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Socio-Economic Characteristics Of Women's Well-Being In Rural Areas Of Uzbekistan

Azizova Nodira Mannapovna

PhD candidate of the National University named after Mirzo Ulugbek, Uzbekistan
E - mail: nodiraazizova@gmail.com
Head of Social and Gender development department "IKS Group of Companies"

ABSTRACT

This article presents the findings of the social survey conducted in the frame of the dissertation related to women’s empowerment in rural areas of Uzbekistan. The sociological analysis of the role and status of rural women has made it possible to analyze in depth the gender specificity of indicators of women's socio-economic well-being and to develop recommendations for reducing the gender gap in the social, economic and socio-political spheres. The study was conducted on proportionally selected samples of representatives in four regions of the Republic of Uzbekistan: Tashkent, Fergana, Surkhandarya, and Khorezm. It is concluded that despite the regional characteristics of each region, agriculture is not only the main source of income, but also opens up new opportunities for the development of entrepreneurship, business management and information technology, thereby demonstrating the transformation of the status of rural women by improving their professional skills and involving them in new areas of work in entrepreneurship.

Keywords:

Rural women, wellbeing, empowerment, socio-economic indicators, gender Uzbekistan

Introduction. In our country, in the context of the implementation of the concept of the New Uzbekistan, special attention is being paid to ensuring equal opportunities for women and men. The improvement of women's well-being and their active participation in the socio-economic life of society are under the unwavering attention of the Government, since the level of culture and spirituality depends primarily on the intellectual and spiritual development of women. As the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Sh. M. Mirziyoyev, stressed: "Women and family issues are a key task that determines not only today but also tomorrow". The gradual involvement of women

in the sustainable economic development of their families, mahallas, provinces and the entire country by helping them to secure preferential access to financial and natural resources and local infrastructure and providing social assistance to widows, disabled persons, mothers with many children, wives of migrants and young girls has become a priority of State policy.

This research serves to some extent to the implementation of the national indicators of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. 562 of 2 September

2019 "On Guarantees of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men", the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan RP-60 of 28 January 2022 "On the Strategy for the Development of New Uzbekistan for 2022-2026", the Resolution of the Senate of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Approval of the Strategy for Achieving Gender Equality in the Republic of Uzbekistan".

Literature review. Gender studies of agriculture affect all areas of socio-economic development of society and use interdisciplinary concepts of human development. The theme of praising women, their important role in the family and the upbringing of children, as well as the keepers of the home, is covered from the holy book of the Zoroastrian religion Avesta, Abu Nasr Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Farabi, Abu Rayhan Beruniy, Alisher Navoi, Zahir al-Din Muhammad Babur, and Gulbadan Begim, a woman historian who described in her works the advanced women of medieval Central Asia. A whole pleiad of 19th-century Uzbek poetesses such as Hafiza-Mariyam, Zebuniso-begim, Nuri-Jahan-begim, Jahan-atyn Uvaisi, Mohlar-oyim Nodira-begim and Dilshod praised not only the beauty of women, but also their intelligence, feelings, dignity and important role in society. Al-Farabi developed the doctrine of social development, which positively influenced the development of the Eastern sociological concept of well-being. The basis of his theory is the doctrine of a virtuous state and society, which are characterised by the following moral ideals - universal equality, respect, justice. It is noteworthy that al-Farabi saw the way to a prosperous and virtuous society in science and knowledge. The processes of modernisation of society in Central Asia were deeply considered in the works of such representatives of Jadidism as Abdurauf Fitrat, Mahmudhodja Behbudiy, Abdullah Kadiri and others.

¹ Azizova Nodira Mannapovna, & Bekmurodov Mansur Bobomurodovich. (2023). International Experience and Theoretical Concepts of Improving the Wellbeing of Uzbekistan's Rural Women. *Genius Repository*, 24, 70–76.

