

# Women's Rights in Kazakhstan



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**By**

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## Abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CSO	Civil Society Organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OIC	Organization of Islamic Conference
UNPD	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WDI	World Development Indicator
ECA	Europe and Central Asia
NDI	National Democratic Institution
SRI	Sexual Rights Initiative
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
SMEs	Small and medium-sized enterprises

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

The republics of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan were formed after the collapse of the Communist Party and the subsequent fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. Having been a part of the Soviet Union for almost 75 years, these republics emerged as self-proclaimed independent nations with little clue to their future well-being, their major driving force being the reclamation of their lost national identities. Kazakhs, Uzbeks and Kyrgyz took the path of creating new individual states for their people by way of restructuring the national economy, designing a new constitution and indigenizing their societies to reflect their respective cultures and value systems.

This paper will focus on the rights and status of women in Kazakhstan for which it becomes imperative to highlight some key historical events that led to the fall of the Soviet Union and the consequent worsening of the status of women of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Going back a little into history, the ideology behind sovietisation of Central Asia in early 1920s was to modernize the society as well as reduce the influence of Islam among the population. But what the advocates of the Soviet policies overlooked was the fact that Islam was the basic foundation over which the Central Asian society stood. It served as a socio-political connection which kept the regions together (Corcoran-Nantes, 2005). This was among the first clues towards social and political instability in Central Asia in the presence of Soviet dominance.

Gradually, Soviet Union started competing with United States to gain greater military and technological superiority as well as cultural prominence. Soviet Union had also acquired nuclear weapons technology which led to an arms race between the two super powers (US and Soviet Union). Since the Soviet economy was nearly not as robust as the US economy, the defence and military expenditure which Soviet Union incurred to match that of United States' severely hurt the Soviet economy. The arms race acted as a drain on their economy leaving them bankrupt.

At this time 3 main problems characterised the Soviet economy- 1) lack of public faith in the country's leadership, 2) A well-established network of bureaucratic ministers and 3) stagnating growth rates in the economy. Someone had to step in to tackle these issues facing the Soviet societies. As a result, Mikhail Gorbachev was elected as the new General Secretary of the Communist party in 1985. Gorbachev had a reform mind-set and promised to revive the economy through his two major policies namely, Glasnost (which means 'openness') and Perestroika (which means 'restructure').

Glasnost was aimed at greater transparency in government dealings for the general public to regain their trust on the government while also providing for greater freedom of speech and

expression to the people which was previously suppressed during Stalin's rule. Perestroika on the other hand aimed at political and economic reconstruction. On the political front, elections were carried out to reflect democratic practices of the west and on the economic front, efforts were made to create a semi-free market system to reflect the capitalist societies like Germany and United States.

Gorbachev's policies paved way for women to exchange more intellectual and cultural ideas, participate in academic conferences, conduct researches and express themselves freely. The shift from a Marxist society to a liberalised one provided greater freedom in the hands of women who could now for the first time ask the 'real' questions and receive 'honest' replies (Corcoran-Nantes, 2005).

Women enjoyed benefits such as paid maternity leave for one year or unpaid leave for three years during which they could not be dismissed from her job. The leave period also counted as working period towards calculation of their pensions. The state also provided free of charge health care system, low-cost child care system, free education, inexpensive clothing, and housing facilities and so on (Khassanova, 2002).

But who knew, that all that looked so promising and well planned would come to such a tragic end. The failure of perestroika marked the downfall of the Soviet Union. This led to a realignment of the economic and the political forces in Russia and the independent former Soviet republics. Moreover, there was a constant pressure from international experts, business consultants and financial institutions to democratize the political system on similar lines with the western society. In fact they aimed at westernizing the entire social and cultural landscape of the former Soviet republics (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan) and after being under the Soviet tutelage for almost 75 years, this came as a curse on the Soviet republics. Westernization of the Soviet societies took away the freedom previously enjoyed by the Soviet women. In the past, the women were empowered to an extent that they could voice out the unequal treatment extended to them and put hard statistics on the table demonstrating the level of gender inequality existing in their workplace, academic institutions, health care and politics. But much has changed since those days. International level feminist debates are now mostly driven by American and European women's experiences (Corcoran-Nantes, 2005). The Central Asian women seem to have little say in these internationally held debates. The question which they are now faced with is whether they should strive for equality or cry about the loss of social protection?

## Chapter 2



### Kazakhstan's background and Policy Situation

In terms of Geographical area, Kazakhstan is ranked as the 9<sup>th</sup> largest country in the world. Also, among the five Central Asian Countries, Kazakhstan has the strongest economy with a GDP growth rate of 5.8% (Economist, 2014), currently standing at \$212.2 billion (WDI, 2014). People in Kazakhstan also enjoy a higher standard of living vis-à-vis their neighbours largely due to abundance of natural resources in the country and high crude oil prices in the world market (Nominal average monthly wage in 2012 was noted to be \$679 (Smailov, 2013)).

