

Investigation of the post-05 adolescents' families' attitudes toward fertility—A case study of Changshu

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Abstract: Under the influence of social, economic, cultural, and other factors in the new era, young people, who are responsible for the country's future, have different attitudes toward fertility from those of their predecessors. It is of great practical significance to study their attitudes toward fertility. Based on the analysis of the questionnaire survey on post-05 adolescents' families in Changshu City, this paper indicates:

1. The family income has a certain degree of influence on the number of children, but there is no positive correlation;
2. post-05 adolescents are more inclined to have brothers or sisters who have the same biological genders as they do;
3. Compared with their parents, who have low reproduction willingness, adolescents' reproductive willingness gradually increases.

Based on these conclusions, the following policy suggestions are put forward:

1. More opportunities should be created for practitioners to accompany their families.
2. Schools should avoid transmitting extreme gender normative education.
3. People should advocate the sustainability of adolescents' positive attitudes toward childbearing under the inclusive and diverse concept of fertility.

1 Introduction

People's perspectives on fertility refer to their relatively stable attitudes and proposals regarding fertility issues. It is closely related to the region, society, and period as a group value. From a micro perspective, a society's attitudes toward fertility directly impact a family's fertility willingness. In addition, a family's fertility willingness is also influenced by the social economy, regional customs, social culture, etcetera. The attitudes toward fertility can be interpreted by five aspects as mentioned in the Dictionary of Population Science: the motivation and purpose of fertility, the choice of the number and quality of children, the preference for female children, the requirement of childbearing age, and the mode of childbearing.^[1]

Adolescents and their families, who are responsible for building the country's future, have different attitudes toward fertility than their predecessors due to the influence of social, economic, cultural, and other factors in the new era. It is of practical significance to study their attitudes toward fertility. However, there is currently a lack of systematic research on adolescents' and their families' attitudes toward fertility in Chinese academia. The lack of systematic analysis makes understanding the current situation of teenagers' views on family fertility impossible. It also leaves a blank study on its influencing

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factors, which is not conducive to the fertility policy's sustainability and effectiveness. Using a questionnaire, we analyze the post-05s generation family group in Changshu's attitudes toward fertility and their influencing factors. We propose policy suggestions to fill gaps in previous research and enrich the content of this research field.

2 Literature review

The study of people's attitudes toward fertility started at the end of the twentieth century in China, with a clear division of the research object's geographical category instead of the research object's age level. It primarily combined with factors such as fertility policy and economic system to study the influence of fertility attitudes in a specific area. For example, Cao Jingchun (1985) investigated the impact of commodity economy development on rural fertility^[2]; Gu Shengzu (1986) discussed the relationship between birth policy and birth view^[3]. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, academic circles had analyzed the various perspectives on the fertility of middle-aged, young, and older people. The research primarily focused on non-adolescent groups such as adult women and adult men in rural or urban areas. Wang Xu et al. (2019) stated that the change in rural women's fertility outlook is primarily due to improved family status and emphasis on quality of life^[4]. Yuan Ming

(2019) interviewed 22-40-year-old women in Jinan following the implementation of the “universal two-child” policy and stated that the core of their fertility view lies in “self-value judgment and maternal value judgment.” Their fertility view is influenced by “family status.”^[5] There have been few studies on teenagers’ perspectives on fertility and few direct studies on teenagers. Most of them are presented indirectly through the mouths of elders, books, and movies. Wu Chengchao (2019), for example, used the film *How to Be At Home* to highlight the difference between parents’ and offspring’s perspectives on fertility^[6]. The investigation of adolescents’ and their families’ fertility attitudes has received insufficient attention in existing research. In this paper, adolescent families in Changshu City, Jiangsu Province, are chosen as the subjects of the investigation on the attitudes toward fertility. The study not only compensates for the lack of existing research on the research object but also provides the theoretical value of the research and makes targeted suggestions for China’s fertility policy. Therefore, the investigation has practical significance.

3 Questionnaire survey and analysis

3.1 Basic information of children’s questionnaire

This questionnaire collected data on parents’ and children’s identities. A total of 152 questionnaires were distributed to children, and 150 questionnaires were effectively collected. Regarding the age distribution among 150 post-05s adolescents, 137 were born in 2005-2007, accounting for 91%; 1 was born in 2008-2010, accounting for 7.3%; Very few samples were born after 2010.

3.2 Survey status of adolescents’ questionnaire

Table 1. Basic information of children’s questionnaire survey (the table is created by the author)

Title	Option	Quantity	Proportion (%)
Year of birth	2005-2007	137	91.33
	2008-2010	11	7.33
	2011-2013	1	0.67
	2014-2016	1	0.67
Number of children	0	62	42.76
	1	57	39.31
	2	18	12.41
	3	2	1.38
	4	2	1.38

62 (41.3%) of the 150 valid survey samples have one child, 57 (38%) have two children, 18 (12%) have three children, and very few families have more than three children. Approximately 80% of families have one or two children.

