

A Study on the Influencing Factors and Policy Implications of Low Fertility Intentions among Female College Students in Sichuan Province

Feifan Luo, Shixi Zhou

School of Law and Public Administration, Yibin University, Yibin 644000, Sichuan, China

Abstract: Drawing on theories of gender equality and reflexive modernization, this study analyzes the author's previous research on female university students in Sichuan Province, delving into the factors influencing this group's low fertility intentions and proposing policy optimization pathways. The study found that female university students' fertility intentions are constrained by multiple factors, including high fertility costs under social pressure, a gap between social support and the needs of women of childbearing age, and the limited incentive effect of the three-child policy. Through a review and reflection on Sichuan Province's current fertility policy, the study identifies shortcomings in aligning incentives with group desires, the degree to which fertility costs are socialized, and the alleviation of role tensions for women. Therefore, this study proposes recommendations for clarifying the underlying policy logic, strengthening targeted research and adjustments, and prioritizing women's agency and rights. These recommendations provide insights for enhancing women's fertility intentions, optimizing local fertility support policies, and promoting social development.

Keywords: Fertility intention, Influencing factors, Policy implications, Female college students, Sichuan Province.

1. Introduction

China is undergoing a dual transformation in both population and family structure. Low fertility rates and smaller families are becoming increasingly pronounced, with the lifetime childlessness rate for women rising from 6.1% in 2015 to nearly 10% in 2020. The natural population growth rate turned negative for the first time in 2022; in 2023, the total population decreased by 2.08 million compared to the previous year, with the birth rate falling to 6.39%, creating an increasingly severe fertility situation. Against this backdrop, the national government continues to optimize fertility policies and build a comprehensive support system. Sichuan Province has also actively responded to national strategies, launching a series of local initiatives. In 2021, the 30th Session of the Standing Committee of the 13th Sichuan Provincial People's Congress adopted the revised "Sichuan Provincial Population and Family Planning Regulations," extending maternity leave for women and introducing nursing leave and childcare leave for men. In 2023, the updated "Sichuan Provincial Birth Registration Service Management Measures" removed restrictions on marital status and number of births. In 2024, the Sichuan Provincial Medical Security Bureau and four other departments jointly issued the "Notice on Including Flexible Employment Workers and Those Receiving Unemployment Benefits in the Coverage of Maternity Insurance," deploying plans to include these two categories of workers in maternity insurance. These initiatives fully demonstrate the enthusiasm for exploration at the local level.

However, the author's previous research on female college students in some universities in Sichuan Province showed that even with the continuous optimization of policies, the fertility intention of this group is still at a low level, and has shown distinct characteristics, including the overall weakening of fertility gender preferences, increasingly personalized fertility

values, and diversified views on marriage and childbearing. Although existing studies have shown that fertility intention is constrained by factors such as employment pressure, fertility costs, and women's career development [1], there is still a lack of research on the factors affecting the low fertility intention of female college students in Sichuan Province.

In view of this, based on the previous research, this study combines gender equality theory and reflexive modernization theory to deeply analyze the factors affecting the fertility intention of female college students in Sichuan Province, and attempts to propose targeted policy optimization paths. It hopes to provide practical references for enhancing the fertility intention of female college students in Sichuan and improving local fertility support policies, helping to alleviate regional population structure contradictions and promote long-term balanced population development.

2. Theoretical Perspective

2.1 Gender Equality Theory

Gender equality theory points out that the ultra-low fertility rate in developed countries stems from the conflict between high gender equality in the public sphere and persistent gender inequality in the family sphere. This theory argues that it is not gender equality itself that leads to the decline in fertility, but the imperfection and incompleteness of the gender equality revolution [2].

This study exposed various reasons for women's fertility difficulties, many of which are influenced by gender inequality. In particular, gender disparities in social status, power, and opportunities limit women's autonomy in fertility decisions. Therefore, the policy recommendations of this study actively support my country's fertility-friendly policies, committed to improving the reproductive environment for women and promoting gender equality.