Ever since the Soviet Union collapsed, Kazakhstan's government has formulated numerous policies to promote greater gender equality. These policies have also been acknowledged in the national action plans so that they can be put to practice. Nevertheless, their implementation has still not taken place in full potential. Hence, it can be said that the country lacks a systematic mechanism to monitor the implementation and progress of gender related policies. Moreover, Kazakhstan has also received criticism from NGOs and some independent organizations for its slow progress in democratizing the elections, lack of a strong civil society and inability to address issues concerning human rights (ADB, 2013).



### Indicators to measure Gender disparity in Kazakhstan

#### 1. Gender Inequality Index (GII)

This indicator is devised by UNDP to measure the loss in a nation's development due to gender inequality. It is based on five parameters namely, maternal mortality rate, adolescent fertility rate, labour force participation, number of seats in parliament and people with at least secondary education (ADB, 2013). The higher the value of the indicator, the higher is the level of discrimination in the economy. As of 2013, the value stood at 0.312 implying a 31% loss of development in Kazakhstan. This value is higher than that of the regional average for Europe and Central Asia standing at 28% (UNDP, 2013).

#### 2. Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI)

This indicator is devised by the World Economic Forum to measure gender-based gaps in the availability of resources, taking into consideration 4 basic categories- economic participation, political presence, healthcare amenities and educational opportunities.

Kazakhstan's score in 2013 was 0.722 showing an improvement since 2006 but at a slow pace (World Economic Forum, 2013).

I would now like to throw some light on the areas where women's rights are compromised.

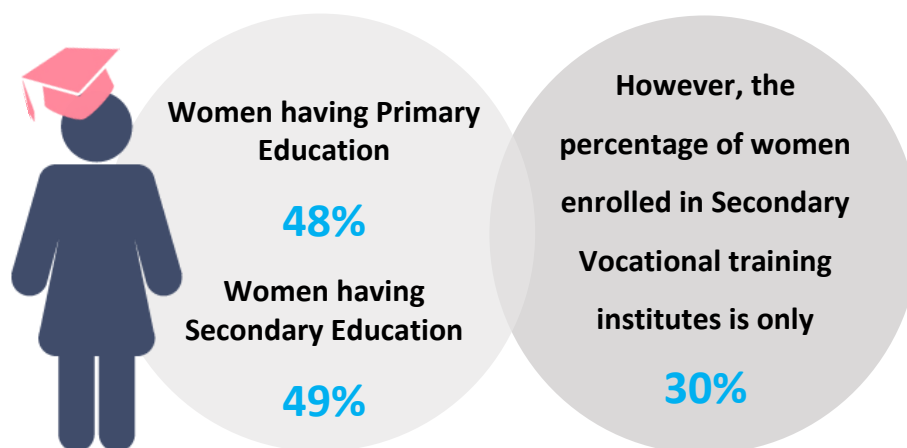


## Education

Despite having a per capita GDP close of that of ECA (Europe and Central Asia) average, Kazakhstan's expenditure on education is lowest amongst all of them. Their per person expenditure on education is approximately equal to 11.7 of their GDP per capita (WBG, 2012), which is quite lower than the top performers like Japan (22.8%), Switzerland (27.1%) and Poland (23.9%).

Also, gender differences in the field of education become more prominent after the primary level. It has been observed that boys are more likely to enrol for technical and vocational training institutes (which offer courses to enter into high growth experiencing sectors), while girls are more likely to enrol themselves into traditional fields of healthcare, social services, teaching etc. which are paid through the state budget and hence offer low salaried jobs and fewer career advancing opportunities.

*Figure 1: Education*



Source: World Development Indicators (World Bank)



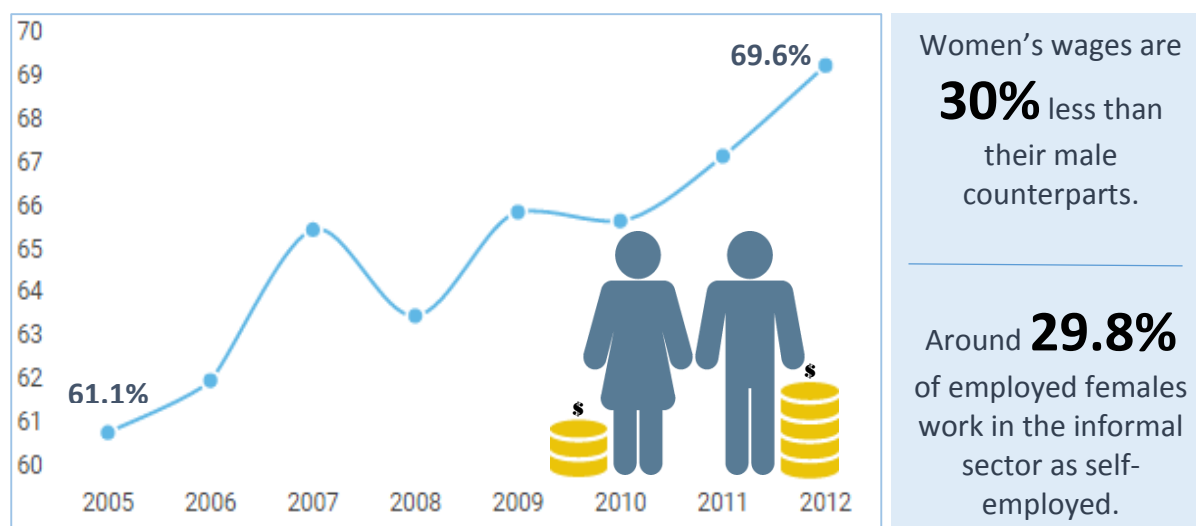
## Employment and Labour Market

Since men generally enrol themselves in large numbers in technical fields, they are able to ensure good salaries in future. While women despite having educational brilliance are not able to grab the top rung of the high level management positions, which in turn restricts their chances for equitable salaries.



