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Awareness of Gender-Related Integrity Issues Among Public-Sector Employees in Uzbekistan: Findings of A National Survey

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Abstract

Gender-related aspects of integrity in the public sector receive less attention than other topics in anti-corruption research, and they are not always recognised as part of the corruption agenda. This article looks at how public-sector employees in Uzbekistan understand and perceive such issues, including the sensitive forms of misuse of position that the literature refers to as sextortion. The study draws on aggregated results of a national survey of 30,535 public-sector employees, about three quarters of whom work in education. Using descriptive statistics, it considers prior training, self-assessed understanding, familiarity with the concept, views on how institutions address these issues, areas perceived as most sensitive, factors that may make reporting difficult, and training preferences. The results suggest some difference between the level of preparation reported and the level of confidence expressed. Most respondents (73.8%) had not received training in gender equality and 48.9% had not received training in corruption prevention or integrity, while 69.1% considered that gender-related integrity risks were addressed well or sufficiently in their institutions. Some 42.2% were not familiar with the concept as a form of corruption, and a further 34.1% knew it in general terms. Respondents most often associated sensitivity with everyday administrative interactions, particularly public services (36.8%), the handling of complaints (23.3%) and inspections (23.1%). The factors mentioned most often as making reporting difficult were limited awareness (39.8%), concern about the opinion of colleagues and society (22.7%) and uncertainty about confidentiality (19.4%). These patterns may point to a need for further awareness-raising and for continued attention to reporting arrangements and to prevailing social attitudes. The article offers some considerations for gender-sensitive integrity policy and for short, practice-oriented training in public institutions.

Keywords: Gender-sensitive integrity, public sector, anti-corruption awareness, reporting arrangements, training needs, Uzbekistan.

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1. Introduction

Corruption is often understood in terms of material exchanges, such as money or gifts. The literature also describes situations in which the benefit sought is of a personal or sexual nature. Transparency International uses the term sextortion for this type of conduct, describing it as the exploitation of people who depend on someone entrusted with power, and notes that it is a gender-related form of corruption found in many countries [1]. Because it sits between two policy areas,

anti-corruption policy and policy on gender-based violence, it is not always clearly covered by either. Transparency International reports that research in Latin America and the Caribbean and in the Middle East and North Africa found that about one in five people had experienced, or knew someone who had experienced, such a situation when accessing government services such as health care or education, and that cases are rarely reported and are not always covered by existing laws [1]. In this article we speak more generally of gender-related integrity issues.

Anti-corruption guidance has noted that women and men may experience corruption differently. Women tend to rely more on public services such as health care and education, which can increase their exposure at the point of service delivery, and sensitive cases are seldom reported, partly because of prevailing social attitudes towards those affected [2]. At the international level, the text of the United Nations Convention against Corruption does not refer to gender, and only three resolutions of its Conference of the States Parties mention women or gender [3].

Uzbekistan has been developing its anti-corruption arrangements in recent years. A dedicated Anti-Corruption Agency has been established and the 2022 Development Strategy confirmed a zero-tolerance approach, while the literature also notes that more than 9,500 corruption offences were recorded over a four-year period and that some legislative and enforcement gaps remain [4]. The reforms have been reviewed under the Istanbul Anti-Corruption Action Plan, whose fifth-round baseline report covers policy, prevention and criminal liability across nine performance areas [5]. A 2019 law on equal rights and opportunities for women and men treats sexual harassment as a form of direct gender discrimination and provides for equal access to public service [6]. A study presented by the United Nations Development Programme in May 2026, based on a survey of 539 respondents and ten focus groups, found that the national anti-corruption framework broadly corresponds to international standards, that gender-sensitive approaches could be reflected more fully in legislation and policy implementation, and that shame, social perception and limited legal awareness may make it harder for affected persons to come forward [7].

Less is known about how public-sector employees themselves understand these issues, whether they consider that their institutions address them, and what would make it easier or harder to raise a concern. This article uses a national survey of 30,535 public-sector employees to consider three questions: (RQ1) How familiar are employees with gender-related integrity issues, and what training have they received? (RQ2) How do they view the way their institutions address these issues? (RQ3) In which areas do they see the greatest sensitivity, what may make reporting difficult, and what training would they find useful? The article describes these patterns and offers some practical considerations for policy and training.

