Gender Inequality and Its Implications for the Youth Labor Market of Kazakhstan

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Abstract

The article presents the problem of gender segregation in the population of the Republic of Kazakhstan and its consequences for the youth labor market. Gender discrimination is an uneven distribution of men and women in different sectors of the economy, which affects the economic condition of the country. The introduction of segregation takes place during the school years, forming possible obstacles to free choice. The paper points out the causes of inequality, including socio-cultural stereotypes regarding gender roles, which influence the choice of profession. Also, the consequences of this choice for wages and career opportunities of young people. In addition, the economic, social, and psychological consequences of gender segregation are studied. One of the economic consequences is the growth of unemployment among women and the increase in the wage gap. Social consequences include issues of social mobility and access to managerial positions, while psychological consequences include the impact on the self-development and psychological well-being of workers. State and private sector measures to reduce discrimination are highlighted, and recommendations for improving the situation in the country are offered. Foreign studies are presented as examples for comparison and possible application of successful practices in Kazakhstan. As a result, this study points to the importance of studying and addressing gender inequality in the youth labor market and suggests ways to achieve a more equitable and effective distribution of labor resources in Kazakhstan.

Keywords: Gender, Gender Discrimination, Youth, Segregation, Labor Market, Inequality, Kazakhstan

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the economic consequences of gender inequality is the significant growth of unemployment among women and the consequent increase in the wage gap between men and women. This disparity has far-reaching implications for the overall economy, reducing the economic potential and financial independence of a significant portion of the population. Furthermore, the wage gap perpetuates economic dependency and inequality, thereby reinforcing the cycle of poverty and limiting women's contributions to economic growth and development. The social consequences of gender inequality are equally concerning. Issues of social mobility and access to managerial positions are prevalent, with women often facing significant barriers in climbing the corporate ladder. This lack of upward mobility not only affects individual career prospects but also undermines the potential for diverse leadership, which is crucial for innovative and inclusive decision-making processes. Moreover, gender inequality in the workplace can lead to a lack of role models for young women, discouraging them from pursuing ambitious career paths. Psychological consequences are also profound, impacting the self-development and psychological well-being of workers. Women who face discrimination and unequal treatment in the workplace may experience decreased job satisfaction, lower self-esteem, and higher levels of stress and anxiety. These psychological effects can hinder their professional growth and personal development, leading to a decrease in overall productivity and workplace morale. Addressing these psychological impacts is essential for creating a supportive and inclusive work environment where all employees can thrive. To combat these issues, state and private sector measures to reduce discrimination are highlighted in this study. For instance, implementing policies that promote equal pay for equal work, providing mentorship programs for women, and creating flexible work arrangements to accommodate family responsibilities are some of the measures that can help bridge the gender gap. Additionally, promoting gender-sensitive hiring practices and providing training on unconscious bias can further support the creation of an equitable workplace. Recommendations for improving the situation in the country are also offered. These include strengthening legal frameworks to protect against gender discrimination, increasing public awareness about the benefits of gender equality, and encouraging more women to enter and stay in the workforce. Providing incentives for companies that demonstrate a commitment to gender equality and supporting women's entrepreneurship are also crucial steps toward achieving this goal. By implementing these recommendations, Kazakhstan can make significant strides towards reducing gender inequality in the labor market. Foreign studies are presented as examples for comparison and possible application of successful practices in Kazakhstan. Countries that have offered substantial progress in achieving gender equality have valuable lessons and best practices that can be adapted to the Kazakh context. For instance, examining the policies and programs implemented in Scandinavian countries, which are known for their high levels of gender equality, can provide insights into effective strategies for promoting women's participation in the labor market and ensuring equal opportunities for all.

As an article purpose, this study indicates the importance of studying and addressing gender inequality in the youth labor market. It highlights the need for comprehensive and targeted interventions to achieve a more equal and effective distribution of labor resources in the Republic of Kazakhstan. The findings underscore the necessity of a multi-faceted approach that includes legal, economic, social, and cultural measures to create a more inclusive and equitable labor market.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender inequality, as a significant factor

influencing the reduction of rights and opportunities for citizens, suggests a low level of public engagement in this issue, indicating a lack of interest. Despite Kazakhstan's recent orientation towards gender equality, the past decade has seen a decrease in the gender gap within the labor force structure. However, gender inequalities persist, particularly in the form of workplace discrimination against women, which current and future job candidates may encounter. This literature review examines key studies on the causes and consequences of gender segregation in the youth labor market.

