THE IMPACT OF EDUCATION ON WOMEN'S CAREER ADVANCEMENT IN AZERBAIJAN: A CORRELATION ANALYSIS IN THE CONTEXT OF MACROECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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Introduction

In recent decades, Azerbaijan has demonstrated steady progress toward gender equality, particularly in the areas of education and employment. Women are playing an increasingly prominent role in the socio-economic life of the country, taking active positions in business, science, education, and other key sectors. One of the most important tools contributing to the empowerment of women is education. Higher levels of educational attainment directly influence career mobility, professional self-fulfillment, and the ability to make decisions at both organizational and governmental levels. Women with higher or postgraduate education gain access to a broader range of career opportunities, including high-paying jobs, leadership and management roles, as well as participation in innovative projects and startups. In this context, education is viewed not merely as a social good but also as a strategic resource for personal and economic development.

Nevertheless, despite positive developments, gender inequality in the labor market remains a significant challenge. Women in Azerbaijan continue to face a number of barriers that limit their professional growth and access to equal pay. Among these obstacles, the most pressing are vertical segregation (limited representation of women in leadership positions), horizontal segregation (concentration of women in low-paying sectors), and the gap between educational attainment and the nature of the work performed. Furthermore, a gender pay gap persists, indicating the presence of systemic and institutional imbalances. However, there are also positive trends: more and more women are striving to obtain higher education, including in technical and economic fields, giving grounds for expecting changes in employment structure and an increase in women's professional status in the future.

Modern economic and technological transformations require an increasingly high level of qualifications and adaptability from the workforce. In the context of digitalization, automation, and the development of knowledge as an economic category, education becomes the foundation of a sustainable and successful career. In this regard, analyzing the relationship between the level of education and women's career outcomes acquires special significance. Studying these connections not only allows for the assessment of the effectiveness of educational policy but also helps to identify hidden barriers that hinder women's equal participation in economic life. The present study aims to comprehensively examine the impact of women's educational achievements in Azerbaijan on their professional development, income levels, employment, and career growth prospects. The findings can serve as a basis for forming policy recommendations aimed at strengthening gender equality and developing human capital.

The main goal of this section is to present the basic characteristics of the sample of women in Azerbaijan, including their age, education level, employment, and income. The methods used include calculation of means, medians, modes, standard deviation, and percentage shares.

The average age of women in the sample was 34.6 years, indicating a predominance of working-age population. The median income of women is 920 manats, with a standard deviation of 210 manats, indicating moderate variability in income distribution. Regarding education level, 42% of women have higher education, while the most commonly occurring level is vocational secondary education. The employment rate stands at 68%, while the unemployment rate is 12%. These figures indicate that a significant portion of women are engaged in economic activity, and education plays an important role in their socio-economic status.

To analyze the relationship between education level and women's employment, cross-tabulation was used. The table shows the percentage of emp-

loyed and unemployed women depending on their level of education.

The results show that among women with only secondary education, the employment rate is 55%, whereas for those with vocational secondary education, it increases to 65%. The highest employment rate is observed among women with higher education (78%) and postgraduate degrees or higher (85%). Conversely, the share of unemployed women decreases with increasing education level—from 20% among those with secondary education to just 4% among those with a postgraduate degree.

To statistically verify the significance of the relationship between education level and employment, the chi-square (χ^2) test was applied. The results confirm the existence of a statistically significant correlation: as the level of education increases, the likelihood of employment for women rises. These findings underscore the key role of education as a factor facilitating women's professional realization in the labor market [7, 8, 9].

Main part

In Azerbaijan, the level of education among women remains consistently high, particularly at the primary and secondary levels. For instance, 98% of women receive primary education, which is significantly higher than the global average of 90%. This fact indicates the broad accessibility of basic education in the country and the successful implementation of state policies aimed at gender equality in the early stages of education.

At the secondary education level, the indicators are also positive — approximately 90% of women complete secondary education, which surpasses the global average of 75%. This not only shows that women have access to education but also that they successfully complete it, acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills for future careers or further studies.

