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Marriage, Parenthood and Labor Outcomes in China

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Throughout history there have been distinct gender roles between men and women. A stereotype that arises from aforementioned gender roles is that women typically resort within the household to take care of matters within the family, while men take part in the jobs outside of the home. This ideology is observed in various countries, but over the course of time equalization between genders has become a main focus in the workplace. Although the primary aim is equalization, it has come to light that as far as income and employment go, men typically have the upper hand. Through previous research studies, the struggle amongst family/household obligations and work served as the primary cause of gender discrepancy when it came to the individuals’ incomes in industrialized countries.

The range of studies previously conducted have significant differences, some stating that the gender wage gap is completely unbiased while others tend to favor the contrary. For example, the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth arrived at the conclusion that if a woman is married or has multiple children, it is more likely that their wage penalty is greater than that of an unmarried woman. Similar studies that were conducted in European countries concluded that parenthood tends to have relatively positive outcomes of men’s incomes, but negative outcomes on women’s incomes. The underlying reason, being that there is a time crunch post childbirth, resulting in women taking part-time jobs which results in lower incomes. Australian studies that came to this conclusion essentially stated that income and parenthood correlate. There have also been a variety of studies within East Asian countries outside of China that illustrate that there has been an increase of women in the workforce, but culturally household work is reserved for women. China’s pre-reform and reform eras to a market-oriented society stands out in regards to female employment and earnings. The gender gap within China at one point in time was attributed to discrimination, however, previous studies showed that earnings for women and men remained stable pre and post reform meaning discrimination was not the cause. Recent studies stated that the gender gap in obtaining jobs and obtaining income was based around education levels and human capital. Currently women have a higher return rate to education, however, due to men’s previous educational opportunity and higher employment rates in the past they have a high human capital which contributes to this gender gap.

Within this particular study, a survey was conducted that aimed to measure and explain human capital, political capital, as well as the confrontation between family and work. The study conducted utilized the China Urban Labor Survey/ China Adult Literacy Survey as a baseline. The CULS essentially is an appraisal used to measure the adult literacy among urban workers within China. The quantitative data within this study is then used to analyze the connections between human capital and employment/income. The CULS composes a simple random sample of cases by first obtaining a SRS from the cities and then another from the community. From the sample a subsample was drawn based on age (25-44). The total sample within the CULS is 2,280 cases. From this sample, the variables measured included: labor market outcomes, human capital, political capital, family structure, time use, demographic variables, and wealth. For Labor market outcomes, employment was measured by whether or not the individual in the study was currently working (0=no, 1=yes). Income was measured based off of those who responded that they currently were working. Human capital was measured by collecting data on the years of formal education, literacy test results, working experience, as well as job training. The literacy test was distributed to all respondents. Working experience for those who have not worked within the last five years (190 cases) used the duration from their first job. This was crucial because women tend to be the individuals that take a hiatus from work due to childbearing. Job training was measure by whether or not the individual had had previous experience (0=no, 1=yes). Political capital was measured based off of Communist Party Membership (0=no, 1=yes). Family structure was measured by whether or not the respondent was married or not (0=no, 1=yes), as well as if the individual had ever had a child regardless of if the child still lives in the household. Time use essentially measured how many hours the individual spent doing household work in contrast to paid work hours. Gender was also coded as 0 being a male respondent and 1 being a female respondent. Family wealth is essentially the sum of all stable goods within the home.

According to the CULS sample 52.9 percent of respondents are female while according the census about 50 percent were female. Within the CULS, the data states that men on average have 11.8 years of education while women on average have 11.3 years of education. The CULS states that 68.2 percent of women are employed while 81.9 percent of men are employed, however, women make 79 percent of what men make. According to this study men have more human capital because they have more education and are on average more literate than women. In addition to this men also have a higher political capital because men are twice as likely to be a member in the Chinese Communist Party as women are. Family structure is extremely prevalent considering that 89.4 percent of women are married while 78.2 percent of men are married. From the family structure the employment status is observed and the results are significant because there is a 17.4 percentage point difference among employment status for those who are married and a 16.3 percentage point difference for those who have children. Although there is no significant difference between the income of men and women who are married in relation to one another. However, married women’s income is 67 of the income of women who are not married. The same results were seen among individuals who also were parents. This remains steady with the hypothesis that marriage and parenthood inhibits a women’s income and employment. However, it is confounded by compositional differences. These differences that compose the situation as a whole are accounted for through the analysis of education, employment based off of education, Through the analysis of employment, the chance of being employed as a women is 53 percent lower than that of a man primarily because of the higher educational and literacy ratings for men. Through the analysis of income women’s income is 18 percent lower than men’s. Through the analysis of time usage women on average spend 21 more hours doing housework as opposed to men. Through this despite the differences observed, women still spend more time doing household work than men do.

The contribution that this sociological journal makes is extremely beneficial when comparing the distribution of income amongst women and men. Not only does this study show the differences between men and women as just the gender, but this study also includes comparisons amongst married and unmarried men and women and observes how one variable corresponds to the other. The methodology utilized within this study was consistent and credible. The sources were valid and the process in which the Simple Random Sample was obtain was correct and specialized to the study. In addition to the process of how the sample was obtained, the methodology ensured that the study was unbiased and was relevant to the hypothesis.

Considering the primary goal within industrialized countries is to have equalization within the workplace, the fact that inequality is still prevalent makes it come to light more. However, the difference in employment and income between men and women were hypothesized to be due to the marital and parental statuses of the men and women. Throughout this specific study a simple random sample was taken from China’s population and was compared to the CULS which is a survey that measures education and literacy. This data is then helpful when measuring labor market outcomes, human capital, political capital, family structure, time use, demographic variables, and wealth. All of these variables that were measured were not only compared female to male, but also married women to unmarried women. Though this study the data remained consistent with the hypothesis that married women who also happen to be parents are at a greater disadvantage in employment and income as opposed to men and unmarried women. This study is valid considering that the confounding variables are accounted for.