

Assessing the Effect of Public Policy on Women's Workplace Conditions in China through SWOT Analysis

Zhiyan Guo*

Wuhan Britan-China School, Hubei, China

* Corresponding Author Email: 3351876607@qq.com

Abstract. With the rapid development of society, women's social status have been paid more and more attention. In order to understand the impact of maternity leave policy and three-child policy on working women's social responsibilities, this paper adopts the SWOT analysis method to study women's working environment from perspectives of strengths, opportunities, weaknesses, and threats. After careful consideration and analysis, it is concluded that both policies ultimately cause more harm to women. In order to cultivate a more supportive and inclusive work environment for women, the study offers recommendations such as implementing gender-neutral maternity leave policies encouraging telecommuting, and providing training opportunities for female employees. These measures aim to contribute to gender equality and societal progress.

Keywords: Women in the workplace, maternity Leave Policy, three-child policy.

1. Introduction

In contemporary society, with the development of the feminist movement and the increasing number of women's voices, people are increasingly aware that women have great value and status in society. Therefore, the necessity of women's participation in the workplace has become increasingly obvious, and the issue of women's rights and interests has aroused widespread concern in society. This is not only a matter of equality, but also a key driver of social progress and development.

In recent years, China has taken important steps in promoting women's labor rights and interests by implementing the maternity leave policy and the three-child policy. These policies have attracted widespread attention and present both challenges and opportunities for women. These policies not only aim to guarantee women's reproductive rights, but also to improve the fertility structure to meet the challenges brought by an aging population. However, in the actual implementation process, some potential problems have also been exposed, which are worthy of in-depth, rigorous and rational discussion and solution. On the one hand, these policies expand women's reproductive rights and provide more rest time, thereby strengthening their support and protection during childbirth and child-rearing. This is a key aspect of women's rights and empowerment, as it enables them to balance their personal and professional responsibilities more effectively. Maternity leave policies, in particular, ensure that women have enough time to recover from childbirth and bond with their newborns without fear of falling behind in their careers. On the other hand, the three-child policy further encourages women to have more children, which in turn strengthens the bond between women and their families. The policy recognizes the important role of women in family planning and child-rearing and aims to create an environment more conducive to women fulfilling their family responsibilities.

However, despite these positive steps, the intense competition in today's workplace remains a challenge for many women. Staying competitive while fulfilling personal responsibilities can be a daunting task, especially for those struggling to excel in their careers. Women must be provided with the necessary support and resources to strike a balance between their personal and professional lives. To address these challenges, it is critical that companies and organizations create a more inclusive and supportive work environment for women. This includes the provision of flexible working hours, childcare facilities and other support measures to enable women to pursue their career goals without sacrificing their personal responsibilities. In addition, awareness and education on the importance of women's participation in the workplace must be raised. By promoting gender equality and

empowering women, we can create a more inclusive society that values and respects the contributions of women in all aspects of life.

To sum up, with the continuous awakening of feminist consciousness and the increasing recognition of women's rights and interests, the necessity of women's participation in the workplace is becoming more and more obvious. While the maternity leave policy and the three-child policy present challenges and opportunities for women, it is vital that we continue our efforts to create a more supportive and inclusive work environment for women. Only in this way can we realize the full potential of women and achieve gender equality in all aspects of society.

2. Current Situation of Chinese Women

Despite the robust economic growth exhibited by China, the employment prospects for women remain unsatisfactory. Figures released by the National Bureau of Statistics, spanning from 2014 to 2022, reveal a consistent decline in female employment, as evident in Fig.1.

