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Cultural Analysis of Student Youth Attitudes toward Gender Roles in the Southern Regions of Kazakhstan

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Abstract

In modern social sciences and humanities, there is often ambiguity in the interpretation of students' views on gender roles. In particular, the formation of gender values among students in Kazakh society in terms of the urban-rural dichotomy has not been studied empirically enough. Although many studies have emphasised that urbanisation among students from rural areas can weaken traditional views, this position still needs clarification in specific regional and cultural contexts.

Therefore, this study aims to examine students' views on gender norms in southern Kazakhstan through cultural analysis. To achieve this goal, we conducted an empirical assessment of how gender roles affect the value system.

For this, we analysed survey data collected from students living in both urban and rural areas (N=556) and applied the One-Way ANOVA method to examine differences in responses to 14 statements describing gender roles and values.

The empirical results showed no significant differences in the attitudes of urban and rural youth toward gender norms. The residential area factor had a negligible effect on almost all indicators (for example, $F(1,554) = 0.229$, $p = 0.632$ for Q1; $p = 0.379$ for Q8). This finding suggests that the assumption that urbanisation significantly alters young people's attitudes towards gender roles needs to be reconsidered.

The results show that gender norms in Kazakh society are rooted in a shared cultural-axiological foundation, and that the educational system and socialisation processes contribute to changes in young people's values. Therefore, this study provides new empirical insight into cultural studies and aims to explain the transformation of gender norms within broader socio-cultural value systems.

Keywords: Gender Roles; Survey Research; Student Youth; Cultural Identity; Kazakhstan

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Introduction

In the modern paradigm of social and humanitarian education, the shift in values arising from the interaction between tradition and innovation has become the central focus of research. Specifically, this shift in values is closely linked to changes in gender roles, the restructuring of social structures, and the emergence of hybrid forms of cultural identity.

Gendered norms in this context can be understood as an axiological concept that extends beyond social institutions and is shaped by cultural values and symbolic structures. This approach links gender relations to broader changes in the value system, with young people playing a central role in these transformations.

Our research focuses on the southern regions of Kazakhstan, where traditional values remain influential, but urbanisation and digital technology are shaping new value orientations among young people.

Additionally, many studies compare urban and rural areas using a binary opposition approach, characterising urban youth as bearers of progressive values and rural youth as bearers of conservative values. This methodological approach may overlook the shared cultural space where cultural values are formed, depending on regional specifics and latent socialisation mechanisms. As a result, the role of urbanisation and digital technology in shaping gender ideology is often assumed as an axiom, while the process of change in student youth's value orientations is ignored.

The main goal of the study is to analyse the attitudes of students in the southern regions of Kazakhstan towards gendered roles from a cultural perspective and evaluate them based on empirical data.

This study sought answers to the following questions:

- Do traditional (patriarchal) or egalitarian norms prevail in the attitudes of students in the southern regions of Kazakhstan towards gender roles?

- Does urbanisation cause a statistical difference in the gender ideology of young people, or do common education and the digital space balance these differences?

This study aims to determine whether gender norms in Kazakhstani society are grounded in a common cultural and axiological basis by analysing survey data from 556 students. In other words, it shows that Kazakhstani students' gender norms are shaped by a shared cultural, educational, and communicative environment. This provides new empirical data on how values in society are changing.

Literature Review

Current studies emphasise that youth gender norms are shaped by overlapping cultural, structural and social institutions, rather than merely socio-demographic factors (Lao & Childers, 1973; Voth & Schrag, 2024). Consequently, measuring these norms requires culturally adapted instruments. As previous scholars have shown the need to adapt the Attitudes Towards Women Scale (AWS) to specific contexts (Lu & Logan, 1977), our study revised the instrument to reflect the cultural and linguistic realities of Kazakhstan. As Nelson (1988) and Basow (1984) have argued, gender stereotypes are not universal: what is considered 'traditional' in one society may be considered neutral in another. This methodological adaptation was essential for our research, as our findings show that students' gender roles in southern Kazakhstan cannot be accurately captured by standard, Western-centric binary attributes.

Furthermore, rather than being defined by a static masculine-feminine dichotomy (Spence & Helmreich, 1978), students' gender identities function as multidimensional social constructions. We argue that, according to symbolic interactionism, youth norms are shaped by everyday communication and the broader sociocultural environment rather than being treated as homogeneous groups (Wheeler et al., 1977; Wilkinson et al., 2024). This theoretical framework aligns directly with our

empirical findings, which reveal that Kazakhstani university students exhibit a 'hybrid cultural identity'. Their gender attitudes are not strictly traditionalist but are actively negotiated through shared campus socialisation, enabling traditional expectations to coexist with egalitarian values.

When revisiting modernisation theory, it is witnessed that it often links changes in gender norms to socio-economic factors at a macro level (Inglehart & Norris, 2003), relying traditionally on a strict urban–rural dichotomy, framing cities as progressive and rural areas as conservative. However, our findings call into question the validity of this spatial binary. In line with recent scholarship emphasising that higher education reduces stereotypes and that young people have complex, intersecting social identities (Bolsbayeva et al., 2024; Gecici et al., 2017; Secgin & Tural, 2011), our empirical data show that the rural urban divide does not fundamentally determine students' gender positions in southern Kazakhstan.