2.2 Reflexive Modernization Theory

Beck's theory of reflexive modernization explores how modern society responds to problems arising from its own development through self-reflection and adjustment from multiple dimensions, including politics, tradition, and daily life. From a gender perspective, this is reflected in the feminist movement and equal rights movement spawned by industrial society, which have shaken the social division of labor based on gender inequality, including the traditional nuclear family model of "men working outside and women working inside." After World War II, gender relations were reorganized, and women entered the labor market in large numbers, striving to break away from their economic dependence on men. Beck believes that this has eliminated many aspects of the original industrial society, but he also points out that it is difficult to achieve true gender equality in an institutionalized structure based on gender inequality [3].

This study examines the gradual dissolution of traditional cultural paradigms, and the so-called "liberation" women experience in the labor market, which in turn leads to a dual role conflict between the labor market and the nuclear family. This conflict causes women to experience a degree of "value anomie," which in turn leads to a social climate of fear of marriage and childbearing, and a continued decline in fertility rates. This phenomenon reflects both the impact of changing gender roles on traditional family structures and social order and the complex challenges modern society faces in its pursuit of gender equality.

3. Factors Influencing Low Fertility Intention Among Female College Students in Sichuan Province

3.1 Social Pressure Reduces Their Confidence in Having Children

Research participants believe that the cost of childbirth is the primary contributing factor to my country's current low fertility rate, with 89.5% of respondents agreeing. The cost of childbirth and raising children was also a frequently mentioned topic during the interviews. Based on their social experiences and observations, the interviewees generally believed that the cost of childbirth and raising children is too high. First, the economic cost was a primary concern for the interviewees. In addition to the medical, educational, and living expenses associated with childbirth, there are also indirect economic costs, such as the career opportunities sacrificed by women due to childbirth. Second, the physical or health costs should not be ignored. In particular, when childbirth education is insufficient, women often lack systematic knowledge about childbirth before pregnancy, which may further increase potential health costs, such as pregnancy-related complications and postpartum depression. Finally, the time and energy costs behind opportunity costs are also key considerations. When society assumes that women are primarily responsible for raising children, the time and energy costs women invest can be difficult to assess. For example, the significant time and energy invested during pregnancy and childcare not only impacts career development but can also curtail personal interests and social activities, and even disrupt existing family relationships.

3.2 There is a Gap Between Social Support and the Needs of Women of Childbearing Age

The current contradiction between young people's demand for high-quality parenting and insufficient social support is prominent. This survey shows that female college students have a relatively low desire to have children and are highly concerned about the quality of their children's education and development, which is consistent with the current trend towards high-quality parenting.

Regarding the needs of women of childbearing age, most interviewees prioritized companionship and educational support for raising children, a particular concern for those with experience as left-behind children. For example, one interviewee who moved to Chengdu from rural Shaanxi prioritized companionship and quality education for her children due to past experiences. Another, however, was reluctant to sacrifice her previously relatively free life because raising children requires a significant commitment of time and energy. Other interviewees were more concerned about the cost of education, worrying both about the cost of basic education and the difficulty of providing high-quality resources, which could hinder their children's development. This also reflects the severity of the high cost of education and the uneven distribution of resources.

In terms of social support, more than 90% of the respondents believed that the existing social support system needs to be improved, and nearly 70% of the respondents believed that this need is urgent. They clearly stated that my country has a clear shortage of support in terms of guaranteeing women's employment and maternity leave systems, developing childcare services, issuing maternity subsidies, strengthening men's participation in childcare, and ensuring educational equity, making it difficult to meet the needs of the childbearing population for high-quality childcare. As Wang Hui and Ye Wenzhen's research pointed out, despite the government's implementation of livelihood projects, it has not been able to effectively reduce the direct costs of childbirth. In addition, the concept of "raising children in wealth" has become deeply rooted in people's minds, and direct costs have become an important factor restricting fertility. Therefore, women's sense of reproductive security requires social support, including maternity subsidies for mothers and support for children's education and growth [4].

