Review Paper

A Review of Literature on Women Employment Discrimination in China

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Abstract: The transition from one-child policy to two-child policy exacerbated women's employment discrimination in China. Three-child policy may exacerbate women's employment discrimination further. This paper aims to review past literature, on women employment discrimination, causes or factors of the discrimination and the challenges the women faced. Women employment discrimination in China is also reviewed, specifically from the fertility policy perspective. A qualitative systematic thematic literature review revealed specific themes, including employment discrimination and gender discrimination, women discrimination in employment, the influence of childbearing on women employment, fertility policy, and women employment discrimination. Furthermore, there are several causes of women employment discrimination: one of them being fertility policies. The review revealed some research strengths that can strengthen new research on women employment discrimination. Gaps in terms of research limitations are identified, such as a lack of empirical data on gender bias, a paucity of data on research on gender discrimination in relation to specific fertility policies, and a lack of in-depth analyses of women's career opportunities and barriers in different cultural settings. Despite China's concern with the impact of the number of children on women employment, in-depth research on the relationship between fertility policies, especially the latest three-child policy, and women employment discrimination is limited. Therefore, there is a need to conduct more comprehensive and substantive studies on women employment discrimination that is occurring in societies, including in China, undergoing rapid social change due to accelerated modernization, capitalism, and industrialization during this Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR).

Keywords: Fertility policy; China's fertility policies; women employment; women discrimination; gender equality

Introduction

In recent decades, women discrimination in the labour market has attracted considerable attention as a persistent challenge, impeding women's full participation and fair representation in the labour market (Stamarski & Son Hing, 2015). At the same time, population dynamics and gender equality have become key factors influencing global social and economic development, including labour market development. One of the most important policy areas in this regard is that of fertility policy, which directly affects population growth and demographic composition (United Nations, 2021). As a result, a growing body of academic research has focused on exploring women discrimination in employment, while also paying increasing attention to fertility policy and the influence of women's childbearing on women discrimination in employment and its causes.

Whether in terms of the proportion of women who are discriminated against in employment or in terms of the size of the population, the seriousness of discrimination against women in employment should be given high priority. Especially, the transition from one-child policy to two-child policy exacerbated women's employment discrimination in China. Three-child policy may exacerbate women's employment discrimination further. The aim of this literature review is to systematically review past studies that are related to women discrimination and women employment discrimination, especially related specific themes such as employment discrimination, gender discrimination, women employment discrimination, the influence of childbearing on women employment and fertility policy, and women employment discrimination.

This review is done in order to understand how those past studies help in understanding women employment discrimination, namely the causes or factors of the discrimination and the challenges the women faced, including women in China. Consequently, the review will reveal strengths and limitations of the past studies as well as provide some ideas on research gaps seen from those studies. The identified strengths and limitations of the studies will show how the strengths can help to strengthen new research on women employment discrimination in current times, for instance in China. The limitations can show how they can be addressed through new research to better understand, explore, describe, and explain the current situation and scenario of women discrimination, namely women employment discrimination in China. Then the review will also reveal any research gaps that can be filled by new and current studies on women employment discrimination, including in China. Examples of research gaps are in terms of research problem and research questions, theory and/or concepts that are applied, theorization and/or conceptualization, research methodology, empirical findings, practical knowledge, and evidence. More importantly, the limitations of past studies and research gaps seen from those studies will demonstrate the need to conduct new, current, and more comprehensive and substantive studies on women employment discrimination occurring in societies currently undergoing rapid social change due to accelerated modernization, capitalism, and industrialization during this Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). In that way, the need to conduct more up-to-date and new studies, for instance, on causes of women employment discrimination in China, especially from the current 3-child fertility policy perspective, is justified.

Based on the aims of this review mentioned above, the objectives of this literature review are 1) to identify the specific common themes from past studies on women discrimination and women employment discrimination, 2) to analyze the themes by synthesizing key ideas from the themes, and 3) to identify strengths and limitations found from the studies, 4) to identify research gaps, and 5) to ascertain the need to conduct new studies on women employment discrimination in current times from the research gaps.