Rather than geographic determinism, it is arguable that social cognitive theory provides a more accurate framework, proposing that gender identity develops from the combined influence of socialisation agents. Although foundational gender norms are established within the family (Tenenbaum & Leaper, 2002), the university environment is a crucial setting for the renegotiation of norms. Peer influence, driven by social learning, group sanctions and a heightened desire for social approval during emerging adulthood, actively homogenises disparate perspectives (Brechtwald & Prinstein, 2011; Halimi et al., 2021; Laursen & Veenstra, 2021; Witt, 2000). This theoretical perspective effectively explains a central outcome of our study: the powerful unifying effect of a shared 'campus culture'. Our findings suggest that the university setting acts as a cultural mediator, neutralising spatial demographic differences and fostering a common normative framework among young people from various backgrounds.

Nevertheless, this academic socialisation does not uniformly eliminate traditionalism. Everyday campus interactions and implicit educational cultures can inadvertently reproduce gender

stereotypes alongside egalitarian ideals (Grimalt-Alvarado et al., 2025; Sulla et al., 2025). As Davis and Greenstein (2009) argue, youth gender ideology should not be viewed through the reductive lens of a 'traditional-progressive' binary, but rather as a multifaceted value system. Our research corroborates this complexity, demonstrating that modern egalitarian aspirations and traditional patriarchal orders are not mutually exclusive for Kazakhstani youth. Rather than experiencing a linear transformation, these students develop a hybrid gender ideology in which both value systems coexist dynamically.

While the university environment effectively neutralises spatial demographic differences, traditional gender values endure through powerful intergenerational transmission. Family structures, parental beliefs and household labour division serve as primary social mechanisms for instilling gender ideology from an early age (Antill et al., 2003; Cano & Hofmeister, 2022; Cunningham, 2001; Halpern & Perry-Jenkins, 2016; Nath et al., 2023; Tenenbaum & Leaper, 2002). Because these deeply ingrained familial experiences have significant economic and practical implications (Gecici et al., 2017), students' gender roles are not transient choices but reflections of long-lasting cultural conditioning. This theoretical foundation explains a key outcome of our study: the strong cultural inertia of traditional roles, such as the expectation of male leadership and economic dominance, persists equally among urban and rural youth due to shared familial socialisation rather than geographic location.

Despite the deep roots of family influence, the university years provide a critical opportunity to redefine these roles. Through continuous interaction with new social contexts, students exhibit changing gender trajectories over time (Bolzendahl & Myers, 2004; Cunningham et al., 2005; Davis, 2007; Fan & Marini, 2000). During this period of reconstruction, the rural–urban dichotomy loses all explanatory power, being overridden by the unifying effect of institutional norms and peer integration (Brechtwald &

Prinstein, 2011; Van Houtte & Vantieghe, 2020).

Furthermore, cross-cultural studies emphasise that the trajectory of these gender ideologies depends heavily on ethnic background, levels of integration and the cultural norms of a given society (De Valk, 2008; Diehl et al., 2009; Kretschmer, 2018; Sanchez Guerrero & Schober, 2021). Due to these complex, intersecting factors, clear measurement indicators in one cultural context often produce ambiguous results in another. Recognising this methodological challenge, our study demonstrates that the psychometric evaluation of youth gender norms in southern Kazakhstan must consider local cultural codes. Our findings confirm that Kazakhstani students do not simply assimilate to a universal standard of modernisation. Instead, they consciously reconstruct a gender identity that is uniquely regional and balances ethnic heritage with academic socialisation.

These internal contradictions have been well documented in international empirical research. For example, studies in Turkey show that university students can advocate for gender equality while also supporting traditional family roles (Gecici et al., 2017). Similar heterogeneity exists in Western Europe, where embedded cultural norms continue to dictate gender behaviour and produce significant attitudinal differences between the sexes (Garcia Vega et al., 2017). As these norms are powerful social constructs, navigating these contradictory cultural expectations can significantly affect students' psychological well-being, self-esteem, and social adjustment (Croft et al., 2020; Gui, 2019; Vega et al., 2017).

Consequently, the transformation of gender norms cannot be viewed as a standardised, global process. As Dotti Sani and Quaranta (2017) demonstrated through their analysis of 36 countries, gender attitudes depend on specific historical, cultural and institutional contexts rather than mere economic development. This theoretical conclusion is strongly corroborated by our empirical data from Southern Kazakhstan. The clear presence of

a 'hybrid cultural identity', which we define as the blending of modern egalitarian views with traditional values among our respondents, who reconcile their support for women's economic independence with their adherence to traditional patriarchal authority, proves that the renegotiation of gender roles in this region is a highly society-specific and culturally assimilated process, rather than a linear trajectory of Western modernisation.

In order to fully grasp these local nuances, it is essential to situate the current study within the wider post-Soviet Central Asian framework (Roberts, 2014). The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, driven by severe economic mismanagement, triggered a profound reconstruction of national identities across the region, significantly affecting women's societal roles and national narratives (Cleuziou & Direnberger, 2016). In neighbouring countries such as Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, youth cultures are characterised by the interplay of globalisation, ethnicity and religious traditions, which perpetuate culturally specific gender stereotypes (Kirmse, 2010; Osmonova et al., 2024; Ozawa, 2025). This regional dynamic aligns perfectly with one of the key empirical findings of our study: young people in southern Kazakhstan do not perceive religion and tradition as conflicting patriarchal constraints, but rather as legitimate and harmonious cultural resources for regulating interpersonal relationships and assigning cultural meaning to gender roles (Abikenov et al., 2025).

