THE WORK-LIFE STRUGGLE OF UZBEK WOMEN SCIENTISTS

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Abstract

This study delves into the work-life balance struggles of Uzbek women scientists, aiming to illuminate the multifaceted challenges they face in their professional and personal lives. Despite significant reforms in Uzbekistan's higher education system and the country's efforts to promote gender equality, women in academia continue to encounter substantial barriers. The study employs a qualitative methodology, including semi-structured interviews with ten women scientists from various higher education institutions in Uzbekistan. The findings reveal that these women are highly qualified and experienced, yet they face societal expectations to manage household responsibilities, care for children, and uphold traditional family roles, which significantly impact their career progression. The research highlights the support extended by family members. This support often enables them to continue their careers despite societal pressures. However, the study also underscores the lack of organizational support systems within academic institutions. The study concludes that while individual resilience and family support are crucial, systemic changes at both societal and organizational levels are necessary to foster a more equitable environment for women scientists in Uzbekistan. The findings suggest that implementing supportive policies and creating a more inclusive academic culture are vital steps toward achieving gender equality and empowering women in science. This research contributes to the broader discourse on gender equality in academia and offers insights for policymakers and educational institutions aiming to support the professional development of women scientists.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This study aimed to explore the work-life challenges faced by Uzbek women scientists. Understanding these challenges is crucial for empowering women in academia and supporting their career development. Women in academia face significant challenges due to societal, organizational, and individual factors. Societally, entrenched socio-cultural frameworks, including religion and gender roles, create negative attitudes that hinder women's career progression (Peus et al., 2015; Al-Kayed, 2015). Research across various countries, including Turkey, Pakistan, and the United States, highlights that women are often expected to prioritize family obligations over their careers, affecting their professional growth (Neale & Özkanlı, 2010; Blackwood et al., 2011).

Organizationally, higher education institutions (HEIs) are male-dominated and patriarchal, often prioritizing norms aligned with men's experiences, which results in harsher evaluations and undervaluation of women's skills (Cubillo & Brown, 2003; O'Connor, 2020). Despite initiatives for gender equality, progress is slow due to resistance from entrenched structures (O'Neil et al., 2008).

At the individual level, women struggle with work-life balance, particularly when managing family responsibilities. The 'motherhood myth' and societal expectations often force women to choose between career and family, leading to fewer aspirations for leadership roles (Etzkowitz et al., 2000; Kuzhabekova & Almukhambetova, 2021).

In Uzbekistan, traditional gender roles further exacerbate these challenges, limiting women's opportunities for education and career advancement despite recent reforms aimed at promoting gender equality (Fayzullaeva, 2018; Madalinska-Michalak & Mamadaminova, 2022). Addressing these systemic barriers is crucial for fostering an inclusive environment that supports women's academic and professional growth.

Uzbekistan, amid numerous reforms, is striving to implement gender equality across various spheres of life. This study is the first of its kind to investigate the work-life balance of women scientists in Uzbekistan. Notably, the topics of gender equality and women's empowerment have only begun to gain academic attention in the past 5-6 years. Women occupy a unique and complex role in Uzbek society. Since 2017, following governmental changes, there has been a noticeable increase in attention and support for women from the government. The current administration has placed greater emphasis on appreciating and empowering women. During this transformational period, significant reforms have been implemented, including those related to education and women's empowerment. This study aims to contribute to the ongoing political, legal, and educational changes within higher educational institutions by examining the lives of ten women scientists in Uzbekistan. The researcher conducted interviews either in person or online/over the phone to gather insights into their work-life struggles.

