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Eliminating Cultural Prejudice and Facilitating Women's Workforce Reintegration: An Analysis from Multiple Dimensions Including Family, Psychology and Work Resources

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Abstract. Cultural inherent biases are the cultural roots of gender discrimination in the workplace, systematically hindering the career development of women returning to the workforce. This article conducts a structured analysis of the multiple impacts of cultural biases from three dimensions: job resources, psychological experiences, and family life. This paper analyzes the literature, reviews organizational culture theory, gendered organization theory, and patriarchal theory, and combines empirical research from both China and other countries to explore the formation mechanisms, manifestations, and impacts of cultural bias. The research results show that cultural bias operates at multiple levels, intertwined with organizational culture, the assumption of the "ideal employee," the reproduction of gender beliefs in social culture, and the cultural conflict between traditional and modern concepts in the Chinese context, collectively constituting systematic obstacles for women returning to the workforce. Explicit and implicit discrimination coexist and reinforce each other, with the former directly denying women employment opportunities and the latter continuously creating barriers in the workplace. Cultural biases undermine women's job resources (income, job stability, promotion opportunities) ,simultaneously cause psychological trauma (fear of seeking help, identity conflict, self-attribution cycles) and negatively impact family life through a pressure transmission chain. The most prominent manifestation within the system is "soft discipline," and the most prominent manifestation outside the system is "hard exclusion," yet both share the same essence. This paper provides a reference for understanding the "motherhood penalty" and offers reasonable suggestions for policy formulation, enterprise management, and the improvement of women's employability to combat discrimination.

Keywords: Cultural inherent bias, Women back to work, Mother's punishment, Implicit discrimination, Work-family conflict

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1. Introduction

With economic development and the improvement of women's educational attainment, the female labor force participation rate has increased substantially, and returning to work after childbirth has become increasingly common. However, traditional gender role expectations have remained largely unchanged, which has created persistent barriers to the employment and career development of women returning to work after childbirth [1]. In the traditional division of labor within society, men are regarded as the primary breadwinners of the family, while women are positioned as the primary caregivers; this gendered structure is widely recognized as a key source of gender discrimination in the workplace [1]. Existing research has primarily focused on the phenomenon of "motherhood penalty", that is, the negative impact of childbearing on women's career development, promotion opportunities and wage growth [2]. Chinese scholars have also examined the effect of childbearing on women's wages, and found that the wage penalty is more pronounced in regions with higher levels of market development [3, 4]. Nevertheless, most scholars only conduct quantitative analysis from the economic dimension, and relevant research remains insufficient [5]. This study systematically explores the impact of cultural bias on family life and women's psychological experience by examining implicit mechanisms such as the "ideal employee" norm [6]. Meanwhile, it analyzes the relationship between explicit discrimination and implicit discrimination, and compares women's experiences under different contexts [7]. Currently, the cultural environment of Chinese enterprises is relatively unique, which is inevitably accompanied by cultural conflicts between modern and traditional concepts [8]. Based on the aforementioned research background, this paper conducts an in-depth analysis of the influence mechanism of inherent cultural bias on women's return to the workplace, with a focus on the following three dimensions: work resources, psychological experience, and family life. This study adopts the literature analysis method, reviews the empirical research findings of scholars at home and abroad, and takes gender organization theory and the "patriarchal enterprise" theory as the theoretical basis [6, 7, 9]. It further explores the formation mechanism, manifestation forms and influence pathways of cultural bias, and proposes corresponding practical implications [5, 7]. This paper aims to deepen the theoretical understanding of the phenomenon of "motherhood penalty", and provide evidence-based suggestions for organizational management, policy formulation and the mitigation of employment discrimination [2, 3, 10].

1.1. Definitions of core concepts

Cultural bias is a stereotype formed in the course of social and cultural development, which negatively affects people's behavior, judgment and thinking, and creates discrimination in employment. In the traditional social division of labor, men were seen as "breadwinners" and women as "housekeepers". This binary opposition determines gender relations within the family and extends its influence to the public domain, which is related to the existence of gender bias in the workplace [1]. Inherent biases are particularly harmful among various forms of cultural biases, as they become "naturalized", leading people to view inequality as the norm and thereby reinforcing institutionalized discrimination [1]. "Maternal punishment" is a typical manifestation of workplace gender discrimination [2, 10]. Correll et al. noted in their study that when resumes are the same, clearly indicating motherhood significantly reduces the chances of being hired and leads to a lower starting salary than other job seekers [2]. Budig and England, after analyzing National Longitudinal Survey of Youth data, pointed out that the decline in postpartum wages for women cannot be simply attributed to human capital factors, but should be related to factors such as employer bias [10]. There