Mukataeva described gender segregation or inequality as the asymmetrical distribution of men and women in various industries. Gender equality, on the other hand, refers to society's equal valuation of the similarities and differences between women and men and the social roles they play without establishing a norm specific to one gender. Despite advancements in the modern world and digital development, societal definitions of "masculine" and "feminine" attributes persist (Mukataeva, 2007).

Gender discrimination in Kazakhstan predominantly affects women, manifesting as obstacles to promotion and a gender pay gap, as emphasized by Roshchin (2020). Gender-biased job advertisements and interviews exacerbate such discrimination.

In CIS countries, gender inequality begins at an early age. According to Baskakova, Sobolev, and Kubishin (2018), women's career choices are influenced by early-formed mentalities and attitudes, which can limit their competitive advantage in the labor market where a high level of education is crucial. Shelomentseva et al. (2019) also highlight that gender stereotypes formed from an early age are a major factor in the persistence of gender inequality.

To address these issues, Khamzina, Buribayev, Ermukhanov, and Alshurazova (2020) highlighted the importance of legal research in regulating gender equality through legislation. They proposed a methodology for comprehensive legislative analysis to identify and eliminate gender discrimination and inequality.

Regarding occupational distribution, Lebedeva and Vikova (2022) noted that women are less likely to pursue technical specialties or jobs due to anticipated discrimination. This tendency leads them to choose less demanding fields, which can result in uneven gender distribution in technical companies, particularly in manufacturing.

Zharkynbaeva, Abdirayimova, Sarsenbaev, and Bekzhanova (2020) conducted a comprehensive study to identify the main obstacles to achieving gender equality in Central Asian countries. Their research highlighted several cultural peculiarities that significantly impact the progress toward gender parity. They found that deeply rooted traditional values and societal norms often perpetuate gender biases and stereotypes, limiting opportunities for women in various sectors. Additionally, the study emphasized the role of family expectations and community pressures in shaping gender roles, which further hinder efforts to promote gender equality. By examining these cultural factors, the authors provided valuable insights into the specific challenges faced by Central Asian countries in addressing gender disparities.

Nusupova, Aidarkhanova, Kenespaeva, and Kelinbaeva (2023) provided information on government efforts to reduce gender inequality. They reviewed women's labor market status, noting progress and gaps in gender equality in Kazakhstan. Despite increased job access for women, significant gender pay gaps and underrepresentation in high positions persist. These issues are addressed in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Shinkarenko and Vitkovskaya (2022) conducted an in-depth examination of youth employment in Nizhny Novgorod, analyzing various factors such as education level, mobility, desired wages, and gender distribution across different sectors. Their comprehensive study uncovered significant patterns of gender segregation in job-seeking behavior among young people. They noted that

young men and women often pursued different types of employment based on societal expectations and personal aspirations, which were influenced by prevailing gender norms. Furthermore, the research highlighted disparities in career opportunities and advancement prospects, demonstrating how gender-based preferences and biases impact the professional trajectories of the youth in this region.

The Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On State Guarantees of Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women" is a primary source of normative acts governing gender policy in the country. It regulates social relations to ensure equal rights and opportunities for men and women, establishing principles and norms for gender equality in all spheres of public and private life (Government of Kazakhstan, 2016).

The state plays a crucial role in forming and supporting gender policy. The Concept of Family and Gender Policy in the Republic of Kazakhstan until 2030 serves as the main program for gender equality development. It analyzes the current situation, achievements, and issues in gender and family policy, offering examples of international experience and an action plan for implementing the concept.

3. METHODOLOGY

A comprehensive approach, including both quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis, will be used to achieve the research's goal of considering gender segregation in the Republic of Kazakhstan and its impact on the youth labor market.

