



Leadership Behind Closed Doors: The Role of Husbands in Supporting or Hindering Women's Professional Advancement in Uzbekistan

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Abstract: This study examines the impact that husbands have on the careers of women in Uzbekistan. It focuses on the question of whether husbands function as supporters, detractors, or are indifferent to their wives' professional advancement by integrating gender role theory alongside social support theory. Based on a survey of 109 married women from different urban and rural areas of Uzbekistan, especially Khorezm and Tashkent, we assess the influence that emotional support, household chore sharing, and prevailing societal norms regarding femininity and masculinity have on women's employment decisions and career progression. These findings are relevant in guiding policy development with regard to gender issues, particularly about family assistance programs and stimulating female participation in the labor force.

Keywords: Gender roles, career development, spousal support, women in Uzbekistan, work-family conflict, labor division

Introduction

Despite growing female labor force participation in Uzbekistan, many women face barriers to career advancement rooted in family expectations, cultural norms, and spousal



dynamics. The role of husbands is particularly critical, as they can either facilitate or hinder their wives' career development through their attitudes, support, or opposition. More women are taking on leadership roles, which has led to talks about the progress made and the problems that still exist in achieving equal opportunities for men and women in different fields. Women bring special qualities to leadership, like new ideas, teamwork, and understanding others' feelings. Studies show that companies do better when more women are leaders. Teams with both men and women in charge tend to make more money, come up with better ideas, and run the company more responsibly. Businesses led by women often make smarter decisions and can handle changes more easily.

Literature review

Gender Role Theory (Eagly, 1987) suggests that society shapes behavior by assigning different roles to men and women. In many cultures, women are expected to take on most domestic and caregiving duties, even when they also work outside the home. This can create a mismatch between verbal support for women's careers and the actual sharing of household work.

Social Support Theory (Cohen & Wills, 1985) explains that both emotional support (such as encouragement and listening) and instrumental support (such as helping with chores) are important for achieving personal and professional goals. While emotional support can reduce stress, instrumental support directly frees time and energy, making it easier for women to succeed in their careers.

Work–Family Conflict Theory (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985) highlights how family responsibilities can interfere with work, especially when domestic labor is not shared equally. Research by Hochschild and Machung (1989) shows that women often face a “second shift” of unpaid work at home, which can slow their career progress. Allen et al.



(2013) also found that flexible work arrangements can help reduce this conflict, but only if domestic responsibilities are shared more evenly.

3. Descriptive statistics

109 married women aged 18-56 from both urban (Tashkent) and rural (Khorezm) areas. Structured questionnaire using Likert-scale items (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). There are 10 questions about household support from husband to wife. The survey was held in May and July 2025 among only women aged 18 to 56 years old. Tashkent and Khorezm were chosen as the target audience.

4. Results. Table 1 shows that the majority of participants are 26–35 years old (66.1%), indicating that the survey primarily reached individuals in their early to mid-adult years. The second largest group is 18–25 years old (11.9%), followed by 46–55 years old (10.1%) and 56 years old and more (8.3%). The smallest proportion belongs to the 36–45 years old group (3.7%). This suggests a respondent pool dominated by younger and middle-aged adults, with relatively fewer older participants. Table 2 illustrates that respondents are from various fields of work, with the majority working in the public sector (39.4%), followed by housewives and private sector employees.

Table 1 Age

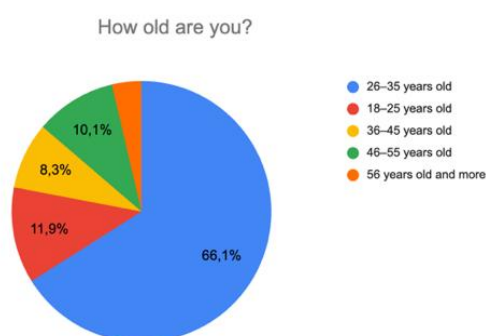
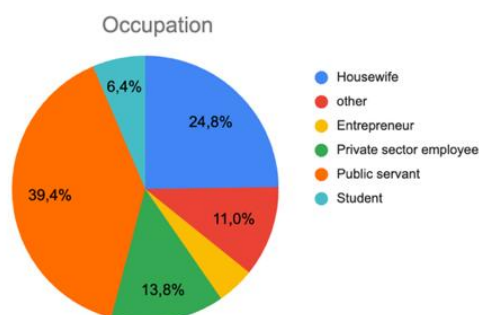