Methodology

1. Research Design
This paper adopts a qualitative methodological approach to conduct a qualitative systematic thematic review of relevant past studies. Through an in-depth analysis and systematic summary of relevant past studies, this paper provided a comprehensive understanding of the existing knowledge in the field. Specifically, a qualitative systematic thematic analysis is employed to synthesize and organize the main perspectives, research findings, and theoretical frameworks found in the existing literature.

2. Data Collection
The researcher selected appropriate databases including Google Scholar, Web of Science (WoS), Scopus, SAGE journal, and CNKI to ensure a comprehensive search. During the literature retrieval phase, various types of literature relevant to women discrimination, women employment discrimination, and fertility policy are gathered. Subsequently, a detailed assessment of each selected literature is conducted to examine the research problem, research design, sample selection, methodology, and data analysis to ensure the credibility and suitability of the literature. Following that, the researcher conducted an initial screening of all the literature to identify specific common themes. This rigorous assessment provided the basis for subsequent synthesis and analysis of each theme. The themes found are on fertility policy, employment discrimination,

gender discrimination, changes experienced by women in employment at different stages of childbearing, the forms and status of women discrimination in employment, and the influence of China's fertility policy on women employment discrimination. The process of data collection is illustrated in Figure 1.

Selection of Databases
- Google Scholar
- Web of Science (WoS)
- Scopus
- SAGE journal
- CNKI

Literature Retrieval Phase
Gather various types of literature relevant to:
  - Women discrimination
  - Women employment discrimination
  - Fertility policy

Detailed Assessment
Examine each selected literature for:
  - Research problem
  - Research design
  - Sample selection
  - Methodology
  - Data analysis

Synthesis and Analysis
  - Based on the identified themes, conduct synthesis and analysis of each theme
  - Use rigorous assessment as the basis for synthesis and analysis

Initial Screening
Identify specific common themes among the literature
  - Themes include:
  - Fertility policy
  - Employment discrimination
  - Gender discrimination
  - Changes experienced by women in employment at different stages of childbearing
  - Forms and status of women discrimination in employment
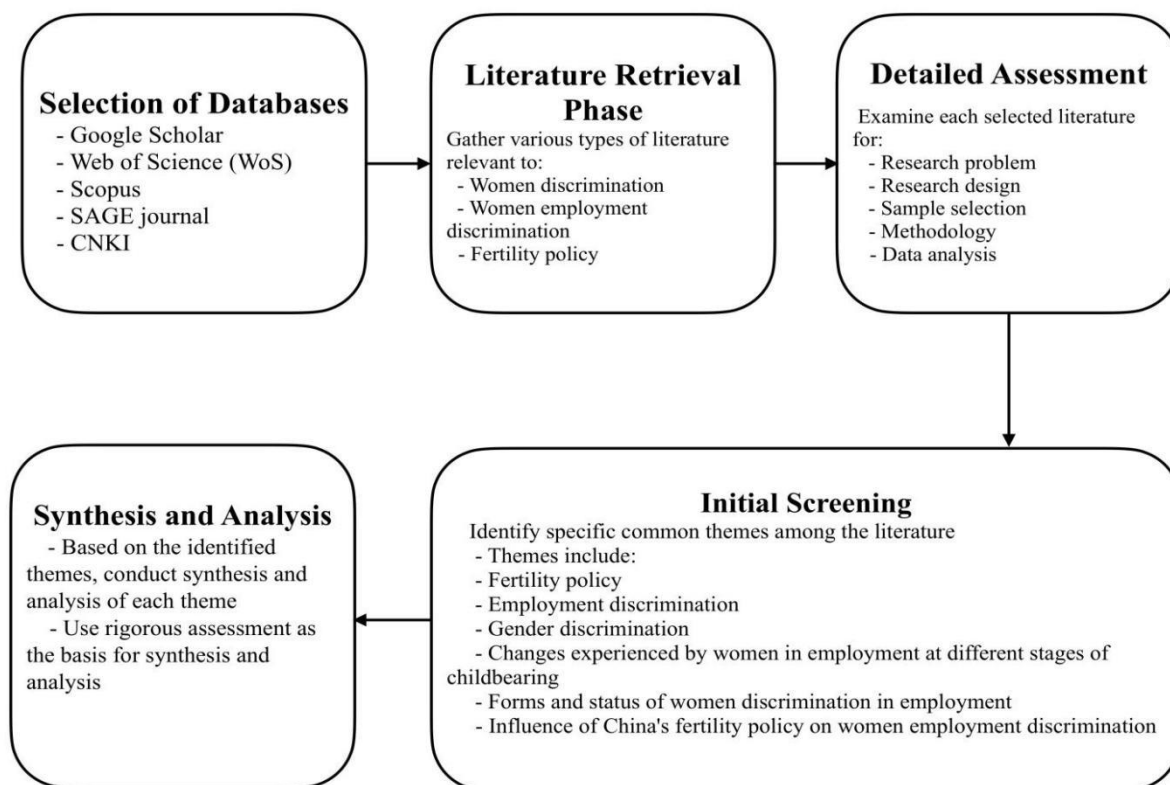 - Influence of China's fertility policy on women employment discrimination