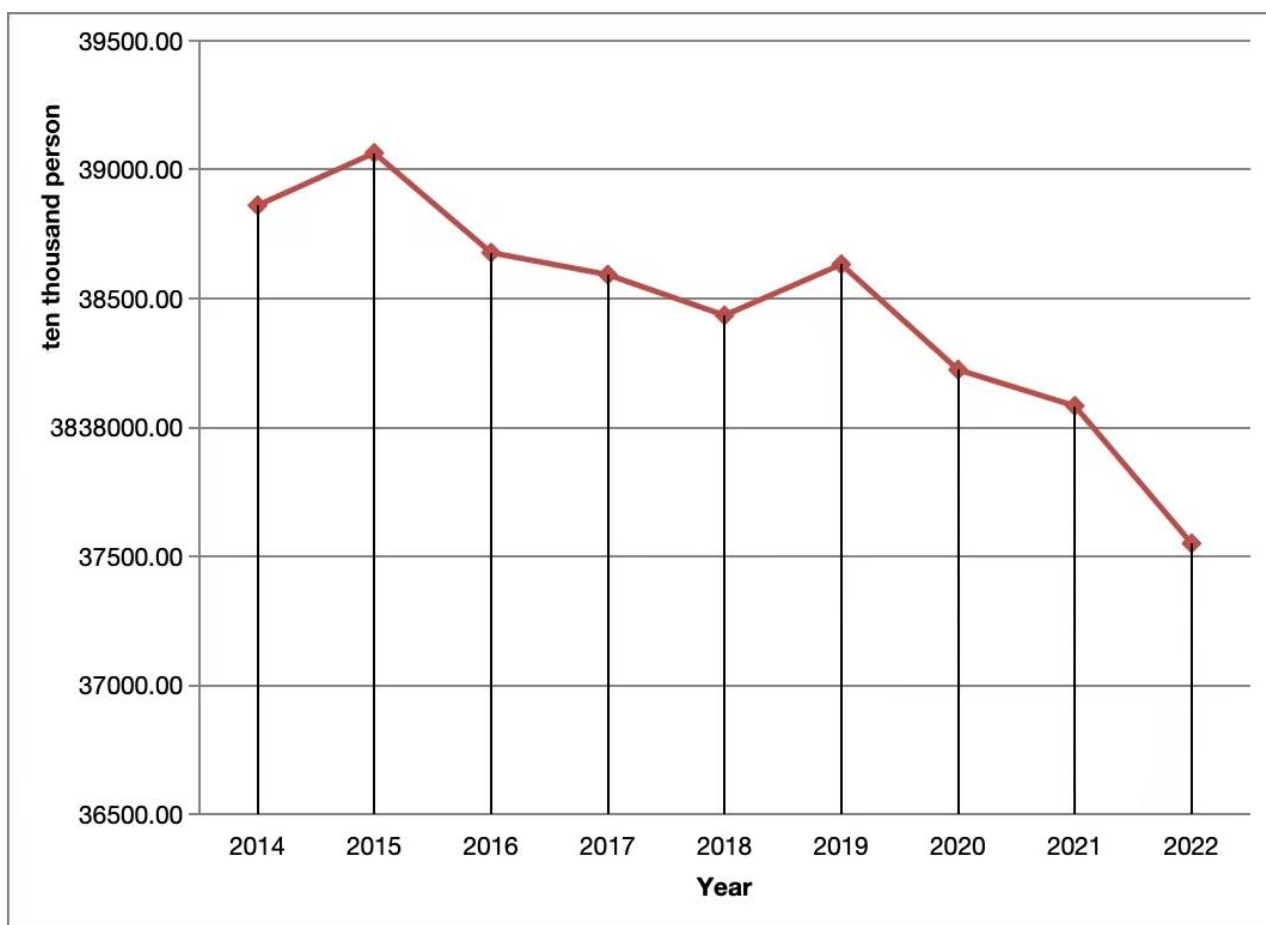


Fig. 1 Female employment figure

As is shown in Fig.1, after the implementation of the three-child policy in 2021, there was a substantial reduction in the employment rate of women in China.

China has gradually liberalized its birth control policy. However, the current outcomes remain unfavorable.

