

**Women's Leadership and Motherhood in Higher Education: A Case Study of
Women Administrators in a Regional University in East Kazakhstan**

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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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ABSTRACT

Women's Leadership and Motherhood in Higher Education: A Case Study of Women
Administrators in a Regional University in East Kazakhstan

This research explores the experiences of mothers who hold administrative positions in a regional university in East Kazakhstan. The study examines the challenges and benefits of balancing motherhood and administrative duties in higher education, aiming to inform the development of supportive structures for these women. This study used a qualitative method with semi-structured interviews as the data collection instrument. It delves into the challenges these mother administrators face, including work-life conflicts, workplace dynamics, and access to institutional support. The study also identifies positive aspects of having the dual role, including personal fulfillment, career advancement, and contributions to diversity within the institution. The findings highlight the significance of implementing flexible work schedules, providing leadership training and coping strategies to support female administrators. These measures can contribute to increasing job satisfaction, improving retention rates, and fostering a more inclusive and supportive work environment. This study adds to the existing body of knowledge on female leadership in higher education by providing practical insights for educational institutions to enhance their support systems for female administrators.

Аңдатпа

Жоғары Оқу Орындарындағы Әйелдер Көшбасшылығы және Ана Болу:
Шығыс Қазақстан Аймақтық Университетіндегі Әкімші Әйелдердің Жағдаяты

Бұл зерттеу Шығыс Қазақстанның аймақтық университетінде әкімшілік қызмет атқаратын аналардың тәжірибесін зерттейді. Зерттеу осы әйелдерге қолдау көрсететін құрылымдардың дамуын ақпараттандыруға бағытталған жоғары оқу орындарындағы ана мен әкімшілік міндеттерді теңестірудің қиындықтары мен артықшылықтарын зерттейді.

Бұл зерттеуде деректерді жинау құралы ретінде жартылай құрылымдық сұхбаттары бар сапалы әдіс қолданылды. Ол осы ана әкімшілер бетпе бет келетін қиындықтарды, соның ішінде жұмыс пен өмір арасындағы қақтығыстарды, жұмыс орнындағы динамиканы және институционалдық қолдауға қол жеткізуді зерттейді. Зерттеу сонымен қатар қос рөлді атқарудың жағымды аспектілерін, соның ішінде жеке тұлғаның өзін-өзі жүзеге асыруын, мансаптық өсуін және оқу орнындағы әртүрлілікке қосқан үлесін анықтайды.

Нәтижелер икемді жұмыс кестесін енгізудің, көшбасшыларды даярлауды қамтамасыз етудің және әйел әкімшілерді қолдау үшін күресу стратегияларын әзірлеудің маңыздылығын көрсетеді. Бұл шаралар жұмысқа қанағаттанушылықты арттыруға, қызметкерлерді ұстап қалу деңгейін арттыруға және инклюзивті және қолайлы жұмыс ортасын құруға ықпал етуі мүмкін.

Бұл зерттеу жоғары оқу орындарындағы әйелдердің көшбасшылығы туралы қолданыстағы білім қорын толықтырады, бұл оқу орындарына әйел әкімшілерді қолдау жүйелерін жетілдіру бойынша практикалық ақпарат береді.

Аннотация

Женское Лидерство и Материнство в Сфере Высшего Образования: На Примере Женщин Руководители Регионального Университета в Восточном Казахстане

В данном исследовании рассматривается опыт матерей, занимающих административные должности в региональном университете в Восточном Казахстане. В исследовании рассматриваются проблемы и преимущества совмещения материнства и административных обязанностей в высшем образовании, с целью информирования о создании структур поддержки для этих женщин.

В этом исследовании использовался качественный метод с использованием полуструктурированных интервью в качестве инструмента сбора данных. В нем рассматриваются проблемы, с которыми сталкиваются матери-администраторы, включая конфликты между работой и личной жизнью, динамику на рабочем месте и доступ к институциональной поддержке. Исследование также выявило положительные аспекты двойной роли, включая личную самореализацию, карьерный рост и вклад в разнообразие внутри учебного заведения.

Полученные результаты подчеркивают важность внедрения гибких графиков работы, проведения тренингов по лидерству и разработке стратегий преодоления трудностей для поддержки женщин-администраторов. Эти меры могут способствовать повышению удовлетворенности работой, повышению коэффициента удержания персонала и созданию более инклюзивной и благоприятной рабочей среды.

Это исследование дополняет существующий объем знаний о женском лидерстве в сфере высшего образования, предоставляя учебным заведениям практические рекомендации по совершенствованию их систем поддержки женщин-администраторов.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Steeped in tradition, universities may struggle to provide the necessary pathways for women to reach leadership positions (Allen et al., 2021). This lack of female role models creates a sense of isolation ("chilly climate") for aspiring women leaders, potentially discouraging them from pursuing leadership opportunities within academia. The late 1800s ushered in a new era for women in education. College doors finally began to creak open, paving the way for a long-overdue shift (Carmen, 2002). This progress continues today, with women steadily climbing the ranks of academic leadership. However, in the process of acquiring leadership ranks, women face significant roadblocks to moving into administrative leadership positions (Carmen, 2002). Administrators, in this study, refer to individuals such as deans heading academic units or faculties within a university, responsible for academic programs, faculty, and students, as well as department heads and faculty members tasked with managing faculty, courses, academic support services, departmental activities, and student instruction. In addition to this, there are conventional responsibilities that typically fall upon faculty members, including teaching, research, and community service. It is commonly observed that female faculty members, particularly mothers, often shoulder the primary burden of managing domestic household tasks (Dickson & Martina, 2018). Moreover, the requirement of assuming the role of the primary caregiver can present a significant obstacle for women, particularly when they occupy positions in the realm of senior administration within higher education (Okin, 2005). Numerous research studies have demonstrated that male faculty members, in contrast, tend to have significantly less involvement in these aspects of child-rearing (Dickson & Martina, 2018). The factors above may limit academic women's potential to

aspire to positions of leadership by slowing their career advancement or even dropping their career aspirations (O'Laughlin & Bischoff, 2005).

Balancing motherhood and a career in education can be a juggling act, filled with challenges for women educators. Yet, research also reveals a positive side to this dual role (Raddon, 2002). Raddon highlights the potential for empowerment and fulfillment that many of these women experience. This often-overlooked perspective sheds light on the sense of satisfaction that mothers in education find in navigating both responsibilities.

My journey into academic motherhood began when I entered higher education in East Kazakhstan as an Assistant Teacher with a young daughter, aged only 11 months. I went through planning and teaching lessons, grading students' paper-based or digital tasks, having extra duties as faculty, and studying for my master's degree at the same time. Juggling two roles as a mom and faculty, I was bereft of energy to do either task well and often wondered about mothers' experiences in administrative roles, particularly in higher education. I am aspired to move to a senior-level leadership administrative position in the future and this aspiration led me to conduct a study that matters to me personally: I wanted to explore mother administrators' experience and understand why and how the demands of motherhood conflict with the demands of a senior-level administrative position.

1.2 Background Information

Examining the historical trajectory of women in higher education offers valuable context for understanding their current presence in leadership roles (Sharma & Afroz, 2014). Historically, women faced significant limitations on their rights, including financial dependence on men, restricted voting rights, and limited access to education, business ownership, and property ownership. In this context, education emerged as a powerful tool for empowerment and advancement (Sharma & Afroz, 2014).

The push for gender equality has ignited a wave of educational research across various fields. This newfound focus has prompted a deeper dive into women's historical roles in education (Rajkhan & Kenzhegulova, 2021). Empowered by this renewed interest, women are now more vocal about the key factors that still impact their rights within higher education.

Despite significant strides towards leadership positions, women remain vastly underrepresented across various sectors, including government, politics, business, and higher education (Carli & Eagly, 2016). This imbalance is particularly evident in Kazakhstan. As of 2023, women are entirely absent from top administrative roles in key institutions like the Prosecutor General's Office, Ministry of Internal Affairs, and Financial Monitoring Agency (Vlast.kz, 2023). Representation remains low in other areas as well, with only a fifth of high-level positions in local government bodies ("Maslikhat") and the presidential administration filled by women. Similarly, government membership and deputy minister positions show a concerning lack of gender parity, with women holding only 15.4% and 11.1% respectively (Vlast.kz, 2023).

While there has been a gradual increase in women leading universities, their numbers still fall short of achieving true parity (Ross & Green, 2000). Historically, women in academia have encountered a unique set of obstacles on their path to leadership roles. These challenges often stem from a combination of factors, including juggling family responsibilities, navigating a system that may prioritize traditional leadership styles, and limitations in career advancement opportunities (Fried & Zeger, 2009). Research by Fried & Zeger (2009) highlights the persistent issues of lower salaries, appointments to less prestigious positions, slower promotions, and higher turnover rates for women in academic leadership. Additionally, Dominici et al. (2009) point to the

perceived conflict between child-bearing and career progression as a further barrier to women's advancement within higher education.

Consequently, gender bias can persist in certain academic environments, and the absence of a supportive workplace and personal life settings can make it harder for female administrators to overcome these challenges (Chugh & Sahgal, 2007). In Kazakhstan, cultural norms and expectations place pressure on women to marry and have children at specific times. As a result, women often lack the desire to pursue leadership positions, as they may feel inadequate when presented with opportunities, and occasionally decline promotions (Kuzhabekova, 2021). Yet, there are also overlooked aspects, such as the satisfaction and positivity experienced by women juggling dual roles.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

According to Banker and Banker (2017), a critical research gap exists regarding women's leadership across all levels and sectors within higher education (p. 249). Their work highlights the need for further investigation into this topic. Hill and Wheat (2017) further emphasized the need to explore the factors shaping women's career trajectories and leadership ambitions. They suggested that researchers delve deeper into both personal and professional influences on these choices (p. 2106).

Studies on mothers in academia often mention the burden of "working mother's guilt" (McCutcheon & Morrison, 2016). This guilt stems from outdated ideas about women being the main caregivers, no matter their job. These societal expectations, as Kark & Eagly (2010) point out, are a big reason why women haven't climbed the leadership ladder in universities as quickly as men. Balancing childcare and family needs with career advancement can be a constant struggle for women. Research by Johnson (2017) even shows a connection between women presidents at universities and being less likely to get married, having fewer children, and needing to change their careers to fit

family demands. This situation becomes even trickier when you consider the pressure of having children at a certain age while also needing strong professional credentials. Ultimately, these stereotypes, as Kark & Eagly (2010) highlight, create a major hurdle by limiting how society sees women's potential to be leaders compared to their male colleagues.

Eagly (2012) further elucidates that childcare and familial duties constitute foundational factors contributing to the limited empowerment and authority experienced by women in the workforce, thereby constraining their prospects for career advancement, impeding their pursuit and attainment of promotions, and placing a cap on their overall professional success. Eagly and Carli (2007) introduced the metaphorical concept of a labyrinth to symbolize the formidable hurdles women encounter in their journey toward leadership positions. This labyrinth serves as a representation of the intricate challenges and impediments that women confront as they strive to ascend the hierarchical ladder in leadership roles.

The aforementioned factors possess the capacity to impede the professional progression of academic women, potentially hampering their pursuit of leadership positions or even prompting a decline in their career aspirations (O'Laughlin & Bischoff, 2005). However, there are often neglected facets, such as the contentment and positive experiences of women managing dual responsibilities, which have been inadequately explored in research endeavors. There is a huge need to comprehensively examine the individual and occupational determinants that shape the trajectories of women's careers and learn pivotal factors influencing the progression of women in leadership within higher education.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

This study aims to illuminate the experiences of women administrators at one medium-sized multi-profile educational institution in East Kazakhstan who combine the dual roles of administrator and mother. Since more and more women participate in the administration of institutions and hold faculty positions, my study focused on investigating the challenges and opportunities women at a regional university in East Kazakhstan faced in balancing professional and family responsibilities.

1.5 Research Questions

The central research question addressed by this study is: How do mother administrators at a regional university in East Kazakhstan balance their roles in motherhood and higher education senior-level administrative positions, while considering gender biases and advocating for the development of supportive structures?

In order to answer this central question the following sub-questions were designed:

- 1) What are the benefits and challenges of combining the dual roles of motherhood and higher education administrator at a regional university in East Kazakhstan?
- 2) Do the mother administrators experience gender-biased challenges? And if they do, how do they describe them?
- 3) What are the implications for developing supportive structures for mother administrators in Kazakhstan?

The next section of this chapter discusses the research design and explains the reasons for its choice.

1.6 Methodology

I decided to apply a qualitative case study design to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by women administrators who are also mothers. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were used to collect the data. The participants were chosen using a purposeful sampling strategy. Such a design allowed participants to share their lived experiences, and helped me investigate the complexities of their experiences, thus offering rich insights that might not be captured by more quantitative methods. The details of the methodology will be discussed in the corresponding chapter.

1.7 Significance of the Study

Studies on women in higher education leadership are delving into the qualities and experiences that make them successful leaders (Shepherd, 2017). This research is particularly relevant as universities strive for gender parity in administration, yet progress remains uneven. While recruitment efforts have undeniably increased the number of women in leadership roles (Shepherd, 2017), a significant gap persists, especially at the executive level.

This suggests the need for a more comprehensive approach than just recruitment. As Phipps and Prieto (2021) argue, achieving true gender balance requires offering women equal opportunities for advancement at all levels of the organization. These opportunities allow women to develop the essential skills and experience needed to be influential and inspiring leaders. Ultimately, by fostering a more inclusive leadership landscape within higher education, universities can harness the power of diverse perspectives to drive positive change (Phipps & Prieto, 2021).

This study dives deep into the experiences of women leaders in higher education, like deans, department heads, and others who play a crucial role in running universities (Carli & Eagly, 2016). By examining their journeys, we can gain valuable insights into the

challenges they face as they climb the career ladder in academia. These insights can be a game-changer for college and university leaders at all levels, from presidents on down to those who aspire to leadership positions in the future. Understanding these challenges can help leaders create a more inclusive environment where women can thrive (Trigg, 2006).

By offering detailed insights, this study may become a resource for nurturing the next generation of women administrators. Understanding the diverse backgrounds and influences on women administrators is crucial for measuring and comprehending the factors influencing their ascent at administrative levels. While acknowledging the underrepresentation of women at the highest echelons of higher education, it remains imperative to disseminate this information across various layers of organizations within the realm of higher learning.

1.8 Outline of the Thesis

This research dives into the experiences of women in leadership roles in higher education. The opening chapter sets the stage by providing essential background information, outlining the central issue of female underrepresentation in leadership, and defining the study's objectives and research questions. **It then clarifies the design of the study.** Chapter Two delves into existing research, exploring factors about mother administrators and their advancement in leadership positions within the university. Following this, Chapter Three details the research methodology employed in the study. The heart of the research unfolds in Chapters Four and Five, where the findings gleaned from the research are presented. Finally, Chapter Six brings the study to a close by summarizing the key findings, drawing conclusions and exploring the practical implications of the research, and offering recommendations for further investigation.