For quantitative analysis, statistical data from the Bureau of National Statistics of the Agency for Statistical Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan was used. These data include various aspects of the labor market, such as the distribution of employment by sector, gender ratio in different sectors of the economy, and data on wages of men and women. The collection and analysis of these statistics provide an objective and accurate picture of the situation of the youth labor market and gender differences in the country. Using statistical data ensures objectivity and accuracy of the research results, as they are based on measurements and mathematical calculations.

The main focus of the study is on qualitative methods of analysis, as they are key tools in the field of studying gender segregation and its consequences. Qualitative methods allow for a deeper understanding of the causes and mechanisms underlying gender differences in the labor market. The most important qualitative method is the method of comparison. It allows for the comparison of existing indicators and values to identify trends and patterns regarding the position of men and women in the labor market. Comparative analysis includes comparing data for different regions of Kazakhstan, as well as with international data, to identify unique and common features.

Analysis of existing legislation and programs aimed at combating gender discrimination. This includes examining public and private initiatives aimed at supporting gender equality in the labor market. A qualitative analysis of these measures will assess their effectiveness and identify areas for improvement.

Thus, this study's use of quantitative and qualitative analysis methods has provided a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the problem of gender segregation in the youth labor market in Kazakhstan. This integrated approach identified key factors and consequences of segregation and developed practically applicable recommendations to improve the situation. The study results can be used to formulate more effective government policies aimed at reducing gender inequality and supporting equal opportunities for all young workers in Kazakhstan.

To carry out the correlation and regression analysis and describe the result, we used the formulas for the Prison correlation coefficient and the coefficient of determination. Both coefficients describe the relationship between the dependent and independent variables and

determine the percentage influence of the independent factor on the dependent factor.

Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) measures the linear relationship between two variables. Its value ranges from -1 to 1, where 1 indicates a perfect positive linear relationship, -1 indicates a perfect negative linear relationship, and 0 indicates no linear relationship. The formula for calculating Pearson's correlation coefficient is as follows (1) and (2):

$$r_{xy} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{n}(x_i-x)(y_i-y)}{\sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^{n}(x_i-x)^2}\sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^{n}(y_i-y)^2}} \qquad (1)$$

$$R^2 = \frac{\sum(y_x-y)^2}{\sum(y_i-y)^2} = 1 - \frac{\sum(y_i-y_x)^2}{\sum(y_i-y)^2} \qquad (2)$$

where:
R - coefficient of determination;
$\sum(y_x - y)^2$ – the total sum of squares of deviations of the dependent variable from the mean;
$\sum(y_i - y_x)^2$ – the residual sum of squares characterizing the influence of unaccounted factors;
$\sum(y_i - y)^2$ – the sum of squares due to regression.

These formulas allow quantifying the degree of linear dependence between variables and the share of variation of the dependent variable explained by the model, which is a key aspect in analyzing data and building forecast models.

4. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

At the moment, the youth labor market of the Republic of Kazakhstan is confirmed by various factors. Nevertheless, the number of youths is growing in 2023. This is due to the increase in the age limit of youth from 14 to 35 years old. That accordingly stimulates the growth of the unemployed, economically active, and employed population. On the contrary, the unemployment rate is falling despite the growth of other indicators. The author explains this by the fact that young people aged 30 to 35 years old work in official employment much more often than young people of the younger age group.

