

# **Msc Thesis**

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MSc THESIS

# **GENDER INEQUALITY IN RURAL AREAS, THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT IN TAJIKISTAN**

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## **List of Abbreviations**

UNDP- United Nations Development Program

GII- Gender Inequality Index

GAD- Gender and Development Approach

UN- United Nations

FPE- Feminist Political Economy

SRT- Social Reproduction Theory

UN SDGs- United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

IPV- Intimate Partner Violence

CCA- Climate Change Adaptation

MHC- Maternal Health Care

ANC- Antenatal care

PNC- Postnatal care

SES- Socioeconomic Status

SDA- Skilled Delivery Attendance

JAICA- Japan International Cooperation Agency

ADB- Asian Development Bank

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background

Tajikistan is a mountainous, landlocked country that borders two other former Soviet republics, the Kyrgyzstan Republic and Uzbekistan, as well as Afghanistan and the People's Republic of China. Its population is 10.0 million (2022 estimate), with three-quarters of the country's residents living in rural areas. According to the 2010 census, 84.3% of the population is of Tajik ethnicity, followed by Uzbek's, who make up 12.2% of the population, and other ethnic groups such as Russians, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmen, numbering less than 1% for each group.

Tajikistan up to date is the poorest among the Central Asian countries and this can be attributed to post independence civil war and natural disasters that have injured its economy causing a lack of employment opportunities and significant migration of men to Russia in search of jobs and better wages. Some women are taking on greater tasks as a result of the male population's increasing emigration. Nonetheless, comparatively conservative ideas about what roles men and women should play in society are impeding their advancement, particularly in rural areas but also elsewhere. Many people think that men should be the primary breadwinners and that women should take care of the family, the home, the children, and the old. As a result, they limit the options for women to work outside the home. Girls and women are being discouraged from going to school, which makes them even less equipped to enter the workforce (Kyrgyzstan et al., 2010)

According to other comparable international indicators, such as the UNDP Gender Inequality Index, since 1995, women in Tajikistan have not been able to realize their full human potential. This is reflected in three dimensions: 1) reproductive health, 2) empowerment (measured by educational attainment and political participation), and 3) labor market participation.

However, one can also notice progress towards gender equality in the country. Today, Tajikistan has seen a decline in maternal mortality rates, an increase in the number of women in parliament, and an increase in the proportion of women with at least secondary education. Due to gender discrimination and existing social norms, the

work of the weaker sex in the country remains unrecognized and undervalued. Rural women are at increased risk of experiencing sexual harassment and other types of gender-based violence starting within the family. To improve the situation, the inequalities between men and women that lead to chronic violence must be eliminated urgently.

Considering these challenges, it is critical to understand the specific dynamics of gender inequality in rural areas, examine the challenges faced by rural women, and identify policies and interventions to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. By understanding the context and complexities of rural gender inequality, we can work to create a more equitable rural society.

### **1.1.1 Objective**

The purpose of my research is a comprehensive analysis of gender inequality in Tajikistan, with a focus on rural areas, specifically in Bustonqala village in Kushoniyon district. The research aims to identify the underlying factors and dynamics shaping gender inequality and develop recommendations to address these inequalities and create a more equitable society.

The research will include analysis of existing data, statistics and scientific publications related to this topic. Based on the information collected, the study will identify key factors contributing to gender inequality in rural areas and propose potential strategies and measures to eliminate inequalities and enhance the role of women in rural development in Tajikistan.

### **1.1.2 Research questions**

The main research questions that my research will seek to answer are, what factors influence gender inequality in rural areas of Tajikistan? What are the sociocultural, educational, and economic aspects that form gender disparities in the region? What is the role of education in shaping gender inequalities in rural areas? What is the level of access to education for men and women, factors limiting educational opportunities, and their impact on gender roles?

What are the economic dimensions of gender inequality in agricultural communities? What is the level of women's participation in the economy, access to resources, their role in agriculture and other economic factors? How do traditional roles and stereotypes affect the situation of women in rural communities in Tajikistan? What policy and social measures can help eliminate gender inequality in rural areas?

These questions are aimed at gaining a deep understanding of the situation and identifying specific aspects that require attention and intervention to eliminate gender inequality in rural areas of Tajikistan, with a focus on the Kushoniyon district of Bustonqala village. The research will help develop recommendations for implementing effective measures, including policies, programs, and educational initiatives to improve the gender situation.

### **1.1.3 Hypothesis**

The persistent gender inequality in rural areas of Tajikistan is significantly influenced by traditional socio-cultural norms and economic structures, which limit women's access to education, economic opportunities, and decision-making roles.

1. Hypothesis on Access to Education: The level of access to education for women in rural areas of Tajikistan is significantly lower than that of men, limiting their opportunities for economic and social development.
2. Hypothesis on Employment: Women in rural areas of Tajikistan face greater gender-based labor segregation and have fewer opportunities to participate in high-paying and prestigious professions compared to men.
3. Hypothesis on Decision-Making Role: Women in rural areas of Tajikistan have limited influence on decision-making in households and community structures, perpetuating gender inequality.
4. Hypothesis on Development Program Impact: The implementation of gender-sensitive development programs in rural areas of Tajikistan leads to improvements in the economic status of women and increases their participation in public life.



5. Hypothesis on Cultural Factors Impact: Cultural and traditional beliefs in rural areas of Tajikistan significantly influence gender inequality, restricting women's opportunities in education and professional endeavors.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Theoretical Frameworks on Gender and Development**

#### **2.1.1 Gender and Development approach**

This is a noteworthy progression from prior frameworks that centered on women's integration into advancement without addressing the fundamental gender disparities. GAD developed within the 1980s, emphasizing the social development of gender roles and relations and how these influence people of all genders. It advocates for transformative improvement techniques that point to promote value and empowerment, challenging and reshaping gender relations for more prominent societal balance and decency.

One basic point of view given by the GAD approach is its formative view on gender, recommending a constructive-ecological point of view. This perspective considers the complex interaction of science, socialization, and cognition in gender advancement, from conception through adulthood. It digs into hormonal impacts, ethical improvement, play, fellowships, encounters at school and work, and psychopathology, giving a comprehensive understanding of gender's part in individual and social development (Liben, 2017).

Additionally, the talk on gender in development has advanced through basic examination of the concepts and categories utilized by advancement institutions, such as the World Bank, and their impact on understanding and tending to gender and control in development settings. The role of women's organizations in affecting worldwide development talk, especially through UN conferences and the resulting Beijing Platform for Action, highlights the key fights over how gender and power are conceptualized and tended to inside development work. This engagement outlines the continuous endeavors to guarantee that gender considerations in development are

significant and trans-formative, addressing not just the symptoms but the root causes of gender inequality (Signe Arnfred, 2023).

The GAD approach speaks to an all-encompassing and nuanced understanding of gender's part in development, calling for mediations that go past shallow incorporation to on a very basic level transform gender relations for impartial results. It gives a hypothetical and viable system for tending to gender disparities, emphasizing the significance of setting, power elements, and the dynamic inclusion of all partners in cultivating gender equality and empowerment.

### **2.1.2 Feminist Political Economy**

Feminist Political Economy (FPE) is a critical perspective that challenges traditional economic theories by highlighting the integral role of gender dynamics in economic processes. This approach scrutinizes how economic policies and practices produce gender-differentiated impacts, often sidelining women's contributions, particularly in terms of unpaid labor such as care-giving and household tasks. FPE argues that these contributions, although crucial to the functioning of economies, are frequently undervalued or ignored in economic policy-making.

One of the foundational ideas within FPE is the Separate Spheres Model, which articulates a belief system known as the separate spheres ideology. This model predicts specific relationships between individuals' endorsement of this ideology and various cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral outcomes. It suggests that societal insistence on separate roles for men and women results in gendered outcomes, with individual and situational variations in the endorsement of this ideology leading to discrimination and policies that exacerbate gender inequality. This conceptualization is aimed at uncovering sources of variation in gender discrimination and support for policies that perpetuate gender inequality (Miller & Borgida, 2016).

Moreover, the measurement of gender as a social determinant of health represents an application of feminist perspectives to epidemiology, recognizing the complex ways in which gender influences health outcomes. This approach calls for a shift from sex-stratified analyses towards more nuanced methods that account for gender's multifaceted impacts, encompassing material, psycho-social, behavioral, and biological factors. The incorporation of intersectionality theory into gender and health

research highlights the interlocking systems of marginalization and privilege, such as racism, classism, and sexism, and their combined effects on health disparities (Miani et al., 2021).

Additionally, economic influences on population health in the United States underscore the interconnectedness of economic policies and health outcomes. Studies leveraging natural experiments have shown how economic insecurities, particularly among low-income and less-educated adults, have direct health consequences, including increased mortality rates and worsening mental health. These findings underscore the potential of social and economic policies, such as early-life interventions, access to quality education, and supportive labor market policies, to improve both economic and health outcomes. Innovative policy approaches, including Universal Basic Income and interventions targeting historically marginalized groups, hold promise for addressing the intertwined challenges of economic insecurity and health disparities (Venkataramani et al., 2020).

### **2.1.3 Social Reproduction Theory**

Social Reproduction Theory (SRT) is a critical framework within Marxist feminism, analyzing how social and economic inequalities are perpetuated through daily life and labor, particularly emphasizing the role of gender in these processes. SRT underscores the significance of unpaid work, mostly undertaken by women, in maintaining and reproducing the labor force essential for capitalist economies. This theory critiques the lack of recognition and valuation of social reproductive work in economic and development policies, advocating for a comprehensive understanding of labor that includes the essential, yet often invisible, work of social reproduction.

The theory has gained momentum in addressing new questions around gender, affect, and the substance of value, particularly post-2008 fiscal crisis, marking a resurgence in Marxist feminism. Central to SRT is the assertion that the sustenance of life and human relationships, recognized or not as labor, is integral to capitalism as a production mode. It places gender and gendered labor at the heart of capitalist production's reproduction, challenging both the historical oversight of these contributions and the ideological superstructures that overlook or marginalize them (Vishmidt & Sutherland, 2020).

Martha E. Giménez's work on SRT emphasizes the necessity of grounding intersectionality within Marxism to overcome categorical problems and address class, gender, and race in a more comprehensive and historically grounded manner. Giménez argues for a robust understanding of Marx, beyond the often-oversimplified caricatures, to appreciate his rich analysis of class, attention to gendered and racialized categories, and critique of capitalist accumulation. This approach reveals the contradictory nature of capitalism, which simultaneously undermines traditional forms of gender inequality while creating new ones that contribute to long-term increased gender inequity (Wendling, 2023).

A decolonial approach to SRT suggests broadening the theory's scope to include epistemology and subjectivism from beyond the West and those dwelling on its margins. It highlights the importance of understanding gendered capitalist social–property–land relations and the dynamic between social production and reproduction. Decolonial social reproduction feminism aims to move beyond Eurocentric labor value understandings, recognizing the affective value of reproductive work and labor that lies outside the Western conceptualization of commodity, labor, and value (Dibavar, 2022).

#### **2.1.4 Intersectionality**

Intersectionality, a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, provides a crucial framework for understanding the interconnectedness of various social identities such as gender, race, class, and sexuality, and how these intersections contribute to unique experiences of oppression or privilege. This approach has significantly influenced discussions on discrimination, allowing for a more nuanced analysis that accounts for the complexity of individual experiences within social structures.

In the context of the geosciences, research highlights the prevalence of sexual and racial harassment, particularly affecting women of color, which undermines their access to research and educational opportunities. Such experiences are exacerbated in environments that lack diversity and inclusivity, where institutional climates tolerate discriminatory behaviors and uphold stereotypes that alienate those who do not fit the normative image of a geoscientist. Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted

approach that includes transforming institutional cultures, implementing effective policies, and empowering individuals through education (Mattheis et al., 2022).

The application of intersectionality in epidemiology has grown in recent years, emphasizing the importance of considering various social determinants of health, including gender, and their compounded effects on health outcomes. Intersectionality theory suggests that the health of individuals cannot be fully understood without considering the multilevel complexity of power relations and the interconnectedness of different social positions. This approach is particularly relevant in analyzing gender-related health inequities, advocating for research and interventions that move beyond gender-sensitive to gender-transformative actions, promoting gender diversity and inclusivity (Miani et al., 2021).

For Indigenous oral health inequities in Australia, intersectionality offers a lens to understand the super-additive impacts of racism and negative life events. The historical context of colonization, policies of assimilation, and institutional racism have cumulatively oppressed Indigenous Australians, contributing to significant health disparities, including oral health. Addressing these inequities requires acknowledging and tackling the structural and interpersonal racism that impedes access to culturally safe and equitable health care (Jamieson et al., 2023).

In applying intersectionality to various fields, understanding, and addressing the overlapping and mutually constitutive nature of different forms of oppression is crucial. Whether it is tackling discrimination in the geosciences, understanding health inequities through epidemiology, or addressing oral health disparities among Indigenous populations, an inter-sectional approach provides a comprehensive framework for recognizing and combating the complex realities of social inequality.

## **2.2 Application of Theoretical Frameworks on Gender and Development**

Theoretical frameworks on gender and development offer insightful perspectives on gender inequality, particularly in developing countries and regions like Central Asia. These frameworks, while varied, commonly emphasize the intersection of gender with

other social categories such as socioeconomic status, race, and ethnicity, impacting individuals' experiences and opportunities.

One significant aspect of gender and development studies is the focus on how sex and gender considerations are integrated into research supporting the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Research shows a need for systematic mainstreaming of a gender perspective across all SDGs to ensure equitable outcomes for both men and women. However, a study reveals that gender dimensions are often missing in SDG-related research, particularly where male authors dominate. This suggests a gender gap in research authorship and content, underscoring the importance of including diverse perspectives to address gender inequality comprehensively (Herbert et al., 2022).

