

**Gender Equality in Academia: Experiences of Women in Leadership Roles in  
Higher Education in Kazakhstan**

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Master of Science

in

Higher Education Leadership

Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education

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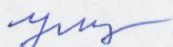
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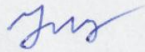
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Date: 24 of October, 2025

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You may proceed with contacting your preferred research site and commencing your participant recruitment strategy.

Yours sincerely,

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Thank you all from the bottom of my heart.

## **Abstract**

### **Gender Equality in Academia: Experiences of Women in Leadership Roles in Higher Education in Kazakhstan**

This research explores the experiences, perceptions and challenges of female leaders in higher education institutions in Kazakhstan. The representation of women in higher education institutions outweighs the number of men; however, women's leadership remains considerably less. Although women's leadership in higher education has received increased attention, limited research studies women's leadership in academia. The study aims to identify challenges that women leaders face, and examine how organizational, personal, social and cultural factors influence their leadership roles. The study used a qualitative phenomenological approach, involving semi-structured interviews with women leaders in higher education institutions of Kazakhstan. The findings suggest that women's leadership journey in academia is characterized by gradual professional growth. Women's pathways to academic leadership in Kazakhstani higher education institutions are shaped by a complex interaction of career trajectories, structural and inner barriers, and personal and professional enablers. The findings prove that women leaders viewed themselves as transformer leaders and mentors, which aligns with their responsibility and professionalism. Women leaders in higher education are recognized and evaluated based on their professional competence, personal qualities and demonstrated results rather than gender. Women leaders in higher education manage work- life balance in different ways shaped by personal circumstances, institutional strategies and support systems. Women leaders face several challenges in balancing work and life responsibilities. Institutional policies have a positive and negative impact on the career advancement of women leaders. Since

leadership is recognized as masculine, participants suggest more policies to support women's leadership.

*Keywords:* women leadership, higher education institution, work-life balance, structural, socio- cultural, organizational challenges and enablers, gender policies, career advancement

## Андатпа

### **Академиялық ортадағы гендерлік теңдік: Қазақстандағы жоғары білім беру жүйесіндегі әйел көшбасшылардың тәжірибесі**

Бұл зерттеу Қазақстанның жоғары білім беру ұйымдарындағы әйел көшбасшылардың тәжірибесін, көзқарастарын және кездесетін қиындықтарын зерттеуге бағытталған.

Жоғары білім беру жүйесінде әйелдердің үлесі ерлерге қарағанда жоғары болғанымен, басшылық лауазымдардағы әйелдердің өкілдігі айтарлықтай төмен болып қала береді.

Жоғары білім беру саласындағы әйел көшбасшылығы мәселесіне қызығушылық артып келе жатқанына қарамастан, академиялық ортадағы әйел көшбасшылығына арналған зерттеулер әлі де шектеулі. Зерттеудің мақсаты — әйел көшбасшылар кездесетін қиындықтарды анықтау және олардың көшбасшылық рөлдеріне ұйымдық, жеке, әлеуметтік және мәдени факторлардың әсерін зерттеу.

Зерттеуде сапалық феноменологиялық тәсіл қолданылып, Қазақстанның жоғары білім беру ұйымдарында қызмет атқаратын әйел көшбасшылармен жартылай құрылымдалған сұхбаттар жүргізілді. Нәтижелер әйелдердің академиялық көшбасшылық жолы біртіндеп кәсіби даму арқылы қалыптасатынын көрсетті. Қазақстандағы жоғары білім беру жүйесіндегі әйел көшбасшылардың мансаптық траекториялары кәсіби даму үдерістері, құрылымдық және ішкі кедергілер, сондай-ақ жеке және кәсіби қолдаушы факторлардың күрделі өзара әрекеттесуі арқылы айқындалады. Зерттеу нәтижелері әйел көшбасшылардың өздерін трансформациялық көшбасшы және тәлімгер ретінде қабылдайтынын, бұл олардың кәсіби жауапкершілігі мен біліктілігіне сәйкес келетінін

көрсетті. Әйел көшбасшылар көбінесе жынысына емес, кәсіби құзыреттілігіне, жеке қасиеттеріне және нақты нәтижелеріне қарай бағаланады.

Әйел көшбасшылар жұмыс пен жеке өмір арасындағы тепе-теңдікті жеке жағдайларына, институционалдық қолдау мен ұйымдық стратегияларға негізделген әртүрлі тәсілдер арқылы сақтауға тырысады. Сонымен қатар, олар кәсіби және отбасылық міндеттерді үйлестіру барысында бірқатар қиындықтарға тап болады. Институционалдық саясат әйел көшбасшылардың мансаптық дамуына әрі оң, әрі теріс әсер етеді. Көшбасшылық көбіне ерлерге тән сала ретінде қабылданатындықтан, зерттеуге қатысушылар әйел көшбасшылығын қолдауға бағытталған қосымша саясаттарды енгізу қажеттігін атап өтті.

*Түйінді сөздер:* әйел көшбасшылығы, жоғары білім беру ұйымдары, жұмыс пен жеке өмір теңгерімі, құрылымдық, әлеуметтік-мәдени және ұйымдық қиындықтар мен қолдау факторлары, гендерлік саясат, мансаптық даму

## **Аннотация**

### **Гендерное равенство в академической среде: опыт женщин на руководящих должностях в высшем образовании Казахстана**

Данное исследование посвящено изучению опыта, восприятия и трудности, с которыми сталкиваются женщины-руководители в высших учебных заведениях Казахстана.

Несмотря на то, что доля женщин в системе высшего образования превышает количество мужчин, представительство женщин на руководящих позициях остается значительно ниже. Хотя вопросам женского лидерства в высшем образовании уделяется все больше внимания, исследования, посвященные лидерству женщин в академической среде, остаются ограниченными. Цель исследования — выявить трудности, с которыми сталкиваются женщины-руководители, а также изучить влияние организационных, личных, социальных и культурных факторов на их лидерские роли. В исследовании использован феноменологический подход, включающий полу-структурированные интервью с женщинами-руководителями высших учебных заведений Казахстана.

Результаты показывают, что лидерский путь женщин в академической сфере характеризуется постепенным профессиональным ростом. Карьерные траектории женщин-лидеров в высшем образовании Казахстана формируются под влиянием сложного взаимодействия профессионального развития, структурных и внутренних барьеров, а также личных и профессиональных факторов, способствующих продвижению.

Полученные данные свидетельствуют о том, что женщины-руководители рассматривают себя как трансформационных лидеров и наставников, что соответствует их профессиональной ответственности и компетентности. Женщины-лидеры оцениваются

преимущественно на основе профессиональной компетентности, личностных качеств и достигнутых результатов, а не гендерной принадлежности.

Женщины-руководители стремятся поддерживать баланс между работой и личной жизнью посредством различных стратегий, обусловленных личными обстоятельствами, институциональной поддержкой и организационными механизмами. Вместе с тем они сталкиваются с рядом трудностей при совмещении профессиональных и семейных обязанностей. Институциональные политики оказывают как положительное, так и отрицательное влияние на карьерное продвижение женщин-лидеров. Поскольку лидерство традиционно воспринимается как преимущественно мужская сфера, участницы исследования подчеркивают необходимость разработки дополнительных политик, направленных на поддержку женского лидерства.

**Ключевые слова:** женское лидерство, высшее образование, баланс между работой и личной жизнью, структурные, социокультурные и организационные вызовы и факторы поддержки, гендерная политика, карьерное продвижение

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## **Chapter 1. Introduction**

In this chapter, I will outline the background information, statement of the problem, purpose and research questions. This will set the context and stage of the research, clarify the main problem, and distinctly explain the goal of the research. After that, I will present the significance of the current research, followed by a brief outline of the thesis.

### **1.1 Background of the Study**

Gender equality in academia is a vital aspect of social progress, as universities serve not only as centers of knowledge, but also as institutions of shaping future generations, producing knowledge, and influencing social change. Higher education is gaining greater importance in navigating the future development of society, especially for disadvantaged and marginalized groups (Chauhan, 2011; Levchenko et al., 2017).

Across the world, women's participation in higher education has grown significantly in recent decades, yet they are largely absent from senior faculty positions and leadership roles (O'Connor, 2020; UNESCO IESALC, 2021). Furthermore, the percentage of men who attain professorial positions is more than double that of women. While female enrollment in tertiary education is increasing, both as students and academic staff, leadership roles are still largely held by men. According to UNESCO IESALC (2021), in 2020, only 15% of rectors at member universities of the European University Association (EUA) across 48 countries were women, while the remaining 85% were men.

Feminist scholarship has criticized for a long time the hierarchical and patriarchal structure of academia, where leadership is often associated with traditionally masculine traits. According to Dunn et al. (2014), leadership structures and standards that are predominantly

shaped by male perspectives have restricted female leadership ambitions and limited their path to leadership roles.

Kazakhstan, like other post-Soviet countries passed -down a well-established education arrangement from the Soviet Democracy and, began their independence with a strong foundation of Soviet-era policies that supported gender equality (Kuzhabekova et al., 2025). As cited in Harden-Wolfson and Shakirova (2025) notes that since independence in 1991, female enrollment in higher education has remained consistently high compared to other Central Asian countries, with women representing over half of all students and the majority of teaching staff. However, this number declines significantly at leadership positions. Only a small percentage of rectors at Kazakhstani universities are women. Kuzhabekova and Almukhambetova (2025) note that in 2022, women held one-fifth of university leadership roles in Kazakhstan, with just 22 of 116 rector positions were occupied by women.

This underrepresentation is not unique to Kazakhstan. Globally, according to the latest report by Times Higher Education (THE) women are heads of just 25% universities of the world's top universities. According to the University World News (UWN, 2024), the proportion of female rectors in Kazakhstan is 26% (Harden-Wolfson & Shakirova, 2025). In Kazakhstan, cultural and institutional norms play a distinctive role. Leadership positions or titles belong to men, reflecting deep-seated social norms that expect oriental women to prioritize household responsibilities and the care of her family over career advancement (Galsanjigmed & Sekiguchi, 2023; Kataeva et al., 2025).

Kazakhstan's gender norms reflect mostly "masculine" society, when gendered emotional rules are unambiguous: men are expected to be forceful, resilient, and devoted to material things, on the other hand women are required to be humbler, caring, tender and engaged with the living

conditions (Yildiz & Vural, 2019). These norms influence educational choices from an early age: parents tend to choose physical, mathematical, and technical education for boys, and humanitarian education are more suitable for girls (Ryskaliyev et al., 2019). Therefore, women are overrepresented in less profitable, traditionally female-dominated areas such as health, education, and social services, which limits their visibility in high-status and leadership-intensive sectors (Burubayev & Khamzina, 2019; Olzhebayeva, 2024).

Kazakhstan government has made an important commitment to gender equality. Kataeva et al. (2025) assert that Kazakhstan is devoted to advancing gender equality and has put major global gender equality initiatives. According to Kataeva et al. (2022), Kazakhstan was ranked 65th out of 146 countries on the Global Gender Gap Index (as cited from the World Economic Forum 2022). However, it also faced certain limitations. Kazakhstan's Constitution insures equal rights and freedom of all citizens of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The program *Family and Gender policy until 2030* includes the strategy to boost female participation at determination process up to 30% (UN Women, n.d.). This factor shows that the participation of women in the workplace management system is low if to compare to men.

While gender balance in academia has been widely examined in Western and some Asian contexts, there is limited research on the experiences of women in leadership roles within Kazakhstani tertiary education. Much of the available literature focuses on global or regional trends, with few studies exploring the specific cultural, structural, and institutional factors shaping women's leadership ways in Kazakhstan (Kuzhabekova & Almukhambetova, 2025). Kazakhstan's women have strong women representation in tertiary education but there is persistent leadership gap. This research aims to address this gap by examining the experiences,

challenges, and supports influencing access for women, participation and advancement in academic leadership roles in Kazakhstan.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

Female in tertiary education leadership is a pivotal topic to study, as a university is a place for gaining knowledge and forming future leaders. Chan (2016) states that some may argue that the main goal of higher education is to gain new knowledge and develop abilities for future occupation. In contrast, others believe that higher education institutions should strive to make broader, more meaningful contributions to the well-being of society as a whole. Higher education institutions play a role in promoting and evaluating principles such as equality, inclusion, and meritocracy. Osborn et al. (2000), as cited in Widekind et al. (2021), assert that academic institutions carry an ethical responsibility to create environments that ensure all individuals have equal rights and prospect to engage and reach their fullest potential. Individuals with a university degree have significantly better employment opportunities and higher lifetime earnings than those with only a secondary education, while graduates of more selective institutions often enjoy further advantages (Brighouse, 2022). Even considering this, women stay underrepresented in academia and administrative roles worldwide. Men continue to hold the majority of roles across all ranks, with a notable dominance at the professorial level (Endeley & Ngaling, 2007). Despite a growing number of women working in academia, a quantity of women holding leadership positions is significantly lower than men. American Council on Education and Boston College (2021) report that women take only 30% of senior leadership roles in colleges and universities.

Overall, in many countries, including Kazakhstan, women face barriers and challenges that prevent them from top academic and administrative roles. According to Olzhebaeva (2024), in Kazakhstan, as in many other countries, gender inequality appears in multiple ways, including the pay gap between men and women, restricted career advancement for women, and their underrepresentation in leadership and management roles. There is extensive research on academia worldwide, but much less on academia in Kazakhstan. This represents a significant gap that I believe needs deeper exploration. According to Kataeva et al. (2023), among former Soviet republics, such as Russia, Estonia, and Ukraine, are leaders in gender research, while countries in the Caucasus and Central Asia, excluding Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, show relatively limited engagement in this field. Hence, there is a need to more research in this context.

### **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences, perceptions, and challenges faced by women in leadership positions within higher education institutions in Kazakhstan. The study aims to identify challenges that women leaders face, and examine how organizational, personal, social and cultural factors influence their leadership roles. The findings can be useful for the development of more inclusive policies and practices in HE leadership, that is, strategies and guidelines that promote equal access to leadership opportunities, eliminate gender bias, and support the advancement of women and other underrepresented groups. Inclusive practices may include transparent recruitment and promotion processes, programs of mentorships, alternative work arrangements, and leadership development programs tailored to diverse needs.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

This research seeks to examine and explore the experiences and challenges of women in leadership positions within higher education institutions in Kazakhstan. The research will be guided by the following questions:

RQ1: What are the key factors that support or prevent women's access to leadership roles in higher education institutions in Kazakhstan?

RQ2: How do women leaders in academia perceive and experience their roles and responsibilities?

RQ3: What strategies do women in higher education leadership use to balance professional and personal responsibilities?

RQ4: How do institutional policies and workplace cultures affect the career progression of women in leadership positions?

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

The research is significant because a number of women in leadership positions are increasing in higher education institutions in Kazakhstan nowadays. Most of them are women with caregiving responsibilities or those from diverse backgrounds, life situations, or challenges. Despite social and cultural norms to gender equity, women continue to struggle with institutional barriers, limited company policies while occupying their senior roles. By examining the factors that influence women's career progression in academia and administration, and combining family life, this research offers valuable insights into social and structural part of the higher education institutions. The findings will be of benefit to university administrators, professors, policymakers and gender advocacy groups by providing evidence-based recommendations to

support more women leadership practices. Additionally, this research will provide context-specific ideas and knowledge aimed at promoting meritocracy, work-life balance, and equitable leadership conditions for women in academia from Kazakhstan, as such studies are scarce.

### **1.6 Outline of the Thesis**

The thesis consists of six chapters. The first chapter provides information on the background, the research problem, the purpose, the significance of the study and the research questions. The second chapter offers a literature review on the topic. The methodology of the study will be presented in the chapter three, including the research design, research site, sample and sampling strategy, data collection instruments, data collection procedures, data analysis and ethical consideration. Chapter four consists of findings of the study that were guided by research questions. Chapter five is the discussion chapter, where the results of the research will be interpreted with the connection to previous literature in the field. Further, chapter six is conclusion, where I will outline the findings, their research implications, make recommendations for future researchers, identify limitations and suggestions for future research.

## **Chapter 2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides a view of existing literature on women's leadership in higher education institutions. It begins with a discussion of global perspectives on women in leadership, highlighting women leadership globally. The focus then narrows to the Kazakhstani context, where cultural, social, and institutional dynamics influence women's access to leadership roles. Key challenges and enabling factors for women pursuing leadership positions are examined, followed by an exploration of how women leaders perceive and experience their roles in academia, how they balance work and personal life responsibilities. Finally, the analyzed literature on institutional policies and workplace culture is presented.

### **2.2 Women in Higher Education Leadership: Global and Kazakhstani Context**

Globally, the participation of women in higher education leadership has increased in the last several decades, but their representation in upper management such as rectors, vice-rectors, presidents or deans remains underrepresented compared to their overall presence in academia (UNESCO, 2021; Meza-Mejia et al., 2023). Many countries have achieved high female student enrollment and positions in mid-level academic ranks, but the distribution of top leadership positions in academia continues to reflect gender imbalance. For instance, in several OECD countries, women make up just up to 30% of top institutional leadership positions (OECD, 2022).

Research also suggest that leadership pathways can be planned or intentional, gradually aspiring the leadership position, conversely some leaders do not aim to get leadership opportunity, they get this role as response of institutional opportunity. As Duingnan (1989/88, as

cited in Theobald, 2006) noted that leadership is the “art of possibility”, when leadership is way to promotion, cooperation and unity, critical analysis. According to Woollen (2016, as cited in Vancour, 2020) argued that “normative career path” is examined as crucial in prospering a career trajectory in a way to presidency.

In the context of post- Soviet countries, women’s enrollment to higher education institutions was high and women occupied teaching and mid- level academic management positions. However, top positions at universities remained male-dominated. After independence, in Central Asian countries such as Kazakhstan, women participation in higher education positions has been high, but leadership representation at the rector and vice rector levels has remained comparatively low (Kuzhabekova & Almukhambetova, 2025). In many countries, including Kazakhstan, the senior academic roles or leadership positions belong to men. Women representation in Kazakhstani higher education leadership is scarce and also influenced by the country’s socio-cultural and political environment. The disparity of men in senior leadership positions highlights how HEIs reinforce structures, cultures, policies, procedures, and practices that favor male perspectives, limiting opportunities for women ascending senior positions (Kataeva et al., 2024).

