

**The effect of the three-child policy on women's
fertility, career plans and empowerment**

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Abstract

In 2021, the three-child policy was carried out because of the continuous decline of the fertility rate in China. It is important to understand women's lived reality and feelings about the fertility policy. This study focuses on women in their twenties who are unmarried and have not given birth, who are also the target group of the policy. The qualitative method of unstructured interviews is used, which provides a new perspective and vital new insight into the three-child policy's effect. The results show that women's fertility plans are mainly influenced by their personal desire to have children, such as influenced by their original family, their love for children, individual financial levels, and the physical and socio-economic side effects of childbearing. Women think the three-child policy will have an indirect impact on their fertility plans. Women believe there are conflicts between career development and having babies. Women who want to have children tend to either sacrifice their career development or to be determined to overcome the negative influence of parenthood on their career. Ambitious women think that the three-child policy will undermine their career development by how it impacts norms and values and regulations of the macro environment. Moreover, women believe they are facing unfair treatment in the aspects of family, career development and women's position in society at large; they expect the three-child policy to further undermine women's position in China. Women have doubts about the effectiveness of the three-child policy. Action should be taken to improve women's living and employment environment if the government want to increase the fertility rate.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 The introduction

China's family planning policy has been a hot topic since the 1980s. In 2012, some news drew the world's attention to China's family planning policy. A woman named Feng Jianmei, who was seven months pregnant, was forced to have an abortion because she violated the one-child policy and could not afford to pay the fine; this caused her both emotional and physical trauma (Shuang, 2012). It has also led to controversy over whether the one-child policy is a disempowerment of women.

The family planning policy was carried out in the last century in order to control overpopulation in China. Around 1980, China began to implement the one-child policy, which in general strictly limited each family's offspring to one child (Chen and Huang, 2020). It was not until 2015, in an attempt to alleviate the excessive decline in China's birth rate, that the two-child policy was introduced, replacing the one-child policy and allowing two children per family across the board. In 2021 China's seventh census revealed a more seriously ageing population, while the two-child policy had not been effective to increase the fertility rate (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021). On 31 May of the same year, China introduced the three-child policy, hoping that another liberalisation of fertility restrictions would solve China's demographic problems (Tatum, 2021; Li & Qiu, 2021).

Some argue that the three-child policy is good in comparison to the one-child policy as it liberalises the number of children and gives families the freedom to choose the number of children they want to have. However, the three-child policy has also been questioned by the public. Some argue that the family planning policy is not a significant factor in limiting fertility. The mere liberalisation of fertility restrictions will only help to increase the fertility rate to a limited extent and the state should consider other factors as well. For example, China's economic situation has further deteriorated due to the effects of Covid-19. Rising prices in particular for property have led to high costs of living, and the pressure of increased childcare costs has reduced people's willingness to have children. The cost of childbearing is one of the most important factors deterring families of childbearing age from having children (Liang, Ren, Huang and He, 2022). The cost of raising a child to adulthood in China is mentioned in the Cost of Childbearing in China report (2022) as a multiple of 6.9 times the GDP per capita, which is almost the highest in the world compared to 2.24 times in France and 3.64 times in Germany.

At the same time, some have argued that the three-child policy has had a positive impact on female empowerment by giving women the freedom to have children (Tatum, 2021). However, in fact, women's empowerment seems to be not high in China

now. China ranks 107th in the world based on the Global Gender Gap Index (2021), declining year on year since 2008 when it ranked 57th ("The Global Gender Gap Report", 2008).

Meanwhile, while feminism is becoming a buzzword in discussions of social events and is affecting many women, government-run social media accounts have publicly stigmatised feminism, calling "extreme feminism" a "social cancer" (Yan, 2022). As the three-child policy has only been in place for a year, it is difficult to see how it will have a positive or negative impact on women's empowerment as a whole.

Today, young women in their reproductive years are the target group of the three-child policy and it is important to understand their attitudes towards it. In the context of the conflicting expectations of women to be both modern and independent and to be caring mothers, it is difficult to predict how the new three-child policy will be accepted by women and if it will achieve the desired results. It is particularly important to understand how women of childbearing age interpret the new policy, as their individual fertility perceptions and decisions will affect the future fertility of the country as a whole. In this study, I focus on young women who still have to decide whether to have children, as they are the main target group of the three-child policy, and their fertility plans are more informative in predicting the outcome of the policy than those of women who have already given birth. Their perceptions of the current social environment may also provide a basis for determining how the three-child policy will affect women's empowerment in the future.

1.2 Literature view

There is some literature on family planning in China. Firstly, some literature has explored how family planning policies have affected fertility rates in China. The one-child policy was designed to control population in order to maintain positive socio-economic development and has played an important role in family planning policies (Becker 1991; Lavelly and Freedman 1990; Li, Zhang, and Zhu 2010; McElroy and Yang 2000; Wang 2012). Some of these arguments are that the one-child policy significantly reduced the fertility rate, but others argue that the one-child policy did not play a sufficient role in promoting economic development (Jiang, 2020). Carrying out the two-child policy was to save the low fertility rate and the serious aging crisis in the future, and it is often discussed in conjunction with low fertility rates and future demographic risks. (Feng, 2014; Song and Wen, 2015; Guo, 2015; Jin, 2014).

Second, research has revealed the indirect, possibly unintended (side)effects of family planning policies. For example, Kaufman, Zhang, Qiao and Zhang (1989) studied the poor ability and desire of local officials to implement the one-child policy, due to the uneven economic and political changes that have occurred in rural China over the past decade. Lennart (1998) studied sex ratios during the implementation of family planning, with many female infants remaining hidden and unregistered Hardee, Xie and Gue (2004) examine the added pressure that family planning places on the lives

of rural women, particularly social pressure to give birth to boys as it was still considered most important to have a son.

So far there is little literature relating to the new three-child policy, which was introduced just a year ago. The literature includes the impact of the three-child policy on women's fertility intentions and the factors influencing it (Chen, Lin, Zhang and Qiu, 2022; Li, 2022; Wang and wang, 2022; Ji et al.) These studies were generally conducted in the form of data analysis and restricted to the area of the particular target group of women, such as a particular city or school. In addition, there is literature that examines the impact of policies on women's rights (Wang, 2022). The latter indicate that the three-child policy has liberalized birth restrictions and increased women's autonomy (Fakude, 2021). However, the three-child policy also deprives women's rights in the workplace. Specifically, the three-child policy increases women's reproductive pressure (Fakude, 2021; Lindberg, 2021) and squeezes women's work space (Kennedy, 2021; Lindberg, 2021 ; Yeung and George, 2021), forcing women to choose between work and parenting (Lindberg, 2021). Feminist social media often express the latter position in China. It is for that reason that the thesis will also inquire to what extent young women are influenced by the feminist movement.

1.2.1 Research questions

This paper is based on the perspective of women who are the target group of the three-child policy and focuses on individual women's fertility intentions and career plans. In doing so, the paper searches to also understand the policy's effect on the position and level of empowerment of women in China. More specifically, my research will aim to answer the following main research question:

How do young women without babies perceive and interpret the effect of the three-child policy on their fertility plan and their ambitions?

The main question will be answered by looking into the following sub-questions:

1. Which fertility plans do young women have and what influences their plans?
2. How do women expect the policy to impact their personal ambition
3. What do women think about the impact of the three-child policy on women's position in China and to what extent are they aware and influenced by the Chinese feminist movement?

The thesis is structured as follows.

- ☞ Chapter 2 analyses women's fertility plans and how they are impacted by the consecutive government child policies; in doing so it responds to sub question 1.
- ☞ Chapter 3 answers sub question 2 by discussing the policy's impact on women's ambitions towards work and education.
- ☞ Chapter 4 discusses how women view the policy's influence on women's position in China and in doing so responds to sub question 3.

Overall, this thesis will provide more insights into the effects of the new three child policy taking account of the wider context in which young women decide about having children. It looks also into their perception of women's position in China and their own professional ambitions. In the following I will explain the theoretical framework of my research (1.3) as well its methodology (1.4).

1.3 Theoretical framework

Women's status and women's empowerment have been changing, because of the new family planning policy. Simultaneously, women's choices in the number of children have been affected by the policy but also other factors. Therefore, it is particularly important to clarify the relationships among women's status, women's empowerment, women's fertility plan and the family planning policy.

Some literature has looked into the definition of women's empowerment. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action emphasized the importance of empowering women and the key issues of equal rights between men and women. Ibrahim and Alkire (2007) believe that empowerment is the relationship between women's initiative and the macro-social structure or institution that enhances or restricts women's ability to exercise that initiative, which points out that empowerment is caused by the changes at the macro level. Kabeer (1999) and Rowlands (1995) believe that empowerment is a process in which individual status and empowerment changes from low to high over time. In addition, Hiller & Touré (2021) distinguish between two types of empowerments, intra-family empowerment in the private sphere and institutional empowerment related to the public sphere. They believe that women's decision-making power is connected to the private and public spheres. The mutual influence between these two aspects of empowerment may cause women to lose decision-making power in both fields. Public intervention measures to reinforce women's public and private status and empowerment should, therefore, be implemented in combination.

In addition, Wyndow et al. (2013) explore the relationship between democratic development and women's empowerment, mentioning three variables that can represent changes in the process of women's empowerment: women's education level, female labour force participation rate, and fertility rate. Women receiving education can not only bring about public socio-economic benefits, such as a reduction in fertility and an increase in female labour participation; it also reduces gender inequality at the individual level. Women's participation in education and the labour market can expand women's economic autonomy, enhance women's political awareness, and decentralize the concentration of male power. As far as the fertility rate is concerned, its decline can change women's lives, reduce the time women spend on giving birth and raising children, and can engage in activities outside the home, such as receiving education and work. Wyndow et al. (2013) also mentioned the role

of NGOs and women's movements in promoting women's empowerment. In China, the women's movement concerns primarily feminist activists and activities.

Due to the differences in China's political patterns, understanding the Chinese feminist movement is complicated. By referring to what might be labelled as Chinese 'state feminism', the Chinese Communist Party is not used to empower women, but a tool used by the state to maintain stability. Peng (2019) mentioned that Chinese neoliberal feminism defines women as autonomous individuals, stressing that women take full responsibility for self-care, paying less attention to institutionalized gender inequality. She also mentioned the sterilization of women promoted by the communist feminist movement in the 20th century, ignoring women's free will and alienating Chinese women from femininity. In this context, neoliberal feminism urges Chinese women to desire the self-expression of femininity and then defines this self-expression as an important means of enhancing their sexual attraction to men. Instead, it is used by consumerism, embodying femininity to represent gender identity through stimulating the purchase of products. Besides, by the Chinese Communist Party, collective feminist movements that could potentially threaten the government's control of society have been banned, and feminist content on social media has been strictly censored. Han (2021) mentioned that discursive activism in feminism enables women to raise awareness through vocalization and free themselves from the oppression of patriarchy. For example, the feminist movement labels are seen as a tool and space for digital feminist activism. She also mentioned that online feminism maybe affected by social media that insists on neoliberalism, which will depoliticize feminism.