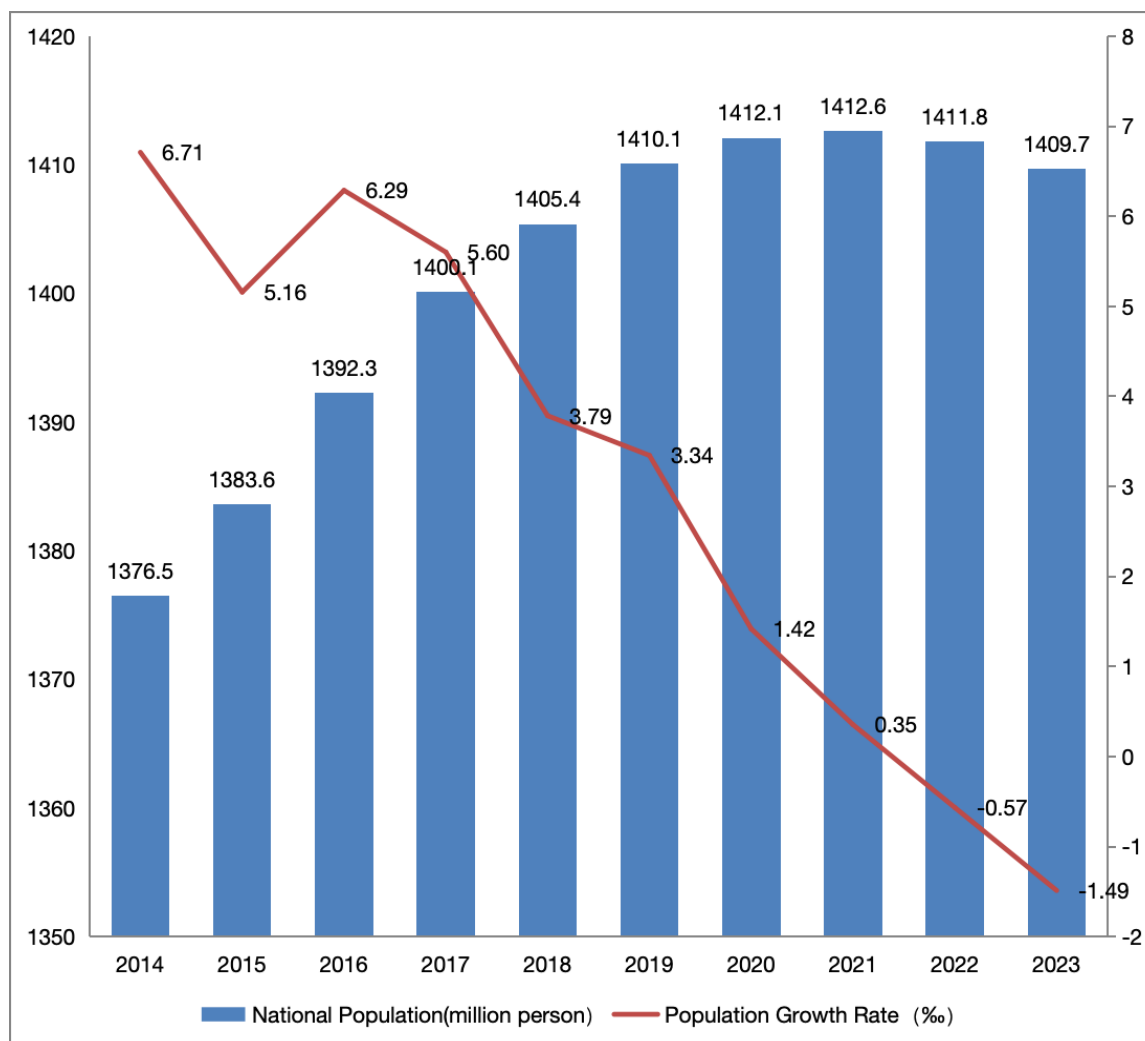


Fig. 2 National population and population growth rate figure

As is depicted in Figure 2, despite the enactment of the three-child policy in 2021, the population growth rate persisted in a downward trajectory, and there appears to be a negative growth rate for the overall population.