Furthermore, gender stereotypes persist in educational and labour markets in Central Asia and Central Eastern Europe, particularly regarding male leadership and female employment (Coleman & Sandfort, 2014; Lipovka & Buzady, 2020; Orazova, 2025; Poplavskaya, 2021; Yerimpasheva et al., 2023). In light of this, the gender attitudes of university students in southern Kazakhstan cannot be viewed as an isolated phenomenon (Syzykova et al., 2024). Indeed, recent studies indicate that traditional values continue to influence social dynamics within modern society (Kudaibergenov et al., 2025). Instead, as our data show, their

acceptance of both women's economic independence and traditional family roles is part of a wider systemic trend in Central Asia. This represents a unique cultural synthesis at the intersection of post-Soviet heritage and modern revivalist traditionalism.

Although the existing international literature mainly attributes the evolution of youth gender roles to socio-demographic variables and institutional factors, it often fails to capture the deep cultural and symbolic nuances of these transitions. Standard approaches specifically overlook how gender norms are negotiated through local cultural codes and regional experiences. Moreover, Western-centric measurement tools pose major methodological challenges when applied to the distinct cultural contexts of post-Soviet regions, as they are not calibrated to capture hybridised value systems.

This study addresses critical gaps in our understanding by analysing student attitudes towards gender roles in southern Kazakhstan through a culturally sensitive, axiological lens. By challenging the assumption that transformation is driven strictly by urbanisation or Western modernisation, our research makes a vital empirical and theoretical contribution. Our findings demonstrate that the gender identities of young people are complex and multi-layered. They are shaped by the integration of regional cultural practices, religious traditions and global modernisation into a unique cultural transformation.

Research Methods

This study used a quantitative research design to identify students' attitudes in southern Kazakhstan toward gender norms. The research used a comparative-cultural approach and a multilevel methodological model that combined empirical data with cultural interpretation.

The study's theoretical and methodological foundation was built on social constructivism, cultural transformation theories, and an axiological approach. These theories helped us understand gender norms as a reflection of a society's value system, socialisation processes, and cultural conventions in society.

The empirical basis of this study was based on data collected from students studying at universities in the southern regions of Kazakhstan. A total of 556 participants were included in the sample, ranging in age from 18 to 25, a period characterised by active formation and revision of gender attitudes. To effectively reach the target demographic, participant recruitment was facilitated through digital student networks and social media platforms. To ensure linguistic consistency, the survey instrument was administered exclusively in Kazakh.

A stratified sampling method was employed during the selection process. Respondents were divided into two groups based on their socio-cultural background: those living in urban areas and those living in rural areas.

Such stratification allowed for a comparative analysis of the influence of urbanisation on gender norms and empirically verified the existence of spatial differences. A structured questionnaire was used as the main data collection tool. The questionnaire contained 14 questions (Q1-Q14), aimed at measuring attitudes towards gender roles and norms. All questions were rated on a Likert scale, allowing for quantitative recording of respondents' level of agreement or disagreement.

The questionnaire was designed to incorporate the cultural and value-based dimensions of gender roles. It covered key aspects such as roles in the family roles, decision-making, and the social responsibilities of men and women. The validity of the instrument's cultural content was ensured by drawing on theoretical works that explain gender norms within the Kazakh socio-cultural context.

To compare the responses of urban and rural students with respect to gender norms, we used a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). In this analysis, the independent variable was the respondent's place of residence (urban or rural), and the dependent variables were survey statements about gender norms.

The ANOVA method was used to determine whether there were any statistically significant

differences in the level of acceptance of gender norms among students from different socio-cultural backgrounds. The significance level (*p*-value) served as the main criterion for evaluating the results.

The internal reliability of the questionnaire used in the study was assessed through psychometric analysis. In particular, the internal consistency of the scale was calculated based on Cronbach's alpha and McDonald's omega coefficients. According to the analysis results, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was equal to 0.767, indicating that the scale has a sufficient level of reliability (95% CI: 0.738–0.795). In addition, the McDonald's omega indicator showed the same value ($\omega = 0.767$; 95% CI: 0.739–0.796).

The results obtained prove that the internal structure of the research instruments is stable and homogeneous; that is, the survey questions reliably measure a single-dimensional construct. This, in turn, ensures the validity and reliability of the interpretation of the research results. As stated above, at the stage of interpreting the quantitative analysis results, we used axiological and cultural analysis methods. This approach allowed us to interpret the survey indicators not only at the behavioural or opinion level, but also as cultural indicators that reflect the dominant values in the minds of young people.

During the study, we fully respected the basic principles of scientific ethics. Participation in the survey was voluntary, and all respondents were informed in advance about the purpose and content of the research. We fully guaranteed participants' anonymity and confidentiality, and we used the collected data only for scientific purposes. We did not collect personal information that could identify individuals during the research process.

Results and Analysis

This section presents the results of a survey conducted among 556 students enrolled in higher education institutions in southern Kazakhstan. The aim of the analysis was to identify students' attitudes towards gender norms, as well as the specific aspects of these attitudes related to urban and rural socio-

cultural environments. Respondents were divided into two groups based on their urban or rural socio-cultural background, and mean values and differences for each question were compared between the two groups.

