

Research on the Employment of Women in Small- and Medium-Sized Enterprises under the New Birth Policy

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Abstract: Under the new birth policy, the employment situation of women in small- and medium-sized enterprises is still very grim. The women of childbearing age will have a greater impact on their own work, and the attitude of small- and medium-sized enterprises to female employees to give birth is an important factor in determining their willingness to have children. Some women with higher education or strong independence are more inclined to choose a career when their personal career development conflicts with childbearing. Some small- and medium-sized enterprises have not fully responded to the new national birth policy, so that female practitioners in these enterprises do not enjoy the complete maternity welfare policy. Therefore, in order to increase women's willingness to have children, it is important to improve the protection of women's employment and a fair employment environment for small- and medium-sized enterprises.

1. Introduction

Since the middle and late 20th century, in order to alleviate the contradiction of social resources caused by the rapid population growth, China began to implement the family planning policy. However, over time, this policy has also brought about problems such as a decrease in fertility, an uneven sex ratio at birth and an increase in the proportion of the elderly population year by year. China's seventh population census in 2020 showed that the total fertility rate of women of childbearing age in China was only 1.3, which has fallen below the international warning line of 2.1, and according to data from the National Bureau of Statistics, China's population in 2022 experienced negative growth for the first time in nearly 61 years. In the face of this grim reality, since 2013, from the implementation of the "single two-child" policy to the landing of the "comprehensive two-child" in 2016 to the gradual implementation of the "three-child policy" in 2021, a series of birth policies have been promulgated, reflecting China's emphasis on fertility issues and its determination to change the status quo of low fertility.

Central enterprises that are relatively friendly to female employees giving birth, maternity leave is given in full according to the law, maternity allowance is issued according to the law, and the unit will also give humanitarian care to give condolences, in this case, female employees are still more and more unwilling to have children, the age of first marriage has gone straight to 35, there is already a child, most of them are not willing to have a second child. Female employees of small- and medium-sized enterprises who are relatively unfriendly to female employees giving birth are difficult to give full maternity leave in accordance with the law, and maternity allowances are paid according to the law.

2. Under the New Birth Policy, Women still Face Difficult Choices in Childbirth

2.1. Increased Sense of Female Autonomy

At present, the childbearing age of women in China is generally delayed, and one of the main reasons may be that when women are in the most suitable childbearing age, they are in the early

stage or rising period of career development, and they are facing greater family and work pressure. Different work units often have various forms of hidden discrimination against women's childbirth, which will also force women to delay the age of childbearing^[1]. Compared to the private sector, state-owned enterprises often mean more stable jobs and better welfare policies, which will help alleviate women's worries about work due to childbirth, and thus increase their willingness to have children. In addition, women's willingness to have multiple children is currently low overall. On the one hand, with the increase of age, although the career is gradually stable, the damage to the body before and after childbirth makes most women unwilling or afraid to bear it anymore. On the other hand, with the continuous improvement of education level, women's willingness to realize self-worth and demand to participate in social labour and receive corresponding remuneration is also stronger. This means that women will allocate more time to work than to raising and educating children. And with the degree of involution of children's parenting in the current society, most parents have high expectations for their children's future, and will spend more manpower and material resources to cultivate them. If the satisfaction brought by the partner or family to the woman is low at this time, it will affect the woman's mood and attitude towards work and family, and in the case of limited personal energy, the willingness to have multiple children will naturally continue to decrease^[2].

2.2. Family Decision-Making is More Rational

As part of household expenses, raising children makes most ordinary families very cautious before deciding to have children. According to the resource scarcity theory, resources in the family are limited. When the number of children increases, the resources allocated to each child are correspondingly reduced, and modern parents are more inclined to give their children access to the best quality family resources, so they are less willing to have multiple children. Especially for families where both husband and wife are only children, on the one hand, they are alone in the process of growing up and have not experienced the process of brothers and sisters growing up together. On the other hand, being influenced by the "family planning" policy from an early age will be more acceptable to the concept of having one child, and the willingness to have multiple children will be weakened. However, when the number of children in the family is small, the proportion of resources consumed in the family is also lower, making parents more optimistic about the cost of raising multiple children, and the willingness to have multiple children may also increase. In addition, parental age and old-age status also have a certain impact on women's consideration of childbearing. Young parents tend to be in better physical condition, do not need too much energy from the couple, and can also help take care of the children, reducing the burden of childcare for both spouses^[3]. At the same time, the more pension security of both parents, it also means that there is less pressure on the elderly, so the willingness to have multiple children will be stronger. Starting from Leibenstein's child cost-utility theory, the better the child's learning, the greater the benefit parents get from their children, and the more conducive it is to realize their fertility intentions.

