



PROBLEMS OF GENDER SENSITIVITY IN MODERN UZBEK FAMILIES

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Abstract: Gender sensitivity remains a critical issue in many societies, and Uzbek families are no exception. This study examines the prevailing challenges related to gender sensitivity in modern Uzbek households, exploring how traditional norms and contemporary influences intersect. Using qualitative and quantitative data, this research highlights disparities in gender roles, decision-making power, and cultural expectations within Uzbek families. Findings suggest that while some progress is being made, traditional gender expectations still heavily influence family dynamics, leading to gender inequality in various aspects of family life. Recommendations for promoting gender sensitivity within this cultural context are provided.

Keywords: gender sensitivity, gender roles, family dynamics, decision-making, patriarchy, Uzbekistan, traditional norms, Central Asia, gender inequality, intergenerational differences, urban-rural divide, cultural expectations, mixed-methods study, post-soviet societies, women's empowerment;

INTRODUCTION. Gender sensitivity—awareness and consideration of gender-based differences and their impacts on social, economic, and cultural contexts—remains a complex and evolving issue globally. In Uzbekistan, a country deeply influenced by its historical, cultural, and socio-political background, traditional gender roles are still highly prevalent in many family structures. These roles, shaped by influences from pre-Soviet patriarchal traditions, Soviet-era policies, and post-independence reforms, continue to impact the dynamics within Uzbek households today. Understanding these dynamics is essential, as family structures are a primary influence on individuals' development and, collectively, on broader social patterns related to gender equality.

The persistence of gender inequality within Uzbek families is partially rooted in the cultural norms established by Uzbekistan's historical experiences. The Soviet era brought official gender equality policies, aiming to involve women in the workforce and education. However, these policies often reinforced women's dual responsibilities, requiring them to balance paid labor with traditional household roles, leading to a phenomenon often referred to as the **dual burden**. Since independence in 1991, Uzbekistan has experienced social transformations driven by globalization, urbanization, and economic reform. Nonetheless, many gender norms remain deeply entrenched, particularly in rural areas where traditional expectations are stronger and influence family dynamics more rigidly.

In Uzbek families, the division of labor and decision-making is often marked by strong patriarchal norms. Men are typically viewed as the heads of households, wielding authority in significant matters such as financial decisions, career paths, and family goals. Women, meanwhile, are usually assigned domestic responsibilities, child-rearing, and caregiving roles. This study aims to examine how these gender roles persist or shift in modern Uzbek families, especially given increasing exposure to egalitarian gender models through education and urban development. Although there are indications of gradual changes, with younger generations in urban areas showing more balanced approaches to gender roles, the extent and impact of these shifts remain unclear.

METHODS. This research utilizes a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews. This design allows for a comprehensive analysis of gender sensitivity in Uzbek families, leveraging both statistical trends from survey data and detailed personal narratives from interviews.

The quantitative data provides a broad view of prevalent attitudes and practices, while the qualitative data offers in-depth insights into individual experiences and perceptions regarding gender roles within family structures.

This research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, to explore gender sensitivity challenges within Uzbek families. The study design draws on prior research by Kane and Gorbenko (1, 2016), Constantine et al. (2, 2013), and Kamp (3, 2005), which investigated the intersection of colonial legacies, Soviet policies, and traditional gender norms across Central Asia, offering insights into the historical and socio-political influences on gender dynamics. The integration of both quantitative and qualitative methods allows this study to capture broad patterns in gender perceptions and decision-making roles while examining how these patterns align with or diverge from historical and ideological influences in Uzbek society.

Participants were selected from diverse regions across Uzbekistan, with an even gender split to reflect balanced perspectives on family dynamics and gender sensitivity. The sample included 200 individuals aged 18 to 60, representing various familial roles (e.g., married, single, widowed). This approach ensured representation across age groups and socio-cultural contexts, following recommendations from Kamp (3, 2005), who highlighted the importance of examining gender norms across different generations to understand the persistence or transformation of traditional ideals.

Was analyzed using descriptive statistics to establish patterns in gender role perceptions, household decision-making, and generational views on gender equality. This approach allowed for comparison with findings from prior studies, such as the prevalence of traditional authority figures noted by Kamp in Uzbek households.

Qualitative data analysis employed thematic coding, allowing for the identification of recurring themes, such as “colonial influences on gender expectations” and “the impact of Soviet-era gender norms,” as referenced by Kane and Gorbenko. This thematic analysis highlighted specific gender sensitivity challenges that align with, but also evolve from, those described in earlier studies, thus providing a nuanced understanding of gender dynamics in contemporary Uzbek families.

RESULTS. Results indicate that traditional gender roles are deeply embedded in Uzbek family structures, reflecting longstanding cultural norms and expectations influenced by historical, social, and economic factors. The quantitative survey revealed that a majority of male respondents (65%) identified themselves as the primary decision-makers within the household. Specifically, these men reported making key decisions related to family finances (73%), children’s education (68%), and career-related matters (61%) for both themselves and their spouses. This finding aligns with previous studies on Central Asian gender norms, which emphasize the patriarchal structure of many Uzbek families, where men are commonly regarded as the head of the household and hold ultimate authority in decision-making (Kane & Gorbenko).

