

# GENDER FORUM

Challenges and Changes in Gender in Central Asia:  
Bridging Researchers, Policy Makers, and Practitioners

JUNE 13-14, 2019 | NUR-SULTAN CITY, KAZAKHSTAN



## EDITORIAL

The Gender Forum 2019 brought up topics not eagerly discussed in Kazakhstan, such as gender equality, sexual education, LGBTQ population, domestic violence, women's and girls' human rights, and gender imbalance in representation across various sectors, as well as other relevant topics. The Forum was initiated in hopes of ensuring a safe space where interested people could be brought together to discuss gender issues, speak to each other and learn from one another's research, practice, and insights into policy.

The Forum organizers did a great job bringing together qualified, engaging speakers, who clearly care about gender equality and women's empowerment. Every speech presented at the Forum was one-of-a-kind and gave the opportunity to look at the issues from different perspectives. It was about time for such a forum. While we are witnessing a progress in gender equality on macro and micro levels in some parts of the world, there are initiatives restricting women's rights in other parts. The problem will not go away unless we discuss it and try to find possible solutions. This newsletter covers the key ideas discussed at the Forum. Enjoy your reading!

Truly yours,

Yevgeniya Serkova and Tatyana Kim

EDHE 648: Perspectives of Teacher Education

## The 1st Annual Gender Forum at Nazarbayev University



## FROM MINORITY TO DIVERSITY: CONTEXTUALIZING GENDERED INNOVATION - AN OVERVIEW AND REFLECTION OF THE 20-YEAR HISTORY OF MAINSTREAMING GENDER IN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY POLICY IN SOUTH KOREA

So Young Kim, PhD  
Head of the Graduate School of Science and  
Technology Policy at KAIST, South Korea

According to Dr. So Young Ki, Head of the Graduate School of Science and Technology Policy at KAIST, South Korea, there is a very strong culture in South Korea preferring men. All industries are dominated by men. The more advanced the field, the fewer women there are in the field. There is a shortage of women in science. Although the Korean government takes many initiatives to support women in science, there is still a gender bias in science and technology (S&T). Thus, it is important to change perceptions on gender equality, not just state policies.

The Korean government places a mandatory requirement for the workplace to have a certain number of female (full-time) workers. However, in S&T fields, women are mostly hired at low-level positions. Interestingly, the more educated a woman is, the more she is likely to be hired in temporary, not permanent positions. So, it is not about the number of women but also the quality of work women are hired to perform.

During the session, a gender representative for the UNDP Kazakhstan mentioned there is a stereotype that girls are not as good at STEM as boys. Therefore, they decided to promote coding and programming among schoolgirls as a way to ensure women's engagement in the discipline. As a result, two teenage girls from Nur-Sultan volunteered to learn more about STEM and ended up developing a special Telegram "Genderbot" within just a few days. The program aims at raising awareness about gender equality, as well as the rights and opportunities of girls and women.



Another important aspect mentioned by the audience was focusing not only on macro-level changes like giving more places to women in parliament, but also on micro-level changes which anyone can implement in his or her daily life. It is crucial to acknowledge that while mostly women are concerned about the issue, actually men are gatekeepers to gender equality. Hence, it takes the entire society to improve the situation.

Dr. Kim emphasized it is hard for educated women to find a high-level job, as there are both many male competitors and also traditional expectations for women to have more family commitments. While Dr. Kim showed photos of male civil servants taking their children to kindergarten, pushing strollers and carrying children while wearing business attire, it is an exception in Korea. Usually, it is the mothers' duty to take care of children and only in very rare, high paid, stable positions are men starting to take on this role.



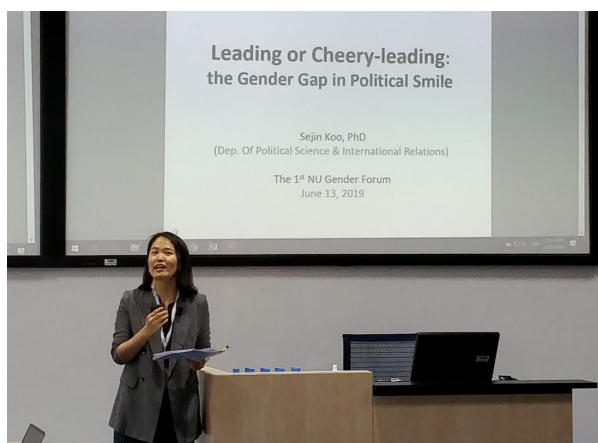
## LEADING OR CHEERY-LEADING: THE GENDER GAP IN POLITICAL SMILE

Sejin Koo, PhD  
Department of Political Science and  
International Relations

One of the most fascinating speeches was about the role of facial expressions among female and male politicians and their impact on the election results. Dr. Sejin Koo's research aimed to understand if female politicians smile more than their male counterparts, whether smiling is equally helpful for female and male candidates to win votes, and if there is a gender gap in smiling across different nations.