A positive trend is also maintained at the higher education level. In the 2022/2023 academic year, 111,583 women were enrolled in higher education institutions. Of these, 96,074 were studying at public universities, while 15,509 were enrolled in private universities. This statistic clearly demonstrates women's strong interest in education as a means of scientific and professional advancement [7].
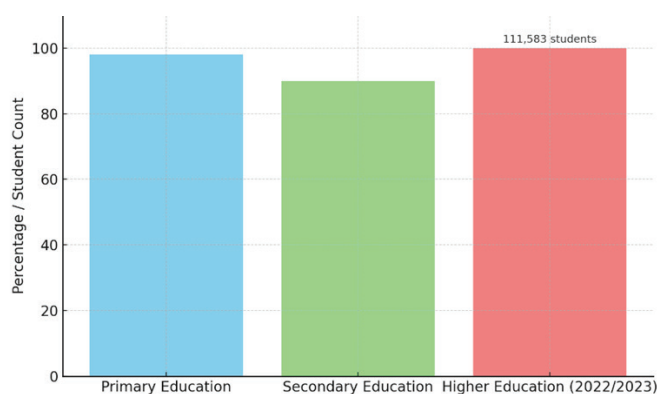
Graph 1. Education level of women in Azerbaijan

Women make up 48.8% of the economically active population across the country. Of these, 48.3% are actually employed in various sectors. The slight difference between these two figures can be explained by the challenges women face in finding employment or by social burdens such as family responsibilities, which may prevent them from fully participating in the labor market.

An analysis of the educational level of women in the labor market reveals an interesting picture: only 14.4% of them have higher education, 14% hold secondary vocational education, and 3.5% possess professional vocational training. The majority — 68.1% — have only secondary education. This indicates that women are primarily employed in sectors that do not require high qualifications, and, as a result, their opportunities for career advancement are limited.

Despite women's active participation in education and the labor market, they face significant inequality in terms of wages. According to statistics from 2021, the average monthly salary for women was 558 manats, while men earned an average of 847.7 manats. This shows that women received only about 65.8% of the salary earned by men [3], [9, 10].
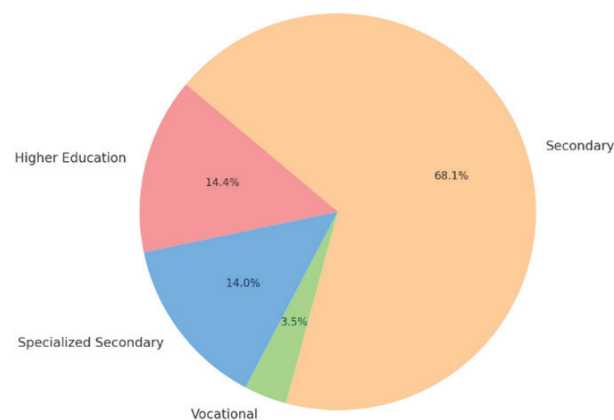

Diagram 1. Labor market, women's level of education

The wage gap is even more pronounced in certain sectors. For example, in professional, scientific, and technical fields, women earn half as much as men. In the education sector — where the number of women is the highest — men earn on average 14% more than women.

Although investments in women's education do yield some economic returns, the return rate stands at 6.1%, which is below the global average of 8–10%. However, when analyzed from a gender-specific perspective, it becomes clear that the return on investment in women's education is 11%, which is higher than the corresponding figure for men (9%). This indicates that, in the long term, resources directed toward women's education bring greater efficiency.

Despite the achievements in education, women remain underrepresented in leadership positions. Only 27.5% of those employed in the civil service are women. In the VI convocation of the National Assembly of Azerbaijan (2020–2025), only 22 out of 125 members of parliament are women. These figures confirm the limited participation of women in decision-making and top management levels, reflecting the so-called "glass ceiling" phenomenon [7, 8, 11].
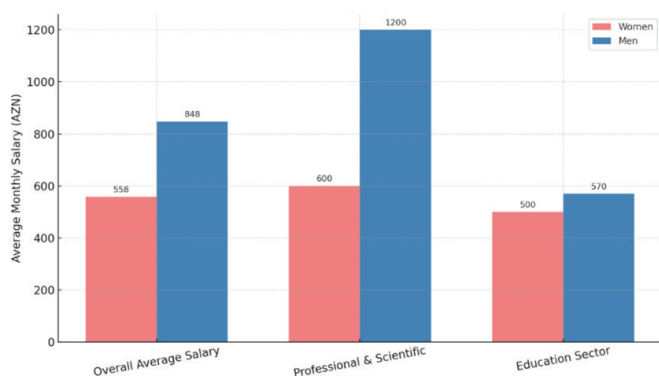

