

Women's Status, Family Decision Making, and Childbearing in Jiangsu, China

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Extended abstract

Background

China has experienced an obvious fertility drop since the 1990s. Researches showed that social-economic growth played a more significant role than birth control policy in the process (Chen, 2005; Li, 2004). Analysis by Cai (2008) found that economic indicators are significantly related to total fertility rates in counties of Jiangsu and Zhejiang. However, there is a lack of analysis on the relationship between women's status and fertility, which has been believed closely related, especially in fertility drop during a demographic transition. For example, gender equity and women development index is found closely related to TFR and natural increase rate in Jiangsu Province, with a correlation coefficient of -0.68. This paper will take a close look at the relationship between women's status, women's role in family decision making, and their childbearing opinions and intentions, by using a survey data from Jiangsu Province, which has a population of 74.68 million.

Research Methods and Data Source

According to the negative relationship between fertility rates and women development index in Jiangsu Province, I hypothesized that a woman would be clearer on her childbearing decision in consider of the childbearing cost on her if she had a higher status in family and had a larger power on decision making of family issues.

The Jiangsu Study took place in year of 2006-2007. The data was collected by a questionnaire survey and interviews in the field. Six survey sites were selected to represent the north, middle, and southern part of Jiangsu Province with adequate number of couples who are eligible to have two children according to the current birth policy. With the Women's Information System as the sampling frame, the research team selected 25 villages and 24 urban communities by random cluster sampling. The study surveyed 18,638 women of age 18-40, single or married, from rural or urban areas, from December 2006 to February 2007. Information collected by survey include: respondent's social-demographic characteristics, economic status, fertility history, family information (including husband, siblings of respondent and husband, parents and parent-in-laws), opinion on childbearing, fertility desire and determinants, childbearing intention (number, sex, and timing), major consideration for having another child, the role of family members in childbearing decision-making. Information related to women's status was also collected in the survey, including family decision making and self assessment about her social and family status.

The dependent variables are (1) women's opinion about childbearing, including ideal number of children and motivation for having a child; and (2) childbearing intention, for those who already have one child and eligible to have another one according to the provincial birth policy. Indexes will be constructed for women's status by using variables such as education, employment, self rated social and family status; other variables will be used are family decision making on daily expenditure, childbearing, children's education, as well as important issues such as invest or buying apartment.

A multivariate analysis will be used to examine the relationships. Models will be fit separately for each interested dependent variables, with women's age, marital status, and county controlled.

Major Findings

It is found that women who are more satisfied with her status in family and in society are more likely to make family decision with her husband together or even with her own, and is less likely to consider her parents and parent-in-laws opinion for childbearing decision. Women with a higher status are more likely to think that one child is enough for a family, and are less likely wanting another child. If the childbearing cost is expected to be high, a woman will less likely to have another child, while the cost of childbearing for a woman seems higher if she works as an enterprise employee. However, the result shows that there are significant regional differences.

The research findings suggested that both economic development and improvement in women's status have made great contribution to the very low fertility in part of China.

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