FACTORS INFLUENCING WOMEN'S PROMOTION INTO SENIOR ROLE EMPLOYMENT IN UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract. *This research investigates the critical determinants of women's upward mobility into senior leadership roles within the Uzbekistan labor market. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach combining secondary source analysis with a primary survey of 300 employed women. The study identifies the structural and personal barriers hindering professional advancement. Key variables analyzed include demographic factors, perceived discrimination, and the quantitative impact of domestic caregiving and maternity support systems. The findings suggest that while Uzbekistan's institutional frameworks are modernizing, a persistent "glass ceiling" remains, reinforced by a complex interplay between domestic expectations and entrenched structural realities.*

Key words: *women's promotion, Uzbekistan labor market, gender barriers.*

Introduction: Women's participation in leadership roles has become an increasingly important topic in Uzbekistan as the country continues to grow socially and economically. Although progress has been made in expanding women's access to education and employment, many women still face challenges when seeking promotion into senior positions. Recognizing these issues is essential not only for gender equality but also for country's economic development, because greater female leadership is linked to improved organizational performance.

Literature Review: Women's career advancement in Uzbekistan has been shaped by a combination of cultural expectations and workplace structures. Recent government initiatives have aimed to expand women's participation in the labor market, including equal pay laws, anti-discrimination policies, and increased access to higher education. For example, according to Uzdaily (2024) the share of women in leadership positions increased from 27.0% in 2018 to 28.2% in 2022, reflecting gradual progress but still indicating a significant gender gap in senior roles.

Furthermore, international organizations have highlighted the structural barriers that continue to limit women's promotion opportunities. A World Bank (2024) assessment notes that Uzbekistan's female employment-to-population ratio represented in Figure 1, gradually declined from 2013, reaching a relatively low level of 36.8% in 2024. This indicates how crucial the situation is, since achieving gender parity could increase national GDP by up to 29%. These findings suggest that women's underrepresentation in senior roles is not only a social issue but also an economic one.

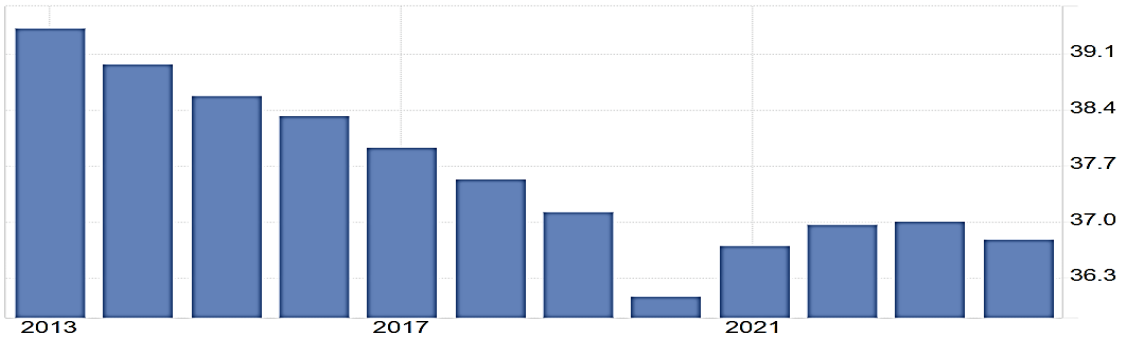


Fig.1: Uzbekistan's employment to population ratio provided (World Bank, 2024).

Another research by UNFPA and WIUT (2022) underlines the influence of traditional gender norms on women's career paths. Their reports identify family caregiving responsibilities, limited access to leadership training, and persistent gender stereotypes as key obstacles to advancement. Many women experience a "double burden," balancing full-time employment with expectations of domestic labor, which reduces their availability for promotions, networking, and professional development.

