasion of responsibility and persistent gender discrimination in the workplace. The deep-rooted contradiction stems from the fragmentation of the policy, the lack of supporting measures and the shackles of the traditional gender division of labor. The study proposes that the construction of a "maternity-friendly society" requires a shift to systematic governance: integrating economic support (expansion of maternity allowance and childcare subsidies), service support (universal childcare coverage), time support (exclusive quota system for fathers), and cultural support (elimination of prejudice against motherhood), and strengthening policy effectiveness through cross-sectoral collaboration (finance, human resources and social welfare, and health care, etc.). Future research needs to focus on the multiplier effect of the policy mix, the protection of flexible employment groups, and the design of incentives for male participation.

Keywords: fertility support policy; parental leave system; gender equality; fertility-friendly society

1. Introduction

1.1 Policy-related Background

In order to solve the problem of aging population in Beijing, the Standing Committee of the Beijing Municipal People's Congress (PPC) has amended the Regulations on Population and Family Planning to address the dual challenges of demographic crisis and social development needs. The Standing Committee of the Beijing Municipal People's Congress (NPC) has passed legislation to amend the Regulations on Population and Family Planning in order to respond to the dual challenges of the demographic crisis and the needs of social development. By the end of 2023, 6.7% of Beijing's resident population was between the ages of 60 and 65, and 15.9% was 65 years old or older, with the resident elderly population accounting for 22.6% of the resident population and entering a moderately aging society [1]. At the same time, according to the latest statistics from the Beijing Municipal Commission of Health, the fertility rate has continued to decline, with the birth rate of the household population dropping to below 6 per thousand in 2023, a drop of nearly 40% compared to 2016, when the comprehensive two-child policy was implemented [2].

Beijing is a mega-city with a high proportion of high-end service industries in its industrial structure, with the tertiary industry accounting for more than 84%, and the financial, science and technology, and education industries being the pillar industries, where the proportion of female employment is high, but the competition in the workplace is fierce and the work intensity is high [3]. Therefore, in order to increase the fertility rate, it is necessary to increase women's willingness to give birth and realize the transition from a "birth-unfriendly society" to a "birth-friendly society".

Against this background, the policy aims to reduce women's burden of childcare by extending maternity leave, and to realize equal maternity leave for both men and women in order to strengthen family support and promote the sharing of family responsibilities between men and women. The policy also aims to alleviate the "motherhood dilemma" faced by women in the workplace, thereby raising the fertility rate and easing the pressure of an aging population, creating a healthier pattern of population growth, and promoting the long-term balanced development of the population. In addition, this policy not only responds to the national "three-child" birth policy, but also promotes equal opportunities for men and women in the workplace in the process of implementation, promoting gender equality and social equity.

1.2 Research Content and Main Structure of This Paper

China has entered the stage of population aging, and the birth rate of newborns continues to be low, resulting in a slow natural population growth rate. In order to better understand and effectively respond to this challenge, this study focuses on Beijing's extended maternity leave and related maternity support policies, and systematically analyzes the policy background, content, implementation effects, and problems. This study aims to summarize and explore the limitations of the current maternity policy in terms of increasing fertility, enhancing fathers' participation in childcare, and promoting gender equality by examining the relevant literature, and to propose policy recommendations and possible paths for future research, so as to serve as a reference for subsequent studies.

This study first analyzes the policy context and phenomenon in order to clarify the research questions. It then analyzes the content of the policy in detail, including the areas covered by the policy, the target audience, and the possible impact of the policy on audience behavior. Then, the research methodology was clarified, relevant literature was screened and categorized, and existing research results were synthesized and analyzed to explain the research findings, policy implications, and potential directions for future research.

2. Policy Content Analysis and Literature Retrieval Overview

2.1 Analysis of the Content of the Policy

This policy covers a number of public policy areas. In the area of population and family planning policy, it encourages childbirth by extending maternity leave and providing additional parental leave; in the area of labor and social security policy, it clarifies the rights and interests of female employees during childbirth and childcare, and strengthens the supervision of the implementation of the maternity leave system by companies in order to safeguard women's rights and interests; in the area of family welfare policy, it reduces the pressure on families to care for their children through the extension of parental leave, the provision of maternity subsidies, and other measures; and in the area of gender equality policy, it establishes a parental leave for fathers and encourages them to take parental leave. In the area of gender equality policy, parental leave is provided for fathers to encourage fathers to share the burden of childcare with mothers, thus promoting gender equality; and in the area of public health and child development policy, the government provides nursing

resources for infants and young children to create a safer and healthier environment for infants and young children to grow up in.

