

Discourse on Social Problems in Society and Gender Equality Stereotypes in the Media

Shirin Kostiuka^a, Aina Duishekeeva^a, Kubanychbek Taabaldiev^b, Gulanda Aldashova^a, Elnura Esenkelova^a

Abstract

This study aims to comprehensively examine the issue of gender equality in Kyrgyzstan. To achieve this goal, relevant statistical data was analysed and a monitoring of the country's most popular mass media outlets was conducted. As a result of the study, a positive dynamic in the gender balance was revealed, with the gap between the number of men and women decreasing by 3.5% over 50 years. The effectiveness of introducing gender quotas for political parties running for the Jogorku Kenesh and local keneshes into the Kyrgyz political system was also investigated. A comparison was made between the representation of women in legislative bodies of the Republic before and after the adoption of the relevant Law. A separate analysis was conducted of the ratio of men and women holding public office positions, as well as their salary levels. The study of the results from the nationwide testing revealed a contradiction where girls, who achieved a higher average score, tended to abandon their careers and become homemakers after completing their studies. Additionally, a monitoring of television channels such as the National Broadcasting Corporation of the Kyrgyz Republic (KTRK), Ala-Too 24, and the most popular social media platforms revealed a promotion of negative gender stereotypes. The research identified and demonstrated, through examples, the existing gender issues within Kyrgyz society, and also highlighted the correlation between an increase in the number of female professionals and the strengthening of the country's economy.

Keywords: women's rights, media, discourse on social issues, gender quotas for elected positions, right to a career, patriarchal traditions.

^a Institute of Journalism and Communication, Jusup Balasagyn Kyrgyz National University, Kyrgyz Republic

^b Faculty of Sciences, Ala-Too International University, Kyrgyz Republic

Corresponding author:
Aina Duishekeeva
E-mail: ain.duishe@gmail.com

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1. Introduction

While observing the implementation of economic reforms in Kyrgyzstan, the emergence of a new political elite, and following the civilisational vector chosen by the people of the Republic, it is essential to remain the issue of gender inequality. In Kyrgyzstan, a country that has long been entrenched in traditional customs, instances of women's rights violations still occur. It is the responsibility of contemporary mass media to highlight such violations and bring the discourse on gender inequality into the public arena.

The existence of this issue has been repeatedly highlighted by both Kyrgyz and international scholars. For instance, Akisheva (2023) argued that Kyrgyzstan remains a mentally patriarchal society. Having dedicated her study to researching the situation of women's rights and their legal regulation, the author concludes that neither the constitutional principle of gender equality nor the 30% gender quota has been able to fundamentally change the situation. Childress et al. (2024) found the roots of women's diminished status in the cultural codes of the Kyrgyz people, particularly in their traditions and rituals. A centuries-old social structure, in which women are considered "property" first of their fathers and then their husbands, coupled with the stigmatisation of divorce, has become so deeply ingrained in the cultural fabric that significant collective efforts from all mass media outlets are required to address it (Le, 2024; Rosa Farias et al., 2025). Moreover, the authors noted that within the framework of this entrenched traditional paradigm, families are plagued by an even more negative phenomenon – domestic violence.

The significance of public social discourses and their impact on changes in citizens' behaviour was highlighted by Kim (2022). By examining prevalent societal narratives about family, society, and the state, as well as stereotypes about the roles of men and women within these contexts, the scholar conducted over 60 in-depth interviews with representatives of relevant government agencies. The results demonstrated that dominant conventions of masculinity, femininity, and national identity exert a significant influence on social welfare services. Consequently, changes in the behaviour of social service workers are closely tied to public sentiment and media agendas. According to Commercio (2021), the development of a network of specialised non-governmental organisations could also have a positive impact on women's activism in the Kyrgyz Republic.

Geib (2023) highlighted a significant aspect of modern media representations of gender roles: the visual representation in music videos. By analysing 22 Kyrgyz-language music videos through the lens of cultural representation theory, the author found that, in the vast majority of cases, women are depicted solely in familial roles. Thus, contemporary entertainment

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media and social networks in Kyrgyzstan promote the stereotype that for the “ideal woman”, as embodied by the leading female characters in music videos, the highest values are marriage, motherhood, and domesticity. At the same time, some musical works stigmatise the tradition of bride abduction, which is generally a positive message.

Abdoubayetova (2022) also noted a rise in illiberal discourses in Kyrgyzstan in the early 2020s, particularly the activism of social groups promoting conservative values among the Kyrgyz-speaking population. The author identified three main characteristics of their patriarchal rhetoric: the use of anti-western sentiments and calls; appeals to religious doctrines combined with Kyrgyz ethnic identity; and actively using digital and social media. Interestingly, neither the audience of these retrograde traditionalists nor the activists themselves seem to notice the dissonance between the call to reject Western values and the use of Western technological innovations to do so.

An important aspect of gender equality is societal attitudes towards transgender individuals (Khamzina et al., 2021; Nechyporenko et al., 2019). Kurmanov and Kurmanov (2023) found in their research that Kyrgyz digital media is host to a centralised propaganda campaign aimed at developing and popularising narratives portraying the transgender community as a marker of moral decline. Furthermore, the fight for transgender civil rights is labelled as a sign of some kind of “Western” external influence aimed at eroding Kyrgyz identity. In reality, this so-called “defence of family values” is merely a cover for reactionary forces that have no interest in the civilizational development of the Kyrgyz Republic. The task of modern media is to convey these messages to civil society.