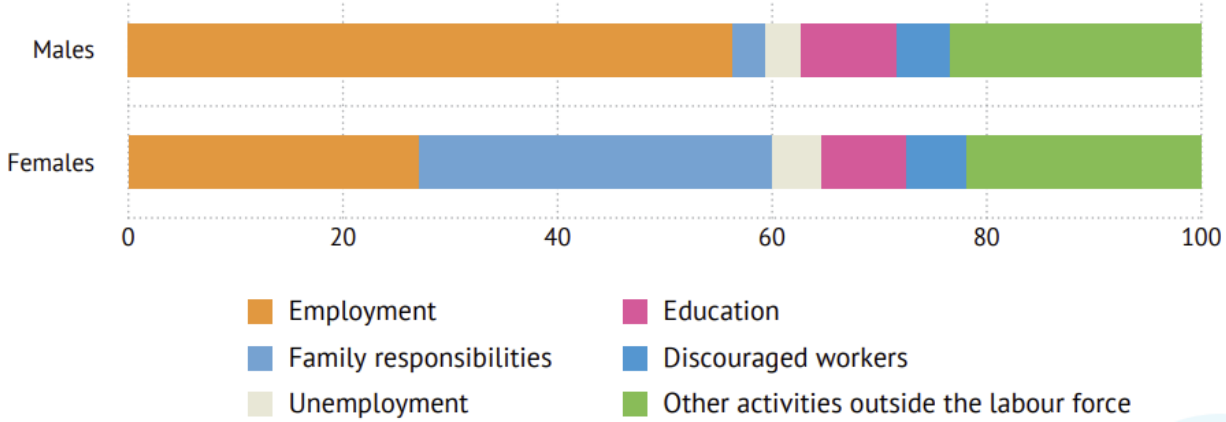


Fig.2: Distribution of working-age women and men by main activity (ILO, 2020)

As seen in the Figure 2, family responsibilities for females are significantly higher compared to males, indicating a persistent gender disparity in unpaid care work. Workplace-level factors also play a significant role. Studies show that women in Uzbekistan often face slight forms of discrimination in hiring, evaluations, and promotion decisions. Biases regarding women's "suitability" for leadership positions are still quite common. At the same time, gaps in managerial skills and limited mentorship opportunities further restrict women's growth.

Overall, the existing literature suggests that gender-specific barriers such as stereotypes and family duties and structural or organizational factors such as training access and workplace policies shape women's promotion into senior roles in Uzbekistan. This research builds on these findings by using primary survey data to explore how working females themselves recognize these challenges and which factors they identify as most influential in their career advancement.

Methodology: This research was through a quantitative approach with survey data. A Google Forms survey was distributed targeting working women in Uzbekistan. The survey had 300 complete responses from employed women. It included five key questions: (1) their age, (2) biggest promotion barrier, (3) gender discrimination experiences, (4) family caregiving impact (1-5 scale), and (5) maternity support availability (1-5 scale).

Results:

Demographics. The survey questioned women between the ages 18-55 dividing them into three categories: 46-55 (17.2%), 18-29 (24.1%), and majority (58.6%) being aged 30-45.

Key Survey Findings.

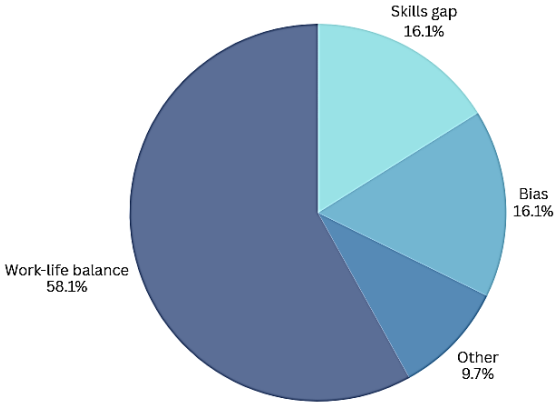


Fig.3: Barriers to Advancement

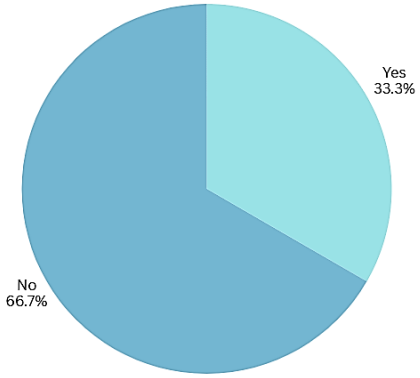


Fig.4: Exposure to Gender Discrimination

- **Barriers to Advancement (Fig. 3):** The most significant obstacle identified was Work-life balance, cited by 58.1% of respondents. This was followed by existing Skill gaps and Direct bias towards female employees, both tied at **16.1%**, while other factors accounted for 9.7%.
- **Discrimination (Fig. 4):** While 33.3% of women reported that they had experienced direct gender-based discrimination, a significant 66.7% indicated they had not faced such challenges in the workplace.

