

**Czech University of Life Sciences Prague**

**Faculty of Economics and Management**



## **Bachelor Thesis**

**Impact of Ethics and Cultural Prejudices towards  
Women on Corporate and Business Environment in  
Central Asia**

**Loretta Petrosyan**

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## BACHELOR THESIS ASSIGNMENT

Loretta Petrosyan

Business Administration

Thesis title

**Impact of Ethics and Cultural Prejudices towards Women on Corporate and Business Environment in Central Asia**

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### Objectives of thesis

The thesis investigates the impact of ethical norms and cultural prejudices on women in work in Central Asian countries. It will consider the historical and cultural context of these countries, and consider how these impact the experiences of women in the workplace and on the job market. It will examine the current state of gender equality at work in these countries, and link these to contemporary debates about gender inequality and discrimination. It will investigate cultural attitudes, experiences and understandings of these concepts through interviews and a survey.

### Methodology

The thesis will develop a literature review covering relevant issues in the cultural and historical context of Central Asia, and link these to ethical and policy debates about discrimination and gender inequality. It will investigate cultural attitudes, experiences and understandings of these concepts through: A quantitative survey of attitudes of men in Central Asia; quantitative interviews with women from selected Central Asian countries.

## The proposed extent of the thesis

40-50 pages

## Keywords

Working women, rights violations, inequalities, prejudices, Central Asia, traditions, mentality, labour market, objectification

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## Recommended information sources

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## The Bachelor Thesis Supervisor

Daniel Rosenhaft Swain, Ph.D., MA

## Supervising department

Department of Humanities

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**prof. PhDr. Michal Lošťák, Ph.D.**

Head of department

Electronic approval: 15. 3. 2022

**doc. Ing. Tomáš Šubrt, Ph.D.**

Dean

Prague on 15. 03. 2022

### **Declaration**

I declare that I have worked on my bachelor thesis titled "**Impact of Ethics and Cultural Prejudices towards Women on Corporate and Business Environment in Central Asia**" by myself and I have used only the sources mentioned at the end of the thesis. As the author of the bachelor thesis, I declare that the thesis does not break any copyrights.

In Prague on 15.03.2022

\_\_\_\_\_ Loretta Petrosyan \_\_\_\_\_

### **Acknowledgement**

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# **Impact of Ethics and Cultural Prejudices towards Women on Corporate and Business Environment in Central Asia**

## **Abstract**

The given work is intended to analyse the tendency of violation of women's rights within a variety of workplaces or business environments in Central Asia. The given region has been associated with patriarchy and superiority of men in different spheres of life and the system established throughout the decades still exists. Thus, mental and sexual assault, stalking, forced marriages, "glass ceiling", etc. are the real issues that women are compelled to endure and live with because of their gender identity. As a result, such phenomena constrict women from career growth and estrange from being free in corporate and business spheres. According to that, the main goal of the author is to analyse the influence of culture and traditions on attitudes and corporate position of women actively working environment. In order to achieve the goal, this work will have a series of interpersonal interviews with women actively working in the Central Asian region and verify whether there are any prejudices and discrimination based on their gender identity. In addition, there will be a survey among numerous male-participants to get to the bottom of their attitudes' nature towards women. Apparently, one of the main tasks will be to define some valuable solutions for the issues listed above.

**Keywords:** Working women, rights violations, inequalities, prejudices, Central Asia, traditions, mentality, labour market, objectification, glass-ceiling

# Vliv etiky a kulturních předsudků vůči ženám na firemní a obchodní prostředí ve střední Asii

## Abstrakt

Cílem práce je analyzovat tendence porušování práv žen na různých pracovištích nebo v podnikatelském prostředí ve Střední Asii. Daný region je spojován s patriarchátem a nadřazeností mužů v různých sférách života a tento systém zavedený v průběhu desetiletí stále přetrvává. Psychické a sexuální útoky, stalking, nucené sňatky, "skleněný strop" atd. jsou tedy skutečnými problémy, které jsou ženy nuceny snášet a žít s nimi kvůli své genderové identitě. V důsledku toho tyto jevy omezují ženy v kariérním růstu a odcizují je svobodě v podnikové a obchodní sféře. V souladu s tím je hlavním cílem autorky analyzovat vliv kultury a tradic na postoje a firemní postavení žen v aktivně pracujícím prostředí. K dosažení cíle bude v této práci provedena řada interpersonálních rozhovorů s aktivně pracujícími ženami ve středoasijském regionu a ověřeno, zda existují předsudky a diskriminace na základě jejich genderové identity. Kromě toho bude proveden průzkum mezi četnými účastníky-muži, aby se zjistila podstata jejich postojů k ženám. Jedním z hlavních úkolů bude zřejmě definovat některá hodnotná řešení výše uvedených problémů.

**Klíčová slova:** Pracující ženy, porušování práv, nerovnosti, předsudky, Střední Asie, tradice, mentalita, trh práce, objektivizace, skleněný strop

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**List of abbreviations**

UN – United Nations

UNDP - United Nations Development Programme

UNECE - United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

# 1 Introduction

After the Soviet Union collapsed, the whole system of the governing in Central Asia changed. The regular regime of the bare gender balance started its shifting and over the years seemed to be faded away. With the decades, the renewal of patriarchal traditions became a priority again, which subsequently affected the economies of countries and displaced even the slightest existing in those times coefficient of gender equality in labour market and generally in daily women's lives. The old principles took its roots and lots of women from 5 countries of Central Asia currently do not feel themselves free to apply for a job, to be fairly interviewed, to work with colleagues due to quantitative superiority of men and even safe commitment to and from their workplaces might be endangered. Unfortunately, cases of violations of female's rights can fairly comprise a longlist. For instance, the phrase "self-sufficient working woman" is inappropriate in some families where young girls are born and raised or to those ones they get after so-called "marriages of convenience". As a result, women are objectified and live according to the script prescribed by male representatives of their prior or new families. Such scenarios make women either admit their way of living or frequently end up as huge tragedies. Old-fashioned beliefs usually have a direct impact not only on women's well-being but retards the country's economic progress as well. Thus, mentality formulated throughout the period of transformation of people's way of living in Independent Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan gained distinctive elements of sexism towards women and their rights (Nadirova, 2021).

Apparently, these issues are becoming public more and more, even though the process of acknowledgement and dealing with them is quite slow. Volunteers all over the countries listed above contribute a lot to the tackle the problem by organizing some shifting centres for women who are needing mental health assistance, any kinds of therapies and so on. However, the main goal to eradicate the source of problems is still not reached due to the lack of initiative from the society, which is raised on the unaltered prejudices, principles and traditions. Movements as feminism are not highly perceived in Central Asian region as they are reckoned to threat common traditions and culture and destabilize policy that has been gaining momentum within numerous amounts of generations (Ulugova, 2020).

Subsequently, this work is intended to analyse the extent of cultural and traditional aspects on people's perception of women, working in corporate and business environment in Central Asia and to understand the reasons of uprise of barriers for female in labour market. It is also crucial

to vindicate the significance of educating and raising awareness of the issue of violation of women's rights in the society of Central Asia and to identify all the possible solutions.

## **2 Objectives and Methodology**

### **2.1 Objectives**

Considering the objectives of the work, it is significant to mention that one of the main goals is to focus on the ethical and cultural influence on women's being in the region with patriarchal perspectives and to analyse the issues they face in corporate environment and labour market.