Beyond the familiar challenges of intergender relations, several uniquely Kyrgyz national characteristics also require close public attention. Commercio (2022) wrote about the psychology of polygamous men who hide their economic and domestic failures behind the facade of multiple marriages; Sultanalieva (2023) studied feminist narratives in contemporary Kyrgyzstan and the influence of the country’s colonial past on modern gender stereotypes, while Kenzhebaeva and Kim (2022) conducted an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon of “nebere aluu”. As the authors note in their research based on primary data, the practice of “nebere aluu” involves the forcible adoption of a child by the father’s parents and is primarily a tool of punishment for women who refuse to submit to outdated patriarchal norms.

Therefore, the issue of gender inequality is quite pressing in Kyrgyzstan and manifests itself in numerous ways and forms. This study aims to comprehensively investigate gender issues in Kyrgyz society, including through an examination of existing media stereotypes.

2. Theoretical Framework and Conceptual Clarification

The study's theoretical framework, which focusses on Kyrgyzstan particularly, is based on a variety of viewpoints that examine the relationship between gender, media, and social norms. The study uses feminist theory, discourse theory, and social constructivism to investigate how gender stereotypes are reinforced in the media and how they affect public opinion and gender norms. This approach makes it possible to examine how gender dynamics are shaped by patriarchal traditions in both the public and private domains, as well as how media portrayals either support or contradict these established roles. The study also incorporates post-colonial and cultural representation theories, which provide insights into how historical and cultural contexts, particularly those linked to the nomadic lifestyle and Islamic traditions, contribute to the continued marginalisation of women. Using these frameworks, the study examines how media narratives affect gender equality, paying special attention to how social media and television influence public opinion and perpetuate gender stereotypes.

It is crucial to define and explain the important terminology used during the analysis to increase the methodological rigour of this study and provide conceptual clarity. The following ideas are critically analysed using accepted theoretical viewpoints in order to provide a strong theoretical foundation.

Stereotypes refer to widely held yet generalised, simplistic ideas about specific groups of people. These mental models influence how people and groups view other people, frequently in an unbalanced or skewed way. According to this study, stereotypes are socially manufactured depictions that uphold particular standards and expectations, especially those pertaining to gender. Social constructivism, which holds that information, including societal norms and roles, is formed via social interactions and is always growing, is used to examine the idea of stereotypes.

These stereotypes are created and perpetuated in large part by media discourse. It describes how media, such as news, commercials, and entertainment, disseminate and reinforce beliefs. This study explores how language and media representations influence public perceptions of gender roles and societal expectations, drawing on discourse theory, especially the writings of Michel Foucault. According to discourse theory, language serves as a means of enforcing social hierarchies and exercising power in addition to being a tool for communication (Nwadinihu, 2025; Sultanbayeva, 2013). In terms of discourse, the media is seen as a platform for both the articulation of prevailing views and opposition to them.

The term “patriarchy”, which is frequently used in gender studies, refers to a social structure where men dominate in the political, moral, and economic

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domains and wield the majority of power and authority. Feminist ideas, particularly those of bell hooks and Judith Butler, are used to examine how media discourse reinforces and maintains patriarchal institutions (Orsini, 2024). This research investigates the normalisation of patriarchal values in media portrayals and their role in perpetuating gender inequality.

The unequal treatment or perception of people depending on their gender is known as gender inequality. It is regarded as a result of patriarchal power relations and as intricately linked to concerns of race, class, and colonial history, drawing on feminist and post-colonial perspectives. The study places gender inequality in the larger framework of intersectionality, which recognises how many social categories (like gender, race, and class) interconnect to shape people's experiences of privilege and oppression.

3. Materials and Methods

In conducting this research, various social problems related to gender, typical of Kyrgyz society, were examined, as well as the factors and trends shaping stereotypes about gender equality. A review of several media sources was also conducted. The selection of media outlets was based on their relevance to the topic of gender representation, influence, and national and worldwide reach. The emphasis on gender-related issues, such as stereotypes, gender roles, and patriarchal depictions in news stories, commercials, and entertainment media, was one of the criteria used to choose particular content. To ensure a varied representation of media kinds and formats, the content was selected from a variety of platforms, such as social media outlets, online news sites, and television broadcasts. To make sure the analysis represents current discussions about gender disparity, the content was also filtered by publication date, with an emphasis on the recent five years. The review involved methodically monitoring media content over a predetermined time frame, with an emphasis on news stories, commercials, and entertainment shows that dealt with gender-related issues. This method made it possible for the study to gather a wide variety of media representations, guaranteeing that the material examined was up to date and pertinent to the study's goals.

To determine the dynamics of demographic indicators and the sex ratio, an analysis of the Population and housing census of the Kyrgyz Republic (National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2024a) was carried out, and a comparison was made between the number of permanent residents by gender and similar indicators from previous censuses in 1970, 1979, 1989, 1999, and 2009. The ratio of men to women in urban and rural populations was calculated separately for each year.