Along with sectoral/horizontal segregation, women are often victims of vertical segregation as well. According to the World Bank data of Gender Statistic, only 18.9% of the firms have female top managers (World Bank, 2013). Huge wage differential exists between men and women for the same kind of work. There has only been an 8% decline in wage differential between 2005 and 2012.

*Figure 2: Women's wage in proportion to men's wage (%)*



Sources: Women and Men in Kazakhstan 2006-2010, Astana; Agency of Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan 2011 & World Development Indicators (Gender Statistics).

There are two reasons for this wage gap. One is the explained earnings gap while the other is the unexplained earnings gap. The former can be associated with differences in skill sets and job characteristics. For example, some women choose to work in specific fields which allow greater freedom to take time off for child bearing and raising. Such jobs are often low paid and less challenging.

While on the other hand, women are also paid less because they are women, which precisely explains the unexplained earnings gap. This becomes evident when practices such as hiring without a written contract, asking women about their marital status in job interviews and constructive termination is followed<sup>1</sup>.

As of 2013, some 29.8% of women working in the informal sector are self-employed. These women have very little or no social security. They do not contribute towards their pensions and are deprived of social insurance. They enjoy no employee benefits like paid maternity or sick leaves and are not entitled to any legal protection in case of workplace harassment.

<sup>1</sup> Constructive termination occurs when an employer resorts to making the work conditions extremely difficult such that the employee resigns, rather than firing the employee outright.

## **Women Entrepreneurship and Access to Micro-credit**

Self-employment has gained a lot of momentum during the world economic crisis. It is that category of the informal sector (wholesale and retail trade, shuttle trade<sup>2</sup> etc.) which is particularly attractive to women because it does not require them to possess specialised trainings or have a significant work experience. Moreover, these businesses are not scrutinized by the tax authorities and do not require tax returns to be filed.

More than often, women are necessity driven to indulge in informal self-employment rather than driven by motivation or desire. It's difficult for them to make a transition to the formal sector due to various structural as well as psychological barriers such as,

### **1. Unequal access to micro-credit and physical assets for collateral**

Around 70% of women have reported insufficient finance as a deterrent to the formal sector. Moreover, women also have limited access to land or any other physical property to serve as collateral in turn restricting their access to bank loans.

### **2. Asymmetric Information and lack of technical know-how**

Most women are unaware of the various microfinance programs and government schemes. They have to rely on friends and family members for such information which might be skewed sometimes. Also, the business support services available are not sufficient to cater to the needs of women entrepreneurs who have limited knowledge in how to run a business.

### **3. Psychological barriers**

Many women find themselves as the victims of the patriarchal society. They tend to undervalue their strengths and abilities and form a negative notion about themselves. The process of starting a business and carrying it forward frightens them and restricts them to take the step forward.



## **Political and Public Life**

The political arena is still predominantly dominated by men. Men still hold the most powerful positions of the parliament, despite a commitment by the government to achieve critical minority i.e. 30-40% of decision making roles to be assigned to women, necessary for an effective voice in the political setup.

In order to help the Kazakh government to meet its gender equality agendas following the commitment made by signing the "Covenant on Civil and Political Rights", various international experts, civil servants, business leaders and social workers came together to draft a plan so as to enable the government achieve its targets.

The action plan devised by these participants required:

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<sup>2</sup> Shuttle trade occurs when a person travels across borders in order to purchase consumer goods like textiles, handicrafts, household items for the purpose of resale in the home country.