Gender norms, power dynamics, and violence, especially intimate partner violence (IPV), are critical areas within gender and development frameworks. Studies highlight how masculinity ideologies and social norms about violence against women and power inequities in relationships contribute to IPV. Gender inequitable norms, attitudes, and practices at various societal levels are identified as key drivers of IPV perpetration by men. These findings call for targeted interventions and measures to address gender inequitable norms and power dynamics as part of IPV prevention efforts (McCarthy et al., 2018).

The spatial distribution of gender inequality, as explored in a study on global gender inequality, highlights significant disparities in land ownership and asset wealth between male- and female-headed households. This research demonstrates that focusing solely on income might underestimate the extent of gender inequality, as disparities in land ownership and asset wealth are profound. Male-headed households own significantly more land and have more asset wealth than their female counterparts in many countries, with considerable spatial heterogeneity in inequality within and across countries. Such findings stress the importance of addressing different dimensions of poverty and inequality to understand and tackle gender disparities effectively (Fisher & Naidoo, 2016).

These studies collectively illustrate the complex interplay of gender with various social, economic, and cultural factors, emphasizing the need for multidimensional approaches to understand and address gender inequality. The application of

theoretical frameworks on gender and development, particularly in contexts like Central Asia, requires careful consideration of local social structures, norms, and the specific challenges faced by women and marginalized groups.

### **2.3 Gender Inequality in Developing Countries**

The issue of gender inequality in rural settings, especially within the context of developing countries, encompasses various dimensions including access to health care, participation in climate change adaptation (CCA), and socioeconomic disparities. These aspects are deeply influenced by the gender dynamics at the household level, societal norms, and the historical legacies of colonial health systems.

In rural East Africa, gender relations significantly influence decision-making processes related to climate change adaptation (CCA). The inter-dependency between intra-household gender relations and CCA practices has been understudied, pointing to a gap in synthesizing research for policy-making. This oversight is particularly critical as gender roles and decision-making in CCA processes are highly context-dependent, revealing that gender-responsive CCA research and practices need to move beyond mere comparisons of women's and men's perceptions and activities. Instead, they should address the broader socio-political and economic structures that mediate exchanges, opportunities, and the distribution of resources, contributing to specific vulnerabilities and capacities to respond to climate stresses (Niemann et al., 2024).

In Tanzania, the rural-urban divide significantly impacts maternal health care utilization (MHC), rooted in the colonial era's centralized health care system. This historical legacy has led to a disproportionate distribution of health care facilities favoring urban areas, leaving rural areas with inadequate resources. Despite the free accessibility of certain health care services, the utilization rates of antenatal care (ANC) and skilled delivery attendance (SDA) are significantly higher in urban than in rural women. The disparities extend to postnatal care (PNC), which is not freely available, with urban women more likely to use these services than their rural counterparts. These inequalities in health care resources between rural and urban populations underscore the critical role of residential context in influencing socioeconomic status (SES) disparities in MHC utilization (Langa & Bhatta, 2020).

The comparative analysis of gender inequality in rural areas across different regions reveals a complex interplay of historical, economic, and social factors contributing to varied experiences of gender inequality. One study highlights the significant disparities in land ownership and asset wealth between male- and female-headed households globally, illustrating that households headed by males possess on average 13% more asset wealth and astonishingly 303% more land. This disparity not only highlights the extent of gender inequality but also points to the inadequacy of common measures of inequality, such as income, to fully capture the magnitude of gender disparities in rural settings. The research also emphasizes the spatial heterogeneity of gender inequality within and across countries, showing varying degrees of disparity in regions like Western South America, West Africa, and Southeast Asia. This underscores the importance of considering geographical and contextual factors in addressing gender inequality (Fisher & Naidoo, 2016).

Another study examines how gender inequality rankings among countries can dramatically shift depending on the methodology used to adjust for wage gaps. This reveals the challenge in accurately comparing and understanding gender wage inequality across countries, given the variation in labor market characteristics and institutional features. The study indicates that cross-country rankings of gender wage inequality can change significantly, by about ten places towards greater equality or greater inequality, based on whether the methodology accounts for selection into full-time employment. This highlights the nuanced nature of gender wage gaps and the need for a careful selection of analytical methods to obtain a more accurate picture of gender inequality across different settings (Tanska et al., 2020).

In Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), structural transformation has shown mixed implications for the gender pay gap. Despite high economic growth and urbanization, the shift in employment from agriculture to non-tradable services has been linked to larger income inequalities, potentially exacerbating the vulnerability of women. Evidence suggests that while urban labor markets in SSA demonstrate considerable gender pay gaps, comprehensive insights into rural areas and informal self-employment, which form a huge portion of non-farm employment, are lacking. By focusing on Malawi, Nigeria, and Tanzania, the study sheds light on the extent and drivers of the gender pay gap in non-farm wage and self-employment activities. It employs the Kitagawa-Oaxaca-Blinder decomposition methods to differentiate the gender pay gap into



components explained by observable characteristics and those attributable to gender differences in returns to these characteristics. This approach offers insights into how structural transformation and the gender pay gap are interlinked across urban and rural settings (Van Den Broeck et al., 2023).

## **2.4 Areas of Gender Inequality**

### **2.4.1 Impact of Covid-19 on Gender Inequality**

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on labor markets globally, exacerbating existing gender inequalities, particularly affecting women with children. Collins et al. (2020) provides a critical analysis using data from the Current Population Survey to compare the periods before and during the initial wave of the pandemic. Their study reveals that during the early stages of the pandemic, women, especially mothers, were disproportionately affected in terms of labor force participation, unemployment, and reductions in work hours. Key findings include a marked tendency for mothers to exit the labor force or become unemployed at higher rates than fathers. This trend was particularly pronounced among heterosexual married couples where both partners could potentially telecommute; mothers in these scenarios reduced their work hours significantly more than fathers. These patterns suggest that the COVID-19 crisis not only intensified existing gender inequalities but also may have long-term implications for women's employment and professional development (Collins et al., 2021).

Expanding on the labor market effects, the economic implications of these disparities during the COVID-19 pandemic are profound and multifaceted. Hai-Anh H. Dang and C. Nguyen (2020) explore these dimensions by examining the differences in income, expenditure, savings, and job losses between genders during the pandemic. Their research highlights several key economic outcomes: The pandemic led to a significant decrease in income for many, but the impact was notably severe for women. The gender gap in earnings widened as many women, particularly those with care-giving responsibilities, either lost their jobs or had to transition to lower-paying part-time jobs (Dang & Viet Nguyen, 2021).

The economic shock of the pandemic significantly affected savings, with a larger percentage of women reporting a depletion of their savings compared to men. This erosion of financial buffers places women in a precarious financial position, potentially affecting their long-term financial security and resilience. Dang and Nguyen report that job losses were highly gendered, with sectors employing a larger proportion of women being more affected. The hospitality, retail, and service sectors, for example, saw substantial layoffs due to lockdown and reduced consumer spending. Women's over representation in these sectors resulted in higher unemployment rates among women compared to men.

### **2.4.2 Technological Influences on Gender Inequality**

The study by Vlasceanu and Amodio (2022) explores a critical aspect of technology's impact on gender inequality: the propagation of gender bias through internet search algorithms. The authors examine how artificial intelligence (AI), particularly algorithms that govern search engine results and social media feeds, can reflect and reinforce societal biases. They argue that these technologies are not neutral but are instead infused with the gender biases present in the data they are trained on. This can lead to a cyclical effect where biased algorithmic outputs influence user perceptions and behaviors, further entrenching gender stereotypes in society.

Key findings from Vlasceanu and Amodio's study include search algorithms often prioritize content that reflects widespread societal norms and biases, which can disproportionately highlight stereotypical roles and expectations associated with genders. By repeatedly exposing users to biased content, algorithms can reinforce outdated or discriminatory views on gender roles. For example, women may be more frequently associated with domestic roles while men are linked to leadership positions (Vlasceanu & Amodio, n.d.).

Social media, for example, often perpetuates unrealistic standards of beauty and success that can be particularly damaging for women and girls' self-esteem and body image. Additionally, online harassment and gender trolling can discourage women from participating fully in digital spaces. The digital economy offers new job opportunities in tech-driven fields, potentially narrowing the gender gap in STEM professions. However, without targeted educational and policy interventions, there is

a risk that these new economic sectors replicate existing gender inequalities (Vlasceanu & Amodio, n.d.).

### **2.4.3 Gender Inequality in Professional Fields**

The study by Huang et al. (2019) provides a comprehensive historical comparison of gender inequality in scientific careers across various countries and disciplines. By analyzing over 1.5 million gender-identified authors whose publishing careers spanned from 1955 to 2010, Huang and colleagues offer a detailed examination of gender differences in academic productivity and impact. Despite the increasing participation of women in science over the past six decades, the study shows that gender differences in both productivity (number of publications) and impact (citations) have increased. Women and men publish at similar annual rates and achieve comparable impacts per publication, yet women's overall career productivity and impact remain lower (Huang et al., 2020).

The disparities in productivity and impact are largely explained by differences in career lengths and dropout rates between genders. Women are more likely to have shorter academic careers and higher dropout rates, which significantly affects their total productivity and lifetime impact. The study suggests that these differences might be influenced by several factors, including systemic biases within academia, the challenges of balancing professional and personal life (especially pertaining to family responsibilities), and the lack of support for women in STEM fields (Huang et al., 2020).

### **2.4.4 Impact on parenthood**

Research by Kleven, Landais, and Søgaaard (2018) specifically investigates how parenthood impacts gender inequality within the labor market. Their study, using extensive administrative data from Denmark, quantifies the so-called "child penalties" which are the effects of having children on parents' earnings. Key findings include: After the arrival of children, there is a persistent long-run gender gap in earnings, with mothers experiencing a 20% reduction in earnings relative to fathers. This gap is primarily driven by reductions in hours worked, labor participation, and wage rates for mothers. Parenthood significantly affects the occupational, sector, and firm

choices of mothers, which contributes to their reduced income and slower career progression compared to fathers (Kleven et al., n.d.).

Interestingly, the study also finds that these child penalties are transmitted from parents to daughters, suggesting that the gender norms and behaviors influencing gender inequality are deeply entrenched and perpetuated across generations.

#### **2.4.5 Economic perspectives on gender inequality**

Silva and Klasen (2021) delve into the theoretical perspectives concerning how gender inequality poses a barrier to economic growth. Theorists argue that gender inequality reduces the pool of talent available in the labor market by limiting women's participation. This under-utilization of human resources results in lower aggregate productivity and a slower pace of economic growth. Gender inequality often leads to disparities in investment in education and health for women compared to men. This imbalance not only affects women's economic opportunities but also impacts their productivity and ability to contribute to economic growth. Gender biases can lead to policies that do not fully address or even worsen gender disparities, thus failing to harness the full economic potential of a gender-inclusive approach (Santos Silva & Klasen, 2021).

Mitra, Chattopadhyay, and Chatterjee (2022) explore the relationship between tourism development and gender inequality, suggesting that the tourism sector holds unique potential for mitigating gender disparities, especially in lower-income regions. Tourism can foster female entrepreneurship by enabling women to start their own businesses related to tourism, such as lodgings, restaurants, and tour companies. These enterprises can provide women with greater financial independence and decision-making power. Exposure to tourists from diverse backgrounds can also lead to a cultural exchange that challenges traditional gender norms. This interaction can promote more unbiased views and practices within local communities. While tourism can provide substantial benefits, the study also warns that these are not uniformly distributed. In areas where tourism is poorly developed or where economic conditions are harsh, the benefits might not be sufficient to significantly alter the gender inequality landscape (Mitra et al., 2023).

## 2.5 Gender Inequality in Tajikistan

Gender inequality and development in Tajikistan are illuminated from various theoretical perspectives and concepts that enrich the understanding of the dynamics of gender relations in this country. It is important to consider the cultural and traditional aspects of Tajik society, which can significantly influence the formation of gender roles and expectations. An approach based on an understanding of sociocultural stereotypes will make it possible to consider traditional values that affect the lives of men and women. An economic analysis of gender inequality will examine issues of financial independence, access to resources and women's participation in agriculture. This is particularly important in the context of agricultural communities, where levels of economic activity may be associated with gender inequalities. All these theoretical approaches provide rich tools for analyzing gender inequality in the context of Tajikistan's developing society and provide a basis for developing strategies to promote gender equality in rural areas.

Tajikistan, like many other countries, grapples with issues of gender inequality, especially in rural areas. In the rural regions of this country, many aspects of women's and girls' lives are constrained by traditional roles, expectations, and cultural norms. According to the UNDP Human Development reports of 2022, Tajikistan has a Gender Inequality Index of 0.269 placing it on 67<sup>th</sup> position on world rank as of 2022. This indicates a 26.9% decline in accomplishment because of gender disparity. The GII evaluates gender disparities in three important areas: the labor economy, empowerment, and reproductive health (*UNDP Human Development Reports*, 2024). As illustrated in the table below, Tajikistan's GII Index has been on a decline over the last decade. This truly shows that the country is still plagued with gender inequality issues. In 2020, the index was 0.279 compared to 0.291 in the previous year. This can be attributed to the negative impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic which might have increased the gender inequality rates.

**Table 1: Tajikistan Gender Inequality Index**

Tajikistan		GII
Year	Index	Difference
2010	0.369	-
2011	0.364	-0.005
2012	0.356	-0.008
2013	0.348	-0.008
2014	0.347	-0.001
2015	0.339	-0.008
2016	0.306	-0.033
2017	0.283	-0.023
2018	0.287	0.004
2019	0.291	0.004
2020	0.279	-0.012
2021	0.277	-0.002
2022	0.269	-0.008

Source: Own editing based on UNDP Human Development Reports

### **2.5.1 Access to education**

Access to education for girls in rural areas may be limited compared to boys. This could be linked to economic challenges within families, the remoteness of schools, and cultural beliefs that assign less importance to girls' education. In families with both a boy and a girl, the priority often goes to the boy's education, as the family believes it is more important for him to study, while the girl is expected to marry at an early age. Her key role might be limited to domestic crafts at home. In the figure below it is observed that 62.1% of females attain secondary vocational education compared to 37.9% of males but very few attain higher professional, postgraduate and PhD education. There are numerous reasons for the gender disparity in secondary and post-secondary education. Girls were most often absent from school due to the combination of limited financial resources (for uniforms, textbooks, etc.) and social norms that drove families to prioritize their sons' education over their daughters',

according to focus group discussions led by the ADB during its 2016 gender assessment (*Tajikistan-Country-Gender-Assessment*, n.d.).