To study public opinion on women's rights and their potential in the Kyrgyz Republic, an analysis of survey data from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) was conducted. In particular, respondents' opinions on the following issues were analysed: the most important spheres of society for women to realise their roles, the willingness of politicians to listen to women's ideas and consider their needs, and an assessment of the effectiveness of gender quotas in the Jogorku Kenesh and local kenesh to ensure equal representation of women and men in legislative and executive bodies. Survey data was analysed using statistical comparison to compare audience perceptions of gender equality prior to and following exposure to particular media material. The study's findings were given a quantitative foundation thanks to this method, which made it possible to identify notable variations and patterns in the perceptions of gender issues among various demographic groups. Simultaneously, factual data provided by the National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic (2022b) on the dynamics of gender balance in the Kyrgyz Parliament and the sex ratio among civil servants between 2013 and 2022 were analysed. As an additional indicator of gender inequality in Kyrgyzstan, data from the National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic (2024b) on the ratio of average wages for the two sexes in the Republic from 2004 to 2023 were also presented. In addition to the materials already mentioned, the data from the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic (2010), Law of the Kyrgyz Republic No. 938-XII "On Mass Media" (1992), Law of the Kyrgyz Republic No. 117 "On Amendments to the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic "On Elections of Deputies of Local Councils" (2019) were used in this research.

To more objectively assess the influence of the media on public opinion, the primary sources of information for Kyrgyz citizens were also investigated, with television, social media, and specialised websites emerging as the leaders. Within each of these media groups, the most influential outlets were identified, examples of how they addressed gender issues and contradictions were studied, and the basic stereotypes characteristic of these media were described. Furthermore, by extrapolating from the collected statistical data, forecasts were made regarding the future development of media in terms of challenging gender stereotypes and patriarchal beliefs. Recommendations were also formulated on how to address gender issues in the information space of the Kyrgyz Republic.

A mixed-approaches approach was utilised to incorporate qualitative and quantitative findings. The findings were supported by statistical data from quantitative methodologies, while themes and patterns in media representations of gender were identified through qualitative content analysis. To investigate how patriarchal narratives and gender stereotypes were depicted, media information was coded and categorised as part of the qualitative study.

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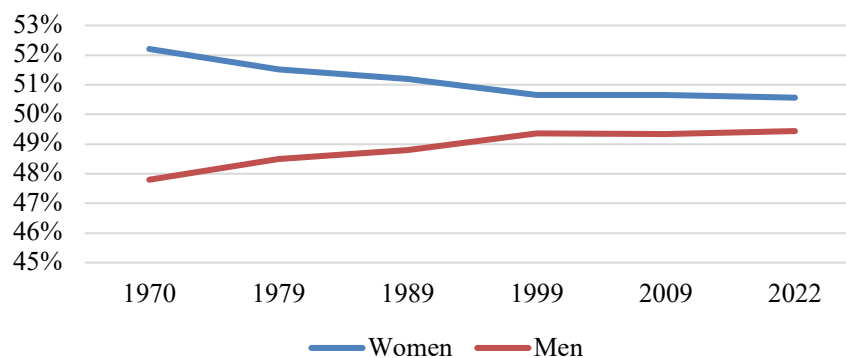
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Quantitative analysis, which included polls gauging audience views of gender equality in connection to the media content, was used to supplement this. The study was able to provide a thorough knowledge of the impact of media discourse on social gender norms by triangulating two data sets.

4. Results

The traditions of the Kyrgyz people, particularly the characteristics of their nomadic lifestyle, originally presupposed distinct roles for men and women. Additionally, the Kyrgyz adoption of Islam and its subsequent popularisation did not contribute to the development of gender equality. At the same time, in the modern civilised world, patriarchal customs typically significantly hinder a country's economic development. Consequently, the issue of gender equality needs to be more actively brought into the public sphere, thus breaking down established stereotypes. According to the National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic (2024a), by 2022 the gender ratio in the country had almost reached parity, with women accounting for 50.6% and men for 49.4%, respectively. However, when examining this statistic over time, a more pronounced imbalance was observed 50 years ago, reaching 4.5% (Figure 1).

Figure 1. The gender ratio in the Kyrgyz Republic by year



Source: compiled by the authors based on the National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic (2024a).

The observed trend confirms that, currently, gender-related social problems in Kyrgyzstan are primarily psychological in nature and lack factual basis. The tendency toward an ideal gender ratio of “50% to 50%” is further evidence of de facto gender equality in all spheres of social, domestic, and

political life. The ratio of men to women in urban and rural populations also deserves special attention (Table 1). Historically, the transition from a traditional to an industrial phase of development has typically been accompanied by increased activity in the women’s movement for equal rights.

Table 1. Population ratio, men per 1,000 women

Year	Kyrgyzstan as a whole	Urban population	Rural population
1970	916	886	934
1979	941	920	955
1989	953	901	986
1999	975	915	1 008
2009	974	895	1 017
2022	978	907	1 018

Source: compiled by the authors based on the National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic (2024a).