As already noted above, one-way ANOVA was used to compare the responses of urban and rural students on a set of questions. The results showed that for most of the questions (Q1–Q14), there were no statistically significant differences between the two groups ($p > 0.05$).

For example, for question Q1, the *F*-value was 0.229, and the *p*-value was 0.632. This means that there was no significant difference between the mean responses of urban and rural students for this question. Similarly, for question Q8, the *p*-value of 0.379 indicated no significant difference in responses between the two groups.

Overall, the results indicated that there were no significant differences in the responses of urban and rural students regarding gender norms. The average scores for both groups were similar for all statements under consideration.

Most participants were female (78.9%, $n=439$), with a smaller proportion male (21.1%, $n=117$). Of these, 64.8% ($n=360$) were urban residents and 35.2% ($n=196$) lived in rural areas or districts. In terms of education, most participants were undergraduate students (97.3%, $n=541$) and only 2.7% ($n=15$) were graduate students. Regarding marital status, the majority indicated that they were unmarried or single (95.1%, $n=529$). The socio-demographic details of the participants can be found in Table 1.

Mean values and standard deviations for urban and rural respondents were calculated for questions Q1–Q14. The descriptive statistics results are presented in Table 2. The equality of variances for all variables was tested using Levene's test. Based on the test results, equality of variances was observed for all questions (all *p*-values > 0.05).

Table 1: Profile of the Respondents

Category	Group	Frequency (N)	%
Gender	Female	439	78.9%
	Male	117	21.1%
	Other	0	0%
	Refused to answer	0	0%
Residence	City	360	64.8%
	District/village	196	35.2%
Education	Bachelor's degree	541	97.3%
	Master's degree	15	2.7%
	Technical/vocational	0	0%
	Doctoral degree (PhD)	0	0%
Marital status	Single/single	529	95.1%
	Married/married	9	1.6%
	Other	1	0.2%
	Refused to answer	17	3.1%

Note: Full Sample: N = 556

Source: Compiled by the Authors based on an Online Survey Conducted in 2026.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics and Equality of Variance (Levene) for Urban and Rural Respondents by Statements Q1–Q14

Conclusion	Residence	N	Mean	SD	SE	Coefficient of Variation	Levene F	df1	df2	p
Q1	City	360	3.286	1.076	0.057	0.327	0.341	1	554	0.559
	Village	196	3.24	1.113	0.08	0.344				
Q2	City	360	1.764	1.062	0.056	0.602	0.791	1	554	0.374
	Village	196	1.74	1.007	0.072	0.579				
Q3	City	360	3.803	1.138	0.06	0.299	3.281	1	554	0.071
	Village	196	3.867	1.063	0.076	0.275				
Q4	City	360	3.233	1.238	0.065	0.383	0.821	1	554	0.365
	Village	196	3.061	1.222	0.087	0.399				
Q5	City	360	3.228	1.177	0.062	0.365	2.525	1	554	0.113
	Village	196	3.168	1.08	0.077	0.341				
Q6	City	360	3.089	1.011	0.053	0.327	0.009	1	554	0.925
	Village	196	3.087	1.006	0.072	0.326				
Q7	City	360	3.269	0.983	0.052	0.301	0.351	1	554	0.554
	Village	196	3.265	0.912	0.065	0.279				
Q8	City	360	3.264	1.087	0.057	0.333	8.489e-05	1	554	0.993
	Village	196	3.179	1.102	0.079	0.347				
Q9	City	360	3.383	1.128	0.059	0.334	2.241	1	554	0.135
	Village	196	3.219	1.061	0.076	0.33				
Q10	City	360	3.728	1.068	0.056	0.286	0.024	1	554	0.876
	Village	196	3.633	1.066	0.076	0.293				
Q11	City	360	3.367	1.017	0.054	0.302	2.141	1	554	0.144
	Village	196	3.179	0.973	0.07	0.306				
Q12	City	359	3.758	1.175	0.062	0.313	0.017	1	553	0.896
	Village	196	3.679	1.161	0.083	0.316				
Q13	City	360	3.144	1.108	0.058	0.352	1.734	1	554	0.188
	Village	196	3.138	1.031	0.074	0.329				
Q14	City	360	2.672	1.226	0.065	0.459	1.126	1	554	0.289
	Village	196	2.51	1.13	0.081	0.45				

Note: All values are interpreted as mean $\pm$ SD. All $p > 0.05$ according to Levene's test, assuming equality of variances.

Source: Compiled by the authors based on an online survey conducted in 2026.

One-way ANOVA analysis was conducted to compare the responses of urban and rural participants. The results are presented in Table

3. There were no statistically significant differences between the two groups for questions 1-10 and 12-14 ($p > 0.05$). However,

there was a significant difference for question 11 (Gender roles in society have changed) between urban and rural groups ($F(1,554)=4.47$, $p=0.035$, $\eta^2=0.006$).

Contrary to the urbanisation hypothesis, our data do not support the assumption that urban environments automatically lead to progressive gender attitudes. Both city and village students held similar attitudes towards gender roles.