**Table 2: Academic levels based on Gender**

Academic level	% Female	% Male
Phd	20.4	79.6
Postgraduate	32.3	67.7
Higher professional	36.4	63.6
Secondary vocational	62.1	37.9
Grade 10-11	46.5	53.5
Grade 5-9	48.3	51.7
Grade 1-4	48.5	51.5
Pre-school	44.9	55.1

Source: Own editing based on Tajikistan Country Gender Assessment 2021, World Bank Group and UK Aid.

## 2.5.2 Entrepreneurship and employment

Women in rural areas are often constrained in their ability to engage in entrepreneurship or secure decent employment. It may be more challenging for them to access credit or land resources to develop their businesses. Trends indicate that entrepreneurship is one of the key avenues for millions of women to participate in the economy, improve their quality of life, and achieve a certain degree of financial independence for themselves and their families. However, gender disparities persist in various areas, ranging from access to finance to opportunities for acquiring essential skills. Women often face poverty due to discriminatory social norms that impact their access to decent work and entrepreneurial opportunities. Additionally, these norms affect their access to education, professional training, and medical services in social protection (Maybalieva Garibova & Garibova, 2022).

In the table below, there is a notable decrease in the percentage of women employed in the agriculture, hunting and forestry sector, from 49.5% in 2013 to 41.1% in 2017, while the percentage of men increased from 43.9% to 48.3%. This suggests a

widening gender gap where men are increasingly predominant in this sector. There's a slight decrease in both women and men's employment in the manufacturing and industry sector, but the gap between men and women widened slightly, indicating that this sector is also predominantly male.

In the education sector, there is a significant increase for women from 22.4% to 27.3% and a decrease for men from 16.1% to 14%. This sector shows a strong female presence and is one of the few where women are more predominant. The same can be said of the health and social services sector where women saw a significant increase from 12.2% to 15.4%, and men remained almost constant. This sector is another where women dominate, which is common globally in health and social sectors. Overall, the data reveals that in most sectors in Tajikistan, men tend to dominate the more technical and traditionally male-oriented fields (like construction, manufacturing, and mining), while women are more predominant in sectors typically associated with caregiving and education. The shifts in percentages could reflect slight improvements or deteriorations in gender equality within specific sectors, and the overall trend indicates that while there are areas of progress, significant gender disparities remain in many fields of employment. (*Tajikistan-Country-Gender-Assessment*, n.d.).



**Table 3: Distribution of gender in full-time employment by sector (2013 & 2017)  
as a %**

Sector	Sub-sector	Gender 2013 2017	
EXTRACTIVE MANUFACTURING SECTORS			
	Agriculture, hunting, & forestry	Women 49.5	41.1
		Men 43.9	48.3
	Mining & quarrying	Women 0.3	0.3
		Men 1.8	1.5
	Manufacturing & industry	Women 3.7	3.4
		Men 7.2	5.9
	Electricity, gas, & water supply	Women 0.6	0.5
		Men 2.8	2.2
	Construction	Women 0.4	0.7
		Men 3.7	4.2
SERVICE SECTOR			
	Wholesale & retail trade & repair services	Women 1.3	1.2
		Men 3.1	2.7
	Hotels & restaurants	Women 0.5	0.5
		Men 0.5	0.4
	Public administration & defense	Women 2.4	2.9
		Men 3.7	4.6
	Education	Women 22.4	27.3
		Men 16.1	14
	Health & social services	Women 12.2	15.4
		Men 5.4	5.3

Source: Own editing based on Tajikistan Country Gender Assessment 2021, World Bank Group and UK Aid.

A key issue requiring attention is the lack of formal employment opportunities in rural areas, which is further aggravated by the low level of education of women. Also, unpaid domestic care and work is one of the most important factors influencing women's participation in the labor market. The issue of the need to ensure a balance between work and personal life of women and men is recognized in the Labor Code of Tajikistan (with an emphasis on the characteristics of work in the home and at home), in the National Strategy for Enhancing the Role of Women for 2011-2020 and in the State Strategy for the Development of the Labor Market 2020, the fundamental orientation is still on the traditional idea that the main responsibility for unpaid domestic work lies with women, and even now in such a rapidly developing world, ask the men of Tajikistan they can proudly answer that women's responsibilities are to bear children and do housework .

**Table 4: Number of male and female migrants over the years**

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>ofPercentage of</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>ofPercentage of</b>
<b>Year migrants</b>	<b>number</b>	<b>ofmale</b>	<b>male</b>	<b>female</b>	<b>female</b>
		<b>migrants</b>	<b>migrants</b>	<b>migrants</b>	<b>migrants</b>
2015	551,728	487,137	88.30%	64,591	11.70%
2016	517,308	435,457	84.20%	81,851	15.80%
2017	487,757	419,721	86.10%	68,036	13.90%
2018	484,176	419,664	86.70%	64,512	13.30%
2019	530,883	453,870	85.50%	77,013	14.50%

Source: Own editing based on Asian Development Bank (ADB) Strengthening support for labor migration in Tajikistan; Assessment and recommendations December 2020

From the above table it clearly shows a huge difference in the number of male and female migrants over the years. Although the female migrants have been increasing by a small percentage the numbers still remain low compared to men because labor migration can put women in a contradictory position; although it raises their economic standing, stigma and discrimination against them are far more common than for men.

Women are frequently ostracized and "accused of not fulfilling a 'woman's role' and of leaving children in the care of their grandparents," especially those who travel alone (*Tajikistan-Country-Gender-Assessment*, n.d.).

### **2.5.3 Domestic violence**

Despite the introduction of the Law on The Prevention of Domestic Violence in 2013 to help curb domestic and gender-based violence, its implementation has proven to be challenging. In Tajikistan, almost one-third of marriages end in spousal abuse. In 2017, 24% of women who had ever been married in the prior year reported having experienced emotional, physical, or sexual abuse at least once in their marriage. The most prevalent kind of marital abuse is physical, which is followed by emotional abuse. Married women typically experience abuse from their husbands, but other family members, such as mothers-in-law, can also cause harm to them. Typically, these behaviors include humiliation, isolating them from friends and family, controlling behaviors, and/or encouraging their sons to use violence. Domestic abuse by moms, stepmothers, or siblings is more common among women who have never married (*Tajikistan-Country-Gender-Assessment*, n.d.).

Seventy-five percent of women who are abused by their spouses choose not to report or ask for assistance. Of these, 15% inform someone, while only 10% ask for assistance.<sup>90</sup> Social pressure and attitudes can prevent women from speaking up. In 2017, almost sixty percent of women between the ages of fifteen and forty-nine thought that a husband could get away with beating his wife if she got into an argument with him. Furthermore, a lot of people consider domestic abuse to be a "private matter" in which outsiders have no business becoming involved. Because they are often financially dependent on their spouses and might not be able to support themselves if they were to split, women may also be reluctant to disclose domestic abuse. For the past 12 to 15 years, divorce records have shown an increasing tendency, which may indicate a rise in domestic violence on the one hand and, on the other, the empowerment of women and rejection of mistreatment and domestic assault on the other (*Tajikistan-Country-Gender-Assessment*, n.d.).

## **2.6 Role of Women in Rural Development**

### **2.6.1 Economic contributions: Agricultural roles**

Women's participation in agriculture is a critical component of rural development. Globally, women make up a substantial portion of the agricultural workforce, particularly in developing countries. Women are pivotal in the agricultural labor force, often contributing to both subsistence farming and commercial agriculture. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), women account for about 43% of the agricultural labor force in developing countries (Doss, 2010). Their roles vary widely but commonly include planting and harvesting crops, livestock management, and post-harvest processing. Studies have shown that despite having less access to resources such as land, credit, and high-quality inputs, women achieve a high level of productivity. Quisumbing et al. (2014) found that if women had the same access to productive resources as men, they could increase yields on their farms by 20-30% (Quisumbing et al., 2014). This increase in productivity could raise total agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5-4%, which could, in turn, reduce the number of hungry people in the world by 12-17% (Doss, 2010).

Women's contributions to agriculture extend beyond fieldwork. They play a crucial role in ensuring food security and managing household income. A study by Kabeer (2012) highlighted that women tend to invest a higher proportion of their earnings back into their families and communities than men. Such investments often go towards children's education, health, and nutrition, which have long-term benefits for community development and poverty alleviation. Despite their contributions, women face significant barriers in agriculture. Limited access to land is a major issue, as land ownership typically skews towards men due to traditional inheritance laws and practices. Furthermore, women often have limited access to agricultural training and credit facilities. Agarwal (2003) argues that addressing these inequalities is not only a matter of social justice but also of economic efficiency. Programs that focus on women empowerment, such as micro finance, education, and legal reforms regarding land ownership, are critical (Agarwal, 2003). The World Bank (2012) underscores the importance of incorporating gender perspectives into agricultural policies to harness the full potential of the agricultural sector (Gender Equality and Development, n.d.).

## **2.6.2 Women roles in rural entrepreneurship**

Rural entrepreneurship by women is a significant area of interest as it not only contributes to economic development but also promotes gender equality and empowerment in rural regions. Women entrepreneurs in rural areas are often at the forefront of innovation, creating businesses that range from agricultural enterprises to artisan and tourism-related activities. Huda, Akter, and Safder (2023) illustrate how platforms like Ekshop in Bangladesh enable rural women to access broader markets through technology, thus promoting women's entrepreneurship and empowerment in rural areas (Sadrul Huda et al., 2023). The research by Nulleshi and Kalonaityte (2022) explores the motives of women who join family businesses in rural Sweden, thereby challenging the demographic trend of rural depopulation. Their findings emphasize that women view participation in family enterprises positively, aligning with their needs for professional flexibility, rewarding relationships, and a balanced lifestyle. The study underscores the importance of non-material benefits such as work-life balance and social support, which are significant motivators for women engaging in rural family businesses (Gashi Nulleshi & Kalonaityte, 2023).

In the study conducted by Niazi, Salehi, and Taj (2022), the role of rural women's entrepreneurship in the development of food tourism in Guilan province, Iran, is analyzed. This research highlights how women entrepreneurs have become pivotal in transforming the food tourism sector by leveraging local culinary traditions to create sustainable tourist attractions. The study illustrates the significant relationship between the individual characteristics of rural women entrepreneurs and the development of food tourism (Niazi et al., 2023). Ahl et al. (2023) discuss how rural women entrepreneurs contribute to rural development in Sweden and analyze the implications for entrepreneurship policy. Their findings reveal that women entrepreneurs are deeply embedded in family and local social structures, and their contributions are crucial for rural viability. The study suggests that more inclusive policies are needed to support women-owned businesses, emphasizing the importance of integrating entrepreneurship with rural development policies (Ahl et al., 2023).

Despite their critical contributions, rural women entrepreneurs face several obstacles. Semkunde et al. (2021) discuss how women groups in rural Tanzania navigate barriers such as limited access to land, financial resources, and business networks.

These groups facilitate women engagement in entrepreneurship by providing access to business services and training, highlighting the importance of community-based strategies in overcoming these challenges. The development of rural women entrepreneurship is crucial for sustainable rural livelihoods. Mashapure et al. (2023) emphasize the need for supportive government schemes and access to entrepreneurship education to sustain women entrepreneurial activities in Zimbabwe. Effective policies should address financial inclusion, educational opportunities, and infrastructural development to support rural women entrepreneurs. Rural women entrepreneurs are key drivers of economic and social change in their communities. However, they require more targeted support to overcome the systemic barriers they face. Enhancing their access to financial services, markets, and education can lead to more sustainable development and a more inclusive economic growth (Mashapure et al., 2023).

### **2.6.3 Environmental Management**

Environmental management in rural areas significantly depends on the active participation of local communities, especially women, who often play crucial roles due to their direct interaction with natural resources. Studies have highlighted the integral role that women play in environmental management in both urban and rural settings. Nasreen (2019) explores how rural women in Lahore district contribute to managing environmental pollution. Despite facing significant challenges like load shedding which affects their ability to use electric pumps, these women are pivotal in water, food, and waste management. The study underscores the need for targeted awareness campaigns to improve environmental management practices in rural areas (Nasreen et al., 2019). The role of rural women in Myanmar as environmental custodians is detailed by Aye (2018), who notes that from a young age, girls are taught to manage resources sustainably, which includes the efficient use of firewood, safe water collection, and the use of indigenous plants for medicine. This cultural practice of environmental stewardship is crucial for resource conservation and minimizing waste through reuse and recycling strategies (Aye, 2018).

Hassan and Elsehry (2022) address the knowledge, practices, and beliefs of rural women in El Gharbia Governorate about household solid waste management. Their findings reveal a significant gap in knowledge and practices regarding effective waste

management, despite the positive beliefs about its importance. This gap highlights the critical need for educational programs to enhance rural women's practices and knowledge about environmental sustainability (Abdelwahab et al., 2022). In Vhembe District, South Africa, Nyahunda and Tirivangasi (2022) document the adaptation strategies employed by rural women facing climate change impacts. Women utilize indigenous knowledge systems, social capital, and diversify livelihood strategies to combat the adverse effects of climate change. The study highlighted the resilience of rural women and the importance of their involvement in crafting effective local responses to global environmental changes (Nyahunda & Tirivangasi, 2022). Supporting rural women through education, proper infrastructure, and inclusive policy-making is essential for sustainable environmental management.