In my research, the impact of the three-child policy on empowerment will be divided into two major areas for analysis: the individual-level and the macro-level. Based on the theory from Wyndow et al. (2013), the macro aspect of empowerment has three variables, education, labour and fertility rate, which are also interconnected by each other. The fertility rate is related to the three-child policy. Three variables at the individual level are expressed as three personal factors career ambitions/plans, education ambitions/plans and fertility ambitions/plans respectively. The influences of the three-child policy on these personal factors are studied in my research. Feminism movements and the one-child policy are assumed as other factors that can affect these personal factors. I mainly focus on empowerment at the individual level and measure it by these personal factors. The following chart (Figure 1) illustrates by conceptual framework.

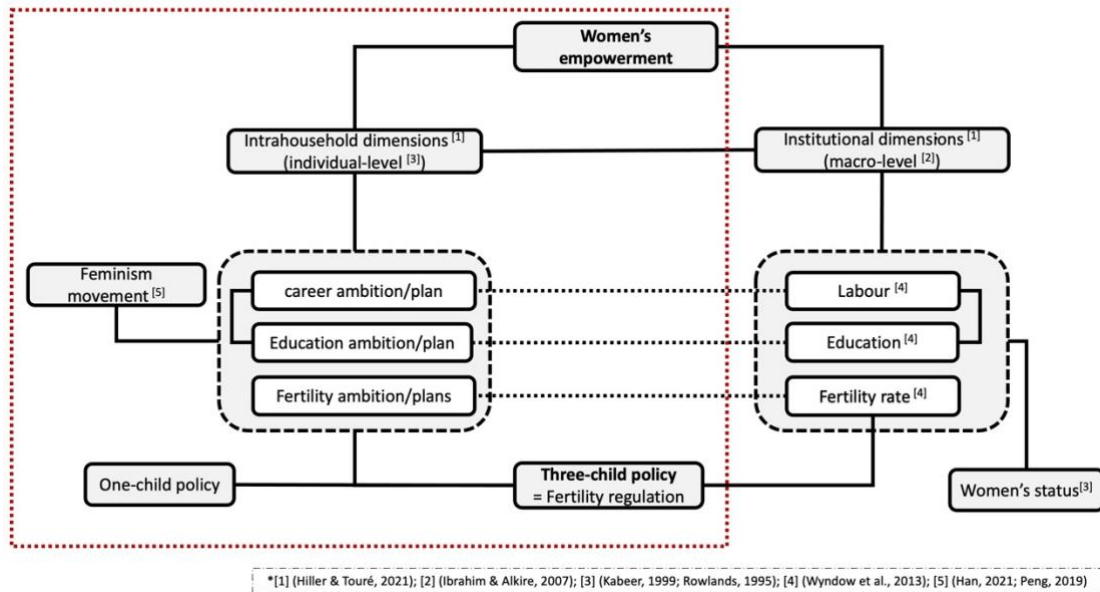


Figure 1: The Theoretical framework

1.4 Methodology

To research the impact of the three-child policy on young women, the target group of my research is women in their twenties. They are now at childbearing age and represent the main target group of the three-child policy. Moreover, they were born when the one-child policy was strictly implemented, and, hence, represent the generation most affected by the family planning policy. My research, therefore, aims to understand whether the one-child policy will affect their attitudes towards the three-child policy. Meanwhile, the women's feminism movement in China is mainly concentrated on the social media, such as Weibo. Young women who often read information on social media are probably more exposed to feminist-related discussions or controversies, regardless of whether they are feminists or not. Besides, because of the covid-19, my interviews should be online. It is easier for me to find young women who meet the research requirements and are willing to be interviewed at the same time.

In addition, I only pay attention to women who have not yet married and have not given birth. I want to control for the factor of marriage and having given birth as I expect them to be of great influence on women's future fertility plans, while I am more interested to get a clear view of other factors.

Besides, I only focus on middle-class women. In China, we use "Xiao Kang" more frequently to represent the middle class. "Xiao Kang", "well-off" in English, refers to being able to earn a living on wages and salaries, having sufficient necessities, but not a particularly wealthy living condition (reference). Women from well-off families have fewer financial constraints, generally can receive higher education, and are more likely

to participate in online discussions. Compared to poor women, they have more opportunities to freely choose their socio-economic status. But compared to wealthy women, they are more likely to be in career-care dilemma, which is also relatively prominent. Moreover, most feminist movements on the Internet are concentrated in this class, and they are more susceptible to feminism.

In short, considering the relevance of the research questions and the feasibility of online interviews, my research object is middle-class women in their twenties who are unmarried and have not given birth.

1.4.1 data-collection and analysis and ethical issues

My research pays more attention to the in-depth research of women's personal experience, to understand the perception, motivation and emotions of individual women, and the connection and resonance between women. Therefore, I adopt a qualitative research method, with unstructured in-depth interviews. Considering Corona and time constraints, this research was not suitable for quantitative research that requires a large sample size, and interviews could only be conducted online. Due to the limitations of online interviews, I used snowballing for approaching the interviewees. The sample was purposively limited to a specific group of women as explained above.

I interviewed a total of 26 people. I contacted 22 people through Chinese social media Weibo. I also asked my friends to find out in a snowball way for 4 people. Unstructured interviews were anonymous and conducted in Chinese. The average time was about an hour.

I sent the consent form to the interviewees before each interview. After the interviewee's consent was obtained, the whole process was recorded on a mobile phone. The original recordings were confidential and could not be accessed by anyone except me and the interviewees.

I used a Chinese software called Feishu to convert the recording into Chinese. The original recording will be completely deleted after this report is completed and will not be kept in the university database. The results of the interviews are kept in the form of Chinese documents and kept in the university's database. I sent the document to the interviewer to check for omissions. I translated two interview recordings for my supervisor to share the content of the interview and check the specific process of the whole interview. After preparing all the recording documents, I started coding.

I set 28 codes based on my research questions. Before the start of coding, I translated the codes into English and checked them with my supervisor. The coding process was all in Chinese and implemented in Excel. I marked the original content with coded serial numbers in the recording document and registered the conclusion in coding table of Excel. When responding the research questions, I searched for the

corresponding code and the responses from all the interviewers in the coding table of Excel. The figures in the chapter 2 were also made using Excel.

The whole data management process including collecting and analysing data were taken by me. My supervisor took the role of checking the data after my analysis and provided some suggestions related to the data. The recordings of interviews were stored in the Voice memos in the phone, upload to iCloud to sharing the same app in iPad. The file of recordings was sent to the laptop. After finishing the analysis, the recordings were deleted. The new recordings were backed up on the same day. All the documents for data management were stored both in the laptop and tablet, which were backed up once a week. I never shared my data with others expect for my supervisor, in line with the confidentiality promises made to my respondents. There are no funder's requirements to share my data, or to impose an embargo. There are no agreements on how the data will be used and shared within my group or with other parties involved in this research. Interviewees were identified by the serial number from 1 to 9 and from 11 to 27. The scheduled Interviewee NO.10 was temporarily quit just before the interview. Personal identifying information of interviewees which collected for data only includes the necessary anonymised ones such as their age, the unmarried, childless, and middle-class backgrounds for identifying the target group with the consent of all interviewees. There is no privacy or security issues during the process of data management.

In the way of doing my research and its results will not harm to third parties, among the people who are directly or indirectly involved in my research, such as contacts and interviewees.

1.4.2 Positionality

Since I belong to one of the target groups, I am enthusiastic about research, and I have a closer connection with the research group. Because the three-child policy was not implemented until the end of May, it is a new research topic. In my opinion, women's opinions have been ignored in the public sphere, even for women's policies. And now the relatively intense discussions on the Chinese Internet have also reduced the opportunities for women to communicate with each other in depth. I want to use my research to tell people what women really think about the three-child policy, and I also want to create an equal, comfortable, and safe opportunity to share and exchange views. But as a member of the research group, I will also be somewhat biased regarding the research topic, because I am a feminist and have no desire to have children, and I personally have a subjectively negative view of the three-child policy. Inevitably, my subjective emotions will affect the neutrality and objectivity of my research. But at the same time, I will pay attention to and reflect on my emotions in my field diary and discussions with my supervisor and make sure my curiosity to learn about others' perspectives prevails just like my respect of other women's choices.

In interviews with the target group, I consciously created a safe speaking environment, set up neutral interview questions, and maintained an open mind, which could help the interviewees freely narrate their views, even if they were different from mine. I wrote a field diary to reflect after interviews, and the reflections were also part of the transcript. Then, I had two transcripts translated and checked by my supervisor. When analysing the results, I wrote carefully and used critical analysis under the guidance of my supervisor.

Chapter 2 Women’s fertility plans

This chapter looks into the fertility plans of women and the factors that influence their plans.

I interviewed a total of 26 people. In terms of the fertility plans, they can be divided into 4 groups as shown by Table 1: women who want to have children (12) and women who do not want to have children (5); women who are unsure but probably do want children (3) and women who are unsure but probably do not want children in the future (6).

Table 1. The classification of interviewees with different fertility plans

NO.	Group Classification	Group Size
1	People who do NOT want to have children	12
2	People who do want to have children	5
3	people who are <i>unsure</i> but probably do NOT want children in the future	6
4	people who are <i>unsure</i> but probably do want children in the future	3

Compared to interviewees who certainly or probably do NOT want children (Green zone in Figure 1), it is notable that a large share of women does certainly or probably do NOT want children (Blue zone in Figure 1). I will look into the reasons and influential factors of women’s fertility plans in the following.

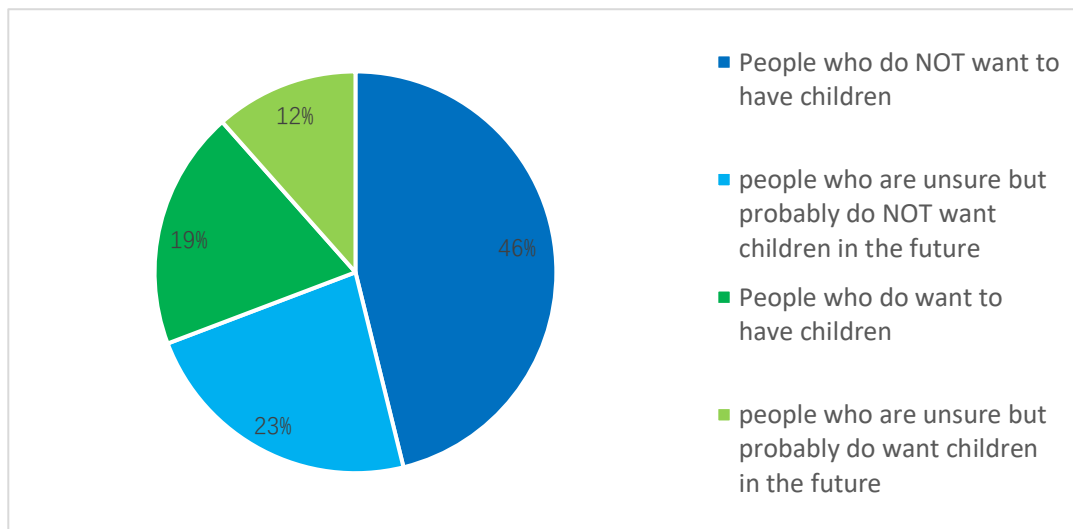


Figure 2. The classification of interviewees with different fertility plans

2.1 The influence factors of women’s fertility plans

There are similarities and differences among the factors which influence women’s fertility plans. I will fist list the influencing factors based on the groups of interviewees

of different fertility plans (Table 1) and then discuss how the effects of the one-child policy and the three-child policy on women's fertility plans.