When it comes to choosing a candidate during elections, people tend to make their decisions based on assumption rather than evidence-based information. And, therefore, appearance might influence election outcomes. Dr. Koo explained that good-looking, tall, well-built and smiling candidates have better chances to succeed.

The results of the study analysis using facial recognition program showed that female candidates tend to smile more than their male peers. Moreover, women have to smile to stay competitive, meaning smiling female candidates win more votes. Geographically, there is a small gender gap in smiling in America and South Korea while in Kazakhstan and Russia, female candidates smile much more often than their male peers. Overall, facial expressions influence the voting decisions, rewarding women who hold to gender stereotypes.

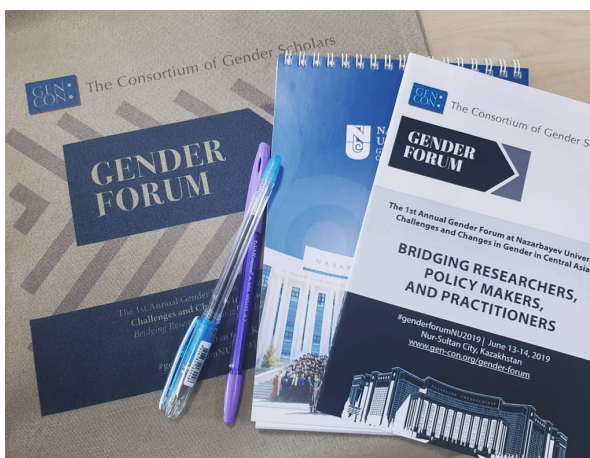
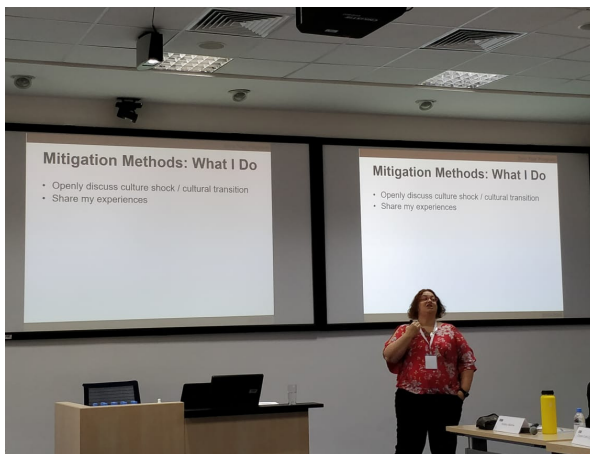


## EXAMINING GENDER IN PHILOSOPHY

Sydney Morrow, PhD  
Department of History, Philosophy and  
Religious Studies

The speaker, Dr. Sydney Morrow from the Department of History, Philosophy and Religious Studies, talked about gender in philosophy. She noted that Philosophy has a gender bias. It is difficult not to agree that the field of Philosophy has always been dominated by men as explained by Dr. Morrow. She detailed that most works were written by men historically and canonically. Currently, there is still an underrepresentation of females in the discipline. Even though there have been some positive changes, male PhD holders and lectures still prevail.

Dr. Morrow emphasised the importance of changing pronouns to feminine such as "she" and "her" as language in literature tends to be male-prone. If these changes take place, female students might feel more engaged and empowered. Another important aspect mentioned by the speaker is culture. Dr. Morrow's work experience in Kazakhstan shows that Kazakhstani students tend to use masculine pronouns in their speech, all the time. While there are social, historical and other reasons why this happens, it is important to engage students in discussing gender issues with a focus not only on Western experience but also on local culture.



## GENDER AWARENESS IN CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

Rheanne Anderson, MA  
Centre for Preparatory Studies

The speaker, Rheanne Anderson, discussed her experience of integrating gender into the curriculum at Nazarbayev University. After explaining that the texts used in most classes favor male authors, she provided a simple solution to remedy the imbalance. Anderson discussed how using more female scholars' works in the classroom is a way to bring students' attention to women's contribution to the knowledge pool across various disciplines.

