

SOCIAL EXPECTATIONS AND PERSONAL CHOICES: ANALYZING THE MARRIAGE WILLINGNESS OF YOUNG PEOPLE UNDER ECONOMIC CONSTRAINTS

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze the reasons for the declining marriage willingness among young people in China, with a particular focus on the roles of social expectations and economic factors. Through a literature review and theoretical analysis, the research finds that: First, despite the increasingly diverse views on marriage in modern society, traditional culture continues to play an important role in the marriage choices of young people, with many feeling pressured to marry due to family and societal expectations. Second, economic factors such as high housing prices and living costs significantly restrict young people's marriage choices, leading them to tend to postpone marriage. Finally, changes in personal values have led young people to prioritize self-actualization and personal happiness, preferring to consider marriage only after achieving career stability. These findings reveal the conflict between social expectations and personal choices, providing important implications for policy-making and social support. Future research should further explore the impact of these factors in different regions and cultural contexts to better understand the dilemmas young people face regarding marriage choices.

Keywords: Marriage willingness; Social expectations; Economic factors; Personal values; Young people in China

1 INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been a significant decline in the marriage willingness of young people in China, a phenomenon that has drawn widespread attention from academia and society. Against the backdrop of rapid social development, the lifestyles and values of young people have undergone profound changes. Many prioritize personal growth, career development, and self-actualization, viewing marriage as not the only option in life [1-2]. Modern society offers more opportunities and choices, allowing young people to pursue independent lifestyles and rich personal experiences. At the same time, with rising educational levels, an increasing number of young people hope to achieve success in their careers before considering marriage.

However, statistics show that many young people choose to delay marriage or remain single for life, forming new concepts of marriage [3]. This change is not merely the result of personal choice but is closely related to social expectations and the economic environment. As a social institution, the significance of marriage is influenced by multiple factors, including family, culture, and economy. Therefore, exploring how social expectations and economic hardships jointly affect young people's marriage willingness is crucial for understanding the transformations occurring in contemporary Chinese society.

This paper aims to analyze the roles of social expectations and personal choices in the declining marriage willingness among young people in China, particularly focusing on the impact of economic factors on this phenomenon. Economic pressure is an important consideration, as high living costs and career demands significantly influence young people's life choices [4]. The study will systematically examine how social and economic environments shape young people's views on marriage through literature reviews, theoretical analyses, and case studies. Finally, the paper will summarize the research findings and offer suggestions for future research.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Marriage willingness refers to an individual's attitude and choice toward marriage, influenced by various factors. In recent years, with rapid social development and changes in young people's lifestyles, research on marriage willingness has gradually gained attention in academia. Studies indicate that young people's marriage willingness is influenced not only by personal values but also closely related to social culture and economic background [5-6]. Many scholars point out that the role of social expectations in marriage cannot be ignored [7]. Traditional views consider marriage an important manifestation of social and family responsibilities, and this notion still dominates in many families [8].

In traditional culture, marriage is seen as a significant achievement for adults, and negative views toward being single still exist. This expectation often arises from the pressure of family, friends, and society, causing many young people to choose marriage even when they are reluctant [9]. However, with social changes, young people's views on marriage have become increasingly diverse, and many are beginning to question these traditional expectations. More studies have found that modern young people tend to pursue personal independence and self-actualization, and many believe that marriage is not the only choice in life [3]. For example, a survey of university students revealed that over 60% of respondents stated they wished to consider marriage only after achieving career stability [10].

Economically, young people face enormous living pressures, particularly from high housing prices, educational costs, and living expenses, which directly impact their marriage decisions [11]. In recent years, housing prices in China have

continued to rise, far exceeding the purchasing power of young people in many cities. This economic pressure leads many young people to perceive marriage as a significant financial burden, resulting in a preference to avoid entering marriage [12-13]. Some studies have pointed out that economic factors are a significant reason for many young people delaying or choosing not to marry. For instance, facing high housing prices, one study found that over 70% of young people indicated they were unwilling to marry under immature economic conditions [5].

Moreover, the increase in educational attainment has also influenced young people's marriage willingness to some extent. As more young people pursue higher education, their expectations for career development have increased, and many hope to achieve success in their careers before considering marriage [14]. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced among women, many of whom prefer to focus on career development rather than early marriage. This trend has also led many young people to adopt a more cautious attitude toward marriage.

Although existing research has revealed the significant roles of social expectations and economic factors in young people's marriage willingness, studies on how these two interact remain insufficient. Some scholars suggest that social expectations may mitigate or exacerbate the impact of economic pressures on marriage willingness [15]. For example, in some regions, despite poor economic conditions, strong social expectations for marriage still drive young people to choose marriage, reflecting the complex interplay between social culture and economic factors. Therefore, further exploration of the relationship between these two will help deepen the understanding of the dilemmas young people face regarding marriage choices in today's society.

In summary, the literature review reveals multiple factors influencing the marriage willingness of young people in China, including the interplay between social expectations and economic hardships. Through the analysis of existing research, it is evident that young people's choices regarding marriage are not only individual psychological responses but also results formed within a complex socio-cultural and economic environment. This section will lay the foundation for subsequent theoretical analysis, aiding a deeper understanding of this complex phenomenon.