Putting aside ethical and cultural phenomena, it would be also relevant to figure out which factors retard the establishment of gender equality in Central Asia and find out all the reasons of this back off. It would be also appropriate to name all forms of violation of women's rights to shed a brighter light on the whole background of the attitude of society to female.

Moreover, the main concept consists in demonstrating the whole issue from women's point of view to make readers feel the scale of the whole problem. With all the information given, it is crucial to come across any possible solutions eventually, to change the way of thinking of the majority or at least to start from providing basic education from early ages to raise conscious generation.

### **2.2 Methodology**

In order to achieve the main goal of the work, it would be relevant to conduct a series of interpersonal interviews with women actively working in the Central Asian region and verify whether there are any prejudices and discrimination based on their gender identity and how they frequently experience it on a daily basis as well as in their working environment. It is also significant to attribute results to the impact of traditional and cultural biases to working women in countries of the observing region.

Furthermore, for a clearer understanding of the problem's origins, the author finds it inevitable to make an analysis in accordance with not only women's vision, but also to ask men about their seeing of obvious cultural nature bias towards women. It is also significant to know whether the opposites are willing to participate in changing the situation to the better and give women an opportunity to live their lives equally with men.

## **3 Literature Review**

### **3.1 Origins of the issue**

Central Asian region used to be a bunch of countries, fully belonged to the Soviet Union. This country had different ideologies, where it was believed that men as equally as women must have same duties and opportunities. Women were provided with free rights to participate in any paid labour and brought them autonomy in cooperation with men. After the 1917, when The Soviet Union came to power, its leaders were confidently focused on the reconstruction of the life span in Central Asia (Current History, 2016). The main “bridge” for such steps was based on women, as it was believed that they play major role in a formation of economic, political and social life. For instance, it was always taught that motherhood is women’s duty and set some other similar boundaries, that has always been emphasized in society. Thus, some factors, including international impacts and ideologies, standing for the protection of women’s rights coexisted with standards of national and traditional values and economic dislocation, which, subsequently, created multifaceted environment for women. Even though, all the five countries of Central Asia have authorized particles in their constitutions, which stay for the equality of humans’ rights. Apparently, taking into consideration women living in Europe, it is evident, that their opportunities and standards of existing absolutely differed from the ones of those females of Central Asian region, who were born and raised in the culture and traditions, that almost compelled to count mature marriage as a priority and to bear as much children as it could be possible, even in times of the Soviet Union governing, that attempted to implement some plans to persevere the ideology of deriving the status of women in society on a new level, that could establish that significant gender equality in all spheres of live. People used to notice that the idea of making women give birth more was evidently backed up with the fact that the region relentlessly used the child labor, which were reckoned to play a significant role of the whole system. Nevertheless, in comparison with the neighboring countries as Pakistan, Afghanistan and so on, being of women from Central Asia would be not as critical as it seemed, particularly in the period of the late 90’s. The main factors of such conclusion are based on the highest level of literacy, that female could freely have starting from middle school until universities. It is also significant to note the accessibility of any basic healthcare on a free basis, including abortions, holding lands, work force participation, various facilities and pensions, and generally same

rights of locomotion and daily life being as well. Governmental cultural revolution of communists went through the takeover in its economic aspects, including agriculture and instant industrialization. Collectivization was quite pitiless towards the lifestyles of female living in up-country of regions in Central Asia, as their habitual way of nomadic herding was generally reordered. To some extent all these changes were not as disruptive as they seemed to be. Since the reordering, many schools were opened by collective farms and Soviet government insisted on heads of families to stop obstructing their sisters, daughters or wives from getting educated as well as their male representatives.

In the times of post period of the Second World War farms started allowing women to be parts of their memberships and work there till their retirement. Moreover, such female workers received pensions as equally as male did. Listed measures were directed by the Soviet Union to empower women's influence in the society, as they naturally supported Soviet emancipation and always stayed for a brand-new lifestyle (Massel, 1974). Likewise, females became targets of special Soviet policies, which persevered colonial aims as well.

### **3.2 Religion, culture, traditions, and its effects**

Throughout the times of Soviet control in Central Asia, religion was disestablished by any possible ways, including the closure of sacred places and mosques, arresting sacred figures. The law of Sharia was no more guided in society of muslims in Central Asia and was not legally valid as before. Family laws established by the Soviet Union had a colossal difference with the Sharia's ones. New rules stayed for the restriction of polygamy, they defined another minimum marriage ages, where wives as well as husbands had equal rights to file for divorce, giving their children some legacy to choose a care-taker between parents (Current History, 2016). Despite of the laws, all the settled cultural particularities continued to reveal. For instance, Muslims in Central Asia made a statement about the disapproval of divorces and families from suburban areas infrequently permitted their women to leave their homes without male accompanying, which, apparently deprived women of education or work. Moreover, mostly rural families continued to pursue the tradition of marriages of convenience as well. Nevertheless, it is relevant to mention the well-known for Uzbek people story about Tamara Khanum, the distinguished Uzbek dancer, singer and choreographer of Armenian origin, who was a trailblazer and one of the first women, who performed publicly without wearing a veil. This woman contributed a lot to the progressive empowerment of women in Uzbekistan and their rights protection and was awarded with the different valued awards in the Soviet Union.

In the post-Soviet period, as Islam was culturally diversified, directions of this religion differently depended on countries in Central Asia. Subsequently, many separate groups that were bringing their own messages into the masses got organized. Special executors encouraged young generations to choose religious institutions abroad, opened schools where they taught the male and female figures must be distinguished differently. For example, women were reckoned to be complementary elements of society, rather than as equal ones. Apparently, they never missed chances to mention the significance of motherhood and devotion to isolation in their homes where they should bear and grow up new generations, which was generally a direct determination of women's duties and responsibilities by the opposite gender. This is what proved to be the consequences of the overdoing the religious books and other sources, their wrong understanding and putting labels as well.

In course of time, especially throughout the past two decades, in the Middle East territories, women determined themselves as devout Muslims through the tendency of covering their heads with hijabs. However, every country of Central Asia had its own distinctive rules, which played a significant role in identification of women's being in societies of the region. Taking into consideration the position of the Republic of Uzbekistan, it is known that its government incredulously referred to religious tendencies and put into practice quite oppressive measures to suppress wearing of hijabs at various institutions and tried to control mosques and religious figures. Kyrgyzstan, conversely, allowed peaceful Islamic activities and mosques to work, but with the least supervision, in contrast with Uzbekistan. After these quite exempt measures, the amounts of female wearing hijabs and sticking to Muslim ethics concerning gender equalities and other similar phenomena rapidly grew up. Tajikistan followed the secularism in their constitution and after the civil war in 1997, their president's secular party governed the parliament. However, an Islamist opposition started amplifying their influence and power and parliamentarians started to chew over some questions as some virginity tests application for controlling women. Apparently, the parliament of Tajikistan did not include measures like virginity tests into their new laws concerning marriages, but since those times families still require the tests as a guarantee of women's innocence when making marriages. As for Kazakhstan, it had the similar situation that Uzbekistan had (Current History, 2016).

Population of Central Asia admits that their independence led to the long-awaited implosion with religious aspects, nevertheless, their governments are on the alert with the goal of avoiding

radical communalistic activities or any other political issues based on the opposition of devout Muslims. It is also significant to mention that women are not under the gun, as they do not make crowds by massively attending mosques. They are usually taken for harmlessly gathering objects in women-only places and generally never constitute any threats. Such events are quite significant for women in Central Asia as they diversify their daily lives, help to strengthen links among them and encourage cultural and religious heritage as well.

