

# The Fertility Motivation of Chinese childbearing Age Women

Na Li<sup>1, 2, a</sup>, Elna R. Lopez<sup>1, b</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Lyceum of the Philippines University, Batangas 4200, Philippines

<sup>2</sup> Harbin Finance University, Harbin 150030, China

<sup>a</sup> 84849041@qq.com, <sup>b</sup> elna\_lopez@yahoo.com

## Abstract

**This study aims to explore the current situation of low fertility level in China from the perspective of female psychology. Based on the current state of research on fertility motivation and its influencing factors, we use a combination of qualitative analysis and quantitative research to focus on the differences in fertility motivation among different demographic variables of women. From a psychological perspective, suggestions are made to improve the fertility intention of the Chinese female childbearing population. This study investigated 459 Chinese women of childbearing age. The results showed that there are significant differences in fertility motivation in terms of Age, Siblings, number of siblings of parents, birth order, province, education level, household registration nature, occupation, and age. There are significant differences in fertility motivation in terms of age, siblings, number of siblings of parents, birth order, province, education level, household registration nature, occupation type, annual family income, marriage, and number of children, but there are no significant differences in terms of ethnicity, individual annual income, and working hours. The purpose of the study is to provide an objective basis for the relevant management departments to formulate and improve fertility support policies.**

## Keywords

**Fertility motivation, Demographic variables, Chinese women.**

## 1. Introduction

Looking at the global population situation, the long-term low fertility rate and extended life expectancy will drive countries around the world towards an aging population with fewer children. The entire world is aging, and in the near future, the center of population growth will shift from Asia to Africa, and the population structure and fertility behavior patterns will also undergo significant changes. According to the latest United Nations WPP statistics released in July 2022, South Korea's total fertility rate is the lowest in the world, at 0.88, Japan at 1.30, Singapore at 1.02, Taiwan Province at 1.11, and even Thailand at 1.33, almost the same as Japan[1]. The total fertility rate refers to the average number of children born to each couple. Internationally, 2.1 is commonly used as the population replacement level, which means that after considering the risk of death, the average couple needs to have approximately 2.1 children to equalize the number of people between the previous and next generations. A fertility rate below 1.5 is usually referred to as a 'very low fertility rate'. It is shocking that the birth rate in China has sharply decreased in recent years. According to United Nations data, China's birth rate in 2021 was 1.16. Even lower than Japan. It is difficult to believe that a few years ago it could still maintain a level of 1.6-1.8, but it has decreased in the past four years.

Previous studies have mostly predicted fertility levels based on desire to have children, such as whether people are willing to have children, how many children they are willing to have, whether to have a boy or a girl, and when to have children, but have not studied the true

intention of the subject's fertility activities. Compared to the desire to have children, the motivation to have children is more dynamic. However, research on fertility motivation is extremely rare, mostly concentrated before 2000. Fertility motivation is an internal motivation that can directly trigger, guide, and maintain individual Fertility behavior. It is at the core of fertility values and serves as the internal driving force foundation of fertility intention[2]. Numerous studies have shown that with the improvement of modern women's education level and economic status, their fertility motivation has undergone significant changes. Luppi's research results (2018) indicate that as the main body of fertility activities, the content, degree, and development of women's fertility motivation have a significant impact on individual fertility desire, happiness after childbirth, and thus bring changes to every family and society[3]. Overall, this dissertation believes that fertility motivation refers to women's sufficient motivation to have children after fully considering various factors, and the combination of multiple influencing factors that affect their choice of fertility action is called fertility motivation. Fertility motivation can directly affect the foreseeable and predictable next fertility behavior. Generally speaking, fertility behavior belongs to short-term decision-making, and the reasons that affect fertility behavior often consist of two parts: internal reasons and external influencing factors. Fertility motivation is closely related to fertility behavior, which often determines fertility behavior. Fertility motivation is a comprehensive influence of multiple fertility motivations, and to some extent, it can also demonstrate women's fertility values and intuitively display women's views on fertility behavior.

## 2. Research Methodology

### 2.1. Research Objectives

The purpose of this study is to investigate the reproductive status of contemporary Chinese women and further explore the differences of Chinese women's reproductive motivation in different demographic variables. Specifically, it aims to describe the age, nationality, brothers and sisters, parents' brothers and sisters, birth order, province, education level, registered residence registration, occupation, annual personal income, annual family income, working days, working hours Is there a significant difference in female reproductive motivation between marital status and the number of children. Thus providing reference for the formulation of fertility policies.