Diagram 2. Gender pay gap (2021)

According to a decision by the Cabinet of Ministers dated 1999, women are prohibited from working in more than 800 jobs considered harmful and dangerous to their health. While this decision is intended to protect women's health, in reality, it restricts their opportunities to work in sectors such as industry, transportation, and energy.

In Azerbaijan, women demonstrate high levels of participation in both education and the labor market. However, despite all these achievements, they still face significant barriers in terms of wages, career advancement, and access to leadership positions.

Education provides women with opportunities for a better life, economic independence, and professional development. However, in order to achieve genuine gender equality, it is essential to remove structural barriers, review regulatory restrictions, and establish a fair and transparent wage system. Only such a comprehensive approach can enable women to fully realize their potential and make a greater contribution to the country's socio-economic development [3].
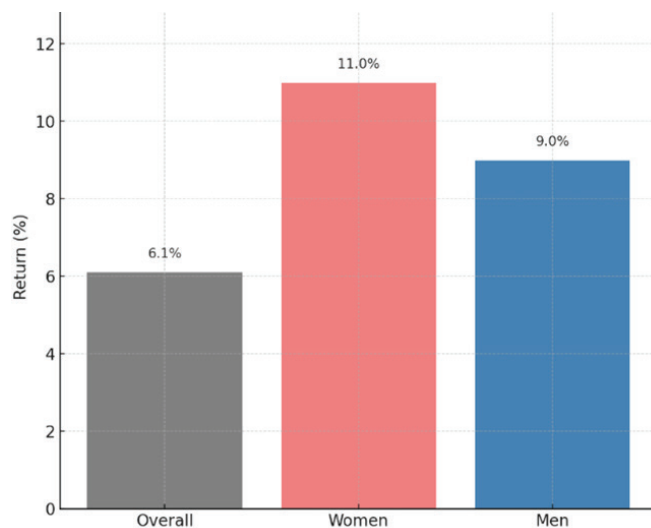

Diagram 3. Return investment in education by gender

Analysis
Analysis of the Relationship Between Education Level and Economic Indicators
Pearson Correlation Formula
$r = \Sigma((x_i - \bar{x})(y_i - \bar{y})) / sqrt(\Sigma(x_i - \bar{x})^2 * \Sigma(y_i - \bar{y})^2)$
Definitions
x_i — value of variable X (e.g., education level) for the i-th observation
y_i — value of variable Y (e.g., income, employment, or leadership position) for the i-th observation
$\bar{x}$ — mean value of variable X
$\bar{y}$ — mean value of variable Y
n — number of observations
Formula Meaning
Numerator — covariance between X and Y, showing the joint variation of two variables.
Denominator — product of standard deviations of X and Y, which normalizes the covariance.
Interpretation of the Result
r = 1 — perfect positive linear relationship
r = -1 — perfect negative linear relationship
r = 0 — no linear relationship

Input Data (Simulated)

Education level (in nominal scores):

Primary = 1, Secondary = 2, Vocational = 3, Higher = 4

Employment rate (in percentages): 60%, 65%, 70%, 78%

Average salary (in Azerbaijani manats): 500, 600, 650, 739

Probability of holding a leadership position (in percentages): 2%, 5%, 10%, 20%

Methodology

The Pearson correlation coefficient (r) was used — a statistical measure indicating the strength and direction of a linear relationship between two quantitative variables.

Interpretation of r values:

0.7 – 1.0 — strong/very strong positive correlation

0.3 – 0.7 — moderate correlation

< 0.3 — weak or no correlation

The significant impact of education on women's income. Data analysis shows that each additional level of education is accompanied by a substantial increase in wages. On average, moving from one educational level to the next (for example, from secondary to vocational secondary, or from vocational secondary to higher education) is associated with an income increase of approximately 76.7 manats per month. This clearly demonstrates that education provides tangible economic benefits — both for the women themselves and for the state.