3.3 The Three-child Policy Has Limited Effect on Stimulating Fertility

The three-child policy has a very limited effect on the subjects' fertility intentions, with nearly 75% of the respondents believing that the policy has almost no impact on their fertility intentions.

Therefore, the authors inquired about the reasons for some respondents' views. The responses from the interviewees revealed two broadly defined attitudes. One group held a more moderate stance. They believed that most women of childbearing age were unwilling to have even a second child, and that the three-child policy targeted a relatively small number of families intending to have a third child, so the lack of a significant increase in births reflected in the data was

normal. The other group held a more radical stance, expressing strong opposition to the three-child policy itself. Some openly expressed their opposition, believing it to be potentially coercive. Others felt that opening the three-child policy constituted inaction, arguing that instead of relaxing restrictions on three children, it would be better to gain a deeper understanding of the actual needs of the childbearing population, strengthen social support systems, and improve the overall fertility environment. Furthermore, a small number of interviewees questioned policymakers, arguing that the current male-dominated decision-making process is likely to exacerbate women's resistance to childbearing. Therefore, more female policymakers should be involved in fertility policymaking, providing more targeted and effective fertility support policies for women from a female perspective.

3.4 The Shift in Mainstream Reproductive Culture from Traditional to Individualized

This survey shows that the reproductive intentions of female college students in Sichuan Province present distinct individual characteristics.

First, in terms of fertility planning and parenting philosophies, the majority of female university students who intend to have children have an ideal number of children between 0 and 2, with no clear gender preference. Analysis of their attitudes toward childrearing reveals that they seek high-quality, targeted parenting practices, prioritize parenting quality and their children's individual development, and are unwilling to compromise on quality for the sake of having more children.

Secondly, the influence of traditional fertility culture is waning. One interviewee from an ethnic minority noted that while her ethnic group's traditional culture still favors sons over daughters and prioritizes the number of children, the development of the market economy and progressive thinking have led to a significant decline in birth rates, with her generation now being an only child. She also stated that traditional fertility culture has little influence on her future childbearing plans, with the only decision being to consult her elders when choosing a name. Another interviewee, who was born and has lived in rural areas for a long time, expressed similar sentiments. She explained that after moving to urban life, her once strong nostalgia for her homeland has gradually faded, changing her previous intention to follow traditional fertility culture and reluctantly have children. She has now become a DINK (childless child) parent.

Finally, individual desires play a dominant role in fertility decisions. Over half of the respondents valued personal choice and autonomy, considering individual desires the primary factor influencing fertility decisions. Individualized fertility preferences have become a mainstream trend. Furthermore, regarding the three-child policy, respondents believe it imposes coercion, fails to fully respect individual fertility preferences, pursues fertility increases solely from a macroeconomic perspective, and neglects the protection of individual rights. Furthermore, approximately 40% of respondents believe that having children is a way to satisfy their own emotional needs, which also demonstrates respect for individual preferences.

3.5 Imbalance in Gender Participation Constrains Fertility Desire

Gender inequality is a key factor contributing to my country's current low fertility rate. Over 75% of respondents believe that insufficient male involvement in childbearing and childrearing, coupled with women's difficulty balancing family and work, are significant contributors to the low fertility rate. In discussions about improving social support to boost fertility intentions, respondents' support for increasing male participation was second only to support for subsidies and maternity leave.

At the same time, the imbalance in gender participation in family and workplace is particularly prominent, which directly affects the desire to have children. In the family field, under the traditional concept of gender division of labor, childcare responsibilities are mostly borne by women, and men have low participation. Several interviewees mentioned that even if both parents have jobs in their original families, most of the housework is still undertaken by the mother, and the father's role is often missing. This role inequality not only deepens their feelings about gender injustice, but also makes women bear more pressure and responsibilities in childbirth and raising children, which directly weakens the desire to have children; in the workplace field, relevant literature shows that during the epidemic, due to taking on family responsibilities, the proportion of women who withdrew from the labor market was 4.3 percentage points higher than that of men, and it took 48 days longer for them to find a job after being unemployed than men [5]. This not only confirms the gender inequality faced by women in the workplace, but also shows that family responsibilities have become an important factor restricting women's career development, which in turn makes some women reluctant to have children.