The target audience of this policy is all couples with children under the age of three in the administrative area of Beijing, and the core audience is female workers. Under the effect of this policy, the audience's behavior will be affected in many ways. In the family, the extension of maternity leave and childcare leave directly reduces the cost of childbirth and increases the willingness of the audience to give birth; the provision of childcare leave for fathers at the same time can share the pressure of childcare to a certain extent, reduce the risk of post-partum depression, and promote the sharing of family responsibilities between men and women; in the workplace, the extension of maternity leave provides female workers with more time to recover after giving birth, and reduces the impact of physical factors on their return to the workplace; moreover, both men and women are equally affected by this policy. In addition, the provision of equal parental leave for both men and women avoids possible discrimination against female employees when they are recruited by companies; and, in society, the provision of equal parental leave for both men and women encourages men to share the responsibility of raising their families, which helps to break down the traditional concepts of gender and promotes the awareness of gender equality between men and women.

At present, the policy has achieved the goals of increasing fertility, improving family welfare, and promoting gender equality to a certain extent, and the birth rate has increased, but it still has not exceeded 6 per 1,000, which makes the situation more serious [2]. Some enterprises have not implemented the policy of extending maternity leave, and discrimination against women in the workplace still exists.

The policy was formulated by the Standing Committee of the Beijing Municipal People's Congress and is implemented by the government, employers and individuals. The family is the foundation of society, and only by strengthening family support and reducing the pressure of childcare will it be possible to increase the birth rate; the government and employers should form a support network and enrich the forms of support, such as flexible working, so that the government and enterprises can share the pressure on families; and the "motherhood dilemma" faced by female employees should be improved by breaking down traditional gender stereotypes and encouraging men to share the responsibility of raising their families. To break the traditional gender stereotypes and encourage men to share the responsibility of raising families, so as to improve the "motherhood dilemma" faced by female employees, and to promote the development of gender

equality awareness between men and women.

2.2 Literature Search Methods and Search Results

The authors mainly read the domestic literature and searched on China Knowledge Network and Baidu Academic; they searched with the keywords of maternity leave, maternity leave, paternity leave, parental leave, maternity-friendly society, and gender equality, and their search instructions were, selecting the core of Peking University and CSSCI, sorting by citations, and sorting by time.

More than twenty articles were found in the first search, and six articles were deleted. The criteria for deletion were that the time was too old, atypical CSSCI and Peking University core journals, the number of citations was too small, and the association with the policy keywords was not that close, etc. The first search resulted in more than twenty articles, and six articles were deleted.

Fifteen articles were finally selected, which were of high quality in terms of the number of citations, time, keyword fit, and CSSCI and NLM core journals. Among them, 40% of the literature contains empirical studies.

3. Research Findings

3.1 Theoretical Reconstruction of Maternity Leave System

The current research on China's maternity leave system shows a theoretical shift from "one-way burden" to "multiple sharing". The traditional maternity leave system has been summarized by scholars as the "traditional unidirectional model", whose core problem lies in the fact that the responsibility for childbearing is overly concentrated on women, and the costs of childbearing are borne by enterprises, thus forming an institutional structure with a single tendency towards mobility. According to Zhan Dongsheng, this model has led to women facing the dual dilemmas of childbearing and career development. On the one hand, traditional attitudes have positioned women as the main caregivers for the family, with the proportion of mothers primarily responsible for the daily life care of children between the ages of 0 and 17, tutoring homework, and transportation being as high as 76.1%, 67.5%, and 63.6%, respectively; On the other hand, the extension of maternity leave and the increase in maternity insurance expenses have caused enterprises to reassess their labor costs, leading to a higher "invisible threshold" for women's employment [4].

In response to this problem, academics have proposed a

theoretical framework for transitioning to a “multi-participatory maternity leave system model”, which includes a three-dimensional reconstruction: the concept of the system should be reshaped to emphasize the concept of gender equality and the cost-sharing mechanism [4]. The maternity leave system needs to pay more attention to the protection of men’s reproductive rights and the equal distribution of reproductive responsibilities, and at the same time establish a mechanism for sharing the costs of childbirth among the state, society, enterprises and families. First, the reconstruction of the right to leave, the protection of men’s right to leave, has become a key breakthrough. Second, supporting measures should be improved, focusing on the reform of the maternity insurance system and financial and tax policy support.