### **3.2.1 Women's fates**

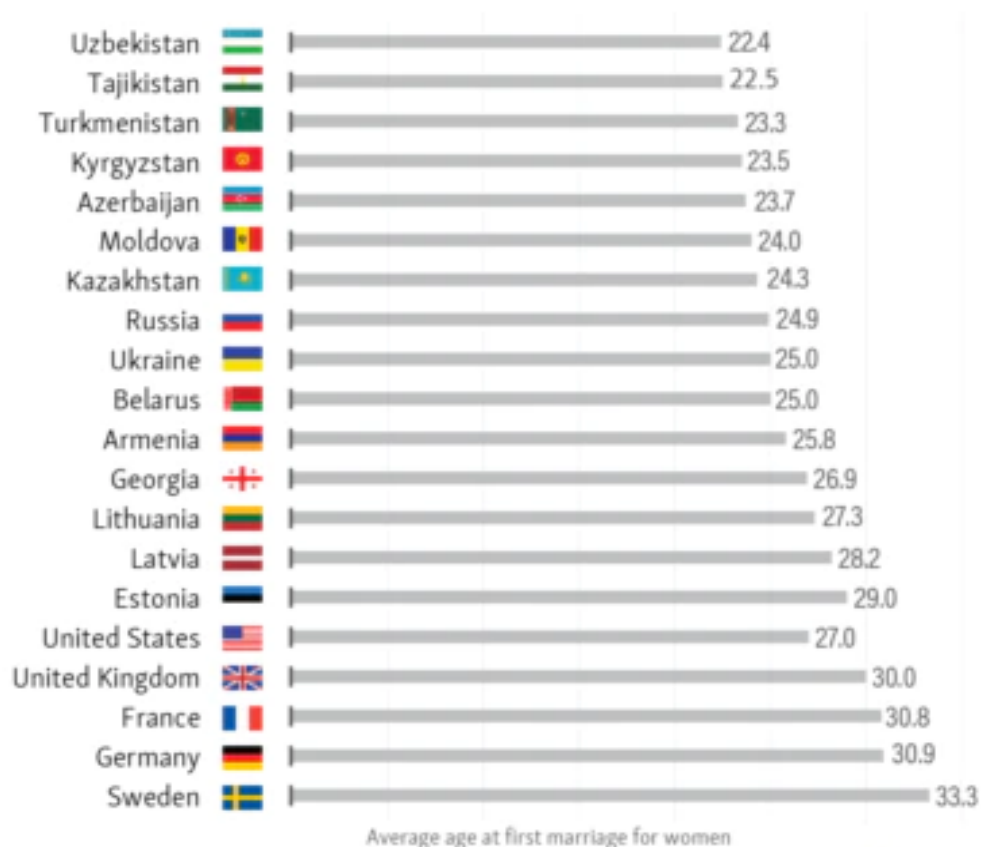
It is not a secret that women in Central Asia are frequently taken as ownership and objectified by their own family members. According to ancient traditions, the tendency of predestination of woman's fate is still up to date, where the questions of female's future are entrusted to heads of their families. Due to the patriarchal type of culture, women's lives are fully in hands of their fathers, brothers, uncles, husbands and so on. Throughout the decades, such traditions have been slowing down and ceased to be excessively violent as they used to be before. Nevertheless, the system so far is quite distinctive and starts from the very birthday of a female in family.

Despite of the evident fact that choosing foetus' gender is impossible, society got used to blaming women for bearing girls instead of boys. Thus, tough period begins during girl's teenage period of life, as they must be like right hands of their mothers, where they are compelled to combine education with all the household activities and help with babysitting as well. Practically, this period of life prepares girls for the next, most fateful stage of life, which is referred to their adolescence. The issue of young child marriages and marriages of convenience consists in immaturity of girls who have miserable rights in finding a couple for themselves independently. Otherwise, they are waiting for their destiny to be chosen by their own family members. There are numerous material factors that are mainly considered in marriage arrangement and everything related to that. Families collate their budgets, finances, houses and cars, all the listed properties are reckoned to be indicators of wealth. In accordance with that, they decide whether their daughter is worth of blessing for a new life with a person she have never met or continue their search. Another aspect which matchmakers usually count proved to be girl's background and her lineage, in order to escape any unwanted rumors related to disgrace and reputation from neighbors or relatives. Those phenomena can further be disruptive for mature families due to the lack of adulthood both in male and female, respectively.



The UN (United Nations, 2016) provided the statistics that found out that 700 million girls were compelled to marriage before 18 (Figure 1). The study took into consideration 144 countries and included the ones that belong to the region of Central Asia. The graph illustrates the statistics, which estimated that women from countries in Central Asia tend to marry the way earlier than, for instance, women from Western countries.

*Figure 1 First marriage age of women in the world.*



Source: United Nations, 2016

The most often cases of marriages by kidnapping are registered in some countries like Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. This kind of marriage by the kidnapping of bride is based on the abduction of young woman in order to show a desire of marrying her. Due to the public attention to the significance of keeping women's virginity, kidnappers usually force women to have a sexual intercourse with them and afterwards present it to women's families as a fact of possession of their daughter. Frequently, women's families make an agreement with their future husbands and proceed this as a tradition, even in spite of the law restrictions in Constitutions of the observed countries due to the violation of women's rights and an increase of devastating accidents.

### **3.2.2 Dangers of being a woman**

Even without including the terrifying experiences from marriages by kidnapping, most of the women face different forms of chasing, catcalling, stalking, threats, sexual harassment and violation of personal boundaries by the physically superior gender. All the offensive and harmful for women situations may occur throughout their whole lives regardless of their age and status. Women can be exposed to harassment almost everywhere, without any limitations of certain places. This can happen while they are at work, in institutions, parks, even in public transport, etc. However, the most dangerous place for women can become their own home, where they are victimized by men. Superiority and power are the basis of any form of harassment: men statistically show it when they can feel that women depend on them. (UN International Labour Organization, 2019).

Considering women's being at their workplace, it also raises safety concerns, as women could be exposed to soliciting or any other forms of harassment, physical, psychological or sexual violence from male managers or colleagues. According to the 2018 World Bank survey data, it is evident that some countries of Central Asia are estimated the world's highest in prevalence of intimate violence by men. Managers' superiority makes them exceed their powers sometimes and such situations make women leave such jobs behind, which violates their rights. This happens as women in Central Asia are objectified even at their workplaces and corporate environments as well, which is also related to the reasons why men do not allow their women to work.