2.1.1 The personal factors influencing women's fertility plans

2.1.1.1 Women who do not want children

Firstly, 12 interviewees think not to have children in the future. Following them, four factors influenced this decision. The most important factor lies in the experiences in the interviewees' original family. Financial issues, health issues and preference for children are also taken into interviewees' consideration. The three-child policy only indirectly affected their plans.

the most important factor influencing the decision not to have children was the interviewer's original family. There are three main aspects. Firstly, most of them mentioned that they had experienced gender discrimination within their families in terms of preference for sons over daughters. In the traditional Chinese patriarchal system, women are subordinated to their husbands' families after marriage, while only men can inherit the family business and property, which drives a greater preference for men. In this case, ten interviewees described their experiences of being treated differently in the family on the basis of gender. Interviewee 13 mentioned that her parents and relatives give more love to her brother. She said,

“When I go back to my hometown during the Chinese New Year, I can feel that my grandparents and other relatives always pay more attention to my younger brother than me. When I was in elementary school and junior high school, my parents didn't care much about my study and grades, but they would often care about my younger brother, his grades and psychological condition. Because my brother didn't talk much when he was a child, my father suspected he got a certain disease, and took him to the hospital for treatment. My brother might have wet the bed when he was a child. My dad thought it might be abnormal for him to wet the bed at such an old age, so he took him to the hospital. But once I fell down and felt uncomfortable about my waist, they didn't take me to the hospital, which wasn't fair for me. When I was really young, my parents would say I treat you as the same as your brother. What did this sentence mean? It was only when I was in high school that I realized that what they were saying was different from their real action.”

Interviewees 4 and 22, whose fathers wanted sons, were glad that they did not have a brother so that they could use all of the family's resources. Interviewee 04 also mentioned that the neighbour's girl stopped going to school at the end of junior high school possibly because she had a brother. She said, “

My family didn't want children at first, but then my father insisted on having children, and I was born. My mother later got pregnant, but because of the one-child policy, she did the abortion and then found this child was a boy. My father was very angry. My mother got pregnant again and my sister was born. It is said that my sister was fined a lot of money because of her birth... I feel that I am very lucky, because my family is very patriarchal. If my dead brother were really born, I think all the resources in my family would be directed towards him. For example, my neighbour has a son and daughter. Their daughter stopped going to school after graduating from junior high school and seemed to have gone out to make money."

Secondly, some interviewees are not very well cared for in the family, for example, lack of care or even domestic violence, so they choose not to have children for fear that they will treat their children in the same impatient way and will not be able to take responsibility for children's health growth. Interviewee 13 mentions it is unfair that one who is not very well cared for by parents is forced to take on the responsibility of caring for a younger brother, representing that her parents were irresponsible. She said,

"I feel like I wasn't taken seriously by my family when I was a kid. My mom and dad were very busy at work, so they didn't take much care of me and even asked me to take care of my younger brother. It is very irresponsible for them not to take care of their children, and it is even more irresponsible for them to ask one child to take care of another child."

Thirdly, their mothers' lives and experiences served as an example for their lives after having children. Some do not want to have children because they did not want to live a life where their mothers focused all their energy on childcare and completely lost personal time, resulting in a loss of opportunity to focus on self-development. For example, Interviewee 25 said, *"In my family, my mother gave birth to three children. I feel like my mother has always been around us since we were little. It feels like she doesn't even have time of her own... she's trapped in the family... We also often quarrel with her, which could affect her mood... My dad is like invisible in education."*

1. Interviewees mentioned financial issues can influence their decision not to have children. Raising a child is bound to become a burden when financial conditions are not sufficient, because it costs a lot of money. Interviewee 17 said, *"A very bad habit of my mother is that she always tells me how much money she spends on me... The cost of raising a child is really high... I think it is better to live a happier life if I use this money on my own."* Interviewee 19 thinks good material conditions can also help the child's positive development without affecting the original standard of living, such as spending money on hobbies and interests. Interviewee 22 think she has not yet reached the stage of full financial independence, which limits her desire to have children.
2. Some interviewees also mentioned the factor of that they did not like children. Interviewee 01, 02, 04, 08 and 13 all prefer to focus on their own personal

development and want to lead a better and freer life than to spend their energy and money on raising children.

3. Physical factors were also considered. Most of them mentioned that there were some after-effects of childbirth, with the interviewee 04 and 22 mentioning that they were not physically fit to have children. Interviewee 04 said, *“I feel that my body is not very suitable for giving birth. For example, I often suffer from neuralgia and my pelvis is very small, so giving birth will be very difficult.”* The interviewee 01, 17 and 23 mentioned that giving childbirth itself will be a painful experience. Interviewee 01 think giving birth will be very painful and she don't want to experience it. interviewee 23 said, *“Childbirth will cause great harm to women physiologically.”*

In terms of family planning policy, their willingness to have children is mainly based on personal factors and does not take the encouragement of the three-child policy into account. However, the three-child policy can have an indirect impact on women's fertility intentions. For example, some interviewees think the policy makes the current social environment worse for women. Interviewee 23 do not want her children to live in the same bad society and choose not to have children. Besides, interviewee 04 also mentioned that their boyfriend's family would ask them to have three children after marriage, adding to the fertility pressure on her.

2.1.1.2 Women who want to have children

The interviewees who want to have children of the group 2 also considered financial issues; but contrary to the interviewees who did not want to have children, they did not feel that raising children was a burden. They expected the process to be a good experience and a sense of well-being. For example, interviewee 07 felt that raising a child would be meaningful for her, providing an opportunity for her self-improvement while educating the child. Meanwhile, she can also realize her dream of being a teacher if she can have her own child.

She said, *“I think raising a child is very meaningful. It can not only teach children, but also allow myself to learn a long-term lesson. Sometimes when I read some news about the various problems that some parents have in teaching their children, I think that I could do better than them... I really want to be a teacher and focus a lot on education because the teachers I have met since I was a child actually take good care of me... I also really like children.”*

Interviewee 24 also mentioned that having babies will bring something new for her life. She said, *“My life now is to work and make money. I actually feel that one day I will get tired of living this kind of life. I am also a person who likes new things very much. I feel that having a child may give me more different surprises, although there will definitely bring more challenges as well. But I felt that living the same life from now on might be even more unacceptable to me, so I chose to give myself a challenge*

(to have a baby).” She also specifically mentioned childbearing as a way to pass on the love she received from her mother. She said, *“Putting aside all objective factors, I actually think I want to have a baby. I think the reason is very simple. My mother is very good, and she gives me a lot of love, and I think I can pass this love on to my child. That’s it.”*

It is noteworthy that three of the interviewees are the only child in the family and none of them has ever experienced a preference for sons over daughters. But their families transmitted different attitudes on marriage and children. Interviewee 07 was anxious and got pressure from her parents because she was 29 years old when interviewed and her parent had age anxiety for her. Interviewee 14 did not feel pressure from her parents to get married because she was in line with her parents' expectation of wanting her to have children. Interviewee 24 said, *“My parents both think it is all fine whether I have children or not, but they will be happier if I have children.”*

Therefore, if we compare the decision-making process of the women who want children with the women who do not want children, we may conclude that their personal desire to have children and become a mother was most important to them, whereas social or financial pressures mattered less.

2.1.1.3 Women with *unsure* fertility plans

The ten people who are unsure about their fertility plans had no definite conclusion about their childbearing intentions and were in a state of oscillation between wanting to have children and not having children. In general, the factors influencing their desire to have children are complex but are closely linked to the reasons and motives mentioned by the women with or without a wish for children. Personal factors still play a role when they decide whether to have kids or not, such as their attitude to the child, the trade-off between personal development and child-raising, and their preferred role as a mother. Economic factors play a relatively important role. In addition to this, they also consider the partner's wishes and abilities with whom they will raise the child together and whether parents can take the parenting responsibilities. Most people are the only child in the family without having experienced the hurt of son preference.

Specifically, I divided the ten people into two groups, group 3 and group 4, according to those who are more unwilling to have children and those who are more willing to have children.

In group 3 who are unsure but probably do NOT want children in the future, economic factors still play an important role. Most people attach great importance to the responsibility of their partner. For example, interviewee 18 concluded the influence herself.

She said, *“First, what kind of person the child's father is in the family is a very important factor. The second one is the economic situation. How much money the entire family*

can spend on raising this child and what kind of environment we can provide for the child is a very important factor. The third one is about the entire concept of parenting. Are there any conflicts between our own parenting ideas and society's requirements? If we want to raise such a child, how much pressure does it take to fight against this kind of society? Then the fourth one is the influence of social policies and other things."

In addition, Interviewee 05 described her struggling with making the decision of having babies.

She said, "Whether or not to have children is very complicated for me. I'm pretty sure I hate noisy kids. I'm also pretty sure that childbirth can be very painful for women. I can't imagine the undignified feeling of being carried onto the operating table if I was pregnant, not like a human being but being manipulated on the operating table like a piece of meat or a corpse. But at the same time, because of the surrounding environment or the general atmosphere, it makes you feel like, as if you have a child, and you will feel happy...I don't even know.....this is the hormonal influence brought to me by the genes themselves, which is just that when I get older, my body produces the feeling of hormones, or it is the feeling caused by the brainwashing given to me by the acquired environment. I feel like my idea is not really what I think. I feel like I was just influenced. So, I have to say my current state is somewhere in between. I may have a preference to be a mother, but at the same time I don't want to give birth by myself, but I also know that surrogacy can harm others. It's a very complicated and chaotic situation."

