

From One-Child to Three-Child Policy: Study of Women's Equal Payment for Equal Work in the Context of the Change in Policy

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Abstract. In the past 42 years, China's fertility policy has experienced and repeated exploration and continuous improvement process, which can be roughly divided into three stages. In 1980, the one-child policy was introduced. In 2016, the country officially allowed two children. In 2021, the three-child policy was fully released. This research tests the relationship between fertility policy change (one-child to three-child policy) and the equal pay for equal work of women. The study applies mixed-research method and critical paradigm. Firstly, the study uses experiment by constructing virtual CVs with 4 categories of women, including women with no children, one child, two children, and three children, which can test the effect of the number of children women have on companies' willingness to pay. Secondly, the research also analyze secondary data from NBS. This study will collect the average wages of men and women over three periods of time (shift of fertility policy) to calculate them as ratios by using scatter plots to find changes and conclude that the three-child policy is related to the issue of equal pay for women for equal work.

Keywords: Women; Three-child Policy; Equal payment for equal work.

1. Introduction

In 1980, China initiated a population control program due to rapid population growth, lasting about 35 years, with strict fertility and economic policies promoting development. However, the reducing population resulted in an aging population issue. To counter this, the government implemented two-child and three-child policies both in 2016 and 2021, hoping for mitigating this trend, yet workplace discrimination against women intensified with the relaxation of fertility policies, affecting both job opportunities and equal payment. This research hopes to find out the connection between fertility policy and women's equal pay for equal work. With the increased access to education for women, many of them decided to delay or forgo childbirth, paying more attention to their own careers. But it also created challenges in balancing work and family due to the Chinese traditional gender division of labor. The release of new child policy will bring a hidden repercussion on women in the workplace. For example, companies may ignore women's real intentions toward fertility and consider women's childbearing willingness as an extra cost. In these situations, companies may hire women with more children. As under the regulation, these women have less opportunity to raise another child and companies' willingness to bear the cost during the maternity leave will decline. They believe that women without children are more likely to get married and spend tremendous time to babysit children after joining the company. To maximize the profit and avoid unnecessary expenses, companies will usually choose to hire married women or men. Similarly, in promotions, men may be more likely to be promoted with the same ability to work. Employers may take the possibility of women having or caring for children into the account. The research will conduct by using mixed method to determine whether or not the connection exists. Furthermore, the research will continue to evaluate, if the previous assumption were true, how does this connection will influence women in China. The population affected will mostly be the policy makers and relevant think tanks on China's public affairs. The research got the conclusion from literature review section and take the general premise of the study to be the H0 that "the cause of unequal payment is due to women's willingness of bearing children will cost company more." It suggests the more children a woman have, the less likely she is to bear new children, thereby, companies will be more willing to employ her. It is because women

are perceived to be potentially fertile, which would affect the economic efficiency of the business, that businesses are reluctant to employ women who have not given birth or who have fewer children. Under the original one-child policy, women who have already had one child will have less of this impact. But with the introduction of the three-child policy, the economic risks faced by companies may increase. So, the research poses the first research question: "Will company's willingness to pay women increase when women have more children after the three-child policy?" The research thinks there exists a hypothesis H1 that is "Companies are more willing to employ women with more children after the three-child policy." Next step, the long-term approach of this research is to determine the influence of policy to women through the timeline of child policy implementation. Given by the background information, the research aware the enactment of two-child policy and three-child policy is in the following 2016 and 2021. Therefore, this study decided to use qualitative method in this section to address the research question: "From one child policy to three child policy, will the situation of women's unequal payment be getting worse?" This research hopes to examine the difference over the years and use this result of comparison to test the following hypothesis, "H2: Women with more children are more likely to suffer unequal payment through the change of three policies." This is because the research suspects a strong connection between influence of child policy and economic & social pressure that women in China encounters. If the lower wages of women in workplace over the years coincides with the implementation of policy, then it will support this hypothesis.

2. Literature review

Prior to the release of the two-child policy, Waldfogel pointed out that raising children have a significant negative impact on women but some benefits for men and noted that the difference in earnings between men and women mainly stemmed from the discrimination in workplace and in family roles [1]. Nevertheless, the problem of equal pay for equal work to men and women was not so serious because women's time was not completely taken up by the family in the context of the one-child family [2]. Since the two-child policy, the employment situation for women has become increasingly critical. Leng and Kang found that firms with higher female employment have lower costs, and this low-cost effect disappears as the scope of the two-child policy expands [3]. This result could suggest firms would like to reduce female employment for economic benefits, which causes a result of wage discrimination [4]. Huang noted that many employers prefer men rather than women in the hiring process because they are concerned about the burden of paid maternity leave policies for female employees [5].