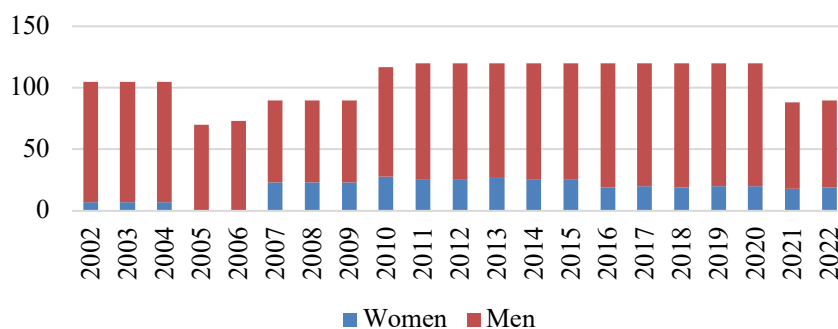
It can be observed that in rural areas, the number of men per 1,000 women is significantly higher than in urban areas, with the lowest figure being recorded in the capital, Bishkek. This indicates a gender imbalance between urban and rural communities, leading to the marginalisation of women in rural areas where patriarchal traditions remain stronger. A targeted approach to address this issue could involve highlighting the problem in media outlets that are popular among rural audiences, such as radio broadcasts or evening entertainment shows on television. The state plays a crucial role in challenging traditional gender stereotypes by introducing various initiatives. A prime example is the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic No. 117 “On Amendments to the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic “On Elections of Deputies of Local Councils” (2019). This legislation, which aims to increase women’s representation in higher legislative bodies, was met with great expectations. Notably, the law mandated that each political party elected to parliament must allocate at least one-third of its seats to women, young people, and people with disabilities. However, despite this seemingly democratic step, the implemented quota system has revealed several critical vulnerabilities in practice. On the one hand, singling out women as a separate group requiring support and protection from the authorities is, in itself, a manifestation of disrespect towards them and a doubt in their own abilities. On the other hand, according to parliamentarians themselves (Erkebaeva, 2023), the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic No. 117 is not being effectively implemented in many regions of Kyrgyzstan. Women’s voices are not being heard, the rights of female deputies in local keneshes are being ignored, and they are being removed from office. Furthermore, even according to official data from the National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic (2022b), between 2013

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and 2022, the number of women in the Jogorku Kenesh decreased from 27 to 19 (Figure 2).

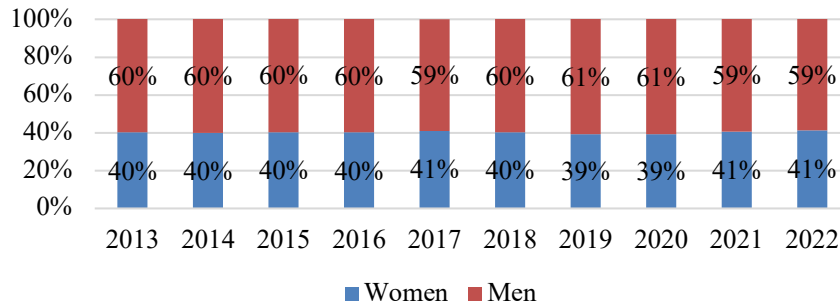
Figure 2. Number of women in Jogorku Kenesh by year



Source: compiled by the authors based on the National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic (2022b).

This means that the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic No. 117 (2019) has not only failed to have the desired positive impact on the gender imbalance in Parliament but has even worsened the situation. Technically, this is because, in practice, the reform only affected half of the parliamentarians elected through party lists, while the other half, elected to the Jogorku Kenesh from c, are not subject to any quotas. In reality, from a media perspective, the state initiative aimed at enhancing gender equality has failed. This assessment is supported by the findings of the National Review of Kyrgyzstan (2024). When asked about the effectiveness of gender quotas in Parliament and local councils in ensuring more equal representation of women and men, only 23% of respondents stated that this innovation is very effective, while 43% considered it to be somewhat effective. Furthermore, 21% of those surveyed directly stated that the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic No. 117 is somewhat or completely ineffective. Significantly, only 19% of the most politically active segment of the population (aged 18-35) consider the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic No. 117 to be very effective. However, the gender ratio of public servants across the country remained virtually unchanged over the same study period from 2013 to 2022, maintaining a nearly stable proportion of 60% men to 40% women. A more detailed breakdown by year is provided in Figure 3.

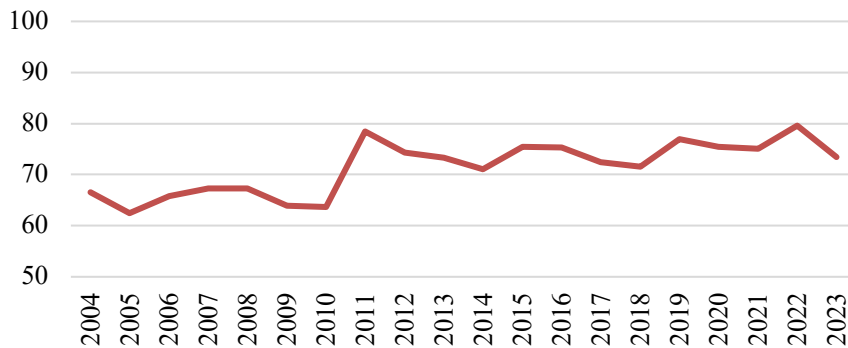
Figure 3. The ratio of the number of civil servants of the Kyrgyz Republic



Source: compiled by the authors based on the National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic (2022b).

