

Female Employment Dilemma Analysis

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Abstract. From a global perspective, discrimination against women in employment is a common problem, which is caused by a series of reasons such as differences in the physiological structure of men and women. Improving women's labor participation rate and allowing them to enter the labor market more freely and equally will be beneficial for improving women's overall social status and promoting harmonious economic and social development. Starting from the current situation of women's employment, this article analyzes the specific manifestations of discrimination against women in the employment market, and deeply analyzes the causes of discrimination against women in employment. Drawing on the relevant experience of developed countries, suggestions and reflections are proposed for China to promote women's equal participation in labor and employment, and to address issues such as gender discrimination in employment.

Keywords: Employment Discrimination; female labor force participation; Gender Equality.

1. Introduction

Comrade Mao Zedong once said: Women can hold up half of the sky. Engels also pointed out that "in every society, the degree of female liberation is a natural measure of overall social liberation.

From the perspective of human civilization development, respect for women can well reflect the degree of progress of a civilization. The free participation of women in labor is an important manifestation of economic empowerment for women, and the employment rate of women is an important indicator reflecting the level of economic development and women's freedom in a country. Ensuring women's free and equal right to participate in labor is not only beneficial for women to achieve their life values, but also relates to their social status and overall balanced economic development.

Starting from the current situation of women's employment, this article analyzes the specific manifestations of discrimination against women in the employment market, and deeply analyzes the causes of discrimination against women in employment. Drawing on the relevant experience of developed countries, suggestions and reflections are proposed for China to promote women's equal participation in labor and employment, and to address issues such as gender discrimination in employment.

2. Gender Discrimination in Employment

Employment discrimination in China is generally understood as being treated unfairly in terms of employment or wages, promotion, training, placement, etc. Gender employment discrimination refers to the unfair treatment received in the employment process due to gender differences when there is no significant difference in abilities, experience, education, etc. Before China's reform and opening up, due to the unified arrangement of work by the state, the issue of gender discrimination in the employment market was not obvious. But after the reform and opening up, with the liberalization of the job market, the competition in the job market has become more intense, and phenomena such as gender discrimination in employment have become increasingly apparent. From a specific perspective, it is mainly reflected in the low participation of women in employment, relatively low income, and difficulties in career development.

From the perspective of female employment participation, female employment discrimination is mainly manifested in the fact that women are easily hindered by various reasons when entering employment. From a specific perspective, firstly, there are relatively few employers willing to accept

women as employees. Due to the existence of stereotypes about women, employers often have discriminatory gender preferences, which leads to significantly fewer employment opportunities for women compared to men. Women have a lower probability of finding a rational job compared to men. There is a certain degree of gender discrimination in various types of recruitment in our country, and some employers will directly indicate that men prioritize during the recruitment process, or even if not explicitly stated, set more employment barriers for women. At the same time, in the context of economic downturn, women will also be the target of limited layoffs in enterprises. From the specific labor rate, according to the 2021 China Women's Development Outline (2021-2030), there were 320 million female employees in China in 2021, accounting for 43.1% of the total employment. Among them, there were 68.52 million female employees in non-private urban units, accounting for only 40.3%. This indicates that compared to men, the employment participation rate of women is significantly lower, and the employment situation is significantly worse.

According to the "2022 China Workplace Gender Salary Difference Report" released by BOSS Direct Employment, the average monthly salary for women in the workplace in 2021 was 8545 yuan, which is about 1200 yuan lower than the 9776 yuan for men. From a family perspective, only 33.1% of women's income accounts for over 40% of the total household income. The income gap and treatment between women and men have a certain impact on women's status in the family and society.

From the distribution of high-end professions, there is also a certain gap in career development between women and men in major countries. Taking the proportion of directors of different genders in the board of directors as an example, according to the Global Gender Gap Report 2022 released by the World Economic Forum, the highest proportion of female directors in the board of directors globally is France, accounting for 45.3%, while China's proportion is only 13.8%.

