

# uniting efforts to tackle harmful gender norms in Central Asia

A visual summary and resource  
pack from the John Smith Trust  
Alumni Ideas Exchange  
*Tashkent, March 2022*



# in this pack...

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- Key ideas emerging from our workshop
- Reflections on next steps for the group
- A selection of UK and Scottish resources



# key ideas & issues

**Emerging from our discussions**



# gender norms

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men can be  
ambitious

men can have  
multiple  
skills

men can have  
sex with  
whoever

boys shouldn't  
complain/  
express  
emotions



## MEN, BOYS, MASCULINITY

boys can't  
choose  
'female'  
professions

expectations  
of being a man  
*as a priori*  
condition of  
being a strong  
leader

men seen as  
smarter than  
women

the man continues to be  
seen as the breadwinner  
and head of the household  
and he can feel ashamed  
and like a failure if he does  
not provide well for his  
family



# gender norms

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girls should be shy/modest/  
can't speak about violence

a women's strengths is in her weakness

should be married (before 30)

not sleep around / be a virgin (virginity is a social construct!)

not play active games

obey husband

hide intelligence



WOMEN,  
GIRLS,  
FEMININITY

girls should go into 'women appropriate' professions e.g. education/healthcare

women should be caretakers - wives or mothers

women shouldn't eat too much

assumption that women's role is restricted to the private domain, and man's role to the public domain

good girls are quiet

victim-blamed for domestic and sexual violence

pretend to be weak



# gender norms

The negative gender norms we mapped underpin and drive gender inequality in communities worldwide. They are social constructs that are designed to maintain the status quo and keep women and other oppressed groups from power. Stereotypes reinforce and perpetuate each other in a cycle, and it's not possible to tackle harmful gender norms in isolation from one another.

Gender stereotypes are harmful to all genders, but are often particular barriers to:

- Women's education
- Women's leadership
- Women's bodily autonomy
- Women's work and economic participation
- Women's safety



# gender-based violence

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## Key issues

**Rates of SGBV have been increasing** during the pandemic, with women getting trapped with perpetrators. **Reporting of SGBV remains very low** - women often feel too ashamed to report. There's a **lack of awareness among** women about their rights and the services available.

There are high rates of **sex-selective abortion** in Azerbaijan; increasing sexual violence against young women and **enforced marriages** in Tajikistan. There are problems in Kazakhstan around **attitudes of services providers** in shelters wanting to reunite women with their abusers.

There are lots of **gaps in legislation** and policies, particularly around online harassment, cyber stalking and workplace harassment. Where there is legislation, it is not well implemented. Central Asian states are not signatories to the Istanbul Convention, and GBV is not criminalized in Criminal Code in most countries.

Governments wanting quick wins when these are **long-term, deep-rooted problems**. When there are national security problems women's security issues are deprioritised.

## Key successes and potential solutions

**Grassroots women's organisations are proving powerful** in this area, despite civil society space shrinking in some Central Asian countries.

**New laws** against SGBV (such as in Azerbaijan in 2010) and **National Action Plans** are beginning to come into force, but lack implementation.

**Women journalists** are writing more about SGBV issues and there have been some successful **public awareness campaigns** (poster and brochure) domestic violence services. **Social media** is playing an important role in terms of raising awareness and accountability around issues such as street harassment.

There have been some successful small scale projects involving **youth peer-to-peer trainings** in rural areas in Tajikistan, and working with local businesses to **tackle street harassment** in Uzbekistan

There is a **need to work on attitudinal change** and economic support for women as well as policy and legislation. Need to work on causes as well as the consequences.

# leadership

## Key issues

There is **pressure on female leaders to display masculine characteristics**: to show that they can act with authority and make decisions. Simultaneously, women often put pressure on themselves to please all.

**Women of different ages experience different problems.** There is a sense that is risky to be promoted under the age of 30-years-old. Conversely, a woman might consider it 'safer' to build her career in her fifties, but then employers do not want them because they are considered old.

**Workplace bullying** is common, and there are limited policies designed to help with workplace harassment.

**Labour market segregation** remains a key issue: there is a list of banned professions for women in CA states. As a result, there is a large gender pay gap.

There are still very **few senior female politicians** in Central Asia. Where they exist, the appointments are often tokenistic.

## Key successes and potential solutions

**Solidarity** and other women providing **mentorship and support** in the workplace is crucial for change in this area, as well as there being a need for support from men.

**Community support** is essential in empowering women.

Some key successes in Kazakhstan **challenging gender segregation** in the workplace, and in Tajikistan around engaging with young rural women about **traditional mindsets** around work and women's employment

There is a need to tackle leadership in the workplace from **multiple angles** - gender segregation due to stereotyping, but also bullying and weak social security protection.

**Gender equality is about choice**: different needs, values and challenges need to be taken into account.



# education

## Key issues

Ongoing pressure on women to be 'traditional women', putting family first above education. Particularly in **rural areas young women do not pursue education.**

**Gender segregation of the labour market starts in education:** young women are pushed into studying different subjects to men, and then working in different sectors and roles, which often pay much less. There are very few women in IT development, for example.

There is little in national education curriculums around **sex education.** The lack of sex education and taboos around talking about sex are linked to high teenage pregnancy rates in Central Asia compared to Europe, and are linked to SGBV.

In more conservative areas, parents are instilling strict rules and teaching that sex is shameful. They expect their children to grow up and have families, but they don't know how to have **relationships.**

## Key successes and potential solutions

**Textbooks** should be audited for gender equality.

In Kazakhstan there are some examples of projects creating **teams of young women** and teaming them up with mentors across different subjects.