Figure 1. The process of data collection

3. Data Analysis
A qualitative systematic thematic literature review focuses on identifying, analysing, and synthesising key themes or patterns in a body of literature related to a research topic or research question (Thomas & Harden, 2008). A thematic literature review organises past studies based on common themes or issues (Thomas & Harden, 2008). The thematic literature review of this study focuses on the themes of fertility policy, employment discrimination, gender discrimination, changes experienced by women in employment at different stages of childbearing, the forms and status of women discrimination in employment, and the influence of China's fertility policy on women employment discrimination. The use of systematic thematic literature reviews can provide a comprehensive overview of women discrimination and women employment discrimination and the causes such as fertility policy, including in China and elsewhere in the world. In turn, these reviews are used to gain insight into the current state of knowledge, gain a global perspective on the topic, understand the key issues, findings, identify trends of past studies, and identify gaps in the research.

The Findings
The research findings are several key themes drawn from the literature: employment discrimination, gender discrimination, women discrimination in employment, the influence of childbearing on women employment, and the influence of China's fertility policy on women discrimination in employment. Review of the themes reveals that the problem of discrimination against women is occurring at the workplace, the causes or factors of the discrimination, and the challenges the women faced, including those in China. Some past studies specifically confirm fertility policy as one of the causes of women employment discrimination, especially in

China. They found that fertility policy shapes a consistent societal expectation that continually leads to women employment discrimination in China.

The review demonstrates the strengths and also limitations of the past studies and identified research gaps that call for more focus on the need for more concrete evidence, more comprehensive strategies, and a more in-depth exploration of the issue and causes of women employment discrimination, especially stereotypes, gender bias, and the impact of fertility policy during maternity leave and childcare. Filling these gaps would contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by women in employment and support the development of effective measures to address discrimination. The following sections discuss the findings and analysis of each theme.

1. Employment Discrimination

This section focuses on some findings from the review of a specific theme of employment discrimination. The scope of the problem of employment discrimination is very broad. Previous empirical studies that have explored employment discrimination have focused more on identifying the existence of employment discrimination rather than exploring its underlying causes (Villadsen & Wulff, 2018). When reviewing a retrospective review of studies on employment discrimination in recent years, it is clear that researchers have focused more on employment discrimination for people with disabilities (Bell, 2019), ethnic minorities (Alteri, 2020; Guul et al., 2019), sexual minorities (Lau & Stotzer, 2010), and a few other specific groups.

In addition to exploring these broad phenomena that exist in the study of employment discrimination, some researchers have also explored the causes of employment discrimination in some culturally specific job categories. For example, in China's current culture, civil service positions are perceived as "iron rice bowls". Competition for civil service jobs is also fierce. As the most important and representative part of the labor market, civil service employment has always been valued. However, discrimination in civil service employment has always existed and become controversial in Chinese society (LI & JIA, 2017).

By reviewing the literature related to employment discrimination, the authors found that the issue of employment discrimination has a long history and covers a wide range of areas. More new issues appeared as time goes on. A comprehensive approach and strategy are needed at all levels of society to improve the social inclusion of those who are discriminated against in employment (Mirjana et al., 2021). Employment discrimination hurts society as a whole and threatens equal employment opportunities for many. Eliminating the phenomenon of employment discrimination requires a variety of measures to create a fair and competitive, reasonable and orderly employment environment for employers, and efforts to achieve equal employment for employers.