#### **2.6.4 Policy and Institutional Frameworks**

Effective policies and institutional frameworks are essential for supporting women roles in rural development. A critical aspect of supporting women in rural development involves integrating a gender perspective into educational and institutional policies. Heemann, Carvalho, and Oliveira (2022) discuss the strategic use of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) to educate about gender inequalities and women empowerment. The study emphasizes that educational institutions play a pivotal role in promoting gender equality through targeted educational strategies and policies. The integration of gender analysis in climate change adaptation policies is crucial for ensuring sustainable livelihoods. Nagasha, Ocaido, and Kaase-Bwanga (2019) provide a framework for gender analysis in Uganda, highlighting how gender-specific responses to climate change can enhance adaptation strategies in rural areas. This approach underscores the necessity of involving women in the planning and implementation phases of climate change policies to ensure effectiveness and sustainability (Judith et al., 2019).

The study by Ryumkin and Ryumkina (2023) analyzes the institutional environment of sustainable rural development in the Siberian Federal District, emphasizing the roles of regulations and institutions in shaping sustainable practices. The research suggests that the sustainability and prosperity of rural areas depend significantly on how institutional environments are structured, highlighting the importance of governance and policy in fostering rural development. Addressing gender challenges

within rural development policy is critical for effective use of women human capital (Ryumkin & Ryumkina, 2023).

Kutsmus and Kovalchuk (2020) discuss the necessity of forming gender-sensitive rural development policies that consider the socioeconomic impacts of gender inequality in rural areas. Their study highlights the importance of transforming rural development policy from gender-neutral to gender-sensitive, focusing on inclusivity and social cohesion (Kutsmus & Kovalchuk, 2020).

The synergy between local and international bodies often leads to more comprehensive support systems for rural women. Partnerships are essential for combining local knowledge with international resources and expertise, thereby fostering environments that support women comprehensive development and participation in rural economies.

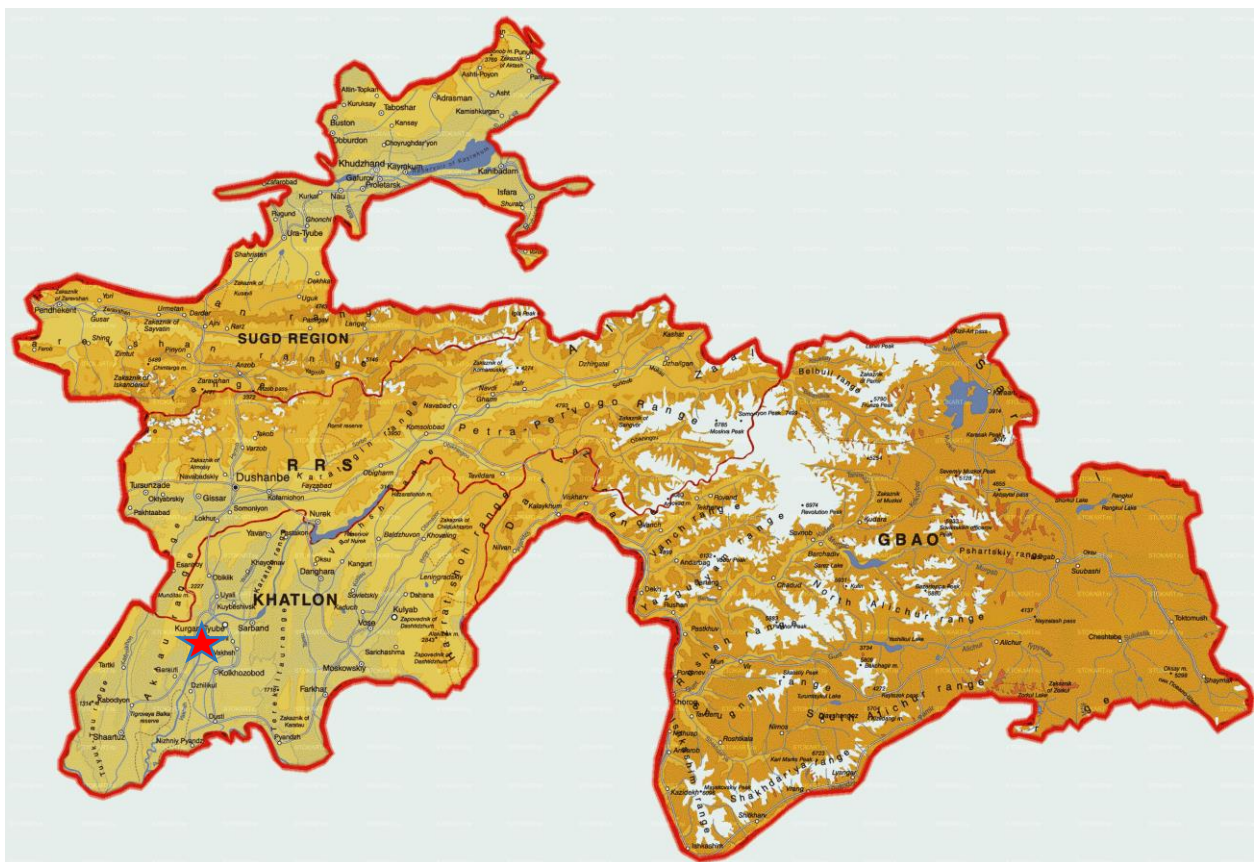


### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Study Area

Bustonqala, a rural jamoat was chosen as the primary area for research. It is in the district of Kushoniyon in the region of Khatlon. It has a population of 4,900 people according to a 2020 estimate. The main economic activity is primarily agriculture. According to World Bank statistics 72% of Tajikistan's population lives in the rural areas as of 2022. From the literature review it is evident that gender equality is highly prevalent especially in rural areas where cultural norms and other gender disparities affect women quite negatively impeding their progress. Therefore, this area will provide an overview of the different gender inequalities that rural women face, and the data acquired could be used as a representation of the situation in majority of the rural areas.

**Figure 1: Map of Tajikistan showing Bustonqala**



Source: <http://www.stokart.ru/index/tajikistan/>

### **3.2 Data Collection**

Within the scope of this study, a general overview of the Republic of Tajikistan (primarily rural regions) was conducted, focusing on one settlement in Bustonqala village, Khatlon region. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure representation of different demographic groups, including age, gender, socioeconomic status and geographic location in rural Tajikistan. This approach allowed for the inclusion of a wide range of views and experiences relevant to the research objectives.

A total of twelve interviewees were interviewed using an interview form with semi-structured questions (three with men, nine with women). Interviews with urban residents (three out of the total twelve interviewees) were also included for comparison. The interviews conducted for this study were structured to gain a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of gender inequality and the role of women in rural development in Tajikistan. The methodological approach aimed to capture a wide range of participants' perspectives and experiences, providing a nuanced understanding of the subject matter.

The questionnaire was divided into 8 sections:

Section 1: Demographics- age, gender, marital status, level of education, employment status and primary occupation

Section 2: Household dynamics and decision making- Areas of decision-making influence (e.g., finances, children's education, health care) and Perception of women's vs. men's decision-making authority in the community

Section 3: Access to resources and opportunities- access to financial resources, ownership or access to land/property, opportunities for professional development and education, barriers to accessing education and employment

Section 4: Cultural practices and gender norms- influence of cultural practices on gender roles, existence of gender-specific restrictions or expectations, impact of cultural norms on personal freedoms and opportunities

Section 5: Health and well-being- access to health-care services, gender-specific health services availability

Section 6: Awareness and impact of supportive programs- awareness of government or NGO programs for gender equality or women's empowerment, participation in or impact of these program

Section 7: Experiences and perceptions of gender inequality- personal experiences of gender inequality, areas where gender inequality is most observed (e.g., employment, education, health care), perceived changes in gender inequality over time

Section 8: Open-ended questions- What are the biggest challenges facing women in your community? Can you share a personal experience or observation of gender inequality? What actions do you believe could significantly improve gender equality in your area?

Ethical principles were strictly adhered to throughout the interview process, including informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality and respect for participant autonomy and cultural sensitivity. Any identifiable information was anonymized to protect participants' privacy and confidentiality.

### **3.3 Interview Analysis**

The responses of the interviewees were systematically reviewed and interpreted to draw conclusions and identification of common themes and patterns . The official Tajikistan statistics were also used for comparison. Excel was used to make visual charts.

### **3.4 Limitations**

The interviews were conducted with a limited number of participants, which may not fully reflect the diversity of perspectives and experiences of all women in rural Tajikistan. However, having lived in Tajikistan all my life and having 15 years of experience in economics and finance, I have encountered these types of problems at a significant level in all regions of the country.

During the interviews it was constantly felt that the participant was afraid to answer and constantly asked "this will not affect my family or concern my husband? He might misunderstand me". Because of this, it may be that we were unable to gain more in-depth information about the state of women's lives in rural areas. As a researcher, I tried to minimize my influence on participants' responses, however subjective perceptions and biases may have influenced the interpretation of the data.

## **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **4.1 Socio-analysis of the status of women**

Analysis of the interviews conducted for this study revealed a multifaceted understanding of the dynamics of gender inequality and the role of women in rural development in Tajikistan. Through systematic examination of participant responses, several key themes and patterns emerged, providing a more detailed understanding of the research topic.

#### **4.1.1 Socio-demographic statistics**

According to the table below, majority of the respondents are female comprising 75% of the total respondents which aligns well with the focus of my study on gender inequality and women's roles. This allows for a rich analysis of women's experiences, perceptions, and roles in rural development. The male participants account for 25% of the total respondents although in a smaller proportion, are crucial for understanding gender dynamics and comparing perspectives on gender inequality. This can help identify areas where gender roles and perceptions differ significantly between men and women.

In the category of marital status, 88.89% of females and 100% of males are married. This high marriage rate among both genders, but especially the complete rate among males, might reflect societal expectations or norms around marriage. For women, being married might influence their roles in rural development, possibly limiting their participation in public life or employment outside the home. 11.11% of females are divorced, and 0% of males are divorced. This suggests a gender disparity in post-marriage outcomes, which could impact women's economic status and social stigma, affecting their empowerment and roles in community development.

According to education level by gender, a significant proportion of females have only primary (22.22%) or secondary education (44.44%). This indicates limited access to higher education for women, which can hinder their opportunities for employment in skilled labor and positions of influence within rural development. While 33.33% of females have tertiary education, all males in the sample have tertiary education. This

stark contrast underscores a gender gap in higher education attainment, potentially reflecting broader systemic barriers that prevent women from accessing or completing higher education.

Most females (66.67%) are employed, which is positive; however, when compared to the employment status of males, where 33.33% are employed and 66.67% are self-employed, it suggests that men may have more autonomy or access to entrepreneurial opportunities. The unemployment rate among females (22.22%) and the absence of self-employment suggests economic vulnerabilities and limited access to entrepreneurial ventures, which are crucial for economic independence and could contribute significantly to rural economies.

**Table 5: Socio-demographic statistics of the interview respondents**

<b>Gender</b>		<b>Percentage %</b>		
Female	9	75.0%		
Male	3	25.0%		
Total	12	100.0%		
<b>Marital status</b>		<b>Percentage %</b>		
Single	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Married	8	88.9%	3	100.0%
Divorced	1	11.1%	0	0.0%
Total	9	100.0%	3	100.0%
<b>Education level</b>		<b>Percentage %</b>		
None	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Primary	2	22.2%	0	0.0%
Secondary	4	44.4%	0	0.0%
Tertiary	3	33.3%	3	100.0%
Total	9	100.0%	3	100.0%
<b>Employment status</b>		<b>Percentage %</b>		
Unemployed	2	22.2%	0	0.0%
Employed	6	66.7%	1	33.3%
Self-employed	0	0.0%	2	66.7%
Retired	1	11.1%	0	0.0%
Total	9	100.0%	3	100.0%
<b>Place of residence</b>		<b>Percentage %</b>		
Rural	6	66.7%	3	100.0%
Urban	3	33.3%	0	0.0%

Total	9	100.00%	3	100.00%
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Source: Own editing based on own analysis

### **4.1.2 Dynamics of household decision-making**

Participants discussed various aspects of household decision-making, emphasizing the prevalence of both primary and joint decision-making roles within households. While some participants described a collaborative approach to decision-making, others and in most cases noted instances where women forcibly assumed secondary roles or had limited influence in decision-making processes, especially in matters related to finances (major household expenses), enrolling daughters in higher education to continue their studies, choosing grooms for daughters (as in most cases fathers try to choose a groom for their daughters), or choosing a profession and being more financially self-sufficient. It was also said by female interviewees that "Almost all men in the country believe that the main duty of women is to take care of all family members and housekeeping", that women in the family and in the society do not have enough influence due to old stereotypes, they are far behind men in the field of special education or financially stable position in all spheres.

### **4.1.3 Violent and early marriages**

Also in the country, forced and early marriages are a serious problem, and these phenomena are often linked to social, economic and cultural factors. The growth of early marriages has increased dramatically since the civil war in 1992-1995, when parents married off their daughters to protect them from rape and to preserve the "reputation" of the family, in addition, parents try to arrange early marriages because they fear for the future of their daughters, and traditional values and customs play a significant role in Tajik society. In some cases, parents force their children into marriage at an early age, often without their consent, under pressure from society or the family, and the economic vulnerability of families is also a strong influence, with parents seeing it as a way to alleviate financial difficulties or strengthen their social ties.

In Tajikistan, domestic violence is a widespread problem because of the persistence of traditional patriarchal values and the lack of state intervention in family affairs. Most



women in Tajikistan face violence from close relatives or their husbands. This violence can be physical, psychological or sexual and is a serious problem for women in the country.

Domestic violence is often justified in Tajik society: 62.4 per cent of women in Tajikistan justify beating a wife if she left without informing her husband; 68 per cent if she argues with her husband; 47.9 per cent if she refuses to have sex with her husband. (According to UNICEF).