According to whether post-05 adolescents and their families want to have younger siblings, 107 post-05s (70.67%) desired younger brothers and sisters, while 45

did not. When asking for reasons, 61 (30.2%) said: “my younger brothers and sisters can accompany me when I am lonely.” 59 (30.2%) said: “I want to experience being an elder brother/sister,” and 60 (30.2%) said: “younger brothers and sisters are adorable.” Only 19 (9.41%) people “support their parents’ desire for a second or third child.”

When asked why they did not want younger siblings, 20 adolescents (24.7%) said: “my parents are too busy to take care of younger siblings.” 7 (21.0%) said: “the financial burden of my family is too heavy.” 13 (16.0%) said: “I want to be my parents’ only child.” The love for younger brothers and sisters, a sense of accomplishment as a big brother/sister, and the joy of life brought by younger brothers and sisters are the main reasons why some post-05 adolescents want younger brothers and sisters. In contrast, some post-05 adolescents do not want younger siblings because they do not have enough time or money to take care of them or because investing too much energy in younger siblings causes them to love themselves less.

When asked if losing parental care due to having a younger sibling is acceptable, more than half of the respondents said the loss was utterly acceptable. 12% said they would not have negative emotions, and 10% said their loneliness would be enhanced significantly. The polarization was evident.

According to adolescents’ preference for their children’s gender, 41 (30%) of the 136 valid samples have no explicit preference for their children’s gender. Women are preferred by 53 (39%) of the population, while men are preferred by 42 (31%). The most common reason adolescents expect their gender to be male is: “I am a boy; my younger brother and I will have a common interest.” Adolescents who expect their gender to be female gave two main reasons: “because a younger sister is easier to take care of than a younger brother” and “I am a girl; my younger sister and I will have a common interest.” From the research, respondents’ gender identities heavily influence their choice of gender for younger siblings.

We collected 93 valid answers from adolescents and their parents regarding childbearing age. The average childbearing age expected by people was 28.6 years, the median was 29 years, the maximum childbearing age was 40 years, and the minimum childbearing age was 24 years. There is a tendency to procreate later based on the age of childbearing.

3.3 Basic information of parents’ questionnaire

We distributed 101 questionnaires for parents and recovered 100 effectively. The age of children is evenly distributed among 6-17 years old, of which 9-11 years old are the majority, accounting for 32%. Most respondents have two children, accounting for more than half, followed by one child, accounting for 39%. 8% of the sample have three children, and some samples have four children and no children.

3.4 Survey status of parents' questionnaire

Table 2. Basic information of parents' questionnaire survey (the table is created by the author)

Title	Option	Quantity	Proportion (%)
Year of birth	2005-2007	21	21
	2008-2010	24	24
	2011-2013	32	32
	2014-2016	23	23
Number of children	0	1	1
	1	39	39
	2	51	51
	3	8	8
	4	1	1
Monthly income	More than 10000 yuan	82	82
	5000-10000 yuan	12	12
	4000-5000 yuan	2	2
	3000-4000 yuan	1	1
	2000-3000 yuan	1	1
	Less than 2000 yuan	2	2

Regarding whether families want a second or third child, 47 parents want a second or third child, and 52 do not, with little difference. When asked why some parents want a second/third child, 29 (61.7%) said: "I do not want my children to be lonely." 18 people (38.3%) said: "I hope my children can accompany and take care of me when I become old." 14 people (29.8%) said: "I think babies are adorable," and 11 people (23.4%) said: "my children want to have younger siblings, so I support them." From the responses, we can conclude that parents want a second/third child, accounting for 61.7%, mainly to alleviate their children's loneliness. It is consistent with the post-2005 generation's response, "Younger brothers and sisters can accompany me and relieve my loneliness."

When asked why some parents do not want a second/third child, 33 people (62.3%) said: "they have no time to take care of their children." 19 people (35.8%) said: "their career development will be hampered." 17 people (32.1%) said: "they have a heavy financial burden," and 15 people (28.3%) said: "their physical health limits their fertility." Other reasons (20.8%) included "children will be under too much educational pressure" and "I am satisfied with the current number of children." Therefore, parents are hesitant to have a second/third child because they do not believe they have enough energy and time to care for another child simultaneously. The answer is consistent with the post-05s generation's response that "parents care less about themselves due to the birth of younger siblings."

When asked, "If you have a second or third child, do you think your child will lose parental care?" 39% of the parents said: "yes, but it is acceptable," while 26% said: "not at all." The distribution of parental responses to this question is similar to children's answers, but the responses are generally more positive.