### 2.2. Research Importance

Fertility motivation plays a dominant role in the logical chain of reproduction, determining subsequent fertility desires and behaviors. Against the backdrop of the continuous relaxation of fertility policies, what is the current situation of fertility motivation among Chinese people of childbearing age? What are the differences between populations and the policy needs reflected from this? This article will focus on the above issues and conduct empirical analysis based on survey data. In the context of a larger society, this study extensively collected women in traditional culture and modern education, and conducted a bottom-up statistical analysis to identify the specific fertility motivations of contemporary Chinese women.

### 2.3. Research Methods

#### 2.3.1. Research Design

This article adopts a descriptive quantitative analysis method. This method uses literature research to describe the current situation of female fertility in China, and searches, consults, categorizes, and analyzes academic articles on female fertility motivation and desire both domestically and internationally. This article collected data from the standard questionnaires, and conducted statistical analysis using Excel and SPSS26.0 mathematical statistical software.

The main statistical analysis methods include descriptive statistics, independent sample t-tests, and analysis of variance.

### 2.3.2. Participants

The participants in the study were Chinese adult women aged 20-49. A questionnaire survey was conducted on women of childbearing age in different regions of China using an online random sampling method. The population variables include age, ethnicity, number of siblings, number of siblings of the father, number of siblings of the mother, birth order in the original family, family location, education level, household registration nature, occupation, personal annual income, family annual income, working days per week, working hours per working day, marital status, number of children. A total of 459 questionnaires were collected, of which 459 were valid.

### 2.3.3. Questionnaire

**Fertility Motivation Scale** The Female Fertility Motivation Scale compiled by Chen Lian (2020) to measure the specific fertility motivation of women who have given birth. This scale is compiled according to Self-Determination Theory (SDT). The author conducts content analysis on the results of open-ended questionnaires and interview surveys. The formal questionnaire has finally identified 31 questions, which has three dimensions: "growth significance", "practical advantages and disadvantages", "role orientation", and three dimensions of Cronbach  $\alpha$ . The coefficients are 0.953, 0.955 and 0.905 respectively. The content and construction validity are good. The scoring method is 5 points for Likert, from 1 "completely disagree" to 5 "completely agree", and the theoretical median is 3.

## 3. Literature Review

The issue of fertility is a hot topic in psychological research, which has significant impacts on individuals, families, and even the entire society. Fertility motivation is an internal motivation that can directly trigger, guide, and maintain individual fertility behavior. It is at the core of fertility values and serves as the internal driving force foundation of fertility intention[2]. Numerous studies have shown that with the improvement of modern women's education level and economic status, their fertility motivation has undergone significant changes. As the main body of fertility activities, the content, degree, and development of women's fertility motivation have a significant impact on individual fertility desire, happiness after childbirth, and thus bring changes to every family and society[4].

The self-determination theory of motivation, as a contemporary authoritative motivation theory, covers numerous research contents of motivation theory[5]. This theory views motivation as a continuum of different levels of self-determination, emphasizing the sense of autonomy that individuals gain in activities. It can more clearly present the changing characteristics of individual behavior motivation and accurately grasp the stability of individual motivation, thus enabling more accurate prediction and evaluation of individual behavior, as well as related events such as the psychological state behind the behavior.

Fertility motivation is the direct driving force that triggers, guides, and maintains individual fertility behavior, and is the internal driving force that directly drives individual fertility activities to achieve fertility goals. Zhang Yiquan (1994) pointed out that "motivation function" and "selection function" are the two major functions of fertility motivation[6]. The dynamic function of fertility motivation plays a promoting role in individual fertility behavior, manifested as the initiation, reinforcement, maintenance, and termination of individual fertility motivation on fertility behavior. The selection function of fertility motivation plays a goal-oriented role in individual fertility behavior, and is manifested by different choice preferences. When an individual's fertility motivation is "having more children and more blessings", having

more children is the goal of their fertility behavior, and the individual's preference for the number of children is very strong.