### **2.3 Barriers and Enablers to Leadership Roles**

Women in tertiary education institutions face a combination of structural, socio-cultural and institutional barriers that hinder their advancement into leadership roles and impede ascent. This section will present and examine these three different types of barriers. Structural or organizational culture plays a significant role for women’s professional growth, especially when it comes to leadership roles. While supportive culture can empower women’s advancement, male- dominated culture, structural disparities, and restricted access to mentorship can restrict

women's advancement. Sponsorship supports women's ability for advancement in leadership positions (Thelma & Nglube, 2024). Furthermore, due to the unfair recruitment and promotion process, the absence of clear and transparent standards for career advancement women's progression is hindered. As a result, fewer women reaching higher academic ranks such as associate professor or rector (Morley, 2012).

Cultural and societal norms also limit women's chances to pursue and accomplish leadership positions. Leadership is often defined by masculine standards, while women are commonly expected to fulfill caregiving responsibilities, balance professional careers with primary family responsibilities. Women place family obligations above professional growth, a challenge that men are less likely to face (Alqantani, 2019; Eagli & Carli, 2007). Gendered societal norms expect women to put in more effort, and prove their ability in order to succeed in their careers more than their male colleagues. Hence, in many organizations, success and achievement are still associated with masculinity (Salas-Lopez et al., 2011; Seo et al., 2017). Deep-seated stereotypes and biases exclude women from leadership positions, as they are frequently viewed as less capable or authoritative than men, leadership qualities such as competence and assertiveness can delay women's success in management roles (Elmuti et al., 2009; Thelma & Nglube, 2024).

Another core barrier preventing women from attaining and thriving in leadership positions is the emotional stereotype (Brescoll, 2016). Women leaders might also experience psychological barriers or feelings like imposter syndrome or as it also called imposter phenomenon, when women leaders feel self-doubt and the belief that their achievements are over evaluated. Hutchins et al. (2018), Bravata et al. (2020), and Chodoff et al. (2023) (as cited in

Garnett & Kinnear, 2025) argue that the most crucial factors of the imposter phenomenon are self-doubt about intelligence and skill. Furthermore, Park (2020, as cited in Gomez Rumbo, 2024) argues that women felt promoted to match a diverse environment, but not owing to their skills.

In addition to gender inequalities, women leaders might face epistemic injustice, where Western knowledge is considered more prestigious and authoritative. According to the scholar Byskof (2020), epistemic injustice is the believe, when we can be unjustly treated based on prejudices about gender, social background, race, voice and so on. Amin (1989, 2011, as cited in Jafari, 2022) stated that the dominance of the west over the rest of the world in political, educational and economic spheres.

In cultures that strongly support traditional gender roles, women may experience both explicit and implicit discrimination, including being passed over for promotions or given fewer opportunities to take up challenging responsibilities. An empirical study conducted by Hakiem (2022) explored that higher education institutions continue to provide rich career advancement opportunities for men, whereas women rarely receive leadership positions and reduced aspiration toward leadership roles is another barrier. Leadership positions demand risk-taking abilities and additional administrative responsibilities, which require constant availability at work and long working hours, professional development for the role. This demands considerable effort with an added challenge of sustaining the leadership position (Gandhi & Sen, 2021).

Another challenge in academic leadership connected with the limited leadership training programs. Usually, academics are promoted to the leadership positions based on their academic degrees, rather than managerial skills. Some leadership training programs would increase the

leadership accomplishment abilities thus lead to organizational performance. According to Jacobsen et al. (2022), training is connected with advanced performance and leadership training is advantageous.

Additionally, challenges such as work-life balance, continue to affect women's career promotion or advancement. Bhatti and Ali (2020) point out that maintaining a work-life balance is quite challenging, and women who are employed often have to put extra effort to manage both their professional duties and family responsibilities.

Despite persistent barriers, several enablers support women's advancement in higher education leadership, such as mentoring and peer networks (Salas-Lopez et al., 2011). Mentoring programs are the key strategies to reduce gender disparities in the workplace and project a commitment to workplace diversity (Harris, 2022). Women leadership development programs that intentionally foster mentorship and sponsorship initiatives can be targeted to help build confidence, leadership skills, empower women advancement and leadership, support systems and opportunities for growth and contribute to the removing of obstacles (Gandhi & Sen, 2021; Thelma & Ngulube, 2024).

In higher education institutions, the leadership position is allocated among administrative and department staff as informal leadership or distributed leadership. The capacity of leadership position exceeds its designation (Ludwikowska et al., 2019), these leaders who do not have any official power, make changes and stay mostly unmarked (Dinh et al., 2021; Juntrasook et al., 2013; Fields et al., 2019, as cited in Ludwikowska et al., 2019).

Institution culture also plays a crucial role through collaborative and inclusive leadership that empowers women in leadership (Thelma & Ngulube, 2024). Delegating and distributing

family responsibilities and learning effective time-management provide women advancement in leadership positions (Gandhi & Sen, 2021). According to European Commission implementation of Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) foster institutional transformation for gender equality. Overall, organizational culture and mentorship opportunities influence women's advancement into leadership positions within academia (Smiley et al., 2021).

## **2.4 Perceptions and Experiences of Women Leaders in Academia**

While the literature on barriers highlights the structural, institutional, and cultural obstacles that restrict women's access to leadership, it is equally important to consider how women themselves perceive and experience these roles. Research on women's experiences in academic leadership consistently shows that their career ways are shaped not only by structural barriers but also by how they perceive, interpret, and enact their own leadership roles. One significant dimension of these experiences is the emotional labor women leaders are expected to maintain harmony, support colleagues and organizational expectations. Female leaders feel them to devote a lot of time to leadership positions in a way that harms their own and family well-being, and additional responsibilities (Maheshwari & Nayak, 2020). Another critical lens is the question of leadership style. Research has shown that women often perceive their leadership as more relational and collaborative compared to traditional authoritative models. Ok and Eniola (2024) examined gender differences in leadership styles and found that women leaders are more likely to perceive and adopt collaborative, empathetic, and inclusive approaches in contrast to men, who are often associated with assertiveness and authority. The study highlights that women's preference for collaboration is not only a leadership strategy but also reflects how they view their own effectiveness in fostering teamwork and inclusivity. Female faculty were more likely to associate leadership with collaboration, support, dedication and communication,

whereas male faculty tended to link leadership with authority and control. Male leaders display more authority, aggression and self-confidence, while their female counterparts are more empathetic, kind and better at understanding (Maheshwari & Nayak, 2020). These findings highlight that women leader not only perceive themselves differently from their male colleagues but also enact leadership in ways that align with inclusivity and collaboration, which are increasingly valued in contemporary academia.

Another popular style of leadership in higher education institutions is transformative leadership. Transformative leader's aim is to inspire, motivate colleagues to growth and develop, and promote innovation within institutions. Robbins and Judge (2008, as cited in Nurtjahjani et al., 2020) noted that transformative leadership is a skill to impact people to realize concept or outlined target. Transformational leaders encourage and inspire followers to get exceptional results, also help them develop their own leadership abilities (Bass, 1985; House & Shamir, 1993; Sashkin, 2004, as cited in Brown et al., 2019).

Despite these adaptive strengths and positive side of women leadership, women leaders highly mentioned challenges in the way when they entered their leadership positions. The research of all women in senior roles showed that women in academia have higher workloads than women in other spheres, as they work in four different areas: teaching, research, supervision and management, they also need to perform their duties at home, which influence women's productivity and their chance of professional growth (Maheshwari & Nayak, 2020). The large workloads were described as overwhelming, health damaging, and unrewarding, leading them to resign or avoid such roles altogether (Ghundol & Muthanna, 2025).

Female leaders in Vietnamese higher education institutions report feeling that their legitimacy is constantly questioned, either by colleagues, subordinates, or institutional culture.

Women faced skepticism from subordinates, which undermined their sense of being accepted as legitimate leaders (Maheshwari & Nayak, 2020), unethical practices reduced women's chances of being viewed as credible leaders, regardless of their qualifications and some women noted that despite gender equality initiatives, they still lacked full parity of participation, making their authority feel conditional or fragile (Ghundol & Muthanna, 2025). To overcome such skepticism, women leaders have to demonstrate their professionalism, competence, performance and visible results. As Suchman (1995, as cited in Simpson et al., 2022, p. 574) stated that legitimacy might be described as general perception that entity's actions are aligned with norms, values and beliefs accepted within a particular social system.

Another factor that affects women leader's career experience is the existence informal professional networks, which is often called as "old boy" clubs. These informal networks usually run outside institutions and have influence on career progression and development. An "informal network" is a group of people who see value in connecting with each other (Atkinson & Moffat, 2005, as cited in Domunco, 2023).

Deep-seated gendered expectations mean that women's collaborative styles may be undervalued in environments that privilege assertiveness and hierarchical control, weak at decision-making, male leaders receive more support, resources and recognition from colleagues (Tessens et al, 2011), lack of self-confidence (Maheshwari & Nayak, 2020), all these lead to imposter syndrome among women leaders. Female academics in higher education often feel unmotivated as a consequence of major factors: the stressfulness of administrative responsibilities and spousal disagreement to professional dealings with male colleagues (Ghundol & Muthanna, 2025), social cooperating hurdles, spending time after works as they home duties (Ghundol & Muthanna, 2025; Maheshwari & Nayak, 2020).

Engaging leadership position in higher education institutions, some women leaders experience positive challenges, such as mentor support, female support, mindset changing (Maheshwari & Nayak, 2020). The society is changing its way of thinking toward women, women were elevated due to their accomplishment, skills, attitude, but not because of their gender.

## **2.5 Work-life Balance**

Broadly, work-life balance refers to the skill to control professional responsibilities alongside personal and family duties in a way that minimizes conflict and fosters well-being (Chang et al., 2010, as cited in Brue, 2019). For women leaders, this balance is complicated by multiple roles they take not only through leadership positions at work, but also through family duties as women mothers and wives at home. Scholars have consistently argued that the pressures of combining leadership responsibilities with domestic obligations not only hinder women's career choices or advancement but also influence their motivation, aspirations, and long-term career trajectories (Alqahtani, 2019; Heath, 2012; Tang et al., 2024).

Family is one of the crucial aspects in any human's life. Family plays a pivotal role in the work and life balance. According to worldwide cultural expectations, family is central norm, female leaders try to meet all family needs, supportive, and harmonious family structures provide emotional resilience, while strained family relationships can intensify obstacles toward work-life balance (Tang et al, 2024). Family responsibilities take time and energy, which can influence on job performance (Naong N. & Naong L., 2023). To overcome these hurdles, female leaders use time-management approaches and they rely on extended family support (Tang et al., 2024). Digital planning tools and organizational technologies are used by women leaders to manage complex schedule and productivity. The using digital technologies increases coordination and

knowledge spent for work, which leads to better work-life balance and work achievement (Duan et al., 2023).

Some studies on the work – family balance highlight the importance boundary management strategy. According to Nippert-Eng (1996, as cited in Leduc et al., 2016), people in order to manage different roles connected with family and work use mental and sometimes physical barriers to divide work and family responsibilities. Boundary management allows individuals to organize and separate the expectations and responsibilities associated with their different roles (Kossek et al., 1999, as cited in Leduc et al., 2016).

The next strategy in balancing work and family is family members—particularly supportive spouses—can act as sources of encouragement and resilience for women navigating leadership challenges, providing emotional and practical support during periods of heavy workloads. (Alqahtani, 2019).

Occupational and socio-cultural factors are influence WLB. A supportive and comfortable workplace is beneficial for female employees in their work-life balance strategy (Heath, 2012). Organizations that provide flexible work arrangements significantly enhance women’s ability to achieve work–life balance. Strategies such as flexible scheduling, job sharing, telecommuting, remote work, part-time employment, and parental leave have been shown to support women in better managing professional and personal responsibilities (Heath, 2012; Tang et al., 2024).

Despite the positive atmosphere, Heath (2012), in her research on women’s strategies for WLB, found that many women leaders experienced constant strain while attempting to balance administrative duties with personal commitments. Restricted career advancement prospects often

lead to longer working hours, heightened responsibilities and lack of professional growth or navigate to minor role (Tang et al., 2024). Similarly, Brue (2019) argued that the competing demands and high responsibilities at workplaces, additional to it, family and personal roles often force women to make stay decreased motivation and, in some cases, withdrawal from leadership pathways. These findings align with studies in other national contexts. For instance, Ghundol and Muthanna (2025) highlighted that despite holding leadership roles, women often resigned or declined opportunities due to overwhelming stress, spousal disagreement on collegial interactions, and lack of institutional support.

In addition to the previously discussed factors, certain personal factors also play a crucial role in shaping women's work-life balance. The first factor is good health. Maintaining good physical health plays a crucial role in enabling women leaders to balance professional and personal responsibilities effectively. When female managers sustain their physical well-being, they are better equipped with the energy, focus, and resilience needed to handle demanding workloads alongside family duties. In contrast, poor health can exacerbate stress and reduce efficiency, making it more difficult to achieve a sustainable work-life balance (Tang et al., 2024). The next factor is self-management, which is for women in leadership positions, is particularly critical for sustaining work-life balance. It involves the capacity to regulate emotions and behaviors, which helps navigate workplace pressures, manage competing demands, and maintain stability in stressful situations (Tang et al., 2024). Scholars also highlight the importance of psychological coping strategies, such as stress management, emotional regulation and keeping a flexible mindset, which help women leaders to advance work and life demands. Stress coping strategies can be used as measures to manage job related stress and promote well-being and regulate workplace pressure (Kim, 2022).

Mentorship and peer support programs can help to achieve the work-life balance. When women experience strong support networks, their overall life satisfaction improves, which in turn enhances motivation and fosters a more optimistic outlook. This positive mindset equips them with the resilience needed to navigate and overcome challenges in both their professional and personal spheres (Tang et al., 2024).

In Kazakhstan, the topic on women's leadership and work-life balance is shaped by a unique crossing of Soviet legacies, traditional cultural norms, and contemporary global influences. The Soviet system supplied a great variety of funds to get work-life balance for working women, such as nurseries, kindergartens, and after-school activities (Kataeva et al., 2023). Kazakhstani women in leadership position, face challenges to get family and work balance advancement. According to deep rooted gender norms, which is strongly fixed in thoughts, women's position and education are not important as family, and family responsibilities go ahead of work responsibilities and women often find themselves in a dilemma between fulfilling the roles of a good mother and wife and pursuing career advancement (Kuzhabekova et al., 2024; Kuzhabekova & Almkhambetova, 2025). In Kazakhstani society, many women experience feelings of guilt for not being able to dedicate themselves to work in the same way as their male counterparts. As a result, they tend to prioritize stable but lower-paid positions over higher-paying, more demanding role (Kuzhabekova et al., 2024). Women tend to achieve success in a career if they are not married or divorced, or otherwise they face disadvantages due to gender bias in career advancement (Bihagen & Ohls, 2006, as cited in Kuzhabekova et al., 2017). Beyond direct caregiving responsibilities, women in Kazakhstan face additional traditional bias: women are often expected to take care of parents-in-law, which takes time and energy, thereby adding barriers for balancing work and life, and career advancement

(Adambayeva, 2024). Despite these challenges, which women face in achieving work-life balance, women meet cultural and institutional support. Policies on maternity leave and the availability of childcare services are key factors influencing how women manage their work-life balance (Adambayeva, 2024). Spousal support and the growth of remote work opportunities can significantly support women in balancing their dual roles at home and in the workplace (Adambayeva, 2024).

## **2.6 Institutional Policies and Workplace Cultures**

Across the world, universities have increasingly introduced gender equality policies to reduce the underrepresentation of women in senior roles (Morley, 2012; O'Connor, 2020). Such policies often include quotas for women in leadership, gender mainstreaming strategies, and the integration of gender-sensitive curricula and training. Transparent hiring and merit-based promotion are also important institutional policies that influence the women's advancement in higher education leadership. Research suggests that clear and transparent hiring and promotion lead to effective leadership within administration, and help strengthen trust between job applicants and employees within institutions (Akter, 2025). However, researchers caution that policy alone does not guarantee substantive change. Because formal measures may be weakened by persistent informal practices and cultural expectations, women learned to conform in order to advance, effectively to adjust themselves to the deeply rooted masculine culture instead of challenging and transforming the universities (Burkinshaw & White, 2017). In the European context, initiatives such as Athena Swan was viewed as a practical tool for both acknowledging inequality and motivating institutions to work toward change (Ovseiko et al., 2017). Some critics argued that obtaining an Athena SWAN Silver award alone may not meaningfully resolve gender

inequality, since sustainable progress depends on cultural and structural reforms within universities as well as in society (Ovseiko et al., 2017).

In Kazakhstan, gender equality policies have been formally endorsed through national strategies such as the Concept of Family and Gender Policy of Kazakhstan 2030. These policies highlight the importance of women's representation in leadership across sectors, including education (ADB, 2013). However, studies suggest that women's presence in academic management remains limited, and existing gender equality strategies often lack enforcement mechanisms (Adambayeva, 2024). In practice, women in Kazakhstani HEIs continue to be concentrated in middle management roles (e.g., deans, heads of departments) rather than in top-level leadership positions such as rectors or vice-rectors (Kuzhabekova & Almukhambetova, 2025).

Maternity leave provisions and flexible work arrangements are central to shaping women's career advancement in higher education. In countries with generous parental leave and childcare support, flexible working hours, women tend to have better chances of combining professional advancement with family responsibilities (Lewis & Humbert, 2010). However, strategies on WLB and flexible working hours do not always address gender equality, women continue to face "career penalties" when making use of such benefits: women accept the flexible working hour system more than men do, but it often leads to salary loss and career stagnation (Lewis & Humbert, 2010).

Leadership is mostly associated with heavy workloads, long working hours and constant availability at work. Such demands reflect the idea "ideal worker norms", which according to the research is a masculine gendered assumption of limitless work commitment (Asker, 1990; Blair-Loy, 2003; Williams et al., 2013, as cited in Müller & Chung, 2026).

