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PROFESSIONAL SEGREGATION IN THE LABOR MARKET OF CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES: GENDER DEAFFERENTATION IN KAZAKHSTAN, KYRGYZSTAN AND UZBEKISTAN

Tolipova Noilakhon Nodir qizi
PhD Student of the Institute for Retraining and Advanced Training of Managers and Specialists of Preschool Education Organizations

ABSTRACT
This study examines gender equality and economic disparities in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan by analyzing the Duncan dissimilation index, Gini index, and Glass Ceiling Index over a defined period. The findings reveal differing trends in gender segregation and income inequality across the three countries. Kyrgyzstan demonstrates significant progress in reducing gender segregation in the workforce and achieving gender parity in leadership roles. In contrast, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan show slower progress, with persistent gender gaps in leadership and income distribution. The Gini index reflects notable improvements in income inequality, particularly in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, while Uzbekistan continues to experience substantial income disparities. The Glass Ceiling Index highlights ongoing challenges in female representation in leadership roles, with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan showing limited progress compared to Kyrgyzstan. The study concludes that while all three countries are making strides in reducing gender segregation and economic inequality, targeted, long-term policies are necessary to address structural barriers and ensure sustainable progress. Recommendations include improving data collection, focusing on inclusive policy implementation, and promoting private sector engagement in gender equality initiatives.
KEY WORDS: *Gender equality, economic inequality, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, gender segregation, income disparity, workforce participation, structural barriers, gender parity.*

INTRODUCTION

The issue of occupational segregation is becoming increasingly relevant in the modern world. This phenomenon, which may initially appear harmless, in reality, carries serious economic and social consequences that can negatively impact societal development and stability.

Occupational segregation refers to the uneven distribution of representatives of various social groups across different types of professional activities. The underlying causes of this phenomenon may include both objective factors, such as differences in education and qualifications, and subjective aspects, including gender stereotypes, discriminatory practices, cultural biases, and systemic barriers that hinder equal access to highly paid and prestigious professions.

The economic consequences of occupational segregation manifest in the limited employment opportunities for certain population groups, leading to inefficient utilization of human capital and, consequently, a decline in economic growth. Discriminatory barriers in the labor market may contribute to lower wages for segregated groups, restrict their professional advancement and social mobility, and, in turn, deepen economic inequality and social tension within society.

The social consequences of occupational segregation are also significant. This phenomenon fosters the formation of entrenched structures of inequality, which can lead to the social marginalization of certain groups, reinforce prejudices and stereotypes, and limit access to resources necessary for improving quality of life. In the long term, occupational segregation may result in decreased levels of societal trust, increased social polarization, and even the escalation of conflict situations.

Given the above, it is evident that the issue of occupational segregation requires thorough investigation and the development of effective strategies for its elimination. Research on this phenomenon should encompass an analysis of its causes, mechanisms of operation, and possible ways to mitigate its effects. Comprehensive measures aimed at eradicating occupational segregation may include the development of inclusive educational programs, improvements in labor legislation, combating workplace discrimination, and conducting informational campaigns to reshape societal stereotypes.

Thus, recognizing the seriousness of occupational segregation and taking timely measures to address it are crucial steps toward building a fairer, more inclusive, and sustainable society.

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Central Asian countries are confronted with significant socio-economic challenges stemming from gender segregation in the labor market. This study explores the extent and nature of gender segregation in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan from 2014 to 2023, a period marked by substantial economic development, political reforms, and global crises.

Utilizing data from national statistical agencies of each country, the research examines gender disparities in employment levels, sectoral distribution, and access to decision-making positions. Through comparative analysis, this study identifies the persistence of gender inequality in the labor market by assessing trends and determining contributing factors.

