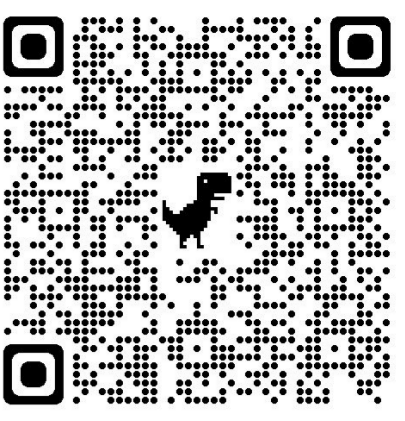# Gender-Biased Selection Practices in Kazakhstan - The first scientific research

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Target Country Overview

Kazakhstan:

❖ A former USSR country
❖ Located by 85% in Asia and 15% in Europe
❖ 19 million people

❖ 9th place by the territory and 6th place by natural resources reserves in the world
❖ Upper-income country, most economically developed in Central Asia

Context Analysis

Politics
- Two-fold policy uniting family and gender, where gender is secondary.
- Special state body under the President of Kazakhstan – National Committee on Women and Family and Demographic Policy.
- The Concept of family and gender policy till 2030.

Economics
- Gender pay gap is 21.7%.
- The share of women in employed population is 48.6% but men represent 89.1% on boards of directors.
- In 52.5% of Kazakhstani households women are the main breadwinners.
- Women do 3 times more chores compared to men.

Culture and society
- Trend for re-traditionalization including religion revival after 1991.
- Polar views of citizens on gender roles with domination of patriarchal standpoints: men are breadwinners, women – ideal wives and mothers.

Legislation
- Antidiscrimination norms in: Labour code, Law on mass media, Law on state guarantees of equal rights and opportunities of women and men, etc.
- Kazakhstan is the signatory of UN and ILO conventions.
- Almost zero statistics of gender discrimination offenses.

Literature Review

Stereotype-based discrimination
(Rudman Et Al., 2008)
Relates to subjective stereotypical interpretation of the gathered data, strategy to shift standards of evaluation depending on gender and application of ambiguous criteria "lack of fit" with the vacant position.

"Matching" strategies
(Smith & Simms, 2018)
Decision makers' desire to avoid risk and to expedite filling in vacancies brings them to "matching" strategies that puts demographic characteristics first, assigning less importance to the candidates' professional qualities.

Mixed approach to HRM
(Hotho et al.,2020)
HR practices in Kazakhstan represent a mix of Western approach, and Soviet cadres management penetrated with Kazakh values – informal networks and relationships.

"Family Cage" phenomenon
(Lipovka & Buzady, 2020)
Strong gender stereotypes engender "women's limited economic progress by the deliberate continuous reproduction of women's caregiver roles in public and private lives".

Methodology

The constructivist paradigm and grounded theory were used to fill in the knowledge gap about how post-socialist culture framed the employee selection process (Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

Research method

❖ 17 in-depth interviews with HR professionals working for private Kazakhstan's companies and multinational corporations and 3 interviews with heads of HR recruiting organizations.

❖ The average interviewees' experience in HRM constituted 9.6 years, ranging from 3 to 21 years.

❖ The total number of employees in which the interviewed HR managers worked constituted about 15,000, with the lowest number of employees - 150 and the highest - 2,700.