### **3.2.3 Society's attitudes**

One of the most common aspects of an overgrowth of various social problems lies in the lack of acknowledgement among society and its inaction. Therefore, men are less involved into the process of changing the situation as most of the time they are not concerned at all. Some of them oppose women's empowerment and try to interfere the process instead of its encouragement (Current History, 2016). It is traditionally believed that freedom of women's rights and permissiveness can badly influence on culture and mentality of a certain nation. Discriminatory measures in Central Asia are frequently maintained not only by men, but also by older women, who was raised in environments where societies do not have solidarity towards female, as women who tend to self-fulfilment and financial independence are harder to manipulate. Women are traditionally objectified and are obliged to win favour with male, which make men idealize women who prefer household activities, rather than those who choose self-

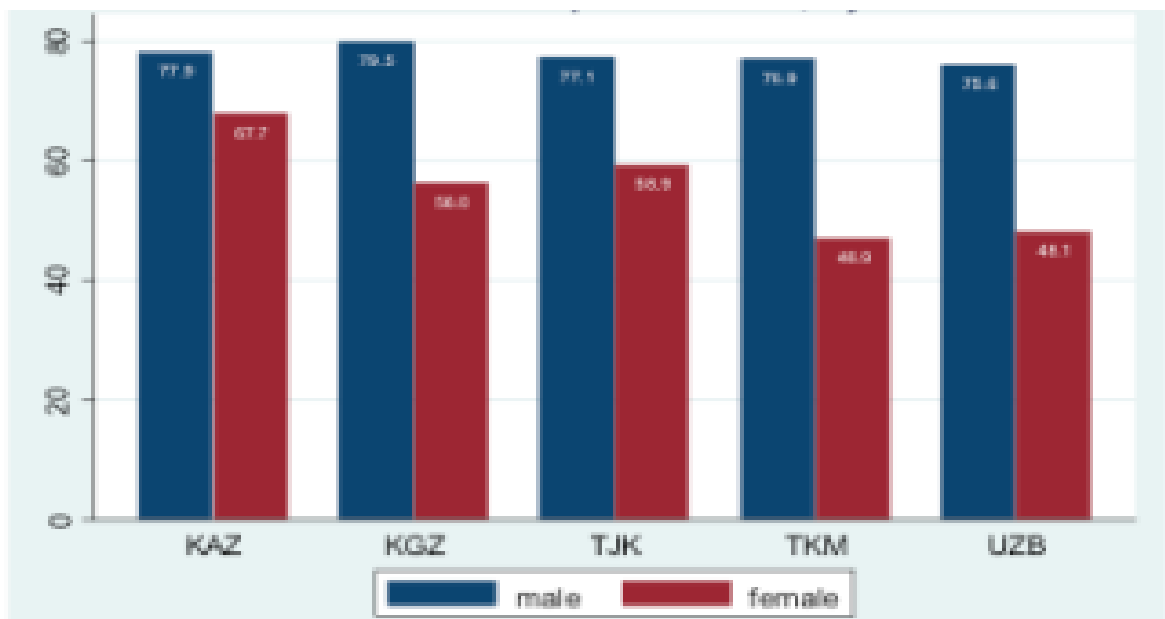
education and career progress. Moreover, many eastern women attach particular importance to family values and with this way of thinking they are being gradually convinced, that they should always choose between job and domestic bliss. Thus, these two phenomena are often reckoned to be incompatible for Central Asian mindsets.

Gender stereotypes enormously affect the perceiving of women’s execution and prevent their progress. Practice shows that gender prejudices towards women manifested in different organizations and environments impede females’ learning process underlying becoming a leader, respectively (UNDP, 2016). When leadership and behaviours are equated, which is mostly specific to men, suggests that women were not born to be leaders. Subsequently, in such realities, the acquisition of qualities related to leadership and decision-making becomes extremely complicating for women who must gain trust and credibility in societies, where people are inconsistent about the way they should exercise authority (UNDP, 2016).

### 3.3 Women in the labour market

The rate of gender inequalities in labour markets in Central Asia in comparison with the rest of the world is quite unfortunate, which can be said according to indexes of women participating in labour force (Figure 2). Generally, the ratio of women at their working age who are searching for job or are already working is lower than among men in countries of Central Asia (World Bank, 2018).

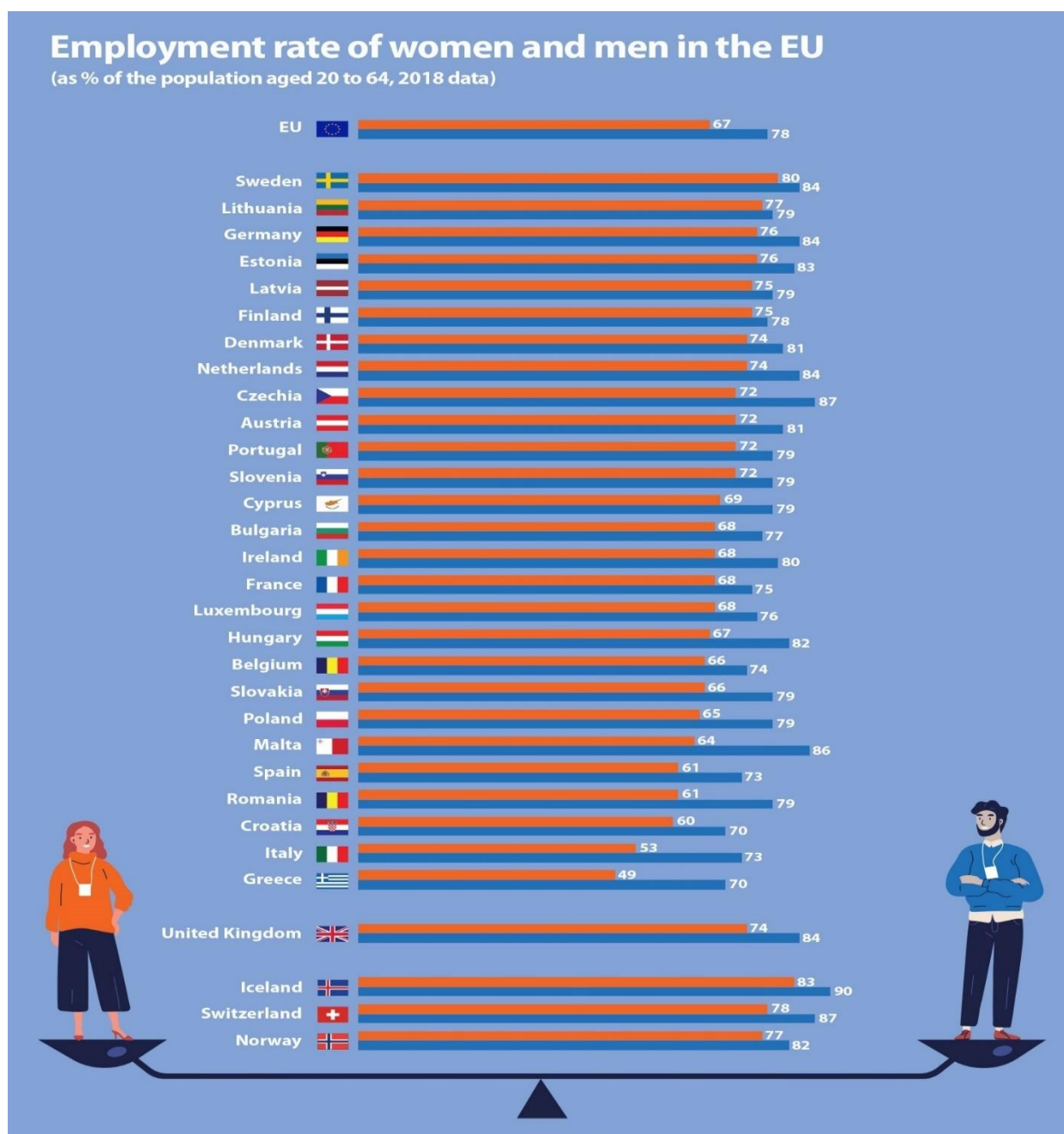
Figure 2 Labour Force Participation Rates by Gender in Central Asia.