In terms of group 4 who are unsure but probably do want children in the future, most people were willing to have children if they met the criteria, such as sufficient financial resources, a reliable partner and parents willing to help raise the child. Exceptional, interviewee 11 said that she resists having children subjectively but possibly will compromise because of the overwhelming family pressure to have children. She said, *"If I have to say, subjectively I am very reluctant to have children. But in reality, I feel that not giving birth is unrealistic. Normally, the boyfriend's parents might want me to have a child. If I strongly say that I am unwilling to have children, my parents may understand, but my boyfriend's parents may not be happy with it."*

2.1.1.4 other common factors which can influence fertility plans

Especially, the impact of childbearing itself on women's bodies and lives was also taken into account by the interviewees. The interviewees who tend to have children think they don't want to take the risks of childbearing, while those who tend not to have children think they can handle the impacts of childbearing.

the interviewees who do not want to have children and who are unsure but probably do NOT want children in the future tend to believe that having a child would affect a woman's life. Childbirth can cause physical damage and after-effects such as stretch marks, urine leakage, haemorrhoids, pregnancy vomiting, etc. Secondly, the demands

of the 'mother' role may cause constraints and pressures on women, among which the idea that fathers spend less time on family responsibility, leaving raising children mainly to women, which grants women less time to spend on other ambitions and desires in their lives.

The interviewees who want to have children and who are unsure but probably do want children in the future tend to believe that the impact of having children on women's lives has to be analysed on a case-by-case basis, such as women's careers, and their educational ambitions for their children. The impact of childbirth on women is reduced by the willingness of parents to share the task of raising children. Interviewee 27 mentions her ability to control herself from being affected by childbirth. And interviewee 24 also mentions that the somewhat matter of childbirth increases the family's resilience to risk, as well as the greater freedom in terms of career development that can be obtained after childbirth.

2.1.2 The influence of the family planning policy

2.1.2.1 The three-child policy

Generally, the three-child policy has an indirect effect on the interviewees' willingness to have children mainly by affecting the above-mentioned personal influence factors on fertility plans and the macro living environment of interviewees. It has no direct effect on switching interviewees' personal decisions on having babies.

The three-child policy can influence the interviewees' original family. Specifically, it can directly influence parents' attitudes and indirectly put more pressure on women to have children. For example, interviewee 03's family explicitly asked her to have three children after marriage, adding much pressure to have children.

Almost all the interviewees agreed that the three-child policy would exacerbate the negative impact on women's lives and career development. On the one hand, the three-child policy could create more intra-family conflicts in their view. They referred among others to married women being required by mother-in-law to have three children, even at advanced age. Older children may have objections to their mothers having more children and may take on the responsibility of caring for the new-born. Differences in parenting attitudes with the parents may also cause conflicts, following the respondents, if the older generation is left to bring up the children. On the other hand, women perceived the chances of being trapped by the responsibility of raising children, taking on more household chores, bringing physical strain and sacrificing their personal career development.

In addition, some expected the three-child policy to exacerbate the inequality between men and women and make the situation more difficult for women. Some do

not want the next generation to live in the same bad situation and choose not to have children, which I will elaborate on in the third sub-question.

2.1.2.2 The one-child policy

In group 1 of interviewees who do not want to have children, seven interviewees felt that the one-child policy had influenced their plans not to have children. Three of the seven interviewees who are the only child in the family, felt that the promotion of 'fewer and better children' during the one-child policy period was meaningful and that they would be more cautious about having children. The remaining four interviewees who had siblings were influenced by the preference for sons in their families during the one-child policy period. Not only did they not receive good care from their parents, but they also had to take care of their younger brother or sister, which made them choose not to have children knowing that they would not be able to be good parents. The remaining five felt that the one-child policy had no impact on their own fertility plans.

All four interviewees in Group 2 who do want to have children felt that the one-child policy had no impact on their own fertility plans. Interviewee 24, on the other hand, believed that the one-child policy would make her willing to have only one child. Because she is an only child herself, she is not sure how it is to live in a multiple-child family.

In Group 3 of interviewees who are unsure but probably do NOT want children in the future, all six interviewees felt that the one-child policy would not be able to influence their own fertility plans. Interviewee 05 mentioned that the one-child policy is a macro-regulation by the state and therefore cannot influence her personal wishes. In contrast, of the remaining three interviewees who felt that the one-child policy had an impact on their own fertility plans, interviewee 09 wanted to have a child with two children to make up for being the only child in her family. Interviewee 12 thought it was bad to have the older child take care of the younger child. Interviewee 21 felt that the policy did not respect women and showed reluctance to have children.

2.2 Conclusion of Chapter 2

Overall, the interviewees' fertility wishes were mainly based on personal willingness and the influencing factors are all personal.

- The original family played the most important role. A happy family experience will promote the interviewer's desire to have children; an unhappy family life will hinder their family planning.
- Simultaneously, the interviewer's love for children is positively correlated with their willingness to have children. The more they like children, the more they tend

to want to have babies. But the interviewer who hated children was reluctant to have children.

- Individual financial levels are also taken into consideration, as raising a child is a financial burden. Economic constraints will reduce the willingness of the interviewees to have children.
- The side effects of childbearing, mainly physical issues and career development are also important. The interviewees refused to have children because they thought their bodies were not fit for them. But on the contrary, a healthy body does not have a significant impact on the interviewer's willingness to have children. Besides, interviewees with strong personal development ambitions were reluctant to have children because it would affect their work.

In terms of the family planning policy, it has only an indirect effect on the interviewees' fertility plans. The three-child policy tends to make interviewees who prefer not having babies, have a stronger desire not to give birth. On the contrast, the effect of the three-child policy on interviewees who prefer having babies is not obvious. The effect of the one-child policy is more based on the interviewee's individual original family, which was influenced and shaped by the one-child policy.

Chapter 3 Women's ambitions

This chapter is about interviewee's ambitions and career plans, the relationship between women's career plans and fertility plans, and the effect of the three-child policy on women's career plans.

In general, all interviewees had some career plans for the future but some were more ambitious than others. Based on ambition and career plans, the interviewees can be divided into two groups, the group with (clear) ambition and the group without (clear) ambition. Five interviewees in the group with ambition have clear plans with determined and optimistic attitudes, while 21 interviewees in the group without ambition have unclear plans with undetermined or pessimistic or indifferent attitudes.

In details, For the 14 interviewees who are currently working, their plans are mainly to change jobs or increase their salary, with a few wanting to go to university again. For the 8 interviewees who are still in education, the majority of them plan to successfully graduate and find a job or continue their education. There were also five interviewees who were still at home in a non-working status after graduation. Most of them, felt anxious and stressed by the desire to not find a job. Overall, most of the interviewees, 81% of the interviewees have no clear ambitions for the future and their plans were short-term, low-challenge, conservative and potentially achievable.

In terms of the relationship between women's career plans and fertility plans, almost all interviewees think that having children negatively influences women's career development. But there are still some differences among the women. Within the group with ambition, interviewees who want to have children think they can overcome the negative effects of having babies on their career development, or they are confident that their career plans will not be dragged by having babies. On the contrast, interviewees who don't want to have babies think they cannot get rid of the negative influences of having babies. They prefer career development instead of having babies.

Within the group without ambition, interviewees who want to have babies tend to sacrifice their career development to having babies. Meanwhile, because they are not ambitious about their future career, they also think having babies makes no difference in their career development. However, interviewees who don't want to have children cannot take over the risks of having babies, so they are unambitious and at the same time, refuse to have children.

Here are two tables presenting the detailed examples of interviewees with different career plans and fertility plans:

Examples	Interviewees With Ambition	
who	Interviewee 24 - Master student - Design related programme	Interviewee 01 - An engineer work in a car company
Fertility plans	She wants to have children, because: - she had the confidence that she could also achieve the balance between life and work, because she witnessed her classmates could balance the life and study.	She does not want to have children, because: - She thinks having babies would affect her career development and she wants to focus on her own life and future development.
Career plans	- After getting the master's degree, she planned to work as a designer for 3 years in America. Then she wanted to work in big city back in China and buy her own house. - She has very firm and positive attitudes towards her plans.	- She wanted to change jobs in another city with higher salaries. Next, she planned to save money and prepare the postgraduate entrance examination at the same time. - She has very firm and positive attitudes towards her plans.

Examples	Interviewees Without Ambition	
who	Interviewee 14 - She graduated with a master's degree, and she tried to find a job.	Interviewee 03 - Work on bidding for company's contracts
Fertility plans	She wants to have children, because: - Having babies will not affect her career plans. - It is not difficult to achieve a balance between having babies and a career.	She does not want to have children, because: - She was personally against having babies. - She thought having babies would definitely affect her career plans.
Career plans	- She wants to find a stable job without many challenges in a big city and then save money and get married. - Her career plans are relatively vague and unsure.	- She planned to change her stable job to work for the government in the future to balance her work and family. - She thought that achieving the opportunity to work for government was difficult because of fierce competition.

In addition, when it comes to the three-child policy, almost all the interviewees felt that it would make their careers more difficult, exacerbating the already serious hiring discrimination and further squeezing women's space in the workplace. Combined with the result in the relation between interviewees' career plans and fertility plans above, in general, the three-child policy is an unimportant issue for interviewees who want to have children while it is play the role of resistance for interviewees who do not want children. Specifically, because the three-child policy makes women's career development more difficult, ambitious interviewees who do not want to have children expect to definitely be affected by it.

The three-child policy has worsened the overall living environment for women, following the ambitious women who do not want children. Ambitious interviewees who want to have children are, however, confident that they can overcome difficulties, so the three-child policy will not affect them. Unambitious interviewees who do not want to have a baby, feel pessimistic towards their future career development. Interviewee 21 mentioned that it is difficult for graduates to find jobs these days and that the job market is very competitive. She has a negative attitude towards her ability to find a job, and the three-child policy exacerbates her fears.

Overall, most of the interviewees are unambitious with unclear plans. It is also shown that all interviewees think there are conflicts between women's career development and having babies. As a result, on one hand, interviewees who choose to have babies tend to have unclear career plans or believe that their career development will not be influenced by having babies. On the other hand, interviewees with clear career plans tend not to have babies. Besides, there is no clear connections between career plans and fertility plans for interviewees who are unambitious and also don't want to have babies. Meanwhile, all interviewees think the three-child policy will have a negative effect on the macro-environment of women's career development and it would have an indirect effect on ambitious interviewees.

Chapter 4 Women's empowerment

This chapter talks about women's current positions in China, the effect of the family planning policy and feminist movements on the women's positions.

4.1 The current position of women in China

Almost all interviewees (25/26) agreed that women are treated unequally in the aspects of family, careers and whole society.