By employing indices such as the Gini Index, Duncan Index, and Glass Ceiling Index, and analyzing longitudinal data, the study confirms two fundamental findings. Despite some advancements, women continue to encounter barriers in specific occupational fields and higher hierarchical positions. The analysis reveals that gender segregation and its manifestations in each of the three countries are shaped by a combination of socioeconomic and cultural factors.

The study culminates in a set of policy recommendations aimed at mitigating gender disparities and fostering a more equitable distribution of opportunities for both genders. Implementing these measures is essential for promoting sustainable development and enhancing economic efficiency across the region.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The issue of gender pay disparity has been widely explored in economic and labor studies. The World Economic Forum (WEF) estimates that at the current rate of progress, it will take approximately 202 years to eliminate the global gender pay gap, based on trends observed over the past 12 years (WEF, 2018). Research has consistently linked wage discrepancies to the underrepresentation of women in high-paying corporate positions. Alkadry and Tower (2006) argue that occupational segregation, particularly the limited presence of women in leadership roles, is a key factor contributing to gender-based wage differences.

Scholars have also examined the structural and systemic causes of the gender pay gap. Blau and Kahn (2003) highlight that economic analyses often focus on gender-related factors, such as differences in educational attainment, skill levels, and workplace discrimination, to explain wage disparities. Moreover, job characteristics and work environments contribute to these inequalities. Certain occupations that require immediate decision-making and quick responses are often dominated by men, leading to higher compensation in these roles compared to those typically occupied by women.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) identifies multiple dimensions influencing gender-based wage disparities. One major factor is the limited representation of women in leadership positions, which affects income distribution and professional advancement opportunities. Another key element is work hours and employment patterns. The *Global Wage Report 2018/2019* by the ILO indicates that in nearly all of the 73 countries analyzed, women are more likely than men to engage in part-time work, with only five exceptions (ILO, 2019). This trend is largely attributed to women's disproportionate share of domestic and caregiving responsibilities, which often necessitate flexible or reduced work hours.

Educational disparities further exacerbate wage inequalities, particularly in fields such as Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM). Women remain underrepresented in these high-paying industries, limiting their access to lucrative career opportunities (ILO, 2019). Finally, occupational segregation plays a crucial role in sustaining the gender pay gap. Many jobs traditionally associated with women, such as caregiving and administrative roles, tend to offer lower wages, further contributing to systemic disparities in earnings.

Alonso-Villar et al. (2012) make a significant contribution to the literature on labor market inequality by demonstrating that occupational segregation is a complex issue shaped by both racial and gendered dynamics. Their findings underscore the need for targeted policies that address structural discrimination and promote equitable employment opportunities across all demographic groups. In their study on occupational segregation, Alonso-Villar, Del Río, and Gradín (2012) offer a nuanced analysis of workforce disparities based on race, ethnicity, and gender. The authors employ an econometric approach that facilitates multigroup comparisons, allowing for a comprehensive examination of segregation patterns across different demographic groups. Their findings reveal that occupational segregation is particularly pronounced among Hispanic and Asian populations, with Hispanic workers facing a more severe disadvantage due to their higher concentration in low-wage jobs.

One of the study's key contributions is its examination of gendered patterns within racial and ethnic groups. The research highlights a unique trend among Hispanics, where occupational segregation is higher for men than for women. However, despite this, Hispanic women remain disproportionately clustered in lower-paying occupations, reinforcing economic disadvantages. This gendered disparity within ethnic groups challenges traditional assumptions that women consistently face higher occupational segregation than men.

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A significant finding of the study is that human capital variables—such as education and work experience—do not fully explain segregation patterns for women, African Americans, and Native Americans. This suggests that structural barriers, rather than individual qualifications, play a critical role in maintaining occupational segregation. The persistence of segregation despite controlling for these factors indicates that discriminatory labor market practices and systemic inequalities continue to influence employment opportunities for marginalized groups.