Next, Figure 1 provides data on spheres of activity among young people.
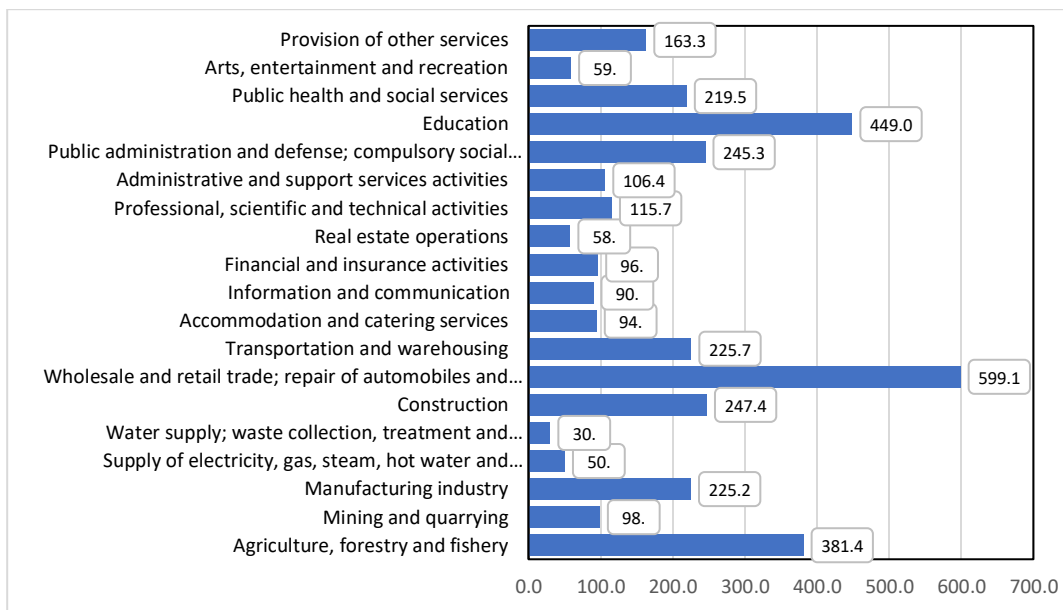

FIGURE 1. Spheres of activity among young people

Note: compiled by authors based on data from the Bureau of National Statistics (2023)

Based on the study, the most popular spheres of activity for young people for 2023 were determined. The most popular spheres are wholesale and retail trade, transportation, communication, catering, construction, and education. The least popular are public administration and defense (including law enforcement and security agencies, social security agencies), science, other industries, and beauty. However, the study did not indicate any specifics of grouping by gender, age, or income. Such data would have allowed us to determine which spheres of activity are relevant for different groups of young people

In addition to people engaged in a certain type of activity, some young people are self-employed without a formal labor contract with an employer. They are not in wage labor but work for themselves or participate in the family business. They can be individual entrepreneurs, freelancers, small business owners, and those who are engaged in agriculture or crafts without hired labor.

Figure 2 shows a graph of the young self-employed population from 2001 to 2013, indicating that from 2013 to 2023, the number of self-employed decreased and strongly matured only from 2023.
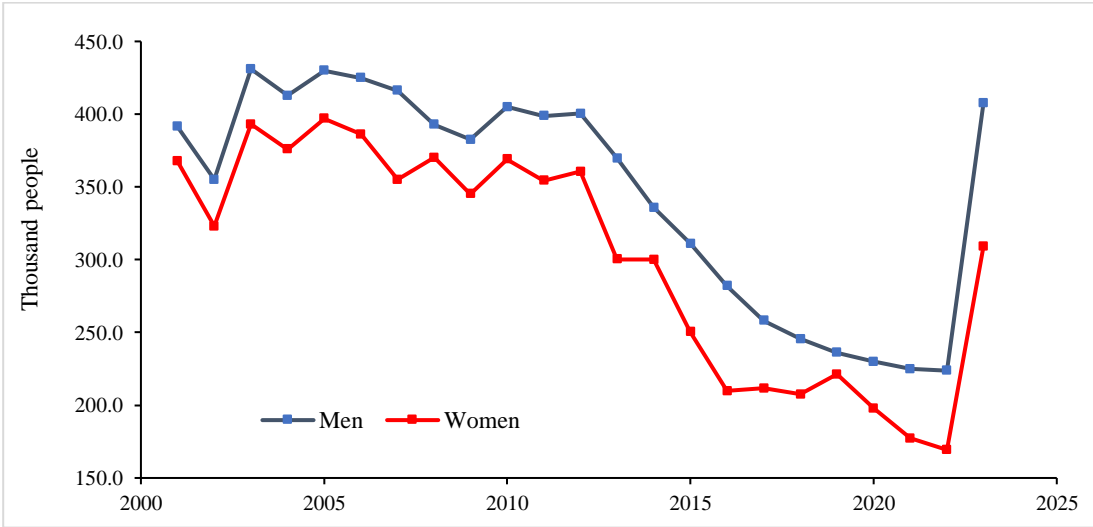
FIGURE 2. Young self-employed population

Note: compiled by authors based on data from the Bureau of National Statistics (2023)

The main categories of self-employment, according to the International Labor Organization, are:
   1. Individual entrepreneurs;
   2. Freelancers;
   3. Those working in family businesses;
   4. Artisans and small producers;
   5. Farmers and agricultural workers.