A unique aspect of her presentation was the way she engaged the audience into the discussion. The attendees had an opportunity to collaboratively generate ideas of how to bring the gender aspect into teaching and learning.

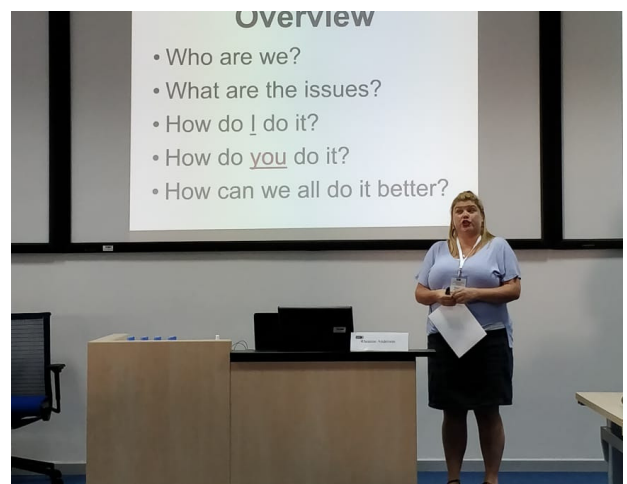
## GENDER LOAD: GRADUATE STUDENTS' GENDERED EXPERIENCES

Deanne Cobb-Zygodlo, MA  
Centre for Preparatory Studies

The speaker, Deanne Cobb-Zygodlo, shared her experience in teaching pre-master's students at Nazarbayev University. According to her observations, pre-master's students find it difficult to maintain multiple identities as they have to shift from Kazakhstani to international context, from professionals to students and creators of knowledge, and from students to self-organized learners.

Cobb-Zygado highlighted that women tend to have more complex challenges than men with regards to childcare, community involvement, spousal and familial support, time constraints, group projects, mental load, energy demand and lower confidence. Evidence of gender load include poor time management due to external demands, self doubt, mental health issues, tiredness, poor academic progress and academic misconduct.

While female students seem to have more responsibilities than men and at the same time are not always provided with sufficient support from the university, Cobb-Zygado highlights that changing the way we teach is needed for them. She recommends practicing empathetic listening and honest, non-judgmental communication with students, providing better access to dormitories, raising faculty awareness about the issue, as well as parental support and childcare funding during illnesses, and peer to peer support, to name a few examples.



## SEXUALITY AND LGBTQ CULTURAL COMPETENCE, AND THE MEDICAL CURRICULUM

Alessandra Clementi, M.D., G.P.  
School of Medicine

People feel uneasiness when talking about sexuality in Kazakhstan explained Alessandra Clementi from the School of Medicine. It gets even more uncomfortable to talk about it when it comes to LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) population. For doctors, however, it is crucial to know the sexual history of their patients.

Studies show that LGBTQ population is more exposed to certain medical conditions, such as cardiovascular diseases, cancer, HIV/AIDS, and hepatitis, for example. Moreover, they are at risk of experiencing mental issues, including depression and stress caused by violence and microaggression. Thus, the Clementi emphasized the importance of community support and family acceptance when it comes to minority groups.

The speaker explained that the Nazarbayev University School of Medicine has introduced an inclusive curriculum, which makes students ready to deal with diverse patients, including the LGBTQ population. As part of the program, the medical students have an opportunity to test and improve their skills in interviewing patients in a non-judgemental manner and make them feel comfortable.



## GENDER INITIATIVES - WORK IN PROGRESS

Loretta O'Donnell  
Provost's Office

Dr. Loretta O'Donnell, Vice-Provost for Academic Affairs, shared Nazarbayev University (NU) experience of bringing more women into higher education. She highlighted the crucial nature of promoting gender equality across disciplines, especially in STEM which has traditionally been male-dominated. Currently, the University enrolls equal number of female and male students in engineering disciplines.

Meanwhile, approximately only 30% of NU faculty are women which, according to O'Donnell, is not ideal but still not too bad. The university has a reasonable number of female assistant professors, a much smaller number of associate professors, and a very small number of full professors who are female. The University plans to increase the number of female faculty and promote gender equality at all levels.

Dr. O'Donnell also shared information about the "Homeward Bound" program, which is the largest all-women sailing expedition to Antarctica. It represents a leadership training for women in STEM. Through this example, O'Donnell noted how this is a great chance for women to unveil their leadership potential.