In the Kazakhstani context, the government provides paid maternity leave and some childcare support, which allows women to take care of their child. However, the length of maternity leave hinders career advancement, as the existing gap makes it challenging for women to “enter the job flow” (Adambayeva, 2024). Research shows that women often prioritize stability and family-oriented roles, even if these positions are lower-paid or less prestigious (Adambayeva, 2024). Moreover, informal promotion practices often disadvantage women. Studies from Central Asia reveal that men are often favored in leadership selections due to perceptions of availability, authority, and suitability, while women are evaluated for the expectations of caregiving and family obligations (Kuzhabekova & Almukhambetova, 2025).

Organizational culture plays a significant role in either supporting or inhibiting women’s leadership advancement. Higher education institutions have been shaped by male-dominated norms, with leadership often associated with masculine traits such as authority, competitiveness, and assertiveness (Brescoll, 2016). It has been suggested that women must demonstrate higher levels of performance than their male counterparts in order to attain equivalent career advancement (Ok & Eniola, 2024). Women who adopt collaborative or relational leadership styles may therefore be undervalued or stereotyped as less authoritative (Ok & Eniola, 2024). A supportive workplace climate characterized by inclusivity, transparency, mentorship opportunities and recognition of diversity, which has been shown to significantly improve women’s career satisfaction and promotion (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016). On the contrary, environments marked by gender bias, harassment, and lack of collegial support can demotivate women from pursuing leadership roles (Ghundol & Muthanna, 2025).

Influential patriarchal norms remain in workplaces in Kazakhstan and Central Asia. Like many other institutions universities often function within hierarchical and male-dominated

governance systems, where decision-making is centralized and informal networks (so-called “old boys’ clubs”) play a crucial role in appointments (Kuzhabekova et al., 2024). Women leaders often report feelings of isolation, lack of mentorship, and double standards in evaluation, where their achievements are evaluated more heavily compared to male colleagues (Adambayeva, 2024). Additionally, cultural stereotypes that associate women primarily with caregiving roles, leading to doubts about women’s ability to handle high-pressure leadership responsibilities (Gandhi & Sen, 2021). In Kazakhstan, the 2030 Gender Equality Strategy and commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are implemented to improve women’s representation in decision-making positions. Kazakhstan accepted a series of national strategies to promote gender equality, beginning with the 2006–2016 Gender Equality Strategy approved by the President of Kazakhstan. The strategy aimed to transform traditional gender hierarchies into a framework of partnership between men and women, focusing on seven priority areas: political and public participation, economic inclusion, education, reproductive health, prevention of gender-based violence, strengthening of families, and raising public awareness (ADB, 2013, as cited in Adambayeva, 2024). In 2017, Kazakhstan introduced the Concept on Family and Gender Policy 2030, a new framework that builds on earlier strategies but combines gender equality with family policy. While the government has attempted to limit gender bias, the lack of structural culture remains unchanged. As a result, women’s advancement continues to depend heavily on individual effort, family support, and informal coping strategies rather than structural enablers (Adambayeva, 2024).

## **2.7 Summary**

The reviewed literature highlights that women’s leadership in higher education is shaped by a complex of cultural, structural and institutional factors. Globally, research works identify

persistent barriers such as gender stereotypes, male-dominated organizational cultures, unequal promotion criteria and challenges in balancing professional and family responsibilities.

Supportive mechanisms, as gender-sensitive policies, flexible work arrangements, peer and mentor support, family and spousal support are found to improve women's access to leadership, although researchers note that such measures often stay without deeper cultural change.

Within Kazakhstan, national strategies such as the Gender Equality Strategy 2006–2016 and the Concept on Family and Gender Policy 2030 reflect governmental commitment to gender equality. However, evidence shows that the translation of these policies into practice remains limited. Women in Kazakhstan continue to face competing expectations of career advancement and family caregiving, often prioritizing stability over leadership opportunities. Research further reveals gaps in workplace cultures within higher education institutions, where Soviet-era hierarchies, patriarchal norms, and lack of organizational support continue to shape women's leadership advancement. The limited scholarship on Kazakhstan and the absence of qualitative research highlights the need for an in-depth exploration of women's lived experiences in higher education leadership. By focusing on the voices of women leaders, this research seeks to shed lights on how institutional policies, workplace cultures, and societal expectations coincide to shape their career paths.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

The thesis aim is to explore the experiences, perceptions, and challenges faced by women in leadership positions within higher education institutions in Kazakhstan. This chapter describes the methodology of the study. It describes the research design, the study site and sample. The relevant data collection instruments and the process of data collection and the data analysis. Finally, it concludes by addressing the ethical considerations that were made to confirm confidentiality of participants.

#### **3.1 Research Design**

This study employed qualitative research design using a phenomenology method to explore the experiences, perceptions, and challenges faced by women in leadership positions within higher education institutions. The aim of the qualitative research is to explore how individuals make sense of their experiences, how they shape their realities, and the meanings they allocate to those experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Phenomenology is a qualitative research approach concentrating on realizing how people come across a specific case in their own words and point of view, lived experiences. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) claim that the phenomenological interview is the central data collection method and before interviewing participants who have experienced the phenomenon, researchers typically consider on their own experiences to better understand the phenomenon and identify personal prejudices, viewpoints, and assumptions (p.27). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), phenomenological interview is a main technique to obtain the backbone of the experience's meaning. This approach allowed for a deep exploration of women leader's experiences, perceptions and obstacles on the way to leadership.

### **3.2 Research Site**

Kazakhstan's higher education system provides a wide context for exploring women's leadership experiences. Since independence in 1991, the country has undergone significant educational reforms, resulting in the expansion and diversification of higher education institutions. Nowadays there are over 120 universities, distributed across public, private, joint stock and national universities. Astana and Almaty stand out as the nation's major academic hubs. Almaty, the former capital, remains the cultural and educational center of the country, while Astana, the current capital, has rapidly developed as a political and administrative hub with growing educational influence. Together, these two cities concentrate many of Kazakhstan's most influential higher education institutions. Among these universities, there are few universities in Kazakhstan where rectors and other administrative staff are women. The research was conducted at universities of two cities Astana and Almaty, where women currently occupy senior leadership roles, including rectors and vice-rectors, deans and vice-deans. Women's representation in university leadership in Kazakhstan remains limited. Identifying institutions with women in top positions ensures that the research engages directly with those who have overcome barriers and can provide first-hand insights into their leadership journeys.

### **3.3 Sample and Sample Strategy**

The study employed non-probabilistic, purposive, snowball or chain sampling strategies in order to recruit participants. Thus, the most suitable sampling approach is non-probabilistic - the most common form of which is called purposive or purposeful. Purposeful sampling operates on the belief that the researcher seeks to explore, acknowledge, and gain meaningful insights, and thus must choose participants who can provide the most valuable and relevant information

(Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As Merriam and Tisdell (2016) clarify snowball, chain, or network sampling is widely considered the most common form of purposeful sampling, as after interviewing the main candidates, other colleagues might be recommended for the future interviews. According to Creswell (2013), the main idea of purposeful sampling is that the researcher intentionally chooses individuals and locations that can provide meaningful insights into the research problem and the main phenomenon is being investigated. The purposeful sampling approach helped the study to explore and gain rich and meaningful data from women leaders about their experiences, perceptions and challenges at leadership positions.

Focus group of the interview is the community which have understanding of the topic (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For the purpose of recruiting the participant, first researcher started by identifying the characteristics of an ideal participants based on the purpose of the study. The main feature of the participant should be women holding leadership positions in higher education institutions in Kazakhstan, such as dean, vice-rector or rector, with the minimum years of leadership experience between 3-5 years. This information was gathered from official university websites that provide the names and positions of academic leaders. The main reason for selecting this group is that women in such positions have direct, lived experience of both the perceptions and challenges of academic leadership in Kazakhstan. They are best positioned to provide rich insights into how women navigate institutional structures, cultural expectations, and work-life balance while advancing their leadership careers.

The invitations for the interviews were sent to 16 women leaders, however only 7 participants agreed to take part in the interviews. The decision to work with a relatively small sample allowed to generate in-depth, nuanced insights into the lived experiences of women leaders. Each participant provided a rich narrative that contributed to a broader understanding of

the supports and barriers shaping women's leadership advancement in Kazakhstan's higher education.

**Table 1**

Occupational Characteristics of Participants

| <b>Participants</b> | <b>Place of University work</b> | <b>Position</b> |
|---------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| Participant 1       | Astana                          | Dean            |
| Participant 2       | Astana                          | Vice-dean       |
| Participant 3       | Almaty                          | Vice-rector     |
| Participant 4       | Astana                          | Vice-dean       |
| Participant 5       | Astana                          | Rector          |
| Participant 6       | Astana                          | Vice-dean       |
| Participant 7       | Astana                          | Vice- rector    |

### **3.4 Data Collection Tools and Procedures**

The present research used an interview method for collecting data on a topic. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) claim that interviewing is the typical type of data collection in qualitative studies. A data collection method that commonly includes interviewing individuals who have personally encountered or lived through the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative interviewing is a technique where the interviewer guides the participant to respond to particular research questions (Fernandez, 2018). According to the structure this study uses semi structured interview. Semi structured interview is conducted by the beforehand prepared questions, but

words and order of the questions are chosen depending on the situation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

According to Creswell (2013), the most significant part in the process is finding people or place for an interview and set up positive empathy with participant in order to obtain good and meaningful data. After obtaining ethical approval from the Graduate School of Education Institutional Research Ethics Committee, the researcher used two techniques to contact potential participants. The initial method was to send a formal invitation letter via email. This was obtained through university websites or professional networks. Second, in case of purposeful sampling when candidates recommended their colleagues, professional messaging service, such as What's up message service was utilized to identify and approach participants. Once potential participants were identified, the researcher sent personalized invitation letters via email. The email included a short introduction of the researcher and the purpose of the study, an explanation of why they were selected (based on their leadership position), information about confidentiality and voluntary participation. A consent form was attached. The type of interview was one – on-one interview. One-on-one interviews between a researcher and a participant allow for an in-depth exploration of a limited number of individuals and provide valuable insights into a wide range of experiences (Stofer, 2019). Three interviews were conducted in person and four interviews were conducted via Zoom online platform. Interviews involved: one university rector, two vice-rectors, one dean and three vice deans. The interviews were lasted between 20 minutes and approximately to 1 hour 30 minutes. During the interview, the research participants answered relevant 5-7 open-ended research questions according to the interview protocol, focused on understanding the central phenomenon in the study. With the consent of the research participant, the interview was audio-recorded. The interviews were conducted in a quiet and

peaceful atmosphere for the participant's convenience. Participants were offered flexibility to choose the time and format of the interview (in-person, Zoom, or Google Meet). The use of online interviews allowed the researcher to reach the participants in geographically distant areas. This flexibility was designed to respect their busy schedules as leaders and increase the likelihood of participation. In addition, the conversation for this interview was conducted in the language most convenient for the participants, including Kazakh, Russian, and English. The purpose is to get good data collection, and pilot interview will help to conduct a good interview. Before the interview, pilot interviews were conducted. As explained by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), pilot interview is significant for testing the questions.

The snowball sampling method was used, where during the interviews, participants were asked if they know other women leaders who might be willing to take part. This method helped to reach participants who did not respond to formal invitations but were more open to participating through peer recommendations. The snowball or chain sampling approach allowed the researcher to involve more participants into the study, as women leaders recommended their colleagues at leadership positions to take part in the interview study. For those who did not respond to the initial email, a polite follow-up message was sent after one week to remind them of the study and invite their participation. In general, data collection for the study began after approval was obtained and continued until the required number of participants was collected.

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

The data analysis section will describe the procedures of data analysis. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) recommend that the most effective approach to data analysis in qualitative research is to conduct it alongside data collection. The researcher knows the problem of the

study, but he does not know what will be founded (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Therefore, I analyzed data simultaneously with data collection. Data was analyzed using thematic analysis, which is used for finding, understanding, and reporting patterns or themes in data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The thematic analysis helped the researcher to explore and understand the participants experiences, perceptions and challenges more deeply through combining them into themes. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), the thematic analysis consists of 4 steps. First, the researcher gets familiar with the data by transcribing and reading it several times. Secondly, important data related to the research questions were coded. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), coding involves giving a brief label or symbol to different parts of the data to make it easier to identify and reclaim specific information. These labels took the form of words, letters, numbers, phrases, colors, or a mix of these elements. Next, themes were developed by grouping codes. Here themes were analyzed and reviewed. Finally, themes finally named to answer the research questions. All interviews were recorded and transcribed manually into Microsoft Word document. As not all participants of the interview were English speakers, their responses were in Kazakh or Russian languages as well, the obtained data were translated into English and were coded in English.

### **3.6 Ethical Consideration**

The risks associated with this study are minimal risk. However, as this research involves human subject, the research might have potential risks for participants. The research primarily explores the participants' experiences, perceptions and challenges, which might be considered sensitive topic, influencing the mood of the participants and some participants may experience mild discomfort. Consequently, the interview was tried to be comfortable for the participants.

Additionally, participants may skip any question or withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. The participants were informed that their participation is voluntary.

This study adhered to ethical research standards established by Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education (NUGSE). Prior to data collection, ethical approval was sought from the NUGSE Research Committee to ensure that the research design, data collection, and storage procedures meet institutional and international ethical guidelines. Participants were approached through email invitations and provided with an information sheet outlining the purpose of the study, their rights as participants, and how the data will be used. Informed consent form was given to participants in advance of the interview, with time provided to read and sign before participation. Anonymity was ensured by using pseudonyms for participants and removing identifiable information related to their position or institution. To maintain confidentiality, all data (recordings, transcripts, and consent forms) was stored securely on a password-protected device and encrypted cloud storage. Identifiers were removed during transcription and data analysis, and access to raw data was limited to the researcher. All data was used exclusively for academic purposes and destroyed after the required retention period.

### **3.7 Summary**

This chapter explained and clarified the methodological foundation of the study. A qualitative research approach with phenomenology method was employed to investigate the experiences, perceptions and challenges of women leaders in higher education institutions of Kazakhstan. The sample consisted of 7 participants chosen via purposeful snowball criterion-based sampling, which ensure rich data for the research investigation. Data collection was achieved using semi-structured interviews. This helped to reach detailed and contextually

appropriate data. Interviews were conducted in the participant's preferred language, place, time and format and adhered to ethical protocols, implicating informed consent form, confidentiality and the right to withdraw at any moment. Thematic analysis was employed to explore the data, using an inductive method for coding and formulating themes based on participant's opinion.

## **Chapter 4. Findings**

The chapter gives information about the findings of this qualitative study searching the experiences, challenges and examining the strategies the women leaders in higher education institutions of Kazakhstan use to balance their professional and personal responsibilities. By investigating the experiences and challenges that women leaders face, the research aimed how organizational, personal, social and cultural factors influence their leadership roles.

As have been explained in the previous chapters, the research was guided by the following questions:

RQ1: What are the key factors that support or prevent women's access to leadership roles in higher education institutions of Kazakhstan?

RQ2: How do women leaders in academia perceive and experience their roles and responsibilities?

RQ3: What strategies do women in higher education leadership use to balance their professional and personal responsibilities?

RQ4: How do institutional policies and workplace cultures affect the career progression of women in leadership positions?

As explained in Chapter 3, this chapter addresses comprehensive semi structured interviews were conducted with 7 women leaders of higher education institution of Kazakhstan. The data were analyzed thematically employing a qualitative coding methodology to distinguish themes and subthemes relevant to the research questions.

The chapter is arranged around four main themes each in accordance with certain research questions. The first theme, barriers and enablers to leadership positions, examines what barriers and enablers women face on the way to advance the leadership position. The second theme, institutional and cultural influences, examines how institutional policies affect women's career progression in academia and explore the aspects of workplace culture that have supported and hindered the women's career. The third theme, perceptions and experiences of women leaders, analyzes how women leaders see their role as leaders in higher education institutions, how their colleagues and subordinates perceive them as leaders and how gender influence on their leadership role. The fourth theme, work-life balance and coping strategies, investigates how women leaders balance their professional role with their personal and family responsibilities, and this theme examines difficulties and strategies women leaders found effective in maintaining work-life balance.

Each theme is classified into subthemes, supported by informatory extracts from the participants interviews. Together, these findings supply with complicated understanding gender equality in academia through experiences of women leadership roles in higher education in Kazakhstan.

#### **4.1 RQ1: What are the key factors that support or prevent women's access to leadership roles in higher education institutions of Kazakhstan?**

This section introduces the findings on the women's description their journey into a leadership role in higher education and the obstacles they faced, their professional and personal factors that helped them to reach current position, based on interviews with 7 women leaders. The data analyses uncovered 4 principal subthemes within this overall category. The first subtheme, career trajectories into academic leadership, mentions the participants background and

their journey to leadership position. In this subtheme, the participants expressed opinions regarding how they entered leadership roles in academia. The second subtheme, structural and inner barriers to leadership role, explains how participants describe systematic, institutional, cultural and inner obstacles women face in reaching leadership position in higher education institutions. The third subtheme, personal and professional enablers and restrictions, refers to participants knowledge, skills and other factors helped them to reach the leadership role. The last subtheme, mentoring and networking as a mechanism of career advancement, explains the role of mentoring and networking in professional progression. Participants, particularly all of them indicated the necessity of networking to attain benefit in career progression and leadership. Altogether, these subthemes a considerable viewpoint about the journey to leadership role.

#### ***4.1.1 Career Trajectories into Academic Leadership***

This subsection addresses the insight of women leaders in Kazakhstani higher education institutions regarding their career path. The findings point out that most of the participants did not initially plan their leadership roles, but emerged gradually through institutional opportunities. This suggest that leadership pathways in higher education institutions are often not because of career planning, but rather through professional experiences and institutional support. The findings indicate that leadership roles are achieved as a part of a gradual trajectory, where individuals move from teaching or research responsibilities to administrative roles. Conversely, some participants indicated that they dreamed to advance leadership position in institutions. This contrast shows that leadership pathway is not always unique. Some leaders get the leadership unexpectedly as an institution encouragement, but some leaders get the role by long, constant aspiration. Participant 3 stated: “I did not specifically go to this position, I always planned to work as a teacher because I enjoyed teaching”. While participant 6 stated: “she [dean] offered me

to become vice dean, and I would say it was just out of the blue for me because I didn't think. I had this thought or dream maybe 10 more than 10 years". Participants often began their careers as lectures or faculty members before working into administrative leadership. Participant 1 noted: "It was a long journey. So, I started after my graduation, I was the assistant professor, then I was associate professor. I was teaching, I was a faculty member".