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is also bias in the subjective evaluations of respondents [2, 10]. Zhang Y. analyzed the data and found that women with children under the age of 12 were more likely to experience career breaks, and women with children under the age of 3 were more likely to move downward [4]. Yu and Xie further found that childbirth has a negative impact on female employees' wages, and this punishment tends to intensify in regions with a higher degree of marketization [10]. Cultural bias is achieved in two ways: explicit discrimination and implicit discrimination [7]. The former is a direct way, such as stipulating that only men can be hired, or asking about the marital and reproductive status of interviewees [7]. With the improvement of anti-discrimination laws, explicit discrimination has decreased significantly, but it still exists [7]. Implicit discrimination is more subtle, manifesting as being marginalized after giving birth, not being assigned important tasks, and facing reduced promotion opportunities [7]. Schein says that organizational culture has a greater impact on people's behavior than formal systems and is less detectable [6]. Rath points out that implicit discrimination often occurs under the guise of "concern" or "consideration" (for example, "I'm worried you're too tired, so I handed this project over to someone else"), leaving women in a situation where they are misunderstood and looked down upon when facing unfair treatment and unable to express their views clearly and directly [7].

1.2. Core theoretical framework

This study introduces literature analysis to examine the role of cultural bias and is based on the following three theories for the entire analysis. First, the theory of gender organization. Acker points out that gender neutrality does not reflect the real situation within an organization [3]. People tacitly assume that the so-called "ideal employee" is someone who can devote all their energy to work without taking on any family responsibilities - an image that implicitly reflects a gendered, masculine standard [9]. This assumption permeates the organization's work arrangement, promotion criteria, and performance appraisal system, resulting in many deficiencies in the establishment of the relevant system. This implicit gender assumption regards individuals without family obligations as organizational norms, but women often take on the main responsibility of raising children, which limits their time and energy [9]. As a result, it is difficult for them to meet the organization's requirements for working hours and business trips, putting them at a relative disadvantage in the assessment. This explains why women returning to work face questioning of their own abilities. Second, organizational culture theory. Schein points out that organizational culture is a set of common fundamental assumptions that subtly influence behavior [6]. For example, beliefs such as "Women are not focused on work because they have children and need to work hard" are not explicitly stated but are still crucial [6]. To eliminate gender discrimination, it is not enough to rely solely on institutional change; Cultural innovation must also be achieved [6]. Third, the "patriarchal corporation" theory. In "Workplace Patriarchy," Rath points out that patriarchy logic establishes a whole set of gender-based regulations that institutionalize implicit discrimination: every stage from recruitment to retirement carries gendered expectations [7]. Many policies framed by "market thinking" do nothing to achieve inclusiveness, equality or diversity and only have a short-term effect, hindering the development of Chinese enterprises [7]. "Mom posts" are an effective counterexample [7]. Three theories complement each other: gendered organization theory, which focuses on gender structure; organizational culture theory, which explains the role of common beliefs; and patriarchal corporation theory, which examines how institutions are institutionalized and reproduced. Together, they provide the basis for a deeper analysis [6, 7, 9].

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2. Literature review and analysis

2.1. Manifestations of inherent cultural biases: external explicit discrimination and internal implicit discrimination

Many women are discriminated against, either openly or covertly, during their employment process, which severely restricts their career development. Overt discrimination is most prominent in recruitment. Heilman and Okimoto used a situational experiment that controlled job seeker eligibility and found that even if a woman had never given birth, simply being labeled as "potentially fertile" would significantly lower her evaluation in recruitment [11]. Li conducted a questionnaire survey of working women in 12 Chinese cities and found that more than 40 percent of "married childless" women were asked about their fertility plans during the job search process, and nearly 30 percent of respondents were rejected directly because of their marital status and fertility plans [5]. While interviewers ask about marriage and childbearing status in the name of "concern", it is essentially an assessment of labor cost risk, Rath noted [7]. The reason behind this practice is that employers consider women of childbearing age inherently costly, due to expected efficiency losses, workflow disruptions, and the additional time and cost of maternity leave. This assessment model directly translates a woman's fertility into a negative indicator of professional competence. Implicit discrimination is more common and harder to detect [7]. Women who return to work after giving birth often find that they are no longer informed to attend important meetings, be assigned to major projects, or be placed on promotion lists [5, 7]. This phenomenon is often masked by neutral language as "organizational adjustment" [7]. Rath refers to this as "gentle disempowerment" - the gradual marginalization of women while management rhetoric remains mild [7]. Li said that more than half of women who return to work after giving birth encounter discrimination, which is often subtle but has a negative impact on their development, specifically in the form of fewer promotion opportunities and fewer important tasks [5].