Source: World Bank Gender Statistics Database, 2013

Comparing the two graphs (Figure 2 and Figure 3), which illustrate data for labour force participation indexes by gender in Central Asia and European countries, it is evident that the amount of working women is less than men's rate in both regions. However, the indexes of the difference between employed males and females proved to be quite lower in most of European countries like Sweden, Germany, Latvia and some others (Figure 3). Still, it is quite important to note that Kazakhstan's indexes were fairly competitive with the ones that some European countries have like, for example, Bulgaria, Cyprus, etc.

Figure 3 Employment rate of men and women in the EU



Source: Eurostat (2018)

Even though men usually complete higher education less than women, it is men who are mostly hired for the well-paid jobs instead of women, whereas women in Central Asia choose financially less paid embranchments, mostly in public administration, including some social works, education or healthcare spheres. Women who work as managers are frequently limited of working only in strategic or less critical branches, as, for example, administration or human resources and barely reach departments where critical decisions are made. One of the examples proved to be Kyrgyzstan, because there are no women working in the major governmental organizations as State Material Reserves, however there is nothing like that in their Ministry of Social Protection and the Ministry of Health, as approximately 70 percent of employers are female (UNDP, 2016). Another vivid example is Tajikistan, where the only two governmental organizations hire women. Thus, only 36 percent of employees of the Committee of Television and Radio under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan are women, and the second organization is the Committee for Women's and Family Affairs which employed 87 percent of females, accordingly (UNDP, 2016). It is also noted that it is utterly complicating for women to reach executive vacancies in strategic departments like finance or development, particularly, in the big companies, which are included into pyramidal structure with career progression (UNDP, 2016). This happens, as career development of women directly depends on their work experience, nevertheless, it is frequently drag on by maternity leave, which is taken by almost every woman in Central Asia. Thereby, men are promoted the way earlier than women in their workplaces, which create the so-called Gender Pay Gaps (UNECE, 2016). This term determines the difference in males' and females' earnings from their jobs in average, which is expressed in percentages out of males' average income. As women in Central Asia are not frequently able to pursue their own goals and interests, as they need to care about their families and other household responsibilities at the same time. There are still not that many girls, who are empowered to get high level of education in strategic spheres and decision-making top positions with higher perspectives and wages, which restates by the fact that women get approximately between 30-70% less earnings than their male colleagues, even though they are applied for the same positions (Asian Development Bank, 2015).

Focusing on women working in public administration in at least three out of five countries in Central Asia, as shown in the Table 1, the data for Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan could not be obtained, but it can be suggested that the results of the research of the ones observed below may be similar with Uzbekistan's and Turkmenistan's indexes, accordingly, as their regimes are

quite alike. Thereby, from the Table 1 we can see that Kazakhstan has the difference between percentages of male and female employees close to gender equality standards.

*Table 1: Representation of women and men in public administration in some countries of Central Asia (%). Source: UNDP, 2016*

Central Asia	Women	Men
Kazakhstan (2015)	55.20%	44.80%
Kyrgyzstan (2011)	38.99%	61.01%
Tajikistan (2014)	22.36%	77.64%

As for the decision-making positions, women get in Central Asia comparing to men, we can see Table 2 on the example of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The results are exponential, as the indicators responsible for the percentage of women are deplorable (Table 2).

*Table 2: Representation of women and men in decision-making positions in public administration in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (%). Source: UNDP, 2017*

Central Asia	Women	Men
Kyrgyzstan (2011)	25.3%	74.7%
Tajikistan (2014)	20%	80%

Women across the Central Asia are used to facing cultural and stereotypical barriers while pursuing their interests in reaching their economic potential which became even worse after the COVID-19 pandemic. Women start their businesses approximately twice less than men and those businesses that are possessed by women are related to low-income and more traditional spheres such as distributive trade. Moreover, women have limited access to finance and intellectual property (World Bank, 2018). In accordance with the World Bank survey data in 2018, only 30 percent of women from Central Asia had their own bank accounts and in the previous year there were only 25 percent of female that saved there their earnings.

### **3.3.1 Glass ceiling and glass walls**

Glass ceilings are defined as invisible obstacles appearing due to organizational or attitude biases, that prevent women from superior executive work, whereas glass walls are artificial obstacles indicating occupational segregation of women. As mentioned earlier (Page 21), in serious organizations, it is highly unlikely that women working as managers could reach strategic positions in Central Asia. There is a tough process of establishing gender equality in

business and corporate environment, as these spheres are beyond breaking the glass ceiling in the observed region. Historically formulated barriers systematically create unfavourable obstacles for women in their working activities. It is laudable how women despite of the difficulties have risen to a leadership in their business management or other corporate jobs and broke the glass ceiling, which can become a good motivation for others and show that challenges only make us stronger. Nevertheless, individual numerous cases of women empowerment and their achieving of decision-making positions cannot just eliminate the deeply rooted issues related to the glass ceiling. Such problems require deliberate approaches in all the society levels in order to achieve the goal of sweeping away the existing sharp edges of violation of women's rights and gender inequality (Asian Development Bank, 2015).

Unfortunately, there is no precise solution to break away glass walls and glass-ceiling, and the only way to get rid of them lies in changes in society via reforms in educational systems, states' policies and at workplaces as well. Gender equality established at workplaces for women turns out to be the framework for the solution of breaking the invisible barriers in organizations and companies, preventing women from career growth. It is evident, that it is impossible to fully escape problems related to those phenomena, which are holding women back, however, with the higher level of education and employment for female, the glass ceiling gets cracked, but not shattered yet in the region of Central Asia (ILO, 2018).

Practical Part

### **3.4 Concept of the research**

The first part of the research's practical part consists of a general survey intended to analyse the percentage of men's exposition to gender inequality that women face in various spheres of life as well in order to understand their attitudes to the ethical and cultural biases in labour market. The overall number of participants of the questionnaire reached 50 men. Likewise, the survey is undoubtedly an inevitable part of the given research as it helps to measure overall results of people's feelings and to see if there is any willingness to change the existing problems of prejudices demonstration towards women in Central Asia. All the collected information can assist in the proper spread of awareness among people in the eastern region and help to establish any possible solutions to the issue of violation of females' rights.

The second part of the research will include personal brief interviews with five female participants, where each of them can generally represent their country. To be more precise, every participant is being a present worker in company located in one out of the five countries in Central Asia and each of them will answer questions concerning their experiences in corporate environment among men and whether they face any discriminatory attitudes from their male-managers or colleagues from their workplace. Another crucial factor covers the effect of traditions and culture on the process of hiring women and choice of candidates in accordance with their gender identity. According to that, it is significant to compare the results of the interviews of women from different countries and define their disparities. Finally, the author finds it critical to collate the data from survey and interviews in order to bring awareness and any optimal solutions to light.

#### **3.4.1 Author's expectations from the results**

Considering the process of the questionnaire first, it is relevant to mention that the author was born and raised in the region of Central Asia and throughout that time has witnessed and heard enormous amounts of true stories of women of different ages, who became victims of patriarchy, disrespectful attitudes, prejudices and other inappropriate actions from men. Agreeably to that fact, it is approximately known what to expect from the survey results, as well as the way female participants of the interview would behave. Likewise, men are more likely to tend to reject the existence of contemptuous attitudes towards women not only at their



workplaces, but generally in their lives. Presumably, this happens as men are less exposed to injustice in comparison with the opposite gender and it is quite tough for them to understand what it is like. In corporate environment men usually acquire less attention from managers or colleagues and have more privileges in labour market than women have. Primarily, the ratio of men in corporate and business environment usually prevails the numbers of women, which does not bring men inconveniences and allows them to be in their own environment. Thus, when women get into a new working environment, big numbers of men-colleagues make them be out of place. In some cases, women start getting excessive attention from the opposite gender even at their workplace, which frequently extends on their daily lives. Such aspects are not experienced by men as often as women and this is supposedly the reason why most of the male participants might not be discriminated at their workplaces. Moreover, men are usually being first priorities candidates on interviews, as employers and managers tend to consider employees for long-term positions, meanwhile almost all women take maternity leave throughout their career, which affects working processes. As a result, unsurprisingly, men who participated in the survey might not be concerned all the listed earlier problems. Apparently, it is quite hard to believe that participants could be familiar with narrow terms, which are related to prejudices toward women in labour markets, because of the lack of education and spread of awareness, correspondingly.