Problems related to the socio-political activity of women in Uzbek society have been considered by such national scholars as R. A. Ubaidullaeva, M. Bekmuradov, O. Musurmonova, M. Ganieva, T. Narbaeva, N. Egamberdieva, M. Nurmatova, N. Rakhimova, M. Gaffarova, S. Rajabova, N. Latipova, E. Sultanova, S. Hodjaev, M. Sukhomlinova, M. Tokhtakhodjaeva, D. Abdurazzakova, N. Alikoriev, V. Alekseeva and others. The works of G.A.Matkarimova, G.Tansykbaeva, A.Alikorieva, N.Muravyeva are devoted to specific problems of women. In addition, studies by a number of domestic sociologists, such as A.Umarov, A.Kholbekov, T.Matibaev, Sh.Sodikova, A.Seitov, O.Abduazimov, B.Farfiev have studied the theories and practices of society development, social activity, socialisation and provision of services to the population, particularly women. The practical results of the research are as follows: the conclusions and recommendations of this dissertation will allow a new assessment of rural women's contribution to the well-being of their families and mahallas on the basis of gender analysis. The sociological analysis of the role and status of rural women has made it possible to analyze in depth the gender specificity of indicators of women's socio-economic well-being and to develop recommendations for reducing the gender gap in the social, economic and socio-political spheres.¹

The use of the term "rural women's well-being, women's empowerment" has also attracted much attention from foreign researchers and governments. It is now widely recognised that gender equality and women's empowerment is a critical component of achieving socio-economic development outcomes, especially for developing states. According to the existing literature, it has been analysed that women's empowerment is a complex and multidimensional concept.² In the opinion of well-known sociologists E.B. Mezentseva, O.A. Voronina, etc. Voronina et al, the problem of

Retrieved from <https://www.geniusrepo.net/index.php/1/article/view/46>
² hooks, be. 1986. "Sisterhood: Political Solidarity between Women." *Feminist Review* 23(1): 125–38.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/1394725>.

empowerment raises the following questions: who has decision-making power, access to the main sources of livelihood, as well as to important sources of information and agencies? What are the characteristics of empowered people? Are they people who can control their own lives, freely participate in any social movements and decide critical issues of social and economic life in the family, community and at the highest level?³

Feminist scholars disagree with the universal and unitary term “empowerment.” Empowerment is the practice of empowering marginalized groups in a community to participate in the process of participation and decision-making at the household and community level. Therefore, women's empowerment in the agricultural sector is a process in which women can participate in and benefit from agricultural production on an equal basis with men, practice their leadership skills in the formal and informal sectors, and have equal access and control over natural and financial resources. Promoting gender equity and fair treatment of women, especially rural women from developing countries who largely prioritize the agricultural sector, are also key factors for empowerment. However, when using gender indicators developed by Western scientists, it was found that indicators for measuring the well-being and involvement of rural women in the economy do not reflect the full and real picture of gender aspects and well-being indicators. In addition, the national traditions and mentality of developing countries such as India, Bangladesh, Nepal, and the countries of Central and East Asia were not taken into account.⁴

According to Professor Chandra Mohanty, any discussion of the intellectual and political

construction of “Third World feminisms” must aim at two simultaneous projects: an internal critique of hegemonic “Western” feminisms and the articulation of autonomous feminist issues and strategies that are geographically, historically and culturally grounded.⁵ The first project is a deconstruction and dismantling project; the second is a project of construction and creation. Although these projects seem contradictory, one working negatively and the other positively, if these two objectives are not addressed simultaneously, Third World feminists' risk being marginalized or ghettoized by both the mainstream (right and left) and Western feminist discourses.⁶

Methodology. The dissertation is based on a comparative-historical approach of analysis, which allows us to investigate socio-economic factors of rural women's well-being. The thesis applies such research methods as systemic, structural-functional approach, comparative, document analysis, survey, and focus group discussions. The study was conducted on proportionally selected samples of representatives in four regions of the Republic of Uzbekistan: Tashkent (26.8%), Fergana (24.4), Surkhandarya (24.4%), Khorezm regions (24.4%). The sample size is 1100 respondents. In each of the 4 regions, 2 FGDs were conducted for women with an average of 15 participants in each group. Thus, this study covered more than 120 rural women in FGDs and 1,100 rural respondents in individual interviews.

Results of the survey.

Today, rural women of Uzbekistan are actively involved in the agricultural sector, engaged in raising livestock, crop production, processing food and fruits and vegetables. In rural areas,

³ Voronina, O. Fundamentals of Gender Theory and Methodology. // Theory and Methodology of Gender Studies. Course of lectures. Moscow, ICGI-MWSSSEN-MFF, 2001, pp. 95-109.

⁴ Kandiyoti, Deniz (January 1990). "Women and rural development policies: the changing agenda". *Development and Change*. **21** (1): 5–22. [doi:10.1111/j.1467-7660.1990.tb00365.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7660.1990.tb00365.x).