It is important to note that many women encounter difficulties in seeking help after experiencing implicit discrimination [5, 7]. On the one hand, it is difficult to determine whether the unfair treatment they have experienced constitutes "discrimination"; On the other hand, they are afraid of being disregarded and damaging their professional image and thus avoid defending their rights - this is what is called the "dilemma of silence" [12]. Swim et al. describe "perception of discrimination," where victims lack clear evidence, leading to cognitive confusion and causing them to blame themselves rather than structural causes [12]. Explicit discrimination and implicit discrimination reinforce each other [7]. Explicit discrimination deprives women of a large number of job opportunities, while they also face implicit discrimination in their daily professional lives [5, 7]. Some women choose to quit or give up promotion opportunities, which is often seen as a lack of ambition and provides an excuse for the continuation of Explicit discrimination and prejudice [8, 9].

2.2. Mechanisms of the formation of inherent cultural biases

There are multiple causes for the formation of inherent cultural biases, which this article analyzes from three aspects: Chinese context, organizational culture, and social culture [1, 6, 8]. In terms of organizational culture, there is a structural contradiction between the assumption of the "ideal employee" and the reproductive role of women, which is the root of the bias [6, 9]. Acker argues that the organizational system implicitly presupposes employees who do not undertake family obligations, and mothers who have to balance parenting responsibilities are often seen as deviating from this norm [9]. Schein points out that this assumption has become an unquestionable "basic

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assumption" among organizational members [6]. When a mother applies for leave or flexible working hours, her behavior is not recognized but regarded as an unreasonable request [6, 9]. Members of the organization do not understand the necessity of such adjustments, considering an individual's lack of professional commitment and sense of responsibility as having a negative impact on their performance evaluation and promotion prospects [6, 9]. From a socio-cultural perspective, gender beliefs are constantly reinforced in daily life [1]. Ridgeway and Correll note that gender beliefs are used as "background knowledge" in interactions to explain the behavior of others, albeit unconsciously [1]. For example, the decisiveness of a male manager is seen as leadership, while the same behavior of a female manager is seen as emotion [1]. Professor Wu noted that the younger generation in China has a more lenient attitude towards gender beliefs and is more willing to accept women in the workplace [8]. However, gender divisions such as "men outside, women inside" are still deeply rooted among rural populations and the elderly, and the generation gap between urban and rural areas is obvious in connection with the imbalance of economic development [8]. Generational changes, higher levels of education and more access to information have contributed to the gradual erosion of traditional gender stereotypes [8]. Nevertheless, the media, schools and families continue to spread these ideas through various channels, which remains a major reason for the persistence of gender discrimination in the workplace. In contemporary China, women face workplace pressures associated with cultural conflicts [8]. The Maoist slogan "Women hold up half the sky" has always encouraged women to participate in public life, but Confucian values also impose different expectations on women, as the traditional ideal of "men in public affairs, women in the family" summarizes. The coexistence of these two expectations means that society expects women to perform like men at work and also manage the household well. Women returning to work have to face the problem of cultural bias, being caught in a dilemma of going beyond the traditional role of "good wife and mother" and meeting the requirements of the "ideal employee" standard [6, 8, 9]. The contradiction between the two mainstream discourses is particularly acute, often exposing women themselves to social criticism regardless of their choices [8].

These three aspects are closely related. The concept of an "ideal employee" is inevitably associated with gender norms [1, 9]. This association is further reinforced by organizational and social cultural factors [6, 8]. The existence of these contradictions has had a negative impact on Chinese society. The resulting cultural biases have endangered women's career development [4, 5, 8]. This finding is supported by multiple studies on workplace discrimination [8]. The Impact of Cultural Inherent Biases: An Analysis from Three Dimensions