Unfortunately, sometimes society choose to decline real facts and urge everyone that women are to blame and find a list of excuses why females get into unfair situations in the observed region instead of rising awareness to problems amongst new generations since their childhood to raise people who are willing to treat women equally. This factor is one of the most influencing one on all the emerging attitudes to women and their activities in life. It is supposed that most of the older women and men participants are not aware of all the issues of violation of women's rights at workplace as they either have never been in such situations or there is lack of raising people's awareness in Central Asia. Women are afraid of spreading their stories and imposing their conditions for protection of their own rights due to traditional, cultural or religious aspects. Thus, even though there could be a desire of raising awareness of the problem, there are many fears and lack of power to make it happen.

Considering the interview's alleged outcome, the author can suppose that all the five women participants have at least once been exposed to discrimination at their workplaces which is related to people's mentality in the observed region. Moreover, the way they got their jobs might not be as easy as it seemed due to their gender identity as well. It is expected that some

of the interview participants' families were against of their desires to work due to some obvious factors referred to traditional factors.

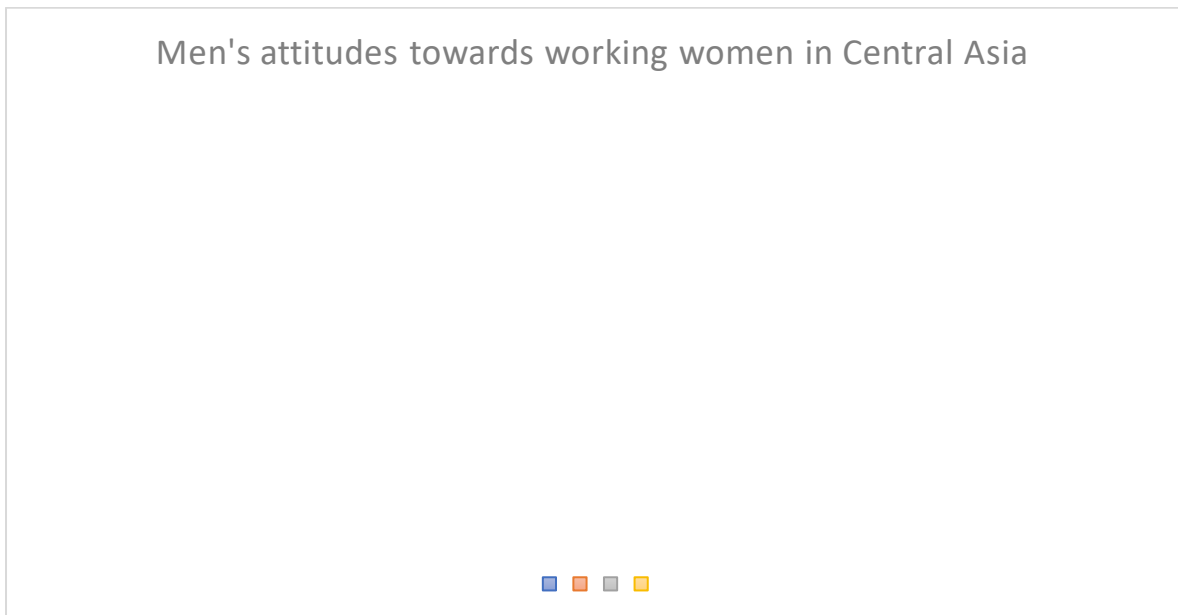
Such questions could be long-standing gender imbalances, which women are not always prepared to speak of. It is possible, that such kind of pressing for working female issues made them accept the situation and adapt to the existing attitudes of environments they work in.

## 4 Results and Discussion

### 4.1 The analysis of the outcome

To begin with, after observing the results of the processed survey, it became obvious even more, that it is extremely important to work on the existing issue of common occurrences of prejudices towards women in labour market and everything related to that in Central Asia. Most men, who participated in the survey seemed to be quite indifferent and not aware of anything which is related to the barriers that women face in today's world of business, job hiring and corporate environment. Generally, the author took four most consistent questions out of ten that were asked, for the closer look in pie charts to understand men's attitudes and opinions about the issue of violation of women's rights and its consequences for females. Thereby, according to the output of the survey concerning men's feelings about the idea of working women (Figure 1), it turned out to be that only 18% of the ones who took part in the survey consider working women in a positive spirit, whereas 40% do not care and stay neutral. As for the negative attitudes, there were 14% who were not sure in their positions and 28% of those who are even against of women's desire to work at all, accordingly.

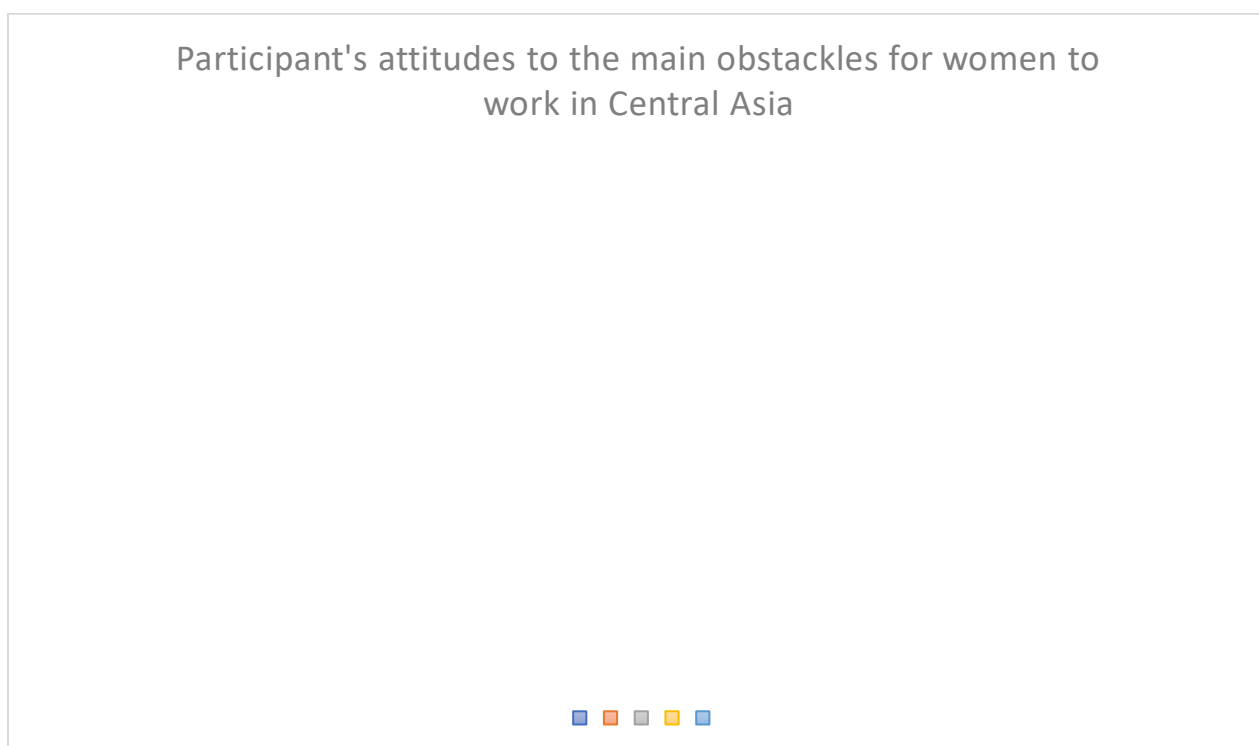
*Table 3 What are your attitudes towards women in Central Asia?*



