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ANALYSIS OF THE TRANSFORMATION OF GENDER ROLES IN THE SOUTHERN REGIONS OF KAZAKHSTAN

Abstract

This research paper examines the formation and transformation of gender roles in Kazakhstan's southern regions in the context of globalization and social change. The purpose of the study is to comprehensively identify and analyze the interaction between historical and cultural traditions and modern transformation processes (urbanization, mass digitalization, and information openness) in shaping the formation of gender identity and roles in society among the inhabitants of the southern regions of Kazakhstan. The study used both quantitative and qualitative methods. An online survey on the Google Forms platform covering the southern regions of Kazakhstan (Kyzylorda, Turkestan, Shymkent, Taraz, Almaty, and Zhetysu) was used to collect empirical data. The sample size of 750 respondents ensured representativeness and demographic diversity. The survey covered issues such as the institution of the family, division of labor, education, and public activity.

The study found that traditional gender models and innovative approaches coexist in the southern regions, sometimes in conflict with one another. Despite the strength of traditional values, the growth of information technologies and the level of education are influencing the formation of new approaches to gender equality.

The data obtained will provide a scientific and practical basis for improving social policy in the region and for developing cultural and educational programs aimed at gender equality.

Keywords: gender roles, society, social transformation, tradition, innovation, value.

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ҚАЗАҚСТАННЫҢ ОҢТҮСТІК Өңірлеріндегі ГЕНДЕРЛІК РӨЛДЕРДІҢ ТРАНСФОРМАЦИЯСЫН ТАЛДАУ

Аңдатпа

Бұл зерттеу жұмысы жаһандану және әлеуметтік өзгерістер жағдайында Қазақстанның оңтүстік өңірлеріндегі гендерлік рөлдердің қалыптасуы мен трансформациясын қарастырады. Зерттеудің мақсаты Қазақстанның оңтүстік өңірлері тұрғындарының гендерлік сәйкестігі мен қоғамдағы рөлдерінің қалыптасуына тарихи-мәдени дәстүрлер мен қазіргі заманғы трансформациялық процестердің (урбанизация, жаппай цифрландыру және ақпараттық ашықтық) өзара ықпалын кешенді түрде анықтау және талдау. Зерттеу сандық және сапалық әдістер негізінде жүргізілді. Эмпирикалық деректерді жинау үшін Қазақстанның оңтүстік облыстарын (Қызылорда, Түркістан, Шымкент, Тараз, Алматы және Жетісу) қамтитын Google Forms платформасындағы онлайн сауалнама пайдаланылды. Іріктеме көлемі 750 респондентті құрады, бұл репрезентативтілікті және демографиялық әртүрлілікті қамтамасыз етті.

Сауалнама отбасы институты, еңбек бөлінісі, білім беру және қоғамдық белсенділік мәселелерін қамтыды.

Зерттеу нәтижелері оңтүстік өңірлерде дәстүрлі гендерлік модельдер мен инновациялық көзқарастардың қатар өмір сүретінін, кейде өзара қайшылыққа түсетінін көрсетті. Дәстүрлі құндылықтардың беріктігіне қарамастан, ақпараттық технологиялар мен білім деңгейінің өсуі гендерлік теңдікке деген жаңа көзқарастардың қалыптасуына әсер етуде.

Алынған деректер аймақтағы әлеуметтік саясатты жетілдіруге және гендерлік теңдікке бағытталған мәдени-ағартушылық бағдарламаларды әзірлеуге ғылыми-тәжірибелік негіз болады.

Түйін сөздер: гендерлік рөлдер, қоғам, әлеуметтік трансформация, дәстүр, инновация, құндылық.

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АНАЛИЗ ТРАНСФОРМАЦИИ ГЕНДЕРНЫХ РОЛЕЙ В ЮЖНЫХ РЕГИОНАХ КАЗАХСТАНА

Аннотация

В данной исследовательской работе рассматривается формирование и трансформация гендерных ролей в южных регионах Казахстана в контексте глобализации и социальных изменений. Цель исследования – всестороннее выявление и анализ взаимодействия историко-культурных традиций и современных трансформационных процессов (урбанизация, массовая цифровизация и информационная открытость) на формирование гендерной идентичности и ролей в обществе жителей южных регионов Казахстана. Исследование проводилось на основе количественных и качественных методов. Для сбора эмпирических данных использовался онлайн-опрос на платформе Google Forms, охватывающий южные регионы Казахстана (Кызылорда, Туркестан, Шымкент, Тараз, Алматы и Жетысу). Размер выборки составил 750 респондентов, что обеспечило репрезентативность и демографическое разнообразие. Опрос охватывал такие вопросы, как институт семьи, разделение труда, образование и общественная деятельность.

Результаты исследования показали, что в южных регионах сосуществуют традиционные гендерные модели и инновационные подходы, порой вступая в конфликт друг с другом. Несмотря на силу традиционных ценностей, развитие информационных технологий и уровень образования влияют на формирование новых подходов к гендерному равенству.

Полученные данные послужат научно-практической основой для совершенствования социальной политики в регионе и разработки культурно-образовательных программ, направленных на гендерное равенство.