The parental leave system is facing jurisprudential dilemmas in its implementation. Feng Qunhan points out that there is a confusion between the nature and function of maternity leave in China, and the legal positioning of various types of leave (maternity leave, paternity leave, parental leave, and breastfeeding leave) is unclear, leading to a lack of policy convergence. For example, paternity leave is referred to as “nursing leave” or “care leave” in various regions, and is positioned differently (some are regarded as maternity incentives, while others are categorized as social security), with significant differences in the number of days of leave [5]. This institutional fragmentation highlights the weakness of the theoretical foundation of maternity leave, and there is an urgent need to clarify the nature, functions and rights of various types of leave at the legal level.

3.2 Multidimensional Theoretical Perspectives on Fathers’ Involvement in Parenting

Research on fathers’ involvement in parenting has led to an intersection of three major theoretical perspectives: the economics of care, family systems theory, and gender - based social critique. Collectively, these perspectives indicate a paradigm shift in the fatherhood role from “marginal assistance” to “shared responsibility”.

3.2.1 Empirical value of fathers’ involvement

Empirical research based on the family systems theory reveals that fathers’ participation in parenting significantly influences children’s behavioral development and the balance of the family system. A survey of 604 primary school students showed that fathers’ engagement in three aspects - interactivity (direct involvement in care - giving activities), accessibility (physical and psychological availability), and responsibility (assuming parenting duties) - has a significant negative predictive effect on both children’s physical aggression and relational aggression [6]. The

study further found that mothers’ “parenting distress” and “interaction dysregulation” partially mediate the relationship between fathers’ involvement and children’s relational aggression. In terms of physical aggression, only parenting distress has a mediating effect. This indicates that fathers’ involvement not only directly impacts children’s behavior but also indirectly alleviates children’s behavioral problems by relieving mothers’ parenting stress.

3.2.2 Social criticism of “parenting without a partner”

From the perspective of gender theory, the phenomenon of “parenting without a partner” has been deeply deconstructed. Guo Ge pointed out that although the discourse of “parenting without a partner” seems to criticize the absence of fathers’ parenting responsibilities, it actually implies a trap for mothers. On one hand, it reinforces the traditional concept that “parenting is the mother’s natural duty”, further “familializing” and “genderizing” parenting responsibilities. On the other hand, it frames “guiding men to participate in parenting” as a new responsibility for women, creating a paradoxical logic where “opposing parenting without a partner becomes the individual responsibility of women” [7].

The roots of this discourse trap lie in two aspects. Firstly, social support is insufficient. With parenting responsibilities being privatized, there is a shortage of public child-care resources (the nursery enrollment rate is only about 6%), the cost of early education is high, and there is no paternity leave system for men. This situation makes the contradictions in the gender division of labor within the family more prominent. Secondly, cultural and ideological constraints play a role. The combination of the traditional division - of - labor model of “men work outside and women take care of the family” and the modern requirement of “mothers taking the lead in children’s education” makes mothers fully responsible for children’s development, bearing the dual pressures of children’s physical and mental development and educational achievements.

3.2.3 Theoretical insights from international experiences

The perspective of care economics is fully reflected in Sweden’s “father quota system”. Through well - crafted “economic incentives” and “institutional coercion”, Sweden has successfully redefined the role of fathers. Since 1995, a “use - it - or - lose - it” dedicated paternity leave has been introduced. It started at 30 days and was gradually extended to 90 days.

This institutional design features an approach. First, it provides opportunity guarantees, ensuring that fathers have leave rights. Second, it offers economic incentives. If fathers take less than 90 days of paternity leave, their fam-

ilies will forfeit the corresponding allowances. Moreover, the more days of leave fathers take, the higher the allowance they can receive [8].

The experiences of Japan and South Korea highlight the significance of transforming work culture. Japan has implemented “work-style reforms” to relieve the time pressure on fathers’ participation due to overtime culture. Meanwhile, South Korea has enhanced fathers’ motivation to take paternity leave by offering salary subsidies (up to 80% of regular wages). These initiatives collectively point to a theoretical consensus: paternal involvement necessitates a synergy of institutional guarantees, economic support, and cultural reconstruction [9].