While the study provides valuable insights into occupational segregation, one limitation is its reliance on quantitative econometric methods, which may not fully capture the lived experiences of workers facing discrimination. A qualitative approach, incorporating workers' perspectives on workplace dynamics and barriers to mobility, could further enrich the findings. Additionally, the study could benefit from a more detailed exploration of policy interventions that have been implemented to address occupational segregation and their effectiveness in reducing disparities.

Borghans and Groot (1999) explore the role of educational presorting in occupational segregation, arguing that segregation in the labor market is, to a significant extent, a consequence of educational pathways that channel individuals into specific career trajectories. Their research highlights how early educational choices influence occupational outcomes, reinforcing gendered and social stratifications in the workforce. By linking educational sorting mechanisms to labor market segmentation, the authors provide a theoretical framework that extends beyond traditional explanations such as discrimination or skill disparities.

A key strength of the study is its emphasis on the institutional structures that guide individuals into specific educational and professional paths. The authors suggest that gendered occupational segregation is not merely a byproduct of workplace discrimination but is also deeply rooted in the way educational systems direct students into different fields of study. This aligns with broader literature indicating that men and women often pursue different academic disciplines, particularly in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) versus humanities and social sciences. These educational choices have long-term implications for employment opportunities and wage disparities.

However, the study primarily focuses on theoretical modeling and does not provide extensive empirical analysis to substantiate its claims. While the authors effectively argue that educational presorting plays a significant role in occupational segregation, a more robust quantitative examination using longitudinal data could strengthen their conclusions. Additionally, while the paper discusses gender-based segregation, it does not thoroughly address how race and socioeconomic status intersect with educational sorting to further exacerbate labor market inequalities.

Research Gap and Hypothesis Development

Despite extensive research on occupational segregation and gender-based wage disparities, significant gaps remain in understanding the precise impact of job and industry separation on underemployment, particularly in specific regional contexts such as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. Existing studies, such as those by Alonso-Villar, Del Río, and Gradín (2012), highlight that occupational segregation persists even after controlling for human capital variables, suggesting that structural barriers play a crucial role in labor market inequalities. Similarly, Borghans and Groot (1999) argue that educational presorting is a major contributor to occupational segregation, yet their study does not provide clear empirical measurements of its direct effect on underemployment.

While previous literature establishes the connection between occupational segregation and gender disparities in employment outcomes, there is a lack of clear, quantitative assessment of how these factors contribute to underemployment in specific labor markets. Furthermore, many studies have primarily focused on Western economies, leaving a gap in the understanding of occupational segregation in post-Soviet economies, where cultural and economic structures differ significantly. Existing studies, including those by Simpson (2004) and Lupton (2006), suggest that men benefit from working in female-dominated fields, whereas women often face barriers such as the "glass ceiling" when working in male-dominated industries. However, these studies do not account for how such dynamics influence the likelihood of underemployment in different sectors.

Additionally, prior research by Martin and Barnard (2013) emphasizes organizational biases that disadvantage women in the workplace, but the connection between these biases and part-time employment remains underexplored. Torre (2018) notes that men in female-dominated jobs often earn more than their female counterparts, but there is limited research on whether this trend holds in Central Asian labor markets. Furthermore, Vuluk et al. (2013) attempted to investigate gender disparities in employment but did not incorporate job segregation as a key factor, leading to potential oversimplification of the issue.

Hypothesis Development

To address these gaps, this study aims to provide a more precise measurement of occupational segregation's effect on underemployment by focusing on gender disparities in labor markets in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. Specifically, we propose the following hypotheses:

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Hypothesis 1: In Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, women are disproportionately employed in low-paying jobs and hold less prestigious positions compared to men. Women are more likely than men to be underemployed, and this disparity is exacerbated by the segregation of jobs into different fields and industries. Occupational segregation contributes to wage inequality by concentrating women in lower-paying roles, while men advance more easily in female-dominated jobs (Barrett & Doyon, 2001; Simpson, 2004; Lupton, 2006).