The findings show that for the most participants leadership position was achieved through gradual progression on academic career "ladder", but for others it was sudden promotion. Most participants experienced linear career growth, while for some participants it was unexpected leadership opportunities. Participant 7: "I started as a lab assistant, then I combined my job of a lab assistant and a teacher". Similarly participant 5 noted the long journey to professional advancement: "I have built my career from the ground up, starting with teaching and gradually moving into managerial roles, working across multiple areas. I have served as a vice-rector, department director, and head of various units". These narratives suggest that leadership roles are achieved through long-term experience and institutional admission. However, not all leadership pathways are the same. Some participants achieved leadership roles as unexpected institutional appointment. For example, Participant 3 noted that leadership role was unexpected suggestion: "Well, basically, I passed the competition, the committee, approved me for this position".

Geographical mobility and involvement in national educational reforms played a significant role in shaping leadership trajectories. For several participants moving to larger cities created an opportunity for new professional experience and leadership advancement. If some leader women indicated their moving to a big city, whereas for others international experiences were crucial reason of leadership career advancement. Participant 2 noted that after moving to Astana, she occupied faculty position, then entered into leadership role: "In Astana, I was as a

faculty member and then I was appointed as a vice dean”. Similarly, participant 1: “Then when I moved to Astana, I worked at my university. In addition to geographical mobility, participation in national education reforms is an opportunity for leadership advancement. For instance, Participant 1 noted that she occupied leadership position as it was part of national task: “then I was the dean, so it was when PhD was newly introduced in Kazakhstan and I was in task of the ministry of education developing policies for PhD”.

The findings say that the participants often shaped leadership not as a pursuing a power, but a response to institutional needs and professional responsibility. For some participants leadership is not an element of power, they did not purposefully search the leadership position, additionally they accept leadership as professional responsibility. Many women leaders said they did not seek power, but accepted responsibility. Participant 2 said: “I focus on specific responsibilities, my role as a leader is quite responsible”. Also, participant 6 mentioned that responsibility was key factor in her leadership role: “When I was doing some responsibilities, I was kind of doing work at a leadership position”.

Overall, the findings indicate that women leadership journey in academia is characterized by gradual professional growth, institutional opportunities and key turning points, like offering leadership position and leadership is often perceived as responsibility rather than ambition.

#### ***4.1.2 Structural and Inner Barriers to Leadership Roles***

This subtheme explains structural, that is systematic, institutional and cultural obstacles that women leaders face in reaching leadership positions in higher education institutions. Inner barriers as well prevented in their leadership positions. Participants reported different barriers that hindered their progression in leadership.

Although participants emphasized the absence of gender bias and highlighted merit-based institutional policies, the findings revealed delicate structural inequalities in academia. Participants frequently stated that they did not face barriers, some participants simultaneously described the need to put greater effort to achieve recognition. One of participant reported experiencing gender bias, where their professional capabilities were underestimated due to their gender. For example, participant 2 described situations where her professional abilities were underestimated due to gender: “They underestimate my capabilities because I am a woman. I have to face up to some difficulties because it requires hours and extra commitment to solve these issues”. Similarly, Participant 1 noted her constant need to demonstrate the professionalism: “I just always have to prove”.

Participants reported that academic credentials obtained from Western institutions were often perceived as more valuable than local qualifications, creating an entire hierarchy of Western knowledge and contributing to epistemic injustice. Participant 1 described feeling discomfort when Western degrees were valued more than local ones. She also highlighted the epistemic injustice, where academic voice is valued depending on your educational origin: “So it wasn't the direct abuse, but I always felt discomfort when people were saying that the Western education is more evaluated, with the Western diploma people are more a well-educated, comparing to their local universities. But all the time I heard between lines, we call it epistemic injustice, when your voice is heard less, your opinion means less, just because your diploma is not from the north or just so we say the global north”. Similarly, participant 5 noted intention of aspiring international education through the Bolashak program: “I wanted to go to Bolashak, to get the professor to register”.

The findings indicated that participants indicated limited leadership mentorship is one of the barriers in advancing leadership. Some participants indicated the limited mentorship structures made the navigation of career advancement more difficult. Participant 2 noted: “limited mentorship opportunities here, I think for women as well, which made it harder to navigate career advancement”. Participants reported limited formal education or training in leadership and management, requiring them to develop administrative and managerial skills. Participant 6 reported: “But at the very beginning, it was hard because I don't have any education in leadership or in management”.

The next barriers are inner barriers which come from personal feelings and beliefs, psychological obstacles, and balancing work-life responsibilities. Several participants indicated inner barriers, like imposter syndrome and self-doubt, especially in the stage of their career advancement. Participant 4 described inner barriers: “There were difficulties in the beginning- lack of self- confidence and doubts about my ability”. Similarly, participant 5 described her hesitation the leadership advancement: “I probably can't be a rector, inside myself”.

Participants indicated that balancing work and life responsibilities and the balance between scholarship and administrative duties restricted their career advancement. Participants reported difficulties in balancing professional responsibilities with personal and family obligations. Participant 1 said: “thing is to make the balance between your work and your personal life and your family. When you have kids, you have to pay attention to them”. Participant 2 described caring for elderly parents while performing leadership responsibilities:” I do live with my parents and they are 74 now”. Participant indicated the balance between scholarship and administrative role is also challenging. Participant 1 indicated: “I want to

conduct research. I want to have my h-index very high, but you are working at administrative position. You have to make this condition for your professors to publish”.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that female’s pathways to leadership at universities are formed by a combination of organizational and inner obstacles. Structural barriers, including epistemic injustice, gender bias, lack of mentorship, and limited leadership training, coincide with inner psychological challenge such as self-doubt and imposter syndrome. The barrier such as balancing academic, administrative, and family responsibilities also exists. Altogether, they discover that women’s leadership experiences are not individual struggles but are fixed in institutional and cultural.

#### ***4.1.3 Personal and Professional Enablers and Restrictions***

This subtheme sheds light on the participants’ personal factors, such as individual qualities, motivation, skills, family and professional factors, like organizational support, policies, career opportunities that helped them in leadership role. Participants highlighted education, advanced academic degrees, international experience, and professional development as crucial factors that helped their progression into leader positions. Participant 2 emphasized how dedicated to leadership development: “I study hard”. Similarly, participant 5 noted the significance of international academic opportunities and this help for leadership advancement: “Education is important. “Bolashak” is a great opportunity to study. Then, about 5-6-7 years ago, I had a lot of Erasmus projects.”.

Personal characteristics such as resilience, responsibility, adaptability and leadership skills were a primary factor in participants’ ability to navigate leadership roles. Participant 2 underlined several personal skills that supported her leadership role: “On a personal level, I would say determination, resilience, and strong time management skills”. Similarly, participant 3

mentioned some personal skills as highly- organized and goal-oriented: “I think I have very good organizational skills. I'm very teachable. if I'm given a goal, I'll achieve it. I'm a very creative person who can motivate people to achieve things”. Some participants highlighted the importance of accountability and informal leadership. Participant 5 indicated taking responsibility during the absence of a rector, this means accountability without formal authority. She also highlighted the importance of multilingual competence in managing institutional communication, especially with diverse stakeholders, like students, colleagues and international partners: “knowledge of languages is extremely helpful”. Participant 6 indicated that her skill like responsibility and ability to meet deadlines is crucial in advancing leadership role: “I had responsibility, I tried to be on time all the deadlines”.

Another factor that enables participants with the leadership roles is the family support. Some participants underlined the crucial role of supportive spouses and family members in engaging leadership role. Participant 1 indicated her spousal support helped a lot in her administrative and doctoral degree: “For personal, I think that's support of my family, so my husband who makes all conditions, supported me with kids when I was doing in my PhD, my second doctoral degree, who supported me a lot”. Participant 7 mentioned about supportive family members: “Supportive family, supportive husband, I was blessed, and I have a wonderful son, great daughters and great brothers and sisters”.

Professional or organizational factors, like workplace relationships and institutional relationship also facilitated women’s leadership development. Participants highlighted that collegial support and a respectful environment are crucial. Participant 1 described the professional environment within her institution collaborative and supportive, particularly senior

management and colleagues support: “our professional environment, the constant support of the President and provost. My peers, when we always exchange our experience. So we just have an ecosystem of support, understanding, collaboration”. Participant 2 mentioned the collaborative work environment. Participant 1 mentioned the support of strategic partners, not only academic resources, but some professional experience and advice: “I think that we are very lucky to have such strong academic partners, and it's not just about the papers or books or your studies, but many things were learned from our partners. They gave very wise pieces of advice.”.

Overall, the findings indicate that female’s leadership growth is shaped by a connection of personal and professional facilitators. Personal factors such as education, resilience, responsibility, leadership skills and family support strengthened women’s ability to navigate leadership challenges. At the same time, professional factors, including collegial support, institutional environment and partnerships, provided crucial factor that enabled women in their leadership roles.

#### ***4.1.4 Mentoring and Networking as a Mechanism of Career Advancement***

According to the findings, mentoring relationships and professional networks were identified as important factor that enabled women’s empowerment to leadership positions and strengthened women’s professional confidence. Many participants indicated that mentors shaped their leadership role, providing professional guidance, support and defense. The participant 3 noted strong influence of her mentor: “That is for 100 percent. I can confidentially say that the rector is my teacher, my mentor. Because she essentially shaped me into a leadership, I am today having become a vice rector”. Participant 4 also mentioned the role of mentor, and a mentor served as a defender: “I received significant support from my supervisor. Whenever someone expressed unfair opinions about me or exerted pressure, my supervisor consistently defended me.

He also acted as my mentor”. Participant 7 mentioned that during the life she had had many mentors, who supported and taught her a lot.

As well as mentoring, networking served as a significant factor that enabled women’s professional progression. The findings indicated the significance of networking, as it increases opportunity for collaboration and career progression. Participant 5 described the role of networking in career advancing: “People who have already achieved success continue to advance their careers largely through networking. I have also observed this in practice through my own work”.

Overall, the findings demonstrated that women’s pathways to academic leadership in Kazakhstani higher education institutions are shaped by a complex interaction of career trajectories, structural and inner barriers, and personal and professional enablers. Women leaders often did not initially aspire to leadership positions; instead, their careers evolved gradually through institutional opportunities, professional responsibility and key turning points. Leadership was frequently perceived not as a pursuit of power, but as an obligation to respond to organizational needs and ensure academic quality.

#### **4.2 RQ2: How do Women Leaders in Academia Perceive and Experience their Roles and Responsibilities?**

The findings revealed the perceptions and experiences of female leaders, how they see their role as a leader and how their colleagues and subordinates perceive them as a leader. Participants reflected diverse leadership identities and professional values. The section is presented under three sections: a. self-perception of leadership role, b. external perceptions and recognition of women leadership, c. gendered perceptions and stereotypes in leadership.

#### ***4.2.1 Self-perception of Leadership Role***

The first subtheme findings examine how women leaders define their leadership roles. Most of the participants viewed leadership as transformative, change leaders or change agents. Participant 2 described herself as change leader: “I pull myself as a change leader I try to foster and inclusive and supportive environment”. Also, participant 5 underlined a desire to change aspects of higher education: “I aspire to be a reformer- to change and transform many aspects of higher education. I want to change and dismantle existing stereotypes”. Similarly, participant 7 highlighted the importance of contributing to institutional transformation: “To contribute to the transition to the transformation of higher education”.

Several women leaders evaluated leadership as contribution and responsibility to the institutional development. Participant 3 noted her strong belief of her contribution to the university’s development: “If I have contributed to improving the university’s position from the students’ perspective, I believe I have fulfilled my role”. Closely, participant 2 emphasized leadership as responsibility and opportunity: “I see my role as a leader as both of responsibility and opportunity to make a positive empathy”.

Some women leaders visioned leadership as a mentorship and collaboration. Participant 1 see herself as a mentor and psychological support figure: “It looks like women empowerment. When my young colleagues may come to me and ask questions, because they feel more comfortable to ask me rather than their male”. Likewise, participant 2 mentioned that her leadership position gave an opportunity to mentor younger academics: “So I also knew my position is a chance to mentor younger colleagues”.

Some participant viewed leadership is not defined as gendered, leadership is about professionalism and self-qualities. Participant 1 explained a professionalism and contribution: “I don't think that is a big difference between the female and male leadership. A professionalism, empathy of this person, of his contribution”. The same, participant 4 noted about the constant professional development: “I see myself as a leader who is engaged in a continuous process of professional development”.

Several participants viewed leadership as an adaptive leadership to modern technologies and global orientations in higher education. Participant 5 highlighted the importance of digital innovation: “Digital technologies and artificial intelligence are often perceived as threats, while I view them as integral to the modern generation’s learning environment. Leaders in higher education must accept these changes rather than resist them”. Similarly, participant 7 noted the need for universities to align with international standards to get global recognition: “In order to get this global recognition, we have to comply with international standards”.

Overall, the findings prove that women leaders viewed themselves as a transformer leader, mentors, which align with their responsibility, professionalism, development in a global modern digitally developed world.

#### ***4.2.2 External Perceptions and Recognition of Women Leadership***

The second subtheme findings examine how colleagues and subordinates of women leaders perceive them as a leader. Most of the participants noted that their leadership roles are evaluated by their professional and personal abilities rather than gender. Participant 1 reported that colleagues focused more on her experience, leadership performance rather than her

belonging to some gender: “I don't think that people are looking if you are a female or male”. The findings suggest that professional performance is more crucial than a gender.

Some participants mentioned that their colleagues perceive them through other professional qualities, as approachability, ambition and determination. Participant 2 mentioned her personal skills as a key factor how her colleagues viewed her: “I believe my colleagues and subordinates see me as an approachable person. Some of them see me as ambitious and determined”. Some participant mentioned about the leadership recognition is established through professional performance and achievements. Participant 5 noted that leadership recognition is earned through concrete actions rather than authority: “Leadership credibility is earned by demonstrating results and actions personally, not just by title”. Several participants mentioned that leadership is recognized through authority. For example, participant 3 mentioned that constant work brought her authority: “I have authority now due to my consistent work and experience”. Similarly, participant 7 described her leadership as demanding and result-oriented: “I can't say I am kind or cruel. I am just demanding”.

The overall insight from this subtheme is that female leaders at universities are recognized and evaluated based on their professional competence, personal qualities, and demonstrated results, rather than their gender.

#### ***4.2.3 Gendered Perceptions and Stereotypes in Leadership***

The third subtheme findings demonstrate how gender has influence on the way how colleagues and subordinates perceive women leaders as a leader. The findings are divided into two parts, while the first part experienced gender-related challenge, the other part disagreed with gender bias, reporting professional competence and performance are the crucial factor how they

were perceived within higher education institution. Several participants pointed out that their belonging to some gender had effect on their leadership experience. Participant 5 mentioned that she did not take part in active social life because of her gender: “I know that men meet after work and communicate with each other, but where do they usually meet? In saunas, bathhouses, or maybe billiard clubs. And they look at me as a woman, and because of this, I miss many opportunities”. This experience suggests that gendered social networks may restrict the women leader’s opportunity to take part, which can influence on their leadership advancement. Similarly, participant 2 mentioned about gender bias, that women may have to demonstrate greater effort to establish her credibility: “Sometimes being a woman means I have to work harder, demonstrate my competence and authority”.

Contradictory, several participants identified that gender impacts on the perceptions of women leaders, but professional performance and leadership style remain a primary factor of perception. Participant 5 highlighted the importance of personal characteristics as confidence: “I mean some personal qualities rather than gender, because I would say being self-confident is really important”. Similarly, participant 7 mentioned that colleagues evaluated professionalism: “They look at the way how really I work with them”.

In sum, female leaders’ experiences of Kazakhstan’s academia reflect a dual reality: while gender bias persists as a structural and cultural factor, professionalism, leadership style and personal factors increasingly serve as the primary foundations of women leadership.

#### **4.3 RQ3: What Strategies do Women in Higher Education Leadership use to Balance Professional and Personal Responsibilities?**

This section reports participants' perceptions on balancing work and life responsibilities and the strategies they use to maintain the balance. The findings indicate that participants employ different approaches to manage work and family duties. This theme reveals three subthemes. The first subtheme, managing multiple roles: professional and family responsibilities, reveals how to obtain work life balance and manage their dual roles as academic leadership and family role. The second subtheme, coping strategies for maintaining work life balance, reports practical and psychological strategies. The third subtheme, critical moments and challenges in balancing roles, uncovers situations where work life balance becomes particularly difficult.

#### ***4.3.1 Managing Multiple Roles: Professional and Family Responsibilities***

This subtheme captures how woman leaders in higher education institutions navigate dual responsibilities of professional leadership and family duties. According to the data analysis the participants are divided into three categories due to their balancing work and life responsibilities. The first group those who have clear boundaries between work and life. Participants revealed that balancing work and life required prioritization and careful planning. Participant 1 reported that she prefers quality time to quantity time when she spends time with her children: "They [children] want me to be an active part, but I'd trust that it doesn't matter how many hours you spend with your kids. It matters the quality of these hours you with your kids". Similarly, participant 7 mentioned about careful planning: "Even all of my weekends are full". Participant 2 emphasized about the delegating tasks, which helped her manage professional responsibilities more effectively: "I started to delegate tasks. I think that's what helped me as well". These experiences prove that time management and delegation set a boundary between professional and professional roles.

One participant emphasized that maintaining balance is a key condition for successful leadership and personal circumstances shape this balance. Participant 3 mentioned the role of balance in leadership experience: “You need to be able to balance. If balance exists, everything works. If not, there will be a disfigurement somewhere”.

Several participants reported that the key factor for balancing both roles is supportive family, spousal and even colleagues. Participant 2 highlighted the role of team support: “I’m not the only one, I have my supportive team”.

