

The Issue of Gender Inequality within Families in China

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Abstract. In recent years, China has made a series of progress in addressing gender inequality. However, in the field of family, women still shoulder heavy household chores. Scholars have delved into various aspects of family life, from the micro-operation of power within families to the macro impact of social structure. They discovered that although society has made progress in gender equality, traditional gender roles and family division of labor still pose significant challenges to women. This paper primarily examines the unequal treatment of women within the family and analyzes women's current living situation, its reasons, and longstanding impacts. The paper argues that gender inequality in Chinese families still exists in every aspect. This not only affects women's personal development, but also harms the harmony within families and society. Therefore, this study proposes that the government, society, and individuals should jointly promote gender equality and create a fairer family and social environment for women in China.

Keywords: Gender inequality; China; familial relationship.

1. Introduction

In recent years, China has made a series of progress in addressing gender inequality, but these advances need to be examined from two different perspectives. In the public sphere, the gap between the status of women in education and the workplace and that of men is gradually narrowing. The level of education for women is constantly improving, and career development opportunities are also increasing.

However, in the field of family, women still shoulder heavy household chores. According to statistical data, Chinese women spend an average of 18 hours per week on household chores - three times more than men [1]. This data reflects that although society has made progress in gender equality, traditional gender roles and family division of labor still pose significant challenges to women.

In existing research, scholars' exploration has delved into various aspects of family life, from the micro-operation of power within families to the macro impact of social structure. They have also explored the underlying reasons and mechanisms through interdisciplinary methodologies [2, 3]. This paper mainly focuses on the unequal treatment of women within the family, discusses its current situation, reasons, and impacts. It further proposes corresponding improvement measures to improve the living environment of Chinese women.

2. Current Situation: Women Are in a Unequal Position in the Family

2.1. Household Chores: Women Work Longer Hours Than Men

The report "Where Has Time Gone? External Shocks and Changes in Time Use in China" jointly released by Inner Mongolia University and China Social Sciences Press is based on nationwide tracking survey data on time use among urban and rural residents in China in 2017 and 2021 [4]. The report shows that Chinese women spend much more time on unpaid labor (mainly including household chores) than men. Although women's unpaid labor time has decreased between 2017 and 2021, while men's has tended to increase, the gender gap has significantly narrowed. However, the ratio of unpaid labor time between women and men still decreased from 3.07 to 2.39, indicating that women still bear the majority of household chores.

In addition to female adults suffering from this inequality, their children are also influenced by society. The report "Unleashing the Power of Data for Girls" released by UNICEF shows that globally,

girls spend 40% more time doing household chores than boys [5]. Specifically, girls between the ages of five and 14 spend 160 million more hours cooking, cleaning, taking care of their families, and fetching water and firewood than boys. This inequality phenomenon begins at a very young age for girls and intensifies with age.

2.2. The Burden of Children's Education Varies

In addition, women often bear the dual burden of household chores and educational time: multiple social surveys and research reports, such as the "2024 Survey Report on the Living Conditions of Working Mothers", show that working mothers often invest more time in their children's education while taking on a large amount of household chores [6]. For example, nearly 80% of working mothers spend more than two hours a day on household chores, which is much higher than working fathers. In addition, mothers also take on more responsibilities in their children's daily care, academic guidance, and other aspects, which invisibly increases their time investment in their children's education.

2.3. The Impact of Marriage and Maternal Identity on Women's Employment Participation Rate

Although marital status itself does not directly determine women's employment participation rate, it often interacts with a series of social, economic, and personal factors, collectively influencing women's employment choices. The impact of maternal identity on women's employment participation rate is more direct and significant. According to data from organizations such as Zhaopin, working mothers also need to take on a significant amount of household and parenting responsibilities in addition to their work. This may result in them having fewer effective working hours than unmarried or childless women, thereby affecting their career development and promotion opportunities.

According to the "2023 China Women's Workplace Status Survey Report" released by Zhaopin, although the average salary of women has been increasing year by year, there is still a pay gap between them and men [7]. This to some extent reflects the disadvantaged position of working mothers in the workplace. For example, in 2023, the average monthly salary for working women is 8689 yuan, while for men it is 9942 yuan, a difference of 1253 yuan [7].

In addition, research from institutions such as 51job has shown that working mothers often face more obstacles in the promotion process. This is related not only to the career interruptions they may face after giving birth, but also to gender bias and discrimination in the workplace. For example, a previous survey by 51job showed that 58.7% of working women feel gender inequality in promotions because companies are not allowed to lay off employees, reduce salaries, or suspend social security contributions during maternity leave.