Hypothesis 2: Women are primarily employed in service-sector jobs, which increases their financial instability. Due to occupational segregation, women face higher risks of part-time employment and economic vulnerability compared to men. The concentration of women in specific industries limits their career growth and financial security, reinforcing gender-based labor market inequalities (Torre, 2018; Martin & Barnard, 2013).

By integrating insights from previous studies while addressing the limitations in measurement and regional focus, this study seeks to provide a clearer, data-driven understanding of how occupational segregation influences underemployment and financial instability for women in Central Asia.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a comprehensive approach to analyzing gender segregation in the labor markets of Central Asian countries, specifically Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. The research aims to identify key characteristics of occupational gender segregation, assess the extent of gender barriers to employment, analyze the distribution of roles by industry and leadership positions held by women, and evaluate national trends over time.

Research Design and Data Sources

The study adopts a comparative analytical framework, integrating both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The analysis is based on statistical data collected from national statistical agencies, including the National Bureau of Statistics of Kazakhstan, the Agency for Statistics under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, and the National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic. The dataset spans the period from 2014 to 2023, enabling an assessment of labor market dynamics over time.

Analytical Approach

The study is structured into three key stages:

1. **Descriptive Analysis:** Examines core employment indicators, including the proportion of women employed across various economic sectors, their representation in leadership positions, and wage disparities.
2. **Quantitative Analysis:** Measures gender segregation using established indices such as horizontal and vertical segregation indices, the Duncan Dissimilarity Index, the Gini Index, and the Glass Ceiling Index.
3. **Qualitative Analysis:** Reviews government policies, legal frameworks, and national programs aimed at promoting gender equality in the labor market.

Quantification of Gender Segregation

To assess gender segregation in the labor market, the study considers two interrelated components: the methodological approach to measurement and the research data foundation. Occupational segregation is categorized into two primary types:

- **Horizontal Segregation:** Refers to the division of men and women into different occupational groups (Rogacheva, 2011). This includes restrictions on women's employment in physically demanding or hazardous conditions.
- **Vertical Segregation:** Involves the unequal distribution of genders within hierarchical workplace structures. Women often face systemic barriers, known as "glass ceilings," which limit their access to leadership roles and high-prestige occupations. These barriers are institutional rather than merit-based, reflecting organizational structures rather than individual skills or experience.

Statistical Methods and Data Processing

To ensure robust statistical analysis, the study utilizes Microsoft Excel for data management, while data visualization is conducted using Python in Jupyter Notebook, along with Mathcad software for additional computational tasks.

The Duncan Dissimilarity Index (ID), one of the most widely used segregation measures, is applied to quantify occupational gender segregation. The general formula for calculating the Duncan Dissimilarity Index is:

$$ID = \frac{1}{2} i \sum \frac{Fi}{F} - \frac{Mi}{M}$$ where:

- Fi and Mi represent the number of women and men working in a given occupation ii,
- F and M denote the total number of women and men employed in the economy, and

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- i ranges from 1 to the total number of occupational sectors considered in the analysis.

The interpretation of the index reflects the proportion of either men or women who would need to switch occupations to achieve an even gender distribution across industries. Various occupational sectors are examined in the calculation of this index to provide a comprehensive view of gender-based labor segregation.

By employing this multi-faceted approach, the study aims to provide an in-depth analysis of gender disparities in the labor market, offering insights into systemic barriers and potential policy interventions to promote gender equality in employment.

The Gini coefficient (G), traditionally used as an income inequality indicator, can also be applied to assess gender disparities in employment across different industries and occupations (Mehta, 2010). This statistical measure quantifies the degree of stratification within a country or region based on a specific factor, such as economic or occupational inequality.

The Gini coefficient ranges from 0 to 1, where a value closer to 0 indicates a more equal distribution, while a value approaching 1 signifies greater concentration, meaning that a particular resource—such as income or employment opportunities—is predominantly held by a specific group (Farris, 2010).