Ключевые слова: гендерные роли, общество, социальные преобразования, традиции, инновации, ценности.

INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization, society's values and gender roles are undergoing a significant transformation. Modern Kazakh society exists in a unique duality: on the one hand, traditional patriarchal values shaped over centuries remain prevalent, while on the other, urbanization, digitization, and the influence of global culture are shaping new norms.

This process is particularly complex in southern regions such as Kyzylorda, Turkestan, Shymkent, Taraz, and Zhetysay, which have deep historical and cultural roots, experience high demographic

growth, and are influenced by traditional institutions. Despite this, gaps remain in the available research on this topic. For instance, most gender studies focus solely on the national level, often disregarding the specific cultural and mental characteristics of these regions.

Moreover, given that existing works often have a qualitative and ethnographic character, there is a notable lack of empirical, quantifiable data that accurately reflects the process of gender transition. Furthermore, there is a lack of comprehensive quantitative analyses examining how innovative approaches affect gender roles in traditional settings in contemporary digital society.

These theoretical and methodological lacunae fully justify the scholarly necessity and significance of the research proposed. The focus of this study is the transformation of gender roles in the spheres of family, the labor market, and public life in the southern regions of Kazakhstan.

The purpose of the study is to empirically assess and analyze the influence of cultural values (traditional continuity and innovative attitudes) on the formation of gender roles among residents of southern Kazakhstan, using survey data from 750 respondents.

To achieve the above goal, the following main hypotheses were tested during the study:

- H1 (hypothesis 1): The increase in innovative factors (increased educational level, economic activity of women, digital literacy) directly contributes to the weakening of traditional gender stereotypes in the southern regions.

- H2 (hypothesis 2): Despite modernization processes, traditional values are not completely eliminated in conservative regions; on the contrary, new «hybrid» (synthetic) models of gender identity are being formed, in which tradition and innovation coexist.

To better understand the nature and dynamics of gender role transformation, it is important to examine the existing scientific literature on this topic.

The transformation of gender roles is analyzed in the scientific literature at three levels: at the macro level, R. Inglehart [1], G. Hofstede [2, p. 127] and S. Schwartz [3] explain the exchange of values in post-industrial emancipation, and at the micro level, McHale et al. [4], Crouter et al. [5] and Platt & Polavieja [6] justify the «intergenerational continuity» in the family. In addition, the effects of religion and internal migration are explained by the theories of acculturation by Kretschmer [7], Roder & Muhlau [8], Van Klingeren & Spierings [9], Portes et al. [10], and the psychological reappraisal of new perspectives is explained by transformative learning and critical reflection by Mezirow [11], Taylor [12], Hoggan [13].

In scientific discourse, gender roles are explained by the performative concept of Butler [14]. Within the context of cultural transformation, Bergh [15] links gender equality to the rise of postmaterialist values.

The non-binary, ambivalent, and hybrid nature of gender attitudes is demonstrated by Scarborough et al. [16], while Bose [17] and Bolzendahl & Myers [18] substantiate their demographic and regional dependence. This multi-layeredness is also evident in the educational space. The influence of institutional culture is studied by Van Houtte [19], Vantieghem [20], Huyge et al [21], Legewie & DiPrete [22], while Halimi et al. [23] argue that young people's attitudes are shaped by the combined influence of the family and the educational institution.

The «historical flexibility» of gender stereotypes, which are changing under the influence of traditional and innovative attitudes in the southern regions of Kazakhstan, is confirmed by the findings of Eagly et al. [24], Dotti Sani & Quaranta [25], and the data of the European Values Study [26].

Recent studies by Syzdykova et al. [27] suggest that values in southern regions are being eroded, and a phenomenon of «flexible traditionalism» has emerged, i.e., residents adopt elements of global culture (education, professional development) in line with their own ethnocultural codes.

The sum of these studies provides a solid basis for a scientific understanding of the slow change in gender roles in the southern regions, where the traditional family model prevails, as well as the interaction between traditional norms transmitted through the family and innovative influences such as urban culture, universities, and the media.

METHODOLOGY

In order to comprehensively reveal the complex dynamics of gender relations in modern society, a mixed research design (Mixed Methods Research) was used in this study. To ensure the objectivity of sociological measurements and a deep immersion in the cultural context, the following set of quantitative, qualitative, and special methods was combined:

1. Quantitative Research Methodology. To create an empirical basis for the study, a standardized mass survey was conducted among residents of southern Kazakhstan. The social survey was conducted among residents of the Kyzylorda, Turkestan, Shymkent, Taraz, Almaty, and Zhetysu regions, covering the southern regions of Kazakhstan.

A total of 750 respondents participated in the study. The sample size was considered sufficient to identify regional specifics, socio-demographic diversity, and differences in gender attitudes. Respondents were citizens of different ages, genders, educational levels, and social statuses, ensuring the representativeness of the data obtained.

The social survey consisted of 8 questions. The survey questions were aimed at identifying respondents' views on gender roles, the influence of traditional cultural values, their attitudes toward modern (innovative) principles, and their opinions on issues such as family, division of labor, education, social activity, and gender equality. The questions were designed in a closed and semi-closed format, which was convenient for quantitative analysis.