The following sections of the article delve deeper into the challenges women face at societal, organizational, and individual levels, with a particular focus on work-life balance issues. It then provides an overview of the context of Uzbekistan, emphasizing women's status and traditional roles. Subsequent sections discuss reforms in higher education management, highlighting efforts to empower women across various spheres of the "New Uzbekistan." The article concludes with a discussion of the methodology, findings, and implications, followed by recommendations, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Difficulties faced by academic women in their careers can be categorized into three levels: societal, organizational, and individual. A strong consensus exists that the socio-cultural framework prevalent in most national contexts is the primary cause of the disadvantages women encounter. According to Peus et al. (2015), social barriers, including religion,

local beliefs, societal attitudes, politics, and other social factors, negatively impact women's careers across various countries and cultures. Al-Kayed (2015), Almaki et al. (2016), and Al-Asfour et al. (2017) similarly acknowledged that these social barriers contribute to negative male attitudes towards women and reinforce gender role stereotypes. The socio-political dimension involves deeply ingrained hegemonic traditions and cultural norms, often influenced by religious beliefs, which women are compelled to accept due to their circumstances (Cubillo & Brown, 2003).

Research indicates that women are expected to shoulder more family obligations than men, particularly in traditional societies. This expectation poses a significant challenge to the academic career development of women academicians in various regions. Studies have documented such challenges in Turkey (Neale & Özkanlı, 2010), Pakistan (Batool & Sajid, 2013), Thailand, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia (Luke et al., 2003), Iran (Hosseini, 2008), and even among African American women in the United States (Blackwood et al., 2011).

Despite the notable increase in the number of women in organizations over recent years, these entities remain predominantly male-dominated (Fitzgerald, 2014; Peterson, 2014; O'Connor, 2015). Existing literature suggests that women's career progression diverges from men's due to gender-specific developmental differences, as well as organizational and societal factors (O'Neil et al., 2008).

Cubillo and Brown (2003) provide an analysis supporting this perspective, describing universities as patriarchal institutions that inherently favor men. Similarly, O'Connor (2020) highlights the hierarchical and paternalistic nature of educational institutions. The structures and practices of academic organizations tend to prioritize intellectual norms and experiences that align with those of men, as academia was originally established and designed by men to cater to their needs and preferences (CohenMiller et al., 2022).

Many women report that their organizations do not adequately value their skills, facing harsher performance requirements and lower pay, which makes developing their credibility a persistent challenge (Van Velsor and Hughes, 1990 as cited in Hopkins et al., 2021).

Researchers such as O'Connor (2020) emphasize the need to address the organizational structure and culture of higher education institutions (HEIs) to foster gender equality. Progress in reducing gender inequality within male-dominated HEIs has been slow, largely due to resistance from entrenched structures and cultures, which undermine the effectiveness of initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality.

In summary, women in academia face significant barriers at societal, organizational, and individual levels. Socio-cultural frameworks, including religion, local beliefs, and ingrained gender roles, contribute to negative attitudes and reinforce stereotypes that disadvantage women. Additionally, organizational structures in higher education institutions, which are historically patriarchal and hierarchical, further impede women's career progression. These institutions often prioritize norms and experiences aligned with men's needs, devaluing women's skills and imposing harsher performance requirements. Addressing these systemic issues within higher education is crucial for promoting gender equality and enabling women to advance in their academic careers.

2.1. Family and work-life balance

Backman (2012) suggests that informal gender dynamics within universities contribute to the differing career outcomes between men and women in academia. A significant issue lies in the perception among senior colleagues that women must choose between a career and family, a concept referred to as the 'motherhood myth' (Etzkowitz et al., 2000). This perception, rather than the career ambitions of women themselves, is often the root of the problem (Cox, 2008; Moir, 2006). Research by Dubach et al. (2012) revealed that academic mothers

were four times more likely than fathers to feel undervalued and unsupported in the workplace after having children (as cited in White & Machado-Taylor, 2016).

Kuzhabekova & Almukhambetova (2021) found in their study of women's advancement to leadership roles in Central Asia that, despite their high qualifications and numerous achievements, many women prioritized their families over their careers. Consequently, they rarely aspired to leadership positions and often felt unqualified to assume leadership responsibilities when opportunities arose.

Women face challenges not only due to family demands, which men typically do not experience (Johnson & Mathur-Helm, 2011; Shakeshaft et al., 2007), but also when taking career breaks. The decision of when and how to re-enter the workforce poses another significant hurdle (Adapa et al., 2015). According to Cohenmiller (2022), Motherscholars encounter difficulties balancing work and personal lives, which can adversely affect traditional measures of productivity (Kossek, 2016; Kossek & Lautsch, 2012). Although men and women faculty generally spend the same amount of time on work weekly, mothers of young children spend less time on research, a critical activity for career prestige and advancement at research institutions (Misra et al., 2012). Despite efforts in some countries, such as Sweden (Elvin-Nowak & Thomsson, 2001), to support mothers, gender inequality remains pervasive in academia (Mayer & Tikka, 2008).