3.3 Multidimensional Framework of the Fertility Support Policy System

Facing the global low-fertility challenge, research on fertility support policies has established a four-dimensional theoretical framework encompassing economic support, time support, service support, and cultural support. An empirical study by Mao Zhuoyan, based on surveys in five provinces and municipalities, reveals that there are structural deficiencies in each dimension of China’s current fertility support policies [10].

3.3.1 In terms of economic support

Current research has uncovered three major challenges in China’s economic support policies: inadequate coverage, limited effectiveness, and a lack of precision. When compared with international practices, China’s economic support measures primarily rely on a limited set of tools, such as special additional deductions for individual income tax and maternity allowances. In contrast, inclusive policies like child allowances, service subsidies, and housing support are conspicuously absent.

The academic community is advocating for the establishment of a differentiated subsidy mechanism that can be dynamically adjusted based on factors such as family income, the number of children, and regional living costs. Sweden’s tiered allowance system (which provides 80% of the salary for 390 days and a payment for 90 days) and Japan’s child allowance program (where the allowance amount increases with the number of children) offer valuable international models [8]. The theoretical consensus behind these systems is that fertility support should follow the principle of compensation. That is, the public finance is required to share the positive external costs incurred by families due to childbearing.

3.3.2 In terms of time support

The maternity leave system faces a theoretical paradox of gender equality. Although simply extending women’s

maternity leave can protect the health of mothers and infants, it exacerbates gender discrimination in the workplace. Data shows that in China, women generally have 128 - 158 days of maternity leave, while children can be admitted to kindergartens at the age of 3, creating a nearly “care gap”. As a result, women are forced to make difficult choices between career and family [11]. To resolve this paradox, three theoretical innovations are needed. The first is to achieve gender balance in leave by strengthening the sharing of parental leave between both parents and redistributing care responsibilities through the “father’s quota”. Second, a flexible leave system: Diverse leave-taking methods such as segmented leave and part-time leave are allowed to enhance the compatibility between leave arrangements and work requirements. Third, lifecycle coverage: Parental leave is extended until the child is 8 years old (as in Sweden), or phased leave rights are set up (such as 5 - 15 days of parental leave per year before the child turns 3).

3.3.3 In terms of service support

The gap in childcare services poses a fundamental obstacle to fertility support. In China, the enrollment rate of infants and toddlers under 3 years old is only 6%, far lower than the OECD countries’ average of 25% - 67%. This shortage is associated with three factors: insufficient overall supply, uneven service quality, and high costs. The academic community points out that childcare services are quasi-public goods, which require the participation of multiple entities under the government’s leadership. Sweden’s investment in childcare, which accounts for 0.95% of its GDP, and Japan’s recognized kindergarten system (integrating childcare and education functions) both reflect the assumption of public responsibility. These service gaps indicate that the fertility support policy is oriented towards emergency response and lacks a full - life - cycle perspective.

3.3.4 In terms of cultural support

Cultural support is an implicit yet crucial dimension of the fertility support system. Research shows that China is confronted with the dual dilemma of “the dissolution of traditional marriage and fertility culture” and “the absence of a fertility culture”. On the one hand, material pressures such as high betrothal gifts and soaring housing prices reduce the appeal of marriage; on the other hand, diverse forms like childbearing and childbearing lack social recognition and institutional tolerance. The academic community advocates the construction of a culture, whose core elements include: first, values, affirming the social value of childbearing and the contributions of motherhood, and discarding the narrow view that childbearing is a private

family matter. Second, promote diversity and inclusion by embracing diverse forms of childbearing, including childbearing within marriage and single motherhood, and ensure legal equality for different childbearing choices. Third, reconstruct the discourse to avoid the consumerist narratives like “hot mom” and “perfect mother” from imposing norms on motherhood and to alleviate women’s self – blame [12].

3.4 Theoretical Foundation of a Fertility-Friendly Society

Research on China’s fertility transition has put forward the core theoretical framework of the “endogenous low-fertility stage”, which marks a fundamental shift in the research paradigm of fertility policy. This theory differentiates between the “policy-induced low fertility” and “endogenous low fertility” stages, indicating that China entered the latter as early as 2000. Endogenous low fertility has four main characteristics: long-term nature (profound transformation of cultural concepts), thoroughness (fertility intention below the replacement level), structural nature (significant disparities between urban and rural areas and social strata), and externality (interconnection with the social system) [12].