Conversely, female respondents highlighted their primary roles as caretakers, with 82% indicating responsibility for domestic duties, including cooking, cleaning, and organizing family affairs. Additionally, 77% of female participants reported that they are primarily responsible for child-rearing and early education, and 63% indicated they are caregivers for elderly or extended family members. These responsibilities significantly affect women’s social and economic participation outside the home. Kamp notes that Uzbek women often internalize these roles due to strong societal expectations, which prioritize family-oriented duties over personal career ambitions or individual autonomy.

Research by Constantine et al. on the impact of Soviet policies on gender in Central Asia also provides context for these findings. During the Soviet era, the state promoted gender equality and encouraged women to work in public spheres; however, the expectations for domestic roles largely persisted, leading to a dual burden for women—balancing formal employment with household responsibilities. In modern Uzbekistan, this dual burden remains evident. In our study, about 55% of employed female participants reported feeling overburdened by the need to fulfill both professional and domestic obligations, with limited support from male family members.

Qualitative interview data further illustrated these dynamics, with female participants expressing that family and community expectations reinforce these gender roles. One female interviewee, aged 45, remarked, “In our family, men are supposed to handle important matters like finances and jobs, while women are expected to take care of the home and children. It’s how we were raised, and it’s how we raise

our children." Such statements indicate the intergenerational transmission of traditional gender roles, a theme observed in Kane and Gorbenko's study, which highlights the persistence of patriarchal values across generations in Uzbek society.

In rural areas, where adherence to traditional values is often stronger, our study found even more pronounced gender role divisions. Male respondents from rural backgrounds reported decision-making power at higher rates (78%) than those from urban areas (54%). This disparity reflects the influence of community norms, which in rural areas tend to be more conservative and less exposed to progressive gender norms due to limited interaction with globalized, egalitarian ideologies.

These findings underscore the embedded nature of traditional gender roles in Uzbek families and the societal expectations that uphold them. Despite some shifts among younger, urban-dwelling families—where dual-income households are more common and some women are more active in decision-making—traditional gender roles remain predominant across Uzbek society. These roles affect not only individual family members' autonomy and life choices but also shape the broader social and economic landscape by limiting women's opportunities for participation outside the home.

Data from this study indicate significant gender disparity in household decision-making within Uzbek families, with many women reporting limited agency in making key family decisions. Quantitative analysis showed that only 30% of female participants felt they had an equal say in major family decisions, such as financial planning, property transactions, children's education, and healthcare choices. This finding is consistent with research by Kane and Gorbenko, who noted that in Uzbekistan's traditional family structure, decision-making power is typically concentrated with men, often due to entrenched patriarchal norms that position men as the primary authority figures in the household.

The disparity in decision-making power appears more pronounced among older generations. Our data revealed that only 20% of women over the age of 50 reported an equal voice in family decisions, compared to 42% of women under 30. This generational divide aligns with Constantine et al., who found that younger couples, particularly in urban areas, are more likely to embrace egalitarian views, influenced by higher levels of education, increased exposure to global norms, and greater economic independence for women. This trend suggests a gradual shift toward more balanced household dynamics, particularly among urban families where both partners may contribute to household income and share responsibilities.

However, despite these shifts, qualitative responses highlight the persistence of traditional expectations that often limit women's autonomy in decision-making. Interviews revealed that even in families where women are consulted on significant matters, social and familial expectations frequently discourage them from expressing opinions that conflict with their husbands' preferences. For instance, one female participant in her late 30s shared, My husband listens to my opinion, but if I disagree with him, it's usually expected that I 'understand' and go along with what he decides in the end. Such accounts reflect the cultural expectation of female deference, as noted in Kamp, who observed that Uzbek women often feel obligated to conform to their husband's decisions, even when they have the opportunity to participate in discussions.

Moreover, the survey data showed that men typically assume primary control over financial decisions, with 68% of male respondents reporting they handle family finances independently. Female participants indicated that their role in financial decisions is often limited to smaller purchases or household-related expenses, while investments, savings, and property transactions remain largely male-dominated areas. This aligns with findings from Zanca, who emphasized that Uzbek women frequently have a secondary role in financial matters, a dynamic rooted in traditional views of men as providers and protectors of the family.

Regional differences also contribute to gender disparities in decision-making. Our study found that women in rural areas have even less decision-making power than those in urban settings. Only 25% of rural women reported having any significant influence over major decisions, compared to 37% of urban women. This discrepancy reflects the stronger adherence to traditional norms in rural areas, where community expectations and limited exposure to progressive gender ideas reinforce male-dominated household structures. This trend is echoed in Kane and Gorbenko's study, which observed that rural Uzbek communities are more resistant to shifts in gender roles due to tighter social networks and collective reinforcement of established norms.