In terms of the family aspects, they see that traditional culture has a huge binding effect on women. Many interviewees (01/04/05/06/13/15/16/18/19/20/22/27) think, under the influence of patriarchal thinking, women who are married are required to take on most of the responsibility of raising children, household chores and taking care of the family, but their labour and dedication is not recognised. This also causes that women were made to lose the confidence to survive on their own, apart from the family. Interviewee 06, 08 and 15 believe women do not have the right to reproduce on their own and by default are expected to carry on the family line for their husbands. Domestic violence against women is also often ignored by society. Interviewee 23 ever witnessed her neighbour hurting his wife and people in their village all thought it was his wife's fault. Within the household, parents are more willing to fight for the future of their sons. If it is a daughter, the parents will not work hard for her future. Interviewee 16 said, traditionally, men should have his own house or apartment for getting married. As a result, parents will work harder to earn more money if they have a son. Men also can get more support than daughter from the family. Interviewee 13 said, *"My cousin failed the college entrance examination and did not retake it, but her brother retook it twice and his parents were willing to pay for it. I guess my cousin also considered that her family might not support her, so she had no choice... Her younger brother failed to pass the exam in the first time but passed the exam in the second time. He went to a more expensive university and his parents also paid a lot of registration fees."*

In the aspects of career, women are subjected to very serious employment discrimination – in industries and within professions. First, there is a lot of gender discrimination within some industries, for example, it is stated outright that women are not hired or there are restrictions on women joining. Interviewee 04 mentioned that she had to be much better than men to get the same opportunities in her field of archaeology. Interviewee 03 also mentioned that her friend's school prefers to recruit male as teachers.

She said, *"The ratio of male to female teachers recruited by their school is 4:1...they provide more jobs for males... (The school) will not write on the official documents how many males and females to recruit. But they will control the admission ratio of men*

and women, because there is an interview at the end (of teacher recruitment) ...It turns out that the interview result can also be finalized by the school..."

Also, there is gender discrimination between the different professions. Interviewee 09 works as a customer service worker in a shopping mall. Most of her colleagues are women. In society customer service careers are also by default more suited to attentive women. Secondly, there is a high level of unequal pay for the same work. Women are paid less and have less room for advancement than men. Interviewees 20 mentioned that women do not have the confidence to ask for the same salary as men. In addition to this, men are more suited to leadership jobs in higher positions by default, while women are suited to stable jobs because they have to take care of their families, leading to the marginalisation of women in the workplace. The term "strong woman" is used to describe a capable woman in the workplace but has been stigmatised in a derogatory way.

In the society, double standards are used when treating women and men. For example, interviewee 09 mentions that she is required to wear formal uniforms at work, as well as sophisticated make-up and a good appearance, whereas men are only required to wear uniforms. There is a prejudice against women who are not married or divorced. Disrespectful behaviour by men towards women is also not taken seriously. Differences based on gender are always used to put down women. Also, there are stereotypes about women. For example, women are expected to be virtuous and gentle; women are not allowed to be angry or challenge authority and become uncontrollable; women do not need to be more educated, they just need to be able to take care of the family.

4.2 the effect of the family planning policy

4.2.1 the effect of the three-child policy

All interviewees agreed that the three-child policy would exacerbate the current situation of gender inequality.

Firstly, the three-child policy will increase the pressure on women to give birth. Interviewee 02, 11 and 15 think that it reduces women to a reproductive tool and traps them in the home.

Interviewee 11 said, "It feels like in the family, they ask woman... keep having children... and some women who love the workplace are forced to become a reproductive tool, and they have to have sons all day long. In this way, of course, the workplace will also be affected. Distracting a lot of energy to give birth to three babies is not what they are willing to do, and it is so tiring."

Taking maternity leave leads to disconnection from society and makes it more difficult for women to return to the workplace, as well as depriving them of promotion opportunities.

Interviewee 01 had a very capable and experienced colleague who was in a leadership position. After pregnancy, the colleague asked for leave for a month due to the bad condition of the fetus. But then, other people in the office wondered if she would lose her leadership position? Will there be another person to fill her job when her job becomes vacant?

Interviewee 08 and interviewee 11 also believe that pregnancy and childbirth, such as maternity check-ups and maternity leave, will affect the working hours and status of working women. If a woman is at a stage where she is going to be promoted, but if she goes to have a baby, then she will lose the promotion position. Interviewee 04 saw that some women gave up the opportunity to study in the museum because of their children, when she did an intern there last year. Interviewee 15 also heard that someone was going to be promoted but was pregnant, so she had no choice but to give up.

Interviewee 18 said, *“In terms of work...everyone defaults to saying that you have a child, so you must lose some of attention in your work. You have to focus on your child. You can't do relatively tiring work, and you won't take too many burdens on you, and your future appreciation space will be smaller. It is a child that will directly change your identity from a person to a mother. Everyone says that being a mother is great, but it is a disguised form. A yoke around a mother's neck is a kind of pressure. It looks like a compliment, but it's actually a prison.”*

Interviewee 21 also said, *“If you work in a private company, (because of having children,) you may be fired, or your promotion in the workplace will be greatly affected... And because you are probably a mother... everyone believes it's not possible to be competent in certain jobs because you have a more important social role and [being a mother] takes up a lot of your energy and time, so you may not have much to give to the company.”*

Secondly, the interviewees expect social discrimination against women in recruitment will become more serious. Specifically, the interviewer's opinions can be divided into two perspectives, from the perspective of the employed and the perspective of the employer.

For the employed side, the three-child policy makes it more difficult for women to find a job. Many interviewees mentioned that after the implement of the three-child policy, companies subconsciously doubt the possibility of women having three children and then reduce the number of women they recruit to avoid those risks (interviewee02/06/19/25).

Interviewee 03 said, *"Before the three-child policy, I worked in another company, and then two months after the three-child policy, because I didn't like that job, I chose to leave. Then I started to re-employ. What impressed me deeply during the company interviews of was that almost every HR would ask me if I had considered when to have a baby, and whether to have a second child or a third child. Some (HR) also asked me if I would take maternity leave completely, and when I want to have babies after getting the job. HR actually put more emphasis on childbirth, because you will definitely miss work when you give birth. So, the three-child policy actually had some impact on my employment, including my current company at the time. After analysing some of my personal situation, even though I said that I would not have three children, the HR still believed that I would have three children, but the reason for her admission was that I was still relatively young, and I would postpone the childbirth for another two years. They could accept this."*

Meanwhile, the work disconnection and cost increase caused by maternity leave will also be taken into account by enterprises. Interviewee16 said, *"My current job position is in the education industry, so it must have a greater demand for women, which may be relatively better. But we also have the same here. For example, after giving birth to a second child and returning from maternity leave, some teachers will be very out of touch with work at this time, because they may not have worked for half a year after all. At the same time, she has to take care of the family, take care of children and so on, and she is already very tired. "*

From the employer side, in order to reduce the cost of paid maternity leave, the enterprise will be more reluctant to recruit women who may have three children. Interviewee 08's occupation is the company's HR.

She said, *"When the policy first came out, I heard something happened from the HR of another company. A woman was just hired, just after the probationary period, then, she immediately said that she was pregnant and wanted to take maternity leave. Because she had passed the probationary period, it would be difficult to ask her to leave the job. As a result, their boss did not want this kind of situation to happen again, so he made it clear to HR that HR should not recruit (women who may appear in similar situations)."*

Interviewee 21 believes, *"(The three-child policy supporting incentives are) to extend maternity leave, but the most important thing is that the overflow of maternity leave directly pushes women to a very unfavourable position in the workplace, because almost all of the costs produced by women who want to take maternity leave, As far as I know, are taken by enterprises. In this way, enterprises will not be very willing to hire female employees."*

Interviewee 19's mother is a civil servant. She said, *"I just have clearly felt that as long as people who want to have children, as long as women who want to have children, they will come to take the civil service exam, because civil servants are relatively stable. If you want to ask for leave, like maternity leave, you will not be subject to any*

performance restrictions. There was such kind of (girls) in my mother's department who had just been admitted after the interview, and then had been pregnant during the civil servant physical examination, and then the girl postponed (of onboarding) for one year. This is legal (of the civil servants' position) in China, which means you can keep the position when you are pregnant, and then you can come back for the position after you have given birth. I feel my mother's attitude that she just doesn't like this kind of thing. I think this kind of phenomenon also shows something on the other hand. Now the company can't guarantee the rights of women who have the desire to have children. So, the three-child policy will definitely be an influence, but it is not an influence on childbirth...It is just a kind of capitalism in the society. "

On the whole, the three-child policy has increased the conflict of interest between employers and employees. Under the background that it is difficult for women to be succeed in the workplace only by themselves, women will choose to rely on men, which further traps women in their families, which is a vicious circle. Interviewee 09 said, *"Because some of the corresponding employment policies and benefits, the care for women may not be in place"*, resulting in the employment of women to bear the risk of childbirth and employment discrimination at the same time. Interviewee 05 said, *"For example, the three-child policy causes a company to increase the cost of hiring women. Because of the higher cost of hiring women, it drove women back to the family. It also caused more women to be dependent on men, relying on marriage to support their own lives."* Interviewee 22 believes, *"I think the policy's purpose is quite obvious. This orientation of the three-child policy will let you return to the family and force you by use various means to have babies, such as the extension of maternity leave. There are some problems, including the normal salary you ask the company to pay during the maternity leave, which the society do not solve. But then this responsibility is thrown by society to the company, and of course the company can only say that they don't know."* In addition, interviewee 15 also expressed her strong concerns. She said, *"I think childbirth has already made it very difficult for women in the family and in the workplace. Then the implementation of the three-child policy must encourage everyone to have three children. Then, the difficulties (of women) are multiplied by three...I think I can't even imagine it before, because I haven't experienced it personally, and now I can only think that my mother raised me, and then she has to take care of his work, which is very... It's not easy. But if this difficulty falls on me, how will I deal with it? No, I can't think of it yet, I can only think that it will be very difficult."*

4.2.2 The different effects of the three-child and one-child policy

Interviewees discussed the differences in the effects of the three-child policy and the one-child policy from two aspects: the role of birth control at the national level and the impact at the individual level.

Interviewers predicted the effectiveness of the three-child policy in increasing fertility. Most of the interviewees think that the effect of the three-child policy will not be obvious. The effect of the three-child policy will vary in different classes, regions, and age groups.

Regarding class, some interviewees (interviewee 5, 8, 16, 22, 24) believe that the rich and the poor will continue to have children because of the three-child policy. Interviewee 08 believes that it is difficult for ordinary working families to afford the cost of raising children, due to the pressure of life, class solidification and the high cost of raising children.

She said, "I don't think (the three-child policy) will be effective. I am a person with a negative view. Because I think the society is really too competitive now. The life of most ordinary people is already difficult. The level of consumption is rising every year, but the rise in wages may not be able to keep up with the rise in housing prices and good prices. Now the involution is so serious. People nowadays may not have their own living standards...or they may still be repaying mortgages, such as car loan and so on. Then if someone is asked to raise a child, he will also invest a lot of money in order to let his own child catch up and be on the same starting line as other people's children. Then the cost of raising the child is getting higher and higher, and everything is getting more and more expensive. I think that if the country's general environment has always been like this, and housing prices cannot be controlled, ...Then this three-child policy is actually not good for ordinary people. It will have too much impact."