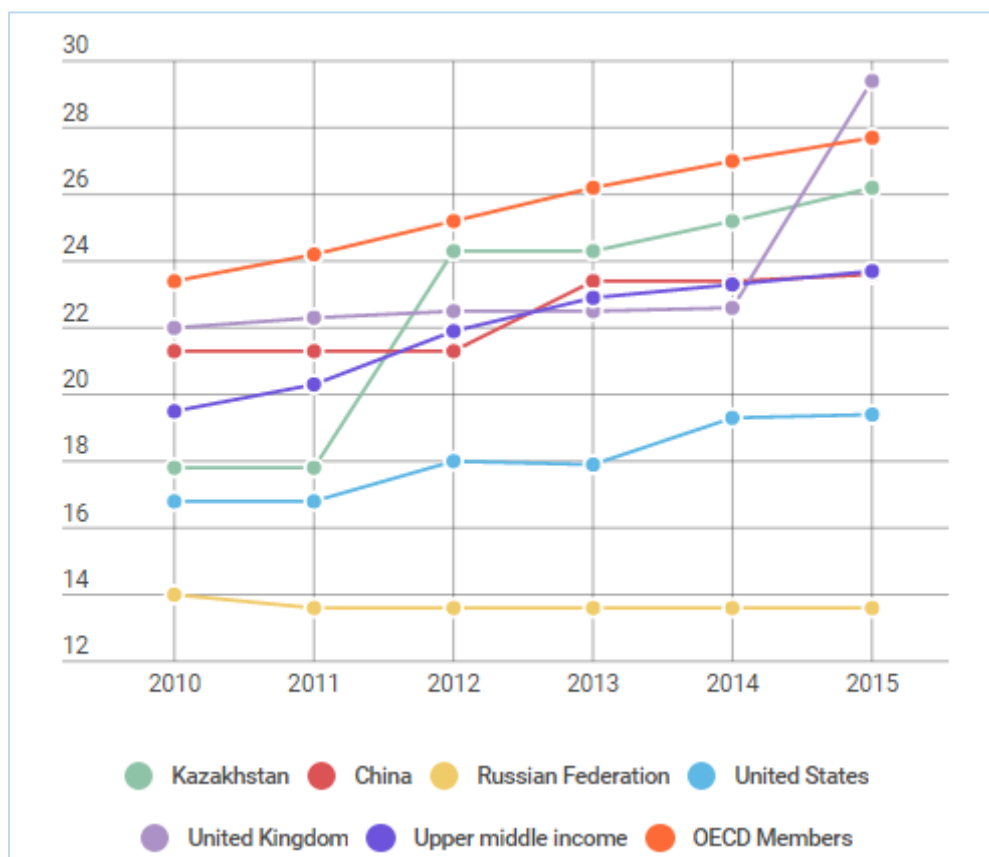
- At least 10% seats to be allocated to women at all levels of government.
- Conducting campaigns to urge women to take up leadership roles.
- Building a network of training schools for women who are interested in learning in depth about the political systems.
- Helping the civil society groups already present in rural areas to encourage women to participate in political discussions (NDI, 2011).

Following the action plan, there has been some improvement in women inclusion in the politics and public life.

Out of the 51.7% female population in Kazakhstan, Proportion of seats held by women in national parliament as of 2015 stands at 26.2% which has increased from 17.8% in 2011. But the proportion of women in ministerial level position stands at 13.3% in 2015 which has decreased from 20% in 2014 (World Bank, 2013).

The increase in women's representation in the decision-making process in Kazakhstan has been quite impressive. The numbers show that the proportion of women holding national parliamentary seats in Kazakhstan is higher than that in China, Russia, Upper-middle-income countries and even United States. It only remains behind United Kingdom and the high-income OECD members.

**Figure 3: Proportion of seats held by Women in National Parliament**



Source: World Bank, Gender Statistics 2015.

## **Barriers for women entering politics**

Despite a good percentage of women acquiring the lower parliamentary positions in Kazakhstan, the trend in the senate, which is the higher chamber of the parliament is not so significant. Only 6.4% of women hold the position of a senate deputy (as of 2013), which represents only 3 women senators in the parliament (Smailov, 2014). Therefore it can be seen that there are significant barriers to women grabbing the top political positions. Again, there are structural barriers as well as psychological barriers. Structural barriers exist because there is no mechanism to ensure 30-40% critical mandate for women representation in decision making since having quotas and reservations in place violate equal rights law.

Psychosocial barriers exist because the societal mind-set still perceives a women as less capable in running governmental/non-governmental offices. Women themselves hesitate in taking a step forward due to their limiting beliefs about themselves and the fear of not being able to devote time and attention to their families.



## **Sexual and Reproductive Health**

The Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan provides every citizen the right to protection of health and free guaranteed medical assistance by law<sup>3</sup>. Numerous healthcare programmes and schemes are in place to ensure easy access to effective and reliable healthcare solutions for all. Some of these programmes include, “Youth friendly Services” established by UNICEF in Kazakhstan, “National Healthy Lifestyle Centre (2004)” and the most recent one, “Salamatty Kazakhstan 2011-2015” being implemented by the Ministry of Health (MOH) majorly focusing on improving access to better maternal and neonatal health services (KMPA & SRI, 2014).

Yet, significant gaps exist in the actual operation of these programmes, specifically when it comes to sexual and reproductive health care. This is due to a general lack of consciousness to have a robust health care mechanism in place. The whole range of areas where government’s attention is required are- safe and reliable methods for family planning, Youth education on sexual and reproductive health, access to safe abortion and sexual & reproductive services information gap.

### **Abortion Laws in the Country**

According to the health code of Kazakhstan, women are entitled to go through an abortion until 12 weeks into the pregnancy; until 22 weeks in some special circumstances and anytime during the pregnancy when the women’s health is at risk. Women under 18 years of age can get an abortion with consent from a parent or a guardian. The Ministry of Health is responsible for outlining the laws relating to abortion. According to those laws, an abortion must be performed by an obstetrician or a gynaecologist and the same must describe the surgical or medical procedures involved (KMPA & SRI, 2014).

