

NARXOZ UNIVERSITY
GENDER ECONOMICS RESEARCH CENTER

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Gender (in)equality in Kazakhstan before Covid-19 Pandemic

A growing body of both popular and academic literature suggests that Covid-19 Pandemic have in many cases widened gender-based gap between men and women worldwide. More women, as opposed to men, have experienced employment related difficulties, such as job loss, reduction in wages and unpaid furlough. Furthermore, the closure of schools and day-care centers and rapid shift to online work and education, brought women to their so-called “traditional roles”, where they are supposed to take care of the children and do most of the house labor. As a result, most of the unpaid work, the amount of which increased during the lockdown period, fell on the shoulders of women. Before trying to analyze to what extent the Covid-19 related measures had widened the gender inequality in Kazakhstan, it is useful to recall the situation with gender inequality even before the pandemic. In what follows, I will try to illustrate the main points related with gender inequality in Kazakhstan before the Covid-19 pandemic.

As of 2019, women account for a slightly higher share of total population (Figure 1). Nevertheless, fewer women, around 65% of total women at the age of 15 and above, as opposed to nearly 76% of men population participate in the labor force (Figure 2).

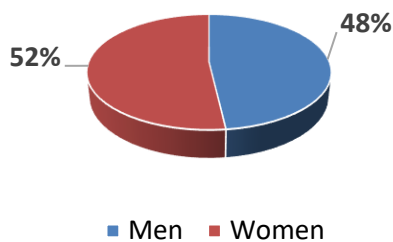


Figure 1: Total Population by gender, 2019
Source: Statistical Agency of Kazakhstan

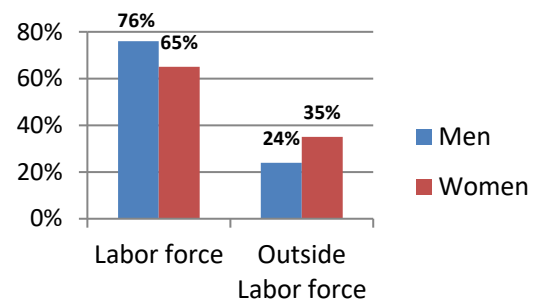


Figure 2: Labor Force participation rate by gender, 2019
Source: Statistical Agency of Kazakhstan



Furthermore, even among the labor force participants, women have historically been facing higher unemployment rate, compared to men, although, during the past two decades, unemployment gap between men and women have decreased substantially, from about 3% in 2001 to around 1% in 2019 (Figure 3).

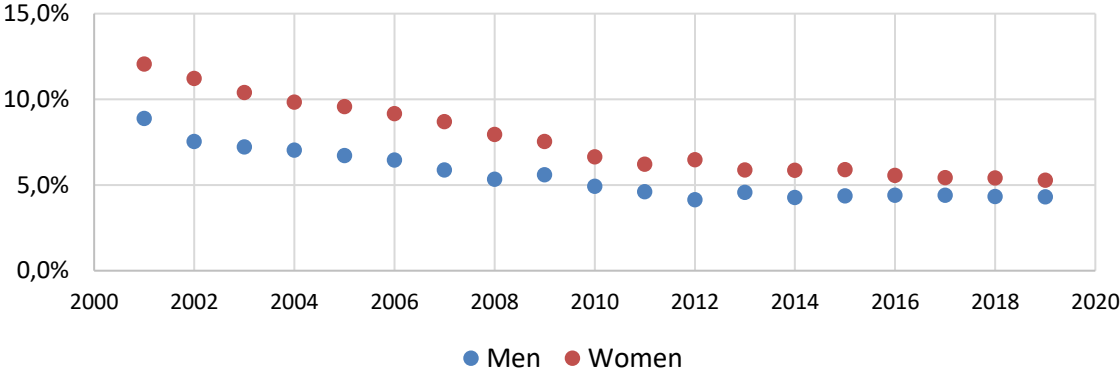


Figure 3: Historical unemployment rate by gender
 Source: Statistical Agency of Kazakhstan

One can also spot a significant wage gap between men and women in the labor market of Kazakhstan. Historically, men have been earning higher salaries compared to women, with gender-based wage gap being slightly above 36% in 2008. This gap has been decreasing since 2008, bottoming to around 30% in 2012. Nevertheless, starting from 2012, the wage gap between men and women have been widening again, reaching to almost 35% in 2018. The situation has improved slightly in 2019, with the wage gap narrowing to a bit over 32% (Figure 4).