Interviewee 22 said, *"The most important thing is that even if it is a woman, she really wants to have a child, but the cost of childbearing is difficult to afford. It is difficult economically and...You don't have the space and no way to let these kids just grow up, similar with my grandma's generation when they had kids. The cost of having a baby is at least a place to live, and a school district, It has already made many people very burdened. Even if many people really want to have babies in this situation, only people at both ends of the barbell can go up, the rich and the poor, will have many children."*

In terms of age, some interviewees think that young people nowadays are not willing to have children, and they guess that people who born in the 1980s and 1970s will respond to three children. Interviewee 02, 04, 11, 13, 16, 19, 24 all mentioned that today's young people, mainly post-90s and post-00s, are unwilling to have children. Both Interviewee 19 and Interviewee 24 said that no one in their social circle wanted to have children. Interviewee 02 said, *"Isn't the current (birth) force the post-90s (to have babies)? What are the post-90s busy doing? (They are) Busy looking for a job, busy supporting themselves... (we) can't afford having a child. (We are) very sober... The saying that the poorer you are, the more you are born is true. You can see that many of us... even ordinary educated children like me will feel afraid of having children. I'm getting more and more sophisticated, and then I feel that men are not good things, and I'm not even sure about getting married in the future, and even having a third child is far away."*

Interviewee 13 analysed the reasons why post-90s are unwilling to have children is education both in school and by internet. She said, "*I think the post-90s and*

post-00s generation will have a higher level of education than the previous generation. Although there are also uneducated people, there may be fewer uneducated people than before. There will be more well-educated people. There will definitely be more people who don't want to have children than before. Because the information is not as closed as it used to be. For example, everyone only knows about giving birth but not how children are born. You can find videos, whether it's a natural birth or a caesarean section. You can also find all the sequelae after giving birth, and there will be many public accounts to popularize this kind of things for you. Many self-media will also tell you what kind of risk is there in childbirth. Many people will know what risk they have to face and whether they can bear it. It depends on themselves. Knowing is much better. If you have the right to know in advance, you can choose not to have babies."

On the contrary, the people who will respond to the third child are from the previous generation, such as those born in the 70s and 80s. interviewee 04 said that her aunt born in the 1980s had several children. "*She is still relatively young now and married a boy with better life conditions than her. She has become a full-time wife and has nothing to do at home, so she hopes to have a few more children. Because her husband is also busy with work and has little time accompanying her, she is planning to have a fourth child, because residents in urban villages can also have four children.*" interviewee13 believes that the reason is that some people "*are not very educated, or they have been brainwashed too much by the people around them.*" She believes that feudal thinking has a certain influence. She said, "*Looking at everyone's living environment, in some places you are oppressing, you may be thought that I should be married and should have children... It is the ideological problem that is more important, and some women feel that they will give birth if other people ask her.*"

As far as regions are concerned, some interviewees think the three-child policy may work in underdeveloped areas or rural areas, but raising the fertility rate in developed large cities will not be effective.

Interviewee 06 said, "*many rural families' childbearing mode is that they can raise children only with dishes and chopsticks for food...I think for such families, the three-child policy is good news for them. And I don't think it will have a great impact on families in cities, for example: families who have to repay urban mortgages and have already struggled to survive, and the middle-class families which is moderate rich but still cannot afford to have one more child. I personally feel that (these urban families) will not be so stupid as to abandon their current life to have three children...and it doesn't matter much to those who are very rich and who don't care how much extra birth fines are paid. I think the three-child policy can work in those rural counties where they are more concerned about having male babies. Their cost of raising children is not too high, so that they will still have more children.*" interviewee25 also has a similar idea. She said, "*I think the effect of the three-child policy should be divided into two*

parts. On the one hand, the policy may not be very successful in developed cities. But if it is in an underdeveloped or rural area, the residents' thinking is more feudal, then there will still be more children."

Some interviewees also believe that the reason for the low birth rate is not closely related to the family planning policy, so they cannot predict the effectiveness of the three-child policy. Limiting the number of children is not the main cause of low fertility. The three-child policy will not solve the problem. Interviewee 1, 9, 21 believes that childbearing is only related to individual wishes, and policies cannot interfere it. Interviewee 21 commented, *"I said that the second child is useless, and the third child will not be useful, because it can be understood that people do not want to have two, so do you think they will have three...The three-child policy is now going to be implemented, which cannot hit the point and won't help."*

Interviewee 17 believes that to increase the fertility rate, it is important to take relevant supporting measures to improve people's living pressure. She said, *"Aging is a global trend, such as in many European, American, North American and Nordic countries are in the Puli region, where is no birth restriction. But people who are unwilling to have children still choose not to have children. Releasing the limitation of policy is useless... If the government really want to increase the fertility rate, actually, the willingness of the people is more important. but their willingness must be increased by improving their life pressure in various aspects. I don't think the three-child policy will be effective because it cannot increase people's willingness to have children."* Interviewee 06 does not believe in the three-child policy and holds a similar view to interviewee 17. She said, *"I think this (three-child) policy does not pay attention to the most important issues...such as women's employment including fertility subsidies...In the absence of these supporting policies, the government is going to implement such a policy alone, I don't think it's a good thing."* In addition, Interviewee 05 believes that there is something wrong with the social structure. Ordinary people can hardly live a good life even if they work hard, so it is difficult to have children.

She said, *"Our country's industry has not been upgraded, and there are not many seats (of good jobs) in our country. Now it is not about whoever to get a master or doctor degrees to improve his competitiveness, but whoever occupies the seat (of good jobs) first has already won. Then at this time, the post-00s will start to enter the society. I think when the real life and salary are too different from their imagination, logically speaking, (young people) should not think about having children anymore, because it will feel very painful. But I found other ways... Unplanned pregnancies will increase, because some people are very stressed, so they will downgrade all the thresholds such as happiness and excitement. What's at the bottom? It's appetite and sexual desire. I think unintended births will increase, that is the number of unwanted children will increase."*

In addition, some interviewees specifically mentioned the female perspective. They hold sceptical attitudes about the effectiveness of the three-child policy, as they

believe that with the awakening of more women, the young's thoughts will begin to change, and will have less desire to get married and have children. Interviewee 14 believes that having children and the number of children should be freely decided by women's personal wishes and should not be affected by policies and families. interviewee 19 feels that the general self-awareness of women today is stronger than that of the previous generation. Interviewee 18, 20, and 26 all mentioned the issue of women's living environment.

Interviewee 18 said, *"Our new generation's attitude is that women with education may not want to enter the family immediately and have many children. There may be more and more people receiving education in the future. Feudal people, on the contrary, will become less and less. This is a process of transformation of thought. If we do not completely solve the idea that women are treated unequally, and the whole social status is harsh on women, I think this kind of fertility problem will have always existed."* interviewee 20 believes that the marriage rate is decreasing every year when the living environment for women is so cruel. Then a woman will not choose to get married, and of course she will not choose to have children. She also said, *"So I think if the three-child policy may work, the reason why it works is that the living environment of women has deteriorated because of the existence of the three-child policy."*

On the contrary, two interviewees, interviewee 15 and interviewee 23, think that the three-child policy may be effective. They all mentioned the possibility of policy enforcement. Interviewee 15 said, *"I think (the three-child policy) will not be as successful as the one-child policy. Because if the government don't allow women to give birth, then it (can) force women to abort. But if they want to enforce the birth... so what else to do? At most, it is not allowed to have an abortion when pregnant by accident... But if faced with such a situation, everyone will definitely be more cautious about pregnancy. So, I think that since the three-child policy encourages people so strongly, It will still be effective to a certain extent. But I think it will not be as effective as the one-child policy."*

Interviewee 23 said, *"You know that family planning back then, in fact, not many people thought it would really be implemented in a forceful way, but it really was. I actually think that if the country really wants to do something, it might really be able to do it. For example, no one thought that the current domestic epidemic prevention policy has become so serious, which has become such a trouble for most of the trips. The government can do what it wants to do. It may really be heading towards a result that we don't really want to see, but the country wants to see. "*

In summary, the interviewees believe that the three-child policy may not be as strong and effective as the one-child policy in controlling the birth rate.

From the individual perspective, interviewees' attitudes toward the family planning policy are complex. They described the similarities and differences between the three-child policy and the one-child policy from several aspects.

First, some interviewees believe that the three-child policy will continue to deprive women of the one-child policy.

From the perspective of women, some interviewees believe the one-child policy and the three-child policy do deprive women of their human rights. Interviewee 05 and interviewee 13 felt that the family planning policy used women as tools. Interviewee 21 believes that the birth policy is one kind of trampling on women.

Interviewee 02 expressed her dissatisfaction, *"To sum it up, women have not been treated as human beings. I don't think women own their rights of living... I know they (the government) want to solve an aging problem for the development of the country, but there is no way for me to agree with this matter, because they have not solved other problems. If they partially improve women's treatment and women's happiness, and then introduce the three-child policy at the same time, saying that we will have more safety precautions... That's how I can still understand... But now, the government just start push people to have three children without doing anything else..."*

Interviewee 24 also feels that the policy seems to treat women as resources. She said, *"Including a relatively basic anger on the Internet, we feel that women's fertility is regarded as a resource...I cannot give birth when you don't let me give birth, and I should give birth if you let me give birth...This is the same as no right to abortion in the United States. Our bodies are not under our own (control). The three-child policy is not just about liberalizing restrictions, but also a variety of encouraging policies. So, what is the essence of encouraging a small number of people? Its essence is to punish other people. Then I think this policy is actually unreasonable in essence..."*

Interviewee 20 said angrily, *"When I was young, I experienced and witnessed the relatively strict impact of the so-called one-child policy on the people around me. Then the three-child policy made me feel that those women who were dragged away (to do the abortion or upper birth control ring) before... what are they? Are they just a livestock that gives birth to a child?"* interviewee 23 said, *"The change from the one-child policy to the three-child policy only makes me feel like a woman is a living womb...the country limit you to have one, and you can only have one; The country wants you to have three children, so you should try your best to have three."*

Moreover, some interviewees mentioned that patriarchal thinking is the root cause of women's oppression and the disappearance of female babies, playing a cruel role in the family planning policy. Interviewee 06 said that since the two-child policy was introduced, *"many friends and classmates around me basically have a younger brother with a relatively large age difference. There are also younger sisters, but most of the second child are male."* Interviewee 13 thinks that patriarchal thinking It has led to people's preference for boys, which has caused tragedies.

She said, *"I think we have to ingrain the idea of equality between men and women before starting this kind of birth policy, as many people still don't accept this idea that it doesn't matter whether it's the same to have a boy or a girl...otherwise the three-*

child policy will just give opportunity for some people whose first child and second child are girls to try another birth for a boy. Now the hospital (in the mainland of China) does not allow to check the (baby) gender, and there will be many people go to Hong Kong to check...and then decide whether to keep the child or not?... Anyway, women are very unlucky. If it is not a boy, then the family of husband will ask the women to do the abortion, which is another burden on the women's body...very terrible."