The survey was conducted online, using the Google Forms platform. This method allowed expanding the study's geographical scope, accelerating data collection and processing, and maintaining respondents' anonymity. The online survey format created an environment where participants could respond freely and honestly.

This method allowed us to accurately record the percentage of public opinion, the main trends, and macro-social patterns, and objectively assess the extent of the spread of gender roles.

2. To reveal the deeper meanings, unconscious motives, and value conflicts behind the numerical data (percentages), socio-cultural hermeneutics and interpretation methods were used. To this end, the following steps were taken:

Focus Group Interviews: To gain a deeper understanding of respondents' real opinions and everyday life experiences, focus groups were organized, and targeted interviews were conducted with the participation of the region's residents. This method enabled direct identification of sensitive issues not reflected in the survey questions through oral discourse.

Cultural typological analysis: Statistical indicators were viewed not as mere numbers, but as an intersection of historical memory and contemporary trends. The study focused on how the flexible gender complementarity inherent in traditional culture is being revived and taking on new social forms in the conditions of the modern urbanized market. This helped to accurately recognize hybrid patterns between egalitarian aspirations and patriarchal norms.

3. Theoretical Sociological Approaches. To strengthen the academic and evidence base of the article, the following classical and modern sociological approaches were applied to the research subject:

- Structural-Functionalism: It was used to assess the system of roles of men and women in the family institution, as well as the specific functions of state policy, education, and media institutions in restructuring (transforming) gender roles.

- Social Constructivism: Gender roles were viewed not as natural biological givens, but as a phenomenon that is constantly constructed through everyday actions, social discourses, and expectations («doing gender»).

To ensure the methodological reliability of this research, special attention was paid to the validity and reliability of the data. The survey questions were pilot-tested in advance. Their clarity and content relevance were assessed objectively. This step improved the quality of the research tools and enabled

verification of the results obtained. At the same time, the anonymity of responses in the online survey reduced the likelihood that respondents would give socially desirable answers.

During the research, statistical and interpretive methods were used to analyze the data. Quantitative data were systematized using percentages. The analysis focused on identifying the main social trends and patterns. Qualitative data were analyzed using content analysis, which identified recurring semantic structures and value orientations in the opinions of participating respondents. This approach enabled the identification not only of quantitative indicators of attitudes towards gender roles but also of the social meanings behind them.

In addition, the principle of data triangulation was used during the study. The survey results, focus group interviews, and theoretical analysis were compared. These were used as complementary sources of data. This method increased the objectivity of the research results and enabled a comprehensive explanation of the complex nature of gender relations.

This comprehensive methodological design combined the representativeness of quantitative data with the theoretical depth of qualitative analysis, providing the most objective and scientifically sound assessment of gender identity in a transitional society.

RESULTS

The study's empirical results comprehensively reflect the views and social positions of residents of Kazakhstan's southern regions on gender roles in modern society. In analyzing the statistical data from a cultural-interpretive perspective, a complex hybrid interaction among historical and traditional values, and modern egalitarian trends in the region was revealed.

Therefore, to identify the reasons for the preservation of traditional positions on gender roles, the possibilities for their transformation, and the mechanisms of interaction with innovative approaches, the aim was to determine the role of traditional cultural values in the formation of gender roles among residents of the southern regions of Kazakhstan. First, to determine how respondents understand gender roles, the question «What are gender roles in modern society?» was asked.

Table 1. What are gender roles in modern society?

Indicators	Share (%)
Social roles of men and women	52,8
The system of division of functions between men and women	15,6
Models of behavior of men and women	15,3
Traditional duties imposed in society	9,7
Set of social norms and rules	6,5

Source: compiled by the authors based on an online survey conducted in 2025

The data presented in Table 1 show that traditional socio-cultural values prevail in perceptions of gender roles in the southern regions of Kazakhstan. While the majority of respondents (52.8%) understand gender as a generalized «social role», others explain it through the division of pragmatic functions (15.6%) and established patterns of behavior (15.3%), confirming the stability of patriarchal norms in the region. On the contrary, the low share of specific «traditional duties» (9.7%) and formal «social norms» (6.5%) indicates that gender perception in society is based not on strict rules, but on unconscious cultural expectations. In general, the region's gender structure is characterized by the coexistence of traditional positions and innovative structural-behavioral approaches.

Table 2. In your opinion, have gender roles in society changed?

Indicators	Share (%)
Yes, it has changed dramatically – the roles of men and women are now played equally.	21,9%
Yes, it has changed significantly – traditional models have weakened and new attitudes have emerged.	29,6%
Partially changed – some families have preserved traditions, while others have adopted modern models.	26,5%
Slightly changed – mostly traditional roles have been preserved, but new elements have been added.	10,0%
No, it has not changed significantly – traditional roles still dominate society.	3,2%
Not changed at all – gender roles in society are still the same.	1,3%
This issue varies depending on social group, age group, and region.	4,8%
I find it difficult to answer	2,7%

Source: compiled by the authors based on an online survey conducted in 2025

The survey results, shown in Table 2, indicate that gender roles in the southern regions of Kazakhstan are in a transitional evolutionary phase. The majority of respondents acknowledge the transformation in society: 29.6% note that traditional patterns have weakened and changed significantly, while 26.5% point to a transitional (hybrid) situation in which the old and the new coexist. And 21.9% of participants support the full establishment of gender equality (characteristic of urbanized, educated groups). On the contrary, a small group of respondents notes limited (10.0%) or no changes at all (low percentages), arguing that patriarchal norms still persist. In addition, the dependence of changes on socio-demographic factors (4.8%) and the difficulties in answering (2.7%) indicate the unevenness of this process. Overall, the region is experiencing a convergence of traditional and innovative values, which requires considering local cultural context when developing social policies and family programs.