The literature offers numerous recommendations for creating work-life benefits that assist employees in managing their various responsibilities. These include parental leave, reduced work hours, flexible work schedules, alternative career paths, job sharing, and telecommuting. There is a consensus that flexible work arrangements and decreased organizational time commitments would facilitate better integration of women into the workforce (O'Neil et al., 2008).

In conclusion, achieving a true balance between work and life for women in academia requires not only policy changes but also a transformation in organizational culture and attitudes. Institutions must recognize and accommodate the unique challenges faced by women, particularly mothers, to foster an environment where they can thrive both professionally and personally.

2.2. The context of Uzbekistan. Women's status in the family and society in Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan has undergone various reforms since 2017, resulting in significant changes across all spheres of life. These transformations have brought about substantial cultural, economic, political, and social shifts, infusing Uzbekistan with a fresh energy and dynamism while maintaining a strong connection to tradition. These advancements have also introduced a range of influences from the Anglo-American West, significantly contributing to Uzbek culture by integrating more capitalist values (Hashimova, 2019).

Existing at the intersection of history and modernity, and at the crossroads of East Asian, European, and Middle Eastern cultures, contemporary Uzbekistan presents a complex landscape. Rapid social changes have influenced the formation and maintenance of masculinities (Zhao, 2022). Research on changing gender norms in Uzbekistan, though limited, has explored the evolving relationship between Uzbek men and women amidst political, religious, and ethnic dynamics. Social changes linked to Soviet modernity and Western influences have brought gender equality into public discourse (Fathi, 2006; Turaeva, 2017).

Despite gender equality being a core value in Uzbekistan's civil and family laws, traditional gender ideologies continue to prescribe normative expectations for women and men within the family and society (Fayzullaeva, 2018; Senate Committee on Women and Gender Equality of Uzbekistan, 2020; cited in Zhao, 2022).

Following Uzbekistan's independence, the country faced significant economic challenges that disproportionately affected women. Many women lost their jobs, with teachers leaving their professions to pursue entrepreneurship. This economic instability led parents to become hesitant about investing in their daughters' higher education, a critical decision in a country where families bear the financial burden of tertiary education (Madalinska-Michalak & Mamadaminova, 2022). As a result, with increased university tuition fees, fewer women had the opportunity to pursue higher education. Economic constraints often led families, especially those with limited resources, to prioritize their sons' education, as daughters were expected to marry and leave the family home (Asian Development Bank, 2018).

Before delving into the current state and reforms in higher education, it is essential to understand the traditional role of women in Uzbek society. Uzbekistan maintains deeply rooted traditional values where women primarily serve as mothers and housewives. Women's educational choices are often heavily influenced by parents, close relatives, or husbands.

In Uzbek society, traditional concepts related to motherhood, children, and family are prevalent. Women face the challenge of balancing family responsibilities with pursuing careers and professional development. Research (Akhmedova, 2019) indicates that the aspiration to integrate personal and professional lives in modern societies creates societal challenges. Economic difficulties have further complicated this balance, as men in families often migrate to neighboring countries for work, leaving women to assume additional responsibilities. In rural areas, women have increasingly engaged in farming, with social and economic transitions leading to the feminization of farm labor and, to a lesser extent, farm management (World Bank report, 2019). Women, compelled to take on these new roles, must navigate changes in gender norms while maintaining traditional household responsibilities, thus increasing their work burden (Najjar et al., 2022).

For women pursuing careers in business, politics, or other fields, balancing professional ambitions with reproductive roles remains an expectation (Asian Development Bank, 2018). The traditional distribution of family responsibilities typically persists, exacerbating women's time poverty and limiting their opportunities for self-development, competitiveness in the labor market, and participation in small and medium-sized enterprises.