Table 2. Occupation





Question 1 is on a typical working day, how actively does your spouse help with household chores (dusting, floor cleaning, tidying up items, washing dishes, or clearing the table after meals)? Respondents answered on a Likert scale. The data indicates that spousal involvement in household chores is generally low, with the largest share of respondents reporting that their spouse helps only once or twice a week (Table 3). Moreover, Table 4 shows that husbands seldom participate in taking care of the children (getting them ready for school, dressing them, preparing breakfast, monitoring lessons, putting them to bed, feeding them) 1-3 times in a week according to the Question 2.

Table 3. Question 1

Q 1. Spouse's help with household chores on a typical workday

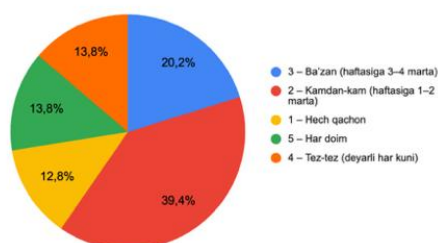
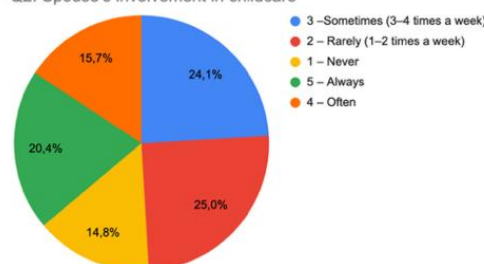


Table 4. Question 2

Q2. Spouse's involvement in childcare



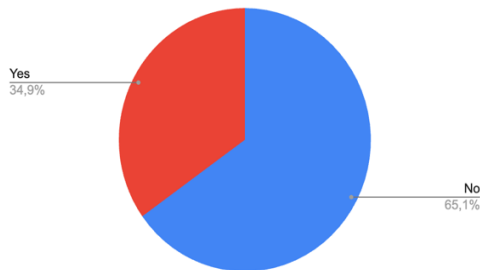
Questions 3 and 4 are about the husband's support for late coming from work and his permission and support for business trips. It can be seen from Tables 5 and 6 that the majority of them have negative results and spouses don't support or understand their spouses, 65% and 55% respectively. These results indicate that for most married women in the sample, after-hours work commitments or business trips are largely unwelcome by their husbands. This trend may highlight underlying sociocultural assumptions regarding the division of gender-specific roles, particularly that of the expectation of domestic duties to take precedence over a woman's career.

Table 5. Question 3

Table 6. Question 4



Q3. Spouse's support for late work/events



Q4. Spouse's attitude toward your business trips

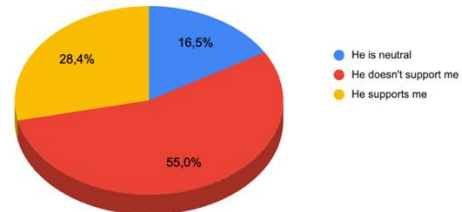


Table 7, Question 5 explored whether respondents could decide how to spend their salary without consulting their spouse. The findings show a clear divide. Around one-third of participants reported having full autonomy over their income, with another portion enjoying partial independence but still engaging in occasional consultation. In contrast, roughly two out of five respondents said they had little or no control over salary spending, needing to seek their spouse's approval. Only a small minority (about 8%) felt neutral on the matter, suggesting that financial decision-making in these marriages is typically characterized by either clear independence or notable restriction.

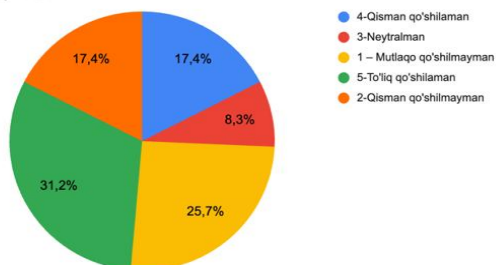
Table 8, Question 6 asks that “ My spouse believes: “*A woman's primary responsibility is to manage the home and children.*””. A large proportion of respondents, 40%, absolutely disagreed with this statement. Otherwise, 21% partially agreed, indicating that their spouses hold somewhat traditional views, while the remaining respondents either fully agreed, were neutral, or expressed uncertainty.