In relation to this, Self Determination Theory (SDT) is a macro theory, with personality and motivation as its main research content. It was proposed by American psychologists Deci Edward L. and Ryan Richard M. in the 1980s. The self-determination theory holds that individuals are born with a positive and upward potential, which drives them to develop, improve, and integrate themselves through continuous learning. However, at the same time, the realization of human intrinsic potential also needs to rely on the external social environment that adapts and matches it. When various factors in the external social environment are not conducive to the realization of individual potential, they can hinder the formation of positive behavior and even have serious adverse effects on mental health. In the external environment that affects individual potential and mental health, the satisfaction of the three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness is the core. These three basic psychological needs are also innate and inherent in humans, and do not change due to differences in gender, race, region, and culture. The satisfaction of the three basic psychological needs can promote individuals to effectively unleash their potential and have a huge impact on their health and happiness[7].

Unlike motivational theories such as instinct theory, inducement theory, and drive theory, the organic integration theory of self determined motivation focuses on the impact of the degree of self determination of individual behavioral motivation on behavior, emotions, cognition, and other aspects. The motivation under the self-determination theory is not a separate concept, nor is it simply distinguished into internal motivation and external motivation. Instead, it includes three different types of motivation, distributed on a continuum based on differences in the degree of self-determination[8]. Among them, located at the leftmost end of this motivational continuum is the motivational regulation state of unmotivation, which gradually extends from external motivation in different regulation states to internal motivation at the rightmost end, and the degree of self-determination also increases from weak to strong.

This dissertation mainly explores women's fertility motivation from the perspectives of autonomous and controlled fertility motivation. From the perspective of self-determination theory, when an individual's fertility motivation is more inclined towards autonomous motivation, then for parents, the process of having children or raising them is a pleasant and enjoyable thing - "For me, having children is a joyful thing in itself. Even if the process of having a child or raising a child is not entirely enjoyable, as long as childbirth is an internalized value - a state of identity regulation - 'as a woman, having children is a glorious mission that makes me proud', individuals will experience a sense of psychological autonomy in their fertility activities. The motivation of fertility has multiple sources. Fertility motivation is the direct motivation that drives individuals to develop fertility thoughts or behaviors, ultimately derived from various fertility needs of individuals, which are formed by internal and external incentives, as well as various psychological factors.

The motivation of fertility has multiple characteristics. Affected by different internal fertility needs, external incentives, and various psychological factors, it is determined that the fertility motivation possessed by individuals often has multiple characteristics, that is, the fertility motivation that drives a person to have children is often not single, but may include various fertility motivations of different genders and levels, such as "passing on the family line", "stabilizing family status", "maintaining marital emotions" There are even potential fertility motivations that individuals may not be aware of, such as 'taking on responsibilities and obligations as children ', 'taking on social responsibility ', 'liking children ', and so on.

The motivation of fertility is variable. The demand for fertility and external incentives change with social norms and environmental changes, and the variability of fertility motivation is

determined by this. On the other hand, once the fertility needs are met or the fertility goals are achieved, the individual's fertility motivation will also change: "giving birth to boys and girls is the same, and women are also half the sky." The spread of such social concepts and changes in the social environment such as the improvement of women's status will affect the fertility motivation of "giving birth to boys to inherit the family", The motivation for childbirth, such as "raise children to provide against old age," can be transformed by social welfare policies such as the development of social pension insurance.

In the field of social psychology, the concept of fertility can be divided into broad sense and narrow sense[9]. The broad concept of fertility refers to people's overall views and attitudes towards fertility issues, and this concept is relatively stable; The narrow concept of fertility refers to an individual's views on fertility issues based on their own worldview, values, and outlook on life. It is consciously formed under the influence of a certain social environment, which includes a certain level of fertility cognition and values. Fertility cognition refers to the evaluation, conception, and behavioral tendencies towards a certain mode of fertility, which permeate certain fertility needs and emotions.

The concept of fertility is formed and developed under the control of fertility motivation: the individual's fertility desire and different incentives generated by the social environment form the individual's fertility motivation, which further forms a relatively stable concept of fertility under the influence of life philosophy, worldview, and other factors. At the same time, an individual's fertility motivation is constrained by their fertility views, which in turn affect their fertility behavior, as individuals always respond to various signal stimuli in the social living environment based on their relatively stable fertility views[10].