3. Root Causes: Multiple Factors

In contemporary society, the causes of gender inequality in Chinese families are deeply rooted in multiple levels, such as history, culture, social structure, and institutions, rather than being caused by a single dimensional factor.

One of the reasons that cannot be ignored is the legacy of traditional cultural concepts. The Confucian ideology of male superiority and female inferiority has shaped societal stereotypes of gender and profoundly influenced the power structure and role allocation within families. Under the long-term influence of Confucian culture, women are often entrusted with the responsibility of taking care of their families and educating their children, while men are expected to become the economic pillars of their families and the leaders of society. This division of roles not only limits women's career development opportunities, but also weakens their influence in family decision-making, thereby exacerbating gender inequality.

Moreover, the underestimation of women's value in traditional beliefs is also one of the important reasons for gender inequality. In some regions and families, women are seen as accessories of the family, and their value is often reflected through marriage and childbirth, which leads to women being at a disadvantage in educational opportunities and resources for a long time. Although the modern education system has gradually achieved gender equality, gender bias and stereotypes still exist in the education process, affecting women's self-awareness and development potential. Even in some families, there are still interferences and restrictions on women's marriage choices, such as forced marriage and prejudice against divorced women.

In addition, social systems and policies also play a key role in shaping gender inequality. The past family planning policy, combined with the traditional concept of favoring sons over daughters in a specific social context, has led to many families adopting gender selective reproductive behavior, thereby exacerbating the gender imbalance. This imbalance not only affects the population structure, but also intensifies the competitive pressure on women in areas such as marriage and employment, further solidifying gender inequality.

Furthermore, gender discrimination in the job market is also an important issue that needs attention at the level of social systems and policies. Although China has made significant progress in promoting gender equality in recent years, women still generally have lower promotion opportunities, salary and benefits in the workplace than men. This inequality not only limits women's career development, but also weakens their status and influence in the family and society.

4. Impacts and Suggestions

4.1. Impact on Marriage Concepts and Rates

According to relevant research and survey data, when women feel unequal treatment in the family, they may develop resistance or fear towards marriage, believing that marriage does not bring the expected happiness and equality [8]. This mentality existing among women will undoubtedly have a negative impact on the overall marriage rate of society.

In addition, with the increasing awareness of women's independence, more and more women are beginning to value personal development and freedom and are unwilling to sacrifice their rights and pursuits for marriage, which has also to some extent promoted the phenomenon of late marriage and non-marriage.

4.2. Impact on Social Trust and Interpersonal Relationships

The unequal status of women in the family may also exacerbate the crisis of social trust and tension in interpersonal relationships. When women feel unfairly treated within the family, they may experience a decrease in trust in the family and even society, believing that gender equality has not truly been achieved in society. The spread of this mentality not only affects family harmony but may also trigger broader social conflicts and contradictions.

At the same time, the inequality of women in the family may also lead to intergenerational awareness of inequality, causing the next generation to continue to be influenced by gender stereotypes during their growth process, further exacerbating gender inequality issues.

4.3. Suggestions

Firstly, the government should strengthen legal protection and policy level protection to ensure the implementation and enforcement of relevant laws and regulations. For example, in response to gender inequality in families, the government can introduce more detailed policies to help women obtain equal rights and opportunities in marriage, property inheritance, and child rearing sharing. In addition, the government should encourage men to participate in household chores and childcare work in terms of policies and concepts.

Secondly, both the government and society should increase their efforts to promote the transformation of social concepts and gender equality education. Through various channels such as

school education, media promotion, and community activities, we aim to popularize the concept of gender equality, change society's inherent views on traditional gender roles of women, and promote the deepening of gender equality awareness.

Finally, personal awakening and action are also crucial. Women should enhance their self-awareness and awareness of protecting their rights, bravely pursue their careers and ideals, and speak out in different fields. On the other hand, men should actively participate in family affairs, share household and parenting responsibilities, and jointly build equal and mutually respectful family relationships.

5. Conclusion

This paper describes the current living situation of women in China, analyzes the root causes of social inequality, and proposes measures to eliminate this inequality problem. Through analysis, the paper argues that gender inequality in Chinese families still exists invisibly in every aspect of daily life. This not only affects the personal development of women, but also has a negative impact on the harmony of families and the entire society.

The main reason for gender inequality is the profound legacy of patriarchal culture in feudal society, which still invisibly influences the expectations and evaluations of women's roles in modern society. Therefore, the government, society, and individuals should work together from multiple levels to promote the development of gender equality and create a more fair, harmonious, and beautiful family and social environment for women.

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