



ISSN: 2249-7315

Vol. 11, Issue 10, October 2021

SJIF –Impact Factor = 8.037 (2021)

DOI: 10.5958/2249-7315.2021.00138.6

AN OVERVIEW OF CHINESE ONE-CHILD POLICY ISSUES AND THEIR POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

The one-child-per-couple policy (OCP), which has had a negative impact on fertility rates in China since 1979, was implemented in 1979. Many studies have been conducted since then to demonstrate the impact of the OCP on China's population's increasing age. The growing percentage of old people in China is causing significant social and economic problems, which need the creation of suitable policies. Using the sandwich generation as an example, this essay explores this problem in a unique manner, highlighting the challenges faced by individuals who are frequently responsible for both younger and older generations. An effort is made to personalize the implications of this demographic transition and to offer potential remedies for mitigating its impacts through the presentation of qualitative data recently gathered from a wide range of members of this generation. We find that there are many opportunities in metropolitan regions, while problems are more pressing in rural areas, owing to the proportionally higher number of older people and the scarcity of alternatives available.

KEYWORDS: *Demographic, Economic, Fertility, Financial, One-Child Policy.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the last few decades, China has seen a decline in fertility and an increase in longevity, two demographic indices that indicate that the country is transitioning towards an elderly culture. A population slowdown, according to the majority of academics, causes less socioeconomic changes than an explosion. However, the potential consequences of prolonged low fertility for social change and economic growth, particularly in emerging nations such as China, should not be overlooked. This research will look at one of the consequences of China's low fertility rate, namely, the changes that have occurred in the lives of the elderly. To be more precise, this article will examine the relationship between China's one child per couple policy (OCP) and the country's ageing population by looking at demographic changes, particularly in family structure and care-giving habits. As we chronicle these changes, we are also identifying potential solutions to the new problems that have arisen. To do this, qualitative data from urban and rural members of the sandwich generation will be examined. This refers to the middle generation, which is frequently tasked with providing care for both younger and older generations at the same time[1].

The significance of researching the sandwich generation, particularly in relation to age-related problems, has been emphasized by a large number of ageing and demographic experts; nevertheless, few studies have focused on the sandwich generation in developing countries. Our attention on this generation in China is an effort to partly fill this vacuum and to personalize the consequences of China's demographic change, while also exploring potential solutions for mitigating its impact on the rest of the world. This research starts by examining the demographic and socio-economic changes that China has lately undergone, with a particular emphasis on the country's growing percentage of old people and the cultural, social, and economic issues that have resulted as a result of this trend. Following that, we personalize societal change by analyzing qualitative data collected at the individual level. The last part addresses potential ideas that might be beneficial in alleviating the problems that the elderly in China are experiencing at this time.

1.1 Filial Piety and Familial Relationships:

Almost every dynasty in China has embraced Confucian philosophy as the official state dogma during the last 2000 years. As a result, the virtue of filial piety was elevated to the status of a social cornerstone in Chinese society. Confucius thought that neglecting to exercise filial piety was the most serious offence a person could commit. More precisely, he felt that the service that a filial son provides to his parents consists of the following activities: In his overall demeanor toward them, he demonstrates the highest level of respect. His goal in feeding them is to provide them with the greatest amount of pleasure possible. When they are sick, he has the most worry in the world. In his sorrow for them, he displays every manifestation of human emotion. When he sacrifices for them, he does it with the greatest seriousness. It is possible to declare a kid capable of serving his parents if he has all five of these characteristics[2].

The result is that Chinese families have historically formed groups around relatives who help one another in terms of finances. Elderly parents are most often accommodated by the oldest son. For thousands of years, blood ties have played an essential role in establishing and maintaining family connections. Although most Confucian beliefs were condemned as feudal folly when communists took power in 1949, the notion that the son(s) should care for the old persisted. As things are right now, the Chinese government is indirectly using the OCP to choose promote certain traditional components of filial piety in order to assist alleviate the load of an ageing population. For example, under the Criminal Law of 1979, an adult child who refuses to provide financial assistance to an elderly family member may be imprisoned for up to five years. According to the Constitution of 1982, which reemphasized Confucian values by requiring parents to assist their young children while also stressing the necessity for adult children to support their elderly parents, reciprocal family responsibilities were clarified in more detail[3].