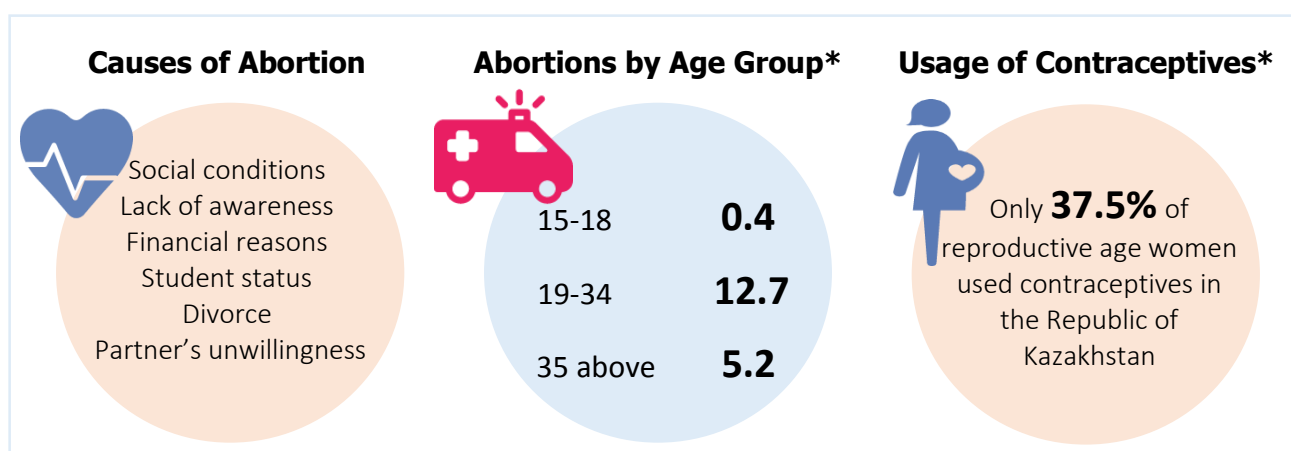
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<sup>3</sup> The Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Article 29, para 1, 2. <http://www.constitution.kz/english/section2/>

## Provisions for easy and safe Abortion

Despite abortion being legally permissible, availability of safe methods at primary healthcare centres are not guaranteed. One method which is considered safe, known as Manual Vacuum Aspiration (MVA) is not registered in the country. Medical procedures are either not available or the doctors do not have the skills to provide them. Therefore, most gynaecologists use surgical methods (curettage) for abortion which come with a very high degree of risk associated. Moreover, since a women can access abortion services only during her first trimester, a lot of them resort to illegal methods such as purchase of unregistered drugs from the local drugstore. These factors violate women's reproductive rights (KMPA & SRI, 2014).

*Figure 4: Sexual and Reproductive Health*



Source: Fertility Regulation in Kazakhstan, HNP Discussion papers; Women and Men in Kazakhstan 2009-2013;  
\* as of 2013

## Family Planning

The State health care program initiated by the Ministry of Health, known as 'Salamatty Kazakhstan' aims to provide a series of ongoing maternal healthcare services conforming to the WHO standards. Along with the services, the program also provides for outpatient drugs at affordable prices for pregnant women and children under the age of 5 years.

However, the list of outpatient drugs available under the above program does not include contraceptives for any age group or category of population. This poses a serious problem to those who cannot afford to buy contraceptives. Moreover, the prices of contraceptives are not regulated by MOH leading to high prices in the open market, thus making contraceptives inaccessible to the vulnerable sections of the society. In 2013, only 37.5% of women in Kazakhstan at reproductive age were using birth control methods. This percentage varies from 7.9% in Mangistauskaya to 77% in Pavlodarskaya (Smailov, 2014).

## Access to sex education and health services

Young adults and adolescents lack comprehensive education on sexuality and reproductive health. There is no school or university curriculum to provide such information to students.

Currently, the main sources of information are social media, youth campaigns, NGOs and parents in some cases. The information is spread in an unsystematic manner and differs from one region to another. Thus, the youth of the country is inaccurately informed and is not prepared to ensure sexual and reproductive well-being.

This leads to greater risk of unwanted pregnancies, Sexually transmitted diseases and unsafe and illegal abortions. This can be seen from the fact that around 10% of young people in Kazakhstan have their first sexual encounter before the age of 16; 22% before age 17 and 33% before age 18 (UNICEF, 2013).



## **Marital rights and the Family Code**

In the year 2011, Kazakhstan introduced a new Code on Marriage and Family. According to the new marriage laws, the minimum permissible age of marriage for both men and women is 18 years. However, in cases where the woman is pregnant or the child has already been born, the minimum statutory age of marriage can be reduced by up to 2 years by the civil registry office after the consent of the marrying couple as well as the parents or guardians of the couple (Law on Marriage and Family, 2015).

As per the new Code, only those marriages that are registered with the state registry office are considered legally valid. Marriages with only religious ceremonies and rituals, without proper registration are not regarded legal (Law on Marriages and Family, Article 2). Due to this, the girls (usually under the age of 18) who are illegally married are not entitled to protect themselves under brides' rights because their marriage is not recognised by the state.