3. The Reasons for Gender Discrimination in China's Labor Market

From a traditional perspective, China has thousands of years of traditional customs of 'men leading the outside and women leading the inside'. Although China currently regards 'gender equality' as a basic national policy and has skyrocketed through laws and other forms, the traditional positioning of women and expectations for their growth paths still guide some women to develop towards their families rather than careers.

From the perspective of Becker's theory of comparative advantage in family economics, due to physiological differences between men and women, from the perspective of maximizing family utility, engaging in different jobs will maximize the overall utility of the family [1]. From a physiological perspective, women have an absolute advantage in the task of giving birth to the next generation, and are also more competitive than men in taking care of and educating the next generation, which requires higher personal character requirements. In the labor market, men have a greater advantage in most jobs that focus on physical exertion. This physiological difference leads to women consciously or unconsciously allocating more time to household labor in the process of maximizing the overall utility of the family. After women give birth, the difference in the distribution of labor time between men and women becomes more apparent.

Schultz proposed the theory of human capital in the 1960s. Schultz pointed out that the cultivation of individual acquired abilities relies on investment in acquired human capital, which includes various aspects such as healthcare, education, on-the-job training, and work experience [2]. From a micro perspective, Becker proposed relevant human capital models and demonstrated that there is a clear relationship between strengthening human capital investment and increasing worker income and economic development [3]. However, due to traditional beliefs and differences in sexual physiology between men and women, women's investment in human capital is more lagging behind that of men, which further reduces their competitiveness in the job market compared to men. According to the seventh population census data in China, the number of years of education for males aged 15 and above is 10.22 years, while for females, it is only 9.59 years. From the perspective of illiteracy rate, the female illiteracy rate is as high as 4.1%, while the male illiteracy rate is only 1.3%

At the same time, when companies consider maximizing profits, they often believe that female employees will incur higher employment costs than male employees due to factors such as childbirth, and thus choose to avoid hiring female employees. On the one hand, it is inevitable for a woman to leave her previous job during childbirth, which means that her previous job must be replaced by someone else. If the female employee is in a high position, it means that their job responsibilities are likely to be more complex, which means it is very difficult to find someone who can take over the job in a short period of time. In other words, this handover will bring a lot of unnecessary friction to the enterprise. On the other hand, returning to work after childbirth may require a period of handover, which is highly likely to reduce the work efficiency of the enterprise and increase the indirect costs of operation. At the same time, the law stipulates that enterprises need to bear the costs of female employees during childbirth. China's labor law stipulates that enterprises must retain their work and pay corresponding wages and bonuses during the maternity leave period for female employees, and the salary level of female employees after returning to their work position cannot be lower than the original level. This means that the childbirth of female employees is an additional cost compared to business operations. At the same time, it is an inevitable trend for women to increase their family labor time after childbirth, as they tend to take on more family roles and allocate less energy to work. This will to some extent hinder companies from investing more in human capital for female employees, leading to discrimination against women in their career development. At the same time, in order to avoid rising costs caused by factors such as female childbirth, companies will be more inclined to recruit male employees to maximize profits, which exacerbates gender discrimination when women enter the job market.

4. Measures for Improving Discrimination Against Women in Employment in Typical Countries

The phenomenon of female employment discrimination is caused by physiological differences between men and women, which means that female employment discrimination is not only a problem that China needs to solve, but also a problem that other countries must face. Some developed countries experienced a dual blow of low fertility and aging populations in the second half of the 20th century. In order to help female workers better balance the relationship between family and career, a series of related policies were implemented, successfully increasing women's labor participation rate.

