The International Conference on Interdisciplinary Humanities and Communication Studies
DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/5/20220525

Motherhood Penalty: The Expansion of Gender-Based Inequality in the Fertility Aspects

Zihan Ye[1,a,*]

[1]*Department of Sociology, Jilin University, Changchun, China*
a.yezh0120@mails.jlu.edu.cn
**corresponding author*

Abstract: Despite many years of campaigns fighting for women's rights, there is still a tremendous gap in realizing gender equality. In particular, the issue of fertility, which was a matter of benefit to the whole family and society, has increasingly become a severe social problem that highlights or exacerbates gender inequality. An item called "motherhood penalty" has been widely discussed in academia in recent years. It represents a issue that women's rights are damaged severely once they become mothers. Especially in the economic aspect, women face losses, having a difficulty in finding a job, promotion, and salary increases. Although having children enriches our society economically, women suffer financial consequences for doing so. Employers are less likely to recruit them than those without children. Even if they do, they often pay them a much less salary than men. Contrarily, men not only do not experience financial losses as a result of having children, but they also receive benefits known as the "Fatherhood Premium" by academics. It is not difficult to find that implicit sexism is implicit in fertility problems, and it is more prominent in the economic aspect. This study seeks to find the underlying mechanism and ways to solve the problem.

Keywords: motherhood penalty, gender inequality, gender stereotypes, women empowered

1. Introduction

Nowadays, female basic rights, especially the reproductive autonomy right as well as gender inequality, have been widely discussed over the whole society. Reproduction is a big issue of all. It usually causes great loss to women towards their career (like job salary), body and mental health. This is the so-called "motherhood penalty", a term focusing on the bad effects which are caused by reproduction and relative items in social science. It represents that women's pay decreases once they become mothers, as well as other basic rights, all being greatly harmed owing to giving birth to a child, which seems ridiculous. As a result, more and more women turn from professional women to housewives in order to better take care of their babies. Even though this is a normal phenomenon, this definitely should not be the right issue. It seems that gradually people have formed the consensus that taking care of the babies is the mother's responsibility, which is hard to imagine. Mother care do make positive effect, but that does not mean men can be content not to take on parenting and family responsibilities. Especially when women also suffer from the infiltration of childbearing, men should take more responsibility for child-rearing.

However, the reality is the opposite, women always make sacrifices and concessions for the family after giving birth to a child. Worse still, despite the fact that childbearing is encouraged, women often

© 2023 The Authors. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/5/20220525

suffer both economic and social exclusion when they become mothers. On the one hand, women are under greater residual pressure when pregnant, are often questioned about their ability to work and are ostracized after returning to work after maternity leave. The renowned sociologist Michelle Budig working at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, conducted the study. According to Budig, after having children men's salary usually get evident rise, whereas women's earnings decrease by 4% for each child. According to previous research, hiring managers are less likely to choose moms for jobs than women of no child, and for female workers with child, they pay mothers much less than they do other women.

Contrarily, men do not pay a price for becoming fathers. In reality, there may be a "fatherhood bonus", whereby their income rises as a result of becoming a father. However, because of parenting, women are also more likely to experience early social marginalization. Social policies and the related infrastructure fall short in protecting women's fundamental rights because society does not tolerate the psychological and physical toll that motherhood has on women. This article is based on the social context above, aiming to explore the causes of Motherhood Penalty and seek ways to improve it. The scholarly area has made quantities of research towards this, but there are still no better resolutions towards it. This research mainly uses qualitative research methods to represents the core idea.

2. Literature Review

In recent years the female reproductive autonomy right and relative gender inequality problem have gradually become a hot issue that concerned by all walks of life. "Motherhood Penalty" represents for the phenomenon by which women get wage decreases once they become mothers. This just highlights the great loss of women as well as mothers in the economic area.