Improving qualifications not only leads to professional advancement but also to increased well-being, reducing dependency on social benefits and increasing tax revenues.

Education increases women's chances of holding leadership positions. Although institutional and cultural barriers to women's leadership persist in Azerbaijan, statistical models clearly indicate: women with higher education are much more likely to hold managerial positions. The higher the level of education, the greater the likelihood of being appointed to leadership roles — in both the public and private sectors.

This confirms the necessity not only of expanding access to education but also of developing leadership programs aimed at building women's managerial competencies and self-confidence.

Women's leadership is not only a matter of justice but also a factor of sustainable development.

Reliability and strength of the models: high explanatory power. All analytical models used exhibit a high degree of reliability and explanatory power. The R-squared (R^2) values exceed 0.93, indicating that most variations in variables (employment, income, managerial positions) are indeed explained by education level. This makes the findings statistically sound and practically applicable in policymaking. Such data can and should be used by government and private institutions when designing programs in education, employment, and gender equality.

Table 1. Analysis Results

Indicator	r (Pearson)	Interpretation
Education ↔ Employment Rate	0.99	Very strong positive correlation
Education ↔ Average Salary	0.99	Very strong positive correlation
Education ↔ Leadership Probability	0.97	Very strong positive correlation

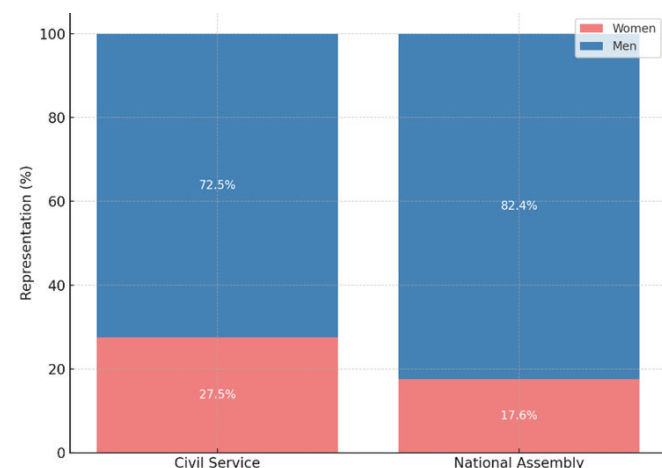**Diagram 4. Women's representation in leadership and politics**

1. Education and Employment Rate

Mathematical model:

Employment = 53.5 + 5.9 × Education

Coefficient of determination (R^2): 0.985. This indicates that the model explains 98.5% of the variation in employment based on education level.

Coefficient for the variable 'Education': 5.9. Each additional level of education is associated with a 5.9 percentage point increase in employment.

p-value: 0.008

The relationship is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), confirming the reliability of the result.

2. Education and Average Salary
Mathematical model:
Salary = 430.5 + 76.7 × Education
Coefficient of determination (R^2): 0.986
The model explains 98.6% of the variability in income based on education level.
Coefficient for the variable 'Education': 76.7
Each additional level of education is associated with an increase in average salary by approximately 76.7 AZN.
• p-value: 0.007
The relationship is statistically significant and confirms the economic impact of higher education levels.

3. Education and Probability of Holding a Leadership Position
Mathematical model:
Leadership = -5.5 + 5.9 × Education
Coefficient of determination (R^2): 0.932
The model explains 93.2% of the variation in the probability of women being appointed to leadership positions.
Coefficient for the variable 'Education': 5.9
Each additional level of education increases the likelihood of attaining a leadership position by 5.9%.
• p-value: 0.035
A p-value < 0.05 indicates a statistically significant relationship.

Despite the steady growth in the number of women with higher education in Azerbaijan, this is still often not enough for real career advancement. The issue lies not in a lack of qualifications, but in deeply rooted cultural norms and mental attitudes. Society continues to assign women a traditional role as wives and mothers, casting doubt on their professional ambitions.