When discussing women’s employment in government institutions, it is important to focus on indicators such as salary and its dependence on the employee’s gender (Figure 4).

Figure 4. The ratio of women’s wages to men’s wages



Source: compiled by the authors based on the National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic (2024b).

As can be seen, over the two decades covered by the statistics, from 2004 to 2023, the initially skewed salary gap favouring men has gradually and quite unevenly shifted towards more equal working conditions. While in 2004, women, on average, earned less than a third of what men earned for equivalent work, by 2022, women had closed the gap to nearly 80%. However, the significant 5% pullback in 2023 is cause for concern. Continued monitoring of this indicator is necessary to determine the reasons behind this decline. It remains to be seen whether this is simply a fluctuation within the non-linear

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trend or if it reflects the impact of some unaccounted-for systemic factors. While the statistical data presented provides a factual overview of women's rights in the Kyrgyz Republic, the mass media often perpetuate gender stereotypes in their reporting. Data journalism offers an alternative approach, focusing exclusively on creating journalistic content based on data analysis. Data journalists are at the forefront of introducing and promoting gender equality in Kyrgyzstan through innovative methods. For instance, the United Nations (2023) has produced a series of reports presenting an objective view of women's rights in Kyrgyzstan. These reports have covered pressing issues such as violence against women and girls, women's participation in politics, access to education, and reproductive health.

Significantly, in this context, multimedia is not being used for entertainment or conventional imagery, but rather as a tool for advocating gender rights. Based on verified and substantiated data, Kyrgyz data journalists have highlighted the importance of women's full participation in decision-making at all levels of government; the issue of gender segregation in education; the barriers Kyrgyz women face in their professional lives; and they have outlined the risks that can limit the opportunities and prospects of women and girls. A significant barrier to achieving universal equality and addressing key social issues in the Republic is the manifestation of religious radicalism. Despite Kyrgyzstan's constitutional position as a secular state, traditional Islamic norms continue to restrict the opportunities of women and girls, prohibiting social development that does not conform to patriarchal standards. Rooted in centuries-old gender roles, women are often viewed solely as childbearers and caregivers (Oklander et al., 2025; Mukhamadiyeva et al., 2017). Even numerous state-initiated programs have been unable to eradicate these harmful norms and attitudes. A potential solution lies in promoting the image of the modern, independent woman and the benefits that social and economic autonomy can bring.

The urgent need for a shift away from existing stereotypes is further evidenced by the findings of the National Review of Kyrgyzstan (2024). When asked about the areas of society most important for women to fulfil their roles, Kyrgyz citizens primarily identified education (58%), household and family (53%), and healthcare (52%). This indicates that a significant portion of Kyrgyz civil society still adheres to outdated stereotypes, confining women to the roles of homemakers or, at best, teachers or doctors. In contrast, professional fields such as business, politics, or diplomacy received only 25%, 13%, and 12% of respondents' votes, respectively. A notable gender gap is evident in the responses to these questions: while men only saw business careers for women in 19% of cases, women themselves identified this field as suitable for them in 30% of responses. The gender gap was even larger regarding a woman's career

as a diplomat, with 8% of men and 15% of women deeming it appropriate. Regarding the unwillingness of politicians or political parties to listen to women's opinions and work towards improving their lives, nearly half of the respondents to the National Review of Kyrgyzstan (2024) partially agree with this negative assessment of the Kyrgyz political establishment, while 18% fully agree. This once again demonstrates the existence of a communication gap between the government and society on issues of equality and underscores the need for a robust feedback mechanism between the two.

The situation regarding the rights of girls and women to education in Kyrgyzstan is well illustrated by the statistics from the Center for Educational Assessment and Teaching Methods (2022). Analysis of the results shows that girls consistently achieve higher average scores in a range of key subjects. Furthermore, the average score for the main test was 123.3 for girls compared to 115.4 for boys. However, despite these initially more favourable starting conditions, women's positions deteriorate significantly in adulthood, as has been repeatedly demonstrated by statistical data. The root cause of this injustice lies in persistent gender stereotypes and traditionalist views held by the majority. These factors prevent talented girls from excelling in STEM subjects, scientific research, and innovation. For example, in 2022, only 23% of female applicants chose technical sciences as their future career, compared to nearly 40% of male applicants. This imbalance, in addition to being another example of gender inequality, also hinders the economic development of Kyrgyzstan by depriving the state of highly qualified specialists solely based on their gender. Given the critical importance of diverse perspectives and experiences for a country's innovative development, and the ability to view problems from new angles, the state should make additional efforts to attract women into exact sciences fields (Vyhovska et al., 2024; Lupenko et al., 2022). However, as indicated by the mixed experience with quota reservations in elected bodies in Kyrgyz Republic (National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2022a), simple directive measures and direct quotas may not have the desired effect.