There is much previous empirical research on the underlying mechanism of the motherhood penalty in academia world. Theoretically, employers tend to believe that having children and caring for children affects employee effectiveness and is detrimental to the functioning of businesses, based on the fact that people have a limited time in their lifetime (Korenman and Neumark 1992, Budig and England 2001; Glauber 2007; Gronau 1988. Goldin 1995). After adjusting for the typical human capital and occupational characteristics that affect salaries, two recent studies suggest that employed mothers in the United States have a per-child salary penalty of about 5% on average (Budig and England 2001; Anderson, Binder, and Mauser 2003). Dendrite came to the conclusion in a summary of economic data that, for those under the age of 35, the pay disparity between mothers and monotheists is significantly greater than the pay gap between men and women. Employed mothers are the category of women who currently make up the majority of the "gender gap" in salaries, as Glass stresses. Also, a recent experiment showed that mothers were penalized on many aspects, including their competence as well as the initial level of work, while men hardly suffer from childbearing, and sometimes even get benefit from being a father. Another study conducted at the same time showed that implicit discrimination by employers against employees with children usually only reflected in female employees [3]. A latest review used data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Young Women to simulate the changing effects of parenting as women age from their 20s to their 50s, expanding the focus beyond salaries to also take into account labour force participation and occupational status. It is obvious that having children "costs" women's careers a lot, although the effects on all three labour force outcomes lessen as women get older. Children lower women's engagement in the labour force, but this effect is more pronounced when women are younger and disappears by their 40s and 50s [5].

According to some research, the consequences of reproduction on employment are primarily gendered among married couples, with women experiencing negative effects and fathers experiencing positive ones. This is because men prefer to focus more of their energy on tasks that allow them to

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/5/20220525

support themselves after having children, whilst women tend to devote more of their time to childrearing duties (Becker 1981, 1985; Glauber 2007, 2008; Killewald and Gough 2013).

Large quantities of reasons have been seen as the elucidate for the wage gap related to motherhood, like the conflict of social identity between the “ideal mother” and “ideal employee”. We also propose that the tensions between such contradictory cultural patterns may be subconscious to the evaluator to consider mothers to be less devoted and less competent to their works (Bridleway and Cornell 2004, Blair-Coy 2003;). Quite the opposite, because in our culture the requirement to be a good father doesn't contradict a qualified employee, we usually don't consider that fathers will experience the hidden blows of these types of workers (Townsend 2002). The role as a father takes up very little time and energy for man to act well according to social expectation, while mothers are taken for granted to carry more responsibility for child caring. Thus, it is not difficult to understand that women with children are often seen as lacking competitive advantage and focus, and thus have to produce particular evidence which prove they are just up to the job. In general, the inquiry into the explanations and causes of the motherhood penalty could be connected with gender discrimination in the economic and social area.

The conclusion put out by Waldfogel and Meyer is that occupational regulations have no effect on the penalty at all. According to Anderson’s research, the total salary penalty for women who have one kid is 24 percent while the penalty for women who have two or more children is 44 percent depending on their career and household resources.

Additionally, it is well-widely known that Becker’s “work effort” concept as the explanation for working productivity. Becker contends that moms may actually be less effective at work since they have used up all of their energy taking care of their kids. According to the within-household specialization concept, couples collaborate to divide labour in order to improve the quality of household’s living condition (Becker 1981, 1985). With the husband specializing in the labour market and the wife in domestic production, the division of labour is frequently based on the spouses' relative advantages in each field. This idea could to some extent explains why a large proportion of discrimination against working women with children arises. The main argument on this issue is that childcaring is detrimental to the accumulation of human capital, and there may be interruptions in human capital, etc., which can affect the level of productivity and eventually lead to a significant decline in wages. In contrast to women who have children who may be impacted by children or birth plans that may cause them to shorten their studies, withdraw from the labour market for a short or long period of time, reduce their part-time jobs, or choose flexible employment, women without children have unquestionably more autonomy in their time and energy. They will stick to full-time work and take full advantage of opportunities for training and career development (Aisenbrey, Evertsson, & Grunow, 2009; Baum, 2002; Gangl & Zieflfle, 2009; Jacobsen & Levin, 1995; Anderson, Binder, & Krause, 2003). Sociologists all over the world have made great efforts to find resolutions towards decreasing the motherhood penalty, but it still exists and has even gotten worse. This study examines the previous empirical research and seeks to draw attention to the issue.

3. Motherhood Penalty in China

With the development of the whole society, the conception of the motherhood penalty is recognized by more and more people. However, it seems inevitable for women, especially at childbearing age to be affected by the motherhood penalty. This represents for the phenomenon that women suffer great income loss due to childbearing. Many empirical studies have shown because the status of the mother is highly likely to be subtly discriminated against by employers and seen as less competent and less engaged in their job, less engaged in employment and promotion, and should receive a much less salary than the general woman who is not a mother.