According to the statistical data depicted in Figure 1 and Figure 2, it is evident that the implementation of the three-child policy in 2021 has led to a noticeable decrease in the number of employed Chinese women, coinciding with a concurrent decline in the natural population growth rate. Hence, we arrive at the conclusion that the implementation of the three-child policy, despite being a childbirth encouragement measure, has disadvantaged women in their family roles, leading to a decrease in their employment opportunities. Additionally, the combined pressure from work and personal life has further discouraged them from having children. Subsequently, we will delve into the ramifications of public policy on the employment circumstances of women.

3. SWOT Analysis

3.1. Maternity Leave Policy

3.1.1. Strengths

The maternity leave policy legally guarantees women's entitlement to childbirth and plays a significant role in promoting the health and well-being of mothers and newborns, as it enables women to recover from childbirth and establish a strong bond with their children. It also supports women during pregnancy and childbirth, promoting their physical and mental health, and women can take time off work without risking their job security or income [1].

3.1.2. Weaknesses

The maternity leave policy, a crucial aspect of labour rights and gender equality, often brings about a range of complex economic and social impacts. One such impact is the potential elevation of employment costs for enterprises, which can, in turn, exert a significant influence on women's employment prospects. This effect is particularly pronounced in a highly competitive workplace where companies are constantly striving to optimize their costs and maximize profits. The cost implications of the maternity leave policy are numerous. Firstly, during the maternity leave period, female employees may not be able to contribute to the workforce, leading to a temporary loss of productivity. Secondly, companies may need to provide additional benefits and allowances to female employees during this period, such as maternity bonuses, health insurance, and paid leave. These additional costs can accumulate quickly, especially when considering the number of female employees in a large enterprise. In addition, extended maternity leave may lead to challenges in reintegrating into the workforce, such as outdated skills [2]. In a highly competitive business environment, companies may be tempted to reduce their recruitment of female employees out of concern for the costs associated with female employees during maternity leave. This practice, unfortunately, creates a vicious cycle where women face greater difficulties in finding employment and advancing their careers. It also perpetuates gender biases and stereotypes that women are less valuable and profitable than their male counterparts. The consequences of this cycle are profound. Women may be denied opportunities for promotion and advancement due to the perception that they will soon become mothers and take maternity leave. They may also face discrimination in salary and job assignments, further compounding the gender pay gap and career disparities. For example, an Equality and Human Rights Commission report found that maternity leave discrimination means 54,000 women lose their jobs each year [3]. What is more, the competing demands of employment and family care can affect mothers' career pathways and lifetime earnings potential as a consequence of interrupted working patterns [4]. Even when the overall return probabilities do not change over a longer period, this can have negative consequences in the long run and destabilize the careers of mothers [5].

3.1.3. Opportunities

The implementation of the maternity leave policies enhances the retention rate of the female workforce. By providing supportive measures that enable women to juggle between work and family responsibilities effectively, organizations can significantly minimize the turnover among female employees. Such a practice not only fosters a positive work environment but also results in cost savings for the organization, as the recruitment and training of new employees can be costly affairs. What is more, companies with supportive maternity leave policies may attract and retain talented female employees [6].

3.1.4. Threats

The maternity leave policy may have an adverse effect on workforce productivity, especially if employers fail to redistribute the workload among absent employees efficiently. This scenario can result in heightened stress levels and workload for the remaining workforce, potentially leading to burnout and a decline in morale. Furthermore, women who take maternity leave may be stigmatized as less committed or reliable employees, potentially leading to stigmatization. Such stigma can materialize in diverse manners, including being bypassed for promotional opportunities or excluded from significant projects and undertakings.

In summary, the SWOT analysis matrix regarding the maternity leave policy is shown in Figure 3.