Discrimination manifests itself in the form of reluctance to hire women to avoid additional costs for women as fringe benefits. The existence of gender segregation and poorly drafted laws on gender inequality create risk and impunity on the part of employers.

At the moment, in Kazakhstan, the issues of discrimination are regulated by two administrative articles:

   1. Discrimination in the field of labor on the part of the employer, which is expressed in violation of the employee's right to equal pay for equal work;

   2. Information on vacancies placed by the employment center, private employment agency, and employer containing discriminatory requirements (Dauletbai et al., 2019).

For a deeper look at the types of discrimination against women, it is necessary to consider not only the industrial division but also other aspects such as socio-cultural stereotypes, limited access to managerial positions, and unequal working conditions and remuneration. For example, wages in female-dominated health, education, and social services tend to be lower compared to male-dominated industries such as construction, oil and gas, and extractive industries. However, there is another factor here in the form of professions on the list of prohibited types of work for women. The main reason for this list's presence is the harmful effect on the female body in the process of work. But it is also a violation of a woman's right to choose. Due to the emergence of new views in recent years, the number of prohibited jobs for women has decreased from 287 to 191.

The youth labor market plays a huge role in shaping society's future by undergoing socio-cultural and economic changes. Young people face various obstacles and opportunities that are shaped by emerging trends. They also have a strong influence on the market. The gender differences of market participants have formed already during the school years. In high school, young men more actively leave school and continue their education in primary or secondary vocational education institutions or directly enter the labor market.

The situation is somewhat different in Azerbaijan, where, according to experts, there is a problem of girls dropping out of high school directly related to early marriages. In CIS countries, except for Azerbaijan, young men comprise most of the primary vocational education institutions, while the secondary and higher levels of vocational schools are feminized (Baskakova et al., 2018).

In Kazakhstan, although girls have higher education, they can still face gender discrimination. This is best illustrated by the average monthly salaries of men and women in Figure 3.
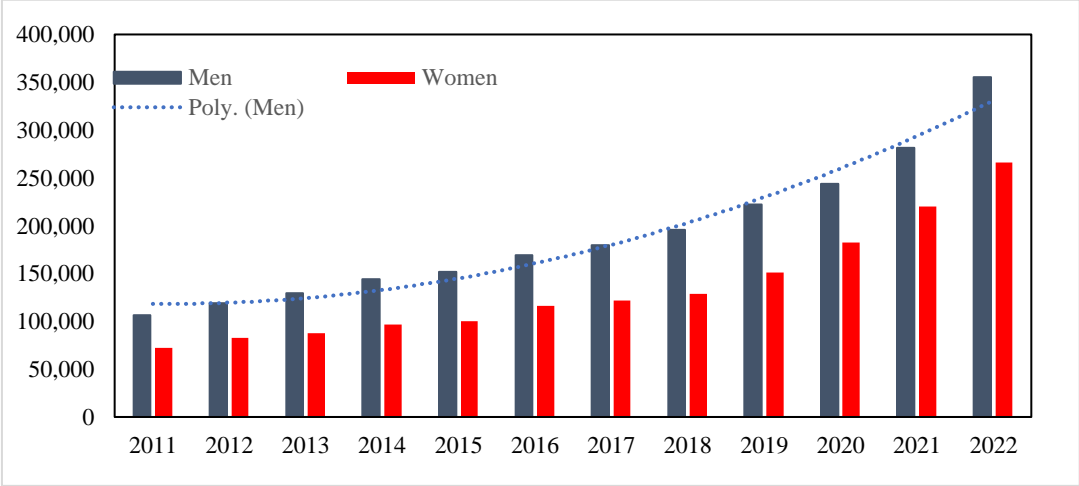
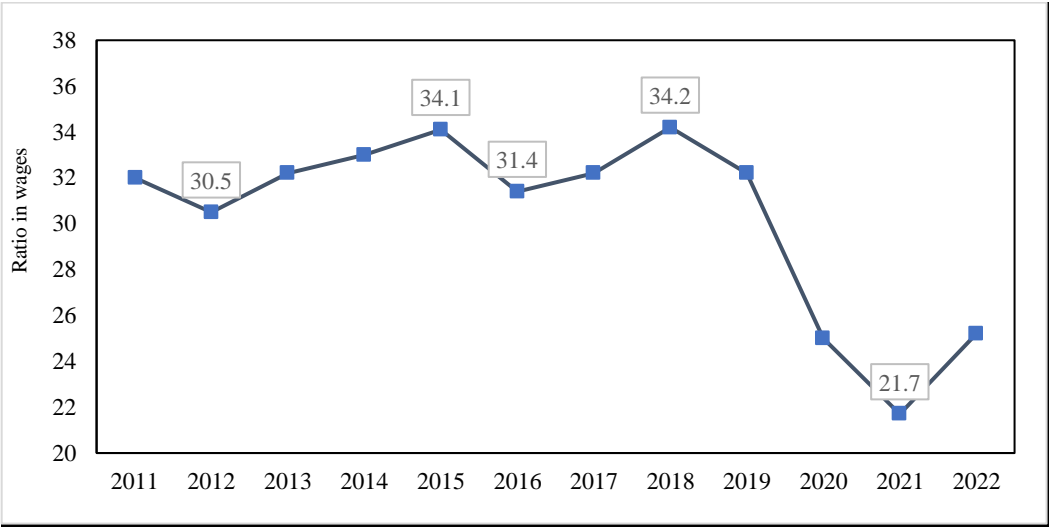**FIGURE 3.** Average monthly wages of men and women in Kazakhstan