Table 3. What factors influence the change in gender roles of men and women in the family?

Indicators	Share (%)
Globalization.	34,8%
Technology and Media.	30,9%
Knowledge and Intellectual Discourse.	32,4%
Demographic Change, Urbanization	22,0%
Social Movements and Activism.	49,6%
Public Policy and Gender Equality Laws	45,7%
Religious values	18,5%
Economic situation	20,4%
Other	1,1%

Source: compiled by the authors based on an online survey conducted in 2025

The study's results, shown in Table 3, indicate that institutional and societal factors are primarily responsible for the transformation of gender roles in the family. Social movements (49.6%) and public policy (45.7%) are identified as the main drivers, underscoring the crucial roles of legal regulation and civic engagement. At the second level are cultural and informational tools such as globalization

(34.8%), education (32.4%), and media and technology (30.9%). Demographics (22.0%), economics (20.4%), and religious values (18.5%) are assessed as having a medium or low impact on this process. In conclusion, gender changes in the family are driven by targeted political, social, and informational influences rather than spontaneous natural and economic processes.

Table 4. How are gender roles divided in your family?

Indicators	Share %
Man is the main breadwinner, woman is responsible for household chores (food, childcare, housework)	23,6%
Duties are traditionally divided (man - external chores, woman - household chores)	18,0%
Duties are performed equally, by mutual agreement	46,8%
Woman's share is greater, more active	7,9%
Man's share is greater, more active	3,7%

Source: compiled by the authors based on an online survey conducted in 2025

The results of the study, as shown in Table 4, indicate that the egalitarian partnership model has emerged as the dominant model in the distribution of family responsibilities (46.8%). This trend is directly related to urbanization, increased education levels, and women's economic activity. However, patriarchal attitudes are still strong: 41.6% of respondents (23.6% - «male breadwinner», 18.0% - traditional division) support the classical model. On the other hand, views that favor the excessive dominance of one sex (women's share is higher - 7.9%, men's - 3.7%) are marginal and do not enjoy public support. In conclusion, society is experiencing a gradual and uneven transition from a strict traditional model to equal partnership.

Table 5. Who do you think should be the primary breadwinner of the family?

Indicators	Share %
Man	48,4%
Woman	1,5%
Both share equally	22,3%
Depending on the family situation (whoever has higher income)	13,6%
It doesn't matter, the main thing is mutual agreement	14,3%

Source: compiled by the authors based on an online survey conducted in 2025

The results in Table 5 show the transitional and hybrid nature of public attitudes. The orientation of the dominant indicator (48.4%) to traditional norms determines the stability of historically established roles and cultural continuity. On the contrary, the lowest share (1.5%) indicates that the radical alternative model collides with rigid stereotypes and remains marginalized. In addition, the indicator of 22.3% indicates partially adaptive attitudes characteristic of a transit society, while the choices of the remaining groups (13.6% and 14.3%) prove that pragmatic and flexible behavioral models are being formed (under the influence of urbanization and education), based not on rigid norms, but on real-life contexts.

Table 6. What is your view on women's work in modern society?

Indicators	Share %
It is not mandatory to work	39,7%
No, the main role of a woman is the family	2,5%
Even if she works, the main role is the family	12,8%
She must work, she must build a career	16,7%
It is better to combine family and work	19,6%
It is a woman's own choice	39,7%

Source: compiled by the authors based on an online survey conducted in 2025

The research data in Table 6 show the hybrid (transitional) nature of the coexistence of traditional and modern values regarding women's work. An equal share of respondents (39.7%) assess women's work as "optional" or "of their own choice" and affirm that participation in the workforce is a voluntary, autonomous decision. On the contrary, the strict traditional view that limits women to household chores has sharply weakened and has fallen to a marginal level (only 2.5%). The remaining indicators, such as working while maintaining family priority (12.8%), pursuing a career (16.7%), and combining the two (19.6%), indicate that a new compromise model is emerging in society that balances women's work and the institution of the family.

Table 7. In which areas of society are equal opportunities for men and women most evident?