1.9 Summary

This study examines the challenges faced by women in East Kazakhstan's regional universities as they strive for leadership roles. Entrenched gender norms have historically limited women's career advancement opportunities. Despite progress, they remain underrepresented in senior administrative positions across various sectors. The research focuses on the experiences of mother administrators, exploring how they navigate dual roles, address gender biases, and advocate for supportive structures. Through a qualitative case study, the study aims to uncover the nuanced challenges and opportunities these women encounter on their journey toward leadership roles. This exploration contributes to the ongoing conversation on gender equality and inclusivity in academic leadership.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The road to leadership in university administration is often filled with hurdles. The very challenges women face in this arena can, paradoxically, propel them towards success. Family circumstances and educational backgrounds play a significant role in shaping these complex journeys. Focusing on the challenges women from various backgrounds face in administration can provide a richer understanding of their experiences. Studies by Gmelch & Wolverton (2002) reveal a persistent web of challenges women administrators encounter. These include marginalization, being seen as a token rather than valued for their skills, feelings of isolation, lack of support networks, limited access to mentorship, and facing stereotypes, double standards, heightened scrutiny, and constant doubts about their competence.

Despite significant progress, persistent "glass ceiling" continues to hinder women's advancement to leadership positions in higher education administration (Gmelch & Wolverton, 2002). This literature review aims to uncover the diverse experiences of women as they navigate these complex pathways. It explores the interplay between family circumstances, educational background, and societal expectations, revealing their impact on women's leadership paths. By carefully examining the persistent obstacles and the inspiring forces that drive them forward, we can gain valuable insights into the factors that shape women's roles in academia. This investigation not only highlights the challenges they encounter but also identifies opportunities to break down systemic barriers and create a more inclusive environment for women in leadership positions across institutions of higher learning.

2.2 Women in Higher Education Leadership

The increasing number of women in leadership positions globally represents a significant advancement towards gender equality (Sandon, 2006). This trend offers a twofold benefit: firstly, it enhances global leadership by bringing in diverse perspectives and experiences. Women leaders often prioritize collaboration, communication, and fostering inclusive environments, which can foster innovation and address complex issues from a more holistic viewpoint (Smith, 2021). Secondly, it helps dismantle societal biases that have historically questioned women's capabilities in leadership and management roles. By demonstrating their competence and effectiveness in these positions, women leaders serve as powerful role models for future generations, chipping away at the perception that leadership is a solely male domain.

However, the journey towards genuine gender parity in leadership is not without its challenges. Women leaders may still face implicit bias, stereotyping, and a lack of access to mentorship opportunities compared to their male counterparts (Jones & Bozer 2018). These challenges can hinder their career advancement and limit their potential impact.

Sandon's (2006) research underscores the significant challenges women confront in attaining leadership positions. To elucidate these impediments, a comprehensive analysis of both external and internal factors hindering their advancement is crucial (Adingar, 2004; Chugh & Sahgal, 2007; White, 2003). A woman's leadership potential transcends her individual characteristics; Sandon (2006) emphasizes the pivotal role of the environmental context in which she operates.

However, addressing the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles requires a multifaceted approach. UNESCO (2002) outlines several key strategies that

universities can implement to achieve this goal. These strategies can be categorized into three main areas: policy changes, support structures, and recruitment practices.

2.2.1 Policy Changes

At the institutional level, legislative measures promoting gender equality in leadership positions send a clear message of commitment. Furthermore, establishing dedicated "equal opportunity offices" provides a central point of contact, oversight, and support mechanisms for women seeking leadership roles (UNESCO, 2002).

While Kazakh women make significant contributions to higher education in various capacities (Kuzhabekova, 2021), their presence in leadership roles, particularly at the highest levels, remains limited. The author highlights women's engagement in teaching, administration, research, and policy development within Kazakhstan's higher education system. However, data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2020) paints a contrasting picture. In 2019, women held only 24% of management positions and 32% of university presidencies (rectors). This indicates a significant gap between women's overall participation and their representation in leadership roles, especially at the highest levels.

Moreover, despite acknowledging the need for greater female participation in leadership roles, Kazakhstan faces challenges in translating this goal into action. Kuzhabekova (2021) also identifies the policy-action gap as one of the key barriers. She points out that the 2017-2019 vision implementation plans, while recognizing the issue, lacks concrete measures specifically addressing the underrepresentation of women in higher education management. This gap between stated goals and implemented actions hinders progress.

Research suggests that women's participation in organizations has a demonstrably positive impact on organizational culture (Babae, 2005; Gopal, 2008). Their presence can contribute to a more ethical and positive work environment in several ways. In the above-

mentioned studies, the authors suggest that women leaders tend to prioritize ethical behavior and decision-making within organizations. This can lead to a more transparent and trustworthy work environment.

Research also indicates that women in leadership roles can foster improved internal communication and a culture of innovation within institutions (Babae, 2005; Gopal, 2008). This can be attributed to their collaborative leadership styles and focus on diverse perspectives.

In the international arena, India reflects a global trend of underrepresentation of women in senior leadership positions within academia (Banker & Banker, 2017). Research by Banker and Banker (2017) and Ghara (2016) reveal a stark disparity that a significant majority of women in Indian academia (around 66.22%) find themselves stalled in mid-level management roles. In contrast, a much smaller percentage (around 6.67%) holds high-ranking positions such as dean or vice-chancellor.

Data from Azman (2021) reveals a concerning gender gap in leadership positions within Malaysian public universities. Despite women making up a significant portion of government-appointed board members (42%), their representation in top leadership roles remains low. This means that a significant portion of the knowledge and skills within the higher education workforce is presently not fully utilized (Azman, 2021).

2.2.2 Support Structures

Equipping women with the necessary skills and confidence is crucial. Designed for women leaders, targeted training programs can address areas like leadership development, negotiation tactics, and public speaking. Additionally, mentorship programs can connect aspiring women leaders with experienced mentors who can offer guidance and support (UNESCO, 2002). Fostering gender-sensitive management practices within universities creates a more inclusive work environment. This can involve promoting flexible work

arrangements, unconscious bias training for faculty and staff, and creating a culture that values diverse perspectives.

Jackson and Harris (2007) emphasize the critical role of role models and mentors in guiding and supporting women on their leadership journey. A woman's motivations for pursuing leadership positions can be influenced by societal expectations and role models and the way women approach decision-making processes may be shaped by societal pressures and leadership stereotypes (Sandon, 2006). Universities can significantly contribute by fostering dedicated mentorship programs and supportive networks specifically designed for aspiring women leaders. These programs can provide valuable guidance, equip women with the necessary skills to navigate challenges, and foster a sense of belonging within the leadership pipeline.

Research by Wilson (2009) identifies family responsibilities, particularly for mothers, as a major hurdle for women seeking leadership positions. Universities can address this challenge by implementing work-life balance policies that offer flexibility, such as flexible work arrangements and subsidized or on-site childcare options (Wilson, 2009). These policies create a more inclusive work environment that acknowledges the realities of personal lives. This, in turn, allows women to excel in leadership roles without sacrificing their family commitments.

Universities in Kazakhstan struggle to achieve gender parity in leadership positions. A significant obstacle lies in the entrenched cultural norms and biases within these institutions. Research by Kuzhabekova (2021) sheds light on this issue. One factor is unconscious bias, where both male colleagues and some women themselves may inadvertently favor men for leadership roles. Additionally, cultural expectations around childcare often influence women's career choices, potentially hindering their advancement (Kuzhabekova, 2021).

Kuzhabekova's research (2021) provides valuable insights into the underrepresentation of women in Kazakhstani university leadership. By categorizing the factors into cultural norms, organizational practices, and institutional structures, the research reveals the multifaceted nature of this challenge. Notably, Kuzhabekova's study suggests that some male colleagues may hold the unsubstantiated belief that women prioritize motherhood over career ambitions. This perception can create a less supportive environment for women aspiring to leadership roles. They may face implicit or explicit discouragement or be seen as less dedicated due to perceived family obligations.

2.2.3 Recruitment Practices

Achieving gender equality in leadership positions remains a complex challenge across various sectors, including higher education (Wise et al., 2003). While the number of women in leadership roles has increased, a significant gap persists at the executive level (Shepherd, 2017). This necessitates a multi-pronged approach that addresses both recruitment practices and the broader societal context.

Unconscious bias against female candidates can be a significant barrier during recruitment. Research by UNESCO (2002) emphasizes the importance of implementing standardized criteria and blind evaluation procedures to mitigate this bias. Standardized rubrics that clearly define the required qualifications and desired leadership qualities can ensure a fair and objective evaluation of all candidates, regardless of gender. Additionally, utilizing blind resume reviews, where identifying information is removed during the initial screening process, can further minimize bias based on name or gender (Gangone, 2008; Marshall, 2009).

The composition of selection committees significantly influences recruitment outcomes. Shepherd (2017) highlights the importance of prioritizing diverse selection committees that reflect the demographics of the applicant pool. This can ensure a wider

range of perspectives are considered during candidate evaluation and reduce the potential for groupthink that may favor candidates similar to existing leadership.

Beyond mitigating bias, universities can also implement proactive strategies to attract qualified female candidates. This can involve highlighting successful women leaders within the university in recruitment materials and showcasing their contributions to the institution (Jackson, 2000). Partnering with organizations focused on women's leadership development can be another effective strategy to connect with a wider pool of qualified female candidates (Chugh & Sahgal, 2007). Additionally, advertising leadership positions at conferences or events specifically geared toward women in academia can increase visibility and attract women who may not actively be searching for new opportunities (Gopal, 2008).

It is important to acknowledge the potential for unconscious bias in search algorithms used to advertise or screen resumes. Universities can mitigate this by utilizing gender-neutral language in job postings and implementing tools that remove identifying information from resumes during the initial screening phase (Jackson, 2000).

Beyond attracting qualified women, fair and inclusive recruitment practices also play a key role in retaining them as leaders. Signaling a commitment to gender equality right from the start fosters a more supportive environment for women in leadership positions. This, in turn, can lead to higher job satisfaction and a greater likelihood of women staying on as leaders within the institution.

2.3 Motherhood in Higher Education Profession

Research suggests that women in academia often face a challenging dilemma: balancing a successful career with motherhood (O'Meara et al., 2008). Baker (2010) explores various factors impacting women's decisions regarding motherhood and career. First of all, external influences such as educational opportunities have an impact on

mothers in academia. Secondly, supportive or challenging workplace environments can impact decisions about motherhood.

In addition to external factors, personal considerations also play a role. For instance, the dynamics within a woman's personal relationships and family can influence decisions about motherhood. Also, some women prioritize career advancement, while others prioritize family life (Baker, 2010).

A study by Madsen (2006) revealed a surprising lack of women in top leadership positions within universities. This gap in representation also exposes a shortage of research on the experiences and backgrounds of these successful female leaders. But instead of discouraging further exploration, this lack of data should be a wake-up call. We need more research to understand the key factors that help women climb the ladder in higher education administration.

William and Pillai's (2004) research adds another hurdle to the already challenging path for women in leadership. Their work highlights the extra challenges women face when it comes to balancing family life, regardless of whether it involves children, elderly parents, or spouses. These responsibilities demand a lot of time and attention, creating a delicate balancing act between personal commitments and career aspirations for women administrators. This juggling act can significantly impact their ability to move up within the ranks of higher education

William and Pillai (2004) coined the term "maternal wall" to describe a major obstacle women face in higher education leadership. This refers to the stereotypes and biases that hold mothers back from leadership positions. Their research explores how this plays out in real life. First, women reported experiencing negative assumptions about their abilities after taking maternity leave, which can hurt their performance evaluations.

Second, the lack of female role models in higher education administration makes it harder for women to see a path forward.

Balancing the demands of motherhood with the pressure of university leadership is a constant struggle for women in academia. This isn't just an issue in one place; studies from all over the world show the same challenges (Bittman & Pixley, 1997; Craig & Bittman, 2008; Craig, 2006; Edlund, 2007; Kitterd & Pettersen, 2006; Potuchek, 1997).

Studies by Burns et al. (2020) suggest that this dual role of mother and leader can significantly impact a woman's psychological well-being. Mothers, even when employed full-time, often carry the primary burden of household chores and childcare. This creates a time management challenge for women juggling these responsibilities alongside their academic careers.

A career in academia presents unique challenges, particularly for mothers (Basset, 2005; Bracken et al., 2006). These challenges stem from the high level of commitment required for success including time-intensive pursuits. Academic careers often involve pursuing advanced degrees and conducting research, both of which necessitate significant time investments. Also, publication and presentation pressure may exist. Maintaining a steady output of publications and presentations is crucial for career advancement, placing a constant demand on a researcher's time. These demanding aspects of academia can create significant obstacles for women trying to balance motherhood with their professional pursuits (Basset, 2005; Bracken et al., 2006).

Aini and Hernawati (2016) highlight a global trend towards shared domestic responsibilities. In contrast, Kazakhstan demonstrates the persistence of more traditional gender roles, as evidenced by the saying "Men make houses, Women make homes" (Kuzhabekova, 2021). This proverb suggests a societal expectation that women take

primary responsibility for domestic tasks. Kuzhabekova (2021) emphasizes the potential gap between the evolving concept of gender equality and the realities of family life in Kazakhstan. This highlights a potential disconnect between how societal norms and expectations impact the way women navigate motherhood and professional careers in academia.

Furthermore, Azman (2021) highlights that female academics navigate the dual pressure of fulfilling traditional domestic roles within the family while simultaneously pursuing successful careers. This creates a significant challenge for women seeking leadership positions, which often require additional time and dedication.

However, while acknowledging the challenges, researchers like Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2005) emphasize that dedication, strong support systems, and effective time management strategies can enable women to achieve success in both their professional and personal lives.

While balancing motherhood and a career in academia presents challenges, research suggests that achieving a work-life balance can offer positive outcomes for both individuals and families (Raddon, 2002). Women may experience greater career satisfaction when they feel their personal lives are not neglected. Work-life balance can allow for shared financial responsibility within families, reducing pressure on individual partners. Additionally, balancing responsibilities can foster mutual respect for each partner's professional aspirations. Moreover, Raddon (2002) suggests that balancing work and family may allow women to serve as positive role models for their children and develop greater empathy for their students. This can create a more supportive learning environment.

While the challenges of balancing motherhood and an academic career are significant, research also highlights potential benefits and motivations for women pursuing both. Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2004) delve into the potential benefits of

balancing these dual roles. Their research focuses on understanding the positive aspects of managing motherhood and a career in academia. This perspective can contribute to understanding the motivations of female academics who choose this path.

It is important to acknowledge the complexities involved. Despite the challenges, numerous success stories exist of successful women leaders (Madsen, 2006). Many women have navigated these obstacles and reached leadership positions in academia, demonstrating the possibility of achieving both professional and personal goals.

2.4 Women Administration, Leadership, and Motherhood

More women are stepping up to leadership roles these days (e.g., Adrienne, 2014), which is a great sign for workplace equality. But even with this progress, there's still a long way to go to achieve true balance. Studies show women's careers often don't advance as quickly as men's (e.g., Adrienne, 2014). This raises important questions about the challenges women face on their path to leadership. And these challenges are likely to differ depending on where they are in the organizational ladder (e.g., Adrienne, 2014). More research is needed to understand the specific hurdles women encounter at different leadership levels.

The concept of successful leadership is complex and can be influenced by gender in two key ways differing expectations and varying definitions of success. Research by Eagly and Johnson (1990) and Loden (1985) suggests that expectations for leadership styles and behaviors often differ depending on whether the leader is a man or a woman. For example, stereotypically masculine traits like decisiveness and assertiveness might be seen as more desirable in leaders, while stereotypically feminine traits like empathy and collaboration might be valued less (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Loden, 1985).