In Tajikistan, polygamy is officially prohibited by law, with offenders facing fines or up to 2 years in prison. But cases of polygamy are practically never heard in the country's courts. However, Sharia law allows a faithful Muslim to have four wives, meaning that a married man's second and subsequent marriages are not registered, but a "Nikah" is concluded.

As the influence of religion in Tajikistan has increased significantly in recent years, the number of men with multiple wives is also increasing. Society believes that polygamy saves thousands of Tajik women left alone by the civil war and the mass labor migration of young men, but most women cannot accept this fact, which leads to many family problems, including murder.

For example, during the interviews when this issue was raised, all the women were negative about it, but at the same time and several times they asked that their names not be published anywhere and that their husbands not hear about what they say, women, as a rule, hide the status of the second wife, covering their polygamous husbands in the hope of monetary help from their side.

From my personal experience (as I have lived among my own people all my life) I can say that mostly women tolerate their husbands' polygamy only for lack of financial stability and education. Also most of the women themselves during the interviews emphasized that if they themselves do not have sufficient education, if they have lived their whole life under the pressure and desire of their parents' family and after early marriage continue to live under the pressure and control of their husbands and their family members, how can they give quality education to their children. Yes, a Muslim man is allowed to have four wives - but there are many factors, one of which is

"obtaining the consent of the first wife" which men must strictly observe, but for some reason they forget this.

According to a 2010 sociological survey, every eighth Tajik man has a family on the side. And it is not only second wives, but also third and fourth wives. In general, cases of polygamy become known after the women themselves have contacted the authorities. But it does not belong to the category of grave offenses and as a rule does not involve imprisonment, and everything is limited to punitive sanctions.

#### **4.1.4 Education and employment**

Participants also expressed concern about the lack of professional development and educational opportunities, citing obstacles such as financial instability in the family, lack of voice in the family, limited access to educational institutions and discriminatory hiring practices. Lack of equal opportunities and challenges to equal access for girls and women to all types of education levels are key factors. At least 9.1 per cent of boys and about 16 per cent of girls are lost each year in the education chain between the end of grade 9 and the transition to primary vocational education. Which becomes the initial barrier to vocational education and involvement in the labor market. There is also a growing number of girls who leave school prematurely, not only for economic reasons, but also because of early marriage.

#### **4.1.5 Access to resources and opportunities**

Interviews shed light on the challenges women face in accessing financial resources, with participants noting moderate to difficult access to banking services and credit opportunities. Moreover, discussions about property rights and land tenure revealed inequalities in access, with some women reporting partial or limited property rights.

#### **4.1.6 Cultural traditions and gender norms**

Cultural norms and practices have become influential factors shaping gender roles and inequalities in rural Tajikistan. Participants emphasized the strong influence of cultural traditions on gender roles, with traditional expectations often reinforcing gender inequality. Moreover, perceptions of gender constraints or expectations varied

among participants, with some recognizing their existence and others denying their existence.

#### **4.1.7 Health and well-being**

Discussions on access to health services revealed varying levels of ease of access to health facilities, with participants indicating medium or difficult access. Gender-specific factors such as maternal and reproductive health were identified as areas requiring particular attention. In addition, participants expressed concern about the inadequacy of health services and disparities in access based on gender.

#### **4.1.8 Awareness and impact of support programmers**

Basically, all participants expressed negative awareness of government and NGO programmers aimed at promoting gender equality and women's empowerment regarding their effectiveness in addressing gender inequality.

Overall, analyzing the interview data provided valuable information on the complexities of gender inequality and women's empowerment in rural Tajikistan. By exploring participants' perspectives across thematic areas, this analysis contributes to a deeper understanding of the socio-cultural, economic and institutional factors shaping gender dynamics in the region.

#### **4.1.9 Examples and quotes**

##### **1. Dynamics of household decision-making:**

*Participant A* - "In our household, decisions about monthly expenses such as buying food or daily expenses for the children are usually made jointly by me and my husband. However, when it comes to managing finances and budgeting, my husband takes the initiative."

*Participant D* - "I feel like my opinion is often ignored when it comes to important decisions regarding our family. My husband tends to make decisions unilaterally, especially when it comes to financial matters."

##### **2. Access to resources and opportunities:**

*Participant G* - "Accessing banking services and getting credit is quite a challenge for women in our community. Banks often require collateral that many women do not have, which makes it difficult for us to get loans to invest in agriculture."

*Participant J* - "By law I inherited part of our family's land, but my property rights are limited compared to my brothers and they tell me that since I am married, I have no right to claim anything".

### 3. Cultural practices and gender norms:

*Participant E* - "Our society has strict gender norms that dictate the role of women as carers and homemakers. Despite some progress in recent years, traditional expectations still prevail, reinforcing gender inequality."

*Participant L* - "I have never felt constrained by gender norms in my community. Both men and women have equal opportunities here and everyone's contribution is valued regardless of gender. It's just that both men and women need to know their places."

### 4. Health and well-being:

*Participant K* - "Access to health services is difficult, especially for women living in remote areas. We often have to travel long distances to reach the nearest health facility, which can be difficult, especially during emergencies."

*Participant G* - "Women in our community are not sufficiently aware of reproductive health services. Many women do not receive adequate antenatal care or family planning services due to limited access and knowledge."

### 5. Awareness and impact of support programmes:

*Participant I* - "I seem to be studying and currently working in my neighborhood, but honestly I haven't heard of any active NGOs working in the area of gender inequality. Maybe they exist and I'm the only one who doesn't know."

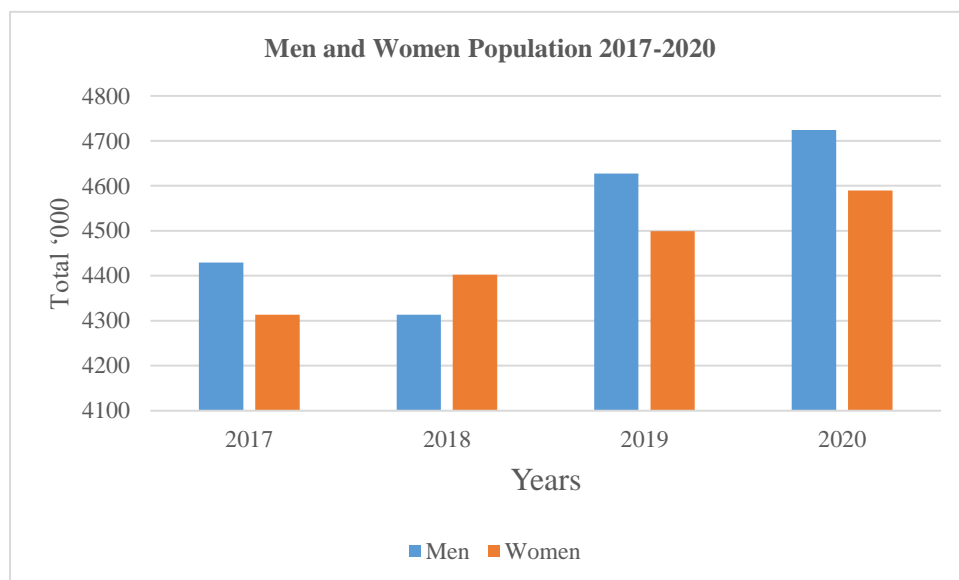
*Participant F* - "Although I have heard of government initiatives to promote gender equality, I have not seen much impact on the ground. Many women in our community are not aware of these programmes and their effectiveness is questionable."

These examples and quotes give an insight into the diverse experiences and perspectives of participants regarding gender dynamics and women's empowerment in rural Tajikistan. They highlight the challenges women face in accessing resources and opportunities, meeting cultural norms and accessing health services.

## 4.2 General statistics

### 4.2.1 Population

This section contains the official statistics from the Government of The Republic of Tajikistan to provide a general overview of the country.

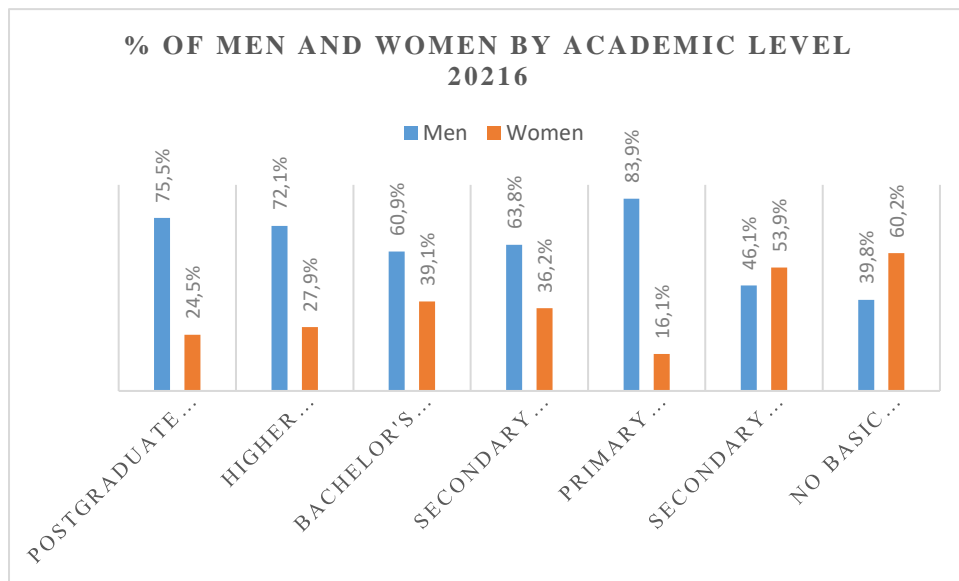


**Figure 2: Population of men and women ('000s) in Tajikistan 2017-2020**

Source: Own editing based on TAJSTAT 2020

From the figure above it is noticeable that the population of both genders has been steadily increasing over time, moreover, the male population has remained high over that of female over the years and this can be attributed to the higher birth rate of boys. Tajikistan has a total population of 9.5 million people according to World Bank statistics 2022.

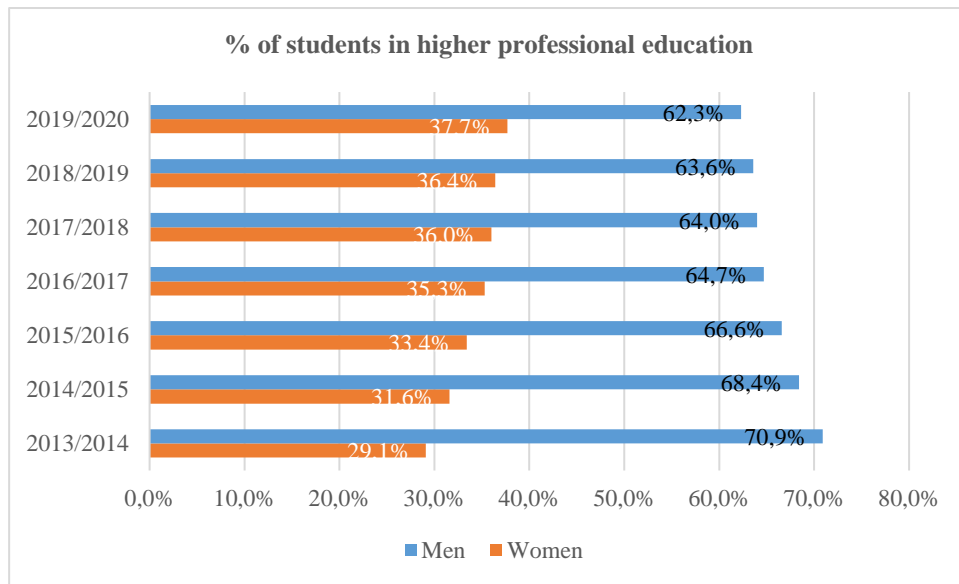
## 4.2.2 Education statistics



**Figure 3: Percentage of men and women by academic level 2016**

Source: Own editing based on TAJSTAT 2020

The above figure displays the distribution of the population aged 15-75 years by sex and education level. 75.5% of men and 24.5% of women have postgraduate level of education (postgraduate studies, ad-juncture, residency, doctoral studies). 72.1% of men and 27.9% of women have higher professional education (higher - specialist, magistracy). 60.9% of men and 39.1% of women have a bachelor's degree. 63.8% of men and 36.2% of women have secondary vocational education. 83.9% of men and 16.1% of women have primary vocational education. 46.1% of men and 53.9% of women have general secondary education. 39.8% of men and 60.2% of women have no basic secondary education. The data suggests a huge disparity between the sexes in different education levels. For instance, a significantly higher percentage of men than women have postgraduate and primary vocational education. Conversely, a higher percentage of women than men have complete secondary education and there are more women without basic secondary education. This shows that women are quite disadvantaged in terms of getting postgraduate education maybe due to cultural expectations that women should be housewives. The high number of women without basic secondary education is quite alarming and clearly portrays gender inequality.