3 THEORETICAL ANALYSIS

When understanding the decline in marriage willingness among young people in China, the interplay between social expectations and economic factors is crucial. This section will analyze the impact of social expectations on marriage, the influence of economic factors on marriage choices, and the relationship between personal values and marriage choices.

3.1 The Impact of Social Expectations on Young People's Marriage Willingness

Social expectations refer to the general views and anticipations of social groups regarding individual behavior. In traditional culture, marriage is seen as an important achievement for adults, especially in a society like China, where families and society have clear expectations regarding young people's marriages. This expectation often manifests as concern from family members about the marriage status of young people, particularly evident in the generation of their parents. Many young people, under pressure from relatives and friends, feel a social responsibility to marry even if they are unwilling.

As society changes, young people's attitudes toward marriage have significantly shifted. This shift is particularly evident in regions where traditional family roles are more strongly enforced but face resistance due to increasing educational attainment [16]. Research indicates that modern young people tend to pursue personal happiness and quality of life. Many believe that marriage is no longer an inevitable part of life but rather a lifestyle choice. This shift is closely related to the transformations in social culture, particularly driven by accelerated urbanization, improved educational levels, and enhanced status of women. In this context, the expectations of society regarding marriage conflict with young people's personal choices, leading to a decline in their interest and willingness to marry.

3.2 The Influence of Economic Factors on Marriage Choices

Economic factors are significant variables affecting marriage willingness. In recent years, China has experienced rapid economic development; however, this has been accompanied by a sharp increase in living costs, particularly high housing prices and educational expenses, which exert tremendous pressure on young people's marriage decisions. Many young people, faced with economic burdens, tend to postpone marriage or even choose not to marry at all. Research shows that economic pressure forces young people to view marriage as a burden rather than a positive choice in life.

High living costs not only impact marriage decisions but also change young people's expectations regarding marriage. For instance, many young people express a desire to consider marriage only after they own their homes [17]. Such economic constraints compel young people to postpone marriage until their financial situation is more secure. Particularly in first-tier cities, many young people believe that marrying without a stable economic foundation is an unwise choice, further intensifying their indifference toward marriage.

3.3 The Relationship Between Personal Values and Marriage Choices

In addition to social expectations and economic factors, personal values also play a crucial role in marriage choices. With the increase in educational attainment, young people increasingly value personal growth and self-actualization. Studies have found that many young people's views on marriage have shifted from being a "necessary life stage" to a

“personal choice,” with a tendency to pursue self-actualization. For instance, some young individuals express the desire to achieve career success before considering marriage, a perspective particularly evident among young women. In this context, young people's views on marriage are becoming increasingly diverse. Their definitions and expectations of marriage are no longer limited to traditional notions of “family responsibility” but instead focus more on personal happiness and quality of life. This transformation indicates that while social expectations still exist, young people's responses to them are becoming more varied, and marriage is no longer their sole life goal. In conclusion, the interaction between social expectations and economic factors in young people's marriage willingness is complex. The influence of traditional culture and modern economic pressures jointly shape young people's attitudes toward marriage. In future research, exploring how these elements interact will provide deeper insights into young people's marriage choices.

4 CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK

The main findings of this study are as follows:

First, social expectations continue to play an important role in young people's marriage choices. Despite the increasingly diverse understanding of marriage concepts in modern society, traditional cultural expectations regarding marriage remain deeply ingrained. Under the influence of family and friends, many young people face significant pressure to marry. However, as societal views change, young people are gradually realizing that marriage is no longer the only option in life, with an increasing number tending to pursue personal happiness and self-actualization. This shift reflects the conflict between societal expectations of traditional marriage and young people's personal choices.

Second, the impact of economic factors on young people's marriage willingness cannot be ignored. The rising housing prices and living costs force many young people to delay marriage. Economic pressure not only restricts their marriage choices but also influences their attitudes toward marriage. Some studies suggest that economic factors like housing prices and the cost of living have been major drivers behind the declining interest in marriage [4]. Many perceive marriage as a burden, preferring to consider it only after achieving financial stability, which directly leads to a decrease in marriage willingness.

Finally, personal values are gradually taking a dominant role in marriage choices. Young people are increasingly valuing self-actualization and personal happiness, with many respondents indicating that they wish to consider marriage only after their careers are stable. This redefinition of marriage signifies the growing maturity and confidence of young people in their life choices.

In summary, the conflict between social expectations and personal choices is becoming more pronounced. Traditional culture still exerts pressure on marriage, and young people often feel a conflict between family and societal expectations and their own values. This conflict may lead to psychological anxiety and confusion, generating negative emotions toward marriage. Therefore, understanding this conflict is crucial for policy-making and social support, helping young people better navigate the relationship between personal choices and social expectations.

Future research could further explore the impacts of social expectations and economic factors in different regional and cultural contexts, particularly the roles of urban-rural differences and gender disparities in marriage willingness. Additionally, research should focus on how to respect young people's personal choices while retaining traditional marriage views, in order to better understand and adapt to this social transition. Through deeper empirical studies, academia can provide valuable recommendations for policymakers, helping them to promote social harmony while meeting the needs of young people.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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