Indicators	Share %
In the field of education	33,9%
In the possibility of career and professional growth	25,3%
In political and public activity	1,0%
In sharing family responsibilities	13,1%
In the field of culture and creativity	8,0%
Other	0,1%

Source: compiled by the authors based on an online survey conducted in 2025

The research data in Table 7 reveal the asymmetric nature of the equal opportunities space in society. The highest share in the education sector (33.9%) indicates that it is the main and most accessible institution of social mobility. Career opportunities (25.3%) are in second place, but obstacles are felt more in this area. The indicators for the division of family responsibilities (13.1%) and the cultural sphere (8.0%) indicate that traditional roles remain influential. The critically low level of political activity opportunities (1.0%) indicates that strict institutional barriers remain in place. In general, while equality has been achieved in education and the basic labor market, significant inequality prevails at the level of political power and governance.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that gender roles in the southern regions of Kazakhstan are not a simple dichotomy, but a complex blending of traditional family values and innovative approaches. In this section, we will delve deeper into the mechanisms that shape a new gender identity in a transitioning society, examining regional particularities in the context of Western modernization, intergenerational transmission, and transformative learning theories.

The findings summarized in Table 1 indicate that 52.8% of respondents conceptualize gender roles chiefly in terms of socially constructed roles for men and women. This indicator measures the ongoing transition of gender from biological determinism to social construction in society. During the

focus group interview, a 52-year-old female respondent (civil servant, Shymkent) described this situation as follows: «Nowadays are different, the role of a woman is not limited to just cooking. We also work, we have our place in society, that is, this is a big social role. "But when we come home tired from work, no one has taken away our responsibilities as wives and mothers. That's why gender is a double responsibility that modern society demands».

The next criterion, the system of division of functions and behavioral patterns, shows that the functionalist paradigm still has relevance. Here, gender roles are defined by specific actions and behavioral standards. This is because for a certain segment of society, gender is closely linked to the practical question of «who should do what?» This reflects the transitional period between patriarchal and liberal values.

This pragmatic view was clarified by a 42-year-old man (individual entrepreneur, Turkestan region) in his interview: «We used to say that 'a man is a man of the outside world, a woman is a man of the inside world, but now you can't say it like that. My wife and I both contribute to the family budget and share the chores. However, I still believe that my main responsibility as a breadwinner and the «final word» in the house is mine. This is an unbreakable pattern in our mentality, an unwritten rule.»

The most striking feature of the table is the low scores for «traditional duties» (9.7%) and «social norms» (6.5%). Based on these data, we can draw the following critical conclusions: The fact that traditional duties account for only about 10% of the total score suggests that conservative structures in society have weakened or been absorbed into the modern concept of «social role». This is a sign that society is moving towards more flexible social models, rather than rigid patterns.

However, the lowest share of social norms (6.5%) may be a cause for concern. This suggests that respondents see gender roles as matters of free choice or as spontaneously formed situations, rather than as regulatory mechanisms.

From the perspective of social constructivism, the concept of gender as a «social role» aligns with J. Butler's argument that gender is a performative process that is continuously constructed («doing gender») [14]. This perspective highlights the historical flexibility of gender stereotypes and their potential for social change [24].

The data in Table 2 demonstrate a significant transformation of gender attitudes in society. 78% of respondents acknowledge that gender roles have evolved, with 51.5% describing this change as «radical» or «significant».

This shift can be attributed to globalization, urbanization, and the need for economic pragmatism, which has led to dual-income families. However, this development is a relatively new phenomenon arising from the intersection of contemporary market demands and historical nomadic pragmatism among women in Central Asia who were active participants in the economy.

However, the optimistic indicator that «the roles of men and women are performed equally» (21.9%) is more likely to reflect normative expectations in society (socially desirable responses) than objective reality. Although women are active at the macro level (legislation, the workplace), the phenomenon of the «second shift» imposed on them in everyday life remains fully intact. During a focus group interview, a 35-year-old female respondent (civil servant, Taraz city) explained this paradox as follows: «Now, according to modern standards, my husband and I both work and earn an income. But when I come home from work in the evening, he relaxes on the sofa, and I go into the kitchen to cook, and then I have to watch the children's lessons. Although we have equal rights in society, the burden of women at home has not gone away».

The answers «partially changed» (26.5%) and «slightly changed» (10.0%) in the table indicate a clear cultural dualism inherent in a transit society. Although society generally accepts modern values (education, career), at the micro-level (in the family), national sentiment and traditional stereotypes remain strong. A 48-year-old female respondent (teacher, Turkestan region) clarified from her own experience how this hybrid identity works: «Now our daughters are studying and doing great jobs, and we support them. But no matter how many bosses or entrepreneurs they are, they still have to bow down to their elders or their mothers-in-law, pour tea, and fulfill their duties as daughters-in-law. This

is a mentality that is ingrained in our blood. Therefore, although we are outwardly modern, our internal unwritten laws still work».

We have observed that gender transformation is taking place unevenly and asymmetrically. Statistical data show that society is moving away from rigid patriarchal polarization and towards role flexibility. However, this process is not linear, but rather through complex socio-cultural barriers and value conflicts.

Within the framework of structural-functional analysis, this transitive dualism indicates the ambivalent coexistence of traditionalist and egalitarian positions in modern society [16].

Continuing to analyze the data in the third table, it is evident that institutional and informational factors, rather than economic or demographic factors, are influencing changes in gender roles within the family institution.