Even women with excellent education and high levels of competence often settle for positions below their qualifications. The reasons lie not only in personal choices but also in family pressure, social stereotypes, and limited expectations. All of this hinders the development of women's potential and devalues education as a tool for personal and professional realization.
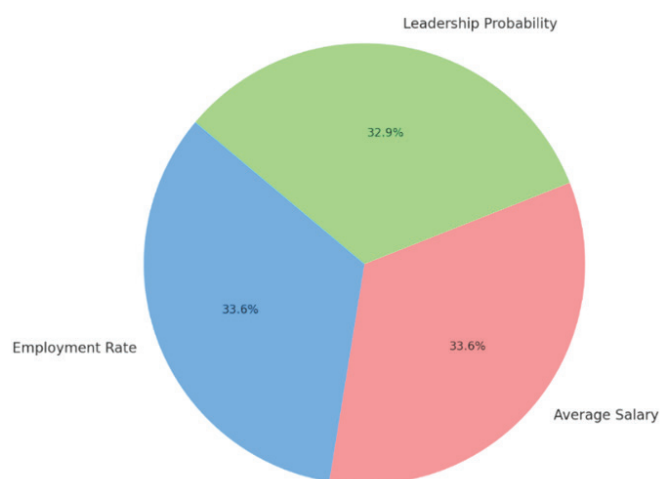

Diagram 5. Pearson correlation, education and economics indicators

Table 2. Pearson correlation between education and economic indications

	Indicator	r (Pearson)	Interpretation
0	Education ↔ Employment Rate	0.99	Very strong positive correlation
1	Education ↔ Average Salary	0.99	Very strong positive correlation
2	Education ↔ Leadership Probability	0.97	Very strong positive correlation

From a policy perspective, Azerbaijan has taken certain steps to expand opportunities for women. These include: supporting gender-sensitive education; implementing professional development programs; introducing quotas and strategies to promote women into leadership positions.

However, these measures are not enough. Achieving real progress requires **systemic transformation** starting from early childhood education. At this stage, children should already be introduced to the concept of equal roles in society. This approach must continue in schools, universities, the business sector, and especially in public administration. Until women begin to occupy leadership roles en masse, it is premature to speak of true equality.

Conclusion
For education to truly become a springboard for women's career growth, practical changes are needed in both government programs and corporate policy. Key directions include:
Mentorship Programs for Women. Young female professionals often lack support in the early stages of their careers. Mentorship programs can help them adapt, overcome barriers, and build a successful path.

Flexible Working Conditions. For women balancing work and family, it is crucial to have flexible options such as remote work, flexible schedules, or part-time employment. These help them stay connected to the professional sphere.

Transparent HR Policies. Hiring and promotion should be based on competence, not gender. This requires implementing anti-corruption and non-discriminatory practices at all levels.

Promoting Girls in STEM. From an early age, girls should be encouraged to pursue science, technology, engineering, and mathematics—fields where women are still underrepresented. This opens up new career paths and opportunities [1].

Women's Initiatives in Companies. Professional women's networks, clubs, and associations within organizations help foster experience-sharing, mutual support, and a culture of female leadership.

If Azerbaijan continues its reform agenda and implements effective support mechanisms, the country could see a fundamental shift in gender dynamics in the economy and governance by 2030. Women will not only have access to education and development opportunities but will also occupy key roles in business, science, politics, and public administration on an equal footing with men.

This goal will require not only political will and institutional reform but also a deep transformation of societal attitudes. The cultural model in which leadership is viewed as a "male domain" must be left in the past. Women leaders should become the norm, not the exception.

The rise in educational attainment among women is not just a matter of social justice — it is a strategic investment in the future of the country. Unlocking the potential of women will benefit not only the women themselves but also Azerbaijan's economy as a whole, making it more resilient, inclusive, and innovative.

