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## **WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVES IN CHOOSING FACULTIES IN HIGHER AND SECONDARY EDUCATION IN UZBEKISTAN**

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### **Abstract**

This article explores the ratio of females' enrolment for higher and secondary education in Uzbekistan. It also discusses girls' perspectives in choosing particular faculties, as well as describes the role of social stereotypes, culture, and tradition that exacerbated gender inequity in educational development of Uzbek women.

**Key words:** secondary and tertiary education, sustainable educational development, development goals, stereotypes, vocational education;

### **Abbreviations**

**ADB** Asian Development Bank

**CEDAW** Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women **SED**  
Sustainable educational development

**NGO** Nongovernmental organization

**TVET** Technical and Vocational Education and Training

**UNDP** United Nation Development Program

**UNESCO** United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization



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**Introduction.** Historically Uzbekistan is one of those countries where many social boundaries exist toward women and there are much more opportunities for men. Under the United Nation Development Goals 5 for Sustainable Development, much has been done to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education in Uzbekistan (UNESCO, 2015). However, there are still much left to do. Although the ratification of CEDAW was adopted in 1995 in the country, gender inequity is still displayed in many domains such as in policy, economy, and education. The barriers like social norms and stereotypes such as “women’s place at home” limit their equal participation in community life (Mee, 2001; Asian Development Bank, 2014). That is, women’s sustainable educational development is less supported than men’s. Parents give priority to man to continue further education, especially on a fee-paying basis as they believe that men are the main provider of the family (Paci, 2002; ADB, 2014). Based on this concept elders do not support girls’ postsecondary schooling as much as they support their sons’ because they consider successful marriage is more beneficial for girls than higher education. Besides, old stereotypes such as educated women will dominate over the man, significantly contribute to the prevalence of this phenomenon. Nepotism and managing households are widely encouraged in the nurture of future bride (*kelin*). Even in the selection of secondary institution parents consider less time-consuming jobs for girls because women, according to the culture, belong to the family than the work. Therefore, 75% of girls’ enrolment for the secondary and tertiary education happens by the wish of their parent (ADB, 2005; ADB, 2014; Mee, 2001; UNDP, 2007-2008; Saima, 2013).

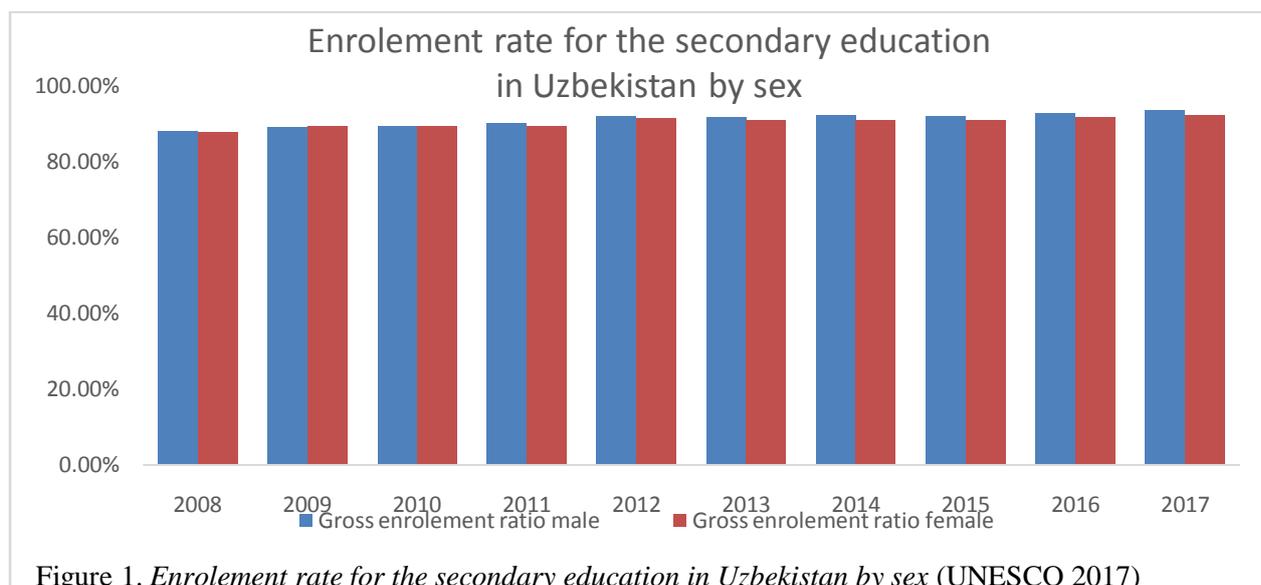
This paper aims to analyse males and females enrolment rate for higher and secondary institutions. This issue has not been studied thoroughly in Uzbekistan context, therefore, following analysis may contribute with new insights to the world literature. Moreover, I will bring more analysis from my experience.