The highest indicators in the survey belong to social movements and activism (49.6%) and state policies and laws (45.7%). This indicates that the gender issue has moved beyond the private family sphere and has become an object of political and legal discourse. Society perceives change as the result of targeted institutional efforts rather than natural evolution. This trend is confirmed by the opinion of a 27-year-old female respondent (Shymkent) in the focus group: «Now, open discussions on social networks and new laws against domestic violence have given women great confidence. We have realized that we do not have to submit to everything and remain silent as before. I think that the current change begins not only with looking at the wallet, but with the awakening of public consciousness.»

The second-level factors were globalization (34.8%), education and intellectual discourse (32.4%), and technology and media (30.9%). Here, a major sociological paradox is observed: the economic situation (the need for a double income), which, according to classical theories, is the main reason for changing roles in the family, scored only 20.4%. That is, respondents put forward not a fundamental material cause, but rather «laws» and «movements» that are its consequences. The high assessment of state policy indicates a paternalistic mood in society, with an expectation of top-down state intervention to regulate micro-level (intra-family) relations. A 45-year-old man (Taraz city) says about this legal and global influence: «Previously, family problems remained a closed cauldron, saying, 'It would be embarrassing. Now, with the Internet and globalization, everything is openly available, and strict state laws have been introduced. "Whether we like it or not, external information and these legal requirements are forcing us to change the previously established rules in the family. This is a big challenge to our mentality».

The low rate of religious adherence (18.5%) suggests that religion is seen as a conservative rather than a transformative force. The lower level of urbanization (22%) compared to globalization suggests that changes are driven by external information flows rather than internal structural developments. Critical sociologists argue that these changes are not natural but are purposefully shaped by institutional forces. For example, the spread of egalitarian principles is directly influenced by macro-institutional changes [15]. This shows how state institutions and the media use hidden mechanisms to regulate gender relations in society.

This situation increases the risk of cultural conflict between traditional national values and external trends. When we analyze these statistical data, it becomes clear that the current gender transition is a complex process, influenced more by discursive factors (laws, media, education, social movements) than by economic needs. Consequently, society is consciously seeking to construct a new understanding of gender equality, not spontaneously, but through legal and information-based approaches.

The critical sociology paradigm argues that these changes are not natural, but purposefully constructed through institutional forces; that is, the spread of egalitarian principles is directly conditioned by macro-institutional transformations [15]. This reveals how the state and media institutions use hidden power mechanisms to regulate gender relations in society.

The data in Table 4 reflect the complex transitional state of the gender division of duties in the family and the process of cultural hybridization, in which tradition and innovation coexist.

The highest indicator is the equal fulfillment of duties by mutual agreement (46.8%). This indicates that the egalitarian family model is becoming the norm. The main reason is the need for both partners to work to provide for the family in the context of the modern market and urbanization. In addition, the gender complementarity inherent in the culture of southern Kazakhstan (historical economic equality) is a strong prerequisite for these modern aspirations.

However, 41.6% of respondents still support the classic patriarchal model: 23.6% say «the man is the breadwinner, the woman is the housewife», and 18.0% prefer the traditional division of duties. This conservative position is reinforced by labor-market inequality and men's higher incomes. A 38-year-old man (Taraz city) in the focus group explained this position as follows: «In my understanding, the main duty of a man is to support and financially provide for the family. Even if my wife works, her income goes to her own petty expenses. And since I bear the main expenses of the house, the woman should be responsible for cleaning, cooking, and raising the children. This is a natural law».

If we critically analyze the empirical data, the 46.8% indicator that we «share responsibilities equally» is more likely a response to social expectations (social desirability bias) than to the real reality. The fact that only 7.9% of the answers in the table «women have a greater share» proves that women's work in society is «invisible labor». Although equality in decision-making is maintained in most cases, housework remains the responsibility of women. This hidden inequality was confirmed by a 34-year-old female respondent (Shymkent city) from her own experience: «My husband and I work from morning to night. But in the evening, he comes home and says he's «tired» and watches TV, and I go into the kitchen to cook, do laundry, and if there's any leftover, I watch the children's lessons. From the outside, we are a modern, equal family, but in reality, 90 percent of the invisible work at home falls to me. No one even considers it work».

There are also internal contradictions among those who support the traditional division. Although in modern times the «outside chores» of men have been significantly reduced through the shift to service sectors, such as repair and delivery, women's daily household responsibilities have not lost their importance, further reinforcing gender inequality.

These statistics show that the modern family is divided. On one side, a flexible, egalitarian model based on mutual agreement is emerging, while on the other side, traditional, paternalistic structures with a strong foundation remain. In the future, society's gender dynamics will be shaped by a search for a balance between these two approaches.

The results of the survey on «Who should be the main breadwinner in the family?» in Table 5 clearly show the typology of resource distribution and power in society. The fact that 48.4% of respondents chose a man as the main breadwinner confirms the traditional «male-breadwinner» ideology. In our society, male identity is legitimized by financial security and has become a main cultural marker that supports the hierarchical dominance of men.

However, the most surprising discovery is that alternative, flexible models have surpassed the traditional approach (50.2%). Models such as «equal sharing» of financial responsibility (22.3%), «adaptation according to income level» (13.6%), and «mutual agreement» (14.3%) are becoming more popular. Since relying on a single source of income can threaten family security in a market-based economy, society is returning to the flexibility inherent in traditional cultures in southern Kazakhstan.