## GENDER AND EDUCATION IN SCHOOLING

Naureen Durrani, PhD,  
Anna CohenMiller, PhD  
Zumrad Kataeva, PhD  
Graduate School of Education

The Stakeholder Meeting gathered together various stakeholders to discuss an issue of gender equality as related to gender in schooling in Kazakhstan. During the meeting Aida Sagindayeva, Dean of Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education, introduced the session and talked about gender imbalance in leadership positions in Kazakhstan. According to statistics, out of 27 Ministers of Education and Science only two are female, out of eight rectors of national universities only three are female, and out of 39 reactors of public universities only two are women.



As was pointed out by Naureen Durrani, Professor in the Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education, women have been historically disadvantaged. Currently, many initiatives around the world have been taken to change the situation. For instance, the UNDP Sustainable Development Goal #5 aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls by the year 2030. Despite the positive changes, gender inequities still persist in educational access, poverty and wealth, health and well-being, social, economic, civic participation, just to name a few.



Professor Durrani explained that sex and gender are different notions. While sex refers to a person's physical traits, such as chromosomes and hormones, gender is more about practices and roles society expects a person to perform, such as what clothes to wear, how to behave or how to express emotions. As an example, in the UK, girls tend to not study math beyond compulsory education because math has a traditionally masculine identity and it is believed that girls are not as good at math as boys. To the contrary, in the Middle East there are more girls in STEM than boys. The reason is that boys and girls are educated separately, with girls being taught by female scientists and scholars who empower them as role models and make them believe in themselves. This example shows one's abilities or propensities have nothing to do with sex, it is all about mindset and sociocultural constructs.

Professor Durrani noted that schools have the potential to make change happen towards an equitable society. The research team highlighted the preliminary findings of the first stage of their study, which examined gender bias in text and visuals in 7th and 8th grade textbooks in Russian, Kazakh, and English. Starting in September 2019, the team will conduct qualitative case studies across Kazakhstani schools. The study will focus on gender equality and include such data collection as classroom observations, interviews with teachers, and focus groups with students. A future step will further involve a quantitative study using surveys distributed across schools in Kazakhstan. In conclusion, gender equality issues need to be talked about and negotiated on macro and micro levels domestically and globally. And, although gender equality should involve both genders, nowadays it often focuses on girls and women. However, unless men are involved in the process of gender equality, there can be little progress achieved in schools.

## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND THE ROLE OF PHYSICIAN AND SOCIETY

Lyazzat Toleubekova, MBChB  
School of Medicine

Dr. Toleubekova talked about the role of physicians and society in preventing domestic violence. While it might take different forms, including for example sexual, financial, or physical abuse, the cases of domestic violence are severely underreported. The speaker presented the results of a survey on women's health and domestic violence against women conducted in Kazakhstan in 2017. According to the results of the study, almost 20% of women have experienced one or another form of abuse from their intimate partners.



Importantly, women with higher education are less likely to experience intimate violence than women with less education. The negative impact of abuse includes physical and mental health problems, unplanned pregnancy, psychological trauma, and even death. However, while women tend to suffer from domestic violence, men can also become victims. Toleubekova concludes that domestic violence deserves zero tolerance, and as a society and as individuals we should highlight this problem, to raise awareness and educate people about the issue and ensure a strict legal framework and punishment system.



## FEEDING OR TEASING? FEMALE BREAST OBJECTIFICATION IN KAZAKHSTAN

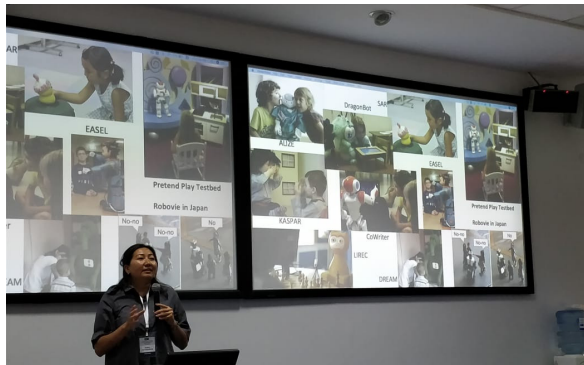
Dinara Kussain  
NU Press Office

A representative of Nazarbayev University Press Office, Dinara Kussain, discussed the issue of breastfeeding in Kazakhstan. While breastfeeding is a natural process and highly recommended by doctors to ensure a newborn's well-being, breastfeeding in public often becomes problematic for women. The factors against breastfeeding in public include public shaming, lack of special spaces, self-restrictions, cultural norms, objectification of female breast and negative gender perceptions. In order to improve the situation, Kussain explained that it is important to raise public awareness about the issue and promote the normalization of breastfeeding in public.