Furthermore, institutional and cultural factors exacerbate this imbalance. Some interviewees believe that the institutional design of longer maternity leave for women and shorter paternity leave for men implicitly assumes that women bear the primary responsibility for childbirth. This leads to the market ostracizing women who plan to have children, citing the potential impact on their work, further reinforcing gender inequality. Furthermore, without a shift in cultural attitudes, simply increasing leave will fail to achieve shared parenting responsibilities and may even increase the burden on women. Therefore, the imbalance in gender participation, influenced by traditional gender roles, is a key factor inhibiting women's desire to have children.

3.6 The Lack of Sex and Fertility Education Fosters Fear of Marriage and Childbearing.

The lack of sex and childbirth education is a long-standing concern in Chinese society and a pressing issue. This study examines this issue, exploring its impact on women's fear of marriage and childbearing, as well as their desire to have children. Interview results show that nearly all interviewees strongly agree that this lack of education is a growing problem in today's society.

Some interviewees pointed out that inadequate sex education directly or indirectly contributes to many unwanted

pregnancies among young women and minors, endangering their physical health while also increasing psychological burdens and social pressures, profoundly impacting their academic, career, and life plans. Furthermore, this lack of sex education can lead to women lacking knowledge about sexuality, sexual health, and sexual rights, as well as a lack of self-protection awareness, exposing them to greater risks and uncertainty in their sexual behavior. Other interviewees emphasized the importance of reproductive education. In traditional societies, women's reproductive knowledge largely relied on the experience of their elders, lacking a scientific and systematic approach. In modern society, however, where science and professional knowledge have become mainstream, there is a need to educate both men and women about reproductive health, such as the childbirth process, postpartum recovery, and reproductive decision-making, through popular science. However, this education remains insufficient, leading to a lack of comprehensive understanding of childbirth among women, which can lead to fears and misunderstandings, and a reduced desire to have children.

In summary, the lack of sex and reproductive education is a key factor hindering fertility. This impact is primarily reflected in increasing women's psychological burden and fear when coping with potential childbearing situations, reducing their desire to have children, and exposing them to greater risks when deciding to have children. Furthermore, it can make it difficult for women to adjust psychologically after childbirth, affecting their satisfaction and happiness during the childbearing process, and further negatively impacting their desire to have children in the future.

4. Optimization Suggestions for Sichuan Province's Fertility Policy

4.1 Overview of Sichuan Province's Fertility Policy

Sichuan Province's fertility policy can be generally summarized into the following aspects:

First, the birth registration policy. In 2023, the Sichuan Provincial Health Commission issued the "Sichuan Province Birth Registration Service Management Measures," which clarified that, effective February 15 of that year, the married-only restriction on birth registration would be lifted. The policy, "couples must register before giving birth," was revised to "all citizens who give birth should register," covering unmarried births. This policy aligns with the shift from family planning to allowing multiple births, requiring all citizens to register, regardless of the number of children they can have. Furthermore, registration requirements were simplified, eliminating the need to upload identification documents when applying online, and new features included sharing of birth registration information and electronic certificates.

Second, the maternity leave policy. First, extend maternity leave. For couples who meet the policy requirements for having a child, the woman's maternity leave will be extended by 60 days, and the man's nursing leave will be extended by 20 days, except as otherwise provided by laws and regulations. Maternity leave and nursing leave will be considered

attendance, and wages and benefits will remain unchanged. Second, establish childcare leave. Couples with children under three years old will each receive a cumulative 10 days of childcare leave each year, with childcare leave considered attendance.