Table 3: Assessment of differences between urban and rural respondents on statements Q1–Q14 (One-Way ANOVA)

Concept	Cases	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p	ω^2
Q1. Traditional values determine the roles of men and women in society.	Residence	0.272	1	0.272	0.229	0.632	0.000
	Residuals	657.260	554	1.186			
Q2. A woman's main duty is to do housework.	Residence	0.074	1	0.074	0.068	0.795	0.000
	Residuals	602.660	554	1.088			
Q3. A man should be the breadwinner and decision maker of the family	Residence	0.529	1	0.529	0.428	0.513	0.000
	Residuals	685.548	554	1.237			
Q4. Traditional society hinders women's career aspirations	Residence	3.759	1	3.759	2.474	0.116	0.003
	Residuals	841.665	554	1.519			
Q5. Social media influences gender roles	Residence	0.448	1	0.448	0.342	0.559	0.000
	Residuals	724.768	554	1.308			
Q6. Religion and tradition harmoniously shape gender relations	Residence	5.889×10^{-4}	1	5.889×10^{-4}	5.778×10^{-4}	0.981	0.000
	Residuals	564.681	554	1.019			
Q7. Today's youth are less likely to adhere to traditional gender roles	Residence	0.002	1	0.002	0.002	0.961	0.000
	Residuals	509.068	554	0.919			
Q8. Gender equality is not contrary to Kazakh culture	Residence	0.924	1	0.924	0.775	0.379	0.000
	Residuals	660.681	554	1.193			
Q9. A woman's economic independence influences family decisions	Residence	3.411	1	3.411	2.793	0.095	0.003
	Residuals	676.978	554	1.221			
Q10. Equal opportunities for men and women in society increase social stability	Residence	1.148	1	1.148	1.008	0.316	1.513×10^{-5}
	Residuals	630.873	554	1.139			
Q11. Gender roles in society have changed	Residence	4.490	1	4.490	4.471	0.035	0.006
	Residuals	556.350	554	1.004			
Q12. In modern families, responsibilities between men and women should be divided equally	Residence	0.793	1	0.793	0.580	0.447	0.000
	Residuals	756.768	553	1.368			
Q13. Traditional gender roles should be preserved	Residence	0.006	1	0.006	0.005	0.944	0.000
	Residuals	647.770	554	1.169			
Q14. A woman's social activities interfere with family responsibilities	Residence	3.331	1	3.331	2.341	0.127	0.002
	Residuals	788.302	554	1.423			

Note: Type III Sum of Squares was used.

Source: Compiled by the authors based on an online survey conducted in 2026.

Discussion

This section discusses the findings of the study. The results indicate a need to reconsider the urban-rural dichotomy, which has been widely used to explain the impact of urbanisation on gender norms. Existing theoretical models often characterise the urban environment as progressive, and the rural space as the guardian of traditional values. However, empirical data from southern Kazakhstan suggests that this binary approach is not universally applicable to student youth. The findings suggest that young people's gender views in cities are not as progressive as those in rural areas, indicating a need to rethink the idea of urbanisation automatically determining values.

This result allows us to critically examine the concepts of modernisation and value transformation as a one-sided process. For instance, the theory of value change proposed by Ronald Inglehart (Inglehart & Norris, 2003) emphasises the importance of economic and institutional factors, while acknowledging that these changes may occur unevenly within specific cultural contexts.

In the case of Kazakhstan, urbanisation seems to be a general condition that interacts with other socio-cultural factors rather than a fundamental restructuring of youth gender attitudes.

The results were considered in relation to the main theoretical frameworks aimed at understanding young people's attitudes towards gender roles and values. During the discussion, emphasis was placed on the interaction between traditional and innovative values, their socio-cultural mechanisms, and the stability and variation of gender norms.

The results of the first concept of the survey indicate that traditional gender values are a widely shared and entrenched cultural norm among urban and rural youth. The lack of a significant difference between urban and rural students ($p = 0.632$; $\omega^2 = 0.000$) indicates that attitudes towards gender roles are not a localised phenomenon dependent on residential environment, but rather a system of internalised values within a broader social context.

The findings are in line with theoretical approaches that regard gender norms as cultural constructs perpetuated through social interactions. From a socio-cognitive standpoint, gender roles evolve through social learning, observation, and imitation, eventually crystallising as enduring cognitive frameworks in the mind. The perception of conventional gender roles among students in southern Kazakhstan appears to be linked to broader cultural values rather than being solely influenced by their immediate social milieu.

It has been noted that traditional values are not confined to rural or conservative environments but also persist among urban youth. These new values do not entirely supplant traditional norms; rather, they coexist with them. This is evident in the fact that traditional values can be observed in urban settings as well as in rural areas.

According to the results of the second concept of the survey, there was no statistically significant difference between urban and rural students ($p = 0.795$; $\omega^2 = 0.000$), indicating that this attitude is perceived as a cultural scheme that is widespread at a broad social level and does not depend on the residential environment. Although the mean values are relatively low ($M \approx 1.75$), indicating that students often disagree with this opinion, this rejection of the position is not specific to urban or rural areas.

Research findings support the view that gender norms are not innate but rather dynamic constructs shaped by social learning and cultural transmission (Davis & Greenstein, 2009). In this regard, students perceive women's roles in the home as a changing cultural pattern rather than a fixed standard. However, these transformations are driven by the exchange of individual values among young people rather than by macro-social factors (Dotti Sani & Quaranta, 2017; Moreau et al., 2021).