According to Huang Xiting's definition of values, values are an attitude system formed and established by individuals based on their own and social needs, based on their understanding of the value attributes of external things. They are an internal scale for evaluating the importance of things and a psychological inclination system that guides behavior[11]. For the values of fertility, Zhang and others view it as a psychological tendency of individuals' perception or cognitive evaluation of the importance of fertility[12]. The values of fertility are subordinate to the values of fertility, and among various ideas about the stability of fertility, the values of fertility are its core.

Different researchers have different perspectives on the theoretical framework of fertility values. From the current perspective, there is not much research on fertility values among scholars in China, and individual scholars have also constructed many milestone theories. Stolk summarized the research on fertility values both domestically and internationally[13]. In the theoretical framework of fertility values, the Economic Theory of Fertility (ETF) and Value of Children (VOC) are the two most influential theories. After relatively systematic research, the utility model theory of fertility values has been confirmed in more than 10 countries and regions around the world. However, because most of them are based on research in demography and sociology, such as open-ended questionnaires and case interviews, these two theories have not formed a structured scale with reliability and validity.

The theoretical research on fertility values in China is still in its early stages. Liu Xiao combined existing research results based on survey interviews or experience in China, and based on literature review, listened to the opinions of relevant experts in the field, combined with the methodology of psychometrics, and developed a questionnaire on fertility values[14]. Based on this research, they viewed the value of fertility as a second-order theoretical model, with three second-order factors: fertility tendency, fertility means, and fertility purpose. Among them, fertility quality, quantity, and preference belong to three first-order factors under fertility tendency, fertility method and duration are two first-order factors under fertility means, and fertility responsibility, fertility desire, fertility value, and fertility demand are four first-order factors under fertility purpose.

In the relationship between fertility values and fertility motivation, we can view fertility values as the content foundation of fertility motivation, and fertility motivation is the core content of fertility values.

Although researchers may have similar directions when using concepts such as fertility motivation, fertility perspective, fertility desire, and fertility values, their connotations and definitions vary in different studies. Overall, these concepts are interrelated and influence each other, but they are also different interpretations of the issue of fertility: the concept of fertility is the overall view and viewpoint of individuals on fertility related issues influenced by the social and cultural environment, and the value of fertility is the core of the concept of fertility. The motivation for fertility is based on the values of fertility, which is the direct motivation that triggers, guides, and maintains individual fertility behavior. The desire to procreate is an external manifestation of the motivation, values, and views of fertility.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

**Table 1.** Respondent's Fertility Motivation when grouped according to Profile

Numbler	Significance of Growth		Realistic Adv. & Disadv.		Role Positioning		Overall Fertility Motivation		Significance of Growth		Realistic Adv. & Disadv.		Role Positioning		Overall Fertility Motivation	
	t/F	p-value	t/F	p-value	t/F	p-value	t/F	p-value	t/F	p-value	t/F	p-value	t/F	p-value	t/F	p-value
Age	31.995	.000	.000		22.723	.000	.000		13.922	.000	.000		27.857	.000	.000	
Nation	1.511	.132	.132		.304	.761	.761		.626	.532	.532		1.045	.297	.297	
Siblings	9.284	.000	.000		13.421	.000	.000		6.141	.000	.000		10.470	.000	.000	
Siblings(Father)	5.264	.000	.000		6.123	.000	.000		4.124	.003	.003		6.062	.000	.000	
Siblings (Mother)	3.829	.005	.005		3.947	.004	.004		4.246	.002	.002		4.577	.001	.001	
Birth Order	7.983	.000	.000		12.332	.000	.000		6.567	.000	.000		9.860	.000	.000	
Province	2.679	.015	.015		3.120	.005	.005		4.907	.000	.000		4.158	.000	.000	
Degree of Educ.	9.655	.000	.000		18.699	.000	.000		20.243	.000	.000		18.395	.000	.000	
Nature of Household	-2.085	.038	.038		-5.033	.000	.000		-4.450	.000	.000		-3.916	.000	.000	
Occupation Type	11.568	.000	.000		12.448	.000	.000		11.363	.000	.000		13.900	.000	.000	
Personal Annual Income	.451	.771	.771		2.357	.053	.053		1.998	.094	.094		.624	.646	.646	
Annual Household Income	.319	.866	.866		3.711	.006	.006		3.900	.004	.004		1.803	.127	.127	
Working Days/Week	.860	.462	.462		1.671	.172	.172		2.593	.052	.052		1.551	.201	.201	
Working Hours(Weekdays)	.643	.588	.588		.388	.762	.762		.087	.967	.967		.270	.847	.847	
Marital Status	28.408	.000	.000		12.085	.000	.000		10.965	.000	.000		21.517	.000	.000	
No.of Children	64.072	.000	.000		39.203	.000	.000		29.550	.000	.000		56.172	.000	.000	

Legend: Difference is significant at 0.05 alpha level.