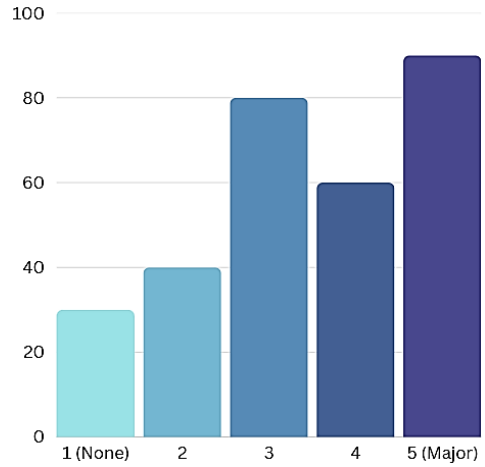


Fig.5: Family Impact on Career Growth

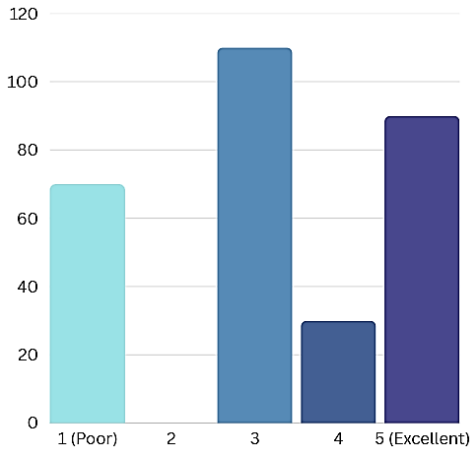


Fig.6: Availability of Maternity Support

- **Family Impact (Fig. 5):** On a 1-5 scale measuring how family caregiving affects career growth, 30% of respondents rated it at a maximum of 5, and 20% rated it at a 4.
- **Maternity Support (Fig. 6**): Perceptions of institutional support were mixed. While 30% rated support at a 5/5, nearly a quarter (23.3%) rated it at a 1/5.

Discussion

Analysis of the survey data alongside existing literature confirms that while the institutional framework in Uzbekistan is evolving, the "glass ceiling" for women is heavily reinforced by domestic and structural realities. The fact that 30% of women rated maternity support at a 5/5

suggests that many workplaces are beginning to align with recent legal reforms. However, the high percentage of women (23.3%) reporting minimal support (1/5) indicates a significant "implementation gap" across different industries.

The core finding of this research is the dominance of work-life balance (58.1%) as a career stopper. This directly mirrors the UNFPA and WIUT (2018) data showing women's disproportionate time spent on unpaid labor. It suggests that women in Uzbekistan are facing a "double burden" where professional ambition is frequently curtailed by cultural expectations of caregiving. The 33.3% who reported experiencing discrimination overall cannot be ignored; it indicates that traditional stereotypes regarding women's leadership "suitability" still permeate the workplace.

Recommendations to address these persistent barriers and unlock the 29% GDP growth projected by the World Bank (2024), the following actions are recommended:

- **Flexible Work Integration:** Organizations should formalize hybrid and remote work policies to help women manage the identified work-life balance barrier without sacrificing promotion eligibility.
- **Standardization of Support:** The government should ensure that the high-quality maternity support reported by some is standardized across all sectors, including the private sector, to prevent "luck of the draw" regarding employer support.

In conclusion, overall progress in Uzbekistan's labor market is evident, however full advancement requires moving beyond anti-discrimination laws toward active structural support that accounts for the cultural context of family life of working women.

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