When represented as a Gini index, the coefficient is expressed as a percentage. While it is primarily used to evaluate economic inequality, its application extends to analyzing gender-based occupational disparities, offering insights into the uneven distribution of men and women across different professional sectors.

The study utilized annual data obtained from national statistical offices to ensure accuracy and reliability. A time series analysis was conducted, presenting the Gini index over multiple years for each of the three countries. Specifically, the Gini coefficient was calculated for Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan over the period 2014–2023, enabling a comprehensive assessment of gender disparities in the labor market across time.

Vertical gender segregation refers to a structural form of inequality in which men and women occupy different hierarchical positions within professions, organizations, or industries. This phenomenon is characterized by women's restricted access to senior and prestigious positions compared to their male counterparts, despite possessing equivalent educational qualifications and professional expertise.

Key indicators of vertical segregation include the leadership attainment gap and the presence of a glass ceiling, which represents invisible barriers that hinder women's career advancement. To quantitatively assess this form of segregation, statistical and analytical methods are employed to measure disparities in occupational hierarchies. A fundamental metric in this analysis is the Glass Ceiling Index (GCI), which quantifies the proportion of women in senior management relative to their overall workforce representation.

This study applies the Glass Ceiling Index to examine vertical gender segregation in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, providing insights into the extent of women's underrepresentation in leadership roles within these labor markets.

To assess the validity of Hypothesis 2, a panel regression analysis was conducted for Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan over the period 2014–2023. This regression incorporated key economic and labor market variables, including gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, the percentage of women in management positions, the employment ratio of men to women in service industries (such as food and living services), and gender representation in the communication sector.

Furthermore, statistical rigor was ensured by computing standard errors for the Duncan Dissimilarity Index, Glass Ceiling Index, and Gini Coefficient using introductory stacking methods. These approaches allowed for the assessment of the statistical significance of observed trends and cross-country differences, despite the complexity of the dataset.

While the Duncan, Gini, and Glass Ceiling Indexes are widely utilized to evaluate gender segregation, the methodology employed in this study remains flexible and adaptable to alternative segregation measures, such as the Carmichael and McLachlan indexes. This adaptability ensures the potential for future validation and cross-validation using different analytical frameworks in labor market research.

Additionally, a counterfactual simulation was performed to analyze the potential impact of policy interventions on gender segregation. The results demonstrated that closing gaps in education and professional training could significantly reduce gender disparities in the labor market. These findings align with previous studies conducted in similar socio-economic contexts.

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The methodological rigor applied in this research ensures that the findings can serve as a robust foundation for evidence-based policy recommendations aimed at mitigating gender segregation in Central Asian labor markets.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the Duncan dissimilation index, Gini index, and Glass Ceiling Index for Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan provides insights into gender equality trends and economic disparities in these countries.

For the dissimilation index, which measures the level of gender segregation in the workforce, Kazakhstan saw a slight decrease from 35 to 25 but ended with a slight increase, indicating persistent gender disparities. Kyrgyzstan showed a steady decline from 25 to 15, reflecting progress in reducing gender segregation, likely due to policies promoting women's involvement in male-dominated sectors. In Uzbekistan, there were fluctuations, with a drop from 40 to 20, followed by an increase back to 35, pointing to challenges in achieving sustained gender equality.

In terms of income inequality, the Gini index showed that Uzbekistan had the highest inequality, although it improved over time, with a sharp reduction from 24.41 in 2014 to 19.12 in 2023. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan experienced more gradual reductions, with Kyrgyzstan having the most equal distribution of income by 2023 (8.33). Despite improvements, Uzbekistan still faces significant inequality.

The Glass Ceiling Index, which tracks women's access to leadership roles, showed that Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan face persistent barriers. Kazakhstan's Gender Community Index (GCI) remained below 1, indicating significant obstacles to women reaching leadership roles. Kyrgyzstan, however, has seen notable progress, with a GCI above 1, indicating greater gender equality in leadership positions.