A comprehensive communication strategy focused on promoting gender equality must involve selecting the right tools and considering the characteristics of the target audience. According to data from the National Review of Kyrgyzstan (2024), 68% of Kyrgyz citizens prefer to receive news from social media, 62% from television, and 32% from the internet (excluding social media). As expected, there is a notable age-related difference: while social media is important for 78% of the youth, television remains the key source for the older generation, with 81%. Beyond the overall ranking of media channels, there are also specific priorities within each of the mentioned communication channels. For web resources, the priority is the video hosting platform YouTube (20%); for television, the leading channels are the National

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Broadcasting Corporation of the Kyrgyz Republic (KTRK) (23%) and Ala-Too 24 (12%); and for social media, the primary app is Instagram (52%). To determine the further communication strategy within these channels, it is necessary to identify the existing gender equality stereotypes in the aforementioned media.

KTRK, one of Kyrgyzstan's most popular television channels, has long been entrenched in gender stereotypes and has not made noticeable efforts to change this. For instance, during the 2015 parliamentary election campaign, the channel devoted 95% of its news program time to male candidates, according to the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (2016). Although KTRK showed a positive trend in the following elections by facilitating debates between female candidates (Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 2020), there have been no significant changes in maintaining gender balance on the channel. In March 2022, KTRK, as usual, dedicated several broadcasts to International Women's Day, but even in these, as journalist E. Nechaeva noted (Black Box, White Noise, 2022), each featured woman was presented primarily as a homemaker and only secondarily as a specialist – a doctor, a trolleybus driver, a postal worker. Such an approach by the central television channel not only fails to break down negative stereotypes but, on the contrary, reinforces them. The second most popular television channel in the country, Ala-Too 24, demonstrates a more balanced and nuanced approach to issues of women's rights. For example, in the program "It Is Not Eternity" (Ala-Too 24, 2021), sensitive gender issues requiring constitutional solutions were directly addressed. Moreover, Ala-Too 24's YouTube channel has over 700,000 subscribers, meaning that the media outlet's output reaches a wider audience beyond traditional television viewers.

As for Instagram, due to the large number of content creators, it is difficult to identify the main trends in the formation or destruction of gender stereotypes in the Kyrgyz segment. Nevertheless, while monitoring the network, video materials have been repeatedly found that aim to dispel established stereotypes – for example, demonstrating how men work in a sewing workshop and girls participate in horse racing. In practice, however, such facts, presented as unique events, on the contrary, further strengthen the existing societal misconceptions about the existence of exclusively male or exclusively female professions, activities, or hobbies. Thus, for a full and, importantly, effective solution to social problems in Kyrgyz society, it is necessary to develop a comprehensive communication strategy that takes into account existing realities and the level of development of the mass media, including electronic media. At the "Media in Kyrgyzstan: Steps to the Future" forum on March 23, 2022, amendments were made to the Code of Ethics of Journalists of the Kyrgyz Republic (2007) concerning media coverage of gender issues. In particular, Article 6 states:

“Journalistic activities that harm the interests of society, human rights and citizens’ rights, or promote war and violence, racial, national, regional, religious, and social intolerance, as well as gender, sexual, and other forms of intolerance are unacceptable.”

The case study can be contrasted with results from European media systems to deepen the analysis and offer a more comprehensive context. For example, the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP), which monitors women's representation in the media worldwide, finds gender bias and persistent under-representation in a variety of national contexts, including European nations (Macharia, 2020; Ashimova et al., 2023). According to the GMMP statistics, women are still under-represented in the news and frequently limited to conventional roles, especially when it comes to politics, business, and science, despite advancements in gender-equality policies (Martínez Rodríguez, 2022; Oklander et al., 2023). This investigation can determine whether comparable gender imbalance patterns are present in the local media and how closely these patterns correspond with worldwide trends by comparing these findings with the case study.

The GenderedNews project, which uses automated techniques to evaluate gender balance in French-language online media, is one example of a recent computational study on gender representation in European media that may be used to compare perspectives. According to the current study, there is still a gender gap in the media throughout Europe, with men still being quoted disproportionately in stories, especially in areas like politics and economics. According to Richard et al. (2022), women are notably under-represented in high-visibility fields, and the media perpetuates gendered patterns despite rising awareness of gender inequality. By incorporating these results, the study can provide a more thorough picture of how gender inequality in media representation within the case study corresponds with or deviates from more general European patterns, improving the conclusions' applicability and relevance.

Gender biases in media depictions are still prominent, according to Thomas et al.'s (2021) study on gendered news coverage of women as heads of state. According to the research, women in leadership roles are under-represented in the media, and when they are, the emphasis is more often on their private lives, looks, and personal qualities than on their political accomplishments or areas of expertise. In political communication, where male politicians are more frequently depicted in relation to their political acumen and policy goals, this trend of gendered news coverage is particularly noticeable. This comparison sheds light on the possible similarities or differences between the case study's media depictions, particularly with regard to how women in

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positions of authority are framed and the media's propensity to highlight characteristics that support gender stereotypes.

A thorough analysis of the literature on objectification, sexualisation, and gender stereotypes in media is provided by Santoniccolo et al. (2023). Their findings highlight how limited and stereotyped depictions of women are still perpetuated in the media, which frequently emphasises their physical attractiveness and sexual appeal over their intelligence or professional prowess. The study describes how these representations limit women's depiction in varied and powerful roles, reinforce traditional gender roles, and contribute to the objectification of women. By providing a framework for evaluating how comparable patterns of objectification and stereotyping might appear in the media outlets examined in the case study, this literature review emphasises the significance of looking at media material from a gender-critical perspective.