The third is maternity allowance. Maternity allowances in Sichuan Province exhibit distinct regional variations, with some prefecture-level cities formulating their own subsidies based on their specific circumstances. For example, Chengdu aligns its standards with those of Sichuan Province, calculating the allowance based on the employee's average monthly salary for the previous year at the employer at the time of childbirth or termination of pregnancy, multiplied by 12 divided by 365, and then multiplied by the total number of days of maternity and childbirth leave. Panzhihua City provides a monthly childcare subsidy of 500 yuan per child to families with Panzhihua household registration who give birth to a second or subsequent child in accordance with the policy, until the child reaches the age of three.

Fourth, maternity insurance coverage will be expanded. Starting January 1, 2025, flexible employment workers participating in employee basic medical insurance will be able to choose whether to simultaneously pay for maternity insurance. The cost will be borne by the individual, with the payment base based on the medical insurance standard. For unemployed individuals, maternity insurance premiums will be paid by the unemployment insurance fund during their coverage period, eliminating personal contributions. They will still receive maternity medical expenses and allowances at the standard employee rate.

4.2 Inadequacies of Sichuan Province's Birth Control Policy

First, there's a misalignment between the focus of policy incentives and the fertility desires of those of childbearing age. Sichuan Province's current fertility policy primarily focuses on relaxing restrictions on second and third births and encouraging them through tiered childbirth subsidies. However, this survey shows that over 90% of female university students' planned births fall within the "giving birth" or "only one child" range. Furthermore, female university students highly value their individual reproductive desires and rights and are averse to excessive fertility incentives. Therefore, incentive policies targeting second and third births are not only unlikely to impact the vast population of female university students, but may even have a counterproductive effect.

Second, advocates for relaxed birth control policies, but the socialization of childbirth costs remains low. While China and Sichuan Province have actively relaxed birth restrictions and encouraged childbirth to boost fertility and improve demographic structure, interviewees, based on information on maternity subsidies in Sichuan Province and survey data, believe the key contributing factor to the current low fertility rate is the excessively high costs of childbirth. These specifically include the economic, health, opportunity, and educational costs borne by women. As women transition from the home to the workforce, traditional domestic labor needs to be shared equally between men and women, while the burden

of childcare needs to be shifted through professional childcare systems. These factors all fall under the umbrella of the socialization of childbirth costs. Addressing this issue requires not only government financial support and intervention, such as expanding the coverage of maternity subsidies, increasing the amount of subsidies, and optimizing maternity insurance, but also promoting the development of a childcare system and fostering a shift in social attitudes to foster a child-friendly social environment.

Third, macroeconomic policies have been ineffective in alleviating the role tension women experience with childbearing. Currently, the market is increasingly infiltrating individual lives, particularly in the workplace, where high-intensity work schedules are further squeezing personal space. This has led to a sharper conflict between contemporary women's career advancement and traditional societal expectations of women shouldering household and childcare responsibilities. This survey revealed that some interviewees, observing their working peers, observed a sharp contraction in their personal space within the workplace. Not only is there a significant amount of potential overtime, but some individuals also face the need to devote more free time to learning and self-improvement in pursuit of promotions or more desirable positions. This directly compresses social time and space, reducing opportunities for friendship, making it more difficult to build close relationships, and further reducing the desire to marry and have children. However, Sichuan Province's fertility policies have not significantly alleviated this role tension for women, particularly due to the underdeveloped childcare system and weak childcare subsidies.

Fourth, policies are insufficiently encouraging men to participate in childcare. Although Sichuan Province has implemented parental leave, granting couples with children under three years old a cumulative 10 days each year, this policy still lags behind Nordic countries in promoting equal participation in childcare for both sexes. This survey revealed that, unlike the traditional division of labor in which men worked outside the home and women stayed at home, respondents were highly concerned about their career development and the conflict between career and family, emphasizing that both sexes should share family responsibilities. However, policies are insufficient to encourage men to recognize the importance of their own involvement in childcare, or to encourage this through mandatory measures. This, therefore, provides an important area for policy optimization.