Interviewee 14 disagreed with the effect of the one-child policy on reducing the birth rate. She doesn't think fewer children are being born, they're just disappearing, given the phenomenon of abandonment and trafficking of female babies. She said, "*I personally think that it is very unwise to do so (during the one-child policy period). I personally think that the policy has not actually stopped the family with extra children.... At that time, only one child was allowed, and I felt, the effect of the policy is counterproductive, causing the baby girl to be abandoned, and the phenomenon of trafficking has increased. I know that some families in the rural area just want to fulfil the birth quota of the boy, and then worry about fines, they sent female babies to other people's homes to be raised or just abandon them. I know that many European and American countries adopt girls, and Chinese girls are all such abandoned as baby girls. Actually, I know a girl with from China in the Netherlands, who was adopted by Dutch from Wuhan, China. There are quite a lot of adopted girls in Europe and the United States. I feel that the one-child policy has no real effect on reducing the birth rate. And it's very unwise."*

Second, interviewees believed that the change from the one-child policy to the three-child policy demonstrated the limitations of the family planning policy. Some interviewees lose their trust in the family planning policy and have resisting emotions. Interviewee 01, 06, 18, 23, and 25 all believed that the three-child policy was the result of too strict control of the one-child policy, and it was an act of patching the one-child policy. Fertility policymakers have no vision and only focus on solving immediate problems.

Interviewee 06 said, "*In my opinion, the three-child policy is an act to patch up the one-child policy. Because the span of the one-child policy is too large, it directly caused a population gap, and the three-child policy have to solve the population problems. But we all know that population growth also takes time. I think that if the three-child policy is only to achieve the purpose of population growth... It maybe causes more negative effects. I just mentioned a lot of its negative effects, such as female employment... of course, in the eyes of our national policy makers, they will not think of female employment."*

Interviewee 25 also said, "*I think the time span of the one-child policy is a bit long... The decision-making did not take into account the period from later to now, which led to problems...the interval between the second child and the third child is only a few years...I think the family planning policy is a bit focused on the present and does not take into account the long-term."* Interviewee 23 mentioned, "*Besides, I haven't seen*

the any compensation or apology for people who experienced bad things during the first-child policy... Some people in my village also joke that the change of the one-child policy to the three-child policy is annoying, fickle, and terrifying."

In particular, some interviewees (Interviewee 5, 24, 26) mentioned the implementation during the one-child policy showed the bureaucratic problems of the government.

Interviewee 24 said, *"(The childbirth policy shows) a problem with China's political system and a cultural gene of its citizens. (For example), during the one-child policy, there was an event that children were not allowed to be born in 100 days within one county. Essentially, the policy should be a thought-through policy to face population and aging issues. But various problems arose during its implementation."* Interviewee 26 also said, *"There is no problem with this policy itself, but in the process of uploading and distributing it, it caused a lot of misunderstandings. What do the leaders think?...The grassroots personnel were limited by their work or their vision. Limited by the amount of knowledge, they misunderstood the leadership's thinking."*

At the same time, some interviewees (05,06,15,21,22) mentioned the mandatory measures during the one-child policy period and worried whether they would reappear during the three-child policy. Interviewee 05 is worried about whether the three-child policy will force communist party members who work for the government to respond to the call of the state to have three children. Interviewee 06 said, *"Like the government could do forced abortions and forced abortions (during the one-child policy) ... I think it violated human rights. If the government can still do forced mating and forced births, I think it really no different from a concentration camp."* Interviewee 15 was scared because of the one-child policy. She said, *"It makes me feel like the government can do everything, but I'm still a little scared. Sometimes you don't have a choice, and it's just encouragement on the surface, but in fact it's more or less coercive."* Interviewee 22 also felt fear. She said, *"Whether it's one-child policy or three, the policy is a kind of planning... planning that you can only have one child and planning that you have to have three children... In the past they could make a nine-month pregnant woman abort ...When the birth rate is really exaggerated in the future, I can't imagine what they would do... Maybe they will really use any means.... This kind of plan...is an anti-humanity, especially bad, and people have no way to accept it. Maybe the population problem is really serious or something, but must it be done to this level? I think it's scary."*

In addition, some interviewees think that the birth policy is unfair, causing the exploitation of some groups. Interviewee 08 mentioned that the birth control policy sacrifices the interests of some people to maintain the development of the country. Interviewee 03 mentioned that the country's promise during the one-child policy was not fulfilled, which made her lose trust. She said, *"I am the only child in the family. At that time, my mother was taken by the Residential Committee to put on a birth control ring after giving birth to me, and then awarded us an honorary certificate of only child."*

The one-child policy at that time promised that the pension problem for the parents of the only child would be solved by the government in the future, but the current situation is impossible... So, I think the birth policy is similar with painting a cake for the hunger... I don't think it can affect me, and I also do not trust the birth policy."

On the contrary, some interviewees think that the one-child policy also has positive meanings, such as making many families with one child. From this perspective, the three-child policy will have different effects.

First, some interviewees believed that the one-child policy led to the one-child phenomenon, so that each family has only one child, increasing the competitiveness of children. Interviewee 04 believes that people who are the only child in the family would not choose to have three children. She said, *"You think, all the resources of the whole family belong to the only one child, who can be well nurtured. But if there are three children in the family at once, then the family resources will have to be divided into three... I think that most people who have enjoyed the convenience or advantage of the one-child policy should focus more on concentrating resources and improving their children's competitiveness and are less likely to divide resources into three for three children."*

Interviewee 05 is the only child in her family. She said, *"Because of the one-child policy, some women have enjoyed the resources which is usually enjoyed by a boy in a traditional family... because of the one-child policy, I feel that my personality may be the same as boys who are the only child in their family. Except that I am a female, I am no different from those men in other respects, I am also very arrogant and even a little conceited, and I also enjoy all the resources of the whole family."* Interviewee 06 also has a similar point of view. She said, *"I can be considered as the person who has enjoyed the benefits of the one-child policy... No matter how many children per family, the value it can create, its productivity and its economic conditions are fixed...I think such a policy is a supervision and a reminder. For example, if my family have two children, I have less family support than other people who are the only child in their family, then will our competitiveness be less than theirs?"* Interviewee 16 said that because of the one-child policy, although her father and grandfather had patriarchal ideas, she did not suffer much discrimination.

Second, some interviewees believe that the current social environment is different from that of the one-child policy period due to the increasing pressure of modern society. The three-child policy will also have different effects. Interviewee 12 believes that the publicity during the one-child policy period is deeply rooted in the hearts of the people, coupled with the increasing social pressure, which makes it difficult for people to respond to the three-child policy.

Interviewee 16 also said, *"The government's three-child policy itself is encouraging, but it has increased the burden to a certain extent. On the one hand, people in our generation who are only children themselves have to support both parents... if they have to raise three children at the same time... they also pay social insurance and*

personal taxes...That policy disproportionately squeezes the generation of the middle-aged and the young...I personally think so. So according to this level, I think the most tiring will be the middle class of society... the three-child policy just squeezes the middle class of society in order to solve the aging population. So It makes me feel that the three-child policy itself is actually very disguised. I think it is not as good as the one-child policy."

In particular, although some interviewees expressed concern about the mandatory measures that would be conducted in the three-child policy, interviewee 07 believes that the three-child policy is only a signal to encourage births, and it is a guide, and there will be no such inhumane practices as before during the one-child policy.

In general, from the perspective of fertility rate, most interviewees guessed that the three-child policy would not be as effective as the one-child policy in controlling the birth rate, because they believed that the effect of three-child policy would differ in different classes, regions, and age groups. However, there are also a small number of interviewees who think that if the compulsory measures of the one-child policy are adopted during the three-child policy period, the three-child policy may be effective.

From the individual aspect, most interviewees think the three-child policy will continue to deprive women of human rights and the middle class as the same as the one-child policy period, reflecting the limitations of the one-child policy and the bureaucratic problems of the government. On the contrary, some interviewees believe that the three-child policy encourages people to have three children, which will reduce the competitiveness of children, which is different from the one-child policy under the one-child policy. At the same time, because the current society is different from that during the one-child policy and people are under increasing pressure to survive, some interviewees speculate that the three-child policy will also have different effects from the one-child policy.

4.3 the effect of the feminist movements

In terms of fertility plans, half of the interviewees think that their fertility plans are influenced by feminist discussions online. These interviewees also mentioned the influence on their marriage decision and believed that the feminist discussion makes them break free from the shackles of traditional thinking on women's marriage and childbearing, gaining the courage to choose freely, liberating their minds. Interviewee 01 said that witnessing a 40-year-old woman who does not have babies sharing her happy life online, she was inspired and strengthened her decision not to have children. Interviewee 24 also said that the life of single women in big cities on the Internet provided her with a new vision, making her think more carefully about what she really wants to live. Interviewees 02, 06, 08 and 21 thought that getting married and having children was something women should do under the influence of the surrounding environment, but the feminist discussion made them rethink it and then they can make decisions according to their own wishes.

Interviewee 06 said, *"When I was in high school, I was a person who had a longing for marriage... I thought there would be a sweet love... At that time, I didn't realize the essence of so-called marriage at all. But now I see a lot of discussions like marriage may be very unfair to women... there is no guarantee, so I will be more cautious now, and I will have a little resistance on marriage, or this is not something I should think about now."* Interviewee 21 said, *"I may still feel the pressure of other people urging me to get married and have babies. For example, when I was young, everyone said that I would find a better boy (to get married) in the future. At that time, I actually didn't feel anything in my heart, maybe I thought it was good. Now, I feel that it's impossible for me to get married, because there are no good men. Meanwhile, I feel that it's okay to live independently. This kind of future life seems to be good."* Both interviewees 15 and 19 thought it was normal to sacrifice self-development for the family, but now they are rethinking. Interviewee 15 said, *"If I followed theoretical (traditional) values I accepted since I was a child, I might think that I would sacrifice my own development for my family, because everyone does this, because everyone says it is normal and good. But Now I don't want to follow that. I will not sacrifice myself for the family, never."* Interviewee 20 said that she used to feel Frightened towards having babies, feminist discussions made her understand where her fears were coming from. However, interviewee 11 also mentioned that the discussion made her realize that having children is not a good thing, and she worried that her daughter would encounter bad things in the future.

On the contrary, the other half of the interviewees who think that family planning has not been affected by feminist discussions think that childbearing is completely determined by their personal wishes (Interviewee 04, 05, 09, 13 and 27). Meanwhile, Interviewee 16, 23, 26 and 27 think their personality is not easily influenced by Internet discussions.

