



A family planning officer explains a healthcare pamphlet to a pregnant woman in Zhengang, Jiangxi province. ZHOU KE / XINHUA

Reproduction: Officials boosted by new roles and regulations

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Wang is one of about 200 family planning officials in Guiyang's Wudang district whose roles have been transformed. They have started to focus more heavily on working with colleagues to provide maternal healthcare services to suit the universal second-child policy.

For more than three decades, the primary task of family planning officers was to prevent unauthorized births via the promotion and use of contraception, according to Qin Desheng, deputy director of Wudang's bureau of health and family planning.

However, that began to change a few years ago as the national family planning policy was gradually relaxed.

The merger of the district's family planning and health departments resulted in family planning officers being integrated with other health workers, especially those at the grassroots.

"The effect of the second-child policy in Wudang can be seen clearly, with nearly 4,000 births expected by the end of the year," Qin said, speaking in December.

"By comparison, in 2016, the total number of births in the district was about 2,000. Many couples who already had one child delayed having a second until the universal second-child policy was implemented," he added.

Qin noted that some rural couples, such as those whose only child was a girl, were allowed to have two children in the hope the second would be a boy, which would help to maintain the workforce.

As in many other parts of China, a large number of the women in Wudang who plan to have a second child are considered to be at high risk — for example, those ages 40 and older — so improving health management has become a key task for the district's health and family planning officials.

"While village doctors provide purely medical care, family planning officials have other functions," Qin said.

"They have close contact with villagers over many years, and as a result they establish a vast information network at the grassroots. For example, they can provide useful information about pregnant women, and also help those who plan to have a second child to have a pre-pregnancy check-up. When the universal second-child policy was implemented, many of our



A woman collects medication prescribed after a free checkup as part of a "Healthy Mother" program launched by Langao county in Shaanxi province. LIU XIAO / XIHUA

family planning workers were puzzled and did not know what their new jobs would entail. We believe they still have a role to play, and we have arranged training programs so they can provide a better service."

Promoting contraception

Qin said some couples want to have more than two babies in violation of the law, so the district's family planning officers have maintained some of their traditional duties, such as promoting awareness of contraception, distributing free contraceptive pills and devices, and fining people who break the law.

Lu Shiyuan has been engaged in family planning in two villages in Dongfeng, the township under the jurisdiction of Wudang, since 2003. He has seen a lot of changes during the past 14 years.

"Unlike our current role as service providers, back in 2003, we were like the residents' managers and our priority was to prevent illegal births," he said. "At the time, villagers who planned to have a child had to go through a number of registration procedures with the local government."

For Lu, the changes really gained momentum in 2014, when the national family planning policy was relaxed. The new regulations allowed cou-

“The effect of the second-child policy in Wudang can be seen clearly, with nearly 4,000 births expected (in 2017).”

Qin Desheng, deputy director of Wudang's bureau of health and family planning, speaking in December

ples to have a second child if one partner was the only child in their family. In response, local governments simplified the registration procedures to adapt to the change, including making it easier for people to register via computers or smartphones, he said.

Lu and his colleagues have relocated from their old office to the health center in Dongfeng so they can better assist the doctors and nurses and provide health management for women who are pregnant, have recently given birth, or are planning to have a baby, he added.

Complicated procedures
In 2012, when his wife gave

birth to their first child, Zhao Ping, a Dongfeng native who owns a grocery store in Guiyang, had to return to the township to complete the birth registration forms.

"The procedures were very complicated back then, and we had to collect or fill in a lot of forms, including our marriage certificate, a letter from the local hospital confirming that my wife was pregnant and a letter from the local authorities certifying that my wife and I did not already have a child," he said.

He was pleased that the procedures were simplified in 2016 because he will not have to travel to Dongfeng to register if he and his wife have another child.

Instead, he will only need to enter their personal information, such as names, ID numbers and place of household registration, on the local government's website.

The change implemented by the family planning services in Guizhou is a microcosm of the transformation that has happened nationally, which is estimated to have affected nearly 1 million family planning officials, according to a national survey in 2015.

The number of family planning officers has remained unchanged since then, despite the relaxation of the family planning policy, according to



Villagers undergo checks for cervical and breast cancer at the family planning office in Liaocheng city, Shandong province. ZHAO YUGUO / FOR CHINA DAILY

the commission, which said the officials have been integrated with health workers at the grassroots across the country.

For example, family planning officials in Gansu province are also actively engaged in the provision of services such as health education, disease control and prevention, and poverty alleviation.

Meanwhile, many provinces have streamlined their administrative procedures so people can receive a wide range of ser-

Beijing residents face new fines for exceeding quota

By WANG XIAODONG

Couples in Beijing who have a third child without permission will face fines as much as three times the average disposable income the previous year, according to a regulation issued by the municipal government in July.

Urbanites and people living in rural areas will be fined based on the average disposable income in their home areas.

Those who have more than three children without permission will be fined for every child over the number permitted by law, the regulation stated.

In 2016, the average disposable income of city dwellers was about 57,000 yuan (\$8,790), while the figure for rural residents was 22,300 yuan, according to the Beijing Bureau of Statistics.

Under the revised Family Planning Law of 2016, all couples are allowed to have two children, but provincial governments have the power to formulate regulations that allow specific groups to have more.

Some couples in Beijing are allowed to have three children, such as those who have one child certified as having non-congenital disabilities and certain couples

where a partner has remarried, according to a regulation on family planning adopted in the capital in March 2016.

The July regulation will see violators pay lower fines than before.

Under a regulation adopted in the capital in 2002, couples with more than one child faced fines of up to 10 times the average disposable income for the previous year. However, if their disposable income was higher than the city average in the previous year they would face fines up to 10 times their disposable income in that year.

Many regions and cities updated their regulations following the implementation of the second-child policy in 2016, with fines varying from place to place.

For example, in Liaoning province, urban residents who have an unauthorized child face fines of up to 10 times the previous year's average disposable income in their place of residence.

Many regions and cities specify additional punishments for government employees who break the laws on childbirth, while in some places, such as the provinces of Guizhou, Yunnan and Hubei, government employees also face being dismissed from their jobs.

Timeline

1971: The State Council, China's Cabinet, approves proposals from the Ministry of Health to implement a family planning policy. The central government proposes that most couples should not have more than two children.

1973: The central government proposes a family planning policy that promotes late birth and limits each family to no more than two children.

1978: The concept of a family planning policy is written into the Chinese Constitution.

1980: To check rapid population growth, the central government stipulates that most couples are only allowed to have one child.

1988: Couples living in

rural areas whose only child is female are allowed to have a second child.

Late-1990s: A number of provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions gradually allow couples in which both partners are their family's only child to have a second child.

2002: The Family Planning Law is revised. It states that provincial bodies can devise regulations to allow certain groups to have a second child.

2013: A national regulation states that couples in which one partner is their family's only child are allowed to have a second child.

2016: It is announced that all couples are allowed to have two children.

services, including birth registration, maternal and child healthcare and child vaccinations, by producing a single certificate instead of the large number of documents required before.

Yuan Xin, a professor of population studies in Nankai University in Tianjin, said family planning officers will now be expected to focus more on providing healthcare services, but the authorities will need to provide training during the transition period.

"The family planning workers are familiar with reproductive health, but most lack sufficient knowledge of overall healthcare, including amended or new policies and technologies," he said.

"A number of training programs must be arranged to allow the workers to provide a more diverse range of healthcare."

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