As a result of social and economic developments, and intergenerational co-residence have decreased, family size has shrunk, and families have ceased to be the main production units that they were before. While China's transition to a low mortality and low fertility society has resulted in an increase in the number of surviving generations, the number of individuals within each generation has decreased as a consequence of the change. By 2005, the Chinese Association of Senior Citizens predicted that half of the country's elderly would be living in "empty nests," an increase from the previous year's projection of a third. More and more urban people will reach their last years without having given birth to any children, owing to the low fertility rates in metropolitan regions. In Tianjin, a large city near Beijing, for example, 54 percent of elderly people lived alone in 1997, according to government statistics. It is expected to reach 90 percent by 2012, having risen from 62.5 percent in 2002 to 62.5 percent in 2002. Apart from that, a large number of these empty nesters live in houses that are not built for older people yet are reluctant to move and spend their last years in a nursing facility because of the stigma associated with doing so[4].

Some high-quality nursing facilities, as a result, struggle to maintain acceptable occupancy levels, despite the fact that demographic studies indicate that there should be a high demand for their services. A similar trend is occurring in rural regions, where family support networks for the elderly are eroding. This is mainly due to an increase in the number of young people leaving the country. This situation has deteriorated to the point that it must be addressed, since for the vast majority of rural elders, their families are their primary source of eldercare. We'll come back to this topic later. As previously stated, the OCP has had a significant impact on the structure of Chinese households. Because to the OCP, only a small number of Chinese now have the extensive horizontal family connections that their forefathers and foremothers had[5].

Despite a rise in vertical connections, or the number of living generations, there are fewer individuals within each generation, despite the increase in vertical ties. With the fragmentation of traditional family structures, the 4-2-1 family structure (four grandparents, two parents, and one kid) has arisen as the new dominant type of family organization. As the reality of caring for four elderly parents and their single kid dawns on this sandwich generation, what coping methods will they devise? What will the government do in order to accommodate these socio-demographic shifts is yet to be determined? The issues have surfaced, but institutional reforms and government policies are lagging far behind in their resolution[6].

2. DISCUSSION

One of the inevitable effects of China's One-Child Policy has been the gradual ageing of the country's population. The combination of lower than replacement fertility, lower mortality, and longer life expectancies has turned China into an ageing society that faces problems that have never been seen before in this ancient country or anywhere else in the world, including the United States. Accordingly, this research concentrated on demographic shifts induced by the OCP, investigating changes in family structure and eldercare delivery in an effort to address the question "Who will care for China's elderly?" Because the customary care given by extended families is no longer an option for the majority of Chinese, this problem has suddenly emerged as a significant concern for the whole country[7].

Although previous research has looked at this issue, the vast majority of it has been quantitative and has relied on macro-level studies virtually without exception. This study differs from others in that it relied on in-depth qualitative interviews with people who had been directly impacted by the OCP to gather information. Individuals from different parts of Chinese society, including members of the sandwich generation (i.e., the middle generation that often must care for both younger and older generations at the same time), were questioned for this study. Those who participated in the qualitative interviews were carefully questioned in order to uncover any potential ideas or solutions that may have been missed by the quantitative research described above[8]. The results of our interviews showed that the majority of parents, particularly those living in metropolitan areas, had come to terms with the fact that a single kid would be unable to care for two parents and four grandparents (4-2-1). In order to prepare for their children's futures, parents who are financially competent are increasingly developing non-traditional and autonomous plans of their own.

The majority of people who are able to prepare for their futures, on the other hand, live in metropolitan regions. However, this does not imply that all urban inhabitants are financially equipped to undertake such a venture. Instead, many rural people, who constitute the overwhelming bulk of the population, are mainly left to their own devices, since the severe poverty faced by many means that they are unable to afford the luxury of making financial plans for their future retirement years. The findings of this study, although not typical of the wide range of differences seen among China's elderly in general, did point to the necessity for particular urban and rural types of eldercare, since different locations of living provide a

unique set of problems and possibilities. Specifically, in metropolitan areas, we propose the development of already existing municipal neighborhood committee programmes that provide care for the elderly, as well as the distribution of similar programmes to regions where they are not already available[9].

National standards for neighborhood committees should be developed, and they should be based on the successful Shanghai model, with ideas from other cities' successful programmes incorporated where appropriate. Because there are currently no national standards for neighborhood committees, these should be developed. The system by which volunteers from neighborhood committees give assistance to the elderly, as has been done in Shanghai, may be institutionalized and extended to other metropolitan regions. In Shanghai's well-functioning system, the young-old volunteers are in charge of the majority of the care for the sick and elderly. Those who are helped by the neighborhood committee system do not depend on family members for any part of their eldercare, which reduces the expense of such a programme to a bare minimum while increasing the effectiveness of the outcomes. Similar programmes to be created abroad do not have to be based exclusively on neighborhood committees; they may also be based on previous work units, if they are structured properly.