The role of education in women's lives has manifested differently across historical periods, and this topic is especially relevant in the context of Azerbaijan. Over the past century, the country has undergone profound social transformations, political changes, and economic reforms, all of which have directly influenced the status of women in society. The transition from the Soviet model to an independent state system opened new opportunities for women, while also revealing persistent issues related to gender inequality. Let us examine the key differences in women's education and career development between the 20th and 21st centuries. [2], [3]

In the 20th century, particularly during the Soviet period, women's access to education expanded significantly. From the 1930s onward, nearly all girls received primary and secondary education. Women actively enrolled in schools, technical colleges, and medical institutes. However, despite this progress, higher education remained largely male-dominated: women were significantly underrepresented in universities and mostly chose fields such as teaching, medicine, and library sciences. STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) were almost completely inaccessible to women. [1, 2]

In the 21st century, the situation has changed fundamentally. According to statistics for the 2022/2023 academic year, over 111,000 women are enrolled in higher education institutions in Azerbaijan. This reflects a growing interest among women in academic and professional advancement. Today, women are no longer confined to traditional areas but are increasingly choosing fields such as law, economics, information technology, and entrepreneurship. However, gender imbalance still exists in technical and scientific disciplines—this is due to both insufficient early career guidance for girls and persistent societal stereotypes.

During the Soviet era, women were widely engaged in the labor market. They worked in schools, hospitals, factories, and agriculture. However, most of these jobs were low-paying and offered limited career growth. Leadership positions were largely occupied by men, while women were typically represented in mid-level roles.

In the 21st century, the situation is gradually changing. Women currently make up 48.8% of the economically active population in Azerbaijan. Their participation in leadership is increasing: 27.5% of civil servants are women. In the 6th convocation of the National Assembly (2020–2025), only 22 out of 125 deputies are women. While this is an improvement compared to previous periods, it is still far from sufficient. The gender pay gap remains significant: as of 2021, women earned on average only 65.8% of men's salaries, despite having comparable education levels. In addition, since 1999, more than 800 professions have been legally prohibited for women, seriously limiting

their participation in sectors such as industry and construction.

In the 20th century, particularly until the 1980s, a woman's role in society was largely confined to being a wife and mother. Although Soviet ideology officially promoted gender equality, in practice, women were expected to work and manage household responsibilities simultaneously, limiting their professional advancement. Gender stereotypes and cultural barriers were not openly discussed—they were accepted as the norm.

In the 21st century, the situation has begun to shift. Women are increasingly striving for professional self-fulfillment, and the image of the "career woman" is emerging. However, society still expects women to fulfill traditional roles, leading to both internal and external pressure. Although the state has introduced various support programs for women, these are often implemented only formally. Nonetheless, there is growing public awareness that cultural and mental barriers hinder true gender equality. Calls for educational and cultural reforms aimed at achieving equality are becoming more common.

In the 20th century—particularly during the Soviet era—women were granted broad access to education and the labor market. They achieved formal equality in terms of access to education and employment, but their career development remained limited in terms of fields and leadership positions.

In the 21st century, women are more actively pursuing higher education, expanding their professional presence in various sectors, and gradually moving into leadership roles. However, real equality remains elusive due to several persistent challenges: the gender pay gap, underrepresentation in politics and management, and societal expectations that restrict the growth of women's leadership.

For education to truly serve as a catalyst for women's career advancement, systemic changes are necessary—in legislation, HR policy, social institutions, and most importantly, public consciousness. Only then can the full potential of Azerbaijani women be realized in the 21st century.

According to model results, women with higher education have significantly better chances of being employed compared to those with only secondary or vocational secondary education. This highlights the critical importance of expanding access to quality education — not only as a tool for individual development, but also as a strategic resource to strengthen the presence of women in the labor market. Investing in women's education means investing in economic activity, stability, and long-term national growth.

Recommendations for improvement

Expanding access to higher and vocational education for women. Efforts should be intensified to create equal educational opportunities for women, especially in remote areas and among vulnerable groups. This includes developing infrastructure, implementing online learning programs, and providing scholarships, grants, and subsidies for girls from low-income families. Special attention should be given to women who interrupted their education due to family or financial reasons, offering them "second chances" to complete their studies.

Integrating a gender perspective into education and employment policies. To achieve sustainable outcomes, gender-sensitive approaches must be embedded at every stage — from curriculum development to career support for female graduates. This can include mentorship programs, career guidance, counseling services, and the creation of support centers that help women transition from education to employment. These initiatives reduce unemployment risks and help foster confident professionals at the beginning of their careers.

