

Breaking the Fertility Dilemma: How Do Flexible Work Arrangements Affect the Fertility Intention of Women of Childbearing Age

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Abstract

Currently, China's fertility level has continued to decline, and women of childbearing age are confronted with dual pressures from work and childbearing. Enhancing their fertility intention is the key to ensuring the long-term balanced development of the population. Based on a systematic literature review and practical observation of "fertility-friendly positions", this study focuses on female employees of childbearing age, utilizes the 2022 data from the China Family Panel Studies (CFPS), and examines the influence mechanism of flexible work arrangements on fertility intention as well as the moderating effect of intergenerational support. The findings indicate that flexible work arrangements exert a significantly positive impact on women's fertility intention through two parallel paths: first, they alleviate role conflict by reducing perceived work-family time conflict; second, they mitigate the motherhood penalty by improving career development expectations. There are differences in the moderating effects of different types of intergenerational support: economic intergenerational support exerts a complementary effect and strengthens the positive impact of flexible work arrangements, while caregiving intergenerational support produces a substitution effect and weakens this positive relationship. This study reveals the dual-path mechanism by which flexible work arrangements affect fertility intention, and provides a theoretical basis and practical implications for supporting women to balance work and family and improving fertility-friendly policies.

Keywords

Flexible Work Arrangements, Fertility Intention, Career Development Expectations, Work-family Conflict