2.3. The Women of Childbearing Age is Facing Great Socio-Economic and Employment Pressure

Since the implementation of the basic national policy of gender equality in China in 1995, the status and rights of women in all aspects have been improved, but in the real workplace, women's employment forms are still grim. In order to protect women's rights and interests, the government has formulated a series of maternity incentive compensation policies, but to some extent, they restrict the freedom and flexibility of women's career development and become the shackles of women's employment. In addition, the occupational risks associated with childbirth become a stumbling block to women's willingness to have children. Even working women who already have children bear a heavy burden in the process of childcare, especially the care of preschool children. Although the government has introduced a series of policies to try to reduce women's childcare pressure, such as extending maternity leave, providing marriage leave, maintenance leave, paternity leave, etc., in fact, there are some problems such as inadequate implementation of policies and unequal sharing of family responsibilities, resulting in policies that have failed to fully solve the

problem of female child-rearing. At the same time, the surrounding peers also bring certain anxiety to women of childbearing age, they may face the expectations and pressures of family and relatives and friends, hoping that they can marry and have children as soon as possible, or have more children to meet the expectations of the family and the requirements of society. This family and social pressure can make women feel uneasy and anxious, which has a certain negative impact on their fertility intentions and behaviour.

3. The Conflict between Women's Employment and Childbearing in Small- and Medium-Sized Enterprises

3.1. The Impact of Fertility on a Career

In large central enterprises with relatively perfect maternity protection, it is the best situation for female compatriots. Having a baby, pregnancy + maternity leave + breastfeeding means at least two years in a vulnerable position in the workplace. Three years after having a baby, the company basically assumes that you will spend most of your experience on caring for children and family. The upside is that the heavy work may stay away from you, and the downside is that the opportunity for a promotion and a raise will also bypass you. The golden period of the workplace is just a few years, missed, and may be like this for a lifetime^[4]. As you get older, your male colleagues who come in with you and even younger become your bosses, leaving you behind, and the gap is getting bigger and farther away. If it is in small- and medium-sized enterprises with insufficient maternity protection, it is often seen that various companies use all means to force pregnant female employees to leave, and for most female employees of private enterprises, pregnancy means that at least 3 years of career is completely cut off.

3.2. The Impact of Fertility on Life

Now all walks of life are so rolled, the employment environment is so poor, in order to keep the job, the feeling of being angry, knocking out teeth and swallowing blood, who works knows. If you don't get married and don't have a baby, the whole family is not hungry when you eat alone, and you really can't bear it anymore and you can resign dashing. Once a baby is born, for the sake of firewood, rice, oil, salt, sauce and vinegar tea, you have to weigh a fish. If this can keep the job, it will be enough, but sorry, by the age of 35, it will be fine. In the event of a bad salary reduction in the industry, there is no way to lay off employees, and even the basic layoff compensation is deducted in various ways. Therefore, many young women think that they are difficult to protect themselves, why should they build a baby to suffer with me.

3.3. The Dilemma of Raising Children

Chinese mainland elementary school students leave school at half past three, I don't know which institution invented it so wisely, they have either never been to work or have never had a baby. Primary school students leave school at half past three, small- and medium-sized enterprises will not leave work at half past three, and if you skip work every day to pick up the baby, the boss will definitely not do it. When the child enters primary school, either these female practitioners quit becoming full-time parents, or they tie up an elderly person for several years to pick up the child.

3.4. The Dilemma of Women's Rights Protection

Workplace gender discrimination aside, we all believe that this is difficult to be constrained by legal provisions, rules and regulations, small- and medium-sized business bosses have ways to "discriminate" you openly and covertly. In this article, we only analyze the issue of women's rights in the family. Most of the time, when faced with family and work conflicts, it is the mother who makes the sacrifice. However, Chinese has always advocated that "the economic base determines the status of the family", and women bear the tedious housework and childcare pressure in the family, but it is rarely seen and cannot be quantified. We have seen many such examples in life, originally excellent women retreated to the family in order to take care of their children, the children were older, the other half was swept away after their careers were successful, and finally

there were many people who did not even have a place to stay. If women are protected like Europe and the United States, once divorced, at least half of the common property is divided, and women's contributions in housework, as well as women's responsibilities in housework, or women's career development because of more family responsibilities in marriage, childcare responsibilities, or because marriage affects career development, resulting in the inability to live independently after divorce, may be able to improve the problem of "fear of marriage and childbirth" of more and more women^[5].

