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РЕПРОДУКТИВНОЕ ПОВЕДЕНИЕ В КИТАЙСКОЙ НАРОДНОЙ РЕСПУБЛИКЕ, РЕСПУБЛИКЕ БЕЛАРУСЬ И РЕСПУБЛИКЕ КАЗАХСТАН: СРАВНИТЕЛЬНЫЙ АНАЛИЗ

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Аннотация. Демографическое развитие Китая и Беларуси сталкивается со значительными проблемами, включая отрицательный прирост населения, снижение рождаемости и старение населения. В Китае переход к новой демографической реальности осложняется дисбалансом в соотношении полов, культурными установками и последствиями политики одного ребенка на одну семью. Экономические факторы, урбанизация и изменения в структуре семьи влияют на репродуктивное поведение, при этом многие женщины предпочитают получение образования и построение карьеры рождению детей. Понимание этой динамики важно для решения демографических проблем и содействия устойчивому развитию общества в Беларуси, Китае и Казахстане.

Ключевые слова: снижение рождаемости; репродуктивное поведение; гендерная дискриминация; сравнительный анализ.

MODELS OF WOMEN'S REPRODUCTIVE BEHAVIOUR IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA, THE REPUBLIC OF BELARUS AND THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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Abstract. The demographic development of China and Belarus faces significant challenges, including negative population growth, declining fertility, and aging populations. In China, the transition to a new demographic reality is complicated by skewed sex ratios, cultural attitudes, and the effects of the one-child policy. Economic factors, urbanisation, and changes in family structure influence reproductive behaviour, with many women choosing education and careers over having children. Understanding of these dynamics is important for addressing demographic challenges and promoting sustainable development in Belarus, China, and Kazakhstan.

Keywords: decreased birth rate; reproductive behaviour patterns; gender discrimination; comparative analysis.

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Introduction

China's demographic development is characterised by negative population growth, imbalance in the sex ratio, and aging of the demographic structure, which are typical for the demographic transition period. China's demographic transition is characterised by the following trends: great difficulty in changing fertility attitudes, lack of a stable external environment for population development, no large-scale population outflow, stability in the composition of major ethnic groups, and susceptibility of the population to chronic diseases. After the demographic shift caused by the decline in mortality and fertility, the proportion of the working-age population tends to increase in different countries, and the growth rate exceeds that of both the elderly and child populations. This indicates a relative surplus of labour and a high labour force participation rate, while reducing the burden of productivity on the population, which ultimately favours economic development. Researchers are concerned about the changing attitudes of modern women towards childbearing [1]. Chinese sociologists in their works often touch upon the topic of the two-child policy [2] or corporate ethics regarding gender discrimination in the employment of women [3], the financial issue of childbearing in urban China is also studied [4].

Women's reproductive behaviour in China is shaped by many factors, including cultural, economic, social, and political ones. Chinese culture has traditionally

placed a high value on family and procreation. This can influence decisions about the number of children to have and how to raise them. Since 1979, China has had a birth control policy known as the one-child policy. Although it was repealed in 2015, the effects of this policy are still felt, with women's reproductive decisions influenced by fears about the economic and social consequences of having children. As women's education levels and professional employment levels increase, there is a tendency to postpone having children. Many women choose to focus on their careers first, which can lead to a decrease in the overall number of children. The high costs of raising children, education, and housing also play a significant role in fertility decisions. Many young couples view financial stability as a key factor. In recent decades, there has been a trend toward fewer traditional multi-generational families and more family units with one or two children. This also influences reproductive behaviour. Access to health services, including reproductive health, also influences women's decisions about childbearing. Women are increasingly seeking medical care and family planning. More women are actively participating in public life and politics, which can also influence their reproductive decisions. In recent years, the Chinese government has taken steps to stimulate fertility by offering various support measures for families, including financial assistance and improved access to kindergartens and schools.

Results and discussion

The aim of the article is to identify and compare the factors influencing reproductive decisions, as well as to understand the socio-economic, cultural and political contexts that shape these decisions in China and Belarus.

The main objectives of the research will be to study the current legislation in the field of reproductive health and family policy in China and Belarus. Conduct a comparative analysis of the data obtained.

This comparative analysis can help to better understand how different cultural and social contexts influence women's reproductive behaviour, as well as suggest ways to improve the reproductive health and well-being of women in both countries.

As Belarus and China celebrate 31 years of diplomatic relations and strengthen their all-weather strategic cooperative partnership, it is important to examine the theory and current situation of population development in the country.

Belarus and China share some similar cultural processes that may influence reproductive behaviour:

1) both countries are influenced by traditional values that emphasise the importance of family and children. In such cultures, there is often pressure on young people to start a family and have children;

2) in Belarus and China, economic conditions play an important role in decisions about childbearing. In conditions of economic instability or high costs of raising children (e. g., education and health care), couples may delay or reduce the number of children;

3) both countries are experiencing urbanisation, with people moving from rural areas to cities in search of better opportunities. This may influence reproductive behaviour, as urban life often comes with higher housing and child-rearing costs, which may lead to lower fertility rates;

4) in recent decades, there has been an increase in educational attainment, especially among women. Higher education may lead women to delay motherhood in favour of a career, which is also observed in both Belarus and China;

5) policies related to family life and childbearing may also have similarities. For example, China had a long-standing one-child policy that had a strong impact on reproductive behaviour, although it has been relaxed in recent years. Belarus also has programmes and initiatives aimed at supporting families and increasing the birth rate;

6) the influence of social networks and media on public opinion and perceptions of family and childbearing

can also be observed in both countries. This can shape ideas about what an «ideal» family should look like and how many children one should have.

These cultural processes can interact and have a complex impact on reproductive behaviour in Belarus and China. Belarus is currently in the late stage of demographic transition, with a steady decline in fertility rates and a negative population growth rate. However, Belarus is still in the demographic dividend period, with a relatively high average education level, high labour force participation rate, steadily improving health status, and a good economic development status.

A stable population size and a reasonable population structure are necessary prerequisites for economic development, political stability, cultural prosperity and national well-being. However, during its demographic transition, Belarus has experienced various events, such as the collapse of the Soviet Union, geopolitical crises and the COVID-19 pandemic. Its population growth is not due to a stable socio-economic development environment and external factors. Within the country, there is an imbalance between various elements of the population system, such as a mortality rate higher than the birth rate, population aging, an unbalanced gender structure (with more women than men) and lower life expectancy of men per capita, which still exists even in the third phase of transition. Compared with the demographic transition of other European countries, the demographic transition process of Belarus has both common features and certain specific features. In recent years, the population of Belarus has gradually switched from positive growth to negative growth and is facing a new problem of accelerated aging before the economic level of the country reaches the level of developed countries. Belarus has unique characteristics as an ageing country, but its population ageing is less pronounced compared to developed European countries. Changes in reproductive culture are not only caused by economic factors, and a comprehensive population support policy has helped Belarus achieve population stability.

Reproductive behaviour patterns in Belarus, as in many countries, have changed significantly over the past decades. These changes are influenced by various social, economic and cultural factors. Here are some current trends and prospects for reproductive behaviour in Belarus:

1) declining fertility. Belarus, like other Eastern European countries, has experienced declining fertility. Factors contributing to this include economic uncertainty, urbanisation and changing family structures;

2) changing family structures. There has been a noticeable shift from traditional family patterns to more diverse structures. For example, the number of single-parent families and unmarried cohabitation has increased;

3) postponing childbearing. Many individuals and couples choose to delay having children due to educational goals, career advancement and financial considerations. Women are increasingly entering the workforce and prioritising their professional development before starting a family;

4) increasing contraceptive use. Access to and use of contraceptives has improved, resulting in greater control over reproductive choices. This, coupled with increased awareness of family planning options, continues to influence reproductive behaviour;

5) public policy and family support. The Belarusian government has implemented policies to encourage higher fertility rates, such as financial incentives, maternity leave, and childcare support. These initiatives reflect efforts to address demographic challenges;

6) cultural attitudes. Cultural attitudes towards reproduction and family have changed. Traditional views are being challenged by modern views on relationships and gender roles. Young people often prioritise personal freedom and individualism;

7) women's empowerment. Women's empowerment through education and career opportunities has led to changes in reproductive behaviour. Women assert their rights to make choices about their bodies, marriage, and childbearing;

8) health and awareness. Increased awareness of reproductive health issues, including sexually transmitted infections and maternal health, influences reproductive choices. There is increasing focus on informed decision-making and access to health services;

9) influence of technology. The use of technology, including social media and reproductive health apps, is shaping young people's approaches to relationships and reproduction. These tools provide access to information, resources, and support networks;

10) future outlook. As Belarus continues to undergo social and economic change, reproductive behaviour is expected to continue to evolve. Trends toward smaller families, greater gender equality, and improved access to reproductive health services are likely to shape future generations¹.

Reproductive behaviour in Belarus is influenced by a combination of declining fertility, changing family structures, educational and career priorities, and government policies that support families. As societal norms continue to evolve, reproductive patterns are likely to adapt to reflect broader changes in Belarusian society.

China has introduced many policies that are designed to help young families. However, these measures have not had a significant effect. In this regard, experts have made a number of suggestions, and this issue needs to be considered from several angles.

1. The cost of marriage and childbirth. When talking about marriage and childbirth, one cannot help

¹State support of the family in the Republic of Belarus // President of the Republic of Belarus : website. URL: <https://president.gov.by/ru/belarus/social/zashhita-naselenija/podderzhka-semi> (date of access: 10.12.2024) (in Russ.).

but mention the cost of marriage and childbirth. Although there are mismatches in different regions, the basic material conditions are the same: bride price and a house.

Unlike the older generation, who paid more attention to character and personality, young people are more progressive in their thinking and strive for material things and reality. Material conditions are an important criterion for ensuring future living expenses and raising children, but it is extremely difficult for young people to save enough money for a wedding house and dowry without relying on their family.

Let's talk about the cost of raising children. Raising children of the older generation can be described in the words «free range». As long as the child is not injured, does not die of hunger, lives and grows well, then the child is considered well-mannered. Modern society emphasises refined scientific education, which not only focuses on all-round development but also pays attention to all-round quality, so the cost of raising children naturally increases.

According to the 2023 China birth cost report, the cost of raising a child in the country has increased by 10 % compared with 2022. Raising a child from birth to undergraduate admission costs about 680 thsd yuan. Among them, Shanghai, Beijing and Zhejiang are the three regions with the highest child-raising costs: 1.01 mln yuan, 936 thsd yuan and 855 thsd yuan respectively. In the eyes of ordinary people, this number can be considered an astronomical figure.

2. Women's will. In the process of raising children, a woman's desire to have children cannot be ignored. In modern society, many women value independence, not only personal freedom, but also relative economic independence. They worry that having children will limit their self-development and hinder their career advancement.

According to a recent study, raising children will significantly reduce the number of paid working hours of women. In the period from 0 to 4 years, the paid working hours of mothers decreased by an average of 15 hours per week when their children were born.

Over the next 1, 2, 3 and 4 years, paid working hours will be reduced by 12.5, 5, 7 and 1 hour respectively. Caring for children forces women to sacrifice their careers and not be able to devote themselves to work as fully as men.

This has led to discrimination in the workplace against «baby moms», which is a «motherhood penalty» in women's careers. The «maternity penalty» refers to the difficulties that women face in the workplace, such as worsening working conditions, blocked career opportunities, lower incomes, etc., as they need to take care of children after giving birth.

According to the Global gender gap report – 2022 published by the World Economic Forum, there is a widespread gender pay gap in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development member countries. A 2021 study conducted in 25 European countries found that 60 % of the gender pay gap is due to the maternity penalty. With this data, it is not difficult to understand why more than 70 mln women remain childless throughout their lives.

3. Positivity and negativity. A psychological study found that psychological capital scores were significantly positively correlated with young people's willingness to have children.

The concept of psychological capital is following: a positive psychological state that a person displays in the process of growth, including some dimensions. They are self-efficacy (confidence), hope, optimism, and resilience. Self-efficacy refers to a person's confidence in his or her ability to achieve something, hope is that a person will continue to pursue his or her ideals and goals, optimism refers to a person's positive perception and expectation of the future, resilience is a person's ability to remain persistent and rational in the face of difficulties.

Among them, optimism is especially affecting young people's willingness to have children. While not marrying and not having children will cause some harm to society, causing problems such as increased social burden, disappearing demographic dividend, decreased innovation and creativity, and weakening the family pension function, to solve the problem of population aging, it is still necessary to address the root causes of economic costs, life difficulties, and other problems, and to encourage young people to change their thinking².

The characteristics and problems that Belarus faces in the period of demographic transition are different from those of other Eastern European countries. Income decline, employment difficulties, deteriorating health status of the population, gender imbalance and others are the main problems and challenges that Belarus has faced since independence in terms of population and development. These problems have been extremely unfavourable for the economic and social development of Belarus, while the aging of the population and the increase in dependency ratios continue to put pressure on its economic and social development. However, compared with its neighbouring countries, Belarus still has a relatively high population quality and a lower overall dependency ratio, and its human capital level is relatively good. It is still in the period of demographic dividend, which is favourable for the further development of the national economy. Solving the population problems in Belarus requires scientific development of comprehensive plans to achieve population development

²Family social support // Committee on Labour, Inactivity and Social Protection of the Brest Regional Executive Committee : website. URL: <https://komtsz.gov.by/index.php/osnovnye-napravleniya-deyatelnosti/gosudarstvennaya-sotsialnaya-podderzhka/informatsionnyj-razdel/3926-sotsialnaya-podderzhka-semi> (date of access: 15.11.2024) (in Russ.).

in the context of sustainable social development. In terms of family and fertility policy, further support for families is needed, with the main objective being to create a widely accepted fertility culture and value system, and to encourage families to have more children. In addition, improving health and reducing mortality require promoting healthy lifestyles, raising the standard of living of residents, improving hygiene and environmental conditions, and encouraging positive changes in behaviour and lifestyle among Belarusians.

Several key findings emerge from the analysis of the demographic situation in Belarus are following:

1) Belarus is facing a steady decline in population, which is associated with both low birth rates and high aging rates. This has a negative impact on the country's socio-economic development;

2) the projected increase in the proportion of older people in society (up to 24 % by 2050) creates additional social and economic problems. The changing age structure and age pyramid of the population must be taken into account;

3) the decline in fertility is associated with economic uncertainty, changes in family structure, later childbearing and more active use of family planning methods. This suggests the need to adapt public policy to the new conditions;

4) empowering women is implemented through education and labour activity changes reproductive preferences. Initiatives to support gender equality should be further developed;

5) current measures of state support for fertility – from financial incentives to creating conditions for childcare – emphasise the importance of the state role in addressing demographic issues;

6) addressing the problems of population decline and aging requires a comprehensive approach, including improving living conditions, promoting a healthy lifestyle and supporting families with children;

7) Belarus maintains a relatively high quality of population and level of human capital compared to other Eastern European countries, which provides certain advantages for development³.

Overcoming the current demographic problems of Belarus requires a deeper understanding and adaptation of policies to changing conditions, as well as active involvement of the population in social and economic processes.

For a more in-depth comparative analysis, we can add Kazakhstan. China and Belarus have similar trends in traditions and worldviews, while Kazakhstan, formerly part of the USSR, has a different approach to the

family. Following social guarantees and benefits in Belarus, China and Kazakhstan are aimed at supporting families, especially those raising disabled children, as well as large families. In Belarus they are following:

1) basic labour guarantees for both parents, including stepmothers and stepfathers;

2) the possibility to divide parental leave for children under 3 years between the parents;

3) additional days off and shorter working hours for parents of children with disabilities or large families;

4) employer's obligation to plan leave for employees with pregnant wives;

5) awards for mothers who have raised five or more children;

6) childcare benefits, including increased payments for families in radioactively contaminated areas;

7) social support for single parents and large families⁴.

In China these guarantees and benefits are following:

1) duration of maternity leave from 90 to 180 days depending on the region;

2) dependence of maternity benefits on salary and length of service;

3) support for low-income families and access to free education;

4) local social assistance programmes and additional benefits for large families⁵.