The second group, those who maintain both roles simultaneously and boundaries between work and life are less defined this group tries to maintain both roles simultaneously. For example, participant 5 admitted that sometimes she brings her children to the workplace: “If I work on weekends, I try to take my children to work with me. They play here, feel happy, and at the same time I spend time with them”. This approach means that adaptive strategy when work and family roles coexist.

However, some participants mentioned that maintaining both roles is difficult, as the sense of responsibility is above all. Participant 6 mentioned the importance of personal responsibility: “it’s just my own sense of responsibility”. Similarly, participant 5 noted that leadership role requires constant commitment: “If you have responsible job, you have to be responsible, even if you do not want to that”.

The third group is just learning how to maintain both roles in order to get a balance, they mentioned that achieving work-life balance is life learning process for instance, participant 6 noted: “I’m still learning how to manage my time”.

Overall, the findings show that female leaders in academia manage work and life balancing through different ways shaped by personal circumstances, institutional strategies and support system.

#### ***4.3.2 Coping Strategies for Maintaining Work-life Balance***

The subtheme uncovers strategies female leaders to manage professional and personal life balance for leadership advancement. The findings reveal that women leaders adopt diverse approaches to manage workload, family obligations, and emotional pressures associated with leadership role. These strategies are establishing clear boundaries, prioritizing tasks and managing time effectively, relying on psychology coping mechanism and support systems as well.

Most women leaders noted some key strategies, which help them maintain leadership position. These strategies are clear work and life boundaries, prioritization tasks, where being flexible is a key factor and time management. Participant 1 noted the importance of blundering home and work spaces: “Just try to be flexible, but if you at home, you should be at home. If you are in your office, you should be in your offices”. Similarly, participant 2 mentioned about the importance of prioritization and setting boundary: “I prioritize task as well and set clear boundaries between work and life”. Participant 4 emphasized setting boundary and prioritization family responsibilities: “Clear work home boundaries, family prioritization”. Participant 5 explained that avoiding work at home helps her get balance: “I try not to work at home”. Participant 7 also underlined the importance of time management: “Pull yourself together and time management, prioritizing things and never give up”.

In addition to practical strategies, psychological coping strategies help to maintain and reduce stress in leadership advancement. These strategies are family and spouse support, here is discussing and agreement with spouse. Participant 1 explained that open communication with family members helps her manage leadership role: “I am very open with my family. I discuss with my husband”. Some participants mentioned the importance of maintaining stress and permitting herself time to rest. For example, Participant 2 mentioned that she tries to reduce stress: “I try to reduce this unnecessary feeling of stress”. Participant 6 noted the importance of allowing time to rest: “Nothing will happen if I just don't work. and allow myself to rest”. These experiences suggest that psychological support and maintaining stress are crucial in advancing professional and family roles.

Alongside with some psychological coping mechanisms, some participant reported using some gadgets help them to maintain balance between work and life. Participant 2 noted that using gadgets help her get flexible mindset: “Using that some planning tools, Google calendar, laptop, so when I write all the things that I have to complete, to kind of maintain flexible mindset”.

Overall, the findings show that women leaders maintain career- family balance through a combination of practical organizational strategies and psychological coping mechanisms.

#### ***4.3.3 Critical Moments and Challenges in Balancing Roles***

This subtheme explores situations in which women leaders experienced significant difficulties in balancing their professional responsibilities with personal and family roles. The findings reveal that such moments often connected with periods of increased workload, family obligations, and emotional pressure.

Several participants indicated that the most difficult time in managing both roles was the time when obtaining doctoral degree and managing leadership role and family responsibility. However, the support of family and spouse helped them to face challenges. Participant 1 described the experience which was particularly challenging: “The challenging was when I was doing my doctoral degree, I was working on my thesis all weekends, I spent at home, but I was not with my kids”. Participant 4 noted the most challenging period was completing doctoral degree and holding leadership role: “The hardest period was writing doctoral thesis and maintaining leadership role”.

Several participants indicated tough situations related to family obligations, family traditions and traditional expectations. In addition to their leadership roles, many women leaders continue to carry family responsibilities. Participant 2 described the difficulty of managing several family roles with a leadership role: “I was leading as a vice dean and also managing family responsibilities, taking care of my parents, also taking care of my nephews and nieces was difficult for me”. Cultural norms and family role expectations also make challenging to carry both roles. Participant 5 explained the challenges connected with the family role: “Because they will not look at the fact that you are a rector or that you work. You still have to fulfill the duties of a *kelin* (daughter-in-law). That is probably what makes it difficult”.

Some participants pointed out the challenges connected with meeting the deadlines, which they found quite stressful and tough moment. Participant 2 noted the meeting several work deadlines creates significant pressure: “I would say also managing all the deadlines at work”.

Overall, the findings show that women leaders face the greatest challenges in leveling work and family duties in periods of high professional demands and traditional family expectations, highlighting the tension between career responsibilities and cultural roles.

In sum, in the face some challenges linked to professional and cultural norms, women leaders manage coping strategies to maintain balance between work and life.

#### **4.4 RQ4: How do Institutional Policies and Workplace Cultures Affect the Career Progression of Women in Leadership Position?**

This section presents the data connected to the question four of the research. This section examines how institutional policies support and hinder women leaders' career advancement in higher education institutions of Kazakhstan. The data analysis identified three subthemes within this comprehensive theme. The first subtheme, institutional policies as structural enablers and barriers, expresses how formal rules, policies and systems shape women's careers. The second subtheme, workplace culture and gendered norms, focuses on informal practices and norms. The third subtheme, policy suggestions and cultural gaps in supporting women leaders, refers participants of institutional policies with aspects of workplace culture, their support and hinder of women leadership. This section examines each subtheme supported by quotations from participants' interviews.

##### ***4.4.1 Institutional Policies as Structural Enablers and Barriers***

The findings of this section present the women leaders' perception of institutional policies, their support and hinder in the context of career advancement. Most participants indicate that institutional policies affect positively on their career progression. Participant 1 noted that their institutional policy aligns with national gender equality policy: "Some of the institutional

policies have an alignment with the national policies. So as we say, 30% of leadership positions, we have a special quarter for women”. Participant 2 experienced positive transparent hiring and promotion: “it was positive experience because I was appointed, I think that it was quite transparent process. I had no problems with hiring”.

While institutional policies appeared positive, some participants shared with obstacles in their career advancement. Participants’ narrations revealed some institutional restrictions, which are connected with maternity leave, workload. Participants noted that women in leadership positions feels pressure to return work early, when they go to maternity leave, because of financial problems and institutional demands. Participant 2 noted that sometimes women leaders have to work earlier due to financial problems: “they had to face with some problems in terms of going to the maternity leave, because they had to continue working, and financial problems”. Participants noted that women with children often face greater difficulties in career progression compared to those without family responsibilities. Participant 5 explained: “It is slightly more difficult for women, because many of them have families. This is why there are fewer women in careers who have children and husbands, while most women who advance in their careers tend to be those without families. For them, it is easier to balance professional and personal responsibilities”. Participant 2 noted about workload of leadership position: “if you are at the leadership position, you should be day and night at university”.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that institutional policies have positive and negative impact on women leader career advancement.

#### ***4.4.2 Workplace Culture and Gendered Norms***

In this chapter women leaders' narrations uncover such factors as collegial support, gender stereotypes and expectations and leadership norms, which enables or hinder women leadership in academia. Most participants highlighted respectful, supportive, corporate workplace culture, which can be seen not only in middle management, but even in senior management, and this leads to approachable top management system and academic freedom. Participant 1 noted the democratic environment of her institutional culture: "we say about the democracy, it's about the academic freedom. We are free to say what we think". Similarly, participant 2 noted approachable top management: "They are quite approachable as well".

Despite this positive perception, some participants reveal some factors of workplace culture, such as gender stereotype, hierarchical top management system which hinder women progression. Participant 2 shared that some colleagues may have gender stereotype view: "I would say there is one on my colleagues. He holds the leadership position at the university, and I'm not 100% sure, but I think that he has got some general stereotypes and limited sense of recognition of women's contribution ". Participant 5 experienced hierarchical top management system, which hinder lower management system to grow: "The first university where I worked, even though Rector was a woman, it was like the hierarchy". Participant 2 mentioned about the colleagues, who always hinder women's leadership, but they contribute to women's work harder and growth: "I think that when you face with challenges, you know, you learn a lot and it makes me feel more resilient and perseverance".

Overall, the findings indicate that workplace culture in academia is dual: while supportive and democratic environments enable women's leadership, gendered norms and hierarchical structures simultaneously constrain their career progression.

#### ***4.4.3 Policy Suggestions and Cultural Gaps in Supporting Women Leaders***

This subtheme exhibits participants' considerations and suggestions associated with policy or cultural aspect. Mostly the participants suggest policies, programs or training programs, which support women leadership. Participant 1 highlighted that their organizations have already created course for women leadership in academia: "we would introduce the course for all our female colleagues". Participant 2 pointed out that women leadership cannot be supported by formal equality, it requires some flexible work culture, network expanding opportunity and developing inner factors of women: "I think that developing this flexible work culture, that develops work life balance, would make it easier to pursue the leadership". Similarly, participant 3 pointed out that leadership should be transparent and merit-based rather than focusing on gender: "It is necessary to see all her competencies. It is important to recognize all her achievements and capabilities. In other words, people should not focus on gender". However, several participants noted that leadership is traditionally associated with men. So, they suggest some policy, which increases women leaders' representation at universities and organizations.

Overall, the findings suggest that leadership is widely recognized as masculine and women leaders suggest more policies to promote women's leadership.

#### **4.5 Summary**

In conclusion, the findings demonstrate that institutional policies and workplace cultures contribute a complex function in shaping the occupation progression of female leaders in higher education institutions in Kazakhstan. Furthermore, participants' policy suggestions highlight the demand for more hybrid work arrangements, regulations, merit-based policies and transparent leadership practices.

## **Chapter 5. Discussion**

This chapter explores and explains the findings in connection with prior research regarding the background and challenges of female leaders in higher education institutions. The study aims to identify challenges that women leaders face, and examine how organizational, personal, social, and cultural factors influence their leadership roles. As has been explained in the previous chapters, the research was guided by group of questions:

RQ1: What are the key factors that support or prevent women's access to leadership roles in higher education institutions of Kazakhstan?

RQ2: How do women leaders in academia perceive and experience their roles and responsibilities?

RQ3: What strategies do women in higher education leadership use to balance their professional and personal responsibilities?

RQ4: How do institutional policies and workplace cultures affect the career progression of women in leadership positions?

### **5.1 Career Trajectories into Leadership**

The findings chapter indicates that women leaders career pathways have dual direction, while several participants initially did not plan obtaining leadership positions, emerging gradually through institutional opportunities, other participants get leadership positions by constant and long commitment and aspiration. The findings are in agreement with a previous literature stating that “normative career path” is crucial in prospering career path to presidency

(Woollen, 2016, as cited in Vancour, 2020). Similarly, Duingnan (1988/1989, as cited in Theobald, 2006) noted that leadership is “art of possibility”.

This study demonstrates that expanding geographical mobility and participating in national reforms give an opportunity to advance leadership role. This aligns with Kuzhabekova and Almukhambetova (2025) studies that after the independence in Central Asian countries such as Kazakhstan the women’s participation in higher education has been high, but leadership representations remained lower. Top-leveled positions at universities remained male-dominated.

## **5.2 Structural and Inner Barriers**

Female leaders in higher education institutions experience significant obstacles and enablers on the way to success. One of the key insights from this study is the pivotal role of gender bias. Even though the participants denied the existing the gender bias, the delicate structural inequalities exist in an academia. According to gendered societal norms women have to put more effort and prove their professionalism and ability to advance leadership positions more than their male colleagues. This finding coincides with the findings of the scholars Salas-Lopes et al. (2011), Seo et al. (2017) and Sing and Tarijisen (2008), where success and achievement are still associated with masculinity. Similarly, the findings extend existing literature of Elmutti et al. (2009), Thelma and Nglube (2024), which point out that deep seated gender bias exclude women from leadership as women are viewed less capable and authoritative. Leadership positions always demand additional responsibilities as availability at work, long working hours. These findings are also confirmed by the Gandhi and Sen (2021) findings, that the leadership roles demand considerable effort.

The findings indicate that structural barriers, including limited mentorship access for leadership advancement and lack of trainings in leadership and management, hinder progress into leadership roles. This finding support previous research in gender studies that limited access of mentorship and sponsorship restrict women's entry and progression in leadership pathways (Thelma & Ngulube, 2024). Thelma and Ngulube (2024) and Gandhi and Sen (2021) also mentioned about the role of mentoring programs for women to progress in leadership. One more structural barrier, making the advancing leadership more difficult is limited formal education or training in leadership. Mostly, leaders got promoted based on their academic degrees, but not due to managerial skills. This finding aligns with the research of Jacobsen et al. (2022), leadership trainings show advanced performance.

The findings show that participants experienced epistemic injustice shaped by hierarchy of Western knowledge, where Western institutions are often perceived more valuable and legitimate than local institutions. This finding supports previous research by Byskof (2020), who defines epistemic injustice is when individuals can be treated unfairly based on prejudices related to gender, social background, race, voice and other identity markers. Similarly, Amin (1989, 2011, as cited in Jafari, 2022) highlighted that the dominance of the west over the rest of the world in political, educational and economic spheres.

Alongside with the structural barriers, women leadership progressions also influenced by internal barriers. The findings indicate inner barriers, particularly imposter syndrome or imposter phenomenon, when women leaders feel self-doubt, assuming that their achievements are overestimated. This finding extends existing literature Hutchins et al. (2018), Bravata et al. (2020), and Chodoff et al. (2023) (as cited in Garnett & Kinnear, 2025) the most pivotal factors of imposter phenomenon are self-doubt about intelligence and skills. Similarly, Park (2020) as

cited in Gomez Rumbo (2024), found that women often felt that they were promoted to match diverse environment, rather than owing to their skills. Furthermore, deep-seated gendered expectations contribute to this perception, which mean that women are undervalued in environments where assertiveness and hierarchical control are in privilege, women are weak at decision making, lack of self- confidence, all this led to imposter syndrome (Maheshwari & Nayak, 2020; Tessens et al., 2011).

### **5.3 Personal and Professional Enablers and Restrictions**

Women leaders face some personal and professional enablers and barriers in advancing leadership responsibilities. The findings reported difficulties in balancing professional responsibilities with personal and family obligations. Similarly in previous literature states that women have to place family obligations above professional growth, a challenge that men are less likely to face (Alqantani, 2019; Eagli & Carli, 2007).

The findings demonstrate the significance of personal skills like taking responsibility, meeting deadlines, the importance of accountability, which collectively reflect the idea of informal leadership. This data is expanded with the previous investigation of Ludwikowska et al. (2019), who states that the capacity of leadership position exceeds its designation, it often extends beyond formal job titles

The findings indicate that family and spousal support, together with time management play an important role in engaging leadership role. This finding support previous study, that delegating and sharing family responsibilities, alongside effective time management provide the advancement of women into leadership roles (Gandhi & Sen, 2021).

Professional factors, including workplace relationship or institutional culture have an important impact on women leadership advancement. This aligns with previous literature, indicating that institutional culture plays a crucial role through collaborative and inclusive leadership that empower women in leadership (Thelma & Ngulube, 2024). Similarly, Smiley et al. (2021) note that workplace culture influence women's development into leadership positions within academia.

#### **5.4 Perceptions and Experiences of Women Leaders in Academia**

The findings of this research demonstrate that participants perceive themselves as transformative, change leaders or change agents. Transformative leadership is aimed for inspiration, motivation and promotion innovation within institutions. This finding supports a previous study, which states that transformative leadership is a skill to impact people to realize a concept or an outlined target (Robbins & Judge, 2008, as cited in Nurtjahanjani, 2020). Similarly, transformative leaders encourage and inspire followers to get exceptional results (Bass, 1985; House & Shamir, 1993; Sashkin, 2004, as cited in Brown et al., 2019).

A common and consistent opinion about the leadership in this study is that women leaders consider leadership as contribution and responsibility, which effect on their welfare. This finding corresponds with Maheshwari and Nayak (2020) concept that female leaders feel them to devote a lot of time in leadership positions in the way it harms their own and family well-being and additional responsibilities.

This study found that women leaders perceive leadership as collaboration and mentorship, which they associate with women's empowerment. Previous literature highlights that women leadership style is often perceived as collaborative, emphatic and supportive, in

contrast to male leadership style, that are often associated with assertiveness and authority (Ok & Eniola, 2022). Research by Maheshwari and Nayak (2020) reflect that male leader display more authority, aggression and self- confidence, while their female colleagues are more emphatic, kind and better at understanding.

Furthermore, participants perceive leadership as opportunity to mentor and support younger academics. This finding is supported by previous research, that mentoring and peer networks acting as a driving force in supporting female leadership development and career progression (Harris, 2022; Salas-Lopez et al, 2011).

At the same time, participants indicate the experience to work harder to demonstrate competence, authority and professionalism. This aligns with the previous literature, that women are required to show legitimacy, proficiency and ability of being credible leaders (Maheshvari & Nayak, 2020; Malone, 2024). The heavy workloads were associated with leadership, that described as overwhelming, leading them to resign and sometimes avoid such roles altogether (Ghundol & Muthanna, 2025).

In addition, the findings demonstrate the existing informal network groups which may hinder or limit women leadership advancement. This aligns with the previous research, that existing the “old boy” phenomenon, which run outside institutions and help career progression for male leaders, whereas women feel excluded from the access to influential informal networks (Atkinson & Moffat, 2005, as cited in Domunko, 2023).

The findings show that participants reported that their colleagues evaluate them based on their professional performance, result and experience, rather than gender. This finding contradicts to previous research that leadership is evaluated by gender stereotypes, deep-seated

gendered expectations may undervalue women's leadership style in environments where male leaders receive more support (L.Tessens et al., 2011).