2. Gender Discrimination

This section discusses findings from the review of another specific theme, i.e. gender discrimination. The authors captured the phenomena and manifestations of gender discrimination by conducting a thorough analysis of relevant literature.Early studies of employment discrimination in economics are introduced by Mill (1966), who argued that restrictions on women's legal rights allowed men to be paid more for their labor in the labor market and to gain higher status and authority in the family, and that women are therefore entitled to enter the public sphere and to freely choose suitable occupations (Mill, 1966).

Since the 1970s, research on gender discrimination has grown in volume and evolved in subject matter and methodology (Shen, 2021). Ensuring gender equality is a daunting task even for the most developed countries in the world, as none of them have achieved gender equality. Reviewing the literature and research in recent years, the authors found that gender discrimination exists to varying degrees in countries with different economic levels, historical and cultural differences, or in different regions of the same country. Napier et al. (2020) conducted a hypothesis testing experiment with over 20,000 participants from 23 countries, in which it is verified that most people have experienced gender discrimination at the individual level. Choudhury & Kumar's (2021) index analysis of the Northeastern states of India, where women are relatively well situated, also concluded that sexism exists. Even though women in the Northeast enjoy a higher

perceived status than their counterparts in other parts of India, cultural and customary traditions discriminate greatly against women.

The phenomenon of gender discrimination covers the life cycle of people growing up, from childbearing, and parenting (Beltrán Tapia & Raftakis, 2021; Marco-Gracia & Beltrán Tapia, 2021; Vigod & Rochon, 2020) to getting an education (Khanal, 2018; Kaul, 2018), to entering the labor market (Heilman & Caleo, 2018; Coffman et al., 2021) and to entering the housing rental market (Flage, 2018), the credit market (Montoya et al., 2020; Le & Stefańczyk, 2018) and others. Injustice and inequality are both self-evident and a fact of life worldwide. Both conscious and unconscious gender biases and imbalances rage within humanity, but most of humanity are unaware of them (Armand Brice Eating, 2021).

The past studies have addressed the issue of stereotypes and gender bias faced by women in the workplace in a relatively comprehensive manner and have pointed out that these issues have a negative impact on women's career development and the operation of organisations. However, insufficient data and examples are provided to demonstrate the extent to which these stereotypes exist. As well as regarding the bias against women, whether by men or women employers, particularly in relation to maternity and maternity leave, this may indeed be a real issue. However, past researchers (Storm et al., 2023; Tabassum & Nayak, 2021) have not provided actual examples or data to support the idea of why women childbearing affects employment, making it difficult to identify the extent and impact of bias. However, there are only a few studies (Marco-Gracia & Beltrán Tapia, 2021; Vigod & Rochon, 2020) that have analyzed the issue of gender discrimination in employment in relation to specific fertility policy.

3. Women Discrimination in Employment

This section presents some findings from a review of another theme that is a combination of the earlier themes. This theme is on women discrimination in employment. This review would provide a more comprehensive understanding of women discrimination in employment, laying the groundwork for subsequent discussions and analyses. Gender inequality in the workplace persists, and scholars point to women discrimination as an important contributing factor (Heilman & Caleo, 2018). Heilman and Caleo (2018) argue that the interplay of theory and practice is important in addressing women discrimination in employment. Employment discrimination may hinder the career development of disadvantaged groups or even worse, may prevent these groups from accessing desirable job opportunities.

A review of studies in recent years revealed that in employment, women discrimination is generally reflected in recruitment (Zhang et al., 2021; Dharmawardhane & Navaratne, 2019), promotion (Hipolito, 2020; Steel Fisher et al., 2019), and salary packages (Gagnon et al., 2020) inequality. A study by Fugate et al. (2017) found that women are more likely to report experiencing women discrimination at work than men. This discrimination takes various forms, including unequal pay, sexual harassment, and being passed over for promotions (Fugate et al., 2017). Zhang et al. (2021) conducted a study to disentangle the confounding effect of gender from other factors and found that, on average, women applicants are less likely to be invited to an on-site interview by recruiting firms compared to men applicants, holding all other factors constant (Zhang et al., 2021). Similarly, in Malaysia, Poon & Leeves (2022) estimated women discrimination in the labor market by using fictitious job applicants with gender identifiable names at the top of their resumes. The results showed that women bias against callbacks is only evident in the broader market that traditionally offers women employment (Poon & Leeves, 2022).