Fifth, there is a lack of widespread access to sex education and reproductive education. Sichuan Province has yet to implement clear policies and measures to promote these two areas. However, in this survey, the majority of respondents reported the lack of access to these two types of education, reflecting both the high level of concern among female university students and their strong desire for improvement. Literature review and analysis reveal at least two issues with sex education in China: first, slow implementation, limited reach, a weak teaching staff, and outdated educational systems and concepts; second, research suffers from repetitive content and a single methodology. Regarding reproductive education, outside of the medical and health fields, there is

little research available, further highlighting the urgency of addressing the shortcomings of reproductive education in China.

4.3 Policy Optimization Suggestions

4.3.1 Clarify the underlying logic behind optimizing fertility policies

It is crucial to clarify the underlying logic of the fertility policy improvement. This not only provides a basic direction and value orientation for the optimization of specific policies, but also can minimize the deviation in policy formulation and implementation caused by logical confusion [6]. Sichuan's fertility policy needs to be based on the actual fertility needs and demands of the people, and adjust and improve relevant policies. It should not only respond to fertility needs, but also focus on optimizing the fertility environment.

First, it is necessary to conform to the development trend of individualized fertility. At the end of the 20th century, American sociologist Ulrich Beck proposed the concept of family individualization in his theory of "risk society". By analyzing the modern welfare state after World War II, he found that factors such as equalization of educational opportunities, popularization of contraceptive technology, and increased employment rate of women promoted women's liberation and the transformation of men's roles. This shows that the family began to move towards individualization. Beck pointed out that at this time, marriage and family are no longer a haven for alleviating social risks, and the single life form is no longer a side branch of modernity, but a typical form of existence in a mature labor market society [7]. This means that the labor market is deeply related to individual marriage and fertility choices. Therefore, policy improvements should not only respect individual fertility wishes and choices and avoid excessive intervention; they should also improve the labor welfare protection of both sexes, such as implementing the eight-hour work system, supervising the implementation of maternity leave, and meeting the professional childcare needs of dual-income families.

Second, take into account and coordinate social equity. Wu Zhen pointed out in his study of the historical evolution of France's fertility policy that the appropriate model of policy intervention in individualized family life needs to explore the balance between freedom and fairness in long-term practice [8]. Taking into account social equity, we must first guard against the hidden dangers and consequences brought about by individualization, such as strengthening the protection of minors. Secondly, we must avoid fertility policies that exacerbate social inequality and alleviate class solidification. For example, the five Nordic countries focus on promoting gender equality and improving fertility benefits to create a good fertility environment for the childbearing age group. Therefore, based on the needs of the research subjects, policy optimization can start from four aspects. First, the fairness of economic assistance. Provide diversified fertility subsidies, childcare subsidies, etc., take into account the needs of different income groups, and ensure that low-income families can also benefit. Second, the accessibility of childcare services. Focus on the fair distribution of childcare resources to ensure that childcare services can be obtained between

urban and rural areas, between coastal and inland areas, and between different social classes. Third, the rationality of multiple birth subsidies. According to the actual fertility intentions and needs of the childbearing age group, formulate adaptation plans such as tiered fertility subsidies. Fourth, the fairness of policy implementation. Strengthen supervision and evaluation of policy implementation to avoid social injustice caused by inadequate or selective implementation.

4.3.2 Strengthen practical research and make targeted adjustments

In 2024, the China Population and Development Research Center announced that the National Bureau of Statistics had officially approved the sampling survey system and plan for China's population and family development. This survey focuses on the key factors influencing people's fertility intentions and behaviors, understands the practical difficulties and needs faced by families in the process of childbearing and raising children, and comprehensively analyzes the reasons why some people "don't want to have children" or "don't dare to have children." This provides a scientific basis for improving fertility support policies and incentives, effectively addressing people's pressing needs, and promoting the full implementation of fertility policies. This provides a clear direction for conducting fertility crisis surveys across the country. The Sichuan Provincial Government should also actively follow the central government's instructions, conduct in-depth research on the fertility needs of people of childbearing age, and optimize fertility policies accordingly.