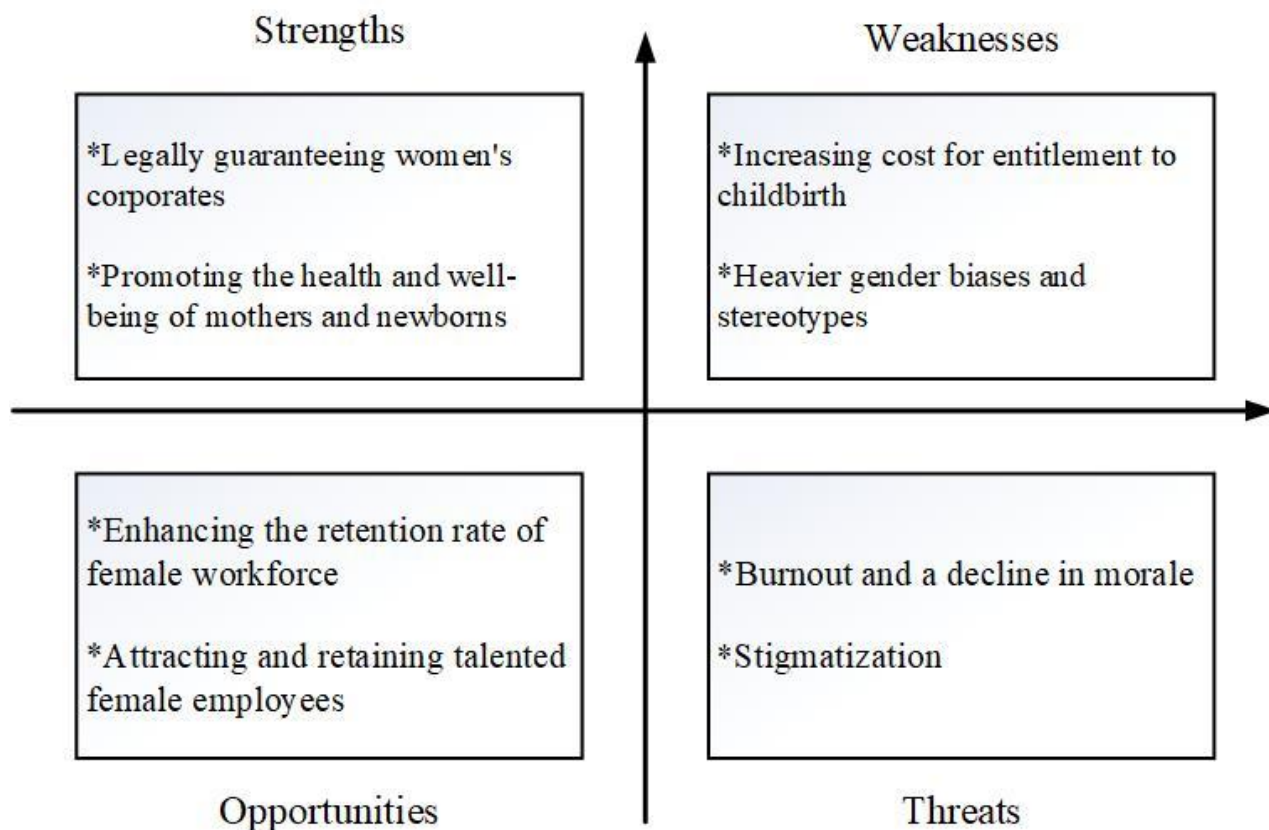


Fig. 3 SWOT Analysis Matrix of Maternity Leave Policy

3.2. Three-child Policy

3.2.1. Strengths

The implementation of the three-child policy is a strategic measure to address critical demographic challenges, including the declining birth rates and the aging population. Research suggests that increasing the number of children per family can help stabilize or increase the population, which is important for maintaining a sustainable workforce and supporting economic growth [7]. What is more, the three-child policy can potentially yield economic advantages in both the short run and long run. In the short run, a rise in the number of children per household has the potential to boost demand for various goods and services related to child-rearing. In the long run, a larger workforce can play a pivotal role in promoting economic growth and stability as the newborn not only ensures a reliable grassroots workforce but also holds the potential to nurture highly skilled and talented individuals who will safeguard the country's need for high-tech innovation.