❖ The length of the conducted interviews constituted from 1 to 1.5 hours.
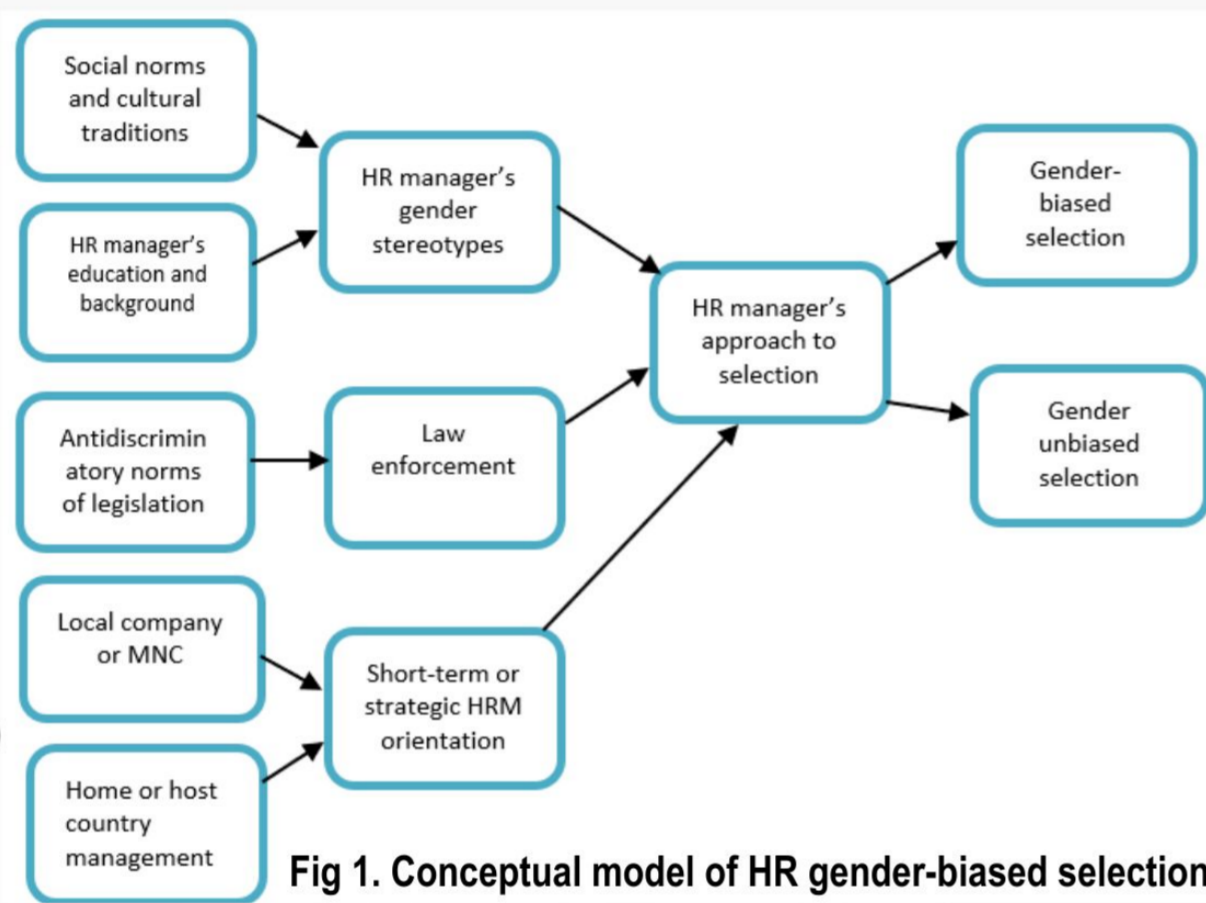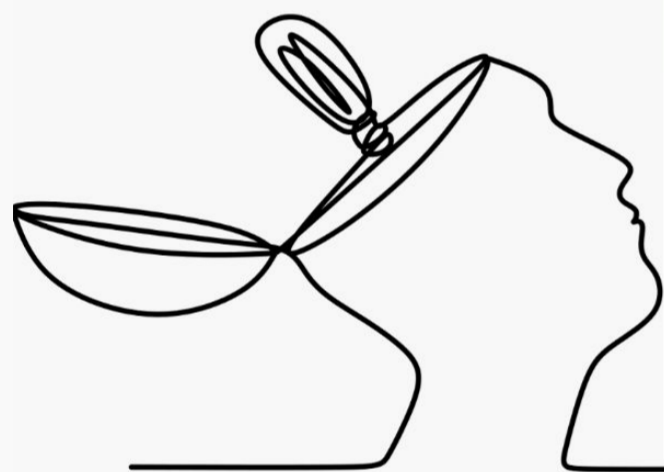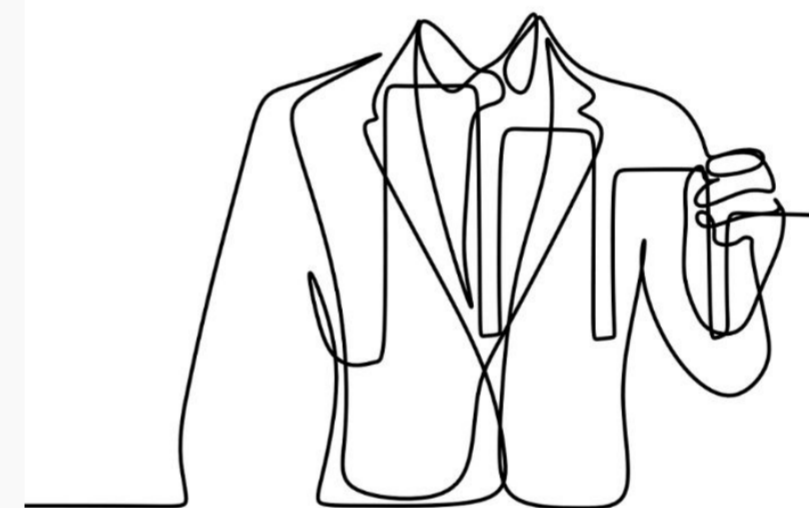
Findings