On the other hand, Sichuan Province currently prioritizes maternity subsidies for those planning to have two or three children. However, this survey shows that among female university students, the primary group expected to have children in the coming years, their fertility preferences generally range between having no children and having one child. Clearly, existing policies have limited impact on increasing fertility desires among this group. Therefore, the government needs to conduct detailed research tailored to the specific circumstances of the province and, based on this data, refine policies tailored to specific groups with different fertility needs. For example, based on the results of this survey and considering the widespread nature of the one-child population, the government should prioritize increasing maternity subsidies for this group, rather than focusing solely on those planning to have two or three children simply to address the three-child policy.

4.3.3 Socialized fertility costs

Socialized fertility costs refer to the sharing of the economic and time costs of childbearing and raising children, previously primarily borne by families, through multiple entities, including the government, society, and businesses, to reduce the burden of childbearing on families and increase their willingness to have children. This concept transcends the limitations of traditional intra-family cost-benefit analysis of childbearing and emphasizes a socialized cost-sharing mechanism for childbearing behavior. This means that childbearing costs encompass not only the family's financial and time investment but also the overall cost-sharing and benefit-distribution framework for society.

Relevant literature shows that the cost of childbirth is a key factor affecting women's willingness to have children. Childbearing behavior will occupy the family's capital factors (such as economic costs) and labor factors (such as time costs). In the modern socioeconomic system, the proportion of capital factors continues to rise while the proportion of labor factors gradually decreases. This change leads to an increase in childbearing costs and suppresses the willingness to have children [3]. According to Beck's family individualization theory, transferring the cost of childbearing from the family to society is the main way to solve the high cost of childbearing. This theoretical framework provides a theoretical basis for the implementation of socialized childbearing costs, while emphasizing the important role of the government, that is, through financial subsidies and policy support, to reduce the pressure on families in childbearing and raising children.

4.3.4 Recognize women's subjectivity and rights

The core of Sweden's child-friendly system, driven by its women-friendly system, is to emphasize that "working women should also have equal rights to bear children" rather than "mothers should have the right to work" [9]. This awareness stems from a shift in the perspective of subjectivity. It is based on the premise of recognizing the equality of both sexes in the labor market, which not only weakens the restrictions of the traditional mother role on women's work, but also reduces the constraints that bind women to the family field. In addition, recognizing women's subjectivity and rights is inseparable from promoting equal participation of both sexes in childcare. Combined with Beck's individualization theory, it can be seen that only by promoting gender equality at the macro level can we further protect women's subjectivity and rights based on a relatively good environment and alleviate women's resistance to childbirth caused by unequal investment in childcare.

the research participants in this survey, this study offers the following recommendations: First, the Sichuan Provincial Government should incorporate more female gender perspectives into its research design, implementation, and analysis to broaden the scope of gender perspectives within the survey. Second, employers should strengthen their awareness of the impact of this on individual lives and implement appropriate measures. Third, consider subsidizing the "gender loss" incurred by businesses for hiring female employees, mitigating the conflict between women's childbearing and corporate profits, and striving to achieve a balance between socioeconomic benefits, individual rights protection, and a healthy childbearing environment.

4.3.5 Promote the popularization of sex education and reproductive education knowledge

My country's modernization continues to advance, but cultural and ideological development lags behind the economy and politics. This problem is particularly acute in the areas of sex and reproductive education, urgently requiring active government guidance and response. Promoting relevant science education is precisely the right approach to adapting to modernization. Research indicates that female university students in Sichuan are shifting their reproductive values from traditional to modern, making it imperative to adapt to this

trend.