2. Literature Review

2.1. From the “fairer sex” hypothesis to context

A long line of research has asked whether women are less corrupt than men, and recent work questions the assumption. Using data for 177 countries between 1998 and 2014, Debski et al. [8] show that the negative association between women’s participation in politics and the labour market and corruption loses significance once country fixed effects are included, and that cultural traits, notably power distance and masculinity, account for the link. Dietrich and Neudorfer [9], analysing World Values Survey data from 49 countries, find no significant gender difference in the perceived risk of being held accountable, which weakens the argument that women are more honest because they are more risk-averse. At the same time, sub-national evidence indicates that women’s presence on local councils is associated with less petty and grand corruption, with the benefits felt mainly by women, possibly because female representatives give priority to services used mainly by women and loosen male-dominated collusive networks [10]. The earlier Transparency International topic guide likewise describes the evidence on women’s integrity as inconclusive and context-dependent [2]. Together, these studies suggest that a more productive question is not whether women are intrinsically less corrupt, but how institutions and cultures shape women’s and men’s exposure to corruption.

2.2. Gender-related integrity issues in the literature

The term sextortion is commonly defined, in the formulation of the International Association of Women Judges used in recent empirical work, as the misuse of entrusted authority to obtain a sexual favour in exchange for a service or benefit [11]. Because no money changes hands, such situations are not always recognised either as corruption or as gender-based violence, and they tend to be poorly captured in research, statistics and complaint

systems [1]. A cross-national analysis by Aja-Eke et al. [11] finds that conventional correlates of corruption, such as economic development, press freedom and women's political participation, do not significantly predict such cases, whereas the general level of corruption does, which suggests that corruption may both enable and obscure them. The same study reports that perceptions and experiences diverge, so that public awareness may not follow actual prevalence, and notes that survey respondents may under-report because of social desirability. Behavioural research on petty corruption in Uganda, Tanzania and Rwanda encountered such situations in all three case studies and proposed specific responses: raising the costs for officials who make such requests and creating safe reporting channels for women [12]. In higher education, a study of Rwandan universities reports that female students may be more exposed because of differences in position and social norms, and describes barriers to reporting and the absence of effective institutional mechanisms [13]. This is relevant here because education employees make up three quarters of our sample.

2.3. Reporting, social norms and trust

Reporting is a social as well as a procedural matter. A UNDP study of public and government attitudes in Uzbekistan, combining public surveys, expert interviews and focus groups, identified concern about retaliation, cultural norms and gaps in trust as major barriers to reporting corruption [14]. For sensitive cases, social attitudes towards those affected may add a further consideration [2], and the 2026 UNDP study similarly points to shame, social perception and limited legal awareness [7]. Perceived norms also influence behaviour more broadly: in a lab-in-the-field experiment in South Africa with 311 participants, posters conveying dynamic descriptive norms reduced the perceived frequency of bribery and bribe-giving in a corruption game [15]. That study concerns bribery rather than reporting, but it illustrates that perceived norms can respond to communication.

2.4. Training and awareness

Evidence on what works in anti-corruption education is limited. A systematic review of 29 studies from 2007 to 2018 found that deterrence and control measures outperformed organisational and cultural interventions in the short term, although most studies were laboratory experiments, which may understate the effect of slower cultural reforms [16]. Practical guidance for integrity training recommends combining theory with case examples and favours short thematic modules and e-learning, but reports no effect sizes [17]. As far as the sources reviewed here show, evidence on training that addresses gender-related integrity issues specifically appears more limited still. The present study cannot test training effects, but it can show what employees know, what they believe and what they ask for, which is the evidence on which any such training would need to be designed.