Policy changes alone are insufficient to alter entrenched gender expectations. Innovators concerned with gender equality must engage with local households, extension officers, and village leaders to challenge restrictive gender norms. Evidence suggests that while gender norms remain restrictive, they are evolving, particularly among mothers-in-law in households with migrant males.

Contemporary socio-cultural expectations in Central Asia often position women as the primary caretakers of their families' well-being and domestic responsibilities. Family values remain paramount, even in the face of divorces, economic hardships, and gender-based violence. Consequently, women's activism may not always reflect a liberal progressive agenda. Their pursuit of rights does not necessarily challenge male dominance or the existing gender hierarchy. Some women strive for the right to work and political participation, while others seek liberation from wage labor to fully embrace their roles as wives and mothers (Peshkova, 2020).

However, reforms across various sectors are gradually transforming these traditional roles, with more women actively participating in diverse aspects of life. Recent statistics from Uzbekistan illustrate these changes.

2.3. Higher Education Management in Uzbekistan
The study focuses on women in science in Uzbekistan, aiming to illuminate their lives and challenges within Uzbek society. We will now

examine the organizational level amidst the numerous changes occurring in the country.

Reforms are being implemented to democratize management further and align with international standards. These reforms involve updating the legal, moral, and informational frameworks within the educational process, ensuring transparency and reform in the management system, and maintaining objectivity and accuracy in student organization and selection processes (Ismailov, 2023).

Like many other countries, Uzbekistan has intensified its efforts to elevate the activities of higher education institutions to meet international standards. A successful integration into the global higher education landscape has become a key focus of Uzbekistan's higher education policy (Uralov, 2020). This policy emphasizes increasing the number of foreign universities, branch campuses, and collaborations with developed countries. In recent years, Uzbekistan has placed significant emphasis on enhancing the international prestige of its higher education institutions.

In 2018, as part of many anticipated reforms, a senior government official expressed the country's ambition to become a higher education hub for the Central Asia region by 2030 (Abdukhakimov, 2018). Beyond economic benefits, this initiative is expected to improve the country's global image. The role of International Branch Campuses (IBCs) in attracting international students was highlighted in early planning documents. In 2019, this vision was formalized in the Concept for the Development of the Higher Education System of the Republic of Uzbekistan until 2030 (Presidential Decree of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2019). The Concept set several targets to be achieved by 2030, including a 50% higher education participation rate, the establishment of 45 institutions based on foreign programs, 15% of students being international, and goals related to institution rankings and publications (Muratov & Wilkins, 2014).

Although many sectors of Uzbekistan's economy are experiencing changes and gender equality is gradually being promoted in various aspects of life, there are still no specific regulations addressing gender equality within higher educational institutions. As women are key change-makers and their leadership styles differ from those of men, achieving gender equality at the organizational level is crucial. This would inspire the younger generation to pursue higher education and aspire to leadership roles within academia.

Creating a supportive environment with family-friendly regulations that allow women to develop both their personal and professional skills is essential for alleviating the work-life struggles of women scientists. Due to substantial domestic responsibilities and societal expectations, women may find it challenging to focus on their professional work, particularly in research areas.

The following section presents the results of interviews with Uzbek women scientists from various regions, followed by the Methodology and Findings.

3. METHODOLOGY

To address the research questions, a qualitative method was employed in this study. This approach was chosen based on literature that emphasizes the effectiveness of qualitative research in exploring complex phenomena and capturing the depth of human experiences and perspectives (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009).

The research questions guiding this study are:

- What are the primary challenges faced by Uzbek women scientists in balancing their professional and personal lives?

- How do cultural expectations and societal norms in Uzbekistan impact the work-life balance of women scientists?

In April 2024, ten interviews were conducted with women from higher education institutions, primarily located in Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan. The recruitment strategy involved reaching out to potential participants via their university email addresses. Despite initial plans for a larger sample size, logistical constraints limited the number of interviews to ten. These were

conducted either in person, online, or via telephone. A total of 177 invitations were sent to women professors across various regions of Uzbekistan, with 17 emails being undeliverable due to incorrect addresses. Out of the remaining invitations, only three affirmative responses were received.