The fact that only 1.5% of those who support women being the main breadwinners shows that the mental barrier to the matriarchal financial model in society is very strong.

This does not mean that women earn less, but that their income is consciously conceptualized only as an «additional resource» in the family budget. During the focus group, a 36-year-old female respondent (accountant, Kyzylorda city) explained this hidden cultural barrier as follows: «In fact, my salary is higher than my husband's. But in front of relatives or in major decisions at home, he still has the final say. Even if I spend my income on family loans and food, everyone perceives it as «the woman's share, additional help», while what my husband earns is considered the «main budget. In order not to offend the man and not be judged by society, we are forced to silently observe this unwritten rule».

Thus, the table data reveals a deep cognitive dissonance between the ideal image of society and objective reality. Crucially, the full financial responsibility for men (48.4%) during the current economic turmoil creates a heavy psychological burden and increases the risk of social frustration. That is, strict gender roles not only limit women but also become a burden for men.

In addition, the emergence of the «not important, the main thing is mutual agreement» group (14.3%) indicates the transition of the family institution from a strict status-hierarchical structure to a consensual partnership phase. This transformation shows that economic rationality is gradually replacing traditional stereotypes and transforming gender relations into a more pragmatic channel. Through the lens of social constructivism, the partial reshaping of the role of the «nurturer» reveals a shift in societal attitudes from traditionalism and egalitarianism towards a more complex and ambivalent structure. This suggests that macroeconomic pressures are forcing patriarchal gender roles to become more flexible and adaptable through everyday interactions.

The results of the question «What is your view on women's work in modern society?» in Table 6 clearly demonstrate the conflict between patriarchal care and liberal emancipation in the public consciousness (the sum of percentages exceeds 100%, since respondents selected multiple answers). This proves that the role of women as economic agents has become the most controversial marker of the current transitional period.

Two poles with the highest and equal indicators can be seen: «Women's own choice» (39.7%) and «Work is not mandatory» (39.7%). This paradox indicates that society simultaneously consumes two different values. On the one hand, a woman is recognized as an independent decision-maker; on the other, the concept of «men as the main breadwinner» typical of Central Asia remains strong. Society perceives the release of women from compulsory labor as a sign of care and high status. This dualistic view was accurately described in an interview by a 42-year-old man (individual entrepreneur, Kyzylorda city), who participated in the focus group: «In my understanding, a woman is not obliged to work to support her family. It is a direct duty of a man. I try to provide for my wife. But if she wants to do something she likes, so she does not feel stuck at home or isolated from society, I do not mind. That is, whether she works or not is her will, her choice, but earning money should not be an obligatory burden on her shoulders».

The positions «It is better to combine family and work» (19.6%) and «It is necessary to work to build a career» (16.7%) reflect the market pragmatism of today, where women's work is no longer just a choice but an objective financial necessity. The categorical prohibition «No, the main role of a woman is the family» is only 2.5%, indicating that the idea of radically isolating women from public life has been marginalized in society and has been abolished.

When the empirical data is analyzed through a critical sociological lens, several hidden issues become apparent. Although the position of «It is not necessary to work» (39.7%) might seem caring on the surface, it is actually a legitimate instrument of dependency that puts women in a vulnerable position and leads to social insecurity. Although «Own choice» (39.7%) appears to be an egalitarian norm in terms of structural constraints, in reality, this choice is often constrained by factors such as inflation, credit burdens, and infrastructure barriers (e.g., a lack of childcare facilities and inflexible working hours). This response may more accurately reflect the neoliberal ideal rather than an objective reality.

As for the «super woman» syndrome, the requirement «Combining family and work» (19.6%) allows a woman to build a career, but does not remove the domestic routine (second shift) from her. This indicates a lack of institutional support for women.

Thus, modern society is undergoing a post-traditional phase regarding the role of women in the workforce. Although society recognizes the right of women to work and supports their emancipation, it partially rejects the idea of treating them as full economic participants on an equal basis with men. This discrepancy serves as an adaptive and protective mechanism for social consciousness during this transitional period.

From a critical sociological perspective, the belief that «women should not work» acts as a manifestation of benevolent sexism, strengthening the structural dependency of women and

confirming that gender roles are shifting ideological constructs. The lack of institutional support for women exacerbates actual power inequality, despite egalitarian rhetoric.

The data in Table 7 shows that gender equality in modern society is progressing unevenly and asymmetrically. The social space is divided into distinct groups, indicating a real institutional segregation. This illustrates how the issue is categorized at the macro-level (institutional) opportunity level.

The highest indicator is in the field of education (33.9%), indicating that the education system is the most gender-neutral and inclusive institution. This is a result of historical egalitarian policies and a modern pragmatic approach that sees a woman's higher education as the key to her future economic security.

The second place is taken by the opportunity for career growth and advancement (25.3%), which is due to the practical nature of the market economy. In today's labor market, which often focuses on skills rather than gender, equal opportunities for women and men have been created at the basic and mid-level positions.