3.4.1 Governance logic of endogenous low fertility

In response to the endogenous low-fertility stage, the research proposes a governance framework for a “fertility-friendly society”, with its theoretical pillars including: Empowering fertility: Defining the right to fertility as a fundamental right at the constitutional level and respecting the subjectivity and autonomy of fertility decisions [12]. Shared national responsibility: A mechanism of “socializing the costs of childbirth and rearing” should be established, and public finance should be used to share the positive externalities of family childbearing. Research indicates that the state needs to fulfill its obligations in three aspects: economic compensation (increasing childbearing allowances), service provision (expanding inclusive childcare services), and institutional guarantee (eliminating employment discrimination). Mao Zhuoyan points out that current policies lack responses to the childbearing rights of single women [10].

3.4.2 Theoretical model of policy synergy

Fertility support policies require systematic governance through cross departmental collaboration. Research reveals the current structural contradiction between “the solo advancement of the three - child policy” and “the lagging of supporting policies”. First, there is a lack of legal coherence. For instance, the flexible working system lacks the support of the Labor Law, leading to strong resistance

from enterprises. Second, fiscal investment is fragmented. Due to the absence of a clear division of powers and expenditure responsibilities between the central and local governments, local pilot programs have weak sustainability. Third, policy - making entities are fragmented. There is insufficient coordination among departments such as health, education, and human resources and social security, and no high - level coordination mechanism has been established. The theoretical circle advocates learning from the experience of Sweden’s “feminist government” and integrating gender equality into all policy evaluation dimensions [13]. The core of this coordination mechanism is the optimization of policy tool combinations. Through the coordinated use of multiple tools, including legal norms, fiscal investment, service delivery, and cultural guidance, full - cycle coverage of fertility support can be achieved.

4. Discussion

4.1 Main Contributions of Existing Research

4.1.1 Marginal effects of fertility enhancement

A systematic review of the existing literature reveals the complex effects of policies to extend maternity and parental leave in the context of the demographic transition. Although such policies are expected to ease aging and raise fertility, their implementation has significant limitations and needs to be analyzed in a multidimensional theoretical framework.

Policies have had only marginal effects in raising fertility. In the short run, a small increase in fertility intentions was observed among institutionalized or highly educated women, mainly because the extension of legal childcare hours eased the pressure to return to work after giving birth [14]. However, the lack of significant improvement in the overall fertility rate is due to multiple structural barriers to childbearing decisions: the high cost of childcare in the economic dimension (both in terms of direct expenses and the opportunity cost of women’s career breaks), the shortage of resources for universal childcare in the service dimension (insufficient supply of childcare places for 0-3 year olds), and the persistence of the “motherhood punishment” phenomenon in the cultural/institutional dimension, and the “motherhood punishment” phenomenon. “phenomenon in the cultural/institutional dimension [15]. It is particularly noteworthy that the extension of women-only leave may be interpreted by employers as an increase in labor costs, which in turn reinforces implicit gender discrimination in the recruitment process and creates a paradox between policy objectives and actual effects.

4.1.2 Rigid constraints on male participation

Policies have had a similarly limited effect on promoting male parental participation. Non-compulsory leave design (e.g. transferable ‘shared’ parental leave) has led to low rates of actual leave taken by fathers [16]. Deeper barriers lie in the dual constraints of social norms and economic rationality: traditional gender roles solidify parenting as a mother’s duty, and men are often forced to give up their right to take leave due to economic pressures (fear of loss of income, risk of career advancement) and a lack of support mechanisms in the workplace (e.g., job substitution, leadership attitudes) [9]. This reveals the policy’s neglect of the synergy between gender cultural transformation and workplace systems.