⁵ Mohanty, C. T. (2003). “Under Western Eyes” Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles. *Signs*, 28(2), 499–535. <https://doi.org/10.1086/342914>

⁶ Allen, Amy. 1998. “Rethinking Power.” *Hypatia* 13(1): 21–40. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.1998.tb01350.x>.
Crenshaw, Kimberle. 1991. “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color.” *Stanford Law Review* 43(6): 1241–99. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039>.

the employment rate of men exceeds that of women, but the difference between them is growing every year. In agriculture, there is an imbalance in the level of employment of women and men, which can be explained by the influence of gender stereotypes, as well as the established system of employment of the rural population and the specifics of work in agriculture. Results of the survey presents the main issues of employment of urban and rural populations. In this context, the urgent task remains the need to clarify how gender imbalance and gender stereotypes affect the labor market. There are stereotypes that hinder the development of women's professional knowledge and abilities, and the choice of professions in the labor market. It is significant that modern women are changing their work attitudes and system of life values, there is a gradual change in living standards, and many women from rural areas migrate to cities or other countries. The first place for this category of women is social status, material well-being, the achievement of which they see in migration to large cities and urbanization processes.

According to respondents, the main role and functions of a woman currently belong to the role of mother (38.8%), wife (32.1%) and daughter (13.4%), grandmother (8.8%). These answers were confirmed in the FGD responses of the participants, 40% of whom emphasized that motherhood is the most important role of a woman.

As the main problems that concern Uzbek rural women, 3 main factors can be noted, such as 1st and 2nd priority: unemployment (25.7% and 17.8%), lack of utilities (11.3% and 13.8%) and poverty (10.5% and 16.3%). The remaining problems indicated in the questionnaire are, in their opinion, of the least relevance. Such problems include bureaucratic red tape, environmental problems, and high taxes. During expert surveys, it was revealed that many

women from the Khorezm region expressed their opinion that the lack of work in the village leads to migration and destroys the traditional foundations of the family, so this problem worries all village women without exception. Especially women of the older generation from the Tashkent region, during the conversation, emphasized that they are trying to help the young unemployed with their pensions, but this does not help, as a result, many young people leave to work.

That is why one of the main problems of the Republic of Uzbekistan is the problem of unemployment. There is unevenness in the distribution of labor resources in some regions of the country where there are problems with providing work, in particular Tashkent (7.9%), Fergana (11%), Samarkand (11%), Surkhandarya and Khorezm, Bukhara regions. The unemployment rate in 2020 was 10.2%, and over the past few years the number of unemployed people has varied from 7-12%. There is a high percentage of unemployed women, their number is 13.7%. And also, during the study, it was revealed that today rural women are actively involved in the agricultural sector, engaged in raising livestock, crop production, processing products and fruits and vegetables. A sociological analysis of this fact revealed that the need and desire to work among women in 2017 was low, because every second married woman preferred to do housework. In 2021, only a fifth of married women chose to stay at home (21%). This shows a sharp increase in self-esteem and social activity of women living in rural areas of Uzbekistan. In rural areas, the employment rate of men (57.6%) prevails over the employment rate of women, but the difference between them is growing every year. In agriculture, 57.6% of men and 42.4% of women employed in the agriculture, forestry and fisheries sectors were provided with jobs.