Nursing homes are another feasible alternative for urban people who are not lucky enough to live in regions where neighborhood committees are well-functioning and successful. This is becoming an increasingly popular option for older Chinese, despite the fact that it is not a conventional way to spend one's golden years. As people become more acquainted with nursing homes, it is likely that an increasing proportion of older people will choose to voluntarily move to such institutions. This alternative is also expected to be promoted more as a result of the recent growth of Protestant churches and the nursing homes they offer for their members. A broader effort to promote nursing homes, on the other hand, would be an effective approach to rapidly relieve the anxiety some prospective residents presently have and gain support for this eldercare alternative.

Of course, the quality of the nursing home into which a person is admitted will most certainly be determined by the resources that individuals are able to pay toward their own medical expenses. Retirement insurance is another kind of investment for old age that is dependent on the resources of the individual. These pension schemes are fairly widely recognized in metropolitan areas, and many people who have the financial wherewithal to do so are taking advantage of them to supplement their income. Most poor rural seniors will continue to depend on traditional family care, or, if these are not available, on whatever little social aid the government decides to offer. The provision of eldercare to rural people is fraught with difficulties that are much greater than those encountered in metropolitan settings. Not only do seniors outnumber younger people in rural regions, but they also constitute a larger percentage of the population as a result of the widespread exodus of the young. Rural areas lack many of the urban eldercare alternatives, such as community committees, nursing facilities, and insurance/pension plans, which are common in metropolitan areas.

As a result, traditional values connected with filial piety continue to be strongly held in these communities. Since of this, and because there are few other alternatives available, family-based eldercare continues to be the most common kind of social support given to the elderly in rural areas. At one point in time, more than 60% of China's rural elderly were housed in multi-generational homes where such eldercare was available. The ideals connected with filial piety, on the other hand, are always changing and must be reaffirmed from time to time, as was the case with the Marriage Law of 1980. According to this legislation, which was enacted to reaffirm traditional views about caring for older family members, children and grandchildren are obligated to care for their parents and grandparents.

Another new trend noticed in rural China is that young married couples are increasingly choosing to live with their wives' parents rather than the usual pattern of couples relocating to

their husbands' families. Promotion of the former pattern may contribute to partly resolving China's unequal gender distribution and promoting new views about conventional gender preferences in rural China, ultimately leading to the creation of more eldercare alternatives in the country.

The elderly living in rural areas would benefit tremendously from more government support as they deal with the fast socio-economic changes that they have experienced and will continue to face. However, due to budgetary limitations, it is extremely doubtful that any of the suggested modifications would be implemented anytime soon. The large-scale rural–urban movement of the young and healthy, on the other hand, is likely to persist for as long as there is a significant economic divide between rural and urban regions. Given the fact that those leaving represent one of the few remaining sources of rural eldercare, this issue must be addressed.

One of the long-term objectives of the administration should be to close the enormous socioeconomic gap that exists between rural and urban regions in the country. That will be a significant issue that will take a significant amount of time and money to overcome. Meanwhile, the government should focus on raising the educational level of the rural population, particularly among female children, and extending some form of the minimal livelihood system that is presently in place in urban areas to rural regions as a temporary measure. Such initiatives may make it possible for rural areas to attract more businesses while also retaining a greater number of its young people[10].

Old-age insurance, which has been offered in certain rural areas since 1991, has to be made available to all rural people, as well as properly marketed and explained to them. Pensions, such as those provided by old-age insurance in rural regions, would offer much-needed freedom to individuals who find themselves alone and in need of outside care, as well as to their families. Currently, however, such insurance is out of reach for many rural people due to its high cost. As a first step in lowering the cost of purchasing old-age insurance, the government should either provide such insurance directly or help those firms that already supply it in their efforts to provide adequate coverage at cheaper prices to rural people.

3. CONCLUSION

It is both essential and vital for China to address its ageing issues, particularly those stemming from the One Belt, One Road Initiative (OCP). Solving these issues should be seen as part of a broader strategic initiative to guarantee that China's economic development continues indefinitely. Although China will almost certainly need to retain the One Child Policy (OCP) in order to control its population increase, it will also need to address its ageing population in order to achieve its objective of a sustainable annual economic growth rate of 7–8 percent in the near future. It is not necessary for an ageing population and a rising economy to be in opposition to one another. Continuous economic growth may be able to assist in addressing some of the most difficult effects of the reduced fertility produced by the OCP, including some of its most severe repercussions. Recreational activities and in-home residential care for the elderly are examples of new businesses that may be beneficial to the economy in the long run. First and foremost, though, is the problem of caring for China's old, which must be properly addressed.

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