4.1.3 Systemic governance: A path to reconstructing a fertility-friendly society

As a result of the above limitations, the authors can see that the construction of a birth-friendly society needs to break away from the dependence on the path of a single vacation extension and shift to the synergy of a multi-level system. The core path lies in the construction of a systematic support network covering economic costs, service provision, workplace equity and responsibility restructuring. The economic dimension requires a social sharing mechanism through the expansion of maternity insurance, special financial subsidies, and targeted tax breaks to address the negative incentives for enterprises to avoid women of childbearing age; the service dimension requires a large-scale increase in the supply of inclusive childcare resources, and the provision of a practical childcare support infrastructure for families; and the workplace dimension urgently needs to strengthen the effectiveness of anti-discrimination law enforcement, and to innovate a flexible work model and a guaranteed leave pay system. More critically, men’s responsibilities must be rigidly constrained through a system of non-transferable fathers-only quotas, and public education must be synchronized to address the traditional gender bias in the division of labour. These measures need to be linked to full-cycle policies, such as housing preferences and educational equity, to form an integrated ecosystem of support across the marriage and parenting chain.

4.2 Major Shortcomings of Existing Research

Although existing research provides a multi-dimensional perspective for understanding the policy of extending maternity leave and parental leave, there are still obvious limitations. First, most of the research focuses on the analysis of the effects of a single leave policy, and there is a lack of a systematic theoretical framework and empirical evaluation of the synergistic mechanism of how to effectively integrate the policies of economic support (such as

subsidies and tax reductions), service support (the expansion of childcare services), and time support (the leave system). Second, in terms of promoting men’s participation in parenting, existing research has failed to explore in depth how to substantively overcome socio-cultural barriers and economic concerns in order to increase the actual utilization rate of men’s parental leave, and relevant proposals (such as “fatherhood quotas”) mostly remain at the level of advocacy in principle, lacking specific, operational and incentive-compatible institutional design details, and verification of their effectiveness. Third, the existing studies are mainly based on traditional labor practices. Third, existing research is mainly based on the framework of traditional labor relations, and there is a lack of theoretical discussion and targeted policy design on how to effectively incorporate flexible employment groups, such as the retail economy and platform employment, into the maternity leave and protection system. Fourth, there is a relative lack of research at the micro level, as the mechanisms by which the policy affects intra-family decision-making on the division of labor in child-rearing, the timing of births, and the career development trajectories of individuals are not yet clear, and there is a lack of tracking and evaluating research on the long-term demographic and social effects of the policy. Finally, there is a lack of in-depth research on cultural intervention strategies and evaluation of the effects of the policy on how to effectively change the deep-rooted concept of “motherhood as a vocation” and gender bias in the workplace, and to promote the development of a genuine culture of shared family responsibilities.

5. Conclusions

By integrating multidisciplinary perspectives, this review reveals that there is a significant effectiveness borderline between extended maternity and parental leave policies in mitigating the crisis of ageing and low fertility. It is found that while the policy has produced weak incentives for specific groups of women to have children, it has had little effect on the three core objectives of raising overall fertility, promoting men’s sharing of childcare responsibilities, and eliminating gender discrimination in the workplace. This is due to deep-rooted structural contradictions: a single point of intervention in the time dimension cannot counteract the combined resistance of economic pressure, service shortages, and cultural biases; the flexible leave design is ineffective in the face of traditional gender norms and economic rationality; and the isolation of the policy has led to a breakdown of synergies with the labor market and the social service system, and has even become an unintended catalyst for reinforcing gender in-

equality.

The solution to the dilemma requires a fundamental reorganization of the policy paradigm. An effective way to do this is to build a synergistic framework for rebalancing the responsibilities of the Government, the market and the family: to establish a mechanism for sharing the costs of childbearing with society by means of fiscal transfers and tax adjustments, to resolve the structural contradiction of the childcare-occupation conflict through the construction of a system of universal childcare services, and to reshape the division of labour within the family by means of a fathers' exclusive quota of leave and the rigidity of anti-discrimination regulations. These measures need to be embedded in a life-cycle policy network covering marriage support, housing security, and education equity, forming a complete ecosystem to support reproductive decision-making. Only by realizing a paradigm shift from single-point breakthroughs to systemic governance can the concept of fertility-friendliness be transformed into a real impetus for demographic transition.

Future research should focus on verifying the multiplier effect of policy combinations, designing innovative male participation systems and exploring protection mechanisms for workers in new occupations, so as to provide continuous academic support for population development strategies. Policymakers need to recognize that a truly fertility-friendly society requires not only the gift of time, but also the reshaping of the economic foundations, services and gender civilization that underpin fertility.

Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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