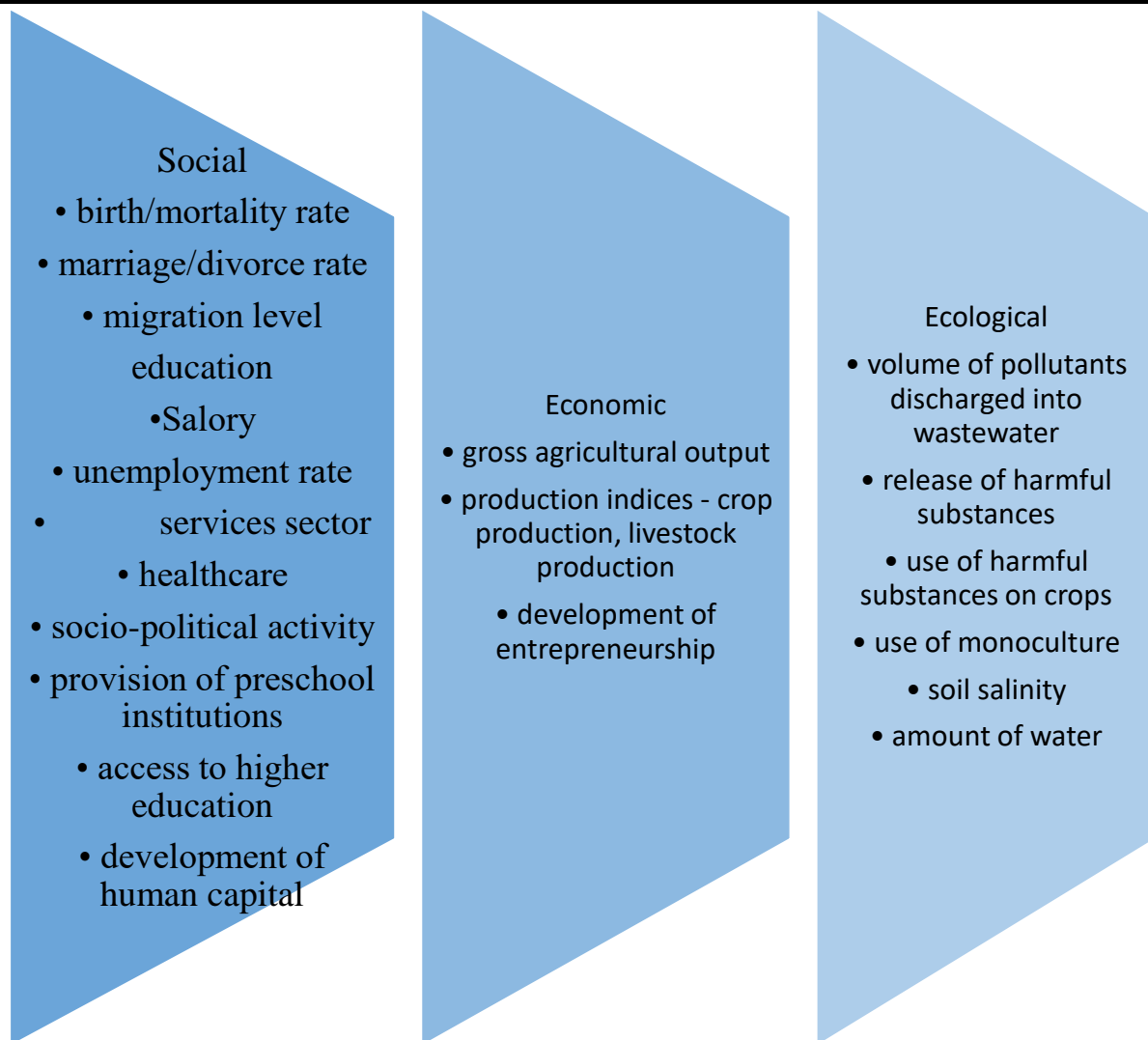
Table 1. Comparative analysis of the share of women in total employment in agriculture, forestry and fishery activities, %

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
The Republic of Uzbekistan	43,7	44,3	43,1	43,2	42,4

Republic of Karakalpakstan	38,4	38,7	38,6	38,6	38,6
Andijan region	49,1	49,8	49,4	49,4	49,4
Bukhara region	50,4	54,3	48,4	51,0	48,2
Jizzakh region	43,4	43,3	43,4	43,4	43,4
Kashkadarya region	44,0	44,0	44,9	44,9	44,9
Navoi region	49,8	52,2	43,4	47,8	45,8
Namangan region	41,4	42,0	41,7	42,8	42,0
Samarkand region	34,3	34,6	34,5	34,5	34,5
Surkhandarya region	48,4	48,7	48,6	48,6	48,6
Syrdarya region	49,2	49,1	49,2	46,0	44,9
Tashkent region	48,6	48,6	43,9	42,6	37,9
Fergana region	39,8	40,2	40,0	40,0	39,7
Khorezm region	38,5	38,6	38,6	38,2	38,5
Tashkent city	44,7	44,2	44,4	44,4	44,4

Having analyzed the information, the author of the dissertation systematized indicators of the development of the rural population by area (**Fig 1**).