When analyzing gender-based inequality in the labor market, both in terms of the gaps in unemployment rate and wage levels, it is important to take into consideration the levels of education of both men and women. Interestingly, women tend to have disadvantageous position in the labor market, in spite of the fact that they are generally better educated, as opposed to men. While approximately 43% of women in the labor force have higher education, this figure is substantially lower for men, with only around 35% of men in the labor force having higher education (Figure 5).

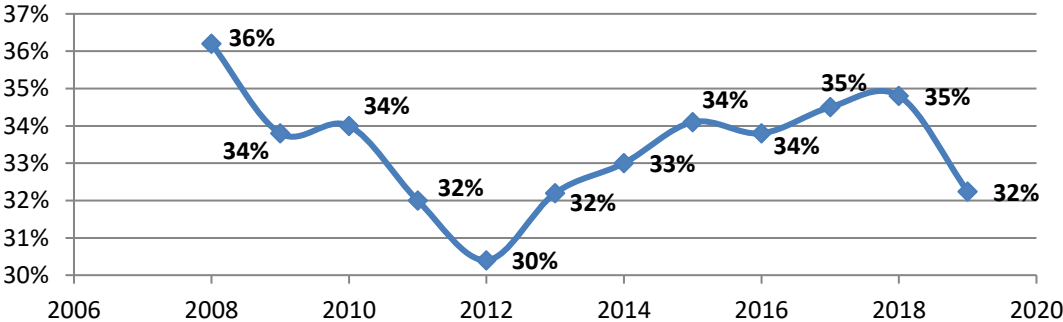


Figure 4: Historical gender based wage gap
 Source: Statistical Agency of Kazakhstan

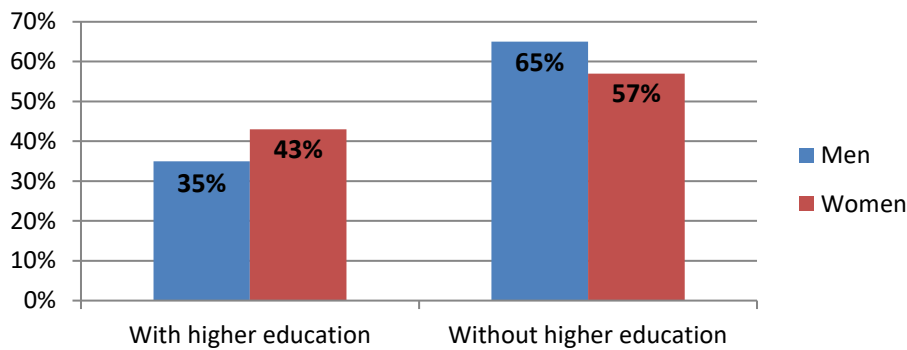


Figure 5: The share of men and women with higher education within the labor force, 2019

Source: Statistical Agency of Kazakhstan

To make an interim summary, available macro level data point out on the existence of gender based inequality in the labor market of Kazakhstan even before the Covid-19 pandemic period, with women illustrating lower labor force participation rate, higher unemployment rate and significantly lower wage level on average, as opposed to men. One of the possible reasons for such inequality in the labor market between men and women, as suggested by the existing literature, might be the overburden of women with unpaid house and care related work. Uneven distribution of both house and care related work between men and women, in favor of the former, forces the latter to spend less time and energy on paid-work and thereby puts them in a priori disadvantageous position in the labor market, compared to men. For instance, as of 2018, among the working population, women spent nearly 18% of their daily time on unpaid house and care related work, as opposed to only about 6% in the case of men (Figure 6). Furthermore, as of 2019, among the unemployed women population, almost 30% reported that their main reason for being unemployed are housework and family related factors. Only 3% of the unemployed men reported the same factors as the main reason of their unemployment (Figure 7). One may therefore conclude that unequal distribution of unpaid work between men and women, including childcare, might be one of the main factors affecting the gender based inequality in the labor market of Kazakhstan.