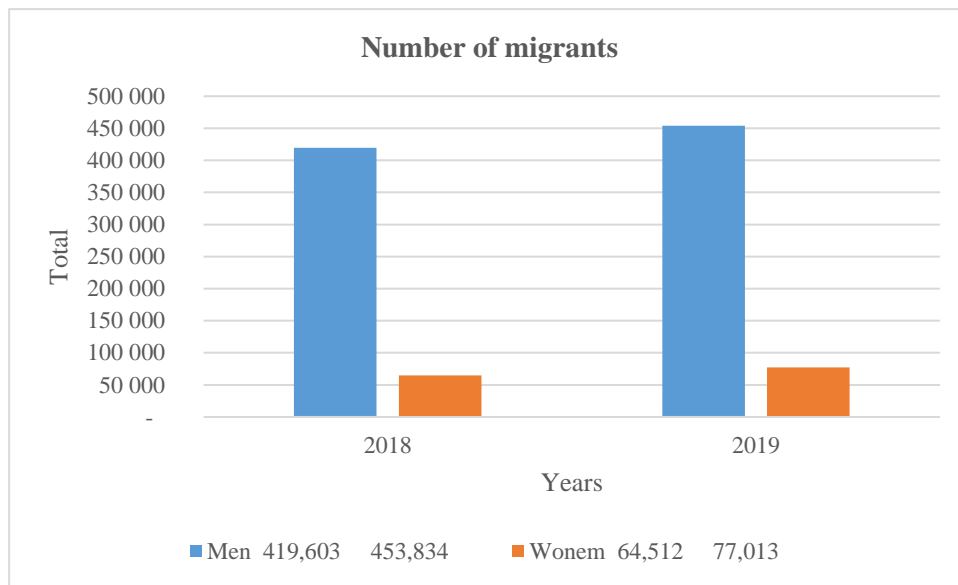
**Figure 4: Distribution of students in higher professional education 2013/2014-2019/2020**

Source: Own editing based on TAJSTAT 2020

The percentage of men enrolled in higher professional education has been decreasing over the observed years. It started at 70.9% in the academic year 2013/2014 and dropped steadily each year, reaching 62.3% by 2019/2020. Conversely, the percentage of women has been increasing. It began at 29.1% in the academic year 2013/2014 and increased each year, reaching 37.7% by 2019/2020. The data indicates a trend toward a more balanced gender distribution in higher professional education over the years.

While the number of men as a percentage of the total is decreasing, the number of women is increasing, suggesting that higher professional education is becoming more gender-inclusive, or that more women are choosing to pursue such education over time. The trend might reflect societal changes such as the encouragement of gender diversity in higher education and professional fields. It might also suggest that fields that traditionally attracted more men are seeing increased interest from women.

### 4.2.3 Employment Statistics



**Figure 5: Number of people leaving Tajikistan in search of a job in other countries**

Source: Own editing based on TAJSTAT 2020

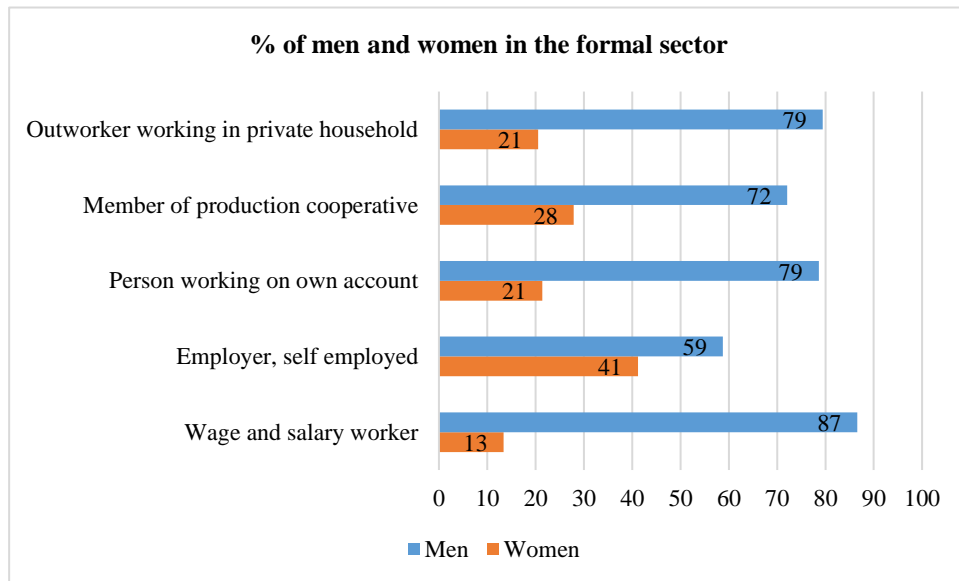
There is a notable increase from 2018 to 2019 in the number of both men and women traveling abroad for work. This indicates a growing trend of labor migration among the citizens of the working-age population of Tajikistan. The number of men traveling abroad for work is significantly higher than that of women in both years. This can be attributed probably to the cultural norms that men should be the providers of the family while women should just stay at home and take care of the children.

The year-over-year increase is 34,231 for men (approximately 8.2% increase) and 12,501 for women (approximately 19.4% increase). The percentage increase for women is higher than for men, which could indicate a faster growth rate of women engaging in labor migration or a change in the availability of work abroad for female citizens of Tajikistan.

Labor migration can have various implications for a country's economy, such as remittances sent back home, which can be a substantial part of the GDP for some countries. It may also reflect the labor market conditions in Tajikistan such as high unemployment rates or low wages, pushing citizens to seek employment opportunities abroad. The trends could have social implications as well, such as family dynamics,



changes in traditional gender roles, and the impact on the labor force remaining within the country.



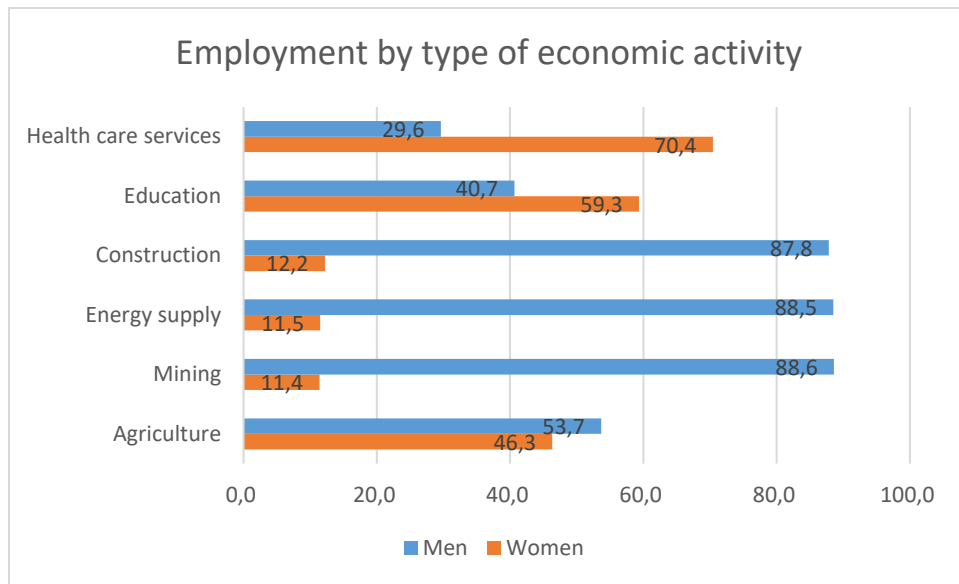
**Figure 6: Distribution of men and women as a percentage in the formal sector 2016**

Source: Own editing based on TAJSTAT 2020

From the data, it can be observed that, men constitute a higher percentage in all categories except for the 'Employer, Self Employed' category, where women have a significantly higher representation (41%) compared to the other categories.

The category with the highest disparity is 'Wage and Salary Worker', with men comprising 87% and women only 13%. In contrast, the category with the smallest disparity is 'Employer, Self Employed', with men at 59% and women at 41%, indicating a more balanced distribution.

The percentage of women is consistently low in the 'Outworker Working in Private Household' and 'Person Working on Own Account' categories (both 21%). The chart may be indicating societal or economic trends, such as which sectors are more inclusive of women, where there may be barriers to entry, or potentially where entrepreneurship among women is more common ('Employer, Self Employed'). This is a clear indication that women are still marginalized in the formal employment sector.



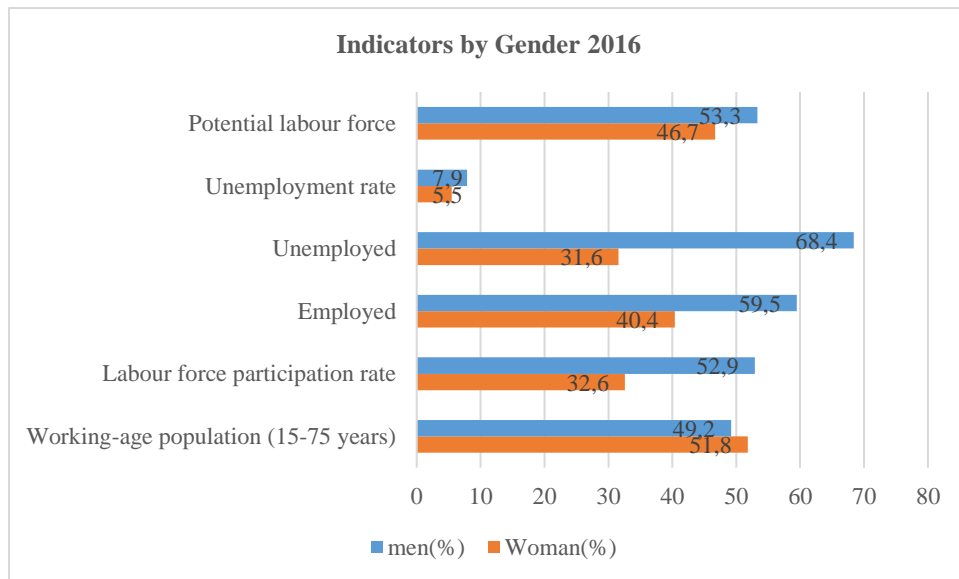
**Figure 7: Distribution of gender employment by type of economic activity (2019)**

Source: Own editing based on TAJSTAT 2020

From the chart, the following observations can be made, the sectors with the highest percentage of male employment are 'Energy Supply', 'Mining', and 'Construction', with over 87% men in each. The sector with the most balanced gender distribution is 'Agriculture', where women make up 46.3% and men make up 53.7%.

'Health Care Services' and 'Education' are the sectors with a higher proportion of female employment compared to the others, yet men still hold a majority with 70.4% in Health Care and 59.3% in Education. The lowest percentage of female employment is in 'Mining' at 11.4%, closely followed by 'Energy Supply' and 'Construction', indicating that these sectors are the most male-dominated according to the data.

This chart provides insights into gender disparities across different economic sectors. It suggests areas where there are potential barriers to entry for women, or sectors where women are traditionally underrepresented. Additionally, it also reflects societal norms and roles that might influence occupational choices or opportunities for different genders.



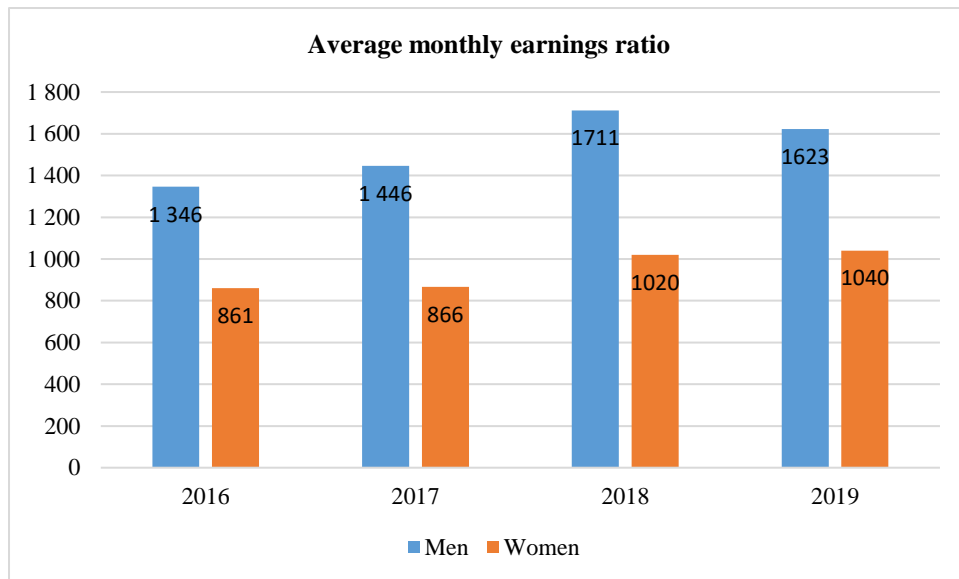
**Figure 8: Summary of gender indicators 2016**

Source: Own editing based on TAJSTAT 2020

The potential labor force is almost evenly split between women and men, with a slight male majority. The unemployment rate for women is lower than that for men by two percentage points. However, a higher percentage of the unemployed are men, indicating that while fewer men are unemployed, those who are unemployed might be facing difficulties getting back into the labor force.

Men hold a higher percentage of employment compared to women, suggesting more men are employed within the working-age population. The labor force participation rate, which includes both employed and unemployed individuals who are actively seeking work, is significantly higher for men (52.9%) than for women (32.6%). This shows that a larger proportion of the male population is either working or looking for work.

Interestingly, the working-age population has more women than men, but this is not reflected in the labor force participation rate or employment figures, which could indicate cultural, societal, or economic barriers that prevent women from participating in the labor force at the same rate as men.



**Figure 9: Average monthly ratio of men to women's earnings. \$1= 9.69TJS**

Source: Own editing based on TAJSTAT 2020

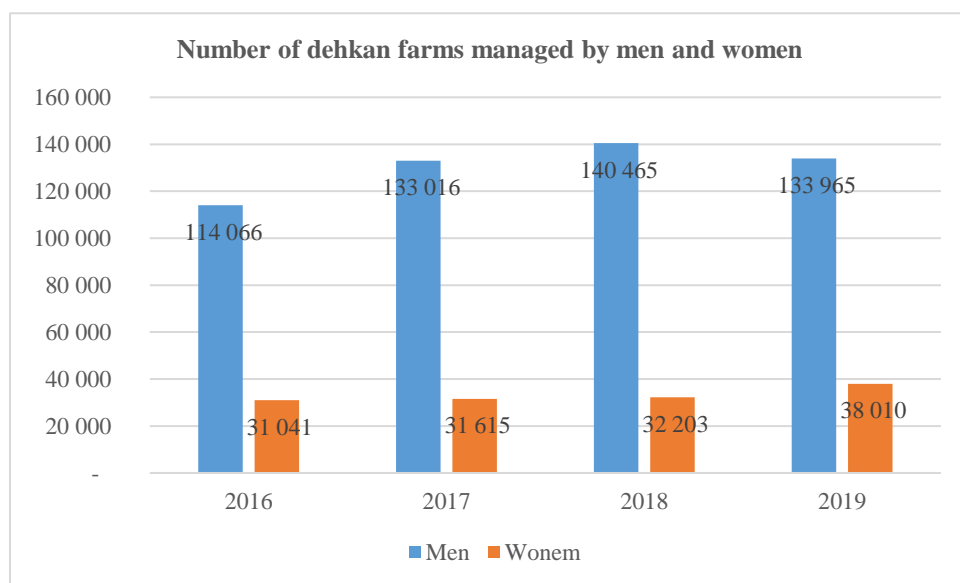
In 2016, men earned an average of 1,346 TJS per month, while women earned 861 TJS. Women earned approximately 64% of what men earned this year. In 2017, the average monthly earnings for men rose to 1,446 TJS, and for women to 866 TJS. Women's earnings were approximately 60% of men's earnings, slightly lower in proportion compared to 2016.