Table 7.Question 5

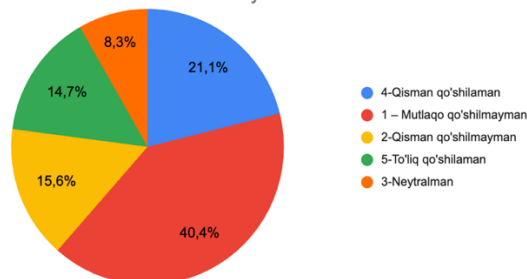
Table 8.Question 6



Q5. "I can decide how to spend my salary without consulting my spouse"



Q6. "Belief: Woman's main duty is home & children"



Interestingly, Table 9 shows strong support for women's career growth, with approximately 70% of respondents agreeing with the statement. Similarly, Table 10 reinforces this finding, as 61% of women reported being encouraged not to refuse a project for family-related reasons.

Table 9.Question 7

Q7. Support for career growth despite less family time

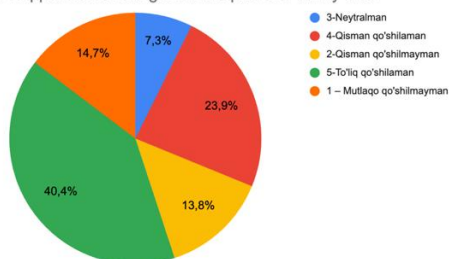


Table 10.Question 8

Q8. Spouse encouraged refusing work/project for family reasons

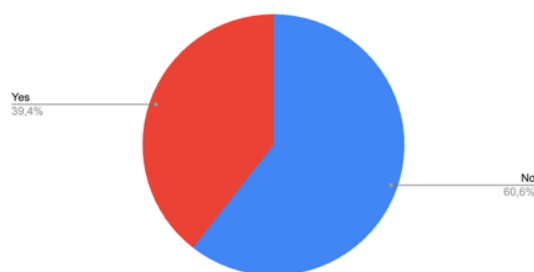
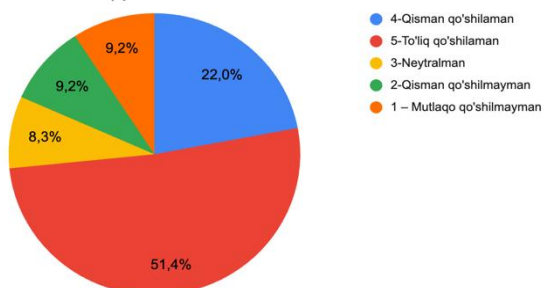


Table 11.Question 9

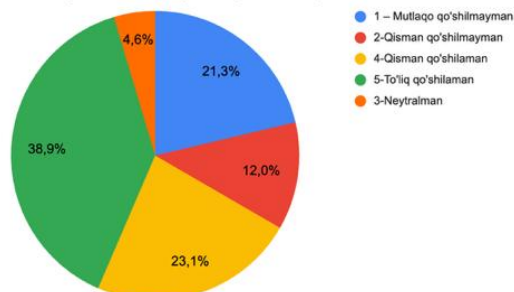
Table 12.Question 10



Q9. My spouse consistently listens to my work-related concerns and supports me.



Q10. Family conflicts negatively affect my work



Lastly, Table 11 indicates that 73% of women are supported and listened to by their husbands regarding work-related conflicts, demonstrating a high level of care and attentiveness toward their wives. Moreover, 62% of respondents acknowledged that family conflicts negatively affect their work, while 33% disagreed with this view.

5. Discussion

The findings reinforce that the husband's role is pivotal in shaping a woman's career trajectory in Uzbekistan. While some men actively support their wives' professional ambitions, others maintain rigid views that limit women's career choices. These dynamics are more pronounced in rural areas where patriarchal values are stronger. However, shifts are visible among younger, urban families where shared responsibilities and mutual support are more common.

6. Policy Implications

The results show that many husbands support their wives' careers in words but give little help with housework and childcare. Policies should encourage couples to share household duties more equally, for example through public campaigns and workplace programs that offer flexible hours and parental leave for both men and women.