During an in-person meeting with one participant, assistance was requested to obtain contact information for other experienced women professors. This approach revealed a key insight: many individuals in Uzbekistan infrequently use their work emails and are hesitant to respond to unknown contacts, despite the clarity of the researcher's identity and purpose. Consequently, the snowball sampling method was employed to identify additional participants.

The participants, aged between 40 and 55 years, had been employed at their respective universities for approximately 15-25 years. All were married, and 90% had an average of 2-3 children. The semi-structured interviews were conducted in both Uzbek and Russian, with Russian being the first language for some respondents, despite their Uzbek nationality. The interview guide comprised nine questions (see Appendix 1), covering topics such as daily activities, work-life balance challenges, societal expectations, prioritization between career and personal commitments, and stress management strategies.

Participants were informed about the research aims and assured of their anonymity in both the invitation letter and prior to the commencement of interviews. The interviews ranged from 25 to 70 minutes in duration and were recorded with the participants' consent. However, two participants declined to be recorded, necessitating note-taking during the interviews and immediate post-interview recollection recording. The interviews were then transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis, a technique particularly suited for capturing subjective experiences, perspectives, and opinions.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Eagly's (1987) social role theory, which argues that widely shared gender stereotypes stem from the gender division of labor within a society, is used to explain the findings of this study. Social role theory traces the process of socialization and personality development through individuals' participation in increasingly diverse and complex social roles (Eagly & Wood, 2012). These roles create socially shared patterns of expectations for behavior, linking individuals to their social environments (Newman & Newman, 2020). Given the unique cultural, traditional, and value context of Uzbekistan, this theoretical framework is particularly relevant for understanding women's career and work-life balance.

4. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

To understand the challenges faced by women scientists in Uzbekistan, I conducted interviews with ten participants and identified several key findings:
- 40% of respondents teach additional courses or undertake extra teaching hours at separate educational institutions.
- 30% of respondents have previously held leadership positions.
- Only one of the respondents' spouses was employed at higher educational institution.

All participants are well-qualified and experienced professors and lecturers in higher educational institutions. Balancing work and family responsibilities, they face societal expectations that women should manage family duties, household chores, and cooking. They have developed strategies to plan their days and prioritize essential activities. Most participants handle housework, cooking, and sending their children to school in the mornings. To prepare for their classes, they often wake up very early to begin their workday.

"I don't know if it is because of my age or due to my life experience, but I now understand that if I am not well, then my work and family will not be well. So, first of all, I learned to take care of myself and that I feel well. This realization came after 16 years of marriage and 20 years of work experience," stated Participant 1.

While they express a deep love for their profession, the participants endured numerous difficulties

during the early years of their careers, particularly when their children were young and they lived with extended family members. Participant 8 recounted:

"I learned to be patient while living with my husband's brothers' families and my mother-in-law in one large household. Although we now live separately, those 14 years taught me to remain calm and manage stress."

The role of spousal support emerged as significant in their academic pursuits. Within Uzbek culture, as highlighted in the literature review, the role of mother-in-laws is highly regarded. Several professors who consider themselves successful in their careers noted that the demanding yet supportive nature of their mother-in-laws contributed significantly to their achievements. Additionally, mother-in-laws often assisted in raising their grandchildren. Participants emphasized their efforts to meticulously schedule their days to balance work and family duties. However, some mentioned that their husbands exhibited jealousy or lack of support, especially when the participants engaged in organizational tasks at work. Despite this, the support from their mother-in-laws enabled them to continue their professional endeavors.

Participant 9 shared:
"I still remember my mother-in-law's words: 'I don't like a woman who sits at home. If a woman has a career, she manages both home and career. If she just stays at home, she manages nothing!'"

The participants identified the relentless nature of academic work as one of the biggest challenges in their careers, noting that work often extends into their home life. They expressed feelings of guilt over not being able to publish as much as they desired due to the extensive preparation and grading required for their classes.