### **5.5 Work-life Balance Challenges and Strategies**

The findings reveal that participants of the study experience several challenges on the way to balancing both roles as professional and personal. The findings show that the challenging factor are connected with increased workloads, family obligations and emotional pressure. This finding aligns with Heath (2012) study, where she claims that women leaders experience constant strain while attempting to balance administrative duties with personal commitments. Furthermore, participants experience competing demands and higher responsibilities at workplace (Brue, 2019). They also experience pressure and indicate cultural expectations, which align with Tang et al. (2024) study, that family is central norm, female leaders try to meet all family needs. Similarly, Naong N. and Naong L (2023), states that family responsibility take time and energy, which can influence on job performance.

The next challenge related to family traditions and traditional expectations, for example, women leaders have to fulfill the duties of mother, wife and “kelin” (daughter-in-law). Similar, the researchers from Kazakhstan state close idea, that according to deep rooted gender norms, which is strongly fixed in thoughts, women's position and education are not important as family and family responsibilities go ahead of work responsibilities and women often find themselves in a dilemma between fulfilling the roles of a good mother and wife and pursuing career advancement (Kuzhabekova et al, 2024; Kuzhabekova & Almukhambetova, 2025). Similarly, Admabayeva (2025) noted that women face additional traditional bias taking care of parents-in-law.

The challenge which is uncovered in this research is some stressful and tough moments, for example, meeting deadlines, obtaining doctoral degree, and heavy workloads. The data align with the prior research, Ghundol & Muthanna (2025) stated that women leaders often resigned or declined leadership opportunities due to overwhelming stress and shortage of institutional support.

Despite all these challenges which prevent managing leadership and family responsibilities, women leaders employ somewhat strategies to balance work and life duties. The findings highlight key strategies, including prioritization and setting clear boundaries, delegation and time management. This aligns with earlier studies suggesting that individuals use boundary management strategies to organize and separate family and work responsibilities (Nippert-Eng, 1996; Kossek et al., 1999, as cited in Leduc et al., 2016). Furthermore, female leaders use time-management approaches to overcome hurdles and maintain their leadership positions (Tang et al, 2024).

The findings show that participants use digital technologies as coping strategy to facilitate work and life balance. Participants noted using gadgets, such as planning tool apps, Google calendar and laptop help them maintain work- life balance. This finding matches with previous results that using digital technologies increases coordination and knowledge spent for work, which help maintain work and life balance (Duan et al., 2023).

The findings indicate that the key factor for balancing leadership and family responsibilities is supportive family, particularly spousal support. This result aligns with the previous literature demonstrating that family members, particularly supportive spouse, can act as sources of encouragement and resilience in balancing work life challenges, providing emotional and practical support during heavy workload periods (Adambayeva, 2025; Alqahtani,2019).

Conversely, the previous literature states that the unsupportive environment characterized by bias, harassment, lack of collegial support can discourage women from pursuing leadership role (Ghundol & Muthanna, 2025).

In addition to family support, the findings reveal that institutional support and workplace culture help maintain work- life balance. This aligns with the previous literature, Heath (2012) states that supportive and comfortable workplace assists to achieving work-life balance. This research data further uncovers those strategies including flexible scheduling, shared job roles, working remotely, part-time work, maternity leave is effective to support women leaders. These strategies are consistent to the strategies identified in previous research, such as job sharing and parental maternity leave policies that promote balance between work and family roles (Heath, 2012).

Besides structural support, the findings reveal psychological aspect to regulate work- life balance. This finding aligns with earlier studies, that the capacity to regulate emotions and behavior, which helps navigate workplace pressures, manage competing demands and maintain stability in stressful situations (Tang et al., 2024). Participants of this study reported adopting some stress coping strategies to maintain work and life balance. This finding support previous research that stresses coping strategies are essential for reducing job related stress and promoting work-life balance (Kim, 2022).

## **5.6 Institutional Policy**

The findings of this chapter indicate women leaders' perception of institutional policies and how institutional policies support or hinder women leadership career progression. The findings show that institutional policies in higher education institutions of Kazakhstan align with

the national Family and Gender policy concept of Kazakhstan 2030, where is said that 30% of leadership positions have to be occupied with women. This policy highlights the significance of women's participation in leadership sectors, including education (ADB, 2013). The previous literature noted that across the world universities have introduced gender equality policies to deal with the limited representation of women in top positions (Morley, 2012; O'Connor, 2020). But researchers Kuzhabekova and Almukhambetova (2022), notes that in practice, women higher education institutions continue to be positioned in middle management rather than in top level leadership positions such rectors and vice-rectors.

The findings show positive aspect of institutional policy like transparent hiring and promotion in advancing leadership position. The same findings were noticed in Diehl and Dzubunski (2016) studies, that inclusivity, transparency, mentorship opportunities and recognition of diversity, which has been shown to significantly improve women's career satisfaction and promotion. Similarly, Akter (2025) mentions that clear and transparent and hiring help to effective leadership with administration.

However, the findings reveal some obstacles in women leader's career advancement, while institutional policies appeared positive. The findings indicated some institutional limitations, which are connected with maternity leave policy, that women feel to return work early or women have to continue working while being on maternity leave due to financial problems. Previous research noted that in countries with generous maternity leave and childcare support, flexible working hours women tend to have better chances of combining professional advancement with family responsibilities (Lewis & Hubert, 2010). Another issue which women face is the career stagnation often due to long maternity leave, as it makes challenging for women to "enter the job flow" (Adambayeva, 2024). However, the previous literature informs

that policies on maternity leave and availability of childcare services are key factors influencing how women manage their work-life balance (Adambayeva, 2025). The data indicated that women leaders with family and children often face greater difficulties compare to those without family responsibilities, as a consequence of lack of support in institutional policy. The previous literature indicates that women tend to achieve success in career if they are not married or divorced, or otherwise they face disadvantages due to gender bias in career advancement (Bihagen & Ohls, 2006, as cited in Kuzhabekova et al., 2018).

### **5.7 Workplace Culture**

The research data reveal that participants described both supportive and hierarchical cultures. Some participants experienced academic freedom and approachable management, others experienced gender stereotypes and strict hierarchies on the leadership management. The findings support the previous literature where dual dynamic factors are noticed, workplace culture functions as both enabling and hindering. Regarding this experience the previous literatures claim that organizational cultures can either support or hinder women leadership. Researchers, Diehl and Dzubinski (2016), report that supportive work place culture as inclusivity, transparency, mentorship opportunities can support women's career satisfaction or promotion. Controversy, the data of this study describes a strict hierarchical system, even with a women rector, hierarchy limited women progression. The previous literature supports this idea, where is stated that universities often function within hierarchical and male-dominated governance system, where decision making is centralized and informal networks (so called "old boys 'clubs'") play a significant role in appointments (Kuzhabekova et al., 2024). Similarly, the previous literature (Burkinshaw and White, 2017) states that women learn to struggle in order to advance they have to adjust themselves to the deeply rooted masculine and hierarchical culture.

The data of the findings contradicts to the previous literatures data. While previous studies emphasize structural inequality and persistent barriers, the data of this study reveal a more nuanced picture. Participants described supportive environment within their institutions, like resilience and personal growth from challenges, approachable senior management, academic freedom. The previous literature suggests, that women have to demonstrate more commitment than male colleagues to advance the same level of leadership (Ok& Eniola, 2024). Additionally, participants indicated that leadership demand being at work day and night. This finding supports the previous research idea “ideal worker norms”, which means masculine gendered assumption of limitless work commitment (Asker, 1990; Blair-Loy, 2023; Williams et al., 2023, as cited in Muller & Chung, 2026).

## **5.8 Summary**

This section discussed the findings of the study regarding to previous research. While some women leaders accept leadership as a high responsibility and achieved their positions through long and gradual growth, others achieved leadership as a spontaneous opportunity in academia. Furthermore, women leaders experienced structural, socio-cultural and organizational barriers and enablers. Women leaders manage work-life balance to advance their leadership positions. Moreover, as leadership is recognized more masculine, some policies to support women leadership should be accepted.

## **Chapter 6. Conclusion**

The chapter summarizes key findings that respond the research questions, acknowledges the limitations of the study, identifies implications and recommendations for stakeholders, gives guides for further research, and provides a personal reflection.

### **6.1 Summary of the Major Findings**

This chapter summarizes the key findings from the study on the experiences, perceptions and challenges of female leaders in higher education institutions of Kazakhstan. The analysis was guided by four research questions regarding key factors supporting and preventing women's leadership, strategies to balance professional and personal responsibilities, the effect of institutional and workplace culture on career advancement and how women leaders perceive their roles and responsibilities. Through in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, the findings have revealed several findings which shape the experiences, perceptions and challenges of women leaders on career progression ways:

The findings indicate that women's leadership journey in academia is characterized by gradual professional growth, where women leaders achieved their high position through long-term professional hard work and growth starting from a low position. However, findings indicate that leadership positions were achieved by institutional opportunities and key turning points for some women leaders, such as offering a leadership position, and leadership is often perceived as a responsibility rather than an ambition.

Women's pathways to academic leadership in Kazakhstani higher education institutions are shaped by a complex interaction of career trajectories, structural and inner barriers, and personal and professional enablers. Structural barriers, including epistemic

injustice, gender bias, lack of mentorship, and limited leadership training, coincide with inner psychological challenges such as self-doubt and imposter syndrome. The barrier, such as balancing academic, administrative, and family responsibilities, also exists. Overall, women's leadership experiences are not individual struggles but are deeply rooted in institutional and cultural contexts.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that women's advancement into leadership roles is shaped by a connection of personal and professional enablers. Personal factors such as education, resilience, responsibility, leadership skills and family support made more powerful women's ability to navigate leadership challenges. At the same time, professional factors, including collegial support, institutional environment and partnerships enable women in their leadership roles.

In addition, mentorship and professional networks are crucial factors that enable women's leadership career progression.

Moreover, the findings prove that women leaders viewed themselves as transformer leader, mentors, which align with their responsibility, professionalism, development in a global, modern digitally developed world.

Additionally, women leaders in higher education are recognized and evaluated based on their professional competence, personal qualities, and demonstrated results, rather than their gender.

Further, women leaders in higher education manage work and life balance through different ways shaped by personal circumstances, institutional strategies and support systems.

Also, women leaders maintain work- life balance through a combination of practical organizational strategies, like setting clear boundaries between work and family responsibilities

and prioritizing tasks, and psychological coping mechanisms, for example, stress management or reducing stress strategies for leadership career advancement.

In addition, women leaders face the greatest challenges in balancing work and family duties during times of high professional demands and traditional family expectations, highlighting the tension between career responsibilities and cultural roles.

Furthermore, institutional policies have a positive and negative impact on women leaders' career advancement. Transparent hiring and promotion are examples of positive institutional policy effects. Maternity leave and workload issues have a negative impact on women's leadership advancement.

Workplace culture in academia is dual: while supportive and democratic environments enable women's leadership, but gendered norms and hierarchical structures simultaneously hinder their career progression.

Finally, leadership is widely recognized as masculine and women leaders suggest more policies to support women leadership. Participants suggest more flexible work arrangements, merit-based policies and transparent leadership practices.

## **6.2 Limitations**

While the study sought to explore the experiences, perceptions and challenges of higher education institution female leaders in Kazakhstan, it is necessary to point out potential limitations. First, the study employed a qualitative cross-sectional research design to examine the experiences of women leaders at a single point time, Consequently, the study does not examine the experiences of women leaders in different time periods.

Second, the study used purposive sampling method which enabled a detailed examination of participants experiences, perceptions and challenges. However, the experiences of only 7

individuals cannot fully cover the experiences of all women leaders. Moreover, only three participants occupied senior leadership positions (rector, vice-rector and vice-president), other participants represented middle-management positions. Therefore, the experiences of top-level women leaders were not fully explored.

In addition, the study was conducted in Astana and Almaty. The experiences, perceptions and challenges of women leaders in other regions may vary, which limits the application of the findings in regional higher education institutions.

Although the research has got some limitations, the research offered important insights into women's leadership experiences and expands the limited number of research on women leadership experiences, perceptions and obstacles in higher education institutions in Kazakhstan.

### **6.3 Implications**

The study has several significant implications for both theoretical and practical policy. The findings of this study contribute to the existing literature on women leadership in higher education by demonstrating that women's career pathways are shaped by complex interchange of career trajectories, structural and inner barriers, personal and professional enablers. Gender policies are still important, but the workplace culture in institutions and gendered stereotypes still prevent women progression. Universities should not only implement gendered policies, but also change organizational culture.

### **6.4 Recommendations**

The findings of this study reveal several recommendations. The findings reveal heavy workloads, gendered stereotypes, difficulties in balancing work and life responsibilities. Based on the results of this study are recommended to create inclusive institutional culture, mentorship

and leadership developing programs, implement flexible working arrangements, establish transparent hiring and promotion procedures, and supportive workplace environment which can help women leaders to progress in leadership positions. Policies should be established to address gender bias and should be controlled their effective implementation and monitor within higher education institutions. This can improve women's representation in leadership positions. The findings recommend to develop strategies to support women's professional growth and address work-life balance challenges.

### **6.5 Directions for Future Research**

To deepen and deepen the findings of this study, the future research should investigate more women leaders in senior leadership positions, as this study investigated the experiences, perceptions and challenges of just three women leaders (1 rector, two vice rectors), other participants were women leaders in middle management positions. The next researchers should study women leaders' experiences in universities in other regions of Kazakhstan, not only in Almaty and Astana. Additionally, future researchers should compare women leaders' experiences, perceptions and challenges of Kazakhstani universities with other Central Asian countries. Future studies would also study opinion of men leaders in higher education institutions. Finally, future researchers would investigate longitudinal study of women leaders' career advancement.

### **6.6 Personal Reflection**

Overall, conducting this research was very fulfilling experience. This experience helped me to gain valuable personal development, and especially using qualitative method helped me to broaden my view and knowledge on the topic of women leadership. The entire process of

conducting research, specifically topic selecting, reading and revising the relevant literature, choosing a research method, collecting data, analyzing data and writing each chapter helped me to grow as a researcher and understand that conducting research is engaging and enthralling process. During the conducting this study, I have learned not only how to conduct research, but I also have learned some challenges and enablers to advance leadership position. The moment of collecting data, conducting interviews with resilient and empathetic women leaders motivated me to work harder and inspired me to pursue my goals with confidence and the courage to overcome hurdles. During the research, I went through the moments when I was the most charged and excited, and there were moments when I just wanted to give up, when it was hard, when I worked late at nights and early mornings. However, all these difficulties contributed to my professional and personal development. I have also found that continuous learning and research makes my life more meaningful. Accordingly, I believe that the skills and knowledge I gained during the conducting research would help me in my future development as a researcher and professional.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Informed Consent Form**

#### **Research topic: Gender Equality in Academia: Experiences of Women in Leadership Roles in Higher Education in Kazakhstan**

**DESCRIPTION:** You are invited to take part in a research study entitled “Gender Equality in Academia: Experiences of Women in Leadership Roles in Higher Education in Kazakhstan”. The purpose of the study is to identify the experiences, challenges, and examine the strategies that women in higher education leadership use to balance their professional and personal responsibilities. By exploring the challenges that women leaders face, the research examines how organizational, personal, social and cultural factors influence their leadership roles. The findings may be useful for the development of more inclusive policies, strategies and guidelines that promote equal access to leadership opportunities, exclude gender bias, and support the advancement of women and other underrepresented groups.

**TIME INVOLVEMENT:** Your participation will take approximately 30-40 minutes.

**RISKS AND BENEFITS:** The risks associated with this study are minimal risk. This study involves a discussion of gender equality and leadership, which may be considered sensitive topics. Some participants may experience mild discomfort when reflecting on their personal or professional experiences. To minimize this risk, confidentiality will be strictly prioritized, identifying information will not be used, and participants may skip any question or withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. Data will be stored on the researcher’s password-protected personal computer with no access to others. Printed documents and handwritten notes will be kept in a locked drawer. Only the researcher and her supervisor will

have access to the materials. All data will be kept confidential by using pseudonyms for participants and transcripts will exclude any identifying information. Data will not be shared with anyone from the university staff, colleagues or participants.

Although there may be no direct personal benefits, but your participation will help understand the experiences and challenges that women leaders in higher education institutions struggle with. The findings will help in designing policies that support women in leadership, such as mentoring programs or flexible work-hours. Finally, this research study will strengthen workplace culture to create inclusive and supportive environments.

**PARTICIPANTS' RIGHTS:** If you have read this form and have decided to participate in this project, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. The alternative is not to participate. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. The results of this research study might be presented at scientific or professional meetings or published in scientific journals.

**COMPENSATION:** No tangible compensation will be given. A copy of the research results will be available at the conclusion of the study via email request [zhuldyz.umekova@nu.edu.kz](mailto:zhuldyz.umekova@nu.edu.kz)

**CONTACT INFORMATION:**

*Questions: If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about this research, its procedures, risks and benefits, contact the Master's Thesis Supervisor for this student's work (Associate Professor and PhD Program Director Dr. Zumrad Kataeva, [zumrad.kataeva@nu.edu.kz](mailto:zumrad.kataeva@nu.edu.kz), 8(7172) 694967).*

Independent Contact: If you are not satisfied with how this study is being conducted, or if you have any concerns, complaints, or general questions about the research or your rights as a participant, please contact the GSE Research IREC subcommittee at [gse.irec@nu.edu.kz](mailto:gse.irec@nu.edu.kz).

Please sign this consent form if you agree to participate in this study.