Note: compiled by the authors based on data from the Bureau of National Statistics (2023)

Whereas according to Figure 4, it is possible to note a decrease in the ratio of men's and women's wages in the Republic of Kazakhstan. However, despite progress toward this outcome in 2021, the gap is trending upward again in 2022. To reduce this gap and achieve more equal conditions for all workers, the state must take additional measures. In particular, it is important to focus on reducing the gender wage gap. This can be achieved by introducing policies and programs aimed at reducing gender inequalities in the labor

market. According to the data, the gender wage gap has remained virtually unchanged for 11 years, except in 2021, when a slight shift was recorded. Next, in Figure 3, data on the wage ratio between men and women in the Republic of Kazakhstan is provided.

FIGURE 4. The ratio in wages between men and women in Kazakhstan

Note: compiled by the authors based on data from the Bureau of National Statistics (2023)

Regarding other countries' methodologies for studying gender discrimination among young people, we can cite the example of a study by Dernberger and Pepin (2020) from the United States of America. Their study emphasized the study of young people's views on the distribution of roles in their future families and derived six classes of parenthood:

1. Traditional class - the group most likely to rate the traditional work-family construct as desirable;

2. Non-traditional class;

3. traditional realists;

4. Dual wage earners;

5. Intensive parents.

6. Strong Intensive Parents - do not prefer the full-time, dual-earner design, preferring to have one of the partners at home with the preschool child.

Piotr Sorokowski and colleagues conducted a study to provide evidence of how love manifests itself at different levels of human development and modernization indices. They concluded that overall, participants from countries with high Human Development Index, World Modernization Index, and low Gender Inequality Index showed more love for their partner (Sorokowski et al., 2023). The current state of Kazakhstani legislation creates the risk that discrimination will go unpunished and victims will be denied compensation for the harm caused. The content of Kazakhstan's labor legislation about the prohibition of discrimination based on sex complies with the requirements of generally accepted standards established by the International Labor Organization (Turebekova et al., 2020). There are no direct discriminatory norms in the norms of national legislation, and the prohibition of gender-based discrimination is guaranteed by administrative liability (of a limited nature) (Ashimkhanova, 2017). There is a real gap between the declaration of equality and the actual situation. This is recognized by human rights activists and state bodies, which have adopted and implemented several special programs to promote gender equality over the past twenty and twenty-seven years. However, several implemented measures have not led to the eradication of this phenomenon. It should

be recognized that the problem of gender inequality begins with preschool and school education and later logically manifests itself in the choice of profession and employment (Kredina et al., 2023). The issue of gender stereotypes and their implications for family and public life, in particular, to promote women's participation in the economy, the labor market, and other areas of social and cultural life. It is recommended that further efforts be made to increase the representation of women in high-level decision-making positions in the public and private sectors, including through special temporary measures. It is proposed to intensify efforts to promote vocational training for women in non-traditional employment and fields that will provide them with equal career opportunities and to take other necessary measures to ensure women's full access to and enjoyment of economic, social, and cultural rights (Kireyeva et al., 2021).