### **Females and males’ enrolment for secondary and tertiary education**

Secondary schools - TVET in Uzbekistan are three-year schooling which was established in 1999. The purpose of TVET was to raise teaching quality, to develop professional skills of youth, and create more opportunity to enter the labour market (UNDP, 2007-2008). TVETs are compulsory education and provide students with a diploma after graduation on different specialization. Higher education is divided into two stages: Bachelor’s and Master’s degree programs.

Bachelor's degree in Uzbekistan is specified on one fundamental knowledge and lasts for four years while Master's strengthens that knowledge and requires 2 years of full-time commitment.

According to UNESCO statistics in 2008-2017 Figure1, data of female and male enrolment to the secondary education is almost similar as it is compulsory but huge discrepancy exists in selecting a specialization.



Uzbekistan statistical bulletin 2010- 2011(table 1) reported that more girls enrol to the healthcare and sport 75.6% while only 24.4% men do, in education girls amount 76.3% but men only 23.7%. Accordingto ADB (2014) the demand for education and healthcare colleges historically were occupied by girls, therefore, they got the name *qizlarkolleji*(girls' college). Reversely, male's enrolment is higher in agriculture 20.8%, in industry 20.8% and transport 42.6%, respectively. Furthermore, according to UNESCO 2008-2007 statistics, Figure 2 shows a significant discrepancy in the gender enrolment for higher education. It is manifested, that males' gross enrolment ratio is considerably higher than females'. After the establishment of secondary schools, women's enrolment to higher education declined dramatically. There is also an impressive gap in selection branches of the institutions whereas higher percentages of girls select education (table 2) (UNDP, 2014).

Men and women enrolment to the secondary education by selecti specialization		
	2007/2008	2008/2009
Total enrolled students 100%	Women 49.1	Men 50.9
Education	76.3	23.7
Healthcare and sport	75.6	24.4
Industry	39.6	60.4
Agriculture	39.6	60.4
Transport	28.7	71.3
Economy and Law	46.9	53.1
Art and cinematography	52.2	47.8
Services	49.3	50.7