Women's right to control their own income should be strengthened, and old ideas that only women should manage the home should be challenged through education and media. Support such as family counseling can also help reduce conflicts that affect women's work.

7. Conclusion

Overall, the survey results reveal a complex picture of spousal attitudes and support toward women's careers. While a significant proportion of husbands provide emotional support—such as listening to work-related concerns (73%) and encouraging women to pursue career opportunities (61–70%)—their practical involvement in domestic responsibilities remains low. Most husbands seldom engage in household chores or childcare, and many show limited support for work commitments that require late hours or travel.

The data also reflects mixed views on gender roles: although 40% of respondents reject the idea that a woman's primary responsibility is home and children, a considerable share (21%) still partially agrees with this traditional perspective. Financial autonomy is similarly divided, with some women enjoying full independence, while others must seek spousal approval for spending.

In summary, the findings point to a supportive attitude toward women's professional growth in principle, but one that is often undermined by persistent traditional expectations around domestic and family roles. This suggests that while gender norms are gradually shifting, cultural and practical barriers to full equality in career–family balance remain significant.

Husbands play a central role in either enabling or limiting women's career growth in Uzbekistan. Cultural norms, domestic labor expectations, and emotional support are key



factors that determine whether women can thrive professionally. A shift towards more egalitarian marital partnerships could be a significant step in enhancing women's economic empowerment in the country.

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Appendix

SURVEY QUESTIONS

Section 1: Personal Details

- **Your age?**
 - 18–25 years
 - 26–35 years
 - 36–45 years
 - 46–55 years
 - Over 56 years
- **Current occupation:**
 - Housewife
 - Civil servant
 - Private sector employee
 - Entrepreneur
 - Student
 - Other
- **Marital status:**
 - Married
 - Divorced

Section 2. Division of Household Roles

1. **Question 1.** On a typical working day, how actively does your spouse help with household chores (dusting, floor cleaning, tidying up items, washing dishes, or clearing the table after meals)?



- 1 – Never
- 2 – Rarely (1–2 times a week)
- 3 – Sometimes (3–4 times a week)
- 4 – Often (almost every day)
- 5 – Always

2. **Question 2.** Does your spouse participate in taking care of the children (getting them ready for school, dressing them, preparing breakfast, monitoring lessons, putting them to bed, feeding them)?

- 1 – Never
- 2 – Rarely (1–2 times a week)
- 3 – Sometimes (3–4 times a week)
- 4 – Often (almost every day)
- 5 – Always

3. **Question 3.** Does your spouse encourage you to stay late at work or attend evening events?

- Yes
- No

4. **Question 4.** If you had the opportunity to go on a business trip, how would your spouse typically respond?

- They encourage me
- They do not want me to go
- They remain neutral

5. **Question 5.** Please share your opinion on this statement: *“I can make decisions independently about how to spend my salary, without consulting my spouse.”*

- 1 – Strongly disagree
- 2 – Somewhat disagree



- 3 – Neutral
- 4 – Somewhat agree
- 5 – Strongly agree

6. Question 6. My spouse believes: *“A woman’s primary responsibility is to manage the home and children.”*

- 1 – Strongly disagree
- 2 – Somewhat disagree
- 3 – Neutral
- 4 – Somewhat agree
- 5 – Strongly agree

7. Question 7. My spouse supports my professional growth, even if it means I spend less time with the family.

- 1 – Strongly disagree
- 2 – Somewhat disagree
- 3 – Neutral
- 4 – Somewhat agree
- 5 – Strongly agree

8. Question 8. Has your spouse ever encouraged you to refuse a work or project offer due to family reasons?

- Yes
- No

9. Question 9. My spouse consistently listens to my work-related concerns and supports me.

- 1 – Strongly disagree
- 2 – Somewhat disagree
- 3 – Neutral



- 4 – Somewhat agree
- 5 – Strongly agree

10. Question 10. Family conflicts (disagreements with my spouse or other family members) negatively affect my focus, productivity, or involvement in work.

- 1 – Strongly disagree
- 2 – Somewhat disagree
- 3 – Neutral
- 4 – Somewhat agree
- 5 – Strongly agree