These phenomena and experiences of women discrimination in employment, as well as the conditions and processes that produce women discrimination in employment, hinder women's career development (Heilman & Caleo, 2018). These may cause psychological harm to these groups of women, such as depression. Kim et al. (2020) analyzed 2,339 respondents identified as employed workers through the Wave 6 (2016) survey data set of the Korean Longitudinal Survey of Women and Families (KLoWF). Depressive symptoms are assessed by the Short Form (10-item) Center for Epidemiologic Studies-Depression Scale. After adjusting for sociodemographic factors, women discrimination in employment is found to be significantly associated with depressive symptoms. In addition, women under 40 years of age are particularly vulnerable to women discrimination in employment (Kim et al., 2020). Research has shown that women

discrimination leads to negative psychological and physical health outcomes for those who experience it (Dovidio et al., 2018). Individuals who experience women discrimination are also more likely to leave their jobs, leading to higher turnover rates and reduced organizational productivity (Hersch & Stratton, 2017).

In the current field of academic researches, the existence and impact of women discrimination in employment have been extensively explored by scholars, covering a number of different fields such as hiring, promotion, wages, and so on. Through analysis of numerous studies and data, researchers have found that the majority of studies focus on the unfair treatment women face in education, the labor market, the housing rental market, the credit market, and so on. However, there is a relative paucity of literature on employment discrimination against women due to childbirth and childcare. There are even some perspectives that have been stumbled upon while researching other issues. While there have been some studies that have focused on this phenomenon, they have not explored it in depth and by extension. As a result, there is an even greater paucity of research related to fertility policy. In view of this, a focus on employment discrimination experienced by women during childbirth and childcare can support academic research and social practice in this area.

4. The Influence of Childbearing on Women Employment

This section presents some findings from the review of some literatures on another theme, i.e. the influence of childbearing on women employment in societies. The linkage between childbirth and fertility policies suggests that understanding the impact of childbirth can also enhance comprehension of how fertility policies influence women employment discrimination.

Levinson (1978), based on a study of successful women's career development stages, pointed out that women tend to interrupt their careers at the age of 30 due to childbirth problems. In addition, women's career patterns can be divided into four typical patterns with significant country-specific social characteristics according to the differences in women's career participation, i.e., inverted L-shaped (typical countries such as China, where women continue to work until retirement), inverted U-shaped (women's career participation rate is high before marriage and declines rapidly after marriage and childbirth, such as Singapore and Japan), M-shaped (women's career participation rate is high before marriage or childbirth and declines rapidly after marriage and childbirth, such as Singapore and Japan), and M-shaped (women's career participation rate is high before marriage or childbirth and declines rapidly after marriage and childbirth). The M model (women have a high career participation rate before marriage or childbirth, and after marriage and childbirth, they temporarily interrupt their work and return to the workplace when their children grow up, typically in the United States), and the multi-stage model in which women can move in and out of the workplace several times according to their needs, as represented by the Nordic countries (Deng.Z.J, 2013). According to the classification of career stages, studies on women's career development (Stamarski & Son Hing, 2015) have shown that family marital status is an important factor influencing women's career. Blomm (1994), based on a panel of 97 countries, found that having a child reduces women's labor force participation by 5-10% and that women work 1.9 years less over their lifetime (Blomm, 1994). Studies in China also showed that women's labor supply declines as the number of children increases, both in urban and rural areas (Zhang, 2011; Song, 2015).

Miller (2009), using data from the U.S., found that delaying childbearing helps increase women's labor market earnings, with each year of delayed childbearing increasing women's wage rate by 3% and lifetime labor income by 9% (Miller, 2009). A study by Batti and Cavalli (2013) showed that for each year that women delay the age of first childbearing, their likelihood of participating in the labor market increases by 1.2% and their weekly working hours increase by half an hour (Bratti & Cavalli, 2013). Torun and Tumen (2016), based on a Swedish sample, found that delaying childbearing has a significant negative effect on both women's average monthly wages and long-term wage earnings (Torun & Tumen, 2016).