Research suggests that men and women leaders may hold differing views on what constitutes success in their roles (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Loden, 1985). These contrasting interpretations can lead to a variety of leadership styles within organizations. However,

this diversity can be a positive force, potentially fostering a richer and more multifaceted leadership landscape.

A growing number of women are aspiring to leadership roles within organizations, reflecting a positive trend toward gender equality in the workplace (e.g., Adrienne, 2014). However, despite these strides, achieving parity remains a critical goal. Research suggests that women's career advancement continues to lag behind that of men, and the challenges they face can vary depending on their position within the organizational hierarchy (e.g., Adrienne, 2014).

Gmelch (2000) observes that many college administrators lack formal leadership training. This highlights a broader issue within academia: the seemingly unplanned approach to leadership development. Gmelch notes that "the socialization of academic leaders seems to be left largely to chance" (p. 217). This suggests a lack of structured programs or mentorship opportunities to support aspiring leaders in developing the necessary skills and knowledge. While individuals may find success through various pathways, research does identify common themes associated with achieving leadership success in academia (Gmelch (2000)).

While the specific challenges faced by women in academia may differ from those encountered by men, research suggests that several key qualities contribute to successful leadership across various contexts. Wolverton et al. (2009) conducted a comprehensive review of leadership literature and identified some of these essential qualities. First of all, effective leaders often possess strong personal attributes such as passion, dedication, and a deep commitment to their work. These qualities can motivate and inspire others. Also, leaders who are self-aware understand their strengths and weaknesses. They also possess a strong sense of self-confidence, which allows them to make decisions and navigate challenges effectively (Wolverton et al.,2009).

2.6 Gender Expectations and Women's Leadership in Kazakhstani Higher Education

Despite an increase in the number of women administrators, their overall representation in leadership roles within higher education remains inadequate (Wise et al., 2003). This ongoing gender gap necessitates further research to explore the challenges women face and identify pathways to leadership. This chapter focuses specifically on the role of gender expectations in shaping women's experiences in Kazakhstani universities.

Culturally entrenched expectations regarding gender roles significantly influence women's career trajectories in Kazakhstan (Kuzhabekova, 2021). This chapter supports this notion, revealing that deeply ingrained societal norms prioritize childcare and domestic responsibilities as women's primary domain. This expectation often impacts career planning decisions that limit women's pursuit of leadership positions, particularly for those of childbearing age. Furthermore, the traditional concept of "kelin" (daughter-in-law) reinforces the notion of women's primary responsibility within the family unit, potentially hindering their professional ambitions.

This research also sheds light on the presence of internalized stereotypes among women in Kazakhstani universities. A significant portion of women believe that men are inherently better suited for leadership roles due to a perceived advantage in "big-picture thinking." This internalized stereotype can have a detrimental effect on women's confidence and self-perception as leaders (Kuzhabekova, 2021). She states that in some cases, it can lead women to undersell their qualifications, overcompensate for perceived shortcomings, or engage in self-criticism that may negatively impact their performance evaluations compared to male colleagues. In turn, this creates a cyclical challenge, where women may be evaluated lower due to the very stereotypes they are working to overcome.

The Kazakhstani government recognizes the importance of increasing women's participation in leadership roles, particularly within social and political spheres

(Kuzhabekova, 2021). This commitment is reflected in their "Conception for Family and Gender Policy for 2017-2030," which sets an ambitious target of 30% female representation in leadership positions by 2030.

However, Kuzhabekova (2021) identifies a crucial gap in implementation. While the government's plan outlines this goal, it lacks specific actionable steps for promoting women in leadership roles, both generally and specifically within higher education. To address this shortcoming, she emphasizes the need for a clearly defined action plan tailored to the higher education sector. Furthermore, she underscores the value of research-based knowledge on women's experiences in academic leadership positions to inform the development of such a plan.

In essence, Kuzhabekova highlights the government's goal of increased female leadership while identifying the need for a more concrete and research-informed implementation strategy within higher education.

By acknowledging and addressing the complex interplay of cultural expectations, internalized stereotypes, and gender bias within university structures, Kazakhstani higher education can pave the way for a more inclusive leadership landscape. Further research is crucial to gain a deeper understanding of these factors and their impact on women's leadership aspirations. Through targeted interventions that challenge traditional gender norms and dismantle structural bias, universities can empower women to thrive in leadership roles and contribute meaningfully to the future of Kazakhstani higher education

2.5 Conceptual Framework

Examining women's experiences in leadership positions requires considering relevant theories that explore how societal expectations and perceptions can influence evaluations. The social role theory examines how societal expectations around gender

influence behaviors. This theory suggests that leadership roles have traditionally been associated with masculine qualities. This creates a situation where women, who may not always embody these stereotypical traits, might be perceived as less qualified for leadership positions (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Building on social role theory, Eagly, and Karau's (2002) role congruity theory delves deeper into how perceptions of fit between an individual and a particular role can impact their evaluation. This theory suggests that people tend to evaluate leaders more favorably when their characteristics align with stereotypical leadership traits. In the context of academia, where leadership roles might be seen as requiring traditionally masculine qualities, this can pose challenges for women seeking leadership positions.

The role congruity theory offers a valuable lens for understanding the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles, particularly within academia. The theory suggests that traditional management practices and norms, often unconsciously biased towards masculine leadership styles, can inadvertently exclude women. These practices may not recognize or value the leadership qualities that women possess (Eagly & Karau, 2002). The lack of female representation is particularly evident in prestigious research institutions where the number of women in senior positions remains low (Carter, 2014). This highlights a potential disconnect between the growing number of women pursuing leadership roles and their attainment of leadership positions in academia.

Even after achieving leadership positions, women often face steeper hurdles than their male counterparts. Research suggests that women may need to demonstrate exceptional skills and capabilities to be perceived as equally valuable contributors within an organization (e.g., Sebastyan., 2015). This phenomenon is sometimes referred to as the

"glass ceiling" or the "double bind," highlights the ongoing need to address gender bias in the workplace.

Gmelch and Wolverton (2002) posit that women and minority deans entering leadership roles are driven by a genuine desire to succeed and make a positive impact on their institutions. Their chapter, titled "Women and Minority Deans and the Keys to Success," establishes this aspiration to improve colleges as a foundational premise.

2.7 Summary

This chapter explores the experiences of women navigating leadership roles within higher education. Despite progress, women still face a glass ceiling, encountering marginalization, stereotyping, and a lack of mentorship. Balancing work and family life adds another layer of complexity. However, women leaders are crucial for academic institutions. They bring diverse perspectives and leadership styles, fostering inclusivity and ethical decision-making.

To overcome underrepresentation, a multi-pronged approach is needed. This includes policy changes promoting gender equality, targeted support structures such as training and mentorship programs, and fair recruitment practices. Additionally, a supportive family environment empowers women and fosters leadership aspirations in girls.

The next chapter will explain in detail the methodology I applied to conduct this study.

3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided a comprehensive review of the literature on working mothers. Building upon that foundation, this chapter delves into the methodology of the current research. As Hammond and Wellington (2014) emphasize, "a research study's value can only be assessed by understanding its methodology." In this chapter, I outline the research design chosen to address the specific research questions outlined earlier, followed by the steps taken to select participants, collect data, and analyze the information gathered.

The first section of this chapter details the research design and the research site. The second section focuses on the sampling procedure and how participants were selected for the interviews. The subsequent sections will delve deeper into the specific research methods used and the strategy for data analysis. Finally, the chapter will discuss the data collection process, and measures taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings and conclude with a summary.

Ethical considerations have been into the research design from the outset, not as an afterthought. This proactive approach ensures potential issues are identified and addressed early on; preventing problems later in the research process (Bryman & Bell, 2007). By adopting this proactive and participant-centered approach, the researcher was able to ensure their studies are conducted ethically and responsibly.

3.2 Design of the Study

A qualitative approach, specifically through in-depth interviews, was chosen for this study to explore the lived experiences of mother administrators at a regional university in East Kazakhstan. Unlike quantitative research, which focuses on measuring

variables and generating numerical data, qualitative methods delve deeper into the "why" and "how" of participants' experiences (Creswell, 2014). This approach is particularly well-suited to answer our research questions, which aim to understand the complexities of balancing motherhood and administrative roles, such as potential gender-based challenges and the need for supportive structures. Ultimately, qualitative research, particularly through interviews was chosen based on a literature review that demonstrated its effectiveness in addressing the research questions at hand.

This study employed a case study design, focusing on a regional university in East Kazakhstan, to explore the research question and its sub-questions in detail. While a universally agreed-upon definition remains elusive, prominent case study researchers highlight key characteristics of case study design (Yin 1994; Merriam 1998; Miles & Huberman 1994). A case study delves into a specific unit within its real-world context, making it ideal for exploring a contemporary issue like this one (Yin, 1994). As Stake (1995) noted, "Case study is defined by interest in individual cases," making it suitable for in-depth exploration of the experiences of mother administrators at this university.

3.3 Research Site and Sampling Strategy

This qualitative research study was conducted at a mid-sized (approximately 1,800 students and staff) multi-profile educational institution in a small city in East Kazakhstan. This study employed purposeful sampling to select participants. This approach involves strategically choosing individuals who possess specific characteristics relevant to the research questions (Onwuegduzie & Leech, 2007). In this case, participants were chosen based on three key criteria: position, experience, and maternity status. The study focused on women in leadership roles, specifically deans heading academic units/faculties, department heads, and faculty members responsible for managing faculty, courses, and student services. These positions were chosen as they represent various leadership levels within the university. Participants were required to have at least five years of experience

in their current roles and all participants were mothers. This selection process ensured that participants had the relevant experience and perspectives to provide valuable insights into the research topic.

A purposeful sample of five women from these leadership positions (deans, department heads, and general managers) were interviewed face-to-face. The research focused on a single department within a multi-profile educational institution in the region. While there were nine administrators within the chosen department, I interviewed five, aiming to achieve data saturation (Onwuegduzie & Leech, 2007). This refers to the point at which no new insights emerge from additional interviews, indicating sufficient data has been collected (Onwuegduzie & Leech, 2007). The sample size was determined considering the size of the university department and the number of administrators available. This approach ensured a manageable workload for data analysis while still capturing diverse experiences relevant to the study.

The following table (Table 1) presents the details about the interview participants. To protect their identities, I use codes instead of their real names.

Table 1

General Demographics of the Participants

Participants	Participants 'codes	Age	Level of education	Years in administrative position	Children
Participant 1	P101	43	Ph.D.	8	4
Participant 2	P102	46	Ph.D.	11	2
Participant 3	P103	41	Ph.D. candidate	8	3
Participant 4	P104	37	Ph.D.	5	4
Participant 5	P105	52	Ph.D.	15	3

Ultimately, this foundation of data collection allows for the development of significant conclusions about the experiences of women administrators balancing work and family life.

3.4 Data Collection Instrument

Qualitative research heavily relies on interviews as a primary data collection method (Oakley, 1998). Interviews provide a platform for in-depth conversations, documented through recordings or detailed notes, between me and the mother administrators.

While various interview formats exist, I opted for **semi-structured interviews**. This approach offers a balance between flexibility and structure (Yin, 2011). It allowed me to have a **predetermined set of open-ended questions** that I consistently asked across individual interviews (Creswell, 2007). This ensured that core research questions were addressed while also allowing the conversation to flow organically based on the participants' experiences. Additionally, I could ask probing questions that emerged naturally during the interview to gain deeper insights (Yin, 2011).

Conducting the Interviews

Data collection for this study employed a combination of **online and face-to-face interviews**. Online interviews were conducted using Google Meet, chosen for its user-friendliness, scheduling flexibility, and features like session recording and note-taking, which aided in subsequent transcription.

The interview protocol consisted of **ten open-ended questions** designed to elicit rich insights on the research topic. Participants were encouraged to discuss their lived experiences, including both the challenges and joys of navigating work-life balance with their dual roles as mothers and administrators. Individual interviews lasted approximately

40 minutes and were conducted in settings chosen for participant comfort, such as personal offices or coffee shops.

It is important to note that interviews were conducted in both Kazakh and Russian languages to accommodate participant preferences and ensure clear communication. This flexibility ensured all participants felt comfortable sharing their experiences openly.

3.5 Data Analysis Approach

Following the exploration of data collection methods, this section delves into the qualitative data analysis process employed in this study. The core objective was to meticulously examine participant responses, specifically focusing on the unique benefits and challenges faced by mother administrators in East Kazakhstan as they navigate work-life balance. Here, I will outline the sequential steps undertaken in the analysis. To arrive at generalizable insights those contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

Qualitative data analysis involves a systematic process of examining and interpreting textual data, such as interview transcripts, to reveal both the explicitly stated and underlying meanings within the participants' experiences (Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014). This approach goes beyond surface-level interpretations, delving into subjective experiences and social constructs. The aim is to discover and describe recurring themes or patterns that emerge across the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

By systematically comparing and contrasting data points from various interviews, the analysis seeks to identify patterns and connections within the participants' narratives. This comparative approach allows for the triangulation of findings, enhancing the overall credibility of the analysis (Flick, 2014). Having explored the interview methods used to gather data; I analyzed the rich information gathered from the mother administrators. My

main goal was to understand their experiences in balancing work and family life at a regional university in East Kazakhstan.

Thematic analysis, as outlined by Creswell (2012), served as the primary method for analyzing the interview data. This approach provides a systematic and flexible framework for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting recurring patterns of meaning within the data (Ayres, 2008). Its adaptability to various theoretical frameworks (Braun & Clarke, 2006) made it well-suited to address the research questions guiding this study.

First, I carefully read through all the interview transcripts. Since some interviews were conducted in Kazakh and Russian, I had them meticulously translated into English for consistent analysis. Then, I started coding them. This means I went through the transcripts line by line, highlighting key ideas and organizing them into categories. As I did this, broader themes began to emerge. Each theme represented a significant pattern I found in the data, and I assigned a code word to each one for easy reference (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The coding was not a one-time activity. As Saldaña (2015) suggests, I kept going back and refining the codes as I learned more from the data. This back-and-forth process helped me develop more nuanced themes, giving me a deeper understanding of the mothers' experiences and the valuable insights they shared (Ayres, 2008).

While thematic analysis offered a powerful tool for identifying patterns, I remained mindful of the importance of preserving the connection between the data and its original context, as emphasized by both Ayres (2008) and Maxwell (2011). To address this, I incorporated elements of case study methodology (Yin, 2018). This allowed me to consider the unique contextual relationships within each participant's experience while presenting the identified themes.

This process of coding, refining themes, and considering context laid the groundwork for interpreting the findings and drawing meaningful conclusions about the

experiences of these mother administrators. The following chapter will present the key themes that emerged from this in-depth analysis of the data.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are fundamental to responsible research. Failure to address these considerations can jeopardize the entire study and potentially harm participants (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Two crucial principles guide ethical research: voluntary participation and informed consent (Bryman & Bell, 2007). First things first, participation should always be voluntary. No one should be pressured or forced to take part in a study. On top of that, participants have the right to bow out at any point, no questions asked. This ensures they have complete control over their involvement.