According to parents' preference for their children's

gender, 62 respondents (62%) have no specific preference for their children's gender. Female children are preferred by 24 people (24%), while male children are preferred by 12 people (12%). There are more than twice as many girls as boys among the answers. The first reason parents expect their children to be male is that boys are easier to take care of, and the second is that they do not want their children to suffer from childbirth. In contrast, parents who mainly expect their child's gender to be female think girls will spend more time with them and have a better parent-child relationship, followed by less financial pressure to have a girl.

The increasing number of parents who want their children to be female demonstrates that the patriarchal phenomenon is gradually fading in today's society. However, some parents have given stereotyped reasons for expecting their children to be male, such as "boys are emotionally insensitive" and "boys can protect their sisters," demonstrating the existence of gender stereotypes.

According to the respondents' monthly income, the overall level is high, with more than 80% of the samples earning more than 10000 yuan, 12% earning 5000-10000 yuan, and only a few samples earning less than 5000 yuan. We used the Chi-square test to investigate the relationship between the monthly income of parents and the number of children. We assume H_0 is "there exists no correlation between parents' monthly income and the number of children," and H_1 is "there is a correlation between parents' monthly income and the number of children." According to Table 3, the monthly income of different families significantly affects the number of children ($p < 0.001$). The p-value is very small, indicating that the H_0 hypothesis can be rejected. Therefore, family income has an impact on the number of children.

Table 3. Chi-square test of the relationship between monthly income and the number of children (the table is created by the author)

Title	Option	Monthly income						Total	χ^2	p
		10000 yuan or more	5000-10000 yuan	4000-5000 yuan	3000-4000 yuan	2000-1000 yuan	Less than 2000 yuan			
Number of Children	0	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	1(50.00)	1(1.00)	54.926	0.000**
	1	31(37.80)	7(58.33)	1(50.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	39(39.00)		
	2	42(51.22)	5(41.67)	1(50.00)	1(100.00)	1(100.00)	1(50.00)	51(51.00)		
	3	8(9.76)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	8(8.00)		
	4	1(1.22)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	1(1.00)		
Total		82	12	2	1	1	2	100		

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$

The monthly household income showed a significant level of 0.001 for the number of children ($\chi^2=54.926$, $p=0.000 < 0.001$). The percentage comparison shows that the proportion of two children and three children for families whose incomes are more than 10000 yuan is 51.22% and 9.76%, respectively, slightly higher than the comparative value of 51% and 8%. 58.33% of parents whose income is 5000-10000 yuan choose to have one child, which is higher than the comparative value of 39.00%. The ratio of parents with 4000-5000 yuan income and one child is 50.00%, more significant than the comparative value of 39.00%. The proportion of two children for parents with both 2000-3000 and 3000-4000 yuan income is 100.00%, significantly higher than the comparative value of 51.00%. The proportion of zero children of parents whose income is less than 2000 yuan

is 50%, considerably higher than the comparative value of 1.00%.

4 Conclusion & Policy Suggestions

As for post-05 adolescents, some desire younger siblings and sisters for various reasons, including their love for them, a sense of accomplishment in being a big brother or sister, and the joy they bring to life. On the other hand, some post-05 teenagers do not want younger siblings because they do not have the time or resources to care for them or because spending too much energy on taking care of their siblings makes them feel less satisfied.

Similarly, most parents desire a second or third child to lessen their kids' loneliness. Most parents are hesitant to have a second/third child because they do not believe they have enough energy and time to care for another child simultaneously. The answers are consistent with the post-05s generation's responses.

As for childbearing age, post-05 adolescents generally expect to reproduce later than their parents did. Parents have more optimistic views than adolescents regarding whether children will lose parental care if their parents have a second or third kid.

Eventually, the relationship between income and the number of children in a family is analyzed. Parents' decisions to have a second/third child are not only influenced by financial costs, but also factors such as time, energy, and their children's feelings.

Based on the above questionnaire survey, the following policy suggestions are proposed.

1. Although the chi-square test indicates that family income influences the number of children, this relationship is not positively correlated. Parents' decisions to have a second/third child are influenced by factors such as time, energy, and their children's feelings, not simply financial costs. The employment pressure of practitioners can be appropriately alleviated by increasing holidays or

compressing working hours, allowing practitioners to spend more time with their families and rationally arranging maternity and paternity leave. As a result, parents will have sufficient time to take care of their children and thus will be more willing to have a second/third child.

2. Teachers and parents should reach a consensus to avoid transmitting extreme gender norms through school and social education to reduce the degree of gender stereotypes.

3. Teenagers' positive fertility willingness is gradually increasing compared to their parents. To advocate for the concept of social inclusion and diversity, we should support the long-term viability of teenagers' positive attitudes toward fertility.

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