Table 1 shows the correlation between different demographic variables and the total score of fertility motivation, as well as the three dimensions. Firstly, demographic variables that exhibit significant positive correlations in the three dimensions of total score and growth significance, practical advantages and disadvantages, and role positioning include age, number of Siblings, father's Siblings, mother's Siblings, Birth Order, Province, Degree of Education, Martial Status, Number of Children. The only demographic variable that is significantly negatively correlated with various dimensions and total scores of fertility motivation is Nature of Household. However, National, Personal Annual Income, Working Days/Weeks, and Working Hours (Weekdays) are correlated with fertility motivation and various dimensions, but the correlation is not significant. Annual Household Income is significantly positively correlated with the two dimensions of reality benefits and drawbacks, as well as role positioning.

Compared to the other two variables in this paper, the significance of demographic variables in fertility motivation is more significant, and the author will analyze them one by one.

Firstly, descriptive statistics on various dimensions of age and fertility motivation show significant differences in fertility motivation among different age groups ( $p < 0.000$ ). This

phenomenon may be due to the younger generation being more inclined to have only one child or choosing not to have children, while middle-aged families may be more inclined to choose to have "two children" or "three children". Due to the younger generation's greater emphasis on self actualization and personal growth, willingness to pursue career development, and higher investment in education and training costs, it may have an impact on the number of children born [15].

Secondly, there was a significant positive correlation ( $p < 0.000$ ) between the number of siblings, as well as the number of siblings of fathers and mothers, and their fertility motivation and various dimensions, indicating that the more siblings the subjects had and the more siblings their parents had, the stronger their fertility motivation. In some cultures, the concept of having more children and more blessings is deeply ingrained, believing that having more children can increase the competitiveness of the family and provide more security for one's elderly life [16]. Therefore, people with more siblings may be more inclined to have more children to maintain family prosperity and their own elderly life. For some families, having more children can increase the lively and joyful atmosphere of the family, and also make each child receive more attention and care. Therefore, people with more siblings from their parents may be more inclined to have more children to create a warm and happy family atmosphere.

Thirdly, there is a significant positive correlation between birth order and fertility motivation and its various dimensions ( $p < 0.000$ ). The higher the birth order, the stronger their fertility motivation. Barclay (2014) found that older children may be exposed to their parents' expectations and responsibilities earlier, which may affect their cognition and attitude towards family life [17]. On the contrary, younger children may be in a more caring position within the family, which may affect their fertility beliefs and motivations.

Fourthly, there is a significant positive correlation between fertility motivation and its various dimensions in different regions ( $p < 0.000$ ). The trend in China's economic development level and the possession of excellent educational resources is that the south is better than the north, and the east is better than the west. This data proves that there are indeed significant differences in fertility motivations among different regions.

Fifth, there is a significant positive correlation ( $p < 0.000$ ) between education level and fertility motivation, as well as their various dimensions. This means that the higher the education level, the stronger the fertility motivation. People with higher education levels generally have higher education and professional skills, making them more likely to obtain higher income and economic foundation in stable professions. According to Wu's (2021) research, the higher the education level, the easier it is to obtain social security, medical care, and other guarantees. Therefore, the motivation for childbirth is stronger [18]. Women who receive a good education also have a relatively high level of self-efficacy, and they will believe that they have the ability to have good offspring.

Sixth, there is a significant positive correlation between occupational types and women's fertility motivation, and there is a significant correlation between the growth significance, practical advantages and disadvantages, and role positions of women of different occupational types in fertility motivation. Generally speaking, women working in enterprises have a stronger pursuit of family size and stability, while women working in the fields of education, healthcare, and social services place greater emphasis on providing better education and growth conditions for their children [19].