Next up, informed consent is a key concept in ethical research. Participants need to be fully in the loop about the study's goals, how the research will be conducted, any potential risks and benefits, and how their data will be used. This information should be clear and easy to understand, allowing participants to make a well-informed choice about whether or not to participate (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Furthermore, the way how researcher communicates with participants throughout the research process should be respectful and professional. This includes avoiding the use of offensive, discriminatory, or any language that could be construed as insensitive or upsetting (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Considerate wording in all research instruments, such as questionnaires, interview guides, and focus group prompts, to ensure a positive and inclusive research experience for all participants.

Privacy and anonymity are paramount in protecting participants from potential harm. Researchers must take steps to ensure that the data they collect cannot be linked back to specific individuals. This may involve anonymizing interview transcripts,

removing identifying information from questionnaires, and storing data securely (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

Thus, maintaining participant confidentiality and anonymity is an essential component of ethical research, particularly when conducting interviews. While the researcher was initially aware of participant identities due to the interview format, several steps were taken to safeguard their privacy. The informed consent form explicitly stated that all participant information would be kept confidential. This means that no identifying details, such as names or affiliations, will be shared in the research findings.

Data collection procedures ensured a separation of participant identities from their responses. This involved using unique codes or identifiers instead of names during the interviews. These codes cannot be traced back to specific individuals, further protecting confidentiality.

All participant data was stored securely using encrypted databases or secure servers. Access to this data was restricted to authorized personnel only, minimizing the risk of unauthorized access. Prior to data analysis, any personally identifiable information (PII) such as names, addresses, phone numbers, or other identifying details was removed from the data. Participant names were replaced with pseudonyms or unique codes throughout the research process. Finally, to ensure the highest level of anonymity, all identifiable information will be destroyed after data collection is complete. These measures collectively guarantee that participants cannot be identified through the research findings.

Following the completion of the interviews, I transcribed all responses into electronic documents and stored them on separate drives. All data collection activities were conducted by the researcher and the data was secured in a safe location. To ensure

confidentiality, I employed encryption methods and password-protected files for data storage. Access to the data was further restricted to authorize personnel only.

Upon completion of the research project, all interview recordings will be permanently deleted to safeguard participant privacy. Furthermore, the study utilized a coding system to anonymize any sensitive participant information, and this data will not be shared with any third parties. These comprehensive measures ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of participants throughout the research process.

3.7 Summary

This research project adopted a qualitative case study approach, employing in-depth interviews with five women administrators who are also mothers at a regional university in East Kazakhstan, to investigate the challenges and opportunities they face. Purposeful sampling ensured participants met specific criteria related to their position, experience, and maternity status. Data collection involved a combination of online and face-to-face interviews, utilizing open-ended questions to gather rich insights. Thematic analysis was employed to systematically identify patterns of meaning within the data, resulting in a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of mother administrators in East Kazakhstan. Ethical considerations were integrated into the research design from the outset, ensuring participant well-being and research integrity. This study sheds light on the challenges and benefits of balancing motherhood with administrative responsibilities in a higher education context, offering valuable insights for universities seeking to support working mothers in leadership roles. The next chapter will present the findings generated through the methodology.

4. Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis and findings of a qualitative study that sheds light on each participant's journey to leadership, the challenges they encountered, and the strategies they used to overcome them. It also examines the support they received from their workplace and families, as well as their advice for fellow mother administrators who aspire to leadership roles within organizations. The findings are based on the responses to ten interview questions of five female leaders, who currently hold leadership positions in their respective organizations for more than five years.

In this chapter, the experiences of five women who hold senior-level administrative positions are presented. The researcher found it beneficial to gather data from these women administrators, who are also mothers, in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the issue through multiple real-life perspectives.

This chapter outlines the main findings from five semi-structured interviews organized according to the key themes that emerged from participants' responses:

1. Work-Life Conflict
2. Self-Imposed and Socially-Constructed Expectations of Motherhood
3. Challenges
4. Benefits and Finding Joy
5. The Role of Family and Other Networks in Offering Support

4.2 Work-Life Conflict of Women Administrators

Research suggests that a large majority (80%) of working women experience challenges in managing these competing demands (Deepa, 2018). This often translates

into feelings of inadequacy in fulfilling childcare responsibilities. Due to work commitments, mothers may rely on alternative childcare arrangements, such as grandparents or hired caregivers (Yesilyaprak, 2015).

Managing the balance between personal and professional life emerged as the main theme of this study, regarding the dual role of mothers and administrators. However, the word "balance" was not the case, since work-life balance means giving up family time in favor of work. In fact, the findings were not about work-life balance but rather work-life conflict. All five women participants in this study had to choose between priorities.

After the data analysis, several topics emerged and were classified as follows and each category will be discussed in subsequent subsections

- Sacrifice
- Lack of work-family life boundaries

4.2.1 Sacrifice

The study identified a central theme in the participants' experiences: managing work-life balance. All five women acknowledged the significant challenges they faced in this area, describing making sacrifices in terms of quality time with their families, especially during the early stages of their careers, when administrative demands were intense. This required a high degree of adaptability in their professional development, as they needed to skillfully manage their professional, family, and social responsibilities. While some women received support from their families and friends, others turned to external solutions like childcare providers to address their childcare needs.

Through interviews with all five participants, two different aspects of sacrifice were identified: 1. absence in children's important life events; and 2. the inability to form emotional connections.

4.2.2 Absence in Children's Important Life Events

In order to understand the main finding of "Work-Life Conflict," the researcher found it necessary to ask participants about the least satisfactory and challenging aspects of balancing their work and family life, and whether they believed it was the primary obstacle to their career. All participants acknowledged that at least once, they felt guilty for being "bad mothers" and for being absent during important life events for their children. Participant P101 stated:

Always, almost! Yes, especially when a child is ill, and you need to be there for them, but responsibilities must be delegated to another person. It is challenging to leave a child, and it breaks your heart, making you feel like a terrible mother.

Participant P101 was not the only one who experiences mixed emotions. Another participant's (P104) comment was: "I remember a few years ago, I had to organize an urgent call with faculty and missed my son's first matinee at kindergarten. I felt upset because some people said he was looking for me with hopeful eyes."

The participants' narratives emphasize the intricate intersection of professional demands and familial responsibilities. While recognizing the practical need to delegate caring responsibilities during a child's illness, they express a profound inner conflict and sense of inadequacy at not being able to provide personal care. Additionally, the story about the absence of a significant family event due to work commitments emphasizes the emotional strain of reconciling career goals with family priorities. These accounts illustrate the multi-faceted emotional landscape of working parents, where feelings of guilt and regret often accompany the inevitable trade-offs between professional ambitions and cherished family moments.

4.2.3 The Inability to Make Emotional Connections

In addition to missing important life events for children, the theme of not being able to establish emotional connections was also identified as one of the key characteristics of sacrifice. In the context of the challenges they face in managing two roles, some participants reported that they struggled to connect emotionally with their children. The respondent, P105, replied:

When the children were toddlers, my mother-in-law was the main person who took care of them. At that time, I felt like I was the luckiest person in the world, but now, when they are almost adults, I cannot have emotional conversations with them. After work, I come home tired and so do they. How lucky is that?"

Another participant gave a similar response, stating:

Outsourcing some household chores makes life easier and more balanced.

However, outsourcing children's full-time care to nannies can be dangerous for the emotional bond between them and their parents. You can never fully recover the emotional connection with your children who have been cared for by nannies or caregivers. (P103)

Participant (P104) claims that problems will be fewer once children grow up, but this is not true. She challenges the idea that parenting becomes easier as children get older, instead arguing that the need for emotional connection and parental attention increases with age.

4.2.4 Lack of Work-Family life Boundaries

The evening routines described by P104 emphasize the struggle to find meaningful time for family interaction in the midst of exhaustion and competing demands.

The children were young, and now they are grown up. Now, even more attention needs to be paid to children. In the evening, I try to establish contact with the children by asking them about their studies and friends, but it's only a short conversation, we talk for about half an hour or an hour. Then, each of us goes back to our rooms to work on deadlines. After a long day, they are tired, and I am also tired. And there is hope for the weekend.

This idea leads to the finding that all participants of the study acknowledged the necessity of making sacrifices in family quality time while navigating their administrative roles, particularly during the early stages of their careers. Juggling between roles and prioritizing the work that emerged as a factor contributing to their career progression, necessitating adept management of their professional responsibilities. Furthermore, the participants' responses shed light on the profound impact of sacrificing emotional connections while balancing work and family roles. One key theme that emerged was the unintended consequence of outsourcing childcare and household tasks, which, while initially seeming like a solution to managing multiple responsibilities, ultimately erodes the emotional bond between parents and children. (P104)

4.2.5 No Flexibility in the Workplace

In today's workplace, the lack of flexibility in scheduling and policy presents a significant challenge for employees trying to navigate their professional and personal responsibilities effectively. This challenge is demonstrated by the experiences shared by participants in this study. For instance, Participant 102, who is in an administrative position revealed the need to rely on a nanny to handle childcare duties because of the demanding nature of their job.

You have to delegate these responsibilities to your babysitter and husband. Only after six o'clock in the evening when we all get together at home do I try to pay attention and show love to my family, but not always with perfect energy. (P102)

This highlights the crucial role of workplace flexibility in allowing individuals to balance family obligations with professional commitments. Another participant stated: "I wish that an organization would allow me to start work one hour late, or leave one hour early before closing, or sometimes work from home" (P103). These desires reflect a growing understanding of the need to meet the diverse needs of employees in today's fast-paced work environment.

This response demonstrates the need for workplace flexibility to support employees' efforts to effectively fulfill both their professional and family responsibilities. For example, Participant P102, who has an administrative position, expressed the need to delegate childcare responsibilities. Similarly, Participant P103 expressed a desire for flexible working arrangements such as adjustable start and finish times or the possibility of working from home, which could facilitate a better balance between work and personal life.

4.2.6 Additional Workload

When examining the work-family life boundaries of women administrators, the additional workload emerged as a significant aspect of this category. Participants' responses showed that additional working hours and workload led to mother administrators experiencing emotional and psychological challenges. P105 said:

Of course, there are times when I feel exhausted because, apart from university work, we, as faculty and administrators, mainly work with paper. We write papers both at work and take those papers home. Despite the fact that student evaluation

is done online, we still make notes on paper during the day, transfer them to a computer at home, do additional homework, and meet another deadline.

Furthermore, participant P104 did not hesitate to share her work hours: "What difficulties, you say? I work from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. At work, if there is an online meeting, I usually stay at the university until 6:30 p.m."

The analysis of the work-life boundaries of women administrators reveals a pronounced impact of increased workload on their well-being. In particular, the data illustrates how the combination of extended working hours and a significant paper-based workload generates emotional and psychological challenges, particularly for mothers who are administrators. The testimony provided by P105 illustrates the extensive nature of their responsibilities, which encompass tasks both within and outside official working hours. This narrative reflects the ongoing effort required to balance professional obligations with familial duties, as exemplified by the constant transfer of paper-based work from the workplace to home environments. Consequently, these findings emphasize the need for organizational interventions designed to reduce the stress experienced by women leaders, such as implementing streamlined digital processes and providing tailored support mechanisms. Moreover, Participant P104 provides insight into the reality of extended work hours, particularly when online meetings extend beyond regular working hours. This highlights the need to reconsider policies that allow for alternative work schedules, remote work options, and an understanding of personal commitments, which can contribute to a more supportive and inclusive work environment for all employees, especially working mothers.

4.3 Self-Imposed and Socially-Constructed Expectations of Motherhood

In the complex world of modern motherhood, the interaction between self-imposed and socially constructed expectations creates a tapestry that shapes the experience and perceptions of women. As they navigate between the dual worlds of work and family, these expectations create tension and challenges inherent in balancing the maternal role. Through the lens of our research participants, I examined the nuances of these expectations and shone a light on the challenges of navigating these dual realities. Among the participants, a common thread emerged: reliance on delegation and support systems for managing the demands of domestic and care giving roles. These strategies, as mentioned in the previous sections, ranging from outsourcing household tasks to hiring nannies or requesting assistance from extended family members, are pragmatic responses to the intricate web of maternal responsibilities. However, participants such as P101 and P105 reveal a deeper level of complexity, articulating feelings of self-criticism, societal pressure, and guilt when perceived deviations from traditional maternal roles occur. These narratives underlined profound questions surrounding the definition of "good motherhood" and societal values placed on maternal versus paternal roles. Participant P104 stated about motherhood: "Motherhood is a very significant part of a child's life. A mother is like colored pencils in a child's world." Her poignant analogy of a mother as "colored pencils in a child's world" captures the significance attributed to maternal presence and influence within familial dynamics, further highlighting the weight of societal expectations on mothers. In contrast, Participant P103 advocates for a strict separation between work and family below:

Therefore, work and family are separate. After leaving home, you need to focus on work and put your family first. After missing a step at work, it's best to forget about it and spend time with your loved ones.

Participant P103 expresses the view that professional setbacks should not negatively impact family interactions. This perspective underscores the inherent conflict between career ambitions and familial obligations, a crucial consideration for mothers today who navigate the delicate balance between these competing demands. However, among these pragmatic approaches and philosophical perspectives, Participant P105's insightful reflection reveals an acute reality: the unintended consequences of ignoring maternal duties amid the daily demands of parenthood. Their admission that they sometimes experience emotional outbursts or lack of attentiveness to children's needs demonstrates the toll of relentlessly pursuing maternal perfection, exacerbated by fatigue and multifaceted thoughts. As I embark on this exploration of self-imposed and socially constructed expectations regarding motherhood, it becomes clear that the narratives of my research participants reflect the broader societal discussion surrounding maternal roles with poignancy.

4.4 Benefits and Finding Joy

4.4.1 Future Career Progression

Participant P103's thoughts about career advancement possibilities:

Of course, when you come to work, you try to meet the job requirements. Not only do you work, but you also pay attention to your own development. You write projects and participate in projects. You are traveling abroad for academic, or relaxing for personal purposes. (P103)

When examining the participants' perspectives it revealed that mother administrators strive not only to fulfill their professional obligations but also to derive personal satisfaction and joy from their efforts. Future career progression is categorized as one part of the main theme "Benefits and Finding Joy" drawing on the perspectives of the

research participants as they navigate the delicate balance between career progress and pursuing personal fulfillment. Participant P101 emphasizes the intrinsic value of taking responsibility in the workplace, arguing that by embracing personal responsibility, individuals can experience a sense of fulfillment and purpose in their roles as senior-level administrators. This view implies that by aligning professional responsibilities with personal strengths, and values, people can find meaning in their work and enjoy contributing to their organizations' goals. Similarly, Participant P102 emphasizes the importance of responsibility in the workplace. They suggest that by gaining experience and fulfilling duties in a timely manner, individuals can experience a sense of accomplishment and pride in their professional achievements. This suggests that individuals can derive satisfaction from their contributions to their fields by actively engaging with work and demonstrating competence.

4.4.2 Financial Family Support

Working mothers are employed women who contribute to the family income through paid work. Financial family support was another category that was analyzed in this study. This paragraph highlights the crucial role of financial help in supporting families, particularly in aiding mothers who bear significant responsibilities.

Research suggests that working mothers can contribute positively to their families in several ways. From an economic standpoint, their employment can provide financial security and access to benefits for their children (Yadaf & Kumar, 2018). Additionally, studies have shown that working mothers may experience a higher sense of satisfaction and well-being compared to stay-at-home mothers, potentially due to the challenges they overcome in balancing work and family life (Apriani & Risnawaty, 2020). This enhanced well-being can, in turn, create a more positive and supportive home environment for their families.