5. Fertility Policy and Women Discrimination in Employment

This section discusses the review on the specific theme of fertility policy and women discrimination in employment. By examining past studies and relevant literature, the focus is placed on specific aspects of

fertility policy and women discrimination in employment. This approach is intended to enhance the understanding of the relationship and explore the reasons behind women discrimination in employment. In comparison with similar fertility policies in other countries, and this section continues to explore the reasons for women employment discrimination based on the background of fertility policies. At the same time, the author delves into the discrimination issues that Chinese women face in employment within the context of China's fertility policies.

A study by Zhao (2019) based on cross-tracking data found that age at childbearing, especially age at first childbearing, is significantly related to women's labor force participation behavior, with women who have first childbearing earlier than 23 or later than 25 being more likely to have labor force participation (Zhao, 2019). Liu and Hu (2018) found, based on data from the 2008 and 2013 China Resident Income Surveys, that women with strong job stability or leadership positions increased their wage income levels after delaying childbearing, while those who had difficulty obtaining technical titles and had poor job stability decreased their wage income levels after delaying childbearing age (Liu & Hu, 2018). Yan and Yu (2020) analyzed the effect of childbearing age on women's labor force participation based on data from the China Integrated Social Survey and found that for each year of delay in childbearing age, the labor force participation rate of married women increased significantly by 0.825-0.884 percentage points (Yan, 2020). Wang (2020), on the other hand, used the same data to study the effect of delaying the age of first childbearing on women's earnings and found that a certain range of later childbearing is beneficial to women's earnings levels. However, this effect is not linear, and the relative advantage is no longer significant after the age of first childbearing exceeds 29 years (Wang, 2020). In particular, the economic benefits of later childbearing are more pronounced for women who are urban domiciled, have higher education levels, and whose first childbearing occurs in the recent past..

Research on birth spacing is scarce, and the few studies that have been conducted have not reached consistent conclusions. Troske's (2012) study suggests that increasing birth spacing has a negative effect on women's labor force participation, reducing their likelihood of participating in full-time work while increasing their chances of participating in part-time work, further affecting their labor earnings (Troske & Voicu, 2012). In examining the interaction between age at first birth and birth spacing, Gough (2017) found that neither long nor short birth spacing is conducive to higher labor earnings, while women with birth spacing of 2 to 6 years experienced the least penalty for childbearing (Gough, 2017). In the policy context of encouraging fertility, only an earlier age of first childbearing and a smaller birth interval make it possible to realize the possibility of multiple births and achieve the policy goal of raising fertility levels..

Earlier, a survey conducted by Shen (1985) on the average ideal number of children for women of childbearing age found that the ideal number of children for Chinese women is 2.40 (Shen, 1985). Jia and Lv (2020) found that the average ideal number of children for the current period is 1.74 by analyzing data from the 1997 National Demographic and Fertility Health Survey (Jia & Lv, 2020). Zhang et al. (2020) surveyed women of childbearing age in Shaanxi Province on their intention to have two children and found that 45.3% have the intention to have two children and 24.2% are unsure (Zhang et al., 2020). It is clear that, overall, the number of children born to Chinese women of childbearing age is declining. However, this finding is disputed by some researchers (Tang, 2014; Chen, 2006). Tang (2014) believes that most women still have a more traditional view of childbearing as a family responsibility and are willing to have more children (Tang, 2014). In particular, people with higher education levels are more inclined to have children, particularly among white-collar workers, with a greater willingness to have two children (Chen, 2006). Zhou (2002) even believes that some highly educated people in China are not only willing to have more children, but also willing to go abroad to have children if they have the conditions (Zhou, 2002).

Liu (2000) also believes that the more educated people are, the fewer children they want to have due to the cost of education (Liu, 2000). Although there is controversy over whether the number of children born to women of childbearing age is increasing or decreasing, data from China's two-child policy and newborn birth rate show that the number of children born to Chinese women of childbearing age is generally on the decline. This controversy has not yet been effectively answered. The number of children further affects women's labor earnings by influencing their labor supply and labor efficiency, and most studies concluded that although the extent to which women are penalized in the labor market varies by family characteristics,

individual factors, and national and regional fertility policies, in general, the number of children born is significantly and positively associated with a reduction in wage earnings. By using European household panel data, Davies and Pierre (2005) found that women's wages decreased by 10% to 11% for each additional child (Davies & Pierre, 2005).