3.2.2. Weaknesses

The three-child policy might also exacerbate the challenges faced by women in the workplace. Specifically, women with childbearing needs might encounter greater occupational pressure and potential unfair treatment due to the policy. Concerns regarding the impact of frequent childbirth on productivity might prompt some companies to hire fewer women or offer fewer career opportunities post-childbirth. Research suggests that women often bear the brunt of childcare duties in larger families, which can limit their participation in the workforce and hinder their career advancement [8]. This not only hinders women's career progression but also undermines the objectives of the policy. Furthermore, social education might lead to disparities in thinking patterns between men and women. If there is a significant gender imbalance in the workforce, particularly in key positions such as policymaking, the perspectives of women might be overlooked, potentially leading to a more incomplete or extreme societal culture. In addition, Balancing work and family responsibilities can be challenging for mothers of children, potentially leading to increased stress and burnout and having

children may reduce women's access to material resources and the psychosocial benefits of paid work with potentially deleterious impacts on their health and wellbeing [9].

3.2.3. Opportunities

The three-child policy offers financial and social assistance to families with three or more children; for instance, in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province, couples who have a third child between January 1, 2023 and December 31, 2025, will be given a one-time bonus. Furthermore, the implementation of this policy may result in a surge in the workforce as the number of births increases, thereby potentially generating additional job opportunities for female individuals. The policy, in addition, holds the potential to exert profound societal ramifications, including fostering a culture that is more accommodating towards families and fostering favourable perspectives towards larger households. This, in turn, could facilitate the emergence of a more supportive and inclusive society that caters to the needs of women and families alike.

3.2.4. Threats

Promoting the expansion of families via the three-child policy may exert pressure on vital resources encompassing healthcare, education, and housing. This could strain existing infrastructure and services, leading to potential challenges in meeting the needs of a larger population [10]. What is more, the implementation of the three-child policy, aimed at supporting larger families, may result in increased economic pressure on governments and taxpayers. Providing financial and social support to families with three or more children could be costly, particularly if it leads to an increase in the number of families eligible for benefits. Additionally, a possible threat of the three-child policy is its environmental impact. A larger population can lead to increased consumption and resource depletion, which could have negative consequences for the environment and future generations.

In summary, the SWOT analysis matrix regarding the three-child policy is shown in Figure 4.