2.2.1. Impact on the level of work resources

From an income perspective, the wage penalty caused by childbirth has been confirmed [2, 3, 10]. Yu and Xie found that women's wage rates decrease by 10% or 7% for each additional child, with a more pronounced effect for the second child [10]. Zhang noted that even when accounting for working time, a significant wage gap between mothers and non-mothers persists, indicating the presence of numerous discriminatory factors in women's career development [4]. The wage penalty has a cumulative effect, impacting a woman's lifetime income [3, 10]. In terms of job stability, Zhang pointed out that women with children under 12 are twice as likely to experience career interruptions as women without children [4]. Mothers working in private enterprises face many difficulties returning to work after maternity leave; their original positions are often filled, some are transferred to roles with low development potential and low wages, and some can only engage in part-time or informal work, which undermines stability [4, 5]. Regarding promotion, Li's research findings indicated that women's promotion speed is relatively slow [5]. After childbirth, women's

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ability to climb the career ladder is weakened, particularly during the transition from middle to senior levels [5]. Some enterprises invoke the justification of "consideration for family responsibilities" to exclude women from high-intensity roles, thereby withholding access to higher-paying positions [5]. This act of "care" deprives women of opportunities to accumulate experience and demonstrate leadership potential [5]. Morrison and Von Glinow pointed out that women encounter a "glass ceiling" in their career development, facing invisible obstacles rather than exclusion by explicit rules [13].

2.2.2. Impact on the psychological experience level

Psychological barriers are also commonly encountered upon returning to work, with reluctance to seek help being among the most frequently reported [14]. Yang and Lee found that most mothers returning to work are reluctant to seek assistance, as they perceive doing so as an admission of inadequacy [14]. They strive to be perfect employees and worry that being viewed as needing help will harm their career development [14]. As a result, many women endure work-related stress in silence, without accessing the support they require [14]. Identity conflict and psychological pressure are significant [15]. Bao and Wang found in their study of Chinese female university teachers that these women are caught in a "zero-sum game" between academic work and the maternal role; limited time and energy must serve both roles, causing self-doubt and anxiety [15]. Rath points out that this is the "cost of motherhood": society expects mothers to devote themselves to their children's growth, while the workplace demands full commitment, creating role conflict [7]. Facing the expectations trap, women are placed in a difficult and irresolvable situation [7]. If women cannot simultaneously play the roles of career women and housewives, they may be forced to withdraw from the workplace and then criticized for a lack of ambition, resulting in secondary harm [7]. The cumulative psychological effect of implicit discrimination is substantial [7, 12]. When mothers find their work being handed to others, they may be unsure whether it constitutes discrimination, falling into a cognitive "self-attribution cycle" [7, 12]. Psychological research indicates that this phenomenon is closely related to a decline in career self-efficacy and shows a clear tendency toward depression, weakening victims' motivation to actively resist and seek external support [12].

2.2.3. Impact on family life

The negative impact on family life is multifaceted [4, 5]. First, workplace discrimination tends to undermine the overall economic status of the family [4]. Zhang points out that women are more likely to move down [4]. Career setbacks after childbirth lead to reduced family income, which has a downstream impact on children's educational opportunities and the family's material well-being. Marital conflicts become more frequent when economic stress increases. Second, there are significant differences in social support systems [5]. Spousal support plays a significant role in alleviating work-family conflicts, Li noted; Employer support (such as flexible working hours) varies greatly, and although companies recognize its importance, they often fail to provide support for employees' promotion [5]. In this regard, support from parents and other family members is even more crucial [5]. Not all Chinese families receive such support [5]. In the absence of adequate support, women face huge and complex pressures from their careers and care needs. Thirdly, when women encounter unfair treatment at work, they bring negative emotions home, causing family stress [4]. Zhang Xiaofeng points out that if women face workplace discrimination, they will become more irritable and depressed, emotionally unstable, have a negative impact on children's growth and reduce the quality of parent-child interaction [4]. If a mother is under stress for a long

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time, she may lack sufficient patience when interacting with her child, which can have a negative impact on the child's social development and emotional safety. Marital conflicts caused by work stress can create a vicious cycle: workplace stress leads to family tension, family tension leads to mental exhaustion, performance decline, and ultimately reinforces the conditions that maintain discrimination [4]. It should be noted that the impact of cultural bias on family life is relatively long-term and can be passed on to the next generation. When mothers are under long-term stress, children inevitably observe and learn that women are at a disadvantage in career development, thus passing on the culture of gender inequality from generation to generation [4].