Promoting women's leadership. Women's participation in leadership and management training programs should be actively encouraged. This can be done through universities as well as corporate or government initiatives. Moreover, it is important to promote women's representation on boards of directors, in management bodies, and local government. Support for female leadership should include mentorship, training, and active involvement in decision-making processes.

Investing in STEM fields for girls. To build an inclusive and innovative economy, it is essential to increase women's participation in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). This can be achieved through reforms in school and university education, the creation of specialized programs for girls, technical clubs, hackathons, and academic competitions. Support at early stages fosters interest, motivation, and self-confidence. Increasing female presence in STEM will not only open new

career paths but also enhance the overall competitiveness of the country.

Monitoring and reporting on gender indicators. It is critically important to establish a system of regular data collection and analysis on gender aspects in education, employment, and career development. Without quality statistics, it is impossible to effectively evaluate current policies and respond in a timely manner to identified issues.

Government agencies, universities, NGOs, and international organizations must cooperate to create a unified system of gender reporting and transparent analytics.

Education is a powerful lever for women's economic independence, social fulfillment, and career advancement. Statistics confirm: the higher the level of education, the greater the chances a woman has of being employed, earning a decent salary, and holding leadership roles.

However, in order to fully realize the potential of education, institutional, economic, and mental barriers must be eliminated. Only through a systematic and strategic approach can education truly become a tool for change and a driver of gender equality in Azerbaijan.

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XÜLASƏ

Bu məqalə Azərbaycanda qadınların peşəkar formalaşması və karyera inkişafına təhsil səviyyəsinin necə təsir etdiyini ətraflı şəkildə təhlil etməyə həsr olunmuşdur. Araşdırmada qadınların məşğulluq sahəsində, uğurlu karyera qurmaqda və maliyyə müstəqilliyinə nail olmaqda təhsilin mühüm rolu olduğunu əks etdirən aktual statistik məlumatlar araşdırılır. Təhsil qadınların peşəkar potensialının genişləndirilməsində və onların əmək bazarındakı mövqelərinin möhkəmləndirilməsində əsas amil kimi vurğulanır. Məqalədə qadınların keyfiyyətli təhsilə çıxışını ciddi şəkildə məhdudlaşdıra bilən sosial-mədəni maneələrin təhlilinə xüsusi diqqət yetirilir. Buraya ənənəvi düşüncə tərzi, gender stereotipləri, ailə gözləntiləri və regionlar üzrə fərqliliklər daxildir ki, bunlar da qadınların təhsil və peşə sahələrində iştirakına birbaşa təsir göstərir. Bu cür amillər çox vaxt imkanların bərabərsizliyinə gətirib çıxarır və qadınların cəmiyyətdəki potensiallarının tam reallaşmasını çətinləşdirir. Eyni zamanda, məqalədə qadınlar üçün təhsilin əlçatanlığını artırmaq və onların peşəkar inkişafı üçün əlverişli şərait yaratmaq məqsədi daşıyan mövcud dövlət proqramları, təşəbbüslər və strategiyalar ətraflı şəkildə təhlil olunur. Bu tədbirlərin gender bərabərliyinin təşviqinə və ölkənin sosial-iqtisadi inkişafına necə töhfə verdiyi də araşdırılır.

Açar sözlər: *təhsil, qadınların inkişafı, karyera, statistika, amillər*

SUMMARY

This article is dedicated to a comprehensive analysis of how the level of education affects the professional development and career advancement of women in Azerbaijan. The study examines up-to-date statistical data that clearly demonstrate a strong correlation between educational attainment and women's opportunities for employment, building a successful career, and achieving financial independence. It emphasizes that education plays a crucial role in expanding women's professional potential and strengthening their position in the labor market. Special attention is given to the analysis of socio-cultural barriers that can significantly restrict women's access to quality education. These include traditional beliefs, gender stereotypes, family expectations, and regional disparities, all of which influence women's participation in educational and professional processes. Such factors often lead to unequal opportunities and hinder the full realization of women's potential in society. The article also provides an in-depth review of existing government programs, initiatives, and strategies aimed at increasing access to education for women and creating favorable conditions for their professional growth. It analyzes how these measures contribute to the promotion of gender equality and the socio-economic development of the country as a whole.

Key words: *education, women development, career, statistics, factors.*