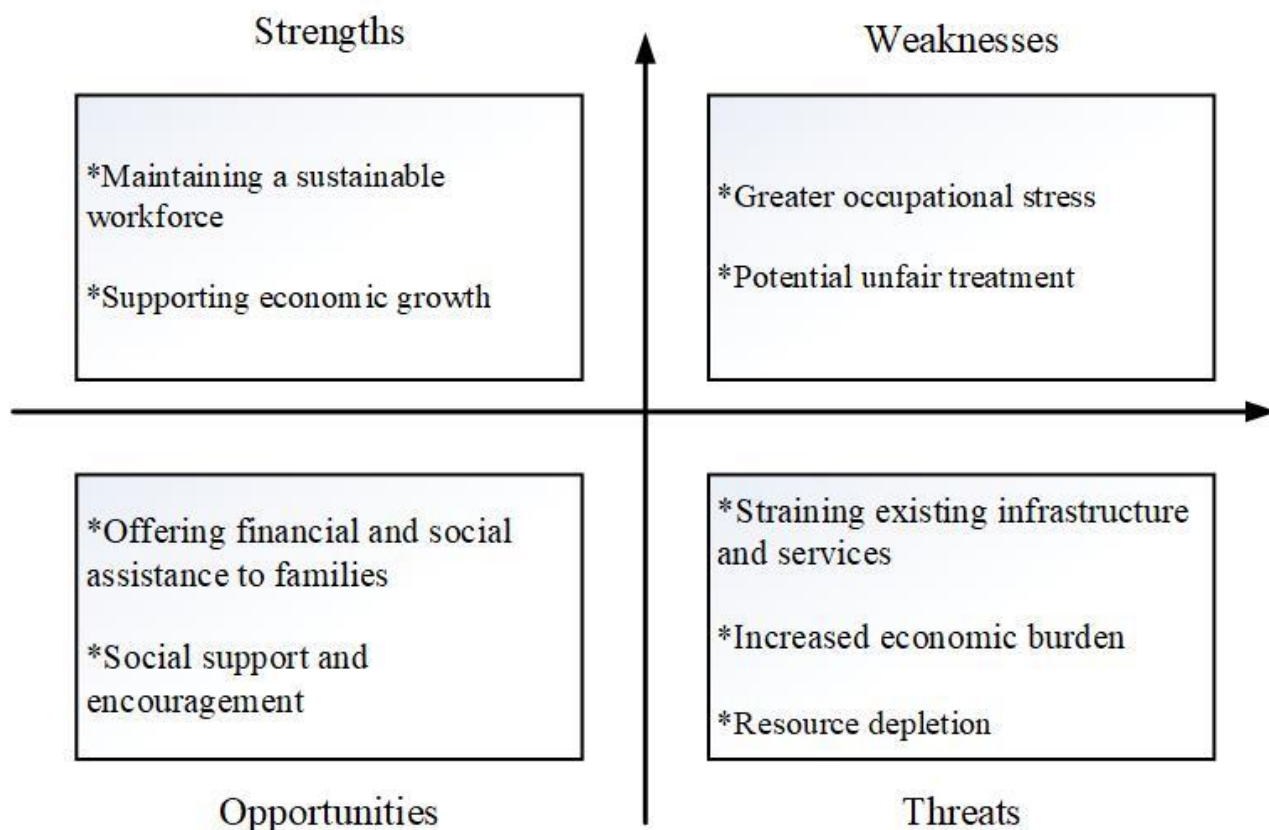


Fig. 4 SWOT Analysis Matrix of Three-child Policy

4. Suggestion

In order to improve the situation of female employees, we offer the following suggestions. First, it is recommended that men and women have equal maternity leave. For example, if women's maternity leave is maintained for a total of three and a half months, after a duration of three and a half months, men should also be entitled to paid maternity leave for a similar or even longer period. This measure is aimed at encouraging men to actively participate in child-rearing and share the responsibilities equally with women. By doing so, it would establish a harmonious balance between family and work, relieving women of the sole burden of childcare. Such a policy not only benefits women but also promotes gender equality in the workplace. It creates a more inclusive environment where men and women are treated equally, regardless of gender. This, in turn, encourages more women to pursue their career goals without fear of discrimination. Furthermore, providing equal maternity leave for men fosters a sense of parenting and responsibility among them. It helps men appreciate the challenges and demands of raising a child, promoting a more equal partnership between parents. This, in turn, contributes to family harmony and the overall well-being of the child. From a business perspective, equal maternity leave for men also helps companies recognize the risks associated with male fertility awareness. By providing equal leave benefits, companies can ensure nondiscrimination against men during the hiring process, attracting a more diverse talent pool. This, in turn, enhances the overall productivity and performance of the organization. In summary, the introduction of equal maternity leave for men and women is a crucial step towards achieving gender equality in the workplace and promoting family harmony. It relieves pressure on women, fosters a sense of parenting and responsibility among men, and creates a more inclusive and equal society.

Second, promote the remote work system. The aspiration of individuals to ice their careers and fulfill these roles has been a constant. However, the advent of remote work has provided women with an opportunity to strike a healthy balance between their professional and personal lives. Now, they can spend quality time with their families while pursuing their professional aspirations. This harmonious situation not only benefits the individual employee but also contributes to the overall happiness and well-being of the family unit. Moreover, remote working has been proven to enhance work efficiency. By eliminating the need for commuting, employees save considerable time and energy, allowing them to concentrate more on their tasks. Additionally, remote work offers a relaxed and stress-free working environment, which can foster creativity and productivity. Studies have demonstrated that employees who work remotely tend to be more engaged and satisfied with their jobs, ultimately leading to superior performance and outcomes. Beyond the individual benefits, remote work has the potential to transform the operational landscape of businesses. By enabling a distributed workforce, companies can access a more diverse talent pool, attracting top-tier candidates from anywhere in the world. This not only expands the company's reach but also enhances its competitiveness in the global market. Furthermore, remote work has the potential to reduce office space requirements, leading to cost savings and a more sustainable business model. In summary, promoting a remote work system is not just a humane and ethical decision; it is also a prudent business strategy. By embracing flexibility and technology, companies can empower their employees to achieve a better work-life balance while simultaneously driving improved productivity and efficiency. As we progress into the future, it is imperative for businesses to recognize the value of remote work and integrate it as a core component of their operations.