Such results could be consequences of a variety of familiar factors which are formulated due to some well-known factors. It was crucial to know the opinions of men and to ask them to which one they are leaning towards, but at the same time it is also quite important to determine the roots of the occurring problems. Women are sometimes not allowed to work by their own

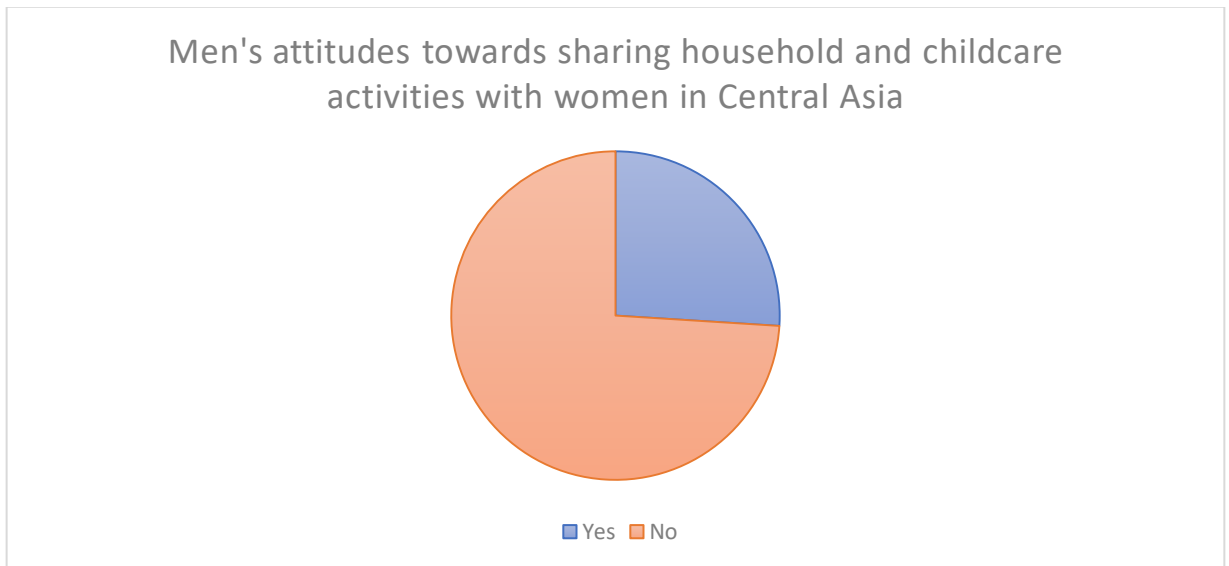
husbands or fathers, who are frequently staying for preservation of old-fashioned traditions, however, it would be interesting to know men’s opinions as well. As we can see from the Table 4, most of men at 34% think that women have no time for their career and job due to dealing with their family or household routines. Only 26% of participant can admit that one of the main obstacles for women to work are prejudices from society caused by traditions that affected mentality of people living in Central Asia. It is also interesting to note that some of participants at their 20% reckon that women do not want to work at all. Only 12% supposes that there is lack of workplaces provided for women and 4% have their own vision.

*Table 4 What do you think is related to the main obstacle for women to work in Central Asia?*



It is evident from the results in Table 4, that men mostly believe that family, children or household activities are incompatible with working environment for women. So, whether a woman work and build up her career or she is having family, these two activities are reckoned to be inconsistent by men, however, in order to take it in a deeper sense, it was also crucial to ask the participants whether it is appropriate in their opinion to share most of household and childcare responsibilities with women, to assist their females in adoption to the new chapters of their lives and give them some opportunities to combine their family lives with their jobs and career building (Table 5).

*Table 5 Should men participate in household activities and share at least the most part of the childcare responsibilities with women?*



According to the results of the Table 5, we can understand that such opinions occur due to traditions and patriarchal culture of Central Asia. Thereby, everything comes down to mentality and traditional biases when we are considering prejudices towards women and the stereotyped thinking regarding the responsibilities assigned only to women.

Last, but not least, it is significant to understand that necessity of spreading awareness to masses can bring considerable changes into perception of the “working woman” term. To begin with, it can be unavoidable to face those people who are certain in thinking that women must be satisfied with everything they already have and aspire to establish different limits, by not letting females to prioritize education and their careers. For instance, from the last and the most crucial question of the survey, it turned out to be that 64% of men, who participated in the observing survey are assured that there is no need to spread awareness into masses in Central Asia concerning violation of females’ rights, which means that they are not sharing ambitions to change current situation for the brighter future with protection of women’s rights and freedoms. Moreover, 26% of men are not even sure about their willingness to contribute to the better world for women and girls. Only 10% out of 50 participants are ready to encourage hopes for a better future for female further.

*Table 6 Is it necessary to raise the awareness of violation of women's rights in society?*



#### **4.1.1 The visions of Central Asia's working women**

The principle of the choice of women for the interview was related to their current workplace and the overall experience in labour market or their business management in some cases. Such backgrounds that women had throughout their lives formulated their positions and goals, gave them valuable lessons and insights and in some extent changed their world perception. Participants made vital conclusions for themselves, learned what to expect from others according to their reasoning after every single job or interview they had. We have heard true stories about the biases occurring due to traditional and cultural factors from five women living in one of five counties in Central Asia. Likewise, it was important to know whether they see a brighter future in their countries with more favourable and loyal attitudes to women and their job activities and to hear their modest proposals as well. Apparently, all the information gathered from the answers of five different women living in five countries of Central Asia must be compared in order to make the logical conclusion and achieve the objective of the thesis.

According to the results, there were identified approximately three identical concepts of women's answers to some questions. Firstly, all five women faced difficulties in getting

permission from their families to work. All the participants declared that men representatives of their families, whether it was fathers, brothers or husbands. Women never mentioned about any opposition from their female family members. Conversely, as an example, participant from Tajikistan referred that her mother always supported her when her male relatives were firmly against.

It is significant to note that most of women from Central Asia did not have many job interviews in their lives, but another interesting part of the question was related to their own thoughts about the analysis of reasons why they were not hired. The answers were quite diverse, as women from Kazakhstan think that she was not hired due to her miserable experience and high competition with men candidates who seemed to be more promising. Woman from Uzbekistan got related to that and added that this could happen due to maternity leave. As for woman from Kyrgyzstan, she had a story about the way interviewer abused of his authority, whereas Tajik woman claimed that she was not hired because of the absence of high degree of education. It is also relevant to add that Turkmen woman got hired at her first interview and could not relate to others.