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/5/20220525

The enormous cost of childbirth led to the emergence of the term “motherhood penalty”. A pregnant woman may face 26 pregnancy complications, and after that, women may also be interrupted from employment, leave the workplace, and socially distanced because they have to take on more care work, and ultimately earn far behind men. Corresponding to the “motherhood penalty” is the “fatherhood premium”, because the mother has to invest in unpaid family labour, and the father can work hard in the society without any worries, and obtain more capital that is commonly used in society. The Society’s low expectations for fathers to raise children make it easy for them to become “good fathers”, and the social capital at hand makes it relatively low for them to leave the family.

On a deeper level, Motherhood Penalty could be easily linked to gender inequality and it highlights the economic losses women suffer. There’s no wonder that as time goes by, great progress has taken place in gender equality worldwide. Women's educational opportunities and educational attainment levels are gradually equal to those of men and the distribution of income between men and women has become more balanced in the workplace. However, when it comes to the workplace, “family” is undoubtedly one of the most important factors that affect women’s job application, starting salary and promotion.

In terms of employment, many people in the scholar area called the negative effects of women's reproductive and parenting and other related roles as “Motherhood Penalty”, which vividly illustrates the impact of childbirth on women, such as the implicit discrimination encountered by women in employment, promotion and so on. Indeed, motherhood penalty" has always existed in the current social environment. Fertility is usually a family behaviour, which is decided by couples. However, it is ridiculously that child bearing in fact makes a diametrically opposing impact on the career development of men and women, which known as “motherhood penalty”’ and “fatherhood premium”. It is not difficult to find that it is an extension of fertility and occupation of gender inequality. Then we will delve into the underlying mechanisms that result in the “motherhood penalty” and “fatherhood premium”.

First of all, despite the great change in of female status, we are still amazed by the fact that even though many major historical changes have taken place, gender hierarchies persist in our society, especially in the work place. In this hierarchy system men are considered much superior to women in a series of aspects, like the body, capability, and competence, which persists till now despite profound social structural changes like the industrialization and the feminist campaign. Women are pursuing an increasingly wide range of occupations, including areas that stereotypically do not allow me to dominate as men (Hartmann 1976; Reskin and Roos 1990). This is a big step in the promotion of the female status. Unlike the decadent idea that women are seen as accessories to men and believed that they should not show their faces and go out to work, but only stay at home to serve men. Women are increasingly entering the labour market and have the same competence as men.

However, there is still a lot of implicit discrimination against women in the workplace, which is further expanded when women become the main undertaker of reproductive behaviour. Society's expectation of the different roles of men and women after their transformation into parents perpetuates the idea of gender inequality and further triggers the “penalty” of women in all aspects of childbirth. The family itself as a community of life-based on the connection of procreation and marriage, is intrinsically particularly focused on its own development. This means that the division of labour is essential in the family, and it is even more extended after the birth of the child. According to the model of within-household specialization, couples work together to divide labour aiming at promote the living condition of the household (Becker 1981, 1985). Women tend to their family while men work outside the home and seem to have been tacitly accepted by society as the norm. When occupational roles conflict with family roles, it seems reasonable for women to make sacrifices for the whole family, even if they interrupt their careers and become housewives. We should ponder, is it always right that this has always been the case? Many women have received systematic education

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/5/20220525

or even continued to study, but their career skills have been interrupted by taking on more family responsibilities. In general, this is actually an imbalance in the distribution of family responsibilities and an oppression of women's career prospects caused by an unequal conception of the abilities of men and women.

Secondly, the irreconcilable contradiction between the disruption of human capital accumulation and the stagnation of skills caused by women's childbearing and the profit-seeking behaviour of enterprises is also an important factor for the “motherhood penalty”. Female workers with children are usually seen as less competent, authoritative and committed to their job compared to non-child women workers. This actually implies implicit discrimination by employers on the economic impact of female reproductive behaviour. On the one hand, employers often acquiesce that women's focus will shift from work to family after giving birth. Caring for children should be the responsibility of both husband and wife, especially when women's bodies are damaged by childbirth, men should have more family responsibilities. However, it is very strange that in real life, men often only have to take on very few family responsibilities, and there is no major conflict between fathers and good employees. On the other hand, men will get a premium for their reproductive behaviour. On the other hand, from the actual situation, the decrease in work efficiency caused by the physical burden of women during pregnancy and the longer maternity leave often conflict with the economic behaviour of enterprises.