Last but not the least, organizations are obligated to offer skill enhancement courses and leadership workshops specifically tailored for female employees. The aim of these programs is to furnish women with the requisite qualifications and abilities to bolster their competitiveness within the workplace. For instance, skill enhancement courses may encompass areas such as technology, project management, and communication. These skills are imperative for success in today's rapidly evolving business landscape. By offering these courses, organizations can assist women in bridging the skills gap and prepare them for leadership positions. Moreover, leadership workshops are indispensable for female personnel. These workshops must prioritize the cultivation of confidence, enhancement of decision-making abilities, and the development of a robust sense of leadership. Through participation

in these workshops, women can acquire the know-how to effectively manage teams, inspire others, and embrace challenging roles. Additionally, organizations must establish a fair promotion system that guarantees equal advancement opportunities and development space for female colleagues. This necessitates the creation of a transparent and merit-based promotion process that takes into account both professional qualifications and performance. By doing so, organizations can foster a level playing field where women enjoy the same opportunities as men to ascend to the apex. In summation, investing in the professional development of female personnel is imperative for achieving gender equality and cultivating a more competitive workforce. By providing vocational training and mentoring, as well as establishing a fair promotion system, organizations can empower women and unlock their fullest potential. This, ultimately, will foster a more diverse, inclusive, and productive workplace where everyone can flourish and contribute to the overall success of the organization.

5. Conclusion

In summary, the maternity leave and three-child policies are crucial in advancing societal welfare by upholding women's reproductive rights and optimizing the birth structure. Nonetheless, it is crucial to guarantee that the execution of these policies emphasizes the safeguarding of women's rights and interests within the workplace. Implementing measures such as gender-neutral maternity leave, promoting remote work arrangements, and bolstering vocational training and mentoring programs can significantly promote a more equitable and inclusive work environment for women. These initiatives empower women to strike a balance between their professional obligations and personal lives. Ultimately, these endeavours not only elevate women's social status and well-being but also contribute to the sustainable growth and prosperity of society at large.

References

- [1] Cheung H, Anderson A, King E, Mahabir B, Warner K, Jones KP. Beyond the baby bump: Subtle discrimination against working mothers in the hiring process. *Journal of Business and Psychology*. 2022, 37(6):1181-98.
- [2] Pettigrew RN. Employers' Perceived Career Impact of Canada's Parental-Leave Extension from 35 to 61 Weeks— "An Empty Gift". *Merits*. 2022, 2(3):170-86.
- [3] Watson H, Downe S. Discrimination against childbearing Romani women in maternity care in Europe: a mixed-methods systematic review. *Reproductive health*. 2017, 14:1-6.
- [4] Ariane H, Janet C. Gornick. *Work and Family Policy*, 2012.
- [5] Aisenbrey S, Evertsson M, Grunow D. Is There a Career Penalty for Mothers' Time Out? A Comparison of Germany, Sweden and the United States. In: *Social Forces*, 2009, 2(88): 573–606.
- [6] Hammer P, Palmgren R. *How parental leave policies influence employee engagement*, 2019.
- [7] Cheung H, Anderson A, King E, Mahabir B, Warner K, Jones KP. Beyond the baby bump: Subtle discrimination against working mothers in the hiring process. *Journal of Business and Psychology*. 2022, 37(6):1181-98.
- [8] Mussida C, Patimo R. Women's family care responsibilities, employment and health: a tale of two countries. *Journal of family and economic issues*. 2021, 42(3):489-507.
- [9] Zoe A, Cameryn C, Garrett B, Hewitt L, Jane S, Hocking, Anne M, Kavanagh. *Social Science & Medicine*. 2015.
- [10] Derkyi N, Kemausuor F. A systematic review of the design considerations for the operation and maintenance of small-scale biogas digesters. *Heliyon*. 2024.