According to the results of the third concept of the questionnaire, there was no statistically significant difference between urban and rural students ($p = 0.513$; $\omega^2 = 0.000$), indicating that attitudes towards the leadership role of men are

established as a widespread cultural norm in society, regardless of the residential environment. This is because the relatively high mean values ($M \approx 3.8$) indicate that a significant portion of student youth support the traditional patriarchal model.

Gender roles are shaped by social experience and interactions and gradually become social norms. The even distribution of these attitudes among rural and urban youth suggests that they have reached the level of universal norms. In addition, in accordance with the concept of hegemonic masculinity, the tendency to accept male economic dominance and power as a natural and legitimate social order is still preserved among young people (Inglehart & Norris, 2003; Dotti Sani & Quaranta, 2017). In this regard, data from the southern region of Kazakhstan reveal the hybrid nature of the gender transformation process in the region—that is, the preservation of traditional norms and the formation of new attitudes go hand in hand.

The results of the study show that there are no significant differences in the gender positions of urban and rural students, which means that this issue is a general cultural discourse, not a local-spatial one. Traditional norms regarding women's professional development are perceived as symbolic constructs in the public consciousness rather than local practices and are considered a common social reality for both groups (Davis & Greenstein, 2009; Halimi et al., 2016). However, the re-discussion of these norms in the student environment indicates the transformation of gender roles (Moreau et al., 2021).

Thus, the example of young people in the southern regions of Kazakhstan demonstrates that gender boundaries are being redefined at the macro-cultural level, rather than at the demographic and spatial level, in accordance with global trends.

According to the fifth conclusion of the study, the lack of differences in the positions of rural and urban students is evidence of the translocal cultural influence of social networks in the formation of gender roles. Digital media, by eliminating the rural-urban border, has become

a common socio-cultural platform where gender narratives are constantly reproduced and transformed. Accordingly, the role of geographical factors in the formation of youth gender attitudes has decreased, and the influence of media socialisation has become decisive.

The sixth concept of the survey revealed that the majority of young people perceive religion and tradition as a non-conflictual and legitimate cultural resource that regulates gendered relations.

This can be understood as a symbolic framework that upholds social order and significance, rather than merely as a means of enforcing gender roles. Gender is enacted through social practice, with religion and tradition playing a significant role in shaping these experiences (Davis & Greenstein, 2009).

Young people in the southern regions of Kazakhstan subscribe to this perspective, indicating that they view religion and tradition not as rigid systems of gender hierarchy, but rather as instruments for constructing cultural meaning.

Based on the results of the seventh concept of the survey, it was shown that the opinion that modern youth adhere to traditional gender roles is accepted equally among urban and rural youth. The data suggest that this change is occurring through the educational system, media environment, and global information flow, rather than due to urbanisation.

Theoretically, gender roles are not a fixed phenomenon, but a performative and flexible construct (Dotti Sani & Quaranta, 2017; Moreau et al., 2021). The results of the study confirm that the weakening of traditional norms and the formation of new identities among contemporary Kazakhstani youth are independent of the rural-urban dichotomy. The macro-social dynamics of the education system and the global media space, rather than regional factors, are decisively influencing this transformation.

As for the view that gender equality is not contrary to Kazakh culture, according to the

results of the eighth concept of the survey, it was noted that it found wide support among student youth. The findings suggest that the notions of tradition and equality do not necessarily conflict with one another, but rather, they are understood within the same cultural framework. This trend is consistent with theoretical perspectives that view gender equality as part of a cultural evolution process, where ideas of equity are interpreted in conjunction with national cultural legacies rather than superseding them.

In this context, empirical data from the southern part of Kazakhstan suggest that gender parity is not viewed as a replacement for national culture but rather as a value being reinvented within the contemporary cultural landscape. Therefore, the findings of this study demonstrate that young individuals in Kazakhstan can reconcile gender equality with both national cultural norms and global discourses. This implies that gender transformations in Kazakhstan have been culturally assimilated.

In addition, the results of the ninth concept of the survey also prove that the concept of economic independence and participation in family decisions among young students is becoming a general social norm in society.

This view aligns with theoretical perspectives that interpret gender relations through the distribution of resources, capital, and cultural norms. Economic capital, in particular, is identified as a key determinant of individual agency within the household, as argued by Davis and Greenstein (2009). International studies also note that recognition of women's economic independence is an important indicator of a shift from a strictly hierarchical to a more negotiated model of gender roles (Dotti Sani & Quaranta, 2017; Wilkinson et al., 2024).

In this context, young people in the southern region of Kazakhstan view women's economic independence as an important factor in family decision-making, regardless of whether they live in urban or rural areas. This indicates a shift from a traditional hierarchical gender model to a more equal relationship based on shared resources and individual agency.

The student argues that gender equality is moving from being an abstract value to a concrete social and economic reality for young people, and this process is occurring within the context of broader socio-cultural changes.

The findings from the tenth concept in the survey indicate that urban and rural youth share a comparable perception of equal opportunities for men and women as a key prerequisite for social stability.