According to the Article 16 of the Marriage and Family code, Marriage may be terminated by dissolution on the application of one or both spouses but it is not possible without the consent of the wife if she is pregnant and during the first year of a child's birth (Law on Marriage and Family, 2015).

Upon getting a divorce, both the parents have equal decision making authority over their children as stated by the Marriage and Family Act (Article 30). In case of disagreement between the parents regarding where the child will live after their divorce, the court takes the decision taking into consideration the child's interest (Article 73).

However, according to a research conducted by UNFPA and USAID, women after marriage are often treated as subordinates to their husbands and their parents-in-law. Such attitude also reflects in decisions regarding the child after a divorce.

## **Failure to pay Alimony to the ex-spouse**

Another issue which needs to be addressed in this context is the failure to pay alimony to the ex-spouse. With a 23.7% increase in the rate of divorce between 2010 and 2013, more number of children are either with one parent or with no parent at all. According to a study conducted by two NGOs named, "Union of Crisis Centres in Kazakhstan" and "Amansaulyk", within a period of one year, there has been a 25% increase in the number of alimony defaulters. Quite commensurate with the increase in the rate of divorce.

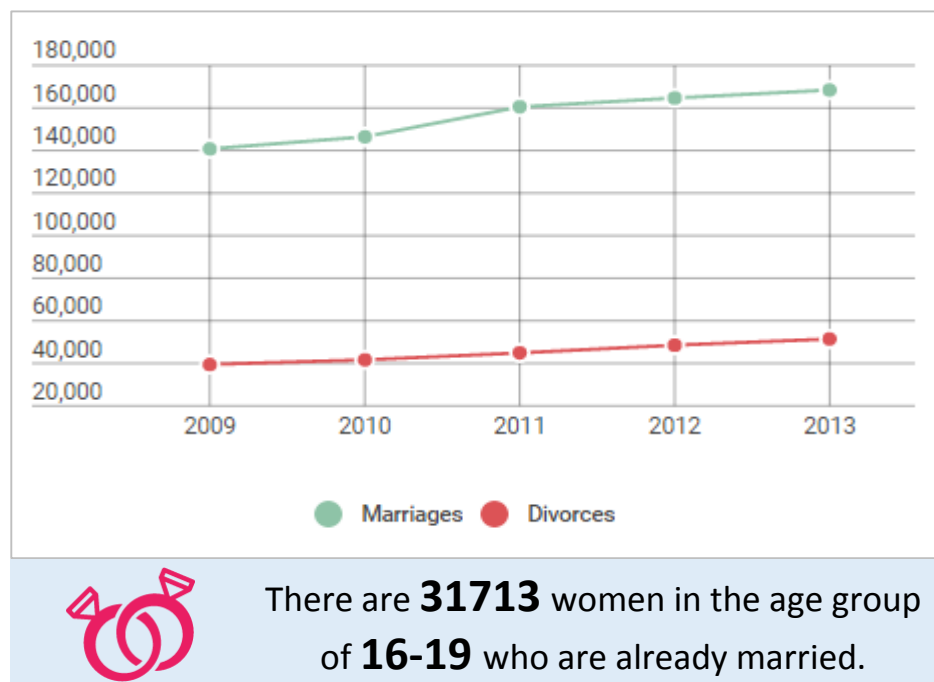
Various reasons that have been found to hold valid for the non-payment of alimony are financial constraints, unemployment and most important of them all, attitude of shirking away from one's responsibilities.

The amount of alimony that a person is liable to pay is decided by the government. In 2012, the government under Nursultan Nazarbayev, decided to amend the legislature and reduce the amount of alimony from 26000 to 4000 tenge per month. The reason for this drastic fall was a change in the method of calculation of alimony. Earlier, the amount was calculated on the basis of the mean income of the region from which the defaulter belongs, but after the amendment, the government decided to use minimum wage as a basis for alimony calculation. This led to a significant decrease in the amount to be paid. Many human rights' activists argued that 4000 tenge was too less to support the growth of a child and might render a lot of children homeless because of the inability of the single parent to provide for the child with such low financial assistance from the other parent.

Following these protests, the government was forced to amend the legislature once again in 2014. The previous method of calculation of alimony was restored and this time the new minimum amount calculated was 27160 tenge. This amount is although higher than the previous amount of 26000 tenge but it does not take into account the 20% devaluation of tenge in the past two years and 20% increase in inflation in the country. Hence, after adjusting for devaluation and inflation, the 2014 amount is actually 37% less than the 2012 amount.

Thus it can be said that the objective of children's well-being has not been met and the government has not been able to address the issue properly.