One of the main aims of doing interpersonal interviews was to understand whether women agree that all the circumstances and obstacles they face while they try to take up employment occur due to prejudices that have been formulated throughout ages and existing traditions of eastern culture. Thus, the participant from Kazakhstan undoubtedly claimed that this is the main factor as people of her motherland and other countries of Central Asia as well give priorities to their culture first and often put human feelings aside. Woman from Kyrgyzstan shared the opinion that was expressed by Kazakh woman by saying that cultural aspects retard the progress of protection women's rights as well as the participants from Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan who also agreed and reckoned that these factors are divisive. As for the participant from Tajikistan, she seemed to be quite cautious in her statements and at the same time did not deny the possibility that traditions could be associated to the existing for women issues in Central Asia. Comparing the results to the men's estimation of the reasons of barriers that women experience in employment, it is notable that quite a large segment of male participants of the survey also tended to think that traditional and cultural biases are one of the main reasons that cause issues for women in working environment and achievements in their career progression, accordingly.

Moreover, to get a clearer vision of hopes for a better future, it was decided to ask the participants about their beliefs and expectations throughout the following decade. And afterwards, it is significant to get to know the proposals of the average women workers from

Central Asian region to empower women as well. Thereby, opinions of participants were divided, as, for example, women from Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan are not expecting any drastic changes for women due to the strong formulated mentality features which directly affected people's perceptions towards women's rights. Meanwhile, the participants from Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan are not despairing of achieving it one day. Kazakh woman is already seeing some progress in women's being in her motherland. Woman from Uzbekistan also claimed that she tries to work on the problem by educating her daughters to make them know what their human rights are. Other women had the exact same understanding of addressing the problem, as they agree that educating society can change their way of thinking and, therefore their being.

#### **4.1.2 Personal attitudes and understanding**

Evidently, people's thinking in countries of Central Asian region is quite distinctive and alike due to eastern characters and mentality. The survey gave the author clearer evidence that men prefer to neglect the issues women face in their lives and this might be the core of the problem. One of the most common problems is that men frequently tend to devalue women's feelings and shirk their responsibility in women's problems in access to labour market. Thus, as we could observe from the survey, the numbers of men who chose not to relate themselves to the existing for women issues indicated the indifference to women's careers and development. The survey participants were not prioritizing such scenarios where women could work in corporate environments and get a free access to labour markets, which is quite a divisive factor in Central Asian countries, where families are based on patriarchal systems. Therefore, the significance of educating such nations by raising awareness amongst their societies is enormously inevitable in order to develop feelings of tolerance and loyalty towards women in people. Moreover, it is relevant to add that the level of security and perspectives also must be improved as well to inspire confidence in fathers, brothers, husbands and other men to safely let their women go for work.

Considering the author's attitudes to the results provided by the female interview participants, it is obvious that every woman had gone through unfavourable situations at their workplaces or while only searched for the job of their dreams. Unfortunately, the real life for women in Central Asia sometimes can be disappointing and make them adapt to the frameworks, which have formulated throughout centuries. People have not developed the awareness of the



level of significance of education for girls and women, to provide the importance for women of being financially independent as well. Women as well as men have to know that equality of rights of two genders must not be taken as a weakness, but conversely, as a privilege of prosperous societies.

## **4.2 Suggested solutions**

From the author's point of view, the problem is still widely spread not only in the region of Central Asia but has deeper roots and is reckoned to be more global. Apparently, leading democratic countries have significantly eliminated the issue in comparison with the eastern ones. Thereby, it would be quite relevant to share the methodises where they succeed and engage intergovernmental organizations as the United Nations even more. All the issues of biases of society towards working women must be discussed and made public.

The first steps of success start from the awareness-raising, which is inevitable from the early ages. All the stereotypes and traditional thinking come to us from generations to generations and this chain must be stopped now. Even though parents are their children's first role models, it is also still crucial to provide educational talks in kindergartens, schools, colleges and so on. Whilst girls would be warned what to expect, how to behave and how to present their human rights in adverse situations, boys would be taught how to treat opposite gender and how to respect their human's rights in general. The model of working women has become too stereotypical and full of prejudices in Central Asia currently, which must be rapidly amended with the help of education and mass media. Undoubtedly, there are many sources where the information concerning women's rights can be provided for people of all genders and ages.

It is vital to inspire women that they should not be afraid of standing for their rights and can become employees of any occupations they are keen on, despite of varieties of factors related to male managers, colleagues, their families, husbands, fathers, etc. Apparently, promoting such banal slogans as "follow your heart" or "go for your dreams" might seem chewed up, however the author still believes that such simple, but relevant at the same time words can become motivations to actions. Moreover, it is significant to understand that governments of Central Asia must encourage organization of special Commissions, that can deal with finding solutions to the way of establishing equality between men and women in having earning potential, decision-making opportunities and in economic independence as well. Providing favourable conditions for women in labour market can make females independent from their families and other men, which, subsequently, will initiate feeling of freedom and self-sufficiency.

It is quite a common phenomenon when in merely debating people forget to get to some real actions. Mentality is what formulates throughout centuries and the task to change society's way of thinking is complicating. Nevertheless, the time passes by and with the years nothing changes due to the lack of people's hunger for change, which, correspondingly accumulate emergence of obstacles in free living.

## 6. Conclusion

Based on all the information provided in this work, one gets impression that it is hard to be a woman in Central Asia even in today's freedom-loving world. This might be true and takes some real work and time to make progress in this question as well. Apathy from men towards women's lives could not be an option and it is significant to let people know that and contribute to the process of women empowerment, especially in working environment. Involving men into participating in decisions, which can assist women in their employment, education and achievement of higher positions might seem hard, however it will be worth it, particularly in patriarchal societies. Moreover, it is believed that with the help of education it is possible to make men get along with the idea of gender equality

Unfortunately, there is nothing we can do with the already formed mentality, traditional thinking and cultural biases that were passed down from generation to generations, however, not all is lost. Most of women from Western societies have also been through difficulties in their empowerment (International Labour Organization, 2017). Subsequently, their experience and achievements in protection of women's rights and freedom must give rise to the possibility of dismantling the existing system countries of Central Asia that limit women in their endeavours. Such kind of avoiding other society's mistakes can not only accelerate the process and save time, but also be more effective and targeting.

The author also fully supports the suggestions of women, participated in the interviews concerning the methods of breaking all the existing barriers for female. It is inevitable to educate equally both men and women, to make everyone understand what line must not be crossed. Moreover, the significance of rising strong, fearless and independent from the opposite gender girls, might also give beneficial indicators to the issue of domestic violence as well, as educated women can better identify what is better for them and protect themselves from abusive partners. Women should be aware that their interests, education and career can come first if they reckon this to be beneficial for them.

Apparently, the author finds it valuable for governments or other private enterprises to organize more meetings and conferences initiated to the significance of gender equality, problems of violations of women's rights and the glass ceiling affects that create obstacles for women's empowerment in Central Asia. It is also important to invite different successful female speakers, activists, businesswomen and, in other words, trailblazers across the region to share their experience of breaking the boundaries, built withing the decades with other girls and

women at schools, universities or any other institutions. Exposing the problem and raising awareness is only half the battle, as it turns out to be more crucial to offer practical solutions, by supporting and encouraging women to get higher education in more tactical spheres, to work with a perspectives of career progression and higher incomes and to provide favourable conditions for women to possess their businesses.

Eventually, the author believes that it is possible to get rid of prejudices towards working female based on traditions, culture and ethics collectively, in the society where men as well as women will be interested and involved into the processes of changing, which can be reached by raising awareness and level of education as well.

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