This result indicates that the idea of gender equality in the minds of Kazakhstani youth is moving beyond individual views and becoming established as a normative social value. Therefore, gender equality is becoming a social position for young people, determined by common cultural and axiological orientations rather than spatial differences. In general, the data obtained show that gender equality is emerging as a shared value at a broad social level, regardless of differences between urban and rural areas.

The level of acceptance of changes in gender roles in society was found to be more pronounced among urban youth than among rural youth. The eleventh concept of this survey revealed that attitudes toward gender roles differed significantly depending on respondents' socio-spatial differences. Urban spaces, such as educational institutions, the labour market, and media, accelerate the process of conscious reinterpretation of gender norms among young people, making them more sensitive to social changes. This is supported by the works of Inglehart and Norris (2003).

In contrast, rural settings tend to exhibit more stable social structures, which often slow the acceptance of shifts in gender roles. The findings indicate that openness to gender role transformation is closely shaped by the surrounding social context. Recognising the distinctions between urban and rural environments is therefore essential when designing gender-responsive policies and youth-focused programmes.

The eleventh concept in the survey revealed a statistically significant difference in perceptions.

Although respondents expressed broadly similar individual views across other indicators, this particular divergence warrants deeper investigation. One plausible explanation lies in the distinct spatial and socio-cultural contexts shaping respondents' experiences. Urban students, accustomed to rapidly evolving environments where shifts in gender roles are more visible, may regard such transformations as an inherent feature of social change.

Conversely, students from rural southern regions may articulate egalitarian personal views shaped by campus culture and digital socialisation, yet these perspectives must be understood in relation to the realities of their home communities. In rural settings, traditional family structures, patriarchal norms, and culturally embedded expectations continue to exert strong influence over everyday life. As a result, while university education may harmonise young people's normative orientations, their descriptive perceptions of broader societal change remain anchored in the objective conditions of their local environments. This underscores the complex interplay between evolving personal values and enduring social structures.

According to the results of the twelfth concept of the survey, it was found that the idea of equal division of family responsibilities between men and women is supported equally by both urban and rural youths. This result shows that the principles of gender equality are becoming established in the minds of young people regardless of their social environment, and traditional differences are gradually weakening. However, this agreement often remains at the normative level and may not be fully implemented in everyday practice. While gender equality is recognised as value, the actual division of family responsibilities continues to be influenced by culturally established roles and institutional constraints. These constraints include implicit expectations and traditional roles that are constantly reproduced in daily life (Tenenbaum & Leaper, 2002).

This gap between declarative support for gender equality and actual practice justifies the need to

comprehensively considering institutional mechanisms in the development of family policies and gender equality.

According to the results of the thirteenth concept of the survey, attitudes toward maintaining traditional gender roles are observed without significant differences between urban and rural youth. This indicates that traditional gender positions have a strong cultural inertia despite urbanisation processes. The data suggest that traditional gender roles are maintained in the minds of young people as normative concepts of cultural identity and social order, rather than specific behavioural guidelines. In other words, traditional gender roles among young people are seen as culturally significant values despite the influence of urbanisation.

In terms of performative approaches that justify the stabilisation of gender roles through repeated social actions, young people may formally acknowledge traditional gender models but reinterpret their content to adapt them to current social circumstances (Davis & Greenstein, 2009).

According to the results of the fourteenth conclusion of the survey, it was found that the opinion that women's social activity interferes with family responsibilities is accepted without significant differences between urban and rural youth. This position appears to be based on cultural and normative understandings rather than spatial factors. The findings are consistent with theoretical foundations that confirm that gender roles are shaped not by biology, but by social expectations and everyday experiences (Davis & Greenstein, 2009). As a result, young people have developed an ambivalent attitude towards women's social activity. Although social activity is generally welcomed, it is often seen as something that comes at the expense of family responsibilities.

Theoretically, gender roles are not a fixed phenomenon, but a performative and flexible construct (Dotti Sani & Quaranta, 2017; Moreau et al., 2021). The results of the study confirm that the weakening of traditional norms and the formation of new identities among

contemporary Kazakhstani youth are independent of the rural-urban dichotomy. The macro-social dynamics of the education system and the global media space, rather than regional factors, are decisively influencing this transformation.

The results of the study indicate that the attitudes of Kazakhstani students towards gender roles are not determined by their place of residence, but rather by general cultural, institutional, and global factors. This is demonstrated by the lack of significant statistical differences between rural and urban youth, indicating that gender norms are not a position held by individual social groups but rather a reflection of collective cultural and value systems, formed through widespread socialisation.

The results of the frequency analysis (Q1–Q14) demonstrate a complex and non-uniform structure of gender attitudes among students. The data obtained prove that gender values are not exclusively traditional or exclusively modern, but rather coexist. That is, a high level of support for gender equality is observed on a number of questions. In particular, the indicators of Q3 (69.25%), Q10 (60.25%) and Q12 (62.52%) indicate that the majority of respondents support attitudes towards gender equality. This indicates that modern, equality-oriented values are widespread among students.

In addition, traditional views persist in some questions. For example, the results for Q2 (7.56%) and Q14 (22.31%) indicate that traditional understandings of gender roles remain important. This suggests that cultural norms have not been completely eliminated but are preserved to a certain extent.