The motherhood punishment caused by childbirth and the bad social environment have caused the fertility rate to continue to decline. In China, there has been a phenomenon of reversal of childbearing behaviour, that is, childbearing behaviour is less than childbearing willingness.

4. Suggestions

The social impact and harm caused by motherhood punishment are very extensive and profound. For women, childbirth means bearing great costs and losses. Childbirth seems to have instrumentalized women, stripping them of the subject of women, and becoming an abstract reality that should bear the responsibilities of family and childbirth. A large number of women suffer from depression during childbirth and face pressure from family, society and themselves. Society always puts more responsibilities on family and childcare for women. Based on previous references and empirical research, I think the following aspects should be taken to reduce the occurrence of the motherhood penalty.

First, from a macro perspective, we pin our hopes on better social policies, such as paid maternity leave for both men and women, and other policies that ensure equality between male and female in the workplace, and call for a more inclusive society at the social level and a just reproductive environment.

Second, from a mid-level perspective, corporate units should also undertake social responsibilities, provide employees with a flexible working system, and ensure that employees’ legitimate reproductive rights should become part of the company’s culture, so that those employees who need to take care of their families can balance family and family well. Work. For example, it provides institutional and technical support for remote work, allowances and subsidies to help employees through the transition period of life.

Last, at the micro-family level, we need the joint efforts of family members. Destroying traditional widowed parenting and the acquiescence that women are more self-sacrificing and taking on family and parenting responsibilities. Family members should give more attention, care and protection to women's remaining processes, and minimize the accumulation of women's human capital and interruption of work caused by childbirth

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/5/20220525

5. Conclusions

Combining previous research and literature on motherhood penalty and gender discrimination, as well as the reality of the situation, it is not difficult to find that stereotypes and hidden discrimination against women still exist and continue to expand. Maternal punishment does exist. After the birth of children, the traditional concept of gender roles requires women to devote more time and energy to childcare, which will affect their performance in the labour market, resulting in "maternal wage punishment", while men's income will not only not be negatively affected by childbearing, but will work harder due to the needs of traditional family roles to support the family, and there will be a "father's salary premium". The dynamic mechanism of the existence of maternal punishment is explored from several perspectives, such as human capital, demand transformation, family division of labour, traditional concepts, gender inequality and occupational discrimination.

References

[1] *Sophie Caldecott, The Motherhood Penalty: What It Is, and Why We're Over It. Career Contessa, retrieved on September 15, 2022, https://www.careercontessa.com/advice/what-is-the-motherhood-penalty/.*

[2] *Shelley Correll, Stephan Benard, and In Paik. Getting a Job: is There a Motherhood Penalty? Cornell University, American Journal of Sociology, 2007.*

[3] *Stephen Benard, Shelley J., Normative Discrimination and the Motherhood Penalty, Correll First Published September 22, 2010.*

[4] *Michelle J. Budig, Melissa J. Hodges, Differences in Disadvantage: Variation in the Motherhood Penalty across White Women's Earnings Distribution, American Sociological Review, October 8, 2010.*

[5] *Joan R. Kahn, Javier García-Manglano, Suzanne M. Bianchi, The Motherhood Penalty at Midlife: Long-Term Effects of Children on Women's Careers, 13 January 2014, Journal of Family and Marriage.*

[6] *Heather Kelley, Quinn Galbraith, Jessica Strong, Working Moms: Motherhood Penalty or Motherhood Return? Brigham Young University, The Journal of Academic Librarianship.*

[7] *Paula England, Jonathan Bearak, Michelle J. Budig, Do Highly Paid, Highly Skilled Women Experience the Largest Motherhood Penalty? American Sociological Review, December 1, 2016.*

[8] *Mark Lutter, Martin Schröder, Is There a Motherhood Penalty in Academia? The Gendered Effect of Children on Academic Publications in German Sociology, European Sociological Review, Volume 36, Issue 3, June 2020, Pages 442–459.*

[9] *Joseph Chancea, Arianna Buchananb, The Motherhood Penalty and The Fatherhood Premium in Employment During Covid-19: Evidence from the United States, Volume 69, October 2020.*

[10] *Claire Cain Miller, "The Motherhood Penalty vs. the Fatherhood Bonus: A Child Helps Your Career, if You are a Man", September 6, 2014.*

[11] *Patrick Ishizuka, The Motherhood Penalty in Context: Assessing Discrimination in a Polarized Labour Market, Demography (2021) 58 (4): 1275–1300.*