Abstract

This dissertation examines the factors influencing Kazakhstani women's decisions to pursue leadership careers in higher education, given the underrepresentation of women in academic leadership roles globally and within Kazakhstan. Grounded in Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Development Theory, this research adopts a mixed-methods approach to explore the multi-layered influences at the micro-, meso-, exo-, and macro-system levels, alongside integrating additional relevant theories to deepen the analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 17 participants, while quantitative part consisted of 168 participants. Participants of the interviews and survey questionnaire were Kazakhstani females at different stages of their careers, who are currently involved in higher education. The novelty of this research lies in its comprehensive approach to dissecting Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Development Theory, specifically tailored to the Kazakhstani context, and with integration of additional theories in each level of the Bronfenbrenner's theory.

At the macro-system level, the research explores how deeply ingrained cultural norms and historical legacies in Kazakhstan shape perceptions of female leadership, revealing a nuanced balance between traditional gender roles and attitude towards women in leadership roles. At the exo-system level, the dissertation highlights the unique impact of organizational culture within Kazakhstani higher education institutions on women's leadership trajectories, underscoring the complex interplay of mentorship, networking opportunities, and institutional support mechanisms. A significant contribution is the detailed exploration of micro-level factors, where individual motivations, self-perception, and the internalization of gender roles emerge as critical determinants of women's leadership aspirations. This aspect of the research shows the internal struggles and negotiations women engage in, which are often overlooked in broader analyses. By juxtaposing the Kazakhstani experience with international literature on female academic leadership, this dissertation shows both unique local challenges and universal obstacles faced by women, offering a comprehensive understanding of the global landscape of academic leadership.

This research provides implications for policy-makers, educators, and leaders committed to fostering a more inclusive and equitable academic environment. The research underscores the importance of addressing gender disparities in leadership through comprehensive and culturally sensitive approaches, ultimately contributing to the broader goal of achieving gender equality in higher education leadership.