Despite facing significant personal and professional challenges, the participants, whose children are now grown, exhibited strong resilience shaped by their hardships. Many had experienced profound losses, which taught them the brevity of life and the importance of continuous self-improvement and aiding others. Participant 3, aged 45, reflected:
"I remember it was extremely difficult. I often had only 2-3 hours of sleep per day, and I would rest only when I was at the university. Listening to my colleagues' experiences, which were often more

challenging than mine, helped me cultivate patience with my own issues."

These experiences underline the critical interplay between personal resilience, familial support, and professional dedication in the careers of Uzbek women scientists.

A minority of participants indicated that they engage in sports and meditation as stress-relief methods to boost their energy levels. Socializing with friends and spending quality time with family members were the primary avenues for relaxation among this demographic. Participant 2 shared:

"I never had time for myself before. I worked even on weekends, giving extra classes. But now that I am over 40, I see the consequences in my health. Therefore, I try to work less and walk 10,000 steps every day".

Participant 8 remarked:
"I always want to do some yoga or other types of sports. But I cannot find the time. I meet with my friends twice a month to get some rest from work and relax."

To maintain a balance between family responsibilities and work tasks, participants primarily sacrificed their own rest time. They often slept less and sometimes did not allocate time for meals, eating while engaging in other activities. Nonetheless, they noted that their spouses, in-laws, and children are now supportive of their efforts.

Also, it is important to highlight that the participants expressed concerns about the lag in their research areas due to time constraints and wished they had more time to dedicate to their research endeavors.

Drawing on the social role theoretical framework, this study elucidates the complex interplay between societal expectations and the professional lives of women scientists in Uzbekistan. Social role theory posits that widely shared gender stereotypes arise from the division of labor within a society, shaping behaviors and expectations through the process of socialization (Eagly, 1987). In the context of Uzbekistan, deeply rooted cultural norms and traditional values significantly influence women's roles both at home and in the workplace.

According to the findings of the current study, it can be noticed that work life balance is very hardly performed by the Uzbek scientists. As it was already found in previous researches (Cubillo &

Brown, 2003; Mohajeri & Mousavi, 2017; Neale & Özkanlı, 2010) that in traditional societies women have more responsibilities in the families compared to societies in more developed countries.

Uzbek culture is distinctive, with women bearing a significant share of responsibilities. They tend to marry earlier and have more children compared to women in other nations, making it particularly challenging to balance studies or a career with family obligations. In some families, mother-in-laws may decide when a woman works or has children. If the mother-in-law is supportive and educated, she often encourages her daughter-in-law to be active and pursue a career. In general, Asian women are expected to be more submissive and obedient, devoted to the family, which complicates career advancement.

The participants did not mention any examples of organizational support systems for women scientists. This highlights the critical need for government regulations that support working mothers, enabling them to achieve a better work-life balance. This finding aligns with the argument of Cubillo and Brown (2003) that universities are patriarchal institutions that inherently favor men. Similarly, O'Connor (2020) emphasized the hierarchical and paternalistic nature of educational institutions.

The structures and practices of academic organizations can be analyzed from a perspective that highlights how they have historically prioritized intellectual norms and experiences that align with those of men. This is because academia was originally established and designed by men, catering to their needs and preferences (CohenMiller et al., 2022). Therefore, while societal changes are necessary to advance women's empowerment and gender equality, organizational changes are equally important. Developing support systems within academic institutions is essential to create a more equitable environment for women scientists.

During the interviews with women scientists in Uzbekistan, considerable potential was observed, with participants demonstrating extensive experience and knowledge in their fields. However, not all participants were actively engaged in research activities, despite the critical importance of publishing and research engagement in academia. As Uzbekistan's higher education system

undergoes significant reforms, it is essential to uphold and promote the values of research, gender equality, and women's empowerment in higher education to facilitate women's development.

When asked about their willingness to assume leadership positions in academia, participants indicated that they had declined such opportunities due to the heavy workload, stress, and bureaucracy associated with these roles. They were concerned about not having enough time for their families, aligning with findings from other literature (Bubshait 2012; Islam et al, 2023; Redmond et al., 2017).