The majority of participants agree that financial support is essential for them to effectively fulfill their family duties. As an unexpected case Participant P101's mention of adherence to labor regulations as being sufficient highlights an implicit expectation of basic support from the workplace. This statement suggests that the participant views adherence to labor laws as a minimal requirement for employers, indicating a baseline level of support that should be provided to employees.

While working mothers can offer significant benefits to their families, they also face unique challenges in balancing work and family life. Research by Cudy & Wolf (2013) suggests that working mothers may experience greater difficulty in prioritizing these competing demands compared to working fathers. Additionally, the time constraints inherent in balancing work and family responsibilities can contribute to increased stress levels for working mothers (Rout et al., 1997).

Aligned with previous studies, Participant P102's narrative reveals the challenges of balancing work with childcare and other family needs, often necessitating help from a nanny. The participants' experiences highlight the dual pressures individuals face: securing income to support their families while ensuring the well-being of their loved ones, especially children. Through actively engaging in their roles, embracing personal responsibility, and nurturing family bonds, individuals can find joy in contributing to their work and supporting their families.

4.4.3 Mother Administrators Nurturing Independent Children

While mothers, regardless of employment status, play a vital role in their children's growth and development, the early childhood years present a unique set of demands. Research suggests that young children, particularly during the preschool stage, have a significant dependence on their parents, especially their mothers, for feelings of safety and

security (Aini & Hernawati, 2016). This inherent dependence can pose challenges for working mothers who strive to balance their professional commitments with their nurturing role.

Participant P105 shared an unexpected perspective by articulating the significant benefit of fostering self-reliance in children, whereby they autonomously manage their needs and surroundings. Through inquiries like “What should I wear mom?” and “What should I eat when hungry?” children are prompted to make decisions and acquire fundamental life skills, thereby assuming responsibility for their actions. While uncertainties persist regarding additional dimensions of this phenomenon, participants assert the existence of a positive aspect, underlining the importance of maintaining equilibrium in parenting practices.

Participant P104 comments “I noticed that my children adjusted to my schedule in many ways and behaved like independent children. They are so smart and always try to support me. I am so proud of them”. By recognizing opportunities for personal growth and self-sufficiency that may arise from children taking on responsibilities and developing independence, individuals can experience joy in watching the development and success of loved ones.

However, there is a bittersweet realization of the rapid development that accompanies this process, as children adapt to adult-like behavior and routines. Ultimately, participants encourage finding joy in their children's independence and growth while acknowledging the need to maintain the magic of childhood in the responsibilities of adulthood.

4.5 Challenges

4.5.1 Gender Bias

Participant P104's response below about experiencing gender bias leads to unexpected findings:

And in my environment, I see a completely different picture. Men, by nature, do not choose a pedagogical path. Perhaps that is why there are very few men in my department and they do not hold administrative positions. The remaining 95% of the women are on the teaching staff, and the rest hold administrative positions. In my experience, these female teachers lead and guide children in their practice. In psychological work with students, women have a great capacity to organize hundreds of papers. And, men don't have that capacity, so the role of women in pedagogic leadership is predominant.

Another response from P101 states: "Well, considering that 90% of our workforce is women, there haven't been any particular issues. Competence has always been strong among women in our workplace."

The examination of gender dynamics in the professional sphere, particularly within administrative roles, reveals divergent perspectives on the presence of gender bias. While one viewpoint emphasizes the competence and prevalence of women in administrative positions without significant challenges, the other suggests a notable gender disparity, with men being underrepresented, particularly in pedagogical and administrative domains. However, an alternative narrative taken from participants suggests that this distribution may not necessarily indicate gender bias but rather reflect distinct career preferences and inclinations between genders.

4.6 Role of Family and Other Networks in Offering Support

4.6.1 Family Support

The family serves as the cornerstone of society, functioning as the smallest social unit (Zeteroglu & Basal, 2016). Within the family unit, individuals experience crucial growth and development throughout their lifespan, from birth to death. The participants' reflections on family support as one piece of coping strategy provide insights into the experience of mother administrators navigating between their professional roles and family responsibilities. The participants stressed the changing dynamics of family relationships over time, from depending on external support systems at the early stages of parenting to seeking emotional connection with almost adult children later in life.

Participant P104 highlights the importance of family support as follows: “Family is a source of energy, and support from loved ones, just kind words move me forward. The support of my family is directly related to the fact that I do this administrative job honestly and well” (P104).

One of the participants answered most of the questions with a very positive perspective mentioning that:

If you want to play the role of an administrative leader, it can be quite challenging to switch between situations. This role can then impact your family and those close to you. However, if you maintain balance, in such situations, it's essential to consider and respect yourself, your state of mind, your body, and your resources.

That way, you can truly maintain a balance. (P101)

Participant 101, a psychologist, acknowledges the potential strain work can place on familial relationships but advocates for balance and self-care.

The participants' narratives highlight the profound impact of family support as a crucial coping mechanism for mothers who are administrators. From relying on extended family members like mothers-in-law for childcare assistance during the formative years of parenting to entrusting partners and nannies with care giving duties while prioritizing professional commitments, the participants demonstrate resourcefulness in managing the intricate balance between their dual roles. Furthermore, the narratives emphasize the indispensable emotional support provided by family, serving as a source of strength and encouragement during the challenges of administrative duties. Overall, their insights illuminate the profound impact of family support on both emotional well-being and professional fulfillment.

4.6.2 Women-only Environment or Supportive Colleagues

The participants' responses highlight the supportive atmosphere in the workplace, especially among colleagues of the mother administrators. Over the years, through experience and mutual respect, they describe a culture of camaraderie and empathy, where colleagues willingly offer assistance during both happy and difficult times. However, participant P103 self-reflects and questions whether their colleagues' support is genuine or merely a product of their own actions, and tenure in administrative roles. She states how supportive her environment and colleagues are and sometimes she admires how supportive and kind people are around. Participant 103's further thoughts below:

If anything happens, God forbid. For example, when life exists, death also exists. When Mom died and so did Dad. At that time, the university team supported me in all possible ways. And you know, when someone has a baby, we always congratulate them sincerely. But I think such a relationship is not just for me, it's for everyone, even teachers. (P103)

Participant P101 similarly thinks that she is in a supportive enough environment by stating “From colleagues? I receive a lot of support. Again, being in a female-dominated team where most have children, there's an immediate readiness to extend helping hands.”

The narratives provided by the participants show a workplace characterized by mutual support and understanding. They describe colleagues as consistently offering help and expressing genuine care for each other's well-being, whether during personal milestones or difficult times. This supportive culture is attributed to their management skills and the overall ethos of treating each other with respect and compassion. Overall, their experiences emphasize the importance of strong interpersonal relations in fostering a supportive working environment for mother administrators.

4.6.3 Support in the Workplace

The participants' reflections provide valuable insights into the supportive dynamic present within their work environment. They emphasize the proactive assistance provided by management, especially in facilitating professional growth opportunities and accommodating personal and family responsibilities.

Participant P104 comments the following:

Every time administration takes into account our opinions. At the time of our requests from work, some children get sick, and now there are diseases with a low immune system. There are times when we get sick three times a month. “I don’t know,” he said. We could leave work in three hours. If it’s too difficult, I’ll ask for two days to sort out family situations.

Another participant P101 states:

We have a supportive administration. Perhaps it's because the majority of them are mothers and women, experiencing similar situations themselves. I can say the support is quite good.

From the university's perspective, there is prompt support. The organizational structure is in place with a dean, vice-rector, rector, president, and head of the HR department. This hierarchy is maintained, allowing for a quick response to various issues. In my opinion, it happens quite swiftly. The power structure is established and adhered to.

The contrast between the challenges faced by mother administrators in managing their dual roles as mothers and professionals, and the overwhelmingly positive experiences they report regarding support from the university, is striking. This juxtaposition highlights the complexity of their experiences and the significance of organizational support in mitigating the challenges associated with balancing work and family responsibilities.

The accounts of conflict and struggle shared by mother administrators reflect the inherent difficulties of juggling demanding professional roles with the responsibilities of parenthood. From navigating personal and family emergencies to dealing with the guilt and stress of balancing competing priorities, these challenges underscore the unique pressures faced by individuals in dual care giving and professional roles.

However, the participants' positive experiences with university support present a counterbalance to these challenges. The proactive assistance provided by the university, including accommodating personal and family needs, facilitating professional development opportunities, and fostering a supportive work environment, emerges as a crucial resource for mother administrators. The presence of a responsive and empathetic

administrative structure particularly composed of individuals who understand and empathize with their experiences, further reinforces the sense of solidarity and support within the organization.

4.7 Summary

The findings show that the concept of "work-life balance" may not have accurately reflected the reality of mother administrators in East Kazakhstan, as they were frequently forced to prioritize work over family time, resulting in work-life conflict.

The narratives of the participants highlighted the complex interplay between professional obligations and family needs. While they acknowledged the practicality of outsourcing childcare, they also expressed emotional strain and a sense of inadequacy when they could not provide personal care for their children themselves.

Furthermore, the current study identified the struggle to establish strong emotional connections with children as another key challenge that mother administrators faced. Participants reported that the need for this connection increased with children's age, contradicting the notion that parenting became easier as children grew older.

The research delved deeper into how the way workplaces function impacts the work-life balance of working mothers. A major hurdle they faced was the lack of flexibility in work schedules and company policies. Participants emphasized the need for more flexible work arrangements, like adjustable start and finish times or the ability to work remotely. The study also highlighted a connection between long hours and heavy workloads on the one hand, and the emotional and mental well-being of working mothers on the other.

Despite the challenges, the study also identified positive aspects of the experience. Participants reported deriving personal satisfaction and joy from their professional achievements. Financial family support provided by working mothers was another crucial theme. While mothers played a vital role in their children's development, the early childhood years presented unique challenges. The research acknowledged the difficulties of maintaining a balance in parenting practices, where mothers could find joy in watching their children develop independence.

The study also examined gender dynamics within the administrative profession. While some participants perceived a lack of gender bias, others noted a disparity in the representation of men and women, particularly in pedagogical and administrative roles. However, an alternative perspective suggested that this distribution may have reflected distinct career preferences between genders.

It is worth mentioning that family support was identified as a key coping strategy for mother administrators. Mothers highlighted the changing dynamics of family relationships over time, from dependence on external support systems in the early stages of parenting to seeking an emotional connection with adult children later in life. The study also found that a supportive workplace environment, characterized by empathy among colleagues, could significantly alleviate the challenges faced by working mothers.

In conclusion, the findings revealed valuable insights into the experiences of working mothers who held administrative positions. It highlighted the constant struggle to balance work and family life, the emotional toll of work-life conflict, and the importance of workplace flexibility and support systems in mitigating these challenges. The research also acknowledged the positive aspects of working motherhood, such as personal fulfillment and financial family support.

5. Discussion

5.1 Introduction

Having established the key findings through data analysis in the previous chapter, this chapter explores their interpretation. The discussion will focus on the three main questions identified at the start of the study. In addition, a critical analysis was conducted to place these findings within the existing body of literature which serves as the basis for this research.

This chapter addresses a critical question central to this study as well as three sub-questions: How do mothers navigate the complexities of motherhood while simultaneously holding leadership positions in a regional university in Eastern Kazakhstan?

- a) What are the advantages and disadvantages faced by mothers who hold administrative positions in universities in Eastern Kazakhstan as they balance their dual roles as mothers and leaders?
- b) Do these mothers encounter gender bias-related obstacles within the university? If so, how do they describe these experiences?
- c) What are the potential consequences of developing supportive structures to empower mothers in administrative roles in higher education?

5.2 Work-Life Conflicts of Women Administrators

Many women see motherhood as a key part of who they are, and society often expects them to be the primary caregiver (Christler, 2013; Hays, 1996; Liss et al., 2013a; Newman and Henderson, 2014). This pressure to be the "perfect mom" can clash with career aspirations. While wanting to be a great mom might fuel career ambition, the struggle for work-life balance can turn that positive connections sour (Hays, 1996; Liss et

al., 2013a; Newman and Henderson, 2014). Long hours and limited childcare options are prime examples of how work-life imbalance intensifies this conflict.

The key finding highlights the work-life conflict faced by women administrators juggling their dual roles as mothers and leaders. Interestingly, the challenges of higher education administration can act as both hurdles and stepping stones on their path to success. Both family and academic factors intertwine throughout this complex journey. Evans (2007) emphasizes the various barriers women administrators face, such as lack of support, stereotypes, double standards, increased scrutiny, and challenges to their competence.

Work-life conflict manifests in several ways, primarily when the time dedicated to work duties encroaches upon the time available for family obligations (Stones & Charles, 1990). Examples include tight deadlines, unexpected overtime, or long commutes that leave working mothers with less time for childcare, housework, or quality time with family members. Conversely, work-home interference arises when responsibilities at home create difficulties in performing work tasks effectively Evans (2007). Needing to attend a child's school event, address a sick family member, or manage household chores during work hours can all contribute to work-life conflict. Working late hours, traveling for work or the emotional toll of a demanding job can all leave working mothers with limited time and energy for their families. These negative emotions can ultimately affect a mother's parenting self-efficacy, which is her belief in her ability to parent effectively. Feelings of guilt, tension, burnout, and frustration can create a negative feedback loop, potentially impacting the quality of parent-child interactions and a mother's overall well-being (Christler, 2013). While work-life conflict presents a significant challenge, it's also important to consider how these mothers navigate career advancement within the university.

This finding is in line with the previous studies that note that women's career advancement often follows a less direct path compared to men. Their progress may involve lateral (horizontal) or diagonal movements within the organization, leading to a slower overall ascent (Kim & Brunner, 2009). Women's ascension to leadership positions requires navigating a complex obstacle course within the workforce. This journey necessitates overcoming various barriers and hurdles encountered throughout their climb up the organizational hierarchy (Pirouznia, 2009). However, in the current study participants did not express challenges characterizing to prove their leadership potential or struggling because of gender bias. There was also no mention of stereotypes regarding physical appearance and age among participants.

5.2.1 Sacrifice

These findings align with William and Pillai's (2004) notion that women encounter multifaceted obstacles in their pursuit of success in higher education administration. They face a multitude of responsibilities encompassing not only their careers but also their families, including children, elderly parents, or spouses and partners. Moreover, research by Wilson (2009) indicates women faculty with larger families (more than two children) might encounter social exclusion within their academic circles, and male faculty, particularly those in administrative positions, often benefit from supportive spouses who manage household duties, allowing them to prioritize career advancement.

This implies a lack of comparable spousal support for female administrators, potentially hindering their academic progress. The findings of this study illustrate that women administrators also face these challenges in their daily lives while juggling between two roles. Research by Moreton and Newsom (2004) emphasizes the inherent conflict between family and professional demands for female administrators. This

necessitates them to skillfully manage their diverse responsibilities. Striking a crucial balance between career advancement and family life significantly impacts their success.

Moreover, as Kuzhabekova (2021) mentioned, cultural norms, organizational practices, and the very structure of these institutions inherently favor men. This manifests in the tendency of male colleagues to view female colleagues' careers as secondary to their maternal roles. Furthermore, career development strategies often align with the cultural expectation that women take a more active role in childcare. This can be explained by how women in East Kazakhstan feel inadequate because of socially constructed expectations of motherhood when they miss important children's events or have to delegate some chores to family members or nannies.