Fig 1. Indicators of development of the rural population by sector



Increasing human capital as a condition for ensuring women's well-being is one of the important factors. Increasing the role of a person, his knowledge, skills, abilities and determination is a driver for ensuring the well-being of the entire society, including young girls and women living in remote areas of Uzbekistan.⁷ The President's address emphasizes that "Everything is based on the desire for improvement, the realization of the dream of a purposeful life, which means attracting people to their specific activities (acquiring a profession, obtaining higher education, entrepreneurship). All implemented work was organized according to the

⁷ Azizova N, Azizova L, "Implication of gender issues on rural women's wellbeing: case study from Uzbekistan" «Марказий Осиёда жамият, гендер ва оила – Общество,

President's model through the "motivation, skills, financial support" model, where the main factor is goal setting. The use of this development model, based on the formation of a sense of purpose, will make it possible to sharply reduce unemployment and dependency approaches and increase the desire to enter higher educational institutions (HEIs), establish their own business and contribute to the family budget. Based on the President's model of "motivation, skills and financial support", according to the dissertation author, social well-being can reflect conditions and situations external to a person, both subjective and objective factors of the socio-psychological

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aspects of the life of rural residents. In particular, the degree of satisfaction, components of personal "happiness and well-being, value orientations, satisfaction with the life situation, risk assessment in society, satisfaction of needs, and other factors.

Factors that ensure the vital interests of women include - ensuring equality of women's rights, their access to economic resources, protecting motherhood and childhood, eliminating occupational segregation and all forms of discrimination in employment, preventing violence against women, a balanced distribution of work and family responsibilities of women and men.

One of the main indicators of the effectiveness of social development of rural areas and the quality of life of people living there is the social well-being of the population. In the author's opinion, social well-being can reflect conditions and situations external to a person, both subjective and objective factors of the socio-psychological aspects of the life of rural residents. In particular, the components of personal happiness and well-being, value orientations, satisfaction with the life situation, risk assessment in society, satisfaction of needs, and other factors.

Data analysis showed that the degree of satisfaction with the lives of rural women is associated with the fulfillment of basic needs for health, housing, work, material security, quality of food, the creation of service centers, and leisure activities. Failure to realize basic human needs will lead to other problems, such as lack of higher education, decreased spiritual education, and changes in value orientations.

According to the results of the study, it was revealed that the level of education has a direct correlation with other indicators. When describing the portrait of a modern woman, the majority of respondents (52%) noted that education is one of the most important criteria along with hard work (47%). According to respondents, the main qualities of a modern woman should be education and upbringing,

this is the opinion of 52.8% of respondents, the second position is occupied by thriftiness and hard work (47.0%), the third position is intelligence and thinking (35.7%), and finally, the fourth the position is taken by patience and complaisance (21.7%).

The author of the dissertation specifically studied the transformation process of rural women's employment. Table 4 shows the comparative performance of the four regions. It should be noted that in 2017-2022 the content and nature of rural women's labor activities changed significantly. The fundamental trend is the transformation and industrialization of work and employment of rural women.

The results of the study revealed regional differences in the employment of rural women. Residents of the Ferghana region are more involved in the textile (38%) and leather industry (18%) compared to women from the Khorezm region (34% and 2%, respectively). The share of rural women employed in agricultural processing turned out to be quite high in all four regions where the sociological study was conducted.

Conclusion. Thus, based on the data obtained, we can conclude that despite the regional characteristics of each region, agriculture is not only the main source of income, but also opens up new opportunities for the development of entrepreneurship, business management and information technology, thereby demonstrating the transformation of the status of rural women by improving their professional skills and involving them in new areas of work in entrepreneurship. ⁸Today, the features of the country's socio-political structure, the level of its economic development, the development of culture, management, legal norms, the protection of motherhood and childhood, ensuring balanced equality of women's rights, the distribution of work and family responsibilities of women and men, and their access to economic resources affect the status of

⁸ Mandal, K. C. (2013, May). Concept and Types of Women Empowerment. In *International Forum of Teaching & Studies* (Vol. 9, No. 2). Reshi, I. A., & Sudha, T. (2022).

Women Empowerment: A Literature Review. *International Journal of Economic, Business, Accounting, Agriculture Management and Sharia Administration (IJEBAAS)*, 2(6), 1353-1359 стр.

women. ⁹Innovative development of the economy presupposes the emergence of new non-standard forms of employment, each of which has its own characteristics and rationality of application. In particular, informal employment, virtual employment, part-time employment, self-employment, etc. It is significant that modern women's work attitudes and system of life values are changing, new living standards are emerging, and many women from rural areas migrate to cities or other countries.

In order to improve the socio-economic well-being of rural women, it is necessary to pay attention to the following aspects: increasing the efficiency of the processes of providing social and medical services to women living in rural areas; providing socio-legal and psychological assistance to women who find themselves in difficult life situations; conducting transparent monitoring and implementation of programs aimed at improving social infrastructure in rural areas; increasing the efficiency of labor market regulation mechanisms; informing rural women about opportunities to increase their potential; and improving the system of social partnership in the process of improving the quality of life of women living in rural areas.

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