*Figure 5: Number of registered Marriages and Divorces*



Source: Women and Men in Kazakhstan 2009-2013



## Restriction to Women's Physical Integrity

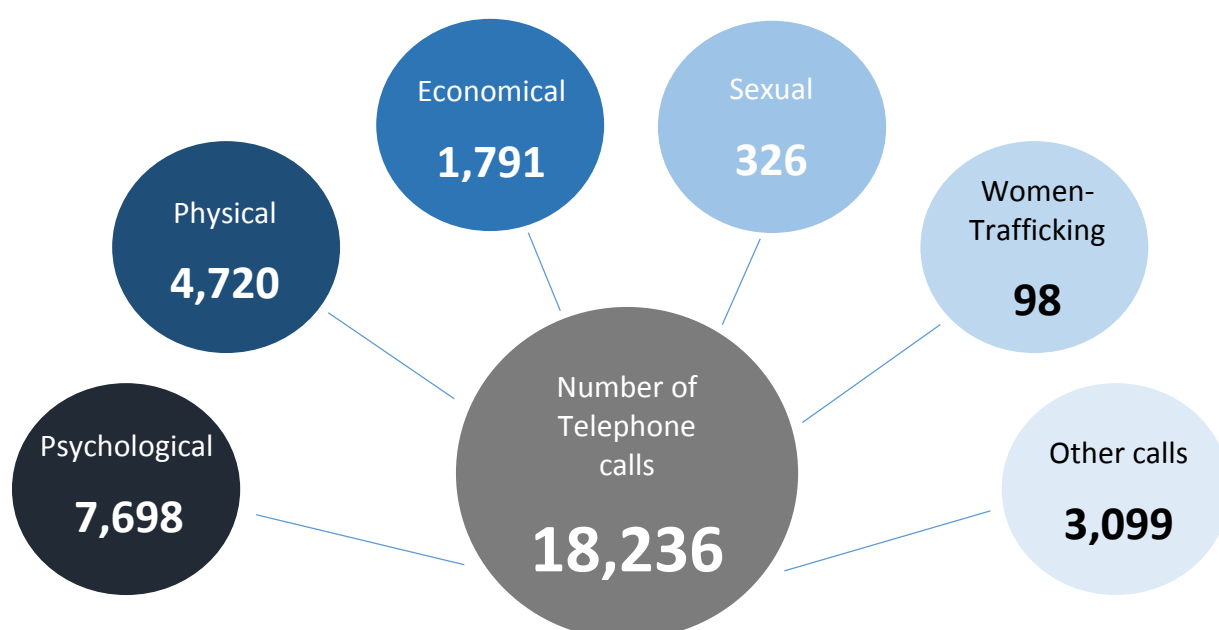
### Domestic Violence

The law of the Republic of Kazakhstan on "Prevention of Domestic Violence" came into existence in 2009. This law for the first time states a comprehensive definition of domestic violence in Kazakhstan which includes physical, sexual, economic and psychological abuse. This law although does not criminalise domestic violence, it allows for administrative detention, which is detention for a short term without a trial (CEDAW, 2012).

According to the provisions under The Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence, the court holds an authority to pass restraining orders against the wrongdoers for a period of three months to one year. In the event of extreme violence, the perpetrators are also subject to imprisonment ranging from three years to ten years.

Despite the above mentioned provisions under the law, it can be seen that this law is not effectively implemented. According to the CEDAW report (Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women), most of the domestic violence cases are withdrawn due to lack of support women have to file a case in the court and follow the judicial proceedings. Also, in few cases, these women victims are manipulated by their male counterparts or their parents-in-law and coerced to withdraw the case. According to the cluster survey 2010-2011, out of 10,581 women interviewed, only 16% admitted to have experienced either physical or sexual violence. Also, there are only 30 crisis centres in the Republic of Kazakhstan to help women (Smailov, 2014).

**Figure 6: Number of Calls received by the Crisis Centre in relation to violence against women in 2013**



Source: Committee on Statistics of the Ministry of national economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan (2014)



## **Sexual Harassment**

In Kazakhstan, sexual harassment is not specifically recognised as an offence by the law. But cases of sexual harassment have been observed to take place quite frequently in schools and workplaces. As a result, several NGOs and the activists of the feminist league are constantly trying to generate public awareness to these occurrences through media. In a small scale survey conducted by the Feminist League, it was found that 70% of the 750 people surveyed had experienced some kind of sexual harassment in their lives (Glushkova & Svetlana, 2013).

The NGO representatives and women parliamentarians are emphasising on the need to sensitize towards the seriousness and the frequency of sexual harassment inflicted on various women in the country through parliament hearings, public confessions and awareness through social media.

## **Bride Kidnapping**

As mentioned earlier in this paper, women have lost access to benefits like guaranteed education, employment, affordable healthcare etc. in the post-soviet era. The soviet era which was marked by Marxist ideals which propagated greater gender equality are replaced in the post-soviet era with nationalist ideals which focus on traditional differences between men and women.

Along with the soviet transition, non-consensual bride kidnapping has become more rampant, especially in the southern regions of Kazakhstan. Although consensual bride kidnapping is considered as a tradition among Kazakhs, non-consensual is less supported by them as it is against the will of the women being kidnapped. Non-consensual bride kidnapping takes place when the prospective groom with the help of his friends, physically kidnaps the girl and brings her to his parents' house where she is expected to and much rather forced to agree to get married with the kidnapper (groom). At this point of time the girl has limited scope to escape as she is pressurized by both, her to-be parents-in-law and her own parents to give her consent towards marriage in order to avoid any kind of social stigma they might have to face in case the girl disagrees.