5.2.2 Absence in Children's Important Life Events

Another category of work-life conflict for mother administrators is the absence in children's important life events. The complex realities of balancing work and family life for working parents often come to light through personal experiences. Participants in this study shared heartfelt stories that captured this struggle powerfully. For example, Participant P101 described the emotional decision to delegate childcare during a child's illness, emphasizing the associated guilt and feelings of inadequacy. This reflects a common theme of parental guilt experienced by many working parents.

Sandon (2006) highlights the challenges women face in securing leadership roles. It is important to recognize the various factors, both external and internal, that hinder women's access to these positions. Alternatively, participants' responses show that work-life conflict is a complex issue, with workplace demands often conflicting with parental responsibilities. Participant's experiences highlight the emotional toll of trying to balance career aspirations with family needs. Moreover, juggling the responsibilities of

motherhood, encompassing duties like school runs, healthcare appointments, and various family commitments, alongside the immense pressures of a high-ranking university administrative position (dean, department head, senior lecturer) presents a demanding and potentially detrimental scenario. Research by Burns et al. (2020) suggests this combination can significantly impact women's psychological well-being. Accordingly, P104's account of missing a special family event due to work commitments underlines the challenges faced by working parents. Several factors contribute to parental guilt and conflict, including societal expectations, internalized norms of parenting, and workplace cultures that prioritize work over family. These narratives also shed light on the systematic barriers that prevent parents, particularly mothers, from fully engaging in both work and family life without experiencing guilt or judgment.

5.2.3 Inability to Make Emotional Connections

The early years of a child's life, particularly under the age of five, are a critical period for development. During this time, active involvement from both parents is crucial. Mothers, in particular, often play a central role in early childhood development, acting as a child's first and primary educator (Astarani & Werdiningsih, 2012). While mothers traditionally play a significant role, it's important to acknowledge the potential influence of other caregivers within the family unit. According to the authors, fathers can also play a vital role in shaping a child's character. Extended families, particularly grandparents, can also provide valuable support and act as surrogate caregivers in some families (Astarani & Werdiningsih, 2012).

Participant narratives highlight this, with P105 experiencing a disconnect attributed to relying on external caregivers during their children's formative years. Similarly, P103 emphasizes the difficulty of repairing emotional bonds once they are weakened by extensive reliance on nannies. The participants' experiences underscore the

crucial role of consistent parental involvement in fostering strong emotional connections with children. Several elements hinder this connection, including: a) dependence on external caregivers; b) demanding work schedules; c) exhaustion from managing multiple responsibilities. Narratives also suggest the influence of societal expectations regarding parenting and the perceived trade-off between career success and family life. The aforementioned factors restrict opportunities for aspiring female academics seeking leadership positions. This can impede, or even stall, their career progression. Many universities lack crucial support structures, such as affordable childcare options, parental leave policies, and flexible work arrangements, further hindering women's advancement (O'Laughlin & Bischoff, 2005).

While working mothers may have less time with their children compared to stay-at-home mothers, research suggests they can still cultivate secure and positive relationships. The common perception is that working mothers have less quality time with their children. However, some studies argue that working mothers may experience improved mental well-being, which can contribute to healthier family dynamics Tracey et al. (2003).

A study by Tracey et al. (2003) explored the impact of maternal employment on family relationships. The research suggests that a mother's employment can have positive benefits for relationships with both children and partners (Tracey et al., 2003). The study posits that maternal employment can empower mothers to better meet their children's emotional, developmental, social, and material needs.

These narratives highlight the complex interaction between work commitments and parental bonding. The experiences of participants emphasize the significance of parental presence and involvement in nurturing emotional ties with their children.

5.2.4 Lack of Work-Family Life Boundaries

Previous studies suggest that the timing of a mother's employment may influence its impact on child development. Several studies (Han et al., 2001; Waldfogel et al., 2002; Brooks-Gunn et al., 2002) found potentially negative effects associated with mothers working full-time when their children are under one year old. Conversely, Nomaguchi (2006) suggests that maternal employment when children are around four years old can have positive outcomes, such as reduced aggression, anxiety, and behavioral problems.

Modern life increasingly blurs the lines between work and family, making it difficult to build strong family bonds amidst professional pressures (supported by prior research). This challenge intensifies as children grow older, requiring parents to adapt their involvement and offer different forms of support. Hectic evenings, characterized by fatigue and fleeting family interactions, exemplify this struggle. This scenario reflects the sacrifices individuals make for career advancement. Research suggests that women aiming to excel in academia and build a family often face a challenging situation (O'Meara et al., 2008). They may be forced to choose between prioritizing one or the other, or possessing exceptional capabilities to navigate the significant obstacles they encounter. The complex issue of work-life balance necessitates a reevaluation of societal norms to foster stronger family connections.

Baker (2010) highlights the multifaceted nature of women's decisions regarding motherhood and employment. Factors like education, work environment, societal discourse, and family dynamics all play a significant role. Women administrators in this study noted that they meticulously weighed this challenge, especially within their chosen career paths, before deciding on having children. Others prioritize what they perceive as their familial duties above all else. This complex decision-making process resonates with

findings from Malaysia, where many female academics face the dual obstacles of fulfilling traditional domestic roles (household chores, caregiving) alongside demanding academic careers (Azman, 2021). Similarly, the mothers in this study, employed as administrators at a university in East Kazakhstan, navigate a complex landscape where work demands compete with family obligations.

5.2.5 Lack of Flexibility in the Workplace

Working mothers often face significant time management challenges in balancing their professional and personal lives (Apriani & Risnawaty, 2020). This can manifest in several ways, including difficulty fulfilling all their motherly duties, managing work-related issues efficiently, and carving out personal time for rest and relaxation. In many cases, working mothers may feel compelled to sacrifice sleep or leisure time to dedicate additional energy to childcare and household chores (Apriani & Risnawaty, 2020).

Investigating the involvement of women in administration has provided us with a deeper understanding and greater appreciation of the positive attributes that women bring to leadership roles. These qualities encompass a focus on the process rather than solely the end result, the ability to consider the impact of one's actions on others, a sensitivity to the broader community's needs, drawing from personal experiences when working in the public realm, valuing of diversity, and challenging established rituals and symbols that can create barriers between collaborators, and perpetuated hierarchies (Tabassum & Nayak, 2021). However, the majority of studies that showed heavy workloads of women administrators can be overwhelming; this study finds the same for women administrators.

A study on healthcare workers by Arpaci and Ersoy (2007) hit the nail on the head when it comes to the biggest struggle working women face: not having enough time for family (44%). Following close behind were feeling like they couldn't carve out any

personal time for themselves (28%) and the exhaustion that spilled over into their home lives (27%). This study perfectly reflects the situation in East Kazakhstan, where working women juggle work, family time, and housework with a constant feeling of being stretched thin. The biggest difficulty is managing all these different roles.

Furthermore, the narratives provided by participants in the current study offer a nuanced understanding of the mechanisms through which workload affects women administrators. For example, the detailed description provided by Participant P105 illustrates the intricate juggling act required to manage both professional and personal tasks, highlighting the constant transfer of paper-based work between different environments. This granularity adds depth to our understanding of the challenges faced by women administrators, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions to alleviate their stress and support their well-being.

It is worth mentioning that previous studies might have focused generally on the negative effects of working too much. This study, however, specifically highlights the need for flexible work arrangements for working mothers. While the core issues in this study align with past research, its focus on workload, stereotypes, and family responsibilities of women administrators offers valuable insights. For instance, the participant (P104) highlighted the issue of long working hours, especially online meetings outside regular work hours. This emphasizes the need for institutions to consider alternative work schedules and remote work options to support working mothers. Organizations can use this information to create a more supportive and inclusive work environment. By listening to the experiences of women administrators, this study helps us understand their challenges and develop solutions to address them.

5.3 Self-Imposed and Socially-Constructed Expectations of Motherhood

Career progression for women in certain cultures can be hindered by traditional expectations. Women are often expected to prioritize childcare and fulfill specific family roles, making career advancement challenging. Research by Kuzhabekova (2021) suggests that women themselves may even perceive men as better suited for leadership due to the perception that men possess stronger strategic thinking skills.

This societal bias creates a situation where women striving to challenge these stereotypes often become overly critical of their own performance. This self-doubt can lead them to take on excessive workloads, ironically resulting in lower performance evaluations compared to their male counterparts. This outcome perpetuates the very stereotypes women are attempting to break (Carter, 2014).

The examination of self-imposed and socially constructed expectations of motherhood presented in the study aligns with previous research that has also delved into the intricate dynamics shaping women's experiences as mothers in modern society. Earlier studies may have similarly highlighted the tension between personal aspirations and societal norms, illustrating how these competing expectations contribute to the complexities of balancing work and family life. However, what sets the current study apart is its focus on the nuanced interplay between self-imposed and socially constructed expectations, shedding light on how these factors jointly shape women's perceptions and experiences of motherhood.

Additionally, the narratives provided by participants in the current study offer a more introspective exploration of the internal conflicts and struggles inherent in navigating maternal roles. For example, Participant P105's candid reflection on experiencing self-criticism and societal pressure highlights the internalization of external

expectations, adding depth to our understanding of the psychological toll of motherhood. Similarly, Participant P103's advocacy for a strict separation between work and family underscores the ongoing negotiation between professional aspirations and familial responsibilities, contributing to the broader discourse on work-life balance among mothers.

Furthermore, the study's emphasis on pragmatic strategies employed by mothers to manage the demands of domestic and care giving roles, such as outsourcing household tasks or seeking assistance from extended family members, resonates with findings from previous research highlighting the adaptive coping mechanisms employed by mothers in response to societal expectations (Carter, 2014). However, the study also exposes the unintended consequences of relentlessly pursuing maternal perfection, as evidenced by Participant P105's admission of emotional outbursts and lack of attentiveness to children's needs. This adds a nuanced dimension to our understanding of the challenges faced by mothers, highlighting the need for greater support and empowerment in navigating the diverse landscape of modern parenthood.

5.4 Benefits

5.4.1 Future Career Progression

This study investigates the career aspirations of mothers in leadership positions. It aligns with past research that explored balancing career goals with family life. Similar to other studies, it acknowledges the multifaceted nature of career development, where both personal growth and professional achievements are important. However, this study isn't about moms in general, it dives deep into the experiences of moms who are bosses in administrative roles. It tackles the specific

challenges they face as they try to move up in their careers while still being awesome moms.

Studies show that striking a good work-life balance can bring several rewards (Raddon, 2002). People often experience a sense of accomplishment in their careers, feel empowered to manage family finances effectively, and develop a shared understanding of professional values within the household. In contrast to earlier research that may have primarily focused on the barriers faced by working mothers in advancing their careers, the narratives provided by participants in the current study offer a more nuanced understanding of how individuals actively seek to integrate personal fulfillment and career progression. For example, Participant P103's emphasis on personal development and engagement in projects reflects a proactive approach to career advancement, suggesting that individuals can derive satisfaction and joy from their professional endeavors by aligning them with their personal interests and goals. It is also important to note the desire for some "me-time" away from child-rearing duties. This personal space allows individuals to recharge and ultimately become better parents and role models for their children. Interestingly, educators who achieve this balance often report an increased sensitivity toward their own students (Gallin-Parisi, 2015).

Similarly, Participant P101 and Participant P102's perspectives highlight the intrinsic value of taking responsibility and demonstrating competence in the workplace, underscoring the importance of personal fulfillment in driving career progression. This contrasts with earlier studies that may have focused more narrowly on external factors such as workplace policies or societal expectations, without delving into individuals' internal motivations and aspirations. (Cooper & Strachan, 2006)

Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2005) further emphasize that with dedication, love, and patience, it is possible to navigate a fulfilling career alongside the joys and demands of family life. By highlighting the ways in which individuals actively pursue professional growth while also seeking personal satisfaction, the study contributes to a richer understanding of the complexities of balancing career aspirations with familial responsibilities.

5.4.2 Financial Family Support

While men may generally hold positive attitudes toward women's employment and financial contributions, research suggests a gap in sharing household responsibilities (Yesilyaprak, 2015). This unequal distribution of domestic labor can create challenges for working mothers. Studies have explored the complex impact of paid employment on women's well-being. Dogan (2016) suggests that while work can affect women's mental and physical health, financial independence and sense of societal value gained through employment can also boost self-confidence (Dogan (2016).

However, work-life balance remains a significant challenge. Despite the challenges, the study by Arpacı and Ersoy (2007) also emphasizes the strong emotional connection working mothers maintain with their families. Research by İlkkaracan (1998) suggests that economic factors are significant motivators for women's participation in the workforce. The study found that 37% of working women cited a desire for economic independence as a key reason for working, while 32% were driven by the need to contribute to their family's financial well-being.

This highlights the complex interplay between economic pressures and women's choices regarding work. Even with significant domestic responsibilities, many women

feel compelled to contribute financially, suggesting that economic factors play a fundamental role in driving women's labor force participation.

Increased household income from a working mother can contribute to poverty reduction, improved access to quality childcare, and better nutrition and educational opportunities for children (Booth, 2000). Several studies (Haddad & Haddinot, 1995) support the notion that a mother's income positively impacts children's well-being.

In addition to this, studies show that achieving a healthy work-life balance can benefit individuals and families (Raddon, 2002). These benefits include career fulfillment, and responsible financial management, shared family values, personal time, and positive role modeling for children. Educators who achieve this balance often report a greater connection with their students.

This current study aligns with previous findings highlighting the importance of financial stability for mothers (Strong et al, 2020). However, it goes further by exploring the specific experiences of mothers and how financial support interacts with workplace rights and family responsibilities. For instance, narratives from participants (e.g., P101) emphasize the need for basic workplace support, fair treatment, and financial security to empower families. Balancing work and childcare remains a significant challenge for mothers (Participant P102). This echoes earlier research on the strain faced by mothers juggling work and family. Financial support can help alleviate this obstacle.

In summary, while similar themes emerge from previous research, this study offers valuable insights by focusing on the specific experiences of mothers. It underscores the crucial role of financial support to families in empowering mothers to navigate the complexities of their roles.

5.4.3 Mother Administrators Nurturing Independent Children

A study by Mukherjee (2010) dug into a question many parents have: does a mom working impact how their kids are doing emotionally? The research found something interesting - kids whose moms spent more time at home seemed to have fewer emotional struggles. These kids scored lower on a test that measures behavior problems, meaning they were less likely to be feeling down or grumpy all the time. Additionally, the study found these kids were less likely to act out in ways like hurting others, taking things that aren't theirs, or ditching school.

Regarding, the current research's participants' responses, it does not definitively prove that a mother's employment directly causes negative emotional or behavioral issues in children. Yesilyaprak (2015) emphasizes the importance of managing guilt for working mothers. Her research suggests that a mother's feelings of guilt can negatively impact her child. Yesilyaprak argues that there is no evidence to suggest that stay-at-home mothers are inherently better mothers than working mothers (Yesilyaprak, 2015).

Another category is about mother administrators nurturing independent children and how they feel proud of this phenomenon. This analysis dives into how working moms raise independent kids, offering a fresh look at parenting. Similar to past research, it explores the pros and cons of encouraging self-reliance in children. Previous studies might have stressed the importance of raising self-sufficient and independent kids, highlighting the benefits for their growth. What sets this study apart is its focus on working mothers who juggle their careers with raising independent children. It delves into their experiences and reveals the complexities of fostering independence while managing demanding jobs.