When developing campaign messages, it is necessary to consider the mentality of residents in both large cities and remote settlements, where patriarchal traditions are still very strong. Breaking down existing gender stereotypes in the media will not only improve the quality of life for women in Kyrgyzstan but also contribute to the overall economic development of the country, as many talented women will no longer fear social condemnation and will contribute to the development of science and business in Kyrgyzstan.

5. Discussion

In today's information age, discourses surrounding societal issues have become more widespread due to electronic media and social networks. The global academic community, in this context, has gained a wealth of tools for researching and analysing questions of gender equality and women's rights. For instance, Hanniffy (2024) in her work highlighted that, within the framework of the European Union's Central Asia Strategy, there has been an expansion of cross-continental cooperation in the field of women's rights protection. The author argues that this complex issue encompasses overall democratisation, human rights, and social policy. Employing Thompson's adductive approach, comments on social media in five Central Asian countries were examined, leading to ambiguous and pessimistic forecasts. Several negative findings regarding the actual rights of women in Kyrgyzstan were also discovered in this research.

Bjegovic-Mikanovic et al. (2024), in turn, examined potential gender differences in the healthcare sector in the Kyrgyz Republic, which aligns with the stereotypes about medicine being a "female" field discovered in this study. A survey of 75 healthcare managers revealed that only 42.9% of respondents

believe that equal gender rights and opportunities are enshrined in their job descriptions, while the rest perceive signs of discrimination in the existing situation. Consequently, even in the medical field, female medical professionals do not feel protected.

As noted above, the situation regarding violations of women's rights is an international issue, but it is particularly prevalent in the Middle East and Asia. Coşkun and Budaichieva (2023) examined the situation of Kyrgyz women who have entered into cross-border marriages in Turkey. Conducting 24 in-depth interviews with lawyers, government officials, consular staff, and the women themselves who decided to move to another country, the authors concluded that such marriages make migrant women even more vulnerable to domestic violence. Moreover, in this case, they are expected to conform to the image of a “good housewife” – a role that, as this study has shown, is unacceptable for Kyrgyz women.

The role of media-imposed stereotypes, as explored in this study, has not only a news-related dimension but also an artistic one. Hancığaz and Hülür (2024) examined how the images subtly imposed by Turkish romantic television series influence the populations of several countries, including Kyrgyzstan. Beyond traditional gender roles, these films, as it turned out, also foster positive attitudes towards Turkey and sympathy for its people. This fact should be taken into account by the Kyrgyz authorities and could potentially be utilised to promote Kyrgyz narratives and discourses abroad.

Durrani et al. (2022) drew attention to the formation of gender stereotypes from a very young age, using the example of textbooks for secondary schools in Kazakhstan. Conducting a poststructuralist discursive analysis of how school textbooks reinforce gender power relations, the authors provide an example of the stereotypical male role of the “fearful khan” and, conversely, the female stereotype of the “delightful beauties” As demonstrated above, such clichés, disseminated through the press, television, or literature, have a negative impact on the psychological well-being of individuals and can lead to adherence to imposed roles.

The formation of such an approach from an early age leads to the development of victimised behaviour in Central Asian women in adulthood, which only exacerbates the gender gap. Wiebesiek (2023), studying the tradition of bride abduction, revealed a contradiction between the competing discourses of folk customs and human rights. Stating that, in most cases, abduction is more of a theatrical, consensual in nature, the author notes the persistent violent undertone of the custom. Militz (2023), in turn, studied another Kyrgyz gender stereotype associated with the cult of virginity. In their study, the author emphasises the marginality of this tradition but acknowledges that it is still popular in the Kyrgyz Republic and significantly influences the behaviour of

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girls. Of particular note is the fact that the obscurantist myth of virginal blood is spread, including through modern means of communication such as Instagram. The problems of “objectification” of a person, the perception of a woman solely as someone else’s property, and the popularisation of these erroneous ideas through modern means of communication, highlighted by the authors, were also illuminated in this study.

The religious, specifically Islamic, factor of the problem, the influence of which was considered above, has also been assessed in other research articles. Stephan-Emmrich and Toktogulova (2024) examined social models in which active Muslim women adhering to a strict religious dress code create inclusive professional communities. Such social activities, on the one hand, help women to step out of the shadow of the family and gain a minimum of independence, but on the other hand, popularise the chador, niqab, and other elements that violate women’s rights to individuality. Ismailbekova (2023), also considering the problem through the prism of religion, noted that Islamic organisations are playing an increasingly active role in the public life of Kyrgyzstan, providing various services on more favourable terms than the state. It is characteristic that leadership in these organisations is often held by women. Thus, a situation is emerging in which some women themselves are interested in preserving the existing gender imbalance.

As noted earlier in this paper, the academic pursuits of young women in Kyrgyzstan are still not encouraged. The biased attitude towards women in academia, according to Dall’Agnola (2022), is also manifested in the fact that their physical safety and mental well-being can be at risk during fieldwork. Notably, Central Asian women are more likely to face attacks from traditionalist men compared to their counterparts from European or American academic schools. Dadakhonov (2023) wrote about the role of the media in the information literacy of citizens of Central Asian states. According to his observations, the effectiveness of programs and grants from foreign donor organisations is increasing, and audience reach is constantly growing. However, the dynamics of these processes, the author stated, are insufficient to shift the discourse of social problems in society from a critical to an everyday phase.