3. Methods

3.1. Data source and instrument

The article analyses aggregated results of a national survey on gender and corruption among people working in public-sector institutions in Uzbekistan. The questionnaire covered institutional affiliation; length of professional experience; prior training in gender equality or gender mainstreaming and in corruption prevention or integrity; self-assessed understanding of how gender dynamics affect integrity risks (five-point scale, 5 = highest); familiarity with the concept of gender-related misuse of position, referred to in the literature as sextortion; assessment of how well the respondent's institution addresses gender-related integrity risks; the areas in which the risk of gender-related inappropriate conduct or misuse of authority is perceived to be highest; factors that may make it difficult to report sensitive matters; and training needs and preferred learning formats. Items were single- or multiple-choice. For multiple-choice items (areas, factors, training topics with up to three choices, and formats), percentages express the share of respondents selecting each option and therefore do not sum to 100%. One open question on the most significant gender-related issue in the respondent's institution was grouped into thematic categories (personnel and promotion, discrimination, corruption, unequal treatment, and trust and governance).

3.2. Sample

The sample comprises 30,535 respondents. The sectoral composition is uneven (Table 1): three quarters of respondents work in educational institutions, and the findings should be read primarily as reflecting the education sector and the civil service.

3.3. Analysis

The analysis is descriptive. Frequencies and percentages were computed for each item; unless stated otherwise,

percentages are shares of all respondents. Interpretation is guided by four analytic categories: recognition (whether a topic is recognised as relevant), normalisation (whether it is treated as ordinary practice), institutional implementation (the distance between formal rules and daily practice) and differences in position (discretion on one side, dependence on the other).

3.4. Ethics and data protection

Only aggregated results are reported. No respondent-level or institution-level data are published, and results are not broken down below the institutional categories shown in Table 1.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Respondents

Table 1 shows the composition of the sample. Educational institutions account for 75.5% of respondents, followed by civil-service bodies (14.7%); health-care, regulatory and control bodies, and law enforcement together account for 5.7%. The workforce is experienced: 47.1% reported more than ten years of service, 15.1% six to ten years, 18.2% two to five years and 13.4% less than two years. Many respondents therefore have long familiarity with institutional routines and decision-making, which lends weight to their perceptions, although the predominance of education means that sector-specific dynamics, such as relationships between staff and students or between managers and teachers, are likely to colour the results.

Table 1. Respondents by type of institution and length of service (N = 30,535)

Category	n	%
Type of institution		
Educational institutions	23,054	75.5
Civil-service bodies	4,494	14.7
Health-care institutions	912	3.0
Regulatory and control bodies	527	1.7
Law enforcement bodies	315	1.0
Other categories	1,233	4.0
Length of service		
More than 10 years	14,370	47.1
6–10 years	4,603	15.1
2–5 years	5,557	18.2
Less than 2 years	4,104	13.4
Other or unclassified answers	1,901	6.2

Source: Survey data (aggregated); authors' calculations.

4.2. Training and self-assessed understanding

Respondents report limited prior training (Table 2). Nearly three quarters (73.8%) had not received training in gender equality or gender mainstreaming, and 14.2% had received formal training. Almost half (48.9%) had not received training in corruption prevention or integrity, 35.2% had received it once and 15.7% several times. Self-assessed understanding of how gender dynamics affect integrity risks varies: 27.8% rated their

understanding as low (scores 1 and 2), while 35.5% chose the highest score, which is the most common answer. In a sample in which most respondents have not had gender-related training, this level of confidence may reflect experience gained in other ways, or a broad reading of the question, and it deserves further examination.

Table 2. Prior training and self-assessed understanding (% of respondents)

Item and response	%
Prior training in gender equality or gender mainstreaming	
No training	73.8
Yes, formal training	14.2
Yes, informal or short-term courses	11.7
Prior training in corruption prevention or integrity	
No training	48.9
Yes, once	35.2
Yes, several times	15.7
Not applicable	<1
Self-assessed understanding of how gender dynamics affect integrity risks (1 = lowest, 5 = highest)	
1	19.2
2	8.6
3	23.2
4	13.6
5	35.5

Source: Survey data (aggregated); authors' calculations.