Table 1. Source: *Uzbekistan statistical bulletin 2007- 2011*

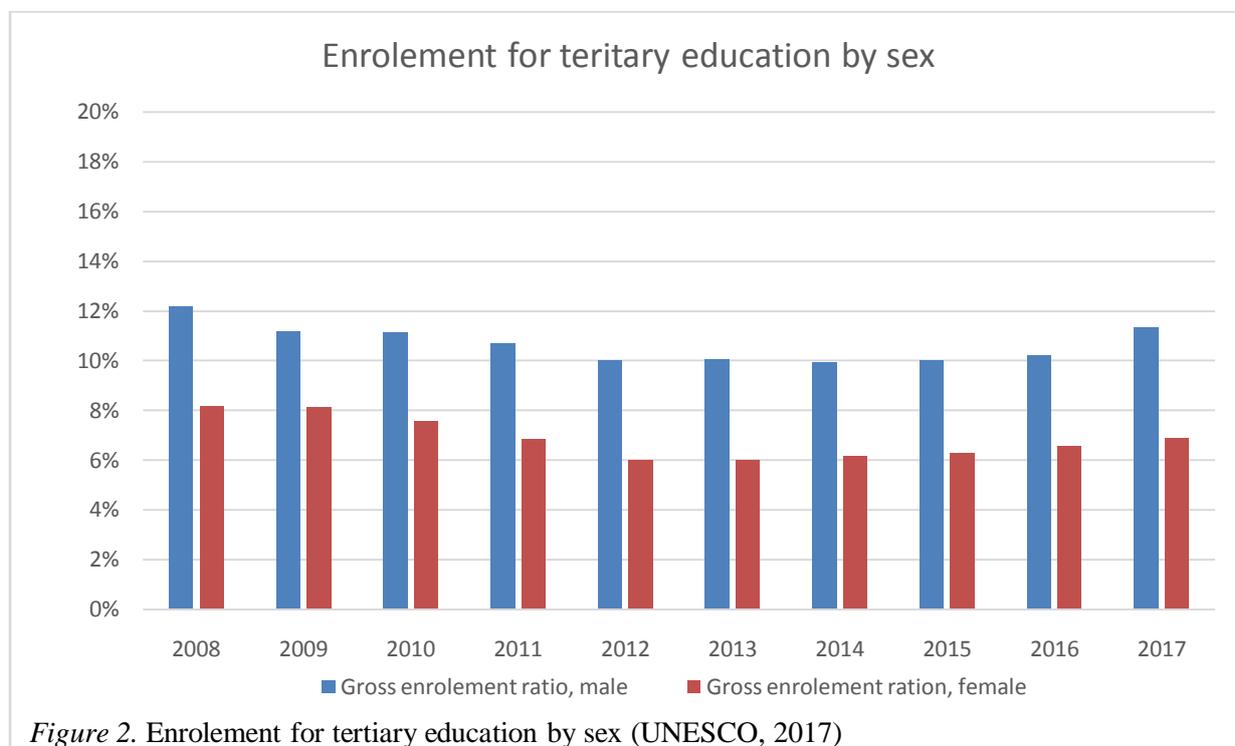


Table 2 illustrates that women’s performance is higher only in education, while men dominate in other branches. Indeed, men preferences are give to the faculties like industry and construction, transport and communication, economy and law.

Men and women enrolment to the tertiary education by selecting specialization								
	2007/2008		2008/2009		2009/2010		2010/2011	
	women	men	women	men	women	men	women	men
Total enrolled students 100%	39.9%	60.1%	40.4%	59.6%	40.0%	60.0%	38.5%	61.5%
Industry and construction	16.3	83.7	16.7	83.3	16.9	83.1	16.5	83.5
Transport and communication	7.9	92.1	8.9	91.1	10.9	89.1	10.4	89.6
Agriculture	14.5	85.5	13.4	86.6	16.1	83.9	17.7	82.3
Economy and Law	17.3	82.7	14.2	85.8	17.1	82.9	19.3	80.7
Healthcare and sport	43.5	56.5	45.1	54.9	45.2	54.8	43.8	56.2
Education	55.5	44.5	55.1	44.9	54.5	45.5	52.9	47.1
Art and cinematography	34.1	65.9	41.7	58.3	40.7	59.3	41.5	58.5

Table 2. Source: *Uzbekistan statistical bulletin 2007- 2011*

In the enrolment for Master degree, we can see similar picture. In 2010-2011 academic year 34.3% were female and 65.% were male from overall accepted students. In terms of research, women’s number accelerated more than men’s in psychology (73.7%), philology (65.2%), pharmacy (63.6%), fine art (52,3%), and political science (51.5%).

**Social stereotypes vs ESD of Uzbek girls. Cultural and traditional focus on specific profession.**

Historically in Uzbek families, household work is not equally shared. The women inherit the responsibility for all task but the men are only decision makers. Therefore, the expression “women’s place is at home” is frequently used by men and selection of the profession is related to this stereotype.

Girls get married in early age at 18 or 17 (in some regions at 16) and in their 21<sup>st</sup> they become mothers when the responsibility is exacerbated and falls only on them. This “mannism” behaviour impact on women’s ESD. Mostly girls get their postgraduate qualification on a granted condition but if it is on a paying basis the parents’ preference will be given to sons (ABD, 2008). Likewise, the selection of profession mainly depends on parents’ wishes who seek



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only successful marriage to their daughters. As healthcare and pedagogy (professions like nursing, teaching, tailoring) are less time consuming, women could spend more time at home. Traditional Uzbek man usually seeks a girl to marry who works in those professions, because she can devote most of her time to the household. Moreover, a woman's possibility to work depends on the decision of her husband but if she lives with the husband's family the primary decision maker is father-in-law following mother-in-law.

### **Territorial division of higher education in Uzbekistan**

The next barrier is the location of the institutes and universities in the territory of Uzbekistan. Predominantly, parents in rural areas and partly in urban areas are less supportive to send their daughters to a remote place to study. They believe that they protect their daughters from sexual harassment which may appear living in the hostels (ADB, 2014; World Bank, 2007). Thus, girls can select postgraduate studies from institutions which are located only in their city. Most higher institutions in the republic include education faculty but may lack agriculture, transport and communication, industry and construction, law and economy. Therefore, there is no choice except choosing one branch from existing ones.