At the same time, there are also positive examples of female leadership that demonstrate significant social shifts. For instance, Nadirova et al. (2022) studied the work of women activists and the strategies they employ in building relationships with government officials. As a result, the authors concluded that Western theories of adaptive and transformational leadership can also be applied to Central Asian countries, but with adjustments for local specificities. Yousafzai et al. (2023) investigated the work of female entrepreneurs in the tourism sector of Kyrgyzstan. Using 18 case studies, the authors demonstrated the possibility of women in Kyrgyzstan running successful tourism businesses

with sufficient perseverance and motivation. The trend towards a gradual strengthening of the role of women in Kyrgyz society was also tracked in this study.

Lottholz (2022) wrote about the unique features of the traditional lifestyle in rural Kyrgyzstan, which were noted in this article. Examining the customs of the patriarchal countryside and existing social institutions such as the courts of aksakals (elders), mahalla committee, and voluntary squads, the author states that in some remote regions, there exists a “parallel power” based not on the country’s constitution but on traditions. This trend requires close attention and control from the state to avoid potential dual power and subsequent social confrontation. Studying gender specifics and traditions of the region in more depth, Peshkova et al. (2022) dedicated their research to the phenomenon of “bacha bazi”, dancers, predominantly in Muslim countries, who perform female roles. It should be noted that in the process of conducting this research and studying gender balances in modern Kyrgyzstan, neither signs of this phenomenon nor the corresponding discourse in society were found.

Discussing the issue of violence against women raised in this study within the context of the Kyrgyz Republic, it is also worth mentioning an article by Cepeda et al. (2022) who investigated the issue on a more global scale. The global index created by the authors and the algorithms developed to calculate the level of gender-based violence reveals a clear regional trend. According to the constructed model, the countries of Northern Europe and Canada demonstrate the lowest index scores, while the highest level of violence is found in African countries. Kyrgyzstan, meanwhile, occupies a middle position among the 101 countries ranked, which indicates the need for further work on upholding women’s rights in the country.

The application of gender quotas in the formation of elected bodies, analysed in this study, is not considered an effective approach by the international expert community. Euchner and Frech (2022), dedicating their study to the conditions of mandatory representation in European parliamentary activities, noted that mandatory gender quotas reinforce prejudice and social categorisation in elected bodies. Such fragmentation of parliament negatively affects communication between groups and, consequently, the quality of public administration. Fernandes et al. (2023) reached similar conclusions in the case of introducing mandatory gender representation in the Portuguese parliament. The authors noted that after the introduction of quotas, women began to experience stigmatisation during legislative debates. The negative effect of introducing quotas in the Jogorku Kenesh was also noted in this study.

Access to education is another crucial factor in achieving gender equality. As demonstrated above, the full utilisation of women’s intellectual potential accelerates economic development at both the household and national levels.

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As Kosec et al. (2021) proved in their research, Kyrgyz families with predominantly egalitarian attitudes, where women play a more significant role in decision-making, have significantly higher incomes. Li et al. (2022) arrived at the same conclusions by analysing data from 8,040 Kyrgyz households using machine learning algorithms. By developing models for early poverty prediction, the authors found a direct correlation between a family's standard of living and its acceptance of gender equality principles.

Therefore, as demonstrated above, the dismantling of negative gender stereotypes in society leads to its economic and social growth, as well as an increase in household well-being.

6. Conclusions

This research identified key problems in Kyrgyz society caused by violations of women's rights and the role of modern mass media in shaping gender stereotypes. In the dynamics of previous periods, based on data from several population censuses in Kyrgyz Republic, the statistics of the ratio of men and women was analysed, and a positive trend towards parity between the sexes was revealed.

A separate analysis was conducted on the effectiveness of an initiative such as the introduction of gender quotas in elections to the Jogorku Kenesh and local keneshes. An assessment of the actual results and the existing gender balance in the highest legislative body of the Republic demonstrated the inexpediency of such directive measures and the need to develop an alternative project to ensure the representation of women's interests in Parliament. By utilising data from sociological surveys, a list of key media outlets in Kyrgyzstan was compiled. Among these, the most popular were found to be the television channels KTRK and Ala-Too 24, YouTube, and the social media platform Instagram. Monitoring of these resources demonstrated a significant amount of content on social media that promotes negative gender stereotypes among the population. Additionally, the impact of existing patriarchal traditions, religious prejudices, and local customs on women's behaviour was studied. As an alternative to traditional media, several Kyrgyz data journalism projects were examined. These projects are based on the analysis of factual data and, consequently, have a higher degree of objectivity. When researching gender rights in Kyrgyzstan, a limitation was noted, related to the strictly binary formulations in society and the media. Non-binary gender identity was not included in the statistics, likely due to its categorical rejection by society at this stage.

Based on the analysis of all the collected data, recommendations were formulated for creating a separate communication strategy targeted at individuals with traditional views. The key message of the campaign should be the fact that women's professional achievements in science and business will accelerate Kyrgyzstan's economic development and improve the well-being of citizens and households. The development of such an information program and the creation of a media plan for media outlets effective for working with the planned target audience could be the subject of future research.

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