4.3. Familiarity with the concept and views on the institutional response

Familiarity with the concept is moderate (Table 3). Before taking the survey, 42.2% of respondents were not familiar with the concept of gender-related misuse of position as a form of corruption, 34.1% knew it in general terms and 23.5% knew it well. At the same time, 69.1% considered that their institution addresses gender-related integrity risks very well (35.4%) or sufficiently (33.7%); 8.3% considered the response insufficient or absent, and 22.2% did not know.

Taken together, these figures may indicate some difference between reported training and perceived institutional readiness, which we refer to as a preparedness–confidence difference. It should be stressed that the data at this stage are aggregated: the survey does not show whether the same individuals who have had little training are those who rate institutional responses highly, and favourable ratings may well reflect good practice. Several readings are consistent with the data: that institutions do address these matters; that respondents who have not encountered a concern have no reason to doubt the response; or that a degree of social desirability influences positive ratings. The divergence between perceptions and experiences described by Aja-

Eke et al. [11] suggests caution in reading positive perceptions as an indication of low prevalence. The share who answered "don't know" (22.2%) is also worth noting, since for more than one respondent in five information on how these matters are handled does not seem to be readily available.

Table 3. Familiarity with the concept and assessment of institutional response

Response	n	%
Familiarity with the concept of gender-related misuse of position as a form of corruption		
No	12,883	42.2
Yes, in general terms	10,401	34.1
Yes, well acquainted	7,167	23.5
Other or invalid answers	84	0.3
Extent to which the institution addresses gender-related integrity risks		
Very well	10,800	35.4
Sufficiently	10,304	33.7
Don't know	6,783	22.2
Insufficiently	1,894	6.2
Not at all	645	2.1

Source: Survey data (aggregated); authors' calculations. Percentages are shares of all respondents; for the second item, 109 respondents (0.4%) gave no valid answer.

4.4. Areas perceived as most sensitive

Respondents most often associated gender-related inappropriate conduct or misuse of authority with routine administrative processes (Table 4; Figure 1A): public services (36.8%), the handling of complaints (23.3%), inspections and controls (23.1%) and recruitment and human-resource management (19.1%). Procurement (10.0%), licensing (6.7%) and detention (6.6%) were named less often. These are core functions in which officials exercise discretion and service users or staff depend on their decisions, a configuration in which differences in position are particularly relevant [1–2]. The pattern is in line with the 2026 UNDP finding that respondents see health care (54.4%) and education (28.4%) as the sectors in which women are more exposed to corruption [7], and with the observation that women's greater reliance on public services can increase exposure at the point of delivery [2]. The place of recruitment and human-resource management (19.1%) may reflect workplace relations in education and the civil service; the instrument does not distinguish whether respondents had in mind service users or colleagues.

In the open question on the most significant gender-related issue in the institution, many respondents did not see a significant issue or found it difficult to name one, while a smaller share mentioned personnel and promotion, discrimination, corruption, unequal treatment, or trust and governance. This may indicate that the topic receives limited attention in everyday discussion. The absence of a perceived issue does not necessarily mean that no such issues exist, since matters that are not commonly framed as corruption may not be named as such.

Table 4. Areas in which gender-related inappropriate conduct or misuse of authority is perceived as most likely

Area	Mentions (n)	% of respondents
Public services	11,248	36.8
Complaint handling	7,114	23.3
Inspections and control activities	7,041	23.1
Recruitment and human-resource management	5,824	19.1
Public procurement and contracting	3,048	10.0
Licensing	2,041	6.7
Detention	2,013	6.6

Source: Survey data (aggregated); authors' calculations. Multiple answers possible; percentages do not sum to 100.

4.5. Factors that may make reporting difficult

The factor mentioned most often as making it difficult to report sensitive matters is insufficient awareness (39.8%), ahead of the other factors (Table 5; Figure 1B). Many respondents therefore point first to uncertainty about what should be reported, or where and how. The remaining factors fall into two groups. The first is social: concern about the opinion of colleagues and society (22.7%). The second relates to trust in institutional arrangements: uncertainty about confidentiality (19.4%), the absence of clear reporting and review procedures (17.2%), concern about possible negative consequences (14.2%) and limited confidence in the objectivity of reviews (9.5%). These factors resemble those that UNDP identified for corruption reporting in Uzbekistan more generally, namely concern about retaliation, cultural norms and gaps in trust [14], and the role of social perception noted for sensitive cases [2, 7].