However, the most important difference is that most responses are mixed and neutral in nature. In many questions (Q1, Q4, Q5, Q7, Q8, Q9, Q11, Q13), the level of agreement is between 30–45%, and the share of neutral responses is high. For example, in questions Q6 (50.54%), Q7 (45.50%) and Q11 (46.76%), a neutral position prevails. This indicates that students have not formed a stable, one-sided position on gender issues.

These results provide empirical evidence for the concept of 'hybrid cultural identity'. That is, students simultaneously embrace both traditional and modern values and integrate them into their worldview. Gender attitudes do not shift in one direction; instead, they become mixed as a result of various social influences.

Limitations

The main limitation of the study is the gender imbalance in the sample. Most participants were women (78.9%, $n = 439$), while men made up 21.1% ($n = 117$). International research shows that women tend to have more egalitarian attitudes toward gender roles than men (Inglehart & Norris, 2003; Dotti Sani & Quaranta, 2017). Therefore, the overall averages of gender values in our study may be higher, partly due to this demographic bias. We acknowledge that this factor creates certain limitations in fully assessing the values of young students. Future research should examine these differences in more depth, while maintaining a balanced gender composition.

Another limitation of the study is its cross-sectional design. While this method allows us to identify associations between variables, it cannot prove definitive causal relationships. Therefore, future longitudinal studies are needed to more accurately assess the direct impact of university education and urbanisation on the formation of egalitarian gender values.

Furthermore, while this study demonstrates the unifying influence of the university environment on gender attitudes, it is important to acknowledge some methodological limitations. The sample consisted mainly of undergraduate students (97.3%), meaning that there was no control group not attending university. In this regard, while 'campus culture' plays a significant role in bridging the urban–rural divide, it is difficult to clearly separate the educational factor from broader macro-societal transformations such as globalisation, urbanisation, and digitalisation that shape young people's values. It is therefore likely that the university environment is not the only driver, but rather acts in concert with these broader societal changes. Future research should conduct

comparative studies that include youth not attending university to better understand the specific impact of higher education on the transformation of traditional values.

These results emphasise the significance of examining gender norms at the level of collective cultural frameworks, rather than simply as a collection of individual perspectives. The development of similar attitudes among urban and rural young people determines the role of higher education in socialisation and unification. The university setting acts as a cultural mediator that reduces the impact of differences in gender roles by introducing students to a shared academic culture, linguistic, and symbolic environment. In this context, academic culture, particularly the content of educational curricula, plays a crucial role in shaping gender attitudes. Educational programs establish collective cultural directions, guiding students towards a specific value and normative framework.

This situation indicates that educational institutions, digital communication, and national cultural discourse play a dominant role in shaping gender norms in Kazakhstan, rather than urbanisation factors. As a result, there is a certain level of homogeneity in gender attitudes. However, this homogeneity is not due to a conflict between traditional and modern values, but rather to their cultural synthesis. Gender norms in Kazakh society are seen not as a source of social tension but as an indicator of cultural stability and agreement on values. The results suggest that the transformation of gender norms among young people in southern Kazakhstan is taking place through the coexistence and adaptation of traditional and innovative ideas, rather than through a binary opposition.

Conclusion

This study analysed cultural attitudes towards gender roles by using One-Way ANOVA results based on survey data from 556 university students in the southern regions of Kazakhstan. The empirical results showed that there were not many significant differences between urban and rural youth. In other words, urbanisation processes were not the main factor in determining gender roles. Students living in

cities and villages held similar attitudes towards gender roles. The study found that traditional and egalitarian gender norms coexisted in the minds of young people without completely replacing each other.

Although traditional roles such as the male breadwinner and leader continue to be highly valued, there is also growing support for women's career ambitions, economic independence, and gender equality. This suggests that gender transformation among university students in Kazakhstan's southern regions is not a radical shift, but a reinterpretation and adaptation of traditional values.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the field of cultural studies by examining gender norms through the lens of a shared cultural-axiological framework, rather than focusing on spatial differences. Rather than viewing gender roles as fixed structures, it sees them as dynamic systems that are constantly evolving through social interactions.

The practical significance of this study is relevant to youth policy, educational programmes, and social initiatives aimed at achieving gender equality. The findings indicate that it is not sufficient to associate gender changes with urbanisation or regional factors alone, and emphasise the need for a comprehensive approach that includes digital environments and institutional practices. Within this context, we recognise the importance of transitioning from declarative statements of gender equality to concrete social action.

In general, the study reveals that the gender attitudes of students in the southern regions of Kazakhstan are shaped by a combination of traditional and modern values. The gender norms of young people are changing not in a single direction, but rather gradually through cultural influences and social practices. Because this transformation occurs at the cultural, symbolic, and value levels, rather than due to regional differences, it is essential to consider the shared cultural background and socialisation processes when designing gender policies and educational approaches.

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Ethical Approval and Conflict of Interest

We declare that we prepared the manuscript in accordance with the protocols of the Declaration of Helsinki. We also declare no conflict of interest, financial or non-financial, related to the

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Artificial Intelligence (AI)–Assisted Technologies

The authors declare that no Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools or AI-assisted technologies were used in the writing or preparation of this manuscript.

Author Contribution Statement

Zhasmin Bazarbay: Methodology, writing initial drafts and editing

Zharkynbek Abikenov: Results and discussion

Serikkhan Zhuzeyev: Results and discussion

Makhpal Syzdykova: Review of Literature

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Data Availability Statement

We confirm that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article.