Seventh, there is a significant positive correlation between marital status and fertility motivation, as marriage gives women a sense of stability and security in terms of legal and social status. After marriage, women usually gain more legal and social rights, such as inheritance rights, property rights, and children's surname rights. These rights and guarantees can enhance women's social status and sense of security, thereby enhancing their fertility

motivation[20]. Women with stable romantic relationships usually receive support and care from their partners. This emotional support and companionship can alleviate women's life pressure and loneliness, enhance their sense of happiness and fertility motivation. In addition, marriage can also provide a more stable economic environment for couples. After marriage, couples usually jointly manage the family economy, plan and manage the family finances. This stable economic environment can provide couples with better economic security and future development plans, thereby enhancing their fertility motivation.

Eighth, there is a significant positive correlation between the number of children and women's fertility motivation. Women often hope to establish a stable and healthy family environment, and the number of children can to some extent represent the size and stability of the family. For women with strong fertility motivation, having more children can enhance their family size and stability, and the significance of growth, practical advantages and disadvantages, role positioning, and the relationship with the number of children are interactive[21].

Finally, the research results show that Annual Household Income is positively correlated in two dimensions: the practical advantages and disadvantages of fertility motivation and role positioning. The increase in family annual income can provide women with more economic security and sense of security, which can alleviate the economic pressure and concerns of women during childbirth and upbringing. In addition, an increase in annual income may also bring better social status and resources to families, making it easier for women to receive social and emotional support and assistance, all of which can enhance women's fertility motivation [22]. As the annual income of families increases, women may have more confidence in playing the role of mothers and wives.

Nature of Household is significantly negatively correlated with the overall and three dimensions of fertility motivation: analysis shows that urban registered residence women have more available resources, and their pursuit of other major life goals reduces their desire for children and, to a certain extent, their sense of value brought by children. However, the culture in the rural social environment is more traditional, and children are more of a major life goal. Some even link the value of life with the birth of children. Therefore, urban women with registered residence are less motivated to have independent children than rural women with registered residence. On the other hand, due to the fact that the urban floating population is far larger than that in rural areas, and the interpersonal communication is also more diversified, which leads to the more open ideas of urban women with registered residence, more self evaluation, less attention and influence from others, thus their controlled fertility motivation is also weaker than that of rural women with registered residence.

According to the data survey results, there is no significant correlation between individual annual income, working day and week length, and overall and various dimensions of female fertility motivation. Women's fertility motivation is more driven by deep-seated psychological and social factors, such as biological driving force, socio-cultural influence, health and social security, etc., and is less influenced by individual economic or work conditions. Therefore, even if an individual's annual income or working hours change, it does not necessarily directly affect women's fertility motivation.

## 5. Conclusions

There are significant differences in fertility motivation in terms of age, siblings, number of siblings of parents, birth order, province, education level, household registration nature, occupation type, annual family income, marriage, and number of children, but there are no significant differences in terms of ethnicity, individual annual income, and working hours.



## 6. Recommendations

The country can implement some incentive policies, such as providing maternity allowances, child support subsidies, increasing maternity and parental leave, to reduce the cost of female childbirth and childcare, and increase women's willingness to have children. In addition, the government can also formulate corresponding laws and regulations to protect the rights and interests of women in the workplace, in order to reduce the pressure on women between career and family.

The government can improve women's economic capabilities and social status through fiscal policies, such as raising the minimum wage standard for women and increasing support for female entrepreneurs. Improving women's economic level can increase their willingness to have children. Increase investment in women's education resources, improve their education level, and thus increase their willingness to have children. In addition, educational means can also be used to improve women's self-awareness and social cognitive abilities, helping them better grasp their life direction and value.

Society should actively promote the updating and popularization of marriage and family concepts, encourage both men and women to participate in family decision-making, build more equal and stable marriage relationships, and provide a more stable social environment for women's childbirth.

The community can provide more parent-child activities and children's play facilities to increase family interaction and cohesion. At the same time, the community can also provide some family parenting support services, such as temporary childcare services, home care services, etc., to help women take better care of their families.

Work units can provide more flexible work time arrangements, such as flexible working hours, remote work, etc., to help women better balance their career and family. At the same time, the workplace should also provide more career development and training opportunities to support women's career development.

Family members can provide women with more support and assistance, such as taking on more household chores, taking care of children, etc., to reduce the burden on women. At the same time, families can also provide more emotional support and encouragement to enhance women's confidence and willingness to have children.

Women themselves can improve their resilience by learning self-care and emotional regulation skills, in order to better cope with the pressure and challenges during childbirth and childcare.

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