4. The New Birth Policy Needs a New Level of Support and Guarantee Policies

4.1. Create a Fair Employment Environment for Women

First of all, appropriately extend the time of maternity leave and establish a sharing mechanism for maternity leave. Women's age, physical factors, etc. will make it longer to recuperate after giving birth to multiple children, so setting different lengths of maternity leave for different births can make women who have multiple children get a good physical and psychological conditioning. At the same time, drawing on the implementation regulations of maternity leave in Germany, Sweden and other countries, the establishment of a maternity leave sharing mechanism allows both husband and wife to enjoy maternity leave, the method and duration of leave are freely arranged by the husband and wife after consultation, and each party is required to take at least 1/3 of the length of maternity leave, so as to avoid that the extension of maternity leave will increase the loss of enterprise manpower, and reduce the discrimination of enterprises against women in recruitment, but also improve men's participation in the process of raising children, reduce the burden of female childcare, and allow women to have more energy to devote themselves to their careers. Many women of childbearing age believe that it is appropriate to spend at least two hours a day with their children and education, so extended maternity leave and flexible leave for both spouses can also meet such needs.

Second, establish a maternity leave cost sharing mechanism to reduce the burden on enterprises. At present, women suffer unfair treatment in employment mainly because enterprises are unwilling to bear the high additional costs caused by female employees due to maternity leave, etc., due to the protection of labour laws, once female employees are recruited, they cannot be forcibly dismissed due to childbirth, making many companies more inclined to choose to recruit male employees. This requires the government to give full play to the role of macro-control, share the cost of women's maternity leave with enterprises, increase the proportion of government subsidies, reduce the burden on enterprises, and provide preferential tax policies for enterprises that employ women of childbearing age, enterprises that take maternity leave account for a certain proportion of women, or subsidize a series of employee insurance paid by enterprises, so as to establish a maternity leave cost sharing mechanism, reduce the burden on enterprises, and change the prejudice of enterprises against female job seekers.

Finally, improve laws and regulations on fair employment for women and actively publicize them. On the basis of the existing labour law, special laws and regulations on the employment of women who give birth have been formulated, focusing on the unfair treatment of women in employment before and during pregnancy, and clarifying the punishment measures for violations of the law to ensure the effective implementation of the law. At the same time, publicize the law for women of childbearing age, so that women can take up legal weapons to protect themselves and protect their rights and interests when they are treated unfairly.

4.2. Strengthen the Construction of Modern Enterprise System for Small- and Medium-sized Enterprises

Small- and medium-sized enterprises of China, especially some family enterprises, are more inclined to authoritarian management methods, which can easily lead to gender discrimination in the workplace, which contradicts the expectations of China's new birth policy. The organizational system construction of small- and medium-sized enterprises in China is unfair, resulting in

professional women generally lower than men in salary, inferior to men in job promotion, and female employees at different levels get differentiated work attention from the organization, especially grassroots employees, enterprises do not take the initiative to care, understand their work, life conditions, and experience their true thoughts, so that they do not feel the humanistic care of the organization. Therefore, China's small- and medium-sized enterprises should earnestly grasp the construction of the system to ensure that professional women have equal opportunities for competition in salary management, performance appraisal, job promotion, etc., and truly achieve "the able are up, the average are increased and the mediocre are lowered".

4.3. Enhance Awareness of Work Crisis

Although the average life expectancy of small- and medium-sized enterprises in China is only 3-4 years, working women are not very concerned about the threat of unemployment caused by restructuring, mergers and acquisitions, bankruptcy, etc. due to higher cultural education and strong knowledge and ability capital. The weak sense of crisis of professional women may lead to low motivation and low sense of responsibility, which will eventually affect the competitive advantage of China's small- and medium-sized enterprises. In order to enhance the awareness of the work crisis of female employees in enterprises, the relevant departments of the state should give them maternity benefits, while allowing small- and medium-sized enterprises to introduce a last-place elimination mechanism, dismiss employees whose work performance is lower than the established level, focus on observing employees at the bottom-line level, and if they cannot improve their performance within the specified period, give salary reduction, transfer or direct dismissal. The introduction of the elimination mechanism can stimulate the work motivation of working women, and the improvement of employees' work performance will further promote the efficiency and competitiveness of enterprises, and improve their support for the new birth policy.

5. Conclusion

In China's small- and medium-sized enterprises, the birth of working women not only involves individuals and families, but also has an impact on the production and operation of enterprises. In view of this, only small- and medium-sized enterprises can effectively adopt the care strategy, the society gives specific security support to working women, and the working women themselves adjust to their own work, so as to achieve a win-win situation for women's rights, social progress and the development of small- and medium-sized enterprises.

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