For 2018, there was a significant increase in average monthly earnings for both genders. Men's earnings were 1,711 TJS, and women's were 1,020 TJS. The proportion increased, with women earning roughly 60% of what men earned, maintaining the relative gap from 2017. In 2019, men's average monthly earnings decreased to 1,623 TJS, while women's earnings increased to 1,040 TJS. The ratio improved, with women earning around 64% of men's earnings, which is more similar to the 2016 ratio.

The earnings for both men and women have generally increased over the four years, with the exception of men's earnings from 2018 to 2019 which slightly decreased. The gap between men's and women's earnings persists throughout the years, although there is a slight increase in the percentage that women earn relative to men from 2017 to 2019. Women's earnings as a percentage of men's earnings fluctuate year to year but do not show a consistent trend towards parity within this dataset.

The continued gender disparity in earnings could be as a result of occupation types, whereby it was observed that men are dominant in the high paying sectors such as construction and mining compared to women who were primarily employed in the service sectors like education.

#### 4.2.4: Management of Dehkan Farms



**Figure 10: Comparison of the number of dehkan farms managed by men and women**

Source: Own editing based on own TAJSTAT 2020

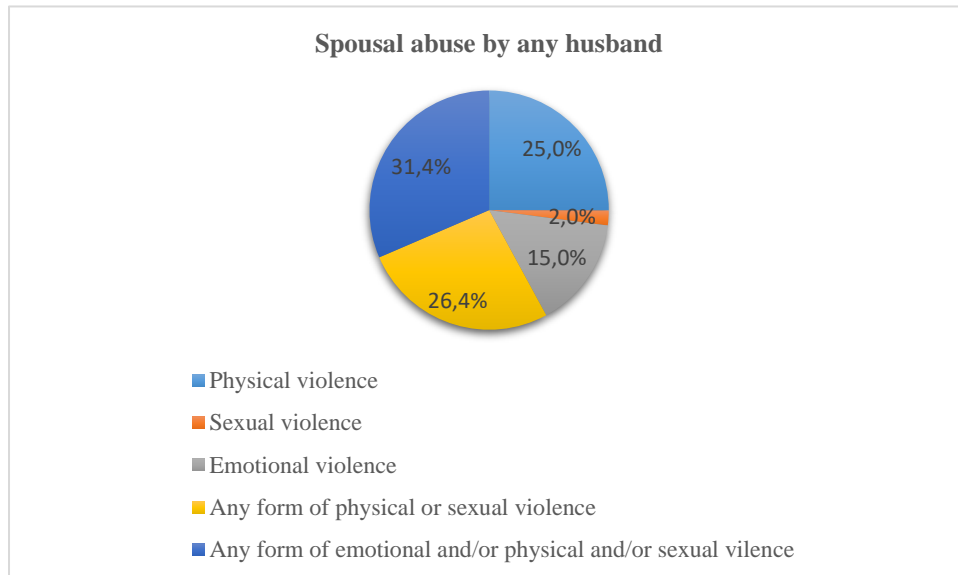
A dehkan farm is a family farm. From the above chart, each year men manage a significantly higher number of dehkan farms compared to women. There was a steady increase in the number of farms managed by men from 2016 to 2018, followed by a slight decrease in 2019.

The number of dehkan farms managed by women has increased every year from 2016 to 2019, with a more noticeable increase between 2018 and 2019. The disparity between the number of farms managed by men and women is large but the growth rate for women managing dehkan farms is consistent, and the increase in 2019 suggests a possible acceleration in women taking on farm management.

This data is useful for analyzing trends in gender roles within the agricultural sector of Tajikistan, the economic empowerment of women, and the overall growth of small-

scale agriculture in the country. It may reflect the impacts of policy changes, societal shifts, or economic development programs aimed at increasing women's participation in agriculture.

#### 4.2.5 Domestic violence



**Figure 11: Percentage of women who have experienced abuse from their spouse**

Source: Own editing based on TAJSTAT 2020

31.4% of the reported spousal abuse involves physical violence. 15.0% of the reported abuse is identified as sexual violence. 26.4% of the reported abuse consists of emotional or psychological violence. 2.0% of the reported cases involve any form of physical or sexual abuse. This could suggest overlapping incidents that are counted separately in the physical and sexual violence categories. 25.0% of the reports involve a combination of emotional, physical, and/or sexual violence, indicating that some victims experience more than one type of abuse.

What the chart shows is the breakdown of reported abuse types, implying that a significant portion of spousal abuse encompasses emotional violence, followed closely by physical violence. It also highlights the severe issue of multiple forms of violence being experienced by individuals.

Emotional violence that women in Tajikistan experience includes being threatened to be injured or beaten up by their husbands or being belittled or talked down upon in public to embarrass them. Physical violence includes being slapped in the face, her

hair being pulled, kicked and punched and objects that can potentially harm being thrown at them. Sexual violence is often non-consensual sex.

**Table 6: Persons committing violence against a woman**

<b>PERSONS COMMITTING PHYSICAL VIOLENCE AGAINST A WOMAN</b>	
Current husband	75,5%
Mother/ stepmother	14,5%
Ex-husband	12,7%
Sister/brother	5,5%
Father/ stepfather	1,6%
Other relatives of husband	1,1%
Daughter/son	0,1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>111 %</b>

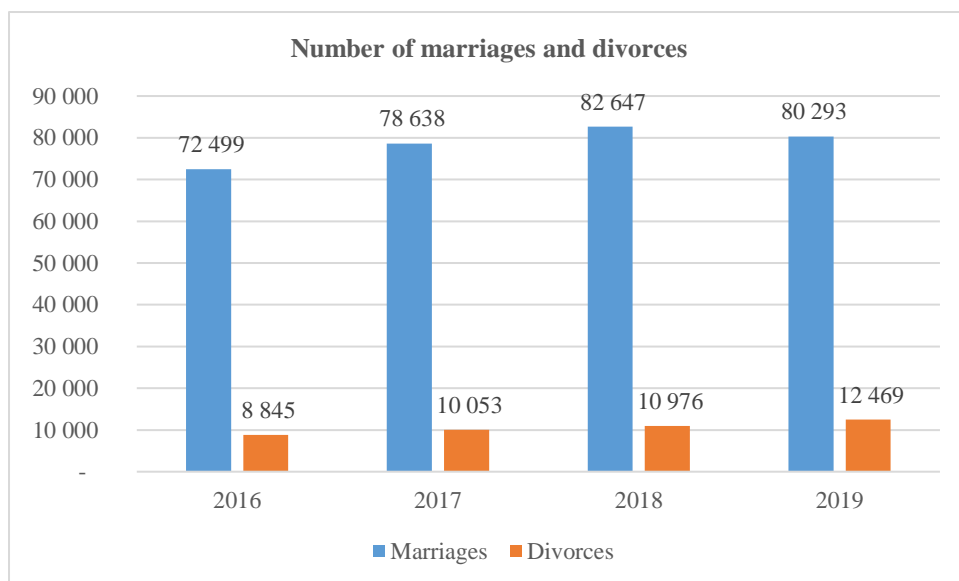
*NB: Women were free to name more than one abuser*

Source: Own editing based on TAJSTAT 2020

It's important to note that these percentages exceed 100%, which may indicate that some women have experienced violence from multiple perpetrators. These statistics are reflective of domestic violence issues within the country, highlighting that the most common source of physical violence against women comes from intimate partners (current or former husbands).

The high incidence of current husbands being reported as perpetrators could indicate deeply entrenched societal issues, possibly including patriarchy, legal shortcomings in protecting women, or cultural norms that may implicitly permit such behavior. The involvement of mothers and stepmothers might also point to complex family dynamics or societal pressures within extended families.

This data may help inform strategies to address domestic violence, improve legal protection for women, and provide support services for victims. It also raises awareness about the need for educational programs aimed at both men and women to promote respectful relationships and non-violent conflict resolution.

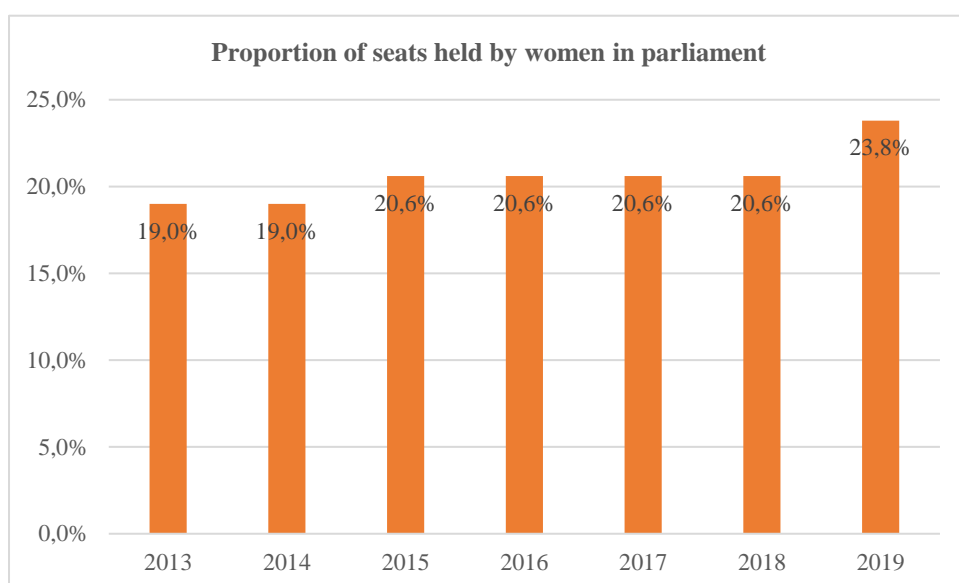


**Figure 12: Number of marriages and divorce (2016-2019)**

Source: Own editing based on TAJSTAT 2020

The number of marriages fluctuated but showed an overall increase from 2016 to 2018 before a slight drop in 2019. There was a consistent year-over-year increase in the number of divorces. The continuous rise in divorces could indicate changing societal attitudes towards divorce, more autonomy and legal avenues for women to exit marriages, or could reflect stresses that impact marital stability.

#### 4.2.6 Political representation



**Figure 13: Proportion of seats held by women in parliament, total percentage**



Source: Own editing based on own analysis

From 2013 to 2018, there was a relatively small change in the proportion of seats held by women, suggesting a period of stagnation or a stable representation within the parliament. In 2019, there's a significant increase in the representation of women, indicating potential progress in gender equality in political participation or the effects of policies aimed at increasing the political representation of women.

Despite fluctuations, the overall trend over the seven years is upward, showing a gradual increase in women's representation in parliament. The increase in 2019, in particular, might reflect specific efforts or shifts in the political landscape that have allowed more women to be elected or appointed to parliament. We can conclude at least there is some progress towards more representation of women in political seats.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECCOMENDATIONS**

The purpose of this study is a comprehensive analysis of gender inequality in Tajikistan, with a focus on rural areas, specifically in the Bustonqala village of Kushoniyon district. The research aims to identify the underlying factors and dynamics shaping gender inequality and develop recommendations to address these inequalities and create a more equitable society.

The number of respondents from the results were twelve out of which nine were female and three were male. Three female respondents were from the urban areas for comparison with the other respondents from the rural areas. From the interview analysis and in comparison with the official statistics from Tajikistan government it was noted that there has been a consistent gender disparity in the formal and agricultural sectors of Tajikistan's economy, with men being predominantly represented in most fields.

While the number of women in the Tajik labor force is significant, they tend to be concentrated in lower-paying sectors and roles, and there is a persistent wage gap between genders. Women's representation in the Tajik Parliament has seen a gradual increase, indicating progress towards gender equality in political participation.

Education attainment levels reveal a gender gap, with a smaller percentage of women reaching higher education levels compared to men. Traditional societal roles

significantly impact gender relations, influencing women's participation in the workforce and their economic opportunities.

The out-migration of men for work has left significant socio-economic impacts on women, often burdening them with additional responsibilities and altering family dynamics. Domestic violence remains a pressing issue, with a large number of women experiencing abuse, yet there is a lack of reporting and assistance for victims. The rural development role of women in Tajikistan is critical, especially in agriculture, where their participation is substantial but undervalued and inadequately supported.

In the category of decision making and areas of influence, it was noted that males were the primary decision makers and had the final say in all matters like education, health and finances. The results pointed to a clear need for targeted interventions aimed at enhancing women's decision-making influence in rural Tajikistan. This therefore confirms the Hypothesis on Decision-Making Role: Women in rural areas of Tajikistan have limited influence on decision-making in households and community structures, perpetuating gender inequality, to be true.

Efforts to empower women should focus on education, economic participation, and health, ensuring that women are equipped with the knowledge, resources, and support needed to participate fully in decisions that affect their lives and communities.