Korenman & Neumark (1992) showed in the US that women with one child earned 7% less than childless women, while those with two or more children earned 22% less. Molina and Montuenga (2009) found a similar gender wage gap in Spain, with the number of children negatively affecting women's earnings, especially as the number of children increases (Molina & Montuenga, 2009). Livermore, Siminski and Rodgers (2011) analyzed Australian data from 2001 to 2008, finding that each child born reduced women's earnings by 4%, decreasing exponentially with more children (Livermore et al., 2011). Noonan (2013) in the US found that for each additional child, women's weekly work hours decreased by 6.4 to 6.8 hours (Noonan, 2013). Perry-Jenkins and Gerstel (2020) found in Europe that each additional child reduced women's workweek by at least 2 hours.

In China, Zhang (2011) found that more children decreased married urban women's labor supply and time commitment, impacting wage income differently between urban and rural women (Zhang, 2011). Wei and Su (2013) using CHNS data found more children reduced rural women's participation in nonfarm employment, labor hours, and earnings (Wei & Su, 2013). Yu and Xie (2014) using China Health and Nutrition Survey data found each child decreased women's wage rates by about 7%, with a greater negative impact with more children (Yu & Xie, 2014).

Using CFPS 2012 cross-sectional data, Fu (2017) similarly identifies a causal effect of the number of children on women's earnings in China and finds that there is an earnings penalty for both rural and urban women in China, with the earnings penalty being more severe in rural areas where the number of births is 2 (Fu, 2017). A study by Li (2019) based on data from the 2016 China Labor Force Dynamics Survey found that an increase in the number of children leads to a greater tendency for women to choose informal occupations with lower income levels and less training (Li, 2019). Xiong and Yuan (2017) measured the impact of having two children on the wage rate of married women in different regions based on the latest data published by the China Integrated Social Survey Center and found that having two children has a significant negative impact on the wage rate of married women in China (Xiong & Yuan, 2017). Based on data from the China Family Tracking Survey (CFPS 2016), Zhang (2022) comprehensively examined the causal effect of the number of children on women's earnings and found that women's willingness to have children increased after the implementation of the "two-child policy" in China, and women's earnings are significantly reduced by 14.1% for having an additional child, while childbearing has no significant effect on men's earnings. There is no significant effect of childbearing on men's income. Some studies have found non-linear and multiple effects of the number of children on the gender wage gap for women (Zhang, 2022). Chen and Jiang (2018) found that the labor force participation curve of migrant women in China is M-shaped with age and inverted U-shaped with age for those with childbearing experience, using data from 2011-2014 on the dynamic monitoring of the migrant population. Based on the regression of LPM with instrumental variables, the researchers found that the number of children has a negative impact on migrant women's labor force participation, and childbearing makes young migrant women more likely to drop out of the labor market (Chen & Jiang, 2018).

The above studies have explored the relationship between Chinese women's perceptions of fertility and actual fertility behavior, and found that the number of children has a significant impact on women's labor supply and efficiency. The findings suggest that although the extent to which women are penalized in the labor market varies according to family characteristics, individual factors, and national and regional fertility policies, the number of children born is, in general, significantly and positively associated with a reduction in wage earnings. In recent years, China has also begun to focus on the impact of the number of children on women's labor supply and earnings, particularly since the implementation of the two-child policy, which has increased women's willingness to have children, but has significantly reduced women's earnings for each additional child, while the impact on men's earnings has been less pronounced.

6. Gaps

The literature review of all the past studies and the five themes uncovered several research gaps. Specifically, the review of literatures on women employment discrimination has confirmed that researchers have identified the longstanding and evolving nature of this issue, spanning various domains. Hence, a comprehensive approach and strategy are deemed essential across all societal levels to enhance the social inclusion of the women facing employment discrimination (Mirjana et al., 2021). Employment discrimination not only harms society at large but also harms equal employment opportunities for many individuals, including women. Addressing this phenomenon necessitates a range of measures to establish a fair, competitive, reasonable, and orderly employment environment for employers, striving towards equal employment opportunities. Past studies, including those on China, have relatively comprehensively addressed stereotypes and gender biases faced by women in employment, highlighting their negative influence on women's career development and organizational operations. However, there is a lack of sufficient data and examples demonstrating the extent of these stereotypes. In particular is employer bias against women, especially regarding maternity and maternity leave; hence, this may indeed be a genuine issue. Past researchers, however, have not provided concrete examples or data supporting why women's childbirth affects employment, making it challenging to identify the extent and influence of bias. Moreover, there is limited research on the specific influence of certain fertility policy on women employment discrimination, even in China.