## SEXUALITY AND COMMUNITY IN CENTRAL ASIA

Zohra Beben, PhD  
Department of Anthropology and Sociology

Dr. Zohra Beben talked about common stereotypes about the lesbian community and difficulties lesbian couples face. She noted the politics of invisibility within the LGBTQ community and lack of awareness of their rights as main issues in Kazakhstan. She also mentioned that the network of sexual minorities is very weak, which means there is no unified community in the country.



## PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN THE POLICY-MAKING IN KAZAKHSTAN

Saltanat Janenova, PhD  
Graduate School of Public Policy

Dr. Saltanat Janenova from the Graduate School of Public Policy discussed the issue of women representation in civil service. Currently, women are underrepresented at all levels of governance: with only 22% of parliamentarians, less than 10% of political positions, no ministers or regional governors.

The speaker presented the results of her collaborative research on females in leadership positions in civil service in Kazakhstan. The research findings show the advantages of having female leaders include responsibility, persistence in carrying out a project to an end, higher expectations to quality, as well as other aspects. On the other hand, women might be demanding, overly controlling, and excessively detail oriented according to the interviews conducted with mid-level female leaders.

While the participants of the study acknowledged the underrepresentation of women in civil service, they link it to societal expectation about gender roles rather than the result of discrimination. Based upon the results, Janenova and her team recommend improving working conditions for civil servants, including providing flexible hours and distance work for women with children under age three, stimulating mentorship, promoting paternity leave, and mitigating working overtime.



## CHILD-ROBOT PERCEPTION: AGE AND GENDER DIFFERENCES

Anara Sandygulova, PhD  
School of Sciences and Technology

Dr. Anara Sandygulova from School of Sciences and Technology discussed using robots in an educational process and the gendered aspect of this phenomenon. While the rapid advancement of technology raises a lot of questions about how to make interactions with robots or other electronic devices more effective and user-friendly, she noted that gender is one of the most important aspects to consider. Dr. Sandygulova emphasized that when it comes to education, it is important that a robot is perfectly adjusted for a child's age and gender.

From her teaching experience, children tend to choose same-sex robots and feel upset when they are not represented. In other words, girls want to learn from female robots while boys prefer male ones. Therefore, she recommends to get children to assign gender to robots by themselves, so they feel comfortable working with them. The speaker also presented the project about using robots to teach children Latin script in Kazakhstani schools, showing how integrating new technologies into a learning process might benefit children.



## NORMALIZING YOUTH SEXUALITY EDUCATION IN KAZAKHSTAN, FORMALLY AND INFORMALLY

Karlygash Kabatova  
Author and manager of UyatEmes.kz

Karlygash Kabatova, the founder of the website UyatEmes, created for young people and parents and devoted to sexual relationships and health issues, discussed the problem of sexual education for youth in Kazakhstan. The speaker noted that there is no system to educate youth about their sexual and reproductive health. The factors contributing to the problem include the taboo of discussing sexual and reproductive health, sporadic educational projects, lack of cooperation between authorities in education and healthcare systems, and gender stereotypes, to name a few obstacles.

In order to improve youth's knowledge about sexual and reproductive health, Kabatova advocates for the introduction of sexual education in Kazakhstani schools and recommends prioritizing youth reproductive rights, raising awareness among policy makers, parents and the general public and making healthcare more youth-friendly.

## TRANSFORMATION OF GENDER RELATIONS AND THE FAMILY IN MODERN KYRGYZSTAN

Gulnara Ibraeva, PhD  
Political Sociology, Kyrgyz Republic

The keynote speaker, Dr. Gulnara Ibraeva, shared her view on how gender relations and family have transformed in Kyrgyzstan. The transformation was mostly fuelled by capitalism and market pressure, as well as the development of consumer society and labour migration.

Ibraeva noted that the economic situation has forced Kyrgyz people to work outside the country. Labour migrants tend to send money earned in the host country back home to build their houses. However, having spent many years in the host country, they do not feel at home neither in the host country nor in the homeland.

Another transformation has been seen in the relationships between labour migrants and their children. Most migrants leave their children with their relatives in Kyrgyzstan for a long time. So, when the migrants return home, they tend to compensate for the lack of care and parental love towards their children with presents and money.

According to Ibraeva, the parent-child relationships thus becomes more commercialized. In other words, children regard their parents as money providers rather than caregivers.

Summarizing the above, we can assume that the economic situation and labour migration have dramatically changed family relations in modern Kyrgyzstan.