The reported difficulty in accessing financial resources by female respondents (eight), contrasted with the ease reported by male (three) respondents, highlighted a critical aspect of gender inequality impacting rural development in Tajikistan. Addressing this imbalance is essential for empowering women and ensuring that rural development efforts are inclusive and equitable. The stark gender disparities in ownership/access to land and property highlighted by the data (seven women had no access while three men had access) pointed to a critical area of concern for rural development and gender equality in Tajikistan. Addressing these disparities requires concerted efforts at multiple levels, from legal reform to societal attitude changes, to ensure that women can fully participate in and benefit from rural development initiatives.

In analyzing barriers to accessing education and employment opportunities, it was noted that the barriers were rooted in stereotypes and cultural norms that confined

women to domestic roles. While all the male respondents stated that they had easy access to health care services, all women acknowledged that it was quite challenging for them especially in accessing health care services such as reproductive health and maternal care. In the case of awareness of government or NGO programs on women empowerment activities and the perceived impacts, it was observed that there was complete lack of awareness among the respondents about gender equality and women's empowerment programs highlighting a crucial area for action. Addressing this issue requires not just the existence of such programs but also a concerted effort to ensure that information about them is effectively communicated and that the programs are accessible and relevant to those they aim to serve. Improving awareness and accessibility can significantly enhance the impact of these initiatives, contributing to more equitable and empowered communities.

The clear indication of often experienced gender inequality, especially among women, signaled an urgent need for comprehensive strategies to combat gender disparities in rural Tajikistan. Addressing these increased incidences of gender inequality requires a comprehensive approach that includes community engagement, empowerment initiatives, policy reforms, and ongoing monitoring to assess progress towards gender equality.

It was also observed that women face gender inequality largely in education and employment opportunities and in one of the responses domestic violence was mentioned by six women as one of the problems facing women in the rural communities. Therefore, there is need for law enforcement on domestic violence and creation of targeted programs to empower women

It can be concluded that gender inequality in rural Tajikistan is deeply entrenched, affecting various aspects of women's lives including education, employment, health care access, and participation in decision-making processes. Limited access to education and employment opportunities are central barriers to women's empowerment, highlighted by both male and female respondents. These areas are crucial for economic independence and societal participation. Gender-specific health services, especially maternal and reproductive health, are perceived as inadequate. This inadequacy points to a significant gap in the health care system's ability to meet women's needs.

Cultural practices and domestic violence are identified as significant factors contributing to gender inequality. These elements not only restrict personal freedoms but also perpetuate harmful stereotypes and practices. Limited access to the internet emerges as a contemporary challenge, affecting women's ability to access information, resources, and opportunities in the digital realm. There is a growing awareness of gender inequality's implications, yet perspectives on its change over time indicate a perception that disparities are increasing rather than diminishing. Based on the results, the study's hypothesis: the persistent gender inequality in rural areas of Tajikistan is significantly influenced by traditional socio-cultural norms and economic structures, which limit women's access to education, economic opportunities, and decision-making roles, is accepted.

Based on this analysis we can confirm that our hypotheses are true:

**H0:** The persistent gender inequality in rural areas of Tajikistan is significantly influenced by traditional socio-cultural norms and economic structures, which limit women's access to education, economic opportunities, and decision-making roles.

**H1:** Hypothesis on Access to Education: The level of access to education for women in rural areas of Tajikistan is significantly lower than that of men, limiting their opportunities for economic and social development.

**H2:** Hypothesis on Employment: Women in rural areas of Tajikistan face greater gender-based labor segregation and have fewer opportunities to participate in high-paying and prestigious professions compared to men.

**H3:** Hypothesis on Decision-Making Role: Women in rural areas of Tajikistan have limited influence on decision-making in households and community structures, perpetuating gender inequality.

**H4:** Hypothesis on Cultural Factors Impact: Cultural and traditional beliefs in rural areas of Tajikistan significantly influence gender inequality, restricting women's opportunities in education and professional endeavors.

My recommendations include:

- Development and implementation of educational initiatives focused on increasing access for girls and women to quality education, including scholarships, mentorship programs, and infrastructure improvements in rural areas.
- Launching economic empowerment programs aimed at women, including vocational training, micro finance, and entrepreneurship support, to enhance employment opportunities.
- Increasing investment in gender-specific health services, with a focus on maternal and reproductive health, to address identified inadequacies and ensure accessible, high-quality care for women.
- Implementing comprehensive domestic violence prevention and support programs, including awareness campaigns, legal support services, and safe shelters for affected women.
- Initiating community-based projects aimed at challenging and changing harmful cultural norms and practices that perpetuate gender inequality. Engage both men and women in these initiatives to foster inclusive dialogue and change.
- Establish robust monitoring and evaluation systems to track the progress of gender equality initiatives, ensuring they are effective and responsive to the needs of women in rural Tajikistan.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS**

The goal of this research was to pinpoint the fundamental factors and circumstances causing gender disparity and to formulate suggestions for resolving these disparities and building a more just society. The study area chosen was Bustonqala one of the rural areas in Tajikistan. The research questions the study sought to answer were: What factors influence gender inequality in rural areas of Tajikistan? What are the sociocultural, educational, and economic aspects that form gender disparities in the region? What is the role of education in shaping gender inequalities in rural areas? What is the level of access to education for men and women, factors limiting educational opportunities, and their impact on gender roles? What are the economic dimensions of gender inequality in agricultural communities? What is the level of women's participation in the economy, access to resources, their role in agriculture and other economic factors? How do traditional roles and stereotypes affect the situation of women in rural communities in Tajikistan? What policy and social measures can help eliminate gender inequality in rural areas? The study's hypothesis was the persistent gender inequality in rural areas of Tajikistan is significantly influenced by traditional socio-cultural norms and economic structures, which limit women's access to education, economic opportunities, and decision-making roles,

A total of twelve participants were interviewed using both open-ended and closed-ended questions in an interview form and their responses were recorded in Excel for

data analysis and also the official statistics of the Tajikistan Republic were used to provide a general overview of the gender dynamics within the country. The questions contained in the interview form covered 8 sections Section 1: Demographics- age, gender, marital status, level of education, employment status and primary occupation, Section 2: Household dynamics and decision making- Areas of decision-making influence (e.g., finances, children's education, health care) and Perception of women's vs. men's decision-making authority in the community, Section 3: Access to resources and opportunities- access to financial resources, ownership or access to land/property, opportunities for professional development and education, barriers to accessing education and employment, Section 4: Cultural practices and gender norms- influence of cultural practices on gender roles, existence of gender-specific restrictions or expectations, impact of cultural norms on personal freedoms and opportunities, Section 5: Health and well-being- access to health-care services, gender-specific health services availability, Section 6: Awareness and impact of supportive programs- awareness of government or NGO programs for gender equality or women's empowerment, participation in or impact of these program, Section 7: Experiences and perceptions of gender inequality- personal experiences of gender inequality, areas where gender inequality is most observed (e.g., employment, education, health care), perceived changes in gender inequality over time, Section 8: Open-ended questions- What are the biggest challenges facing women in your community? Can you share a personal experience or observation of gender inequality? What actions do you believe could significantly improve gender equality in your area?

From the analysis of the results, it is observed that gender inequality is still a big challenge in Tajikistan especially in areas of education, employment and health care. Cultural norms were also identified as significant factors contributing to gender inequality. There is a need to tackle this issue diligently and with the right programs and policies. Some of the future proposals to combat this problem were the launching of economic empowerment programs aimed at women, including vocational training, micro finance, and entrepreneurship support, to enhance employment opportunities. These programs should also be consistently monitored and evaluated to ascertain whether they are achieving the intended purpose.

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## **ANNEX: Interview form.**

### **Section 1: Demographics**

1. Age:
2. Gender: Male / Female / Other
3. Marital Status: Single / Married / Divorced / Widowed
4. Education Level: None / Primary / Secondary / Tertiary
5. Employment Status: Employed / Unemployed / Self-employed / Retired
6. Primary Occupation (if applicable):
7. Place of residence: Urban / Rural

### **Section 2: Household Dynamics and Decision-Making**

8. Role in household decision-making: Primary / Shared / Secondary
9. Areas of decision-making influence (e.g., finances, children's education, health care):
10. Perception of women's vs. men's decision-making authority in the community: Less / Equal / More

### **Section 3: Access to Resources and Opportunities**

11. Access to financial resources (e.g., banking, loans): Easy / Moderate / Difficult
12. Ownership or access to land and property: Yes / No / Partial
13. Opportunities for professional development and education: Sufficient / Insufficient
14. Barriers to accessing education and employment:

### **Section 4: Cultural Practices and Gender Norms**

15. Influence of cultural practices on gender roles: High / Moderate / Low
16. Existence of gender-specific restrictions or expectations: Yes / No
17. Impact of cultural norms on personal freedoms and opportunities: Positive / Negative / Neutral

### **Section 5: Health and Well-being**

18. Access to health-care services: Easy / Moderate / Difficult
19. Gender-specific health services availability (e.g., maternal health, reproductive health): Adequate / Inadequate

### **Section 6: Awareness and Impact of Supportive Programs**

20. Awareness of government or NGO programs for gender equality or women's empowerment: Yes / No

21. Participation in or impact of these programs: High / Moderate / Low / Not Applicable

### **Section 7: Experiences and Perceptions of Gender Inequality**

22. Personal experiences of gender inequality: Never / Rarely / Sometimes / Often

23. Areas where gender inequality is most observed (e.g., employment, education, health care)

24. Perceived changes in gender inequality over time: Increased / Decreased / Stayed the Same

### **Section 8: Open-Ended Questions**

25. What are the biggest challenges facing women in your community?

26. Can you share a personal experience or observation of gender inequality?

27. What actions do you believe could significantly improve gender equality in your area?

## **ANNEX 2: Images of women in Tajikistan rural areas**



**Image 1: One day in the life of a rural girl in Tajikistan**

Source: <https://rus.ozodi.org/a/28082523.html>





**Image 2: Rural Women labor process**

Source: <https://www.asiaplustj.info/ru/news/tajikistan/economic/20240110/v-tadzhikistane-ne-vipolnili-plan-po-sboru-hlopka>



**Image 3: The making of traditional flat bread by rural women**

Source: <https://blogs.worldbank.org/ru/europeandcentralasia/working-towards-gender-equality-tajikistans-labor-market>



## Appendix 1: Declaration

### DECLARATION

#### on authenticity and public assess of final master's thesis

Student's name: Boltaeva Shakhnoza  
Student's Neptun ID: C2HJH6  
Title of the document: Master's thesis  
Year of publication: 2024  
Department: Rural Development and Sustainable Economy

I declare that the submitted final master's thesis is my own, original individual creation. Any parts taken from an another author's work are clearly marked, and listed in the table of contents.


If the statements above are not true, I acknowledge that the Final examination board excludes me from participation in the final exam, and I am only allowed to take final exam if I submit another final essay/thesis/master's thesis/portfolio.

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Student's signature



## **Appendix 2: Supervisor Declaration**

I, Tibor Farkas, supervisor of the research work carried out by Boltaeva Shakhnoza on the topic “Gender inequality in rural areas, the role of women in development in Tajikistan”, confirm that this dissertation work meets the requirements and standards for scientific research at the master's level.

I confirm that this work was carried out by Boltaeva Shakhnoza independently under my supervision. All data and materials used in this work were obtained ethically, and all sources from which data or quotations were taken are properly cited and listed in the reference list.

During her work, Boltaeva Shakhnoza demonstrated a high level of professionalism, academic integrity and scientific approach. The work contains significant scientific findings and contributions to the study of gender inequality in rural areas of Tajikistan and can serve as the basis for further research in this area.

Based on my supervision and control over the execution of the work, I recommend this dissertation for defense for a master's degree.

Date: 19.04.2024.



Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Dr. Tibor Farkas

## **Appendix 3: Abstract**

### **ABSTRACT OF THESIS**

**Thesis title:** GENDER INEQUALITY IN RURAL AREAS, THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT IN TAJIKISTAN

**Author name:** Boltaeva Shakhnoza

**Course:** MSc. Rural Development and Engineering

**Institute:** Institute of Sustainable Development and Economics

**Primary thesis advisor:** Dr Tibor Farkas, Head of Department, Associate Professor, Department of Rural and Regional Development/ Institute of Sustainable Development and Economics

### **Abstract**

This thesis provides a comprehensive examination of gender inequality in rural Tajikistan, with a focus on the Bustonqala village in the Kushoniyon district. The study explores the multifaceted nature of gender disparities within the contexts of education, employment, health care, and decision-making, underpinned by traditional socio-cultural norms and economic structures. Through a mixed-methods approach involving structured questionnaires and interviews with twelve participants (nine females and three males), this research reveals significant challenges that rural women face, including limited access to education and employment, inadequate gender-specific health services, and prevalent domestic violence.

The analysis demonstrates a pronounced gender divide in decision-making roles within households, where males predominantly assume primary decision-making positions. Moreover, the study uncovers systemic barriers to women's economic empowerment, including restricted access to financial resources and property. A critical finding is the universal perception among participants of an increase in gender inequality over time, underscoring the urgency for targeted interventions.

Based on the GAD approach, Feminist Political Economy, Social Reproduction Theory, and Intersectionality, the thesis proposes comprehensive strategies for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in rural Tajikistan. Recommendations include the development of educational initiatives, economic

empowerment programs, improvements in health care access, and policies to mitigate domestic violence. The research calls for participatory approaches that engage community members in addressing gender disparities, alongside robust monitoring and evaluation systems to track progress.

This study contributes to the broader discourse on gender inequality in developing countries, providing insights into the specific challenges and opportunities for intervention in rural Tajikistan. The findings and recommendations offer a foundation for policymakers, NGOs, and community leaders to implement effective measures for achieving gender equality and empowering women in rural areas, thereby enhancing overall rural development.

**Keywords:** Gender Inequality, Rural Development, Tajikistan, Women's Empowerment, Educational Access, Economic Opportunities, Health care Access, Domestic Violence.