In the current academic research landscape, scholars extensively explore women's discrimination across various fields such as education, the labour market, housing rental, and credit markets. However, it is disconcerting that many people remain unaware of this issue. Additionally, there is a relative scarcity of literature on women employment discrimination due to childbirth and childcare. Despite some studies focusing on this phenomenon, they lack in-depth exploration and extension. Consequently, research related to fertility policy also exhibits significant gaps. In reviewing past studies, the literature discusses the varying influences of different countries and regions on women's career development but does not delve into the cultural and social roots of these differences. A more comprehensive examination of the challenges women from diverse backgrounds may face within a pluralistic and inclusive perspective would enhance the study's comprehensiveness. Therefore, an in-depth analysis of the opportunities and barriers to women's career development in different cultural and social environments would contribute to a better understanding of these differences. In recent years, several studies have explored the relationship, for example between Chinese women's perceptions of fertility and their actual fertility behaviour. These studies found a significant influence of the number of children on women's labour supply and efficiency. While the degree of discrimination against women in the labour market varies based on family characteristics, individual factors, and national and regional fertility policy, the overall trend indicates a significant and positive association between the number of children born and a reduction in wage earnings.

Specifically, in the case of China, despite its increasing focus on the influence of the number of children on women's labour supply and earnings, particularly since the implementation of the two-child policy, research on the relationship between the three-child policy and women employment discrimination in China is still limited, lacking a comprehensive research framework. Therefore, this literature review argues that an in-depth study of the influence of the "three-child policy" on women employment will provide a more comprehensive understanding. Specific research on the three-child policy will help further reveal the specific influence of China's fertility policy on women's employment discrimination. The identification of these research gaps underscores the continual need to update research agendas in the field of fertility policy and women employment discrimination. As policies evolve, it is crucial to maintain focus on the challenges faced by women in employment. Furthermore, research can contribute to policymakers' enhanced understanding of the societal influences of new policies, offering guidance for the creation of a more gender equitable and inclusive professional environment.

Conclusion

This literature review has explored past studies on women employment discrimination, causes or factors of the discrimination, and the challenges the women faced through a qualitative systematic thematic literature

review method. Past studies on women employment discrimination and fertility policy, including on Chinese society, are also reviewed. In China, the past studies revealed that historical evolution of fertility policy has generated widespread interest in their influence on women's roles in the workplace. However, there is a notable research gap in academic exploration, namely the relatively limited empirical research on the influence of China's three-child policy specifically on women employment discrimination. This highlights the urgent need for more new and current research in this area in the future. This literature review also aspires to promote informed policymaking on gender equality in Chinese society. Specifically, the intricate relationship between fertility policy and women employment underscores the importance of sustained academic inquiry into this evolving social issue. Overall, by remaining sensitive to the complex intersection of fertility policy and women employment, in China and elsewhere, sustained academic research can serve as a catalyst for positive social change, creating a more just and equal environment for women in employment at the workplace.

In short, this review has shown how the past studies reviewed helped in understanding women employment discrimination, namely the causes and factors of the discrimination and the challenges the women faced; women in China and elsewhere in the world. Consequently, the review has revealed strengths and limitations of the past studies as well as provided some ideas on research gaps seen from those studies. The identified strengths can help to strengthen new research on women employment discrimination in current times, for instance, in China. The limitations can show how they can be addressed through new research to better understand, explore, describe, and explain the current situation and scenario of women discrimination, namely fertility policy and women employment discrimination in China. The research gaps are evident and confirmed the need to conduct new, up-to-date, current, and more comprehensive and substantive studies on women employment discrimination occurring in societies such as China currently undergoing rapid social change due to accelerated modernization, capitalism, and industrialization during this Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). In that way, the need to conduct more up-to-date and new studies, for instance, on causes of women employment discrimination in China, especially from the current 3-child fertility policy perspective, is justified.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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