Taking Sweden as an example, its female labor participation rate ranks first in the world, and its government also boasts itself as the 'world's first feminist government'. From the perspective of parliamentary personnel structure, the average proportion of female members of parliament in European countries is 28%, while the proportion of female members of parliament in Sweden is as high as 44%. From the perspective of specific laws and relevant systems, Sweden has first established a sound employment anti-discrimination legal system, and improved relevant employment and occupational dispute resolution mechanisms. It has also established a specialized judicial commissioner's office to provide supervision for related discrimination cases, enabling the implementation of relevant legal systems in employment discrimination related disputes. On the other hand, Sweden has established a sound socialized childcare system, shifting the high cost of female childcare to be borne by the entire society, buffering the difficult choices women face between unemployment and childcare. According to OECD statistics, the employment rate of unmarried women aged 20-49 in Sweden in 2011 was 76.3, while the employment rate of women with children under 6 years old was also as high as 74.1, with a very small gap between the two [4]. At the same time, in order to achieve gender equality, the Swedish government places great emphasis on the completion of male childcare responsibilities. In 1996, the Swedish government stipulated that at least one month of paid parental leave for men cannot be transferred to the mother, and if men do not use it, it is considered abandoned. This leave was extended to two months in 2002 and three months in 2016. This allows men and women to have basically the same length of leave at the legal level,

making the additional costs caused by factors such as maternity leave indistinguishable between male and female employees, which can effectively alleviate gender discrimination in employment.

Socializing the cost of childcare is also a solution in other countries. Russia has established a family allowance insurance system, where every family with children or adopting children can receive a certain amount of subsidy before the child is one and a half years old. At the same time, Russian mothers can enjoy up to one and a half years of half paid maternity leave, receive a subsidy equivalent to 40% of their original salary borne by the national social insurance fund, and the maternity leave is included in the length of service. These two major subsidy policies have effectively alleviated the contradiction between women's childbirth and career, reduced the economic burden of enterprises on women's employment, and better created an equal employment environment for women. In the context of severe aging, Japan not only socialized the cost of childcare, but also established a nursing insurance system to address elderly care issues. Furthermore, women were released from work-family conflicts, greatly alleviating discrimination in employment for women.

5. Conclusion and Suggestions

From a global perspective, discrimination against women in employment is a common problem, which is caused by a series of reasons such as differences in the physiological structure of men and women. Improving women's labor participation rate and allowing them to enter the labor market more freely and equally will be beneficial for improving women's overall social status and promoting harmonious economic and social development. To balance women's development choices between family and career, relying on spontaneous market implementation is not enough, but also requires strong policy and institutional support from the government. From typical countries, it can be seen that in order to protect women's legitimate rights to employment and create a healthy and harmonious environment for childbirth and employment, the following perspectives should be taken into consideration.

1: Improve the legal system for protecting women's employment rights. Rule of law is the basic strategy of our country, and to ensure women's employment rights, it is necessary to rely on a sound legal system for protection. From the perspective of specific implementation, the relevant departments should first clarify the legal criteria for determining gender discrimination in employment, and introduce detailed regulations and cases. Secondly, a specialized labor supervision department should be established to ensure the effective implementation and enforcement of laws and regulations. At the same time, it is necessary to clarify the legal responsibility of employers for implementing gender discrimination, increase the illegal costs of employers, and empower discriminated women to seek compensation.

2: Improve the social security system, improve relevant fertility policies, provide institutional support for female employees at all stages, and reduce the cost of female childbirth. Firstly, it is necessary to provide multi-level maternity support and subsidies for women, such as extending maternity leave and providing maternity allowances, to alleviate the decline in women's income and welfare caused by factors such as childbirth. At the same time, establish a family allowance system to shift the cost of childbirth for women from being borne by enterprises to being borne by society, reduce gender discrimination in employment caused by the profit perspective of enterprises, and strengthen the concept of gender equality to encourage male responsible participation. Provide reasonable childcare support for women after childbirth to alleviate their worries about employment.

3. Actively increase investment in women's human capital. Relying on platforms such as communities, women's federations, and human resources and social security bureaus, we will strengthen employment training for women, actively update their employment concepts, break through the constraints of traditional concepts on women, and improve their overall competitiveness in employment.

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