However, the most striking and critical indicator is the level of equality in political and public life, which is only 1.0%. Although women have gained a place in education and middle-level careers, power, resource allocation, and strategic decision-making (vertical mobility) remain under complete patriarchal control. A 45-year-old male participant in the focus group (entrepreneur, Shymkent) linked this institutional barrier to traditional stereotypes: «Nowadays, girls study more than boys, and there are many very talented specialists at work. No one imposes restrictions on this. But politics and big power are a man's arena that requires strict, sometimes brutal decisions. I think that women are softer by nature, and since they are the breadwinners of the family, the burden of big politics falls too heavily on them».

In addition, the low level of equality in the sharing of family responsibilities (13.1%) reflects a structural crisis in society. While women have achieved emancipation in the public sphere (education, work), they have not been freed from the burden of traditional roles in the private sphere. This «second shift» is a major time and resource barrier that prevents women from advancing to macro-political or higher-level careers. This paradox was illustrated by a 35-year-old female respondent (civil servant, Turkestan region) from her own experience: «We have full access to education and employment. But when it comes to leadership positions or higher power, we face the unwritten barrier that «women can't do it». Moreover, the burden of housework and child rearing leaves us physically uninterested in getting involved in politics and striving for power».

The figure for culture and creativity (8.0%) indicates that these areas have historically been marked as «soft» sectors, isolated from economic and political capital; that is, formal equality here does not affect real power equality.

These empirical data suggest that gender equality in society is not fully achieved but rather exists in a sectoral, fragmented manner. Society recognizes women as equal partners in terms of human capital development (education) and its utilization in production (career), but when it comes to matters of status, power, and macro-social governance, traditional patriarchal structures continue to hold sway. This reflects a fundamental conflict between neoliberal market demands and conservative political cultures, indicating that women remain structurally excluded from decision-making positions.

Through structural-functional analysis and critical examination, this inequality reveals the establishment of a particular regional gender regime that, despite relative educational equality, also leads to systematic marginalization in political influence. This macro-level inequality ensures the perpetuation of patriarchal dominance at the highest levels of society.

Based on the above empirical data and qualitative analysis, we have identified the following specific research gaps that will guide our analytical section for future scientific research:

1. The theoretical-conceptual dichotomy of gender transformation has its limitations. Western scientific literature often views gender transformation as a binary opposition between «traditional» and «innovative» values. However, our study of the southern regions of Kazakhstan has shown that these two concepts do not necessarily exclude each other. Instead, they can coexist and combine,

forming a «hybrid identity» that combines the traits of a successful specialist and a traditional bride. This «flexible traditionalism» characteristic of these societies requires further theoretical research to understand its mechanisms.

2. There is a gap between social emancipation and family patriarchy. The study revealed a deep structural contradiction between formal and informal institutions. Although women have achieved equal opportunities in the public sphere, they are still burdened with daily household chores and childcare in the private sphere, which hinders their psychological well-being and access to higher political and social services. Existing work often relies on general statistics, such as female employment rates, but there remains a lack of specific empirical data on how this family inequality affects women. The political equality index, for example, is only 1.0%.

3. The study has observed the marginalization of male experience in Masculinity studies. The role of the «sole breadwinner» of the family, which is mainly assigned to men (48.4%), imposes a heavy psychological burden on them in the current economic situation, according to the study. The adaptation of men to changing gender roles and their new fatherhood practices in Kazakhstan have not been fully studied scientifically, and social stresses remain a challenge.

These gaps indicate that gender dynamics in southern Kazakhstan extend beyond economic and demographic dimensions. A deeper study of the symbiosis between «tradition and innovation», including hidden household inequalities and the psychological burden of men, should be a key priority for academic discourse in the future.

CONCLUSION

Summing up the study's results, we can conclude that gender relations in the southern regions of Kazakhstan are undergoing a complex, multifaceted transformation. This process is not linear, but rather a hybrid of traditional patriarchal values and modern egalitarian trends. The pragmatic flexibility of the economies in these regions is a historical adaptation to the demands of globalization and the market economy. While the society seeks to preserve the appearance of tradition, it also strives for mutual understanding and partnership.

Based on the socio-cultural analysis, the following main scientific conclusions can be drawn: the dominance of institutional factors was observed. State policies, the education system, and social movements have a significant influence on changes in family and social roles, rather than demographic or economic factors. Society perceives change through legal and informational discourse.

Although the role of women in the economy and labor market has been recognized, and gender equality has been achieved to a significant extent, their participation in political power and leadership remains critically low at 1.0%. This creates a clear disparity in opportunities between sectors.

Despite progress in the public sphere and the emancipation of women, the issue of unpaid domestic labor («second shift») in families remains unresolved. This reflects a conflict between societal expectations and practical realities, as the traditional «male-breadwinner» model continues to enjoy high ideological support. However, in reality, families often adopt strategies based on economic rationality and flexibility, with a more equal division of responsibilities. The idea of completely restricting women's labor has declined to a marginal position.

Thus, gender identity in the study area has shifted away from a strict traditional framework towards a more flexible, transitional model. This development necessitates a thorough consideration of the region's cultural characteristics, historical understanding, and current value conflicts to develop future socio-demographic policies that include programs to support families and promote women's leadership.

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