The regression analysis confirmed that economic development often exacerbates gender pay gaps, while increasing female representation in leadership roles and addressing female unemployment can help narrow the gender gap. The results suggest that women in lower-paying sectors, like food and hospitality services, face greater financial instability, and that structural changes are needed to improve their financial stability.

In summary, while Kyrgyzstan has made notable strides in gender equality and income distribution, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan face ongoing challenges. The findings emphasize the importance of targeted policies to reduce gender segregation, increase female leadership, and address income inequality.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the analysis of gender equality and economic inequality across Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan highlights both progress and persistent challenges. Kyrgyzstan has made significant strides in reducing gender segregation in the workforce and promoting gender equality in leadership roles, as reflected in its steady improvements in the Duncan dissimilation index and Glass Ceiling Index. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, while showing some positive changes, continue to face substantial barriers to gender equality, particularly in leadership roles and income distribution.

The findings also underscore the importance of addressing income inequality, with Uzbekistan exhibiting the highest disparities despite some improvement. Both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have made gradual progress in reducing inequality, but targeted efforts are still needed to ensure more equitable economic opportunities for women.

Overall, the results of the study point to the need for sustained and focused policies aimed at reducing gender segregation in the labor market, increasing female representation in leadership positions, and addressing the structural factors that contribute to income inequality. These efforts are essential for fostering more inclusive and equitable societies in the region.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Limitations

1. **Data Availability and Accuracy:** The analysis relies on available data, which may have limitations in terms of accuracy or completeness, especially regarding informal sectors or unreported data, which could impact the comprehensiveness of the findings.
2. **Short-Term Focus:** The study examines data over a relatively short period, and while trends are identified, the long-term sustainability and impact of the policies implemented in these countries remain unclear.

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3. **Geographic and Sectoral Scope:** The research focuses on specific countries and may not fully capture gender dynamics in other Central Asian nations or various sectors beyond those included in the study. The findings might therefore be less applicable to countries with different social, cultural, or economic contexts.
4. **External Factors:** The analysis does not account for external global factors such as economic crises, international trade policies, or geopolitical influences that could have affected the labor market and gender equality in these countries during the study period.
5. **Qualitative Aspects:** The study predominantly uses quantitative data and does not include qualitative insights that could provide a deeper understanding of the social and cultural factors influencing gender inequality in the labor market.

Recommendations

1. **Strengthening Data Collection:** Governments in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan should invest in more comprehensive data collection, especially focusing on informal sectors, women's participation in leadership roles, and income disparities. This would improve the accuracy and reliability of future studies on gender equality and income distribution.
2. **Long-Term Monitoring:** To ensure that progress is sustained, it is crucial to establish long-term monitoring mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of gender equality policies. Regular updates to indices like the Duncan dissimilation, Gini, and Glass Ceiling Indexes would provide a clearer picture of ongoing trends and challenges.
3. **Inclusive Policy Implementation:** While Kyrgyzstan has made notable strides, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan need to intensify their efforts to implement policies that specifically target gender segregation in the workforce and barriers to women in leadership roles. These could include gender quotas, targeted recruitment, and mentoring programs for women in male-dominated sectors.
4. **Addressing Structural Barriers:** Policies should focus not only on increasing female participation in the workforce but also on addressing structural barriers such as unequal pay, discriminatory hiring practices, and limited access to training and professional development opportunities for women.
5. **Encouraging Private Sector Engagement:** In addition to governmental efforts, private sector companies should be encouraged to adopt gender-sensitive policies, including promoting work-life balance, offering equal opportunities for career advancement, and addressing unconscious biases in hiring and promotion practices.
6. **Further Research on Cultural and Social Factors:** Future studies should explore the social and cultural factors that contribute to gender inequality in these countries, which could provide valuable insights for designing more effective interventions.

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