Moreover, female job seekers may be asked if they are considering having a second child and if the answer is yes, they are usually declined from recruitment [6]. As a result, the employment discrimination of women is gradually exacerbated after the two-child policy. Subsequently, the three-child policy was enacted and the issue of equal pay for men and women was prominent. Li stated that the three-child policy only affects married women with two children [7]. This phenomenon may occur because employers expect women with two children to be more likely to have a third child. This inspires us to develop H1: firms are more willing to hire women with more children. Meanwhile, the experimental design of this paper is well designed with an achievable method, it leads us to use virtual resumes in this study [8]. In order to avoid possible ethical issues and to conduct a large-scale experiment in most parts of China, Gao and Li point out that women who have had children usually earn less than men in the same position [9], which suggests that women are culturally influenced to usually take on more family responsibilities than men, which leads us to believe that the problem of equal pay for men and women is mainly caused by cultural and market conditions. Additionally, the authors of one research article emphasizes the impact of children's policy in China on Children's behavior and their families' socio-economic status. To prove its theory, they establish a linear slope graph to show the combination of one child and low socio-economic status could result a high

problem behavior model, and vice versa. It could suggest women with one child are also facing pressure from the work and childbearing, which provide a support for H0 [10].

In conclusion, the problem of equal pay for men and women is most significant under the influence of the three-child policy, which makes us focus more on the impact of the three-child policy on the problem of equal pay for women.

3. Method

3.1. Quantitative Method

Overall, the study applies the method of field research, creating virtual Curricula Vitae (CV) with different number of children (that is 0,1,2,3), and send the CV to companies to see how much salary companies are willing to offer.

—Sampling

The study will collect the data from the NBS (National Bureau of Statistics of China) that there are 68,520,000 women participated in labor in 2022 in China. To calculate the required sample size with this given population, this study learns from previous policy-related research that a confidence interval of 95%, an expected error of 0.05, a confidence level of 95% and a standard deviation of 0.5 is normally applied. Then, the study applies these into the following sample size calculation formula: $(n = \frac{Z^2 \cdot \sigma^2}{E^2})$ and get an 'n' of 384.16. Since the sample size must be a whole number, this study needs to round up. Therefore, the study needs at least 385 samples to satisfy the given conditions.

Next step, the study applies the method of cluster random sampling to select companies in all 34 provinces in China to make sure the inclusiveness of the population sample. In this case, the study will be able to eliminate the differences between developed provinces among the China's east coast and less developed provinces among the northwest of China. Additionally, considering the individual difference of the companies' recruiters that they might refuse to accept this research request, this study will apply availability sampling to the companies in each province to ensure this study is able to get enough data. Given the fact that the research needs at least 385 samples in all, the study will assign each province 12 samples and divide them equally into four groups (that has 0,1,2,3 number of children).

The research plans to conduct this study on 58.com, 51job.com and zhipin.com, which are the three of the largest recruitment websites in China. Also, if the companies are listed on the website, the research can confirm that they are open for recruitment, so that companies without recruiting requiring will not be disturbed. The research will only focus on legal staff because most companies have them and thus the volume of employees ensures this study can collect the required quantity of data. Legal tasks are generally similar, so there is no need to control the work content. Plus, in China and in other countries, women are in the majority in the legal staff.

Then, this study will select the job posts that met the selection criteria and recorded company information, which included name and email address.

—Data Collection

Next, this study will keep delivering emails to the companies. Each email will be entitled exactly the same that is "Request for Assistance in Non-Commercial Academic Research + Legal Staff + Salary Estimation Inquiry" (appendix 1) with a resume in PDF format attached (appendix 2). In the resume, this study will set different number of children, whereas keep everything else exactly the same.

In the email, the study will disclose to the companies revealing the resumes were fictitious and explain the educational purpose of the study using a student email, which demonstrates transparency. Additionally, the study will send only 1 resume to each company to not create a significant burden or disruption for recruiters. Furthermore, the study will delete all the identifying company information when analyzing results and keep all the company names vague. This study understands the importance of data security so the study will fully respect their right to withhold any information they deem

confidential or inappropriate to share. Last but not the least, the research consults the IRB of the school to ensure appropriate protections are in place and to receive its approval. However, the study will not reveal this research aim (that focus on women's unequal payment) to keep the recruiters from responding a virtual salary consciously or not.

3.2. Qualitative Method

In order to study the impact of policy changes on women's unequal earnings, the study will first divide the time period into three continuous parts: 2011-2015 (one-child policy), 2016-2020 (two-child policy), and 2021-2022 (three-child policy). It helps us to analyze the trend of change.

Secondly, the study will obtain the average wage per year for men and women from NBS and divide them into "Rural" and "Urban" sub-categories separately. This is because the study anticipates the livelihood in developed provinces and less developed provinces have huge difference in result of wage ratio of women to men, thereby this study needs to separate them by using the standard of poverty line in China. After obtaining the data, the research will use the average male wage for each year as a benchmark to calculate the ratio of female wage to male wage in each year.

3.3. Limitation and Contribution

3.3.1 Contribution

In this research proposal, the study presents a novel approach to evaluate the influence of child policies to women in China. It provides distinctive perspective to enhance the understanding on how population policies impact people's livelihood through the application on both quantitative and qualitative method to analyze the exact impact.