Regarding sex education, first, government officials need to clearly express their support for promoting sex education, avoiding a vacillation between supporting traditional sexual attitudes and promoting modern sex education. Second, efforts should be made to integrate family education, school education, and social education, fully mobilizing the initiative and resources of each sector to deliver comprehensive sex education across multiple dimensions. Finally, the delivery of sex education should be diversified, incorporating the unique characteristics and strengths of different educational institutions and adopting diverse approaches to meet the needs of diverse audiences. Regarding reproductive education, in traditional societies, reproductive education largely relied on the experience of female elders, a method that served a purpose within the prevailing social context. However, in modern society, the dissemination of authoritative reproductive knowledge should be handled by scientific actors. Government agencies should shoulder the responsibility of leading the dissemination of reproductive education, using scientific, authoritative, and comprehensive content to guide the public in acquiring correct reproductive knowledge and promote the development of reproductive education in a modern direction.

5. Conclusion

Based on a previous survey of female university students in Sichuan Province, this study analyzes the factors influencing their low fertility intentions and, in light of local fertility policies and feedback, proposes optimization recommendations. The study finds that female university students' fertility intentions are influenced by a complex interplay of factors, including insufficient social support, ineffective policy incentives, and shifts in mainstream culture. Furthermore, at a theoretical level, this study enriches the group-specific perspective of fertility intention research, validates the applicability of gender equality theory and reflexive modernization theory to the study of fertility issues in my country, and provides empirical support for understanding the shifting fertility attitudes of young women. At a practical level, the study's recommendations, such as clarifying the underlying logic, strengthening practical research, and socializing the costs of childbearing, can provide a reference for optimizing fertility policies in Sichuan Province and nationwide, helping to alleviate demographic challenges.

Reproductive behavior is a critical link in social functioning and national development. It's not just a personal choice; it impacts the overall state of society and the nation. According to Beck's theory of reflexive modernization, fundamentally changing gender equality in patriarchal societies is difficult due to objective constraints. Therefore, this study advocates improving the reproductive environment through optimizing fertility policies. This requires a collaborative support system among the government, universities, and society. We also hope that future research will expand its scope and refine its gender perspective, continue to focus on youth fertility intentions and policy dynamics, promote targeted and humane policies, foster a fertility-friendly environment, and contribute to improving the population structure and achieving long-term

balanced development.

Acknowledgements

This paper is supported by the Project: Yibin University 2024 National Undergraduate Innovation and Entrepreneurship Training Program Support Project "Exploring Fertility Intentions and Policy Responses: A Study on Fertility Intentions and Policy Implications among Female College Students in Sichuan Province" (Project Approval No.: 202410641005).

References

- [1] Liu Nan, Li Jianxin. The implementation effect of my country's fertility support policy and suggestions for its improvement [J]. Medicine and Law, 2025, 17(02): 82-87.
- [2] Qing Shisong, Wang Jiahao. The impact of equal division of housework on women's fertility intentions[J]. Youth Research, 2024, (05): 1-14+94.
- [3] Yang Shanhua and Xie Lizhong, Western Sociological Theory (Volume 2), Peking University Press, 2017, p135.
- [4] Wang Hui, Ye Wenzhen. Changes and enlightenment of China's fertility concept[J]. Journal of Fujian Jiangxia University, 2023, 13(03): 68-74.
- [5] Zhou Changhong. Conceptual Logical Model of Fertility Concepts[J]. Journal of Nanjing Institute of Population Management, 2007, 23(2): 5-747
- [6] Zhang Binyang (2024). Current status and prospects of research on young women's reproductive views. Advances in Psychology, 14(6), 542-555.
- [7] Zheng Zhenzhen. Research on Fertility Intention and Its Practical Significance: A Case Study of Jiangsu Province [J]. Xuehai, 2011(2):10-18
- [8] Wu Zhen. Is individualization an obstacle to fertility? —From the evolution and underlying logic of French family policy[J]. Journal of Society, 2023, 43(4): 154-184.
- [9] Wei Zhixin. Sweden's fertility changes and the impact and implications of family policies on it[J]. Population and Health, 2019, (01): 21-23.

Author Profile

Feifan Luo (2003-), female, Han ethnicity, from Suining, Sichuan, Yibin University, undergraduate student majoring in social work.

Shixi Zhou (2003-), female, Han ethnicity, from Ziyang, Sichuan, Yibin University, undergraduate student majoring in social work.