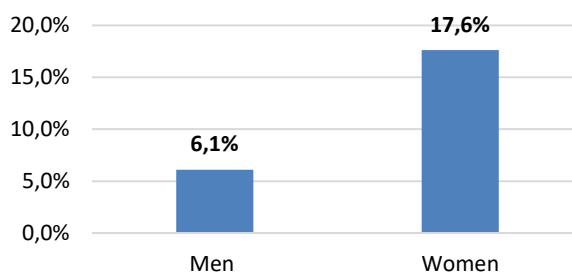


Figure 6: Share of daily time spent on unpaid work, 2018

Source: Statistical Agency of Kazakhstan

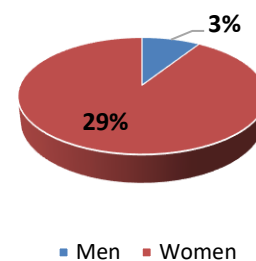


Figure 7: Unemployment due to housework or family (personal) reasons, 2019

Source: Statistical Agency of Kazakhstan

Coming to childcare, almost 60% of all households in Kazakhstan have at least 1 child (Figure 8). Furthermore, more than one-fifth of all households in the country, with children below the age of 18 are single parent households. The bulk share, about 76% of all single parent households are mother-led, as opposed to only around 24% of father-led single parent households (Figure 9). These figures suggest that women do not only do more of an unpaid work, like childcare, compared to men in a

dual-parent household setting, but also that more women as opposed to men live in single-parent households, and therefore have to take all the responsibilities related with childcare on their own shoulders.

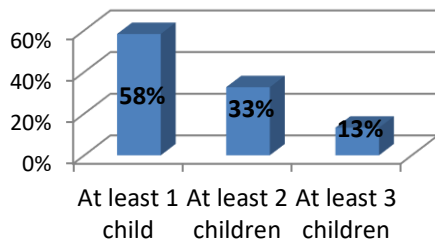


Figure 8: The share of households with children

Source: 2009 National Census

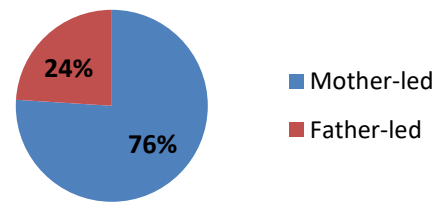


Figure 9: Share of single parent households with children below age of 18

Source: 2009 National Census

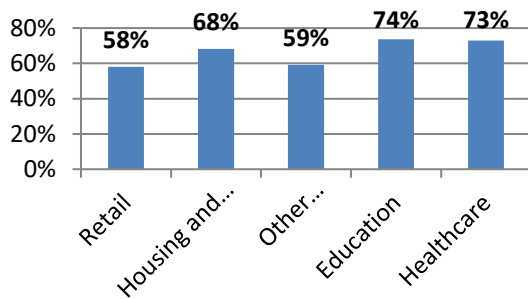


Figure 10: Share of women employers by sectors, 2019

Source: Statistical Agency of Kazakhstan

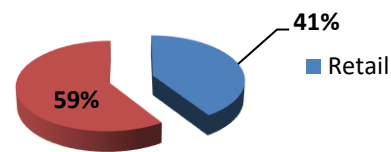


Figure 11: Share of self-employed women by sectors, 2019

Source: Statistical Agency of Kazakhstan

To summarize, even during the pre-pandemic (Covid-19) period, women in Kazakhstan faced higher inequality, compared to men, with relation to both paid and unpaid work. A growing body of literature suggests that Covid-19 pandemic has further widened the gender based inequality in the labor market of many, mainly developed countries. In the case of Kazakhstan, however, a lack of empirical research on the issue does not allow to understand by how much gender-based inequality increased as a result of Covid-19, if such increases at all took place in the country. Nevertheless, at least gender based employment structure of the country suggests that women might have faced higher employment related difficulties, compared to men during the lockdown and subsequent quarantine. After all, one of the hardest hit sectors such as retail (58%), housing and food industry (68%) and other services (59%) were mainly occupied by women during the year preceding the Covid-19 outbreak (Figure 10). Furthermore, among self-employed women, around 41% were involved in retail business (Figure 11), which was also hardly hit by the pandemic, due to major closures in all retail centers around the country. Correspondingly, more women might have faced the risks of job losses or reductions of working hours and wages. Future empirical research should investigate whether and to what extent Covid-19 affected gender inequality in the labor market of Kazakhstan, a country with already high levels of gender inequality even before pandemic, and propose relevant policy recommendations.