2.3. Comparative perspective: differences within and outside the system

Li pointed out that in state-owned enterprises and private enterprises, there are significant differences in the career development of women after childbirth, and the nature of the obstacles they face is different, including implicit and explicit discrimination. In institutional Settings (government agencies, public institutions and state-owned enterprises), the main feature of the organizational culture is relational favoritism - informal network-based advantages - and an emphasis on stability [5]. Institutionally, units within the system can offer reasonable maternity leave and will not dismiss female employees for pregnancy when they return to work [5]. However, implicit discrimination is more subtle and persistent: excluding women from major projects in the name of organizational care, depriving them of promotion opportunities, and considering family circumstances in such decisions [5]. Paradoxically, married women with children may receive informal preferential treatment in some respects, while unmarried women are often regarded as "unstable" - potential liabilities that may soon leave due to marriage or childbearing [5]. Furthermore, male-dominated informal networks - often centered on social drinking and recreational activities - create additional barriers for women seeking access to the core decision-making processes of these organizations. Outside the system (private enterprises, foreign enterprises), organizational cultures are centered on "performance" and "efficiency" [5]. The implementation of maternity leave policies in private enterprises is inadequate; Many women are forced to return to work early, face pay cuts, job transfers, and face discrimination: during interviews, they are directly asked about their marriage and childbearing plans, such as "Are the children still young? Can they travel?" [8] Although performance appraisals are a fair way of assessment, they are unfair to female employees who need to take care of their children after marriage [5]. The "Wolf culture" prevalent in many private enterprises in China - characterized by the expectation of being available at all times and frequent business trips - places disproportionate demands on female employees who bear the main responsibility for care [5]. Therefore, supporting female employees requires not only institutional support but also the use of personal networks and the role of organizations such as women's federations and trade unions, although their role remains relatively limited. Although flexible work arrangements and support networks can work, there is a lack of stability [5]. The differences between the two situations suggest that the impact of cultural bias is different [5]. Institutional environment is the root cause of this difference [5]. The core issue is that there is a fundamental conflict between women's reproductive roles and the "ideal employee" standard, which manifests as "soft discipline" in state-owned institutions and "hard exclusion" in private sector organizations [5, 7, 9]. This requires reasonable measures to help women return to work, and these measures must address organizational culture issues.

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3. Discussion, suggestion, and study of the gaps

3.1. Overall conclusions

First, there is a strong cultural bias in several aspects, including the notion of the "ideal employee" in organizational culture, the gender concept in social culture, and the cultural conflict between China's modernization and traditional concepts, all of which pose obstacles to women's return to the workplace.

Secondly, the negative impact of cultural bias is substantial and multifaceted [4, 5, 7]. Women are not treated fairly in employment and face both explicit and implicit discrimination. This leads to severe psychological trauma, including fear of seeking help, identity conflicts, and self-attribution cycles [12, 14, 15]. Furthermore, discrimination creates a "stress transmission chain" that manifests as declining family economic status, disharmonious marital relationships, and poor parent-child interactions [4, 5, 14]. These three aspects are interrelated [4, 5, 14].

Third, explicit discrimination and implicit discrimination coexist and reinforce each other [5, 7]. Explicit discrimination deprives women of certain positions, while implicit discrimination creates persistent obstacles to women's career development [5, 7]. When women give up promotion opportunities or leave the workplace, such choices are often blamed by others for personal failure rather than structural constraints, which explains the self-reinforcing and widespread nature of discrimination [5, 7].

Fourth, the nature of the organizational culture can influence the expression of bias [5]. "Soft discipline" - the exclusion of target groups under the guise of organizational care - is most common for those within the system, while "hard exclusion" is more pronounced for those outside the system [5]. However, the logic behind it remains the same [5, 6, 9]. It is reflected in both "soft discipline" and" hard exclusion" [7].

3.2. Practical tips

For managers, it is necessary to foster an inclusive organizational culture, establish flexible work arrangements, ensure that family circumstances do not become a basis for employees to be at a disadvantage in promotion decisions, and make a genuine institutional commitment to gender equality [5, 7]. For human resources departments, systematic anti-bias training should be carried out beyond lectures to introduce unconscious bias concepts without the need for follow-up [7]. The training should include recognizing the characteristics of explicit and implicit discrimination, identifying and eliminating gender-coded language in recruitment materials, and mitigating the impact of subjective bias in the evaluation process [5, 7]. In the course of development, organizations should use media influence to eliminate stereotypes of "ideal employees" in social culture, produce public service advertisements to address gender discrimination in the workplace, publish corporate gender equality rankings, and provide career guidance and psychological counseling for women returning to the workplace [5-7]. For policymakers, suggestions for improving maternity insurance systems should be made, and labor inspection mechanisms and the allocation of burden of proof should be adjusted in light of the actual problems encountered [5-7]. Litigation costs remain high and it is difficult to provide evidence in the fight against gender discrimination in employment [5, 7].