Aligning with the Turkish Statistic Institute's Work and Family Life Study (2018), I suggest considering the broader context of childcare options for working mothers. The

Turkish Statistical Institute's Work and Family Life Study (2018) found that a significant majority of working mothers could easily manage childcare (TURKSTAT, 2018). Most mothers reported relying on themselves, their independent children, their spouses, or grandparents for childcare (TURKSTAT, 2018). Only a small percentage utilized alternative options such as paid childcare (15%) or relying on children to care for themselves (15%).

While some research, like Aghdam et al. (2015), suggests potential benefits of maternal employment for children's mental health, other studies highlight potential challenges. For example, Heather et al. (2003) raise concerns about the impact of increased maternal employment on a mother's involvement in her children's education (Heather et al., 2003).

Moreover, findings highlight the importance of fostering self-reliance in children while acknowledging the challenges faced by working moms. By including their experiences, the study sheds light on the complexities of modern parenthood and the need for more support for these women in their diverse roles.

It is also worth mentioning that, in the current study, several participants highlighted the importance of promoting self-reliance and autonomy in children, emphasizing the positive impact on their development and well-being. For example, Participant P105's articulation of the significant benefit of children autonomously managing their needs underscores the importance of equipping children with fundamental life skills and instilling a sense of responsibility from a young age. Additionally, Participant P104's comments highlight the pride and joy experienced by parents as they witness their children's growth and success, further emphasizing the positive impact of fostering independence on both children and parents. This aligns with earlier research that

has documented the sense of fulfillment and satisfaction parents derive from witnessing their children's achievements and development.

The exploration of mother administrators nurturing independent children presented in the study offers a fresh perspective on parenting practices and child development that does not align with previous research. For instance, child welfare agencies that conducted research in the US do not agree that being independent and becoming mature is a phenomenon that parents should be proud of (Hodnett et al, 2009).

Overall, what distinguishes the current study is its focus on the specific experiences and insights of mother administrators, but the study also acknowledges the bittersweet realization that accompanies children's rapid development and adaptation to adult-like behavior, underscoring the need to strike a balance between nurturing independence and preserving the magic of childhood. This adds depth to our understanding of the complexities of parenting, highlighting the emotional nuances involved in watching children grow and mature.

5.5 Challenges

5.5.1 Gender Bias

This research delves into the intricate challenges faced by female administrators in Eastern Kazakhstan, offering a distinct perspective on gender dynamics within the professional landscape. It does not align with prior studies that have explored the interplay of gender within the workplace because according to Ross & Green (2000), despite an increase in female administrators, their presence in higher education leadership positions continues to be inadequate. However, participant narratives (e.g., P104) offer a more nuanced understanding of factors contributing to gender disparities. P104 highlights the

underrepresentation of men in pedagogical and administrative roles, suggesting career preferences and choices might influence workforce demographics.

In addition, the majority of participants emphasize the strong competence of women in the workplace, potentially challenging the notion of pervasive gender bias. This suggests that women in specific contexts might not face significant barriers to advancement. This research aligns with existing knowledge on workplace gender dynamics but offers a unique perspective by focusing on a specific geographical context (East Kazakhstan) and the experiences of women administrators. For instance, Catalyst (2021) states that women still consistently earn less than their male counterparts in the workforce but this was not the case for women administrators in this context.

In sum, what distinguishes the current study is its focus on the specific experiences and perspectives of women administrators in a specific geographic context, shedding light on the interplay between cultural norms, career preferences, and gender dynamics.

5.6 Role of Family and Other Networks in Offering Support

5.6.1 Family Support

Research suggests that the experience of working motherhood can vary depending on individual circumstances and access to support systems. Women with higher levels of education and professional status may be more likely to have internalized strategies for managing work-life balance (Fidan, 2005). Spousal support also plays a crucial role. Women who receive help from their partners with housework and childcare may experience less stress and guilt associated with balancing work and family (Fidan, 2005).

Many studies consistently emphasize the critical role of family support in women's success (Hartman et., 1999). A stable family environment also fosters self-confidence and

leadership potential in young girls, preparing them for future success (Ben et al., 2014). Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2005) further acknowledge the importance of dedication, love, and perseverance in achieving a work-life balance that allows women to thrive in both their careers and family life.

The exploration of family support as a coping strategy among mother administrators offers valuable insights into the intricacies of navigating professional and familial responsibilities, aligning with previous research that has also examined the role of social support networks in managing work-life balance.

In contrast to earlier research that may have primarily focused on the instrumental support provided by family members, such as childcare assistance, the narratives provided by participants in the current study offer a more nuanced understanding of the multifaceted nature of family support. Participant P104's emphasis on the emotional encouragement and motivation provided by family members underscores the importance of relational support in bolstering mothers' resilience and sense of self-efficacy in their professional roles.

Moreover, participant P101's advocacy for balance and self-care highlights the recognition of the potential strain that work can place on familial relationships, echoing findings from previous research that has emphasized the importance of setting boundaries and prioritizing self-care to maintain well-being. This can be explained by a growing awareness among working mothers of the need to cultivate resilience and prioritize their own needs to effectively navigate the demands of both their professional and family roles.

Furthermore, the study highlights the changing nature of family dynamics over time. Mothers adapt their coping strategies by drawing on support networks as parenting

and career demands evolve. This adds depth to our understanding of how family support aids mothers in navigating challenges.

5.6.2 Women-only Environment or Supportive Colleagues

This paragraph examines how supportive work environments benefit mothers in administrative roles. It aligns with past research highlighting the role of workplace support in employee well-being and satisfaction. Participant narratives (e.g., P104) reveal the significance of empathetic leadership that caters to diverse employee needs. This suggests formal policies alone are not sufficient; supportive attitudes from leaders are crucial.

Moreover, Participant P101 highlights the positive impact of a shared experience (majority being mothers) in fostering workplace empathy and understanding, echoing previous findings on the benefits of diverse workforces. Other participants also highlighted the university's proactive approach in providing professional development opportunities and maintaining a responsive administration. This helps working mothers overcome challenges.

However, Edds-Ellis and Keaster's (2013) qualitative research identified a potential shortcoming in the support system for female leaders in higher education. Their study highlighted a lack of both impactful messaging and mentorship opportunities for women in similar leadership roles. Allen and Flood's (2018) subsequent work explored the specific challenges faced by women in leadership positions, particularly regarding their relationships with female colleagues. Their research focused on the phenomenon of relational aggression, confirming that women in leadership can be targeted by other women using indirect, aggressive behaviors. This research suggests that the creation of mentor groups specifically designed for women in higher education could be a viable strategy to mitigate relational aggression.

Examining these key areas can provide valuable insights into how leadership development programs can be improved to support a greater number of women achieving leadership roles. Likewise, analyzing research on leadership preparation programs and fostering collaborative, positive organizational cultures can offer valuable guidance for ensuring women's success in higher education (Allen & Flood, 2018).

5.7 Summary

The participants faced significant work-life conflict, struggling to manage time between professional duties and family obligations. This led to feelings of guilt, stress, and exhaustion. Moreover, societal expectations and self-imposed pressures made it difficult for mothers to achieve a healthy work-life balance. They felt pressure to prioritize childcare and fulfill traditional family roles, hindering career advancement. Despite the challenges, balancing work and family life offered benefits such as career fulfillment, financial security, personal growth, and positive role modeling for children. Financial support from mothers' work contributed to family well-being, improving access to childcare, education, and healthcare. Working mothers nurtured independent children, fostering self-reliance and responsibility. This approach to parenting offered a different perspective compared to traditional views.

The chapter aligned with existing research on work-life conflict, career advancement for women, and the impact of mothers' employment on children. It contributed new insights by focusing on the specific experiences of mothers in administrative roles within the Eastern Kazakhstan context. The study emphasized the need for further support structures to empower these women and help them navigate the complexities of their dual roles. In terms of limitations, the research did not definitively prove that a mother's employment had a direct negative impact on children's well-being.

The study highlighted the benefits of fostering independence in children but acknowledged this approach may not be universally accepted across cultures.

Overall, the chapter provided an exploration of the challenges and opportunities faced by mothers in leadership positions. It emphasized the need for ongoing research and support systems to help these women achieve success in both their professional and personal lives.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

Through the experiences and insights of the participants, I aimed to uncover the intricacies of societal and self-imposed expectations and illuminate pathways toward fostering a greater understanding, support, and empowerment for mothers navigating the diverse landscape of modern parenthood. Drawing upon the experiences and insights shared by the study participants, this research sought to elucidate the multifaceted societal expectations placed upon mothers in the contemporary landscape of parenthood. The ultimate aim was to illuminate pathways towards fostering a more supportive and understanding environment, thereby empowering these mothers to effectively navigate the diverse challenges of raising children.

Achieving a healthy work-life balance is a significant challenge for working mothers. Effective time management and careful planning of both professional and personal schedules are crucial for ensuring balance and fulfillment in both domains (Deepa, 2018). For many working mothers, the intellectual stimulation and sense of accomplishment derived from a career add valuable dimensions to their lives. However, successfully navigating both professional and maternal roles often requires significant adjustments at both the individual and workplace levels. Supportive policies and practices within organizations can play a crucial role in assisting mothers in fulfilling their dual responsibilities.

6.2 Revisiting Research Questions

What are the benefits and challenges of combining the dual roles of motherhood and higher education administrator at a regional university in East Kazakhstan?

This research explored the experiences of women in East Kazakhstan's regional universities who balance motherhood with administrative positions in higher education. A

central finding is the work-life conflict these women experience. The data suggests women administrators often had to sacrifice quality time with family to meet work demands, leading to feelings of guilt and inadequacy. Long hours and demanding workloads blur work-life boundaries, leading to stress and guilt. Societal expectations and self-imposed ideals of motherhood create additional pressures.

The study also identified positive aspects of this experience: Career advancement, being a role model for children, financial security for families, and fostering independent children can be rewarding. Also, the family emerged as a vital support system for mother administrators.

Women administrators reported finding joy and fulfillment in their careers, and expressed aspirations for future professional advancement. They also acknowledged the financial support they provide for their families. Furthermore, participants noted the positive impact of fostering independence in their children, highlighting the importance of finding joy in their children's growth and achievements. In short, while balancing motherhood and administrative roles in higher education presents significant challenges, it can also offer opportunities for personal and professional fulfillment.

Do the mother administrators experience gender-biased challenges? And if they do, how do they describe them?

This research on gender bias among mother administrators in East Kazakhstan offers a fascinating perspective. While the study does identify some evidence of gender disparity, particularly in the underrepresentation of men in pedagogical and administrative roles, the findings suggest these disparities may be linked more to career preferences than explicit bias. Cultural norms or individual inclinations, rather than systemic discrimination, could be contributing factors.

The major finding was the strong competence and capabilities of women administrators, challenging the idea that they face pervasive gender bias within their workplaces. These findings prompted the researchers to explore the complex interplay between career choices, cultural influences, and the recognition of female competence. This nuanced dynamic might be another reason why gender bias, while present to some degree, is not as prominent among mother administrators in this particular context.

Overall, I could see the **result of gender bias**. Participants observed a disparity in leadership positions, with women underrepresented in roles such as rector, president, and the Ministry of Education. While women held positions such as vice-rector, dean, secretary, or manager, they were less likely to be found in the highest leadership positions.

To sum up, the study underscores the intricate nature of gender dynamics in the workplace. It emphasizes the importance of considering local contexts and individual career paths when interpreting gender bias. This research contributes valuable insights to the ongoing discussion on gender equality, highlighting the need for a multifaceted approach to understanding gender dynamics in professional settings.

What are the implications for developing supportive structures for mother administrators in Kazakhstan?

The analysis revealed that family support plays a critical role in enabling these women to effectively manage their dual responsibilities. Additionally, participants highlighted a supportive workplace environment characterized by positive collegial relationships and proactive assistance from university management.

However, the study also identified work-life conflict and associated feelings of guilt and stress as significant challenges faced by mother administrators. Mothers often require flexible hours, and remote work options to manage childcare and family

responsibilities alongside administrative duties. Furthermore, it underscored the importance of organizational support in mitigating these challenges. The research suggests that such support should encompass measures that accommodate personal and family needs, alongside opportunities for professional development. Moreover, fostering a culture of empathy and understanding within the workplace can further enhance the well-being and job satisfaction of mother administrators.

In conclusion, developing supportive structures for mother administrators in Kazakhstan should prioritize strengthening family support networks, fostering a supportive workplace culture, and encouraging proactive assistance from university management. By implementing these measures, institutions can promote healthier work-life integration for mother administrators. Creating support groups for mothers in leadership can provide a space to share experiences, challenges, and advice. These supportive structures would empower mothers to reach their full potential and contribute significantly to leadership.

6.3 Limitations

All research endeavors inherently possess limitations (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Responsible research practice necessitates acknowledging these limitations to ensure the credibility and transparency of the study's findings. Transparency requires researchers to disclose all relevant information to participants, fostering accurate interpretation of the results (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). This includes carefully considering both limitations and delimitations when concluding the research.

Limitations refer to inherent weaknesses or constraints within the research design itself. The case for the current study may rely on self-reported data collected through interviews. The accuracy of the findings could be impacted if participants were not

entirely truthful in their responses or struggled to recall details precisely. Another potential limitation might be a small sample size, which restricts the generalizability of the results to a broader population. While qualitative interviews can provide rich data, the findings may not be applicable to everyone.

6.4. Implications for Theory and Practice

This study, examining the experiences of mother administrators in East Kazakhstan, offers valuable insights with implications for both theoretical and practical applications.

First of all, the limited sample size in this study restricts the researcher's ability to fully grasp the intricacies of challenges and benefits mother administrators' face in Higher Education while managing their dual role. To address this limitation and generate more robust findings, I recommend conducting a quantitative research project. This could involve administering a survey to a larger pool of mother administrators. Furthermore, broadening the participant base to include wider range of participants from different schools or even other universities would enhance the generalizability of the research and offer a more comprehensive understanding the challenges and benefits of mother administrators who are in senior positions in Higher Education within this educational context.

Secondly, this research emphasizes the critical role of supportive organizational structures in mitigating work-life conflict and fostering employee well-being, particularly for mother administrators. Future research can explore the effectiveness of specific support structures and how these systems contribute to positive outcomes for both institutions and employees.

Based on the identified challenges, the study suggests institutions need to implement flexible work arrangements such as flexible start/finish times, compressed workweeks, or telecommuting options to accommodate the diverse needs of mother administrators. Moreover, providing leadership and coping skills training can empower mother administrators to manage their dual roles effectively. By incorporating these recommendations into organizational strategies, institutions can cultivate a more supportive environment for mother administrators. This, in turn, can lead to increased job satisfaction, improved retention rates, and a more diverse and thriving leadership pipeline in higher education settings.

This research aimed to contribute meaningfully to the understanding the challenges and benefits mother administrators experience in higher education while managing two roles administrator and mother. The findings offer valuable insights that can benefit various stakeholders, mother administrators, and senior-level administrators in higher education as president, pro-rector, and rector. Furthermore, this study paves the way for future investigations into women leadership and mother administrators within higher education institutions.