Such a practice of non-consensual bride kidnapping takes away the rights that women hold to pursue their career aspirations. Women are deprived of fulfilling their professional goals and becoming financially and mentally independent. This restricts the women in rising up and fighting for her rights eventually leading to subordination.

Bride kidnapping is the trend which can be noted to have been a result of the coexistence of soviet laws that prohibit forced marriage and Kazakh traditions that discourage women to publically marry the partner of their own liking. Although bride kidnapping is a criminal offence, prosecutions are seldom brought in such cases and even the police is mostly reluctant to intervene considering a matter to be resolved personally between the two families.

## **Women Trafficking**

Kazakh women and girls are mostly subject to trafficking in parts of Europe, United States and UAE. The traffickers entice young women and girls by giving them hopes of employment in large cities as waitresses, nannies and models. There is also a huge influx of women and girls who are trafficked from small villages in Kazakhstan to large economically well-off cities like Almaty, Astana, Aktau and Atyrau to serve as sex workers or labourers. Some of the women and girls are subject to forced labour on domestic construction sites and agricultural fields, while some other are coerced into pornography and criminal behaviours (U.S. Dept of State, July 2015).

The Government has been unable to fully comply with the minimum standards for elimination of trafficking. There has been a lack in the government's ability to identify and investigate victims. Although the government of Kazakhstan increased its budgetary expenditure on the assistance given to victims and continued to maintain strong relations with international organizations and NGOs to protect the interests of these victims and spread awareness, they were not very successful in reducing the number of women and girls trafficked domestically as well as internationally (U.S. Dept of State, July 2015).



## **National Policies and Institutions to Promote Women Rights in Kazakhstan**

### **1. The Equal Rights Law, 2009**

The Equal Rights Law was enacted in 2009, it lays down the basic concepts of gender discrimination encompassing its definitions in almost all spheres, labour market, education, healthcare, social status and political empowerment. Although the law requires every state to adopt gender policies, in case of non-compliance, there is no legal action taken against sex discrimination. Thus, rendering the law ineffective.

### **2. The Gender Equality Strategy, 2005**

The Gender Equality Strategy was approved by the president in 2005, after which action plans were adopted for its implementation. This strategy was formulated with the objective of transforming the present scenario of a patriarchal society to a society where women enjoy equal rights and benefits and are able to live up to their personal and human potential. This strategy even defines independent gender related goals and objectives in the public and political arena, higher education, reproductive health, gender-based violence and public awareness to sensitize people towards equal opportunities for all. Yet monitoring of these goals and objectives do not signify their due implementation. It has been noted that this strategy is purely formal in nature and the government has not been very active in achieving its objectives (OSCE, 2010).

### **3. National Human Rights Policy**

The action plan for The National Human Rights Policy (2009-2012) touches upon the issues of gender discrimination in the labour market, pension insecurity, freedom of expression and human trafficking. The plan is again only a declarative document with no set goals or targets to be achieved (ADB, 2013).

#### **4. The National Commission for Women's Affairs and Family (1998)**

This commission was restructured in 2008 and was renamed as the National Commission for Women's Affairs, Family and Demographic Policy. It serves as the primary institution in Kazakhstan for realization of its gender equality strategy. The chairperson of the commission is responsible to report to the president directly and ensure the implementation of the gender equality strategy.

#### **5. Commissioner for Human Rights and Human Rights Commission under the President.**

The commissioner for Human rights has the responsibility to provide statistics to the parliament about the types of complaints by women and the state of women rights in the country over the year. In 2008, another commission on family policy and gender equality was established which was responsible for taking into consideration the gender inequality issues when formulating and approving national and regional budgets.

### **Conclusion**

The main institution responsible for the implementation of the gender equality policies in Kazakhstan is the National Commission for Women's Affairs and Family. This commission provides a framework within which the NGOs and the human rights activists can work together with the government and try to integrate the national and economic objectives of Kazakhstan with its gender equality goals to fast forwards the process of achieving a more equal society for the realization of the human potential of every individual.

The government to Kazakhstan will also have to make the planning process at the national as well as the sub-national level more inclusive in nature, ensuring greater women participation in decision making roles and giving due importance of the interests of women in the society.

Also, increased participation of women in industries and services sector of the country would not only give them a sense of personal fulfilment but also boost the country's national product. In order to accomplish this objective, the gender digital divide in the country will have to be reduced by giving access to technology to rural women, setting up vocational institutions for women to gain technical skills and training, increase awareness about the growing power of technology and internet among women.

To encourage more number of female entrepreneurs, the government of Kazakhstan will need to ensure that the societal restrictions on the mobility of women are lessened over time and that women are able to enjoy the same kind of freedom that is available to their male counterparts. In essence, for women to be successful entrepreneurs, they will have to be able to network with other people in social settings. However, if women's mobility is restricted due to family responsibilities and societal conventions, their prospects for career advancement would be severely curtailed.

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