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3.3. Balancing advice for female job seekers and the rights of employers

Female job seekers need to be aware of relevant laws and regulations, which explicitly state that discrimination against women in employment is illegal [5, 7]. They can refuse to answer questions that are not related to their ability to work, including inquiries about children or family planning [5, 7]. When encountering such questions, they should not be overly confrontational but rather steer the conversation towards topics related to their ability to work [5, 7]. In the process of employment, individuals should analyze their career plans and grasp the abilities required for the position [5, 7]. If employment discrimination is encountered, evidence must be retained, including screenshots and recordings, as well as reasons for rejection obtained in writing [5, 7]. If necessary, a lawsuit may be filed with the labor inspection department or a claim for equal employment rights [5, 7]. At the same time, employers' concern about employee stability should be limited to assessment methods directly related to job performance, such as inquiring about career planning, setting probationary periods, carefully signing service period agreements, organizing assessment activities, etc. [5, 7]. Using an employee's marital or reproductive status as a basis for employment decisions constitutes discrimination and should be avoided [5, 7]. Companies should develop family-friendly policies to attract and retain outstanding female talents [5, 7].

3.4. Research gaps and future directions

In terms of research subjects, most scholars have focused on the "maternal punishment" faced by women who have given birth rather than the "anticipatory discrimination" faced by married women who have not yet given birth [2, 4, 5]. This group should be included in future studies [8]. In terms of research dimensions, existing studies are not comprehensive enough to integrate family life, psychological feelings, and work resources [4, 5, 15]. The next stage of research should dynamically analyze the relationship among these three factors [4, 5, 15]. In general, existing research takes the entire society as the subject of study and does not analyze enterprises of different ownership types, industries, and sizes, lacking a comparative perspective [5]. The next stage of research should focus on analyzing domestic and foreign systems and delving into the organizational forms of enterprises [5]. In terms of methodology, most scholars use quantitative questionnaires to understand women's life experiences, which do not fully capture the real situation [5, 12]. The next stage of research should make full use of qualitative methods to analyze the life world of women [5, 15]. From a cross-perspective, few studies have explored gender issues from the perspectives of urban-rural disparity, education, social class, household registration, etc. [5, 6]. In the next stage of development, theories such as intersectionality should be drawn to systematically examine how structural factors such as urban-rural disparity can be combined with gender, social class, educational attainment, and household registration in the Chinese context to create differentiated situations for women [16].

4. Conclusion

This paper takes female employees as the research object, analyzing the impact of cultural bias on their career development, mental health, and family life, and explores the interaction between explicit and implicit discrimination, as well as the different manifestations across various organizational cultural environments. Research has found that cultural inherent biases are multi-layered — the presupposition of the "ideal employee" in organizational culture, the reproduction of gender beliefs in social culture, and the cultural conflict between traditional and modern concepts in

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the Chinese context are all intertwined, collectively constituting systematic resistance to women's return to the workplace. Explicit and implicit discrimination exist simultaneously and jointly constrain women's development. The former deprives women of employment opportunities, while the latter sets obstacles in their work. The impact of cultural bias on women's work resources (income, job stability, promotion opportunities) is clear, but it also causes psychological trauma (fear of seeking help, identity conflicts, self-attribution cycles) and affects family life through a "pressure transmission chain" (less-than-ideal family economic status, disharmonious marital relationships, and problematic parent-child relationships). Within institutional organizational cultures, discrimination tends to assume the character of "soft discipline," while private-sector environments are more prone to "hard exclusion"; despite these surface differences, both forms are rooted in the same underlying gendered logic. Based on these research findings, this paper offers reasonable suggestions: enterprise managers should review assumptions about the "ideal employee" and cultivate a positive family-friendly culture; human resources departments need to conduct systematic anti-bias training and establish transparent complaint channels; organizations such as women's federations can utilize media to promote the elimination of stereotypes; policymakers should improve the maternity protection system, strengthen efforts to combat employment discrimination, guide female job seekers to protect their rights according to law, and respond rationally to discriminatory inquiries. In the evaluation process, attention should be paid to employee stability, using legal methods to assess compatibility between work and family. The theoretical significance of this paper is reflected in its reasonable integration of organizational culture theory into a multidimensional analytical perspective, enriching the understanding of the "motherhood penalty". In the pursuit of gender equality, it is insufficient for women to individually adapt to discriminatory environments; systemic change at the levels of public policy, organizational governance, and social culture is equally necessary. Only in this way can women obtain better space for development.

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