It is essential to note the impact of gender inequality on youth unemployment. The Gender Inequality Index is a comprehensive indicator developed by the UN Development Program to measure gender inequality in countries. It shows the difference between women and men in three key aspects of human development: reproductive health, opportunities, and participation in economic and political life (Khamzina et al., 2020).

For this reason, a correlation and regression analysis was conducted between the youth unemployment rate and the gender inequality index. The analysis showed that the index and the youth unemployment rate have a substantial direct correlation equal to 0.7. The coefficient of determination equal to 0.5 indicated that the gender inequality index explained 50% of the variation in the unemployment rate. It was also determined that the regression equation and model parameters are statistically significant as the results of the F-test and P-test are consistent with the norms. Further modeling was conducted in Figure 5, where the impact of the index on the youth unemployment rate is graphically presented.
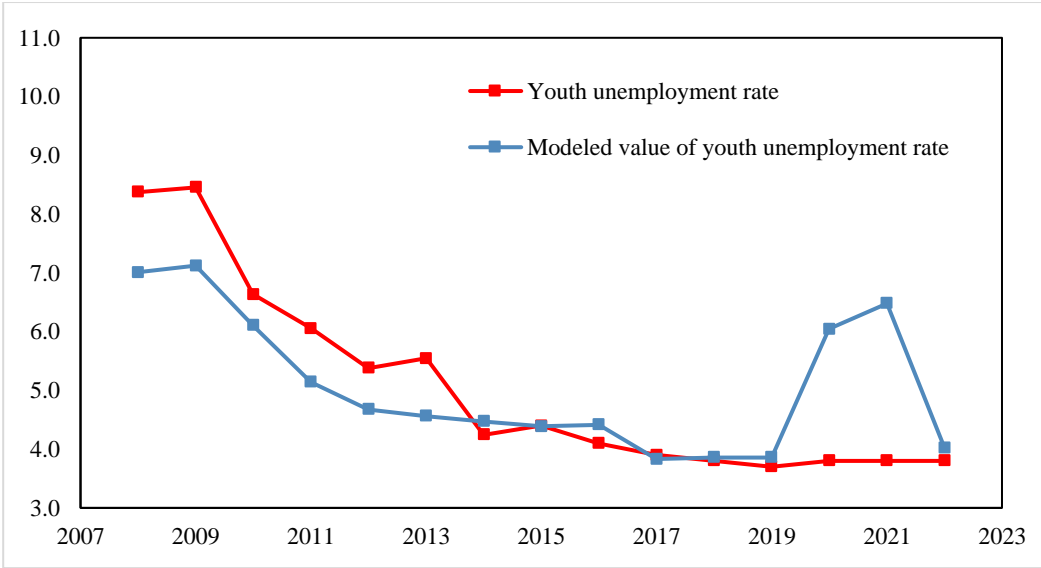
FIGURE 5. Regression analysis results

Note: compiled by the authors based on data from the Bureau of National Statistics (2023)

The results of correlation regression analysis showed that the growth of the index of header inequality follows the growth of youth unemployment. That shows that there is a direct relationship. The correlation coefficient confirms this. Nevertheless, it is noticeable that

starting in 2020, the index increased accordingly, and the youth unemployment rate increased. It also affects the value of the approximation error, which indicates how much the actual values deviate from the theoretical ones. The calculated value of the approximation error was 16%, which is higher than the norm by 6%. This indicates the presence of additional factors affecting the level of youth unemployment, which were not taken into account in this model. It is recommended that additional factors be introduced in further research for a more accurate study of the problem.