### **Political reforms exacerbated gender inequity**

Although the constitution of Uzbekistan was founded on democracy and equity, some political resolutions and decrees embrace only man's perspectives. For example, the Presidential Resolution of the Republic of Uzbekistan Karimov I. (2005), which facilitates with 25% free bonus score of total entrance score to the tertiary education, was adopted only for men who finished military service. Then the amendment in the resolution was done by current president Mirziyayev Sh (2017) who doubled existing bonus (50%) again for the benefits of men, leaving girls without any option. Due to these political reforms, girls' discrimination is exacerbated because they do not have equal opportunity in entrance exams. Naturally, men with this free bonus score select more prestigious postgraduate institutions where girls are unable to compete even though they are highly knowledgeable and literate.



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## **“Jobs for women” are low-paid**

It is obvious that parents concentrate on successful marriage prospects rather than daughters' aspiration. The discrepancy in selecting branches are mostly related to girls' future profession. There is an expression among Uzbeks *ayollarishi* (women's job) in which men feel humiliated (ADB, 200; Corcoran-Nates, 2005) because usually females' jobs are less paid. UNDP (2009) reported that women comprise 72.2% of total employment in healthcare, sport, education, and art (low-paid jobs) while men account for 89.3% in construction, transport and communication (high-paid jobs). We can see a similar picture with selecting specialization and employment.

### **Legal restriction**

However, not only cultural norms play role in this phenomenon but also legal restrictions positively contribute to its existence. According to ADB's 2008 study, Labour Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan includes 380 jobs where women access is wholly or partially forbidden. These jobs are such as manufacturing and industry, transport, construction, refining and processing of natural resources extraction which require heavy physical labour or overutilization of women's labour. Furthermore, the labour code also restricts women's overnight work and pregnant women's business trips. According to it, women retain their job during the last two month of pregnancy and 3-year in maternity period. Therefore, the decline of female labour is high in responsible jobs. Although, it seems that labour code defends women's perspectives but in reality, it limits women's possibility. That is, if a woman wants to work during the maternity period (because of financial insufficiency) the employer refuse taking her back. He thinks she cannot perform her best at work because of her young kid. Moreover, it is a tradition in Uzbek families to have 3-4 kids. Thus, a woman should spend 9-12 years (the best time for her career development) in the maternity period.

### **Key findings**

From the analysis, it transpired that parents play an influential role in girls' ESD. They focus more on the girls' prosperous marriage perspectives than education. Secondly, social norms and stereotypes predominantly challenge women's professional career development by concentrating on certain jobs and marginalize their possibilities equally participate in the labour market. Thirdly, the territorial division of the higher educational institutions usually creates



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barriers for girls' educational development. The last but not least, some political reforms discriminate girls and limit their opportunities to enter postsecondary education.

### **Recommendations**

Public school authorities and teachers play a salient role in recruiting girls to other specialization, therefore, they should establish teacher-student, teacher-parent network. It will remarkably contribute to reaching a goal. Next, women recruitment training programs should be implemented and conducted in problematic areas of the country. These training programs should initially be oriented to cease gender discrimination. Moreover, database reviewing statistics of women's fee-based and granted enrolment to the higher educational institutions should be established. It will provide with more exact data about parents' gender preference in financing their children and will indicate ailing spots in the country. Additionally, scholarships for girls to higher education should be implemented. Particularly, it should cover those specializations and branches where men dominate in number. Last but not least, government should empower Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) to work on vulnerable population such as with females in remote areas (ABD, 2015; UNDP, 2009).

Albeit, there are some challenges in realization those steps; insufficiency of qualified trainers with clear understanding to conduct trainings, financing NGOs' projects and women recruitment trainings. Additionally, the authorities and teachers of schools could be less devoted to working with girls and their parents.

### **Conclusion**

While women's ESD gap is a problem in Uzbekistan its roots are mostly bound with people's stereotypes and cultural norms. Revising all above, significant disagreement we can see in girls' selection future profession which negatively impacts on country's sustainable development. Thus, maintaining women's ESD can play a critical role in the prosperity of the country. Therefore, it is important to raise awareness of society, reinforce NGOs activity which works on women's issues and involve international organizations to cooperate in goals. Moreover, government involvement is important in financing and supporting projects. Indeed, the combination of community efforts, schools, international organizations, and government officials will create the best environment for girl' ESD.



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