Fig 1. Conceptual model of HR gender-biased selection

Findings (Part 2)

Influence of social norms and cultural traditions on gender bias in selection

The bias towards women grounded in women's reproductory function and greater childcare burden. Family is one of the major values of CA countries with a strict hierarchy of power and functions distribution between its members:

We constantly ask questions regarding the family. Husbands play an important role in a woman's choice of workplace and type of employment in Shymkent. Often a wife changes her place of work or leaves it after marriage at the will of her husband. (R11)

Single men in their 30-s are considered immature, dependent, and more mobile compared to their married peers:

I almost always ask private questions: to men about their marital status and the number of their children and about plans to have children I ask only women. We ask men about their marital status to understand how stable they are. (R1)

Findings (Part 3)

Role of a company's MNC status

In our company, no private questions are asked. This is what I liked when I came to get a job here. This was initiated by top managers from Western Europe who previously worked in our office. (R13)

Impact of HR managers' education and background on their approach to selection

I studied Management in Kazakhstan in English that's why the courses were based on Western textbooks, where antidiscriminatory laws are well-developed and gender equality is integrated. Further, I took a professional internship in Canada and was instructed to process HR issues […] In an international company, private questions are unacceptable, my previous foreign boss severely criticized me when I asked such questions. In the Kazakhstan's company, this is important, while working there, I was reprimanded for the fact that the woman whom I approved for the position went on maternity leave after working for a year or two. (R5)

Findings (Part 4)

The intensity of gender bias along the qualifications and professions

❖ Low qualified workers are more prone to be biased.
❖ Expert personnel is almost not discriminated.
❖ Women in managerial jobs are more biased compared to non-supervisory positions:

Men are more suitable for positions where the shift method and frequent business trips are required or career growth is associated with moving. This is because a woman is attached to her children. If she had refused children, she would have been on par with a man. I think this is typical for oriental countries with their mentality. (R5)

Consideration of diversity and gender potential

Diversity and gender equality have barely been pronounced by any participant:
We do not focus too much on diversity or gender parity. However, sometimes we monitor some indicators because we want our organization to have a diverse staff. (R4)

Findings (Part 5)

Ignorance of antidiscriminatory norms of legislation

When recruiting and selecting, HR managers are guided by their internal regulations because they believe that selection is to be carried out and controlled at their discretion and they can choose themselves what to ask and how to select:

I am not aware of certain public requirements for selecting and hiring employees. We just should regularly send statistics of open and closed vacancies for a period to the Labor Department. (R8)

Inadequate selection procedure and techniques

In most companies, selections procedures are insufficiently or formally standardized (non-structured interviews, lack of interview minutes, deficit of candidates' notification about the selection results, etc.):

There is no list of traits of an ideal candidate since everyone is very different. We do not have and do not use such lists. (R5)
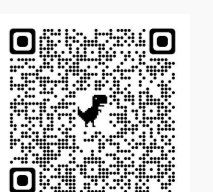
Discussion

❖ The paper has identified a lack of a strategic approach to selection and the company's international status and size often positively impact gender equality that supports Latukha & Malko's (2019) findings.

❖ The results showed the high importance of women's and men's family status for the organizations. The result of the overwhelming influence of the motherhood penalty on candidates are in line with the preceding research in emerging economies (Bedi et al., 2021; Maurer-Fazio and Wang, 2018) and a post-socialist state (Nikolova and Polansky, 2022).

❖ Due to insufficient law enforcement, deficit precedents, and low penalties, enterprises continue their illegal conduct, this partially corresponds with Minbaeva and Muratbekova-Touron's research (2013).

Conclusion

1. The results signalized how explicit gender bias mimicked and became implicit under conditions of formal antidiscrimination norms and gender equality requirements of MNCs that could be used by researchers from other countries to deepen the knowledge of perpetrators' conduct.

2. The paper reveals a whole range of perpetrators' explanations of their unethical and illegal behavior, among which are lowering the risk of employee leave, saving time, defining candidates with the most suitable values for the organization, and the private company's right to set its own rules.

3. This study is the first research that investigated the biased selection and grounds of gender discrimination in private local companies and MNCs in Kazakhstan and in Central Asia.

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