**Sex education** needs to be both compulsory in the national curriculums and normalised. It needs to be taught to both boys and girls, include discussions of the needs and experiences of disabled women, and parents also need to be involved

Materials need to be available in **Central Asian languages** as well as in Russian

There are some great examples of small scale, informal **consent-based sex education projects** happening. For instance, the 'Orange Umbrella' project in Tajikistan which provides sex education to children aged 4 to 16-years-old.

# cross-cutting themes

Stereotypes and social expectations around gender underpin almost everything

Shame is a big part of controlling the lives of women and girls

This is long term, generational work (but progress is being made!!)

Journalists and social media have an important role in creating space, connecting people and challenging the narrative

But also true for anti-equality activists

Gender gets de-prioritised by governments when security issues arise

Lots to do still around stereotypes

There is progress, how do we keep that momentum going? Burnout, exhaustion, isolation

Legislation can be in place, but there's often no implementation

Progress on street harassment, rural gender norms and sex education through smaller, targeted projects

Particularly for rural women, and women of different ages

Harmful gender norms impact on different women differently

Importance of networks and solidarity - with women & men



# reflections on next steps

for the JST Fellows



# next steps

## Short term

Develop a gender-focused community among John Smith Fellows, with the Ideas Exchange participants as a core group and encourage other JS Fellows to become involved.

In addition to the gender-focused group on the JST alumni platform, we will stay in contact via our JST Gender group Telegram channel: <https://t.me/+b0ji77o5sexjNjli>

## Medium term

We started mapping our gender-related experience and expertise within the network, identifying needs in one country and expertise and contacts of Fellows in another country so that we can provide peer support to one another.

We will reach out and engage one another in regional projects and programmes, tapping into the expertise within the network.

We identified self-care as important to our ability to continue working on tackling harmful gender norms. We will have a follow-up online session on self-care.

## Longer term

Develop the idea of Fellows affecting change in the attitudes of the next generation through 'JST-teens'. • JS Fellows can help identify new Fellows who work on gender issues in their countries.

Existing Fellows can also be mentors/offer support to new JS Fellows, including supporting their action plans and by sharing expertise/ experience within the group.



# future workshop topics

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**Workshop topics that might work well to continue this conversation in the future could include:**

- Engaging with rural communities on GBV
- Engaging with children and young people around gender stereotyping, sex and relationships, and consent
- Tackling street harassment and creating safe public spaces for women
- The role of women in the media, including social media and citizen journalism
- Tackling gender segregation in the labour market
- Women's political participation: quotas and beyond...
- Making National Action Plan commitments a reality
- The role of grassroots activism in gender equality
- Feminist movement-building
- Embedding self care and community care in our work



# resources

**from Scotland and the wider UK**



# gender-based violence

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## Spectrum of prevention - grounding what we do

- <https://www.preventioninstitute.org/tools/spectrum-prevention-0>

## Government work on early intervention around harmful sexual behaviour

- <https://www.gov.scot/publications/expert-group-preventing-sexual-offending-involving-children-young-people-prevention-responses-harmful-sexual-behaviour-children-young-people/pages/9/>

## Engaging with men and boys

- <https://promundoglobal.org>
- <https://www.durham.ac.uk/research/institutes-and-centres/research-violence-abuse/research-profile/geo-toolkit/>
- <https://bookings.strath.ac.uk/Home/Course/4165>

## Scotland's equally safe approach

- <https://www.equallysafeatschool.org.uk/gbv-engaging-boys-men/>



# leadership

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Different campaigns and approaches in Scotland:

## **Women in sports leadership**

- <https://www.scottishwomeninsport.co.uk/about-us/women-in-leadership-research/>

## **Women in political leadership**

- <https://women5050.org>

## **Women in STEM**

- <https://equatescotland.org.uk>

## **Women in media**

- <https://www.genderequalmedia.scot/>
- <https://passthemiscotland.wordpress.com/> (focus on Women of Colour)





# education

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## **Scottish Government's Taskforce in Education and Learning**

This group was established based on recommendations developed by the First Minister's National Advisory Council on Women and Girls. As *the collective* we are facilitating this group's theory of change at the moment.

- <https://www.gov.scot/groups/gender-equality-in-education-and-learning-taskforce/>

## **Improving Gender Balance and Equalities resources for education**

- <https://education.gov.scot/improvement/learning-resources/improving-gender-balance-3-18>

## **Gender Friendly Nurseries programme for early years and childcare settings**

At *the collective* we are just about to start a project with them!

- <https://www.nhsggc.org.uk/about-us/professional-support-sites/gender-based-violence-resources/the-gender-friendly-nursery/>

## **Rosey Project's education materials on sex, consent and gender**

- <https://www.roseyproject.co.uk/content/education/>

## **Time for Inclusive Education (TIE) Campaign (LGBTQ+ focus)**

- <https://www.tie.scot/>



# self and community care

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## Encountering Resistance

- <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/-/media/ResourceCentre/PublicationsandResources/PVAW/Encountering-Resistance-Gender-Equality.pdf>

## What's the point in a revolution if we can't dance?

- <https://urgentactionfund.org/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2012/06/WTPR-Final-Book.pdf>

## Self-care manual for women

- <https://mwrc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Self-Care-Manual-for-Women-1.pdf>

## FRIDA and AWID resources

- <https://youngfeministfund.org/solidarity-storms/self-care/>
- <https://www.awid.org/news-and-analysis/wellness-self-care-and-security-why-important-feminism>

## Feminist movement building

- <https://cofemsocialchange.org/feminist-pocketbook/>
- <https://cofemsocialchange.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/TS10-Feminist-movement-building-Taking-a-long-term-view.pdf>



# the collective



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We really enjoyed working with everyone and found it really inspiring. Please do stay in touch!

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