- I have carefully read the information provided;
- I have been given full information regarding the purpose and procedures of the study;
- I understand how the data collected will be used, and that any confidential information will be seen only by the researchers and will not be revealed to anyone else;
- I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason;
- With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

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

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**The extra copy of this signed and dated consent form is for you to keep.**

**According to the law of the Republic of Kazakhstan, an individual under the age of 18 is considered a child. Any participant falling into that category should be given the Parental Consent Form and have it signed by at least one of his/her parent(s) or guardian(s). In addition, the child must give assent to participate in the research. Both parent consent and child assent scripts should be included with this application.**

## **Appendix B**

### **Ақпараттандырылған келісім нысаны**

**Зерттеу тақырыбы: Академиядағы гендерлік теңдік: Қазақстандағы жоғары оқу орындарында басшылық қызметіндегі әйелдердің тәжірибесі**

**СИПАТТАМАСЫ:** Сізді «Академиядағы гендерлік теңдік: Қазақстандағы жоғары оқу орындарында басшылық қызметіндегі әйелдердің тәжірибесі» атты зерттеуге қатысуға шақырамыз. Зерттеудің мақсаты – жоғары білім беру саласында басшылық қызмет атқаратын әйелдердің кәсіби және жеке өмір арасындағы тепе-теңдікті сақтау тәжірибесін, олар кездесетін қиындықтарды және осыны жүзеге асыру үшін қолданатын стратегияларын анықтау. Әйел көшбасшылардың алдында тұрған қиындықтарды зерттеу арқылы бұл жұмыс ұйымдық, жеке, әлеуметтік және мәдени факторлардың олардың көшбасшылық рөлдеріне қалай әсер ететінін талдайды. Зерттеу нәтижелері көшбасшылық мүмкіндіктеріне тең қолжетімділікті қамтамасыз ететін, гендерлік кемсітушілікті болдырмайтын және әйелдер мен басқа да аз қамтылған топтардың кәсіби өсуін қолдайтын неғұрлым инклюзивті саясаттар, стратегиялар мен нұсқаулықтарды әзірлеуге пайдалы болуы мүмкін.

**ҰЗАҚТЫЛЫҒЫ:** Сауалнамаға қатысу шамамен 30–40 минутты алады.

**ТӘУЕКЕЛДЕР МЕН АРТЫҚШЫЛЫҚТАР:** Бұл зерттеуге қатысудың тәуекелі минималды. Зерттеу гендерлік теңдік пен көшбасшылық тақырыптарын талқылауды қамтығандықтан, бұл кейбір қатысушылар үшін сезімтал тақырып болуы мүмкін. Кейбір қатысушылар жеке немесе кәсіби тәжірибелері туралы ой жүгірткенде аздап ыңғайсыздық сезінуі ықтимал. Бұл тәуекелді азайту үшін құпиялылық қатаң сақталады, жеке мәліметтер

қолданылмайды, ал қатысушылар кез келген сұрақты өткізіп жібере алады немесе зерттеуге кез келген уақытта себепсіз бас тартуға құқылы. Деректер зерттеушінің жеке құпия сөзімен қорғалған компьютерінде сақталады және ол зерттеулерге басқалардың қол жеткізе алмайды. Басылған құжаттар мен жазбалар құлыпталған тартпада сақталады. Барлық материалдарға тек зерттеуші және оның жетекшісі ғана қол жеткізе алады. Барлық деректер қатысушылардың аты-жөнін көрсетпей, бүркеншік аттар қолдану арқылы құпия түрде сақталады. Деректерді университет қызметкерлері, әріптестер немесе басқа да қатысушыларға берілмейді. Зерттеуге қатысу сауалнамаға қатысушыға тікелей жеке пайда әкелмеуі мүмкін, бірақ бұл зерттеу жоғары оқу орындарындағы әйел көшбасшылардың қиындықтарын жақсырақ түсінуге көмектеседі және әйелдерді қолдайтын саясаттар мен бағдарламаларды әзірлеуге септігін тигізеді.

**ҚАТЫСУШЫЛАРДЫҢ ҚҰҚЫҚТАРЫ:** Бұл нысанды мұқият оқып шыққаннан кейін зерттеуге қатысуға шешім қабылдасаңыз, қатысу ерікті екенін түсінгеніңіз жөн. Сіз кез келген уақытта себепсіз қатысудан бас тарта аласыз немесе қатысуыңызды тоқтата аласыз. Сіз кез келген сұраққа жауап бермеуге құқылысыз.

Зерттеу нәтижелері ғылыми конференцияларда немесе кәсіби журналдарда жариялануы мүмкін.

**ӨТЕМАҚЫ:** Қатысқаныңыз үшін материалдық өтемақы берілмейді. Зерттеу нәтижелерінің көшірмесін электронды пошта арқылы сұратуға болады:

**zhuldyz.umekova@nu.edu.kz**

***БАЙЛАНЫС АҚПАРАТЫ:*** *Сұрақтарыңыз, ескертулеріңіз немесе шағымдарыңыз болса, магистрлік диссертация жетекшісімен хабарласыңыз: Зумрад Катаева, PhD,*

**қауымдастырылған профессор, докторлық бағдарлама директоры. Электрондық пошта: [zumrad.kataeva@nu.edu.kz](mailto:zumrad.kataeva@nu.edu.kz), тел.: 8 (7172) 694967**

Егер зерттеу барысына байланысты мәселелер туындаса немесе қатысушы ретінде құқықтарыңыз бұзылды деп есептесеңіз, Назарбаев Университеті Білім беру мектебінің этикалық комитетіне хабарласыңыз: **[gse.irec@nu.edu.kz](mailto:gse.irec@nu.edu.kz)**

Егер осы зерттеуге қатысуға келіссеңіз, төменде қол қойыңыз.

- Мен берілген ақпаратпен мұқият таныстым;
- Маған зерттеудің мақсаты мен рәсімдері туралы толық ақпарат берілді;
- Мен жиналған деректер қалай пайдаланылатынын түсіндім және құпия ақпарат тек зерттеушіге белгілі болатынын білемін;
- Мен кез келген уақытта себепсіз зерттеуден шығуға құқылымын;
- Барлығын түсіне отырып, өз еркіммен осы зерттеуге қатысуға келісемін.

Қатысушының қолы: \_\_\_\_\_ Күні: \_\_\_\_\_

**Осы келісім нысанының қосымша данасы қатысушыға беріледі.**

**Қазақстан Республикасының заңына сәйкес, 18 жасқа толмаған тұлға бала болып есептеледі. Мұндай қатысушыларға ата-ананың немесе қамқоршының жазбаша келісімі қажет, сонымен қатар баланың өзі де қатысуға рұқсат беру қажет.**

## Appendix C

### Форма информированного согласия

**Тема исследования:** Гендерное равенство в академической среде: опыт женщин на руководящих должностях в высших учебных заведениях Казахстана

**ОПИСАНИЕ:** Вас приглашают принять участие в исследовании под названием «Гендерное равенство в академической среде: опыт женщин на руководящих должностях в высших учебных заведениях Казахстана». Цель данного исследования - выявить опыт, трудности и стратегии, которые используют женщины, занимающие руководящие должности в сфере высшего образования, для поддержания баланса между профессиональной и личной жизнью. Изучая трудности, с которыми сталкиваются женщины-лидеры, исследование рассматривает, как организационные, личные, социальные и культурные факторы влияют на их лидерские роли. Результаты исследования могут быть полезны для разработки более инклюзивных политик, стратегий и рекомендаций, направленных на обеспечение равного доступа к руководящим должностям, устранение гендерных предубеждений и поддержку профессионального роста женщин и других недостаточно представленных групп.

**ПРОДОЛЖИТЕЛЬНОСТЬ:** Ваше участие займет примерно 30–40 минут.

**РИСКИ И ВЫГОДЫ:** Риски, связанные с данным исследованием, минимальны.

Исследование включает обсуждение вопросов гендерного равенства и лидерства, которые могут считаться чувствительными темами. Некоторые участницы могут испытать лёгкий дискомфорт, размышляя о своём личном или профессиональном опыте. Для минимизации этих рисков конфиденциальность будет строго соблюдаться: идентифицирующая

информация использоваться не будет, участницы могут пропустить любой вопрос или выйти из исследования в любое время без каких-либо последствий. Данные будут храниться на личном компьютере исследователя, защищённом паролем, к которому не будет доступа у третьих лиц. Печатные документы и рукописные заметки будут храниться в запечатанном ящике. Доступ к материалам будет иметь только исследователь и ее руководитель. Все данные будут храниться конфиденциально: для участниц будут использоваться псевдонимы, а расшифровки интервью не будут содержать никакой идентифицирующей информации. Данные не будут передаваться сотрудникам университета, коллегам или другим участникам.

Хотя прямых личных выгод от участия может не быть, но ваш вклад поможет лучше понять опыт и трудности, с которыми сталкиваются женщины-лидеры в учреждениях высшего образования. Результаты исследования будут способствовать разработке политик, поддерживающих женщин в руководстве, например программ наставничества или гибкого графика работы. В конечном итоге это исследование направлено на укрепление корпоративной культуры, создание более инклюзивной и поддерживающей рабочей среды.

**ПРАВА УЧАСТНИКОВ:** Ваше участие является добровольным. Вы имеете право отказаться от участия или прекратить участие в исследовании в любое время без объяснения причин. Вы также имеете право не отвечать на отдельные вопросы. Результаты исследования могут быть представлены на научных конференциях или опубликованы в профессиональных журналах.

**ВОЗНАГРАЖДЕНИЕ:** Материальное вознаграждение не предусмотрено. Копию результатов исследования можно запросить по электронной почте:

**zhuldyz.umekova@nu.edu.kz**

***КОНТАКТНАЯ ИНФОРМАЦИЯ:** Если у вас есть вопросы, замечания или жалобы, пожалуйста, свяжитесь с научным руководителем магистерской диссертации: **Зумрад***

***Катаева, PhD, ассоциированный профессор, директор докторской программы.***

***Электронная почта: zumrad.kataeva@nu.edu.kz, тел.: 8 (7172) 694967***

Если вы не удовлетворены ходом исследования или считаете, что ваши права как участника нарушены, обратитесь в этический комитет Высшей школы образования

Назарбаев Университета: **gse.irec@nu.edu.kz**

Если вы согласны принять участие в этом исследовании, пожалуйста, подпишите ниже.

- Я внимательно ознакомился(ась) с предоставленной информацией;
- Мне была предоставлена полная информация о цели и процедурах исследования;
- Я понимаю, как будут использоваться собранные данные, и что конфиденциальная информация не будет передана третьим лицам;
- Я понимаю, что могу отказаться от участия в любое время без объяснения причин;
- Осознавая все вышеизложенное, я добровольно соглашаюсь принять участие в исследовании.

Подпись участника: \_\_\_\_\_ Дата: \_\_\_\_\_

**Дополнительная копия этого согласия предназначена для участника.**

**Согласно законодательству Республики Казахстан, лицо младше 18 лет считается ребенком. В таком случае необходимо письменное согласие одного из родителей или опекуна, а также согласие самого ребенка на участие в исследовании.**

## **Appendix D**

### **Interview protocol**

Research topic: Gender Equality in Academia: Experiences of Women in Leadership Roles in Higher Education in Kazakhstan

#### **Pre-interview Information:**

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Place:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Year of experience:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Time of the interview:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Duration:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Interviewee's position:** \_\_\_\_\_

Hello. My name is Zhuldyz. I am a master's student at Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education. Thank you for your participation in the study. The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences, perceptions, and challenges faced by women in leadership positions within higher education institutions in Kazakhstan. The interview will last approximately 30-40 minutes. Before we start the interview, could you please sign the informed consent form?

#### **Description of the research:**

You have been invited to participate in an interview. Your participation in this research is important, and thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. This study is about female leaders in higher education institutions, their perceptions, experiences and challenges maintaining the leadership position and balancing work and life duties. The findings of this study will make a positive change into research. Also, policymakers can hear participants' views and ideas as notes for improvement. During the interview, you will be asked questions about your personal views and experiences of challenges and advancing leadership position. I will ask you some open-ended questions about your experience. Your responses will be confidential and private. If you agree, I will record our interview on a recording device or on my phone app. The recording will not be shared with anyone. Also, I will take notes during our interview if you disagree to be recorded. I will store the recording on reliable technology and keep this recording in a secure place. Only my supervisor and I will have access to this recording. The collected data will be used for academic purposes only and will be destroyed after the data are analyzed and processed. Your participation in this study is voluntary, and if some questions are not comfortable, you may not answer them. Our interview will last approximately 30-40 minutes. Please, keep in mind that you may withdraw our interview at any time if you feel uncomfortable.

Please read and sign the informed consent form. Do you have any questions regarding the interview before we start?

### **Interview questions:**

#### **Research questions:**

The research questions of my Master's thesis are the following:

1. What are the key factors that support or prevent women's access to leadership roles in higher education institutions in Kazakhstan?
2. How do women leaders in academia perceive and experience their roles and responsibilities?
3. What strategies do women in higher education leadership use to balance professional and personal responsibilities?
4. How do institutional policies and workplace cultures affect the career progression of women in leadership positions?

| Themes:                                       | Questions:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Follow up questions:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Barriers and enablers to leadership positions | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Could you tell me about yourself?</li> <li>2. Can you describe your journey into a leadership role in higher education?</li> <li>3. What kind of challenges or barriers did you face on your way to this position?</li> </ol> | <p>What personal and professional factors helped you to reach your current position? (Personal factors: education and skills, motivation and ambition, personal traits, role model/ mentors, family support/ background, etc. Professional factors: career development opportunities, organizational support, workplace culture, mentoring, etc.).</p> <p>Do you think mentoring or networking helped you in your career advancement?</p> |

|                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Institutional and Cultural Influences        | <p>4. How do institutional policies (e.g., hiring, promotion, maternity leave) affect women's career progression in academia?</p> <p>5. What aspects of workplace culture have supported or hindered your career?</p>                                                                                                          | If you could change one policy or cultural aspect to better support women leaders, what would it be?                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Perceptions and Experiences of Women Leaders | <p>6. How do you see your role as a leader in higher education?</p> <p>7. How do your colleagues and subordinates perceive you as a leader?</p>                                                                                                                                                                                | Do you think your gender influences how others perceive you as a leader?                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Work- life Balance and Coping Strategies     | <p>8. How do you balance your professional role with your personal and family responsibilities?</p> <p>9. What strategies have you found effective in maintaining work- life balance?</p> <p>10. What do you think needs to change in higher education institutions in Kazakhstan to ensure gender equality in leadership?</p> | <p>Can you describe a time when balancing both roles was particularly difficult?</p> <p>What advice would you give to younger women academics about work- life balance?</p> <p>Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences as a woman in leadership?</p> |

Thank the participant for the interview and stop recording.

## Appendix E

### Интервью-протокол

**Тема исследования:** Гендерное равенство в академической среде: опыт женщин на руководящих должностях в высшем образовании Казахстана

#### Предварительная информация:

**Дата:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Место:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Стаж работы:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Время интервью:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Продолжительность:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Должность:** \_\_\_\_\_

Здравствуйте. Меня зовут Жулдыз. Я являюсь магистрантом Высшей школы образования Назарбаев Университета. Благодарю Вас за участие в данном исследовании. Цель данного исследования – изучить опыт, восприятие и трудности, с которыми сталкиваются женщины, занимающие руководящие должности в высших учебных заведениях Казахстана. Интервью продлится примерно 30–40 минут. Прежде чем начать, прошу Вас подписать форму информированного согласия.

#### Описание исследования:

Вас пригласили принять участие в интервью. Ваше участие в исследовании очень важно, благодарю за согласие принять участие. Данное исследование посвящено женщинам-руководителям в высших учебных заведениях, их восприятию, опыту и вызовам, связанным с сохранением руководящей позиции и балансом между работой и личной жизнью. Результаты исследования могут внести положительный вклад в науку, а также позволят политикам услышать мнение участниц для дальнейших улучшений. Во время интервью Вам будут заданы вопросы о Вашем личном опыте, трудностях и продвижении в карьере. Я задам открытые вопросы о Вашем опыте. Ваши ответы будут конфиденциальными и приватными. При Вашем согласии интервью будет записано на устройство или телефонное приложение. Запись не будет передана третьим лицам. Также я буду вести заметки в ходе интервью, если Вы не согласитесь на запись. Записи будут храниться на надежном носителе в защищенном месте. Доступ к ним будут иметь только мой научный руководитель и я. Собранные данные будут использоваться исключительно в академических целях и будут уничтожены после анализа. Ваше участие является добровольным, и если какой-либо вопрос будет неудобен, Вы можете на него не отвечать. Продолжительность интервью — 30–40 минут. Помните, что Вы можете прекратить участие в интервью в любой момент. Пожалуйста, ознакомьтесь и подпишите форму информированного согласия. У Вас есть вопросы перед началом интервью?

#### Вопросы интервью:

## Исследовательские вопросы:

### Вопросы моей магистерской работы следующие

1. Какие ключевые факторы способствуют или препятствуют доступу женщин к руководящим должностям в вузах Казахстана?
2. Как женщины-руководители в академической среде воспринимают и ощущают свои роли и обязанности?
3. Какие стратегии используют женщины-руководители в высшем образовании для балансирования профессиональных и личных обязанностей?
4. Как институциональные политика и культура рабочего места влияют на карьерное продвижение женщин на руководящих позициях?

| Темы:                                              | Вопросы:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Дополнительные вопросы:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Барьеры и факторы, способствующие лидерству</b> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Не могли бы рассказать немного о себе?</li> <li>2. Могли бы Вы описать свой путь к руководящей должности в высшем образовании?</li> <li>3. С какими трудностями или барьерами Вы столкнулись на пути к этой должности?</li> </ol> | <p>Какие личные и профессиональные факторы помогли Вам достичь нынешней позиции? (Личные: образование и навыки, мотивация и амбиции, личные качества, наставники/ модели для подражания, поддержка семьи.</p> <p>Профессиональные: возможности для развития карьеры, организационная поддержка, культура рабочего места, наставничество и т. д.)</p> <p>Считаете ли Вы, что наставничество или нетворкинг помогли Вам в карьерном продвижении?</p> |
| <b>Институциональные и культурные влияния</b>      | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Как институциональные политические нормы (например, найм, продвижение, декретный отпуск) влияют на карьерное продвижение женщин в академии?</li> </ol>                                                                            | <p>Если бы Вы могли изменить одну политику или аспект культуры для лучшей поддержки женщин-руководителей, что бы это было?</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |

|                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|---------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                   | 5. Какие аспекты корпоративной культуры поддерживали или, наоборот, мешали Вашей карьере?                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Восприятие и опыт женщин-руководителей</b>     | 6. Как Вы видите свою роль как лидера в высшем образовании?<br>7. Как коллеги и подчинённые воспринимают Вас как лидера?                                                                                                                                                                                     | Считаете ли Вы, что Ваш пол влияет на то, как другие воспринимают Вас как лидера?                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Баланс работа-жизнь и стратегии совмещения</b> | 8. Как Вы совмещаете профессиональную роль с личными и семейными обязанностями?<br>9. Какие стратегии оказались наиболее эффективными для сохранения баланса?<br>10. Что, по Вашему мнению, необходимо изменить в системе высшего образования Казахстана для обеспечения гендерного равенства в руководстве? | Можете привести пример, когда совмещение ролей было особенно трудным?<br><br>Какой совет Вы бы дали молодым женщинам-учёным в вопросе баланса работа–жизнь?<br><br>Есть ли что-то ещё, чем Вы хотели бы поделиться о своём опыте как женщины-руководителя? |

Спасибо за интервью и я завершаю запись.