Living in extended families, while shouldering responsibilities not only for the household, children, and spouse but also for in-laws, can present numerous challenges. However, interview results indicate that mothers-in-law played a particularly supportive role in the career development of the women scientists interviewed, often having a more significant impact than the women's spouses. They facilitated the continuation of studies, active professional engagement, and childcare, and assisted in resolving conflicts between the women and their spouses. Despite the considerable responsibilities at home and work, the women exhibited resilience and strength, bolstered by the support of their spouses and parents. It is thus evident that living in extended families, while presenting increased domestic workload, can also offer substantial advantages. These advantages include support systems that enable women to pursue their careers more effectively. Successfully navigating these circumstances requires the ability to cope with difficulties and identify opportunities even in challenging times.

As suggested by the theoretical framework of social role theory, the impact of women's social roles on their careers can be observed in societies with strong cultural values, such as Uzbekistan. In these traditional settings, women are primarily seen as caretakers, mothers, and daughters-in-law, roles that significantly influence their career trajectories.

The interviews with women scientists revealed a strong resilience and determination to continue their careers despite these societal expectations. However, not all women in the society possess such a strong will, and thus, the traditional social roles can impede the career success of many women scientists. The societal expectation that women

should prioritize family responsibilities often leads them to reject leadership roles. This prioritization is not solely about family duties but also involves the stress and increased workload associated with leadership positions.

Women in leadership face additional challenges, including the expectation to balance demanding professional roles with extensive domestic responsibilities. This dual burden can be overwhelming and discourages many from aspiring to higher positions within academia. Thus, while individual resilience plays a significant role, the broader societal norms and expectations profoundly impact women's career advancements. Addressing these issues requires not only societal changes to support gender equality but also organizational reforms to create supportive environments that enable women to thrive both personally and professionally.

5. CONCLUSION

The current study was conducted to understand and investigate the work-life balance of Uzbek women employed in academic institutions in Uzbekistan. To generalize the findings, it is important to conduct both quantitative and qualitative studies in the region, as the unique culture and traditions significantly impact women's careers. Although only ten women participated in the study, valuable insights were gained into their career experiences and their struggles to balance personal and professional lives.

The research revealed that women need more support from organizational perspectives. While cultural and individual barriers are often discussed, changes within organizations are also crucial. It is recommended to conduct further studies to understand the impact of mother-in-laws on career selection and career development for women in Uzbekistan.

Therefore, I would like to highlight the following: the government of Uzbekistan is actively working on gender equality, cultural-traditional roles of women, and women's empowerment. Although it will take time to observe the results of these initiatives, the importance of organizational changes must also be recognized and incorporated into ongoing developments. When women scholars receive better workload management and more support from both their families and universities, they will be more productive at work and less likely

to compromise their health, ultimately benefiting families, organizations, and society as a whole.

Moreover, the findings of this study underscore the critical need for systemic changes within academic institutions to foster a more supportive environment for women. This includes implementing policies that promote flexible working hours, providing childcare facilities, and creating mentorship programs specifically aimed at nurturing the careers of women scientists. Additionally, raising awareness and training within organizations about gender biases and the unique challenges faced by women can contribute to a more inclusive and supportive workplace culture.

Another important aspect to consider is the role of professional networks and support groups in empowering women academics. Encouraging the formation and participation in such networks can provide women with valuable resources, peer support, and opportunities for collaboration, further enhancing their ability to balance work and family responsibilities effectively.

The potential of Uzbek women in academia is immense, but it remains underutilized due to existing structural and cultural barriers. By addressing these barriers through comprehensive policy changes and fostering a supportive organizational culture, Uzbekistan can unlock the full potential of its women scientists. This will not only contribute to the advancement of science and education in the country but also promote greater gender equality and societal progress. As Uzbekistan continues to reform its higher education system, it is crucial to integrate gender-sensitive policies and practices that recognize and address the specific needs of women scholars. By doing so, the nation can ensure that women are not only able to contribute effectively to academia but also thrive in their personal and professional lives.

In summary, while significant strides are being made towards gender equality and women's empowerment in Uzbekistan, a multifaceted approach that includes organizational reforms, cultural shifts, and supportive policies is essential for achieving a sustainable and inclusive academic environment. Such efforts will ultimately lead to a more equitable and prosperous society where women can excel and contribute meaningfully to their fields.

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