As far as career plans are concerned, half of the interviewees believe that their career planning has been influenced by feminist discussions. This part of the interviewees felt that they were motivated by the feminist discussion, which made them freer to make career-related choices. Interviewee 01 believes that the feminist discussion has relieved her age anxiety, and she is ready to resign and want to get the master's degree. She said, *"I was afraid that it would be difficult for me to find a job when I am 27 or 28 years old (after getting the master's degree), but some people also said (online) that if you don't study and just start working now, you will become 27 or 28 years old and face the same age problem as well. Then I think I am free to choose to study, there will be no difference, no impact."* Interviewee 07 thinks that those online discussions made her think clearly that she wants to live easily without pressure. She said, *"Even though the work is very tiring now, I am very happy to be the deputy section chief. Sometimes my dad still thinks to let me see if I can get promoted and work harder. I feel that at my current job I'm exhausted... It's easier for me to think more openly, maybe in this aspect, (the online discussion) has a little impact on career planning, and I don't have such a big ambition."* Interviewee 17 thinks that the feminist discussion encouraged her to continue learning chemistry which has heavy prejudice against girls. Both interviewees

02 and 13 said that after participating in women's rights discussions, they were more willing to choose to work in places with more women. However, Interviewee 21 felt that the difficulty of finding a job for women, which was revealed in the feminist discussion, affected her mood. She said, *"Because the social reality of inequality may make me get a bad mood when I try to find jobs... it is very difficult for girls to find a job. I submitted my resume a lot, but I didn't get any response (from any company)."*

In contrast, the other half of respondents who believed that career planning was not influenced by feminist discussions had some reasons. Interviewee 04 believes that, although she knows that the industry, she works for is misogynistic, she cannot easily change careers, nor can she change the status quo of the industry. Interviewee 14 said that she had not felt any inequality between men and women in the process of job hunting. Interviewee 23 said her career plan was a personal choice to escape her father's grasp.

Aside from fertility and career, most respondents felt that online feminist discussions had an impact on them on a personal level. This part of the interviewees think that the feminist discussion made them gradually realize that they are independent individuals, leading them to continue to learn and think about the meaning of the feminist discussion and keep reflecting on the inequalities in the society that they did not notice before (interviewee 02, 08, 11, 13, 20, 22 and 27). They also got a sense of responsibility to speak out for women's rights and become more courageous (interviewee 18).

Interviewee 02 said, *"I don't want to be silent. I don't want to be the one who is silent, and I don't want to continue to be silent under the general environment."* Interviewee 03 said, *"I was a bit resigned to my fate before, because I am not the only one who feels that I am not treated equally... Everyone came here like this... And I felt at the time that I couldn't change the status quo... Then I could only accept the status quo. But gradually, I later felt that if I accepted this idea, I think it would be very bad for women who are about to enter society. Maybe the boss thinks that women should be submissive, and I also perform as a submissive woman, and they possibly will also ask newcomers the same who enter the workplace in the future. I think I should express my feelings first and not let other people leave a so-called stereotype."*

Interviewee 13 said, *"I will feel that I am an independent individual, and I have the same human rights... I don't need to fully obey my parents My opinion and my life revolves around me, not around anyone in my family... I will not fully listen to my parents and do what they want me to do."* Interviewee 18 said, *"I used to have a little bit of my own opinions, and then because I saw more people had the same views as me, I was more courageous, and I felt that I could do what I wanted to do. It was because of these discussions and the voices that made me feel that I am not alone, which makes me feel that I have the courage to insist on being myself."* However, some interviewees also mentioned that online feminist discussions having negative impacts on their emotions, and even caused conflicts with others. Specifically, interviewees 05,

15, and 23 all said that some society news mentioned in the discussion made them feel anxious and scared, afraid of being similarly hurt. Both Interviewee 09 and 12 mentioned that after participating in or observing discussions, their mood swings became more severe, and they even got angry and argued with their boyfriends. Interviewee 19 mentioned the experience of breaking up with friends because they had different views on one news of online discussions. Interviewee 25 said that, when she opened social platforms and saw related discussions, she felt more pressure. For a while, she avoided reading related news.

On the contrary, there are also a small number of respondents who think that they have not been affected by the feminist discussion. Except that interviewees 16 and 26 think that their thoughts are difficult to be easily changed by online discussion, interviewee 17 avoids participating in the discussion for self-protection. She said, "*On the Internet, as well as in reality, you will also realize that discussing these issues with some people is fruitless, out of self-consideration, and out of self-protection. And I also think it is important that you need to protect your mental health, and don't get too involved in this kind of discussion, especially for individuals, after you realize that it has had a great impact on your health and your psychology. So, I have been avoiding this kind of discussion, just look at it.*"

In general, the feminist discussion liberated some interviewees from the shackles of traditional thinking, aroused their thinking, and allowed them to freely choose the life they wanted. But at the same time, discussions on women's rights also increased the psychological pressure of some interviewees and caused some emotional problems.

4.4 Conclusion of Chapter 4

Overall, almost all interviewees think women in China are facing unfair treatment in the aspects of family, career development and macro-environment level. For what regards the aspect of family, the interviewees think women are trapped by the traditional thoughts, which require women to take more responsibilities of household works and boring children. In career development aspect, interviewees mentioned the discrimination both in gender and industry. At the macro level, interviewees noticed there are two standards for women and men and many women struggle with the stereotypes, which prevent women from being themselves.

All interviewees think the three-child policy will aggravate the severity of current women's position in China. On one hand, interviewees think the three-child policy will increase women's pressure of having babies. On the other hand, the interviewees mentioned the three-child policy increased the contradiction between employers and employees, being a stumbling block for women's career development. Compared with the one-child policy, interviewees believed that the three-child policy will not be so effective in controlling fertility rates but will continue the deprivation of women during the one-child policy, which can prove the limitations of the family planning policy.

When it comes to the feminism movements online, feminist discussions enabled some interviewees to discover new options outside of traditional thinking and liberated their minds. But some interviewees also mentioned that excessive participation in feminist discussions can also bring stress and negative emotions.

Chapter 5 Discussion and Conclusion

This thesis seeks to understand how young women in China make up their minds about having children and investing in a professional career against the background of the new Three Child Policy the Chinese government recently implemented and checking for the effect of the online activism of the Chinese feminist movement. Interviewing 26 women online provided insight in which considerations women make when weighing having children against investing in a professional career and shed light on the factors impacting their decision.

My research reveals that personal wishes play the most important role in the interviewee's fertility plans. There are four personal factors in details that are taken into consideration by interviewees. First, the original family is the main factor. Happy family experiences can increase the interviewees desire to have children, and the unhappy ones can be opposite. The second factor is the interviewees' love for children, which is positively correlated with interviewees' willingness to have children. The third factor is individual financial levels. Economic constraints will reduce the willingness of the interviewees to have children. The last factor is the side effects of childbearing, such as personal physical issues and career development.

It becomes also clear that the family planning policy has only a limited and indirect impact on interviewees' fertility plans. It directly arises the traditional parents' desire to push the young women to have babies, which increasing the pressure put on young women. Similar observations have been made by Hardee, Xie and Gue (2004) who showed that women in rural area feel pushed by the family planning policy to have (more) babies, because of the traditional preference for having sons. The three-child policy tends to further decrease the desire of interviewees who prefer not having babies, while its effect on interviewees who prefer having babies is not obvious, which is consistent with the findings from Fakude (2021) and Lindeberg (2021). We may, hence, conclude that governmental policy mainly affected the interviewee's family, which often had experienced the impact of the prior one-child policy.

In terms of career plans, all interviewees experience women's careers as being in conflict with having babies. Therefore, interviewees who want to have children, tend to either sacrifice their career development or to be determined to counteract the negative influence of having babies on their career. All interviewees think that The three-child policy will have a negative effect on the macro-environment of women's career development, ; as such it directly affects the ambitious interviewees. These findings also can be supported by Kennedy (2021), Lindberg (2021), Yeung and George (2021) who found that women's workspace will be squeezed by the three-child policy and women have to make trade-offs between work and having babies.

What should be paid attention to is that almost all interviewees think women in China are unfairly treated by the government, with regard to family policies, career

development and the development of society at large. They also believe that the three-child policy will further undermine women's position in China. Interviewees also expected that the three-child policy will not be as effective in controlling fertility rates as the one-child policy; it will, however, continue to deprive women of their right to equality as already started during the one-child policy. The online activism of the feminist movement inspired some interviewees who felt encouraged to think independently, while also causing stress and negative emotions.

My research aimed to understand women's lived reality and feelings about the government's fertility policy. In doing so, it provides a new perspective and important new insight into the three-child policy's effect that so far has mainly been studied based on quantitative data and in a restricted geographical area.

However, my research has also some limitations, partly due to COVID and partly due to the limited time available for a MSc thesis. First, the sample of interviewees is rather small, with 26 people in total. Secondly, the interviews were mainly gathered online in one Chinese social media where feminism was a popular issue for discussion. This probably resulted in the inclusion of critical voices. Thirdly, the interviews were related to a sensitive Chinese subject of the family planning policy and were conducted online because of COVID-19. It is difficult to develop a relationship of trust between the interviewee and me. It took effort for me to lead the interviewees to discuss this topic in depth behind the screen in some cases. However, many interviewees appreciated that there was a safe space for them to talk openly. For what regards my positionality, it is important to recognise that I am part of the target group of my research; I am also a feminist and have no desire to have children. Moreover, personally, I have a negative view of the three-child policy. However, during the analysis of the results, I focused on my own emotions, analysed the underlying critical reasons, used myself as a member of the target group and then increased my multi-dimensional perspectives under the guidance of my supervisor.

Based on the results of the research, it is clear that the three-child policy has not only failed to produce an effective promotion of childbearing among unmarried and infertile women at their optimal reproductive age but has also further reduced women's level of empowerment and, indirectly, their willingness to have children. Young women are facing problems in balancing their personal life and career development. All the risks and side effects of having babies have to be taken by themselves, without public assistance. Young women are asked to take the responsibility to have babies, and some of them just feel to be seen as child-bearers only, instead of a human being. Based on the attitudes reflected by the interviewees, young women feel unsafe and unfair when talking about having babies. However, these facts are ignored by the public. If the government wants to increase the effect of the three-child policy, more actions should be taken to improve the serious situation that women are facing. It would be better if the policymakers could take the true requirements of women into consideration, such as improving the employment environment for women and promoting fair treatment for both women and men. For

example, the government can promote the awareness of mothers and fathers to share responsibility for childcare. The same child leave standards should be implemented for all employees, women and men and supported by law. The government can also give extra subsidies for companies, which not only can decrease the financial loss of companies but also encourage the willingness of companies to put it in effect.

For future research, I would suggest that the analysis of the three-child policy could start with a more segmented group, such as the difference in views between women from multiple or sole birth families of origin, or between women living in urban areas and those living in rural areas. It would also be interesting to figure out the detailed process of how the three-child policy influences the macro-environment of women's living conditions.

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