I believe this study sheds light on the journeys of women who have achieved senior leadership positions in public universities. By examining the experiences of these successful leaders, the research aims to inspire and equip other women aspiring to leadership roles in higher education. While acknowledging the established research on resilience and its impact on identity, this study delves deeper into explore the specific motivations that propel these women to thrive in leadership positions.

The importance of disseminating this information across all levels of higher education institutions cannot be overstated. Sharing these findings with faculty, staff, and

existing administrators can spark crucial conversations about fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment for women aspiring to leadership roles. This information can then be used to create better pathways for the next generation of women who want to lead in academia.

Conducting this research on mother administrators in higher education proved to be a deeply personal journey for me. Examining the experiences of these successful women navigating leadership roles while raising children fostered a profound connection to the subject matter. The most significant takeaway for me centers on the critical need for supportive structures within universities. While the research highlighted the challenges faced by mother administrators, it also emphasized the importance of flexibility among organizations. By fostering a more supportive environment, universities can not only retain talented women leaders but also inspire the next generation of women to pursue leadership roles in academia. This realization underscores the importance of further research into specific strategies that empower mothers to excel in leadership positions. Additionally, it highlights the potential benefits of incorporating time management skill development programs specifically designed for working mothers in higher education. Disseminating these findings across all levels of higher education institutions becomes crucial for sparking necessary conversations about creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for women aspiring to leadership roles.

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[regions-universities-have-women-as-rectors/](https://www.iesalc.unesco.org/en/2020/03/07/where-are-the-women-university-rectors-in-latin-america-unesco-iesalc-data-reveals-that-only-18-of-the-regions-universities-have-women-as-rectors/)

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Appendix A



Thesis Title: Women's Leadership and Motherhood in Higher Education;
A case study of Women Administrators in a Regional University
Appendix A – Declaration of the Use of Generative AI in East Kazakhstan

I hereby declare that I have read and understood NUGSE's policy concerning appropriate use of AI and composed this work independently (please check one):

- with the use of artificial intelligence tools, or
 without the use of artificial intelligence tools.

(If you have used AI tools as defined in the GSE policy document, please complete the rest of this form.)

During the preparation of this thesis/examination, I used Gemini [NAME of TOOL] to
to check for grammar errors. [REASON]¹.

I also declare that I

- am aware of the capabilities and limitations of AI tool(s),
 have verified that the content generated by AI systems and adopted by me is factually correct,
 am aware that as the author of this thesis I bear full responsibility for the statements and assertions made in it,
 have submitted complete and accurate information about my use of AI tools in this work, and
 acknowledge that there may be disciplinary consequences if I have not followed NUGSE's guidelines regarding AI appropriate use.

Name: Nessibeli Abdulla

Signature: 

Date: 18.04.2024

¹ Examples of REASON: brainstorm ideas / find or select sources on a topic / paraphrase / structure and organize the written text / edit the text for clarity and grammar / ask for tips to improve coherence / cite and reference sources

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

Introduction: My name is Abdulla Nessibeli Ulzhakyzy, and I am an MSc student in Educational Leadership (Higher Education) at Nazarbayev University. I am inviting you to participate in a research study titled "Women's Leadership and Motherhood in Higher Education: A Case Study of Women Administrators". The purpose of this study is to investigate the challenges and opportunities women administrators at your university face in the career-family interface.

Procedures: If you agree to participate, you will be asked to answer 10 open-ended interview questions. The data collection instrument is online and face-to-face interviews. I will use the Google Meet meeting platform for online interviews because it doesn't have any limitations on timing. Your participation will take approximately 30-45 minutes. It will be longer if, you are willing to share. The interview will be in Kazakh and Russian languages. Before starting the interview I will ask permission from you to allow me to record the process. But if you refuse audio recordings, then I will take notes and write the answers. I will transcribe the answers in electronic versions and keep them in separate drives. Separate drives will be password-protected. Afterward, I will send the transcription to you for checking. You will be given the opportunity to elaborate, delete and modify any of your responses during and after the interview if you choose to do so, in review of the interview transcripts. All data will be collected by the researcher and stored in a secure place. I will encrypt data with password-protected files and manage data access, Only will have access to the data. After finishing the whole research project all recordings will be deleted in order to protect the participants.

Risks: There are only minimal risks for you to participate in this study. Although you will not be asked any sensitive questions, you may feel some discomfort in talking about challenges as a mother and administrator at your university. To minimize this risk, you can skip any questions they do not want to answer. All information provided by you will be kept confidential and used solely for the purpose of this research. Your identity will remain anonymous in any reports or publications resulting from this study. In order to protect your identity, I will use unique codes or identifiers that cannot be linked back to specific individuals. All data will be collected by the researcher and stored in a secure place. I will encrypt data with password-protected files and manage data access, Only will have access to the data.

Benefits: This research will share your professional experience of administrators at your university and give voice to you to speak up and openly discuss your joy and struggles by pushing you to take leadership roles. This research will illustrate how you manage the dual roles of motherhood and administrator. I hope that the current study will facilitate the career development and succession planning of female academics.

Confidentiality & Privacy: All data will be collected by the researcher and stored in a secure place. I will encrypt data with password-protected files and manage data access, only I will have access to the data. After finishing the whole research project all recordings will be deleted in order to protect the participants.

Participant's Rights: If you have read this form and would like to participate in this study, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the choice 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 can also refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to answer or stop the interview anytime and no negative consequences will result.

Points of Contact: It is understood that should any questions or comments arise regarding this project, or a research-related injury is received, the Principal Investigator, Nessibeli Abdulla at nessibeli.abdulla@nu.edu.kz, should be contacted. Alternatively, you may contact my thesis supervisor, Dr Aisi Li at li.aisi@nu.edu.kz. 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 NUGSE Research Committee at gse_researchcommittee@nu.edu.kz

Statement of Consent.

I, _____,

Give my voluntary consent to participate in this study.

The researchers clearly explained to me the background information and objectives of the study and what my participation in this study involves.

I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary. I can at any time and without giving any reasons withdraw my consent, and this will not have any negative consequences for myself.

I understand that the information collected during this study will be treated confidentially.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher:

Signed _____ Date _____

Appendix C

Recruitment Email

Dear [intended participant/s],

I am emailing you to invite you to be part of my research project about "Women's Leadership and Motherhood in Higher Education: A Case Study of Women Administrators in a Regional University in East Kazakhstan. The purpose of the research is to illuminate the experiences of women administrators who combine the dual roles of administrator and mother. Your experience and insights would be invaluable to the study.

If you participate in my project, you will be asked to answer 10 open-ended interview questions. It will take you approximately 30-45 minutes to participate in the research. It can be longer if you are willing to share more. The interview will be conducted online or in person, depending on your preference.

Enclosed with this email is the informed consent form that provides more details about the study and outlines the ethical considerations involved, including the measures to protect your identity and the data security. If you are interested in participating, please review and sign the consent form, and return it to me via email.

Once I receive your signed consent form, I will reach out to schedule a convenient time and place for the interview. If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please do not hesitate to contact me at nessibeli.abdulla@nu.edu.kz.

Thank you for considering this invitation. I genuinely appreciate your time and support in advancing educational research in Kazakhstan.

Warm regards,

Nessibeli Abdulla
MSc in Educational Leadership (Higher Education)
Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education

Appendix D

Interview questions

- 1) Can you describe any specific instances where the demands of your administrative position conflicted with your responsibilities as a mother, and how did you navigate these situations?
- 2) In what ways do workplace policies and practices support or hinder your ability to fulfill both your job responsibilities and motherhood duties?
- 3) How has the workplace environment or culture influenced your experiences as a mother in an administrative role?
- 4) What emotional and psychological challenges have you faced while juggling your roles as a woman administrator and a mother, and how have you coped with them?
- 5) Have you encountered any gender biases or stereotypes in the workplace related to your roles as a woman administrator and a mother, and how have they impacted your professional experiences?
- 6) Can you share instances where you've felt supported or understood by your workplace in managing both your professional and motherhood roles effectively?
- 7) How do you view the impact of your role as a mother on your career progression and opportunities within the administrative domain?
- 8) Can you suggest any improvements or changes in the university's supportive system that you believe would enhance your overall experience as a woman administrator juggling both job and motherhood responsibilities?
- 9) How do you perceive the level of understanding and support you receive from your colleagues and supervisors at the university regarding the challenges you face as a working mother in an administrative position?
- 10) How would you rate the responsiveness of the university's support system in accommodating your needs as a woman administrator balancing both job demands and motherhood responsibilities?

Appendix E

Sample of interview transcript

Date: 21.11.2023

Participant: P101

Can you describe any specific instances where the demands of your administrative position conflicted with your responsibilities as a mother, and how did you navigate these situations?

"Always, almost! Yes, especially when the child is unwell, and you need to be by their side, but responsibilities have to be delegated to someone else. It's challenging to leave your child, and it tears you apart inside, making you feel like a bad mother. In those moments, you negotiate with yourself, find ways to avoid stress, and, overall, navigate through the emotions while fulfilling both professional and parental duties."

“Всегда практический! Да всегда когда ребенок болеет и что нужно быть рядом с ним и его приходится перекидывать на другого. И нужно будет оставлять его и вот тогда внутри раздрает что то, то что ты плохая мама. И все возникает, и в такие моменты ты договариваешься собой, находишь такой момент избегание стресса. И вообще тоже проживаешь”

In what ways do workplace policies and practices support or hinder your ability to fulfill both your job responsibilities and motherhood duties?

"I don't know how to answer."

“Я не знаю что ответить”

How has the workplace environment or culture influenced your experiences as a mother in an administrative role?

"Considering our socio-cultural environment, right? It's a technical nuance... Well, at least, I don't encounter such difficulties. Mainly because, despite the sociocultural influence, having spent more than 20 years in the university, the lines blur. And given that we are predominantly Russian-speaking, it's more straightforward for us. In the Kazakh-speaking environment, it's quite evident. Our students and teachers are different. The socio-cultural difference is noticeable."

“С учетом того что у нас социо-культурная среда да? Техническая особенность... Ну я по крайней мере не испытываю таких сложности. Потому что, ну большой частью социо-культурная влияние есть но по сути находясь в университете больше 20 лет, грань стирается. И с учетом того что мы все таки русскоязычные отделение у

нас проще. Казахскоязычной среде это прям видно. У нас и студенты и учителя другие. Социо-культурная разница видна.”

What emotional and psychological challenges have you faced while juggling your roles as a woman administrator and a mother, and how have you coped with them?

"Considering that I am a professional psychologist, balancing roles isn't overly challenging, but it's crucial to maintain resources and balance. Because if you want to play the role of an administrative leader, it can be quite challenging to switch between situations. This role can then impact your family and those close to you. However, if you maintain balance, in such situations, it's essential to consider and respect yourself, your state of mind, your body, and your resources. That way, you can truly maintain a balance."

“С учетом того что я профессиональный психолог, совмещать роли не так сложно на самом деле но, важно соблюдать ресурс, баланс. Потому что если вы хотите в роли администратора руководителя то в этой ситуаций довольно сложно будет переключаться. То есть, это роль может потом отражаться на семье и на близких кто тебя окружает. А если соблюдать баланс то в этой ситуаций действительно нужно учитывать, считаться собой, со своим состоянием со своим телом, со своим ресурсом и тогда можно соблюдать баланс”.

Have you encountered any gender biases or stereotypes in the workplace related to your roles as a woman administrator and a mother, and how have they impacted your professional experiences?

"Well, considering that 90% of our workforce is women, there haven't been any particular issues. Competence has always been strong among women in our workplace."

“Ну с учетом того что у нас 90% женщины особой проблемой никогда не были. У нас компетенция всегда с женщинами”

Can you share instances where you've felt supported or understood by your workplace in managing both your professional and motherhood roles effectively?

"From colleagues? I receive a lot of support. Again, being in a female-dominated team where most have children, there's an immediate readiness to extend helping hands."

“Со стороны коллег? Очень много поддержки получаю, ну опять же женский коллектив и у большинство дети поэтому сразу готовы притянуть руки помощи. ”

How do you view the impact of your role as a mother on your career progression and opportunities within the administrative domain?

“skipped”

Can you suggest any improvements or changes in the university's supportive system that you believe would enhance your overall experience as a woman administrator juggling both job and motherhood responsibilities?

"Well, essentially, if you have, for example, one position, you should understand that it's a personal responsibility. It's not about the administration; it's about your personal accountability. You need to realize if you can handle the position or not. It's a different kind of question. From the administration, just adherence to the labor code is sufficient. I'm not asking for more. That's my perspective because if someone takes on a role, they assume responsibility and must understand the magnitude of it. They should assess their own strengths. Whether someone is a mother or not, it's a personal choice."

"Ну, посути если у тебя например будет одна должность. Ты должна понимать что, ты должна дать себе отчет. Не со стороны администраций а личная ответственность, ты должна понять ты тянешь эту должность либо не тянешь. Вопрос такой другого плана. Ну со стороны администраций соблюдение трудового кодекса только. Больше не прошу. Ну моя точка зрения, потому что если человек идет на должность он принимает на себя ответственность он должен понимать что это большая ответственность. И он должен считывать свои собственные силы. Ну к тому что она мама, ну она же может не соглашаться. "

How do you perceive the level of understanding and support you receive from your colleagues and supervisors at the university regarding the challenges you face as a working mother in an administrative position?

"We have a supportive administration. Perhaps it's because the majority of them are mothers and women, experiencing similar situations themselves. I can say the support is quite good."

"У нас администрация лояльная. Может связано с тем что большинства из них мамы и женщины и они сами проживают ситуацию. Поддержка такая хорошая могу сказать. "

How would you rate the responsiveness of the university's support system in accommodating your needs as a woman administrator balancing both job demands and motherhood responsibilities?

"From the university's perspective, there is prompt support. The organizational structure is in place with a dean, vice-rector, rector, president, and head of the HR department. This hierarchy is maintained, allowing for a quick response to various issues. In my opinion, it happens quite swiftly. The power structure is established and adhered to."

"Ну со стороны университета происходит такая оперативная поддержка. Ну в любом случае структура же есть. У нас есть декан, проректор, ректор, президент есть начальник отдела кадра. И вот это ступень соблюдается. И вот это помогает быстро среагировать на ту либо другую проблему. Ну на мой взгляд, довольно быстро. Иерархия власти есть и соблюдается."

Appendix F

Sample of Data Analysis

Category	Sub-Category	Theme	Quotations (participant)
Work-Life Conflict	Sacrifice	ST1. Absence in Children's Important Life Events	<p>“Always, almost! Yes, especially when the child is unwell, and you need to be by their side, but responsibilities have to be delegated to someone else. It's challenging to leave your child, and it tears you apart inside, making you feel like a bad mother”(P101).</p> <p>“I remember I had to organize an urgent call with faculty and missed my son's first matinee in kindergarten. I felt upset because some people said that he looked for me with hopeful eyes” (P104).</p>
		ST2. The Inability to Make Emotional Connections	<p>“When the children were toddlers, my mother-in-law was the main person who took care of them. At that time, I felt like I was the luckiest person in the world, but now, when they are almost adults, I cannot have emotional conversations with them. After work, I come home tired and so do they. How lucky is that?” (P105).</p> <p>“Outsourcing some household chores makes life easier and more balanced. However, outsourcing children's full-time care to nannies can be dangerous for the emotional bond between them and their parents. You can never fully recover the emotional connection with your children who have been cared for by nannies or caregivers” (P103).</p>