## Appendix F

### Сұхбат хаттамасы

**Зерттеу тақырыбы:** Академиядағы гендерлік теңдік: Қазақстандағы жоғары білім беру саласындағы басшылық лауазымындағы әйелдердің тәжірибесі

**Алдын ала ақпарат:**

**Күні:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Өтетін орны:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Еңбек өтілі:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Сұхбат уақыты:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Ұзақтығы:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Сұхбат берушінің лауазымы:** \_\_\_\_\_

Сәлеметсіз бе. Менің атым Жұлдыз. Мен Назарбаев Университетінің Білім беру жоғары мектебінің магистрантымын. Бұл зерттеуге қатысқаныңыз үшін алғыс айтамын. Зерттеудің мақсаты – Қазақстандағы жоғары оқу орындарында басшылық лауазымдағы әйелдердің тәжірибесін, қабылдауын және кездесетін қиындықтарын зерттеу. Сұхбат шамамен 30–40 минутқа созылады. Сіздің келісіміңізбен сұхбат Google Meet немесе Zoom арқылы жазылады. Бастамас бұрын, ақпараттандырылған келісімге қол қоюыңызды сұраймын.

#### Зерттеу сипаттамасы:

Сізді сұхбатқа қатысуға шақырдық. Бұл зерттеуге қатысуыңыз өте маңызды, келісім бергеніңіз үшін алғыс айтамын. Бұл зерттеу жоғары оқу орындарындағы әйел-басшыларға, олардың көзқарасы, тәжірибесі, жұмыс пен жеке өмірді үйлестірудегі қиындықтарына арналған. Зерттеу нәтижелері ғылымға оң үлес қосып, сондай-ақ саясаткерлер үшін қатысушылардың пікірлерін ескеруге мүмкіндік береді. Сұхбат барысында Сізге жеке тәжірибеңізге, қиындықтарға және мансаптық өсуге қатысты сұрақтар қойылады. Сұрақтар ашық түрде болады. Жауаптарыңыз құпия түрде сақталады. Сіздің келісіміңізбен сұхбат жазба құрылғысына немесе телефон қосымшасына жазылады. Жазба ешкімге берілмейді. Егер сұхбатты құрылғыға жазуға қарсы болсаңыз, сұхбат барысында мен жазбаша түрде белгі жасаймын. Жазбалар сенімді құрылғыда сақталып, құпия жағдайда болады. Жазбаға тек ғылыми жетекшім мен өзім ғана қол жеткізе аламыз. Жиналған деректер тек академиялық мақсатта қолданылады және талдаудан кейін жойылады. Зерттеуге қатысу ерікті түрде жүреді, егер кейбір сұрақтар ыңғайсыз болса, Сіз жауап бермеуге құқылысыз. Сұхбат шамамен 30–40 минутқа созылады. Кез келген уақытта сұхбатты тоқтатуға болады. Өтінемін, ақпараттандырылған келісіммен танысып, қол қойыңыз. Бастамас бұрын сұрақтарыңыз бар ма?

#### Сұхбат сұрақтары

##### Зерттеу сұрақтары:

Менің магаистрлік жұмысымның зерттеу сұрақтары осындай:

1. Қазақстандағы жоғары оқу орындарында әйелдердің басшылық лауазымдарға қол жеткізуіне ықпал ететін немесе кедергі келтіретін негізгі факторлар қандай?
2. Академиядағы әйел басшылар өз рөлін және міндеттерін қалай қабылдайды және қалай тәжірибелейді?
3. Жоғары білім берудегі әйел басшылар кәсіби және жеке жауапкершілікті үйлестіру үшін қандай стратегияларды қолданады?
4. Институционалдық саясат пен жұмыс мәдениеті әйелдердің мансаптық өсуіне қалай әсер етеді?

| Тақырыптар:                                                 | Сұрақтар:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Қосымша сұрақтар:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Басшылыққа жетудегі кедергілер мен қолдау факторлары</b> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Өзіңіз туралы айтып бересіз бе?</li> <li>2. Жоғары білім беруде басшылық лауазымға жету жолыңызды сипаттап бересіз бе?</li> <li>3. Осы қызметке жету жолында қандай қиындықтар мен кедергілерге тап болдыңыз?</li> </ol>                                                  | Қазіргі лауазымға жетуге қандай жеке және кәсіби факторлар көмектесті? (Жеке: білім мен дағдылар, мотивация мен амбиция, жеке қасиеттер, тәлімгерлер/үлгі тұтар тұлғалар, отбасының қолдауы және т.б. Кәсіби: мансапты дамыту мүмкіндіктері, ұйымдық қолдау, жұмыс мәдениеті, тәлімгерлік және т.б.) Мансаптық дамуда тәлімгерлік немесе кәсіби байланыстардың (нетворкинг) көмегі болды деп ойлайсыз ба? |
| <b>Институционалдық және мәдени ықпалдар</b>                | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Институционалдық саясаттар (мысалы, жұмысқа қабылдау, қызметтік өсім, декреттік демалыс) академиядағы әйелдердің мансаптық өсуіне қалай әсер етеді?</li> <li>5. Жұмыс орнының мәдениеті мансаптық өсуіңізге қандай жағынан ықпал етті немесе кедергі келтірді?</li> </ol> | Әйел басшыларды жақсырақ қолдау үшін бір саясатты немесе мәдени аспектіні өзгерте алсаңыз, ол не болар еді?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>Әйел басшылардың рөлді қабылдауы мен тәжірибесі</b>      | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Жоғары білім беруде өз рөліңізді қалай көресіз?</li> <li>7. Әріптестер мен бағыныштыларыңыз Сізді басшы ретінде қалай қабылдайды?</li> </ol>                                                                                                                              | Сіздің ойыңызша, сіздің жынысыңыз басқалардың сізді лидер етіп қабылдауға әсер ете ме?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |

|                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Жұмыс пен өмірді<br/>үйлестіру және<br/>стратегиялар</b> | <p>8. Кәсіби рөліңізді жеке және отбасылық міндеттеріңізбен қалай үйлестіресіз?</p> <p>9. Жұмыс пен өмір тепе-теңдігін сақтауда қандай стратегиялар тиімді болды?</p> <p>10. Сіздің ойыңызша, Қазақстандағы жоғары оқу орындарында гендерлік теңдікті қамтамасыз ету үшін нені өзгерту керек?</p> | <p>Екі рөлді үйлестіру өте қиын болған кезіңізді сипаттап бере аласыз ба?</p> <p>Жас әйел-ғалымдарға жұмыс пен өмір тепе-теңдігін сақтау жөнінде қандай кеңес берер едіңіз?</p> <p>Әйел басшы ретіндегі тәжірибеңізден тағы қандай ойлармен бөліскіңіз келеді?</p> |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Сұхбат үшін алғыс білдіремін және жазбаны тоқтатамын.

## Appendix G

### Gender Equality in Academia: Experiences of Women in Leadership Roles in Higher Education in Kazakhstan

#### Recruiting through email

**Subject:** Invitation to Participate in Research Interview

**Dear** \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is Zhuldyz Umekova, and I am currently pursuing a Master's degree at the Graduate School of Education, Nazarbayev University. I am conducting research for my thesis entitled *"Gender Equality in Academia: Experiences of Women in Leadership Roles in Higher Education in Kazakhstan."*

Given your role as a woman leader in your university, I would like to kindly invite you to take part in this study by participating in a research interview. Your insights and experiences will make a valuable contribution to understanding the experiences, perceptions and challenges faced by women in academic leadership in Kazakhstan.

The interview will be scheduled at a time and place convenient for you and is expected to last approximately 30- 40 minutes. Please be assured that all information will remain confidential and used only for academic purposes.

I would be most grateful if you would consider this invitation and agree to participate in the study.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Zhuldyz Umekova  
Master's Student  
Graduate School of Education  
Nazarbayev University

## Appendix H

### Набор участников через электронную почту

**Тема:** Приглашение к участию в исследовательском интервью

Уважаемая(ый) \_\_\_\_\_,

Меня зовут Жулдыз Умекова, я являюсь магистранткой Высшей школы образования Назарбаев Университета. В рамках своей магистерской диссертации я провожу исследование на тему: *«Гендерное равенство в академической среде: опыт женщин на руководящих должностях в высших учебных заведениях Казахстана»*.

В связи с Вашей руководящей ролью в университете, я хотела бы пригласить Вас принять участие в данном исследовании через исследовательское интервью. Ваши взгляды и опыт представляют ценность для понимания опыта, восприятия и трудности, с которыми сталкиваются женщины в академическом руководстве в Казахстане.

Интервью будет назначено в удобное для Вас время и место и, как ожидается, продлится около 30–40 минут. Гарантирую, что вся предоставленная информация будет оставаться конфиденциальной и использоваться исключительно в академических целях.

Я была бы весьма признательна, если бы Вы рассмотрели это приглашение и согласились принять участие в исследовании.

Благодарю Вас за уделённое время и внимание.

С уважением,  
Жулдыз Умекова  
Магистрантка  
Высшая школа образования  
Назарбаев Университет

## Appendix I

### Қатысушыларды электрондық пошта арқылы іріктеу

**Тақырып:** Зерттеу сұхбатына қатысуға шақыру

Құрметті \_\_\_\_\_,

Менің атым – Жұлдыз Умекова, мен Назарбаев Университеті Білім беру жоғары мектебінің магистрантымын. Қазіргі уақытта мен магистрлік диссертациям аясында *«Академиядағы гендерлік теңдік: Қазақстандағы жоғары оқу орындарында басшылық қызметтегі әйелдердің тәжірибесі»* тақырыбында зерттеу жүргізіп жатырмын.

Сіздің университеттегі көшбасшылық рөліңізге байланысты Сізді осы зерттеуге қатысып, сұхбат беруге шақырғым келеді. Сіздің көзқарастарыңыз бен тәжірибеңіз Қазақстандағы академиялық көшбасшылықтағы әйелдердің тәжірибесі, қабылдауы және кездесетін қиындықтарын түсінуге құнды үлес қосады.

Сұхбат Сізге қолайлы уақыт пен жерде өткізіледі және шамамен 30–40 минутқа созылады деп жоспарлануда. Барлық ақпарат құпия сақталып, тек академиялық мақсаттарда ғана пайдаланылатынына кепілдік беремін.

Бұл шақыруды қабылдап, зерттеуге қатысуға келіссеңіз, зор ризашылық білдіремін.

Уақытыңыз бен назарыңыз үшін көп рақмет.

Ізгі тілекпен,  
Жұлдыз Умекова  
Магистрант  
Білім беру жоғары мектебі  
Назарбаев Университеті

## Appendix J

### Coding Sample 1

| Questions and Transcription                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Coding                                                                                                                   |
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| <p><b>Researcher: what kind of challenges or barriers did you face on your way to this position?</b></p> <p>Participant: Uh, so I don't think there were a lot of challenges there year ago, so none of the polies was challenging to be appointed, to be elected or to be selected. So GSE would come to the formal leadership position. So I don't think that it was difficult to work, but if I come to my professional, professional life, So from the policies and the legislation and the policies, there were no barriers at all. So because just everything is a merit base, I applied my, I participated in competitions. I was elected sometimes. I was invited and were off at these jobs, it was mostly a promotion rather than the, rather just being the part of the hiring process. From professional perspectives, when I started working as a dean of the graduate school of education, I had my PhD in linguistics from Kazakh University of World languages and international relations. So I defended many years ago, but when I was here at the dean, I heard for my some of my colleagues that the <b>Western diploma</b>. So it wasn't the direct abuse or it wasn't someone that who directly poked just here and poked and they said that I have to have, but I always <b>felt discomfort</b> when people were saying so that they <b>Western education is more, more evaluated</b>, with the <b>Western diploma people are more a well-educated</b>, comparing to their local universities, and it was not something that I wanted to get some, it was not something that I really needed as the professional, but it was something that they had to prove that <b>the national specialist can do the same</b>. But all the time I heard between lines, between words or something that we call it <b>epistemic justice or injustice, here, when your voice is heard less, your opinion means less</b>, just because your diploma is not from the north or just so we say the global north. And I made my decision that I have to have the 2nd doctoral degree, so it was in high education management and it was from the IVY league. So it was the approvement that it's a diploma that makes you professional. It's not a diploma that makes you a real formally informal leader. It's more about the skills, it's about your leadership position, it's about your citizenship position, but if these people wanted to see my paper, so here is the paper. So I think one of the challengers was that I always felt this a <b>little bit epistemic injustice</b>. So just I was <b>young</b> as dean, so it was <b>about the age</b>, I was the <b>only female dean</b>, so it's against some <b>gender bias</b>. I don't say that my male colleagues were rude to me. No, never. But sometimes they had received formal meetings, they could meet Friday nights and having</p> | <p>Not having Western diploma</p> <p>Feeling epistemic injustice</p> <p>Couldn't allow be part of active social life</p> |

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| <p>my family, I couldn't let myself be allow myself to be a part of the active social life. It was about the International National, so I'm just you always have to prove and not about a diminution of your role, but some emotional might be, something that really disturbed me. And the third thing is making the balance, what is challenging, is making the balance between your scholarship and deanship. So I want to conduct research. I want to publish. I also want to have my h-index very higher, but you are working at administrative position. You have to make this condition for your professors, because they have to publish. You have to go with your students to make the more successful. You have to work with different stare holders, and it always disruptive for my own scholarship because they admin position versus academic position and to be at the admin position is also to sacrifice your research life. It was difficult to be. It's also challenging the balance. And the fourth thing is to make the balance between your work and your personal life and your family. So when you have kids, you have to pay attention to them, and that is I said, so just my male colleagues may go and they Friday, they can spend together and I had to go home because some school events, so I just family events. I'm not only a wife and a mother and daughter. I also a daughter in law in Kazakh family, so a lot of things that I had to do. So all the things were challenging...</p> | <p>No research life</p> <p>Family time</p> |
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## Appendix K

### Coding Sample 2

| Questions and Transcription                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Coding                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
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| <p>Researcher: So the next, thank you. So work life balance and coping strategies. So question, <b>how do you balance your professional role with your personal and family responsibilities?</b></p> <p>Participant 2: Oh, I think this is one of the maybe I try to what's but sometimes I have <b>no time to talk to my parents</b>, well, you know, when I come back. Because I have to, you know, I leave home at half past seven every day. And usually come back home at past 9. Because it takes time to come in from my university to back home here and also for times <b>I have to stay up late</b>. Of course it's not mandatory to stay. Nobody makes me stay, but you know that I would like to go home and rest, you know? <b>I don't want to bring work back home</b>. So but balancing professional and personal responsibilities can be very challenging and I'm not a great example of it, I would say. I try to learn how to, but I realize my careful playing again. Sometimes I think that <b>I have to prioritize</b> things here because I'm also work on my time management because I try to circle about this, and work and family. time year, and what I learned, I think to <b>delegate tasks were possible</b>, because when I just started back in, for example, in this particular institution here, last year, I tried to do everything on my own. But at the end of I think at the beginning of this year, yeah, starting from, let's say at last academic year, nothing. So I started to delegate tasks. I think that's what helped me as well, yeah, because I'm not the only one, I have my team here, and supportive team yeah, and I try to do the guitar here because support from my colleagues, you know is tremendous, as well as <b>support from my family, my mom and dad, and colleagues is also I think crucial</b>. Additionally, I make sure to. I tried to dedicate time for her self care. But I'm not good at it, I would say. Because this leadership position has got <b>an impact on my mental state as well</b>, sometimes. I would like to stay alone, especially on Saturdays and Sundays. Sometimes I'm unwilling to talk to my parents because they feel so tired, I that also my brother's family, two nephews and two nieces. They often, you know, visit us and they try to play with me. I tried to, but not as much as I could, you know, previously. So, but I think that self care invest isn't important because to stay, you know, to <b>maintain this kind of the sense of well being</b>. Yeah, because <b>maintaining my well being</b> allows me to be more effective at work, yeah. both at work and at home. So and I think I still have to learn this, because I'm not good at it, because flexibility is a big key, that you in managing is responsibility, successfully, but I'm still learning</p> | <p>No time to talk to family</p> <p>Stay at work late, because don't want to bring work home</p> <p>Have to prioritize</p> <p>Delegate tasks</p> <p>Support from family and colleagues</p> <p>Try to dedicate time for myself</p> <p>Impact on my mental state</p> <p>maintaining my well being allows to be effective</p> <p>after work I go swimming<br/>have health problems: insomnia, mental exhausting, physical tired<br/>wanted withdraw</p> <p>take care of yourself</p> |

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| <p>how to. One of my strategies here now is to, after work, I <b>try to go back to NU and swimming</b>. Yes. So I go swimming now, and I sleep better now because sometimes I feel myself so tired and all the tasks, we have to complete and this year we are about to go through a number of accreditations. So, you know, I <b>sometimes have insomnia, and the lack of sleep</b>, you know. So I decided to, you know, go and attend the swim. So I tried to run, but I'm not with it, you know. You know, there was even one case, in that case, twice I <b>wanted to withdraw</b> from this position. Because of this kind of, you know, feeling, <b>I felt myself exhausted, you not mentally</b>. And physically.</p> | <p>prioritize tasks<br/>set clear bounders<br/>between work and life<br/>reduce unnecessary<br/>stress<br/>planning tools like<br/>Google Calendar help<br/>maintain flexible<br/>mindset<br/>support from<br/>colleagues</p> |
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