The cumulative effect of these disparities is evident in the limited autonomy experienced by many

women in Uzbek families. The expectation of deference and limited decision-making participation restrict women's influence within their own households, impacting their sense of agency and sometimes their economic security. While younger couples and urban families show signs of gradual change toward greater gender equality, the pervasive influence of traditional gender expectations remains a significant barrier. These findings indicate the need for increased gender sensitivity awareness and supportive structures that empower women to participate more fully in household decision-making processes, particularly in rural areas.

DISCUSSION. The findings of this study highlight the persistence of traditional gender roles in modern Uzbek families, particularly in terms of decision-making and domestic responsibilities. Despite some progress toward gender equality, especially among younger and urban couples, entrenched cultural norms continue to shape family dynamics and constrain women's autonomy within households. This discussion explores how these findings align with, extend, and contrast with existing research, and considers the implications for both policy and future studies.

The study found that traditional gender roles remain deeply ingrained in Uzbek families, with men largely controlling major decisions and women primarily responsible for domestic duties. This reflects findings from previous studies, such as Kane and Gorbenko, who argued that Uzbekistan's colonial history and Soviet-era policies left a lasting patriarchal legacy that reinforces male authority within families. Our study supports this, showing that, in many households, men continue to dominate decisions around finances, career choices, and education—domains historically associated with male authority. This gendered division of roles limits women's agency and reinforces a cycle of dependency, reducing their opportunities for economic and personal growth.

Interestingly, our results revealed that younger and urban-dwelling couples demonstrate a slight shift toward shared decision-making, with 42% of women under 30 reporting more balanced participation. This trend may be influenced by increasing access to education, employment, and global media, which expose younger generations to more egalitarian models of gender relations (Constantine). However, in rural areas, traditional gender expectations remain particularly strong, with only 25% of rural women reporting equal involvement in decision-making, compared to 37% of urban women. This rural-urban divide aligns with Kamp's findings, which noted that rural communities often adhere more strictly to traditional values due to tighter-knit social networks and limited exposure to modern ideologies.

Despite the emergence of more balanced dynamics in some families, qualitative responses revealed that cultural expectations frequently inhibit women's ability to assert their opinions, even when they are consulted on important matters. This finding echoes Kamp's observation that Uzbek women are often socialized to prioritize harmony and deference to male authority, even when they participate in household discussions. The influence of these cultural expectations on women's behavior indicates that achieving true gender equality in decision-making may require a cultural shift, not just increased access to decision-making spaces.

This study contributes to the understanding of gender sensitivity issues in Uzbek families, revealing both enduring traditional roles and emerging shifts in household dynamics. While generational and urban-rural differences suggest that some families are beginning to adopt more balanced gender roles, the overall persistence of patriarchal norms underscores the challenges faced by women in achieving full participation in household decision-making. Addressing these disparities requires a multifaceted approach, combining policy support, community education, and economic empowerment initiatives to foster a culture of gender sensitivity that aligns with Uzbekistan's evolving social landscape.

CONCLUSION. This study provides critical insights into the challenges of achieving gender sensitivity within modern Uzbek families, revealing the deeply rooted influence of traditional gender roles and decision-making disparities. Despite social and economic changes in Uzbekistan, our findings suggest that gender norms within families remain largely patriarchal, with men holding primary authority in financial and family-related decisions, while women are predominantly responsible for household management, child-rearing, and caregiving duties. These dynamics are shaped by cultural expectations and societal norms that, in many cases, limit women's autonomy and influence within their own households.

Encouragingly, generational and regional differences indicate a gradual shift toward more egalitarian values, particularly among younger, urban-dwelling couples. This shift reflects the growing impact of

education, economic development, and exposure to global norms on younger generations. However, the persistence of gendered expectations, particularly in rural communities, highlights the need for tailored approaches to fostering gender equality that consider both traditional values and evolving societal norms.

The implications of these findings are significant. Gender disparities within families limit women's participation in broader economic and social spheres, perpetuating cycles of dependency and reducing opportunities for women to contribute fully to society. Promoting gender sensitivity and equal decision-making within families can thus have positive effects beyond the household, supporting women's empowerment, economic growth, and overall social cohesion.

Addressing these issues will require concerted efforts at multiple levels. Policy initiatives that encourage gender-sensitive practices, community education programs that promote shared household responsibilities, and economic support for women's participation in the workforce are key to fostering a more balanced family structure in Uzbekistan. Such efforts should be culturally respectful and adaptive, particularly in rural areas where traditional values are strongest.

In conclusion, while progress toward gender equality within Uzbek families is gradual and complex, fostering greater gender sensitivity within households represents a vital step toward broader social and economic development. By recognizing and addressing these deep-rooted disparities, Uzbekistan can support a future where both men and women have equal opportunities to participate and lead, both within their families and in society at large.

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