To elaborate on that, the study establishes an inclusive field research to collect data from various companies within the China to scrutinize the employment status of women with different children. Furthermore, the study establishes a benchmark to test the impact of policy changes on women's unequal earnings through three sections of policy change. The study hopes these rigorous procedures could enhance the reliability and validity of this research.

In the end, the study hopes the result of this research could provide further support to relevant academic institutions, thinktanks, and policy makers in the government. By providing evidence on how the woman's employment rate, rights of equal payment for equal work being affected, scholars and government officials could improve their design on the policy to avoid any inadvertent repercussions.

3.3.2 Cultural concerns

In the Chinese traditional sexual division of labor, women were required to stay at home and play with conscientious mothers rather than earning money outside. The long-entrenched sexual division of labor marginalizes women from the labor market and imposes unnecessary requirements such as fertility intensions to women. This bias leads to an unhealthy family relationship that can grow more severe over time. Women will receive extra social interventions on reproductive choices. They will also face increased discrimination in the workplace and on the way to promotion, in addition to their ability to work. At the same time, discrimination in society against family background, place of birth and education level may also affect the delivery of CVs. The study understands the existing biases in society and use them as a premise for this study. Candidates from rural areas or from poor family backgrounds may be at a disadvantage in recruitment. Some companies may be inclined to choose a candidate with a higher social background. These biased situations are contrary to the original purpose of this research.

3.3.3 Ethical concerns

It is true that the study avoids using real people to be a part of experimental field research to lower the ethical risks. Because the number of children and the size of the salary for women is generally regarded as a privacy issue. Using virtual methods reduce the consideration of privacy part. However, this kind of poses stress on the HRs of the companies the researcher delivers these CVs. Even though

the study already explained to the company the purpose of sending fake CVs before it sends, reducing the number of resumes the researcher sends while allowing companies to opt-out, and during the process of analyzing results, the study does not publish company names and any identifying information. Processing fake CVs will still increase their workload but does not bring any work performance.

3.3.4 Limitation

The empirical results reported herein should be considered in the light of some limitations. Firstly, the research author has lack working experience. So literally the study does not know the real situation in the workplace, which means limiting the understanding of the true experience women undergo during work. Secondly, fertility discrimination is reflected in all stages of employment, but the study was only engaged to investigate discrimination in the salary section. Studying in the promotion stage, job assignments, and communication in the workplace also be valuable topics. Especially for the part of the promotion stage, it is difficult for the study to evaluate this part as quantitative data. The “glass ceiling” is hard to quantify.

——Quantitative Analysis Limitation

The generalizability of the research is relatively low. The study uses legal staff as the position for all CVs in the research. In that case, it may lead into biased sampling profile.

Under real circumstances, inequality payment may exist for women. However, the research told the company it sends the resumes to in advance that it was an experiment, so the study may not give the intended salary based on the actual situation of the company due to they don't have to actually pay the money. Therefore, this condition may have an impact on the data collection.

——Qualitative Analysis Limitation

In addition, there is another limitation about the timeline setup in the qualitative analysis. In order to maintain the reliability of the raw data for us to assess, the study intentionally categorized each five years as a group for us to analyze the trend of change. However, due to the three-child policy is implemented in 2021, merely two years of data could produce a dearth of samples are to correctly portray the change.

——Timeline

The researcher will continue to send research requests to companies for three months (April, May, and June) during the peak hiring season until the research have collected a sufficient amount of data. The study will then spend another month analyzing the data in further detail.

——Budget

Considering the whole procedure of research does not involve any necessary expenditure to proceed, the budget should be none if by ignoring all the miscellaneous expenses from the researcher.

4. Summary

This study concludes that under the traditional division of labor in the family, women are culturally bound and therefore bear more family responsibilities than men. After the liberalization of the three-child policy, women face greater challenges at work. Many interviewers refuse to hire women when they learn that they have more than one child, and there is a big difference in the treatment of women with more than two children and men in the same position. Therefore, the impact of the three-child policy on women's equal pay for equal work is significant.

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Appendix 2

Request for Assistance in Non-Commercial Academic Research

+ Legal Staff + Salary Estimation Inquiry

Dear Whom it may concern ,

I hope this email finds you well. We are the research team from Columbia University and Shanghai International Studies University. I am reaching out on behalf of a group of dedicated students engaged in a non-commercial academic research project. We are passionate about our field and are eager to make valuable contributions to the scientific community.

As part of our research methodology, we would like to request your assistance in estimating a potential salary for a virtual resume we will be sending to you. Please rest assured that the information we provide will solely serve as an academic exercise, and we will not include any sensitive or proprietary data related to your company.

We understand the importance of data security and respect your right to withhold any information you deem confidential or inappropriate to share. We kindly request your consideration in participating in this endeavor, but we completely understand if you prefer not to provide the requested salary estimation.

Best Regards,

Research Team