This has a practical implication. Hotlines, protective measures and complaint mechanisms speak mainly to the second group, and may be less helpful where a matter is not recognised or where social considerations weigh heavily. A field experiment has shown that communication about what others do can influence perceived norms of bribery [15]. Whether comparable communication could make it easier to raise sensitive concerns is an open question that would need to be tested.

Table 5. Main factors that may make reporting of sensitive matters difficult

Factor	Mentions (n)	% of respondents
Insufficient awareness	12,167	39.8
Concern about the opinion of colleagues and society	6,943	22.7
Uncertainty about confidentiality	5,930	19.4
No clear reporting and review procedures	5,267	17.2
Concern about possible negative consequences	4,328	14.2
Limited confidence in the objectivity of reviews	2,903	9.5

Source: Survey data (aggregated); authors' calculations. Multiple answers possible; percentages do not sum to 100.

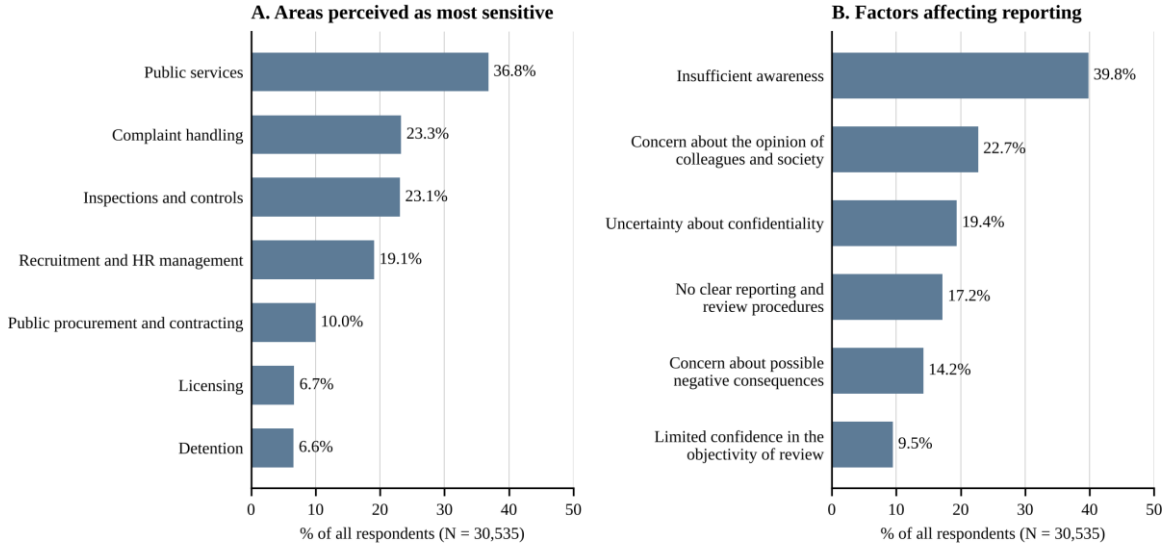


Figure 1. Areas perceived as most sensitive (A) and factors that may make reporting difficult (B), % of all respondents

Source: Survey data (aggregated); authors' calculations.

4.6. Training needs and preferred formats

Asked what a course should cover (up to three choices), respondents chose international standards most often (40.0%), followed by safe channels and ways of communication (27.5%), understanding gender-related integrity risks (27.4%), recognising and responding to sensitive situations of this kind (16.6%), assessing gender-specific risks (14.2%), case handling and review (11.3%) and institutional reform and policy (11.2%). The interest is thus in practical tools as well as in concepts. Preferred formats are short and accessible: short videos (33.1%), blended learning (31.3%), practical tools and templates (22.5%), cases and simulations (20.5%) and interactive tests (15.4%). These preferences are consistent with guidance that favours short thematic modules, case-based exercises and e-learning [17]. The review evidence suggests some caution, however: cultural and organisational interventions, to which training belongs, have shown smaller short-term effects than deterrence and control, and most evidence comