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Exploring women's decisions about childbearing after the lifting of the one-child policy

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Abstract

In 2016, China officially ended the 'one-child' policy permitting all couples to have two children for the first time since 1979. While the policy was relaxed due to demographic concerns, it simultaneously provided many women with a new reproductive opportunity. The goal of this study was to qualitatively understand the childbearing decision process in the new era of the two-child policy. We conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 45 postpartum women at two hospitals in Zhejiang Province, China. The interviews explored women's views on the two-child policy and reproductive decisions and how they decided to have their first or second child. Most women approved of the lifting of the one-child policy; however, many were hesitant or uncertain about their

own decisions to have second children. Many felt pressured to have two children for the good of, or as an obligation to, the family. However, they also felt that caring for two children was burdensome, and that they would have to sacrifice a lot in terms of freedom, energy and money. Their responses to the new reproductive opportunity highlight the complexity of childbearing decision-making in modern Chinese society, against a background of persisting traditional values.

Résumé

En 2016, la Chine a officiellement mis fin à la politique de l’enfant unique, permettant ainsi aux couples d’avoir deux enfants pour la première fois depuis 1979. Si cette politique a été assouplie en raison de préoccupations d’ordre démographique, elle a simultanément offert à de nombreuses femmes de nouvelles opportunités en matière de reproduction. L’objectif de cette étude qualitative était d’approfondir la compréhension du processus de décision de concevoir un enfant dans le cadre de cette nouvelle politique. Nous avons conduit des entretiens semi-structurés en profondeur avec 45 femmes en post-partum dans deux hôpitaux situés dans le Zhejiang. Ces entretiens ont examiné les points de vue de femmes sur la politique des deux enfants et les décisions en matière de reproduction, et comment elles décidaient d’avoir leur premier ou leur second enfant. La plupart des participantes approuvaient la suppression de la politique de l’enfant unique ; un certain nombre d’entre elles étaient cependant hésitantes ou incertaines quant à leur propre décision d’avoir un deuxième enfant. Elles étaient nombreuses à ressentir des pressions pour avoir un deuxième enfant pour le bien de la famille ou par obligation vis-à-vis de celle-ci. Cependant, elles considéraient aussi que prendre soin de deux enfants était une charge qui exigeait qu’elles sacrifient beaucoup de leur liberté, de leur énergie et de leur argent. Leur réaction aux nouvelles opportunités en matière de reproduction met l’accent sur la complexité de la prise de décision de concevoir un enfant dans la société chinoise moderne, dans un contexte de valeurs traditionnelles persistantes.

Resumen

En 2016 China terminó oficialmente la política de “un único hijo” permitiendo que todas las parejas pudiesen tener dos hijos por primera vez desde 1979. Aunque la política se relajó debido a cuestiones demográficas, ha dado a la vez a muchas mujeres una nueva oportunidad reproductiva. El objetivo de este estudio fue entender de modo cualitativo el proceso de decisión sobre la maternidad en la nueva era de la política de dos hijos. Llevamos a cabo entrevistas semiestructuradas y exhaustivas con 45 mujeres en su

periodo posparto en dos hospitales en la provincia de Zhejiang, China. Mediante las entrevistas se analizó qué opinaban las mujeres de la política de dos hijos y las decisiones reproductivas y qué factores eran importantes a la hora de decidir si querían tener uno o dos hijos. La mayoría de las mujeres estaban de acuerdo en eliminar la política de un único hijo; sin embargo, muchas dudaban o no estaban seguras de decidir ellas mismas si querían un segundo hijo. Muchas se sentían presionadas a tener dos hijos por el bien de la familia o como una obligación familiar. Sin embargo, también sentían que ocuparse de dos hijos era una carga, y que tendrían que hacer muchos sacrificios con respecto a su libertad, energía y dinero. Sus respuestas a la nueva oportunidad reproductiva ponen de relieve la complejidad de las decisiones maternales en la sociedad moderna de China frente a un contexto de valores tradicionales persistentes.

Keywords:

China | two-child policy | childbearing | family planning | decision-making

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