According to this recommendation, additional factors for multiple regression were added. Several factors were considered for introduction into the model. This was done by constructing a correlation matrix, which allows us to consider the most vital relationships between the factors. The first group for selection was indicators of the number of employed youth of the Republic of Kazakhstan by types of economic activity. When building the general model, it was noticeable that the highest correlation coefficient of the Gender Inequality Index and the highest correlation coefficient with the sphere of arts. This relationship was moderate and inverse (-0.6), which indicates the growth of the number of representatives of this sphere when the index decreases and decreases when the index increases. Of all the spheres of activity, only agriculture, forestry, and fishery, as well as wholesale and retail trade have a direct connection with the index. However, their indicators are very weak and generally affect only 10-20%.

In addition, the authors determined that there is a strong correlation between the two concepts in promoting overall societal well-being. Sustainable development implies not only the satisfaction of current needs but also ensuring that these needs are met without compromising the ability of future generations to satisfy their own needs. This approach necessitates a holistic consideration of economic, social, and environmental factors, with gender equality crucial in achieving these long-term goals (Lebedeva & Vilkova, 2022).

During the years of independence, all Central Asian countries have joined the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), underscoring their commitment to addressing gender-based discrimination. Kazakhstan joined CEDAW in 1998, marking a significant step toward gender equality in the country. In its efforts to reinforce this commitment, Kazakhstan has adopted two primary laws regarding gender: the Law "On State Guarantees of Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women" and the Law "On the Prevention of Domestic Violence" in 2009. These legislative measures aim to create a more equitable and just society by ensuring legal protection and equal opportunities for both men and women (Zharkynbaeva et al., 2020).

The current situation in the region can be described as a significant disparity between the growth of women's intellectual, socio-political, spiritual, and creative potential and the low level of realization of this potential. Despite the progress made in education and other sectors, many women in Central Asia still face considerable barriers to fully realizing their capabilities. This issue is particularly pressing in the context of Central Asia's current socio-political landscape, where there is a noticeable trend of re-traditionalization of social life. Re-traditionalization often revives and promotes burdensome traditions, reinforces existing prejudices, and perpetuates various forms of discrimination against women, which, in turn, leads to social and economic insecurity for them (Nyussupova et al., 2023).

The revival of traditional norms and practices can undermine the advancements made in gender equality, as these traditions often impose restrictive roles and limit women's participation in public and economic life. This re-rationalization process not only hinders progress toward achieving gender equality but also exacerbates the social and economic challenges women face (Shinkarenko & Vitkovskaya, 2022). It is crucial to address these issues through

comprehensive policies and programs that promote gender equality, protect women's rights, and ensure their active participation in all spheres of life. By doing so, Central Asian countries can harness the full potential of their female population, contributing to sustainable development and social stability in the region.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The study of gender segregation and its impact on the youth labor market in the Republic of Kazakhstan shows that it affects young people's labor opportunities. Despite the increase in the age limit for youth and the growth of the economically active population, significant differences in employment and wages between men and women remain. Sectoral segregation, manifested in different degrees of representation of men and women in different sectors of the economy, leads to unequal working conditions and career opportunities.

Key areas of employment for young people, such as trade, transportation, and construction, are predominantly occupied by men. At the same time, women predominate in the health, education, and social services sectors, where wages are traditionally lower. In addition, gender stereotypes and restrictions on women's access to certain professions exacerbate the situation.

The regression analysis results show a direct correlation between the Gender Inequality Index (GII) and the level of youth unemployment: the higher the GII, the higher the level of youth unemployment. This emphasizes the need to reduce gender inequality to improve the situation in the labor market.

The main recommendations to improve gender inequality are to strengthen legislative measures to combat discrimination, support women's entrepreneurship, form and implement educational and professional programs, promote gender equality in companies, and overcome gender stereotypes.

Implementing these recommendations will not only help reduce gender inequality but also significantly improve the country's overall economic situation. Gender equality in the labor market leads to a more efficient distribution of human resources, contributing to increased productivity and innovation in various sectors of the economy. When women and men have equal opportunities for education, training, and career development, it expands the talent pool available to employers. It contributes to the creation of more balanced and dynamic workforces.

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