In Kazakhstan the situation is a bit different:

1) duration of maternity leave is 126 days (70 before childbirth and 56 after it);

2) dependence of maternity benefits on the average salary;

3) monthly child benefits and the maternity capital programme;

4) access to social services, including education and health care;

5) tax incentives for parents and the possibility of paternity leave [5].

Each country has its own unique measures to support families, adapted to local conditions and needs.

In the study «Growing inequality and reproductive health in transition economies: Kazakhstan and Belarus» N. Danilovich analyses the impact of market-oriented reforms on women's access to health services in Kazakhstan and Belarus. In Kazakhstan, reforms aimed at improving the efficiency of health care have reduced the availability of health services for vulnerable groups, particularly low-income women. In contrast, Belarus maintains a centralised approach to health care, which provides greater access to health services regardless of income and education level [5]. The study highlights that market reforms aimed at reducing budget

³Family policy in the Republic of Belarus // Children's legal site. URL: <https://mir.pravo.by/edu/roditel/gosudarstvennaya-podderzhka-semey/> (date of access: 17.12.2024) (in Russ.).

⁴State support of the family in the Republic of Belarus // President of the Repub. of Belarus : website. URL: <https://president.gov.by/ru/belarus/social/zashhita-naselenija/podderzhka-semi> (date of access: 10.12.2024) (in Russ.).

⁵The General Office of the State Council issued the «Notice on accelerating the improvement of the fertility support policy system promotes the construction of a fertility-friendly notice on several measures for social development // The State Council of the People's Repub. of China : website. URL: https://www.gov.cn/zhengce/zhengceku/202410/content_6983486.htm (date of access: 25.12.2024) (in Chin.).

expenditures can negatively affect access to basic economic services if vulnerable groups are not supported. In Kazakhstan, the level of education significantly affects access to reproductive care, while in Belarus this factor is not as critical due to the socialist model of health care. N. Danilovich also emphasises that the relationship between household income and women's self-assessed health in Kazakhstan confirms the influence of socio-economic factors on health perception. In Belarus, no such relationship is observed, indicating higher satisfaction with the healthcare system [5]. The findings highlight the need for reforms in Kazakhstan to improve access to healthcare for women with low income and education, as well as the importance of the role of the state in ensuring equal access to resources. The work offers an in-depth understanding of differences in health policies and their impact on reproductive health, emphasising the need for a comprehensive analysis of systemic factors affecting reproductive health in countries with transition economies.

Belarus is currently experiencing a demographic transition characterised by a steady decline in fertility rates, negative population growth, and an aging population structure. This mirrors trends observed in many Eastern European countries but presents unique challenges due to socio-economic factors. In contrast, China and Kazakhstan exhibit different demographic patterns influenced by their distinct policies and socio-economic environments.

To construct reproductive model's characteristic of women in China and Belarus, we will consider the reproductive behaviour of women in each of the selected countries.

Let's look at women's reproductive behaviour in China. It is shaped by many factors, including cultural, demographic, economic, and political. Let's describe each of these aspects in more detail.

Cultural factors are following:

1) traditional values (Chinese culture traditionally values family, procreation, and women's roles as mothers, however, as the social context changes, these values are beginning to change);

2) Confucianism (it emphasises the importance of family relationships and responsibilities to the family, which can influence the choice of the number of children and their upbringing);

3) modern ideals (as women become more educated and economically independent, their views on marriage and motherhood change, which can lead to a decrease in the birth rate).

Demographic factors are following:

1) aging population (the increasing proportion of elderly people in the population puts pressure on young families to provide care for the elderly);

2) urban migration (migration from rural areas to cities leads to lifestyle changes and a decrease in the birth rate due to the high cost of living in cities);

3) sex ratio (the one-child policy has led to a gender imbalance, which also affects reproductive behaviour).

Economic factors are following:

1) economic independence (women's higher levels of education and careers contribute to their economic independence, which can influence decisions about the number of children);

2) cost of raising children (high costs of education and health care for children can force families to delay or forgo having children);

3) government programmes (economic incentives such as child benefits can motivate families to have more children).

Political factors are following:

1) the one-child policy (it was in effect in China from 1979 to 2015 and had a significant impact on reproductive behaviour by limiting the number of children in families);

2) changes in family policy (with the transition to a two-child policy and then a three-child policy in recent years, there has been a change in attitudes toward fertility, but the influence of old norms is still felt);

3) legislation and women's rights (legislative initiatives aimed at protecting women's rights and supporting families can contribute to changes in reproductive behaviour and women's reproductive behaviour in China is the result of a complex interaction of various factors, and understanding it requires taking into account cultural, demographic, economic and political contexts).

Women's reproductive behaviour in Belarus, as in any other society, is influenced by many factors. Let's consider the cultural, demographic, economic and political aspects that can influence this behaviour.

Cultural factors are following:

1) traditions and values (certain cultural traditions in Belarus related to family and childbearing can influence the decision on the number of children, for example, the traditional role of a woman as a mother and housewife);

2) religious beliefs (Orthodoxy, as the main religion in the country, can influence attitudes towards abortion and contraception);

3) social norms (society's expectations regarding the age at which a woman should become a mother and the number of children can influence reproductive decisions).

Demographic factors are following:

1) age structure (changes in the age structure of the population can influence the birth rate, for example, an increase in the number of women of reproductive age can lead to an increase in the birth rate);

2) migration (emigration of young and working-age people can reduce the birth rate as young people leave in search of better living conditions);

3) family structure (an increase in single-parent families or families with one child can influence the overall number of children women decide to have).

Economic factors are following:

1) economic situation (in conditions of economic instability, families may postpone having children);

2) employment level (problems with employment and low wages can reduce women's desire to have children or to have more children);

3) access to services (the availability of health and social services, such as maternity hospitals and day care centres, can influence the decision to have children).

Political factors are following:

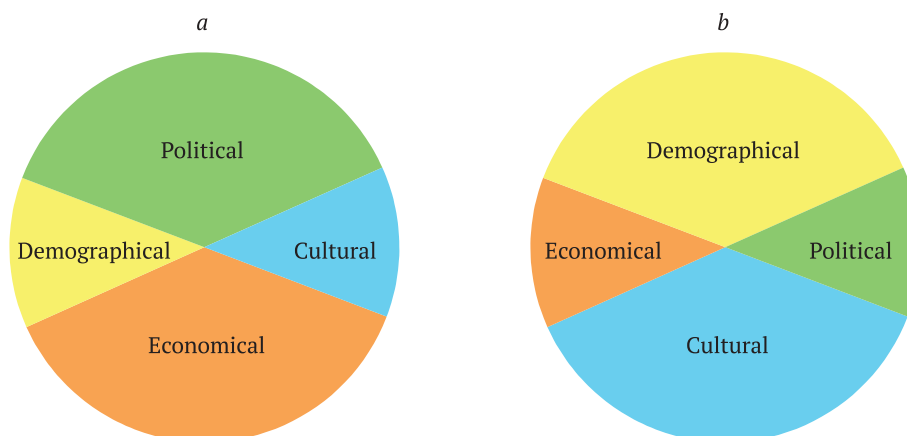
1) government policies on families (family support programmes, such as child benefits, tax credits and other measures can stimulate fertility);

2) legislation (laws regarding abortion, contraception and women's rights can significantly influence reproductive behaviour);

3) education and information (education policy and the availability of information on reproductive health also play an important role in shaping reproductive attitudes).

These factors interact with each other to create a unique picture of women's reproductive behaviour in Belarus.

Based on the above mentioned factors, we obtain models of reproductive behaviour of women in China and Belarus (see figure).



Aspects influencing reproductive behaviour of woman in China (a) and Belarus (b)

As we can see from the models, different factors initially influence women's behaviour. An interesting fact is that in China, the economic factor ranks last, while the political factor comes to the fore. In Belarus, the situation is the opposite: the economic issue comes to the fore, while the cultural factor ranks last. This may be due to the country's geopolitical position and the constant influence of both Eastern and Western culture.

To solve the demographic problems in China and Belarus, a comprehensive and multifaceted approach to improving reproductive behaviour is needed. A combination of economic, social, political and cultural measures will create a more supportive environment for young families, which in turn will contribute to an increase in the birth rate and an improvement in the quality of life.

Improving women's reproductive behaviour in China can be achieved through a comprehensive approach that includes the following recommendations:

1) education and information. Improving sexual and reproductive education among young and adult women will help them better understand their reproductive rights and options including information on family planning, contraception, and pregnancy health;

2) access to health services. Ensuring access to quality health services, including gynecological examina-

tions, family planning counseling, and pregnancy support services can include both public and private health facilities;

3) family support. Introducing programmes that support families with children, such as financial benefits, tax breaks, and affordable housing, can encourage women to decide to have children;

4) promoting gender equality. A programme to improve the status of women in society, including equal opportunities in education and careers, can help women feel more confident about motherhood and reproductive health;

5) flexible working conditions. Providing flexible working hours and telecommuting opportunities can help women better balance work and family responsibilities;

6) social campaigns. Conducting public campaigns to change public opinion on reproductive rights and the role of women in society can promote a more positive perception of motherhood;

7) mental health support. Providing women with access to psychological counseling can help them cope with the emotional and psychological aspects of motherhood.

These measures can help improve women's reproductive behaviour in China and create a more supportive environment for decision-making about motherhood.

Improving women's reproductive behaviour in Belarus can be achieved through a comprehensive approach that includes the following aspects:

1) education and information (providing access to quality information on reproductive health, family planning methods, and the consequences of various decisions). It is important to conduct educational programmes in schools and universities, as well as organise seminars and trainings for women of all ages;

2) access to health services (increasing the availability and quality of health services related to reproductive health). This includes ensuring free access to consultations, preventive examinations, contraception, and reproductive health services;

3) support for motherhood (creating programmes that support mothers, including funding, maternity leave, and

childcare services). This will help women make more confident decisions about pregnancy and raising children;

4) social support and equality (promoting initiatives aimed at improving social support for women, as well as equality in family and professional relationships). This may include programmes to combat discrimination and violence, as well as support for women's career development;

5) discussing and changing public stereotypes (working to change public opinion and stereotypes related to women's reproductive behaviour). It is important that women feel free to choose their reproductive rights and can speak openly about their desires and needs.

These measures can help improve women's reproductive behaviour and create a more supportive environment for their reproductive health decisions.

Conclusions

Demographic developments in China and Belarus reveal significant challenges and trends, particularly with regard to negative population growth, population aging, and evolving reproductive behaviour. The demographic transition in China has been marked by declining fertility, imbalanced sex ratios, and persistent cultural attitudes toward family and childbearing shaped by historical policies such as the one-child policy. Although this policy was repealed in 2015, its long-term effects continue to influence women's reproductive choices, often delaying childbearing due to economic pressures, career aspirations, and the high costs associated with raising children. In contrast, Belarus faces similar demographic challenges characterised by declining fertility and population aging, yet maintains relatively higher levels of human capital compared to other Eastern European countries. Economic instability, changing family structures, and evolving social norms contribute to reproductive behaviour in Belarus, where delayed childbearing and a shift toward more diverse family patterns are common. Moreover, the Belarusian government has implemented various policies to support families and encourage higher fertility rates, including financial incentives and improved access to childcare.

Both countries face common socioeconomic challenges, such as urbanisation and rising costs of living, which affect reproductive decisions. While Belarus is experiencing negative population growth, China is struggling with the consequences of its past population control measures, leading to an urgent need for policies that effectively promote family growth and support women's roles in both the family and professional spheres.

In addition, a comparative analysis with Kazakhstan reveals different approaches to family support and reproductive health. Kazakhstan exhibits a relatively stable demographic profile, supported by higher fertility and immigration rates, but faces its own challenges regarding access to healthcare for vulnerable groups.

As both China and Belarus are going through their own demographic transitions, addressing economic, cultural, and policy-related factors is critical to promoting reproductive health and family well-being. Tailored approaches that take local conditions into account, such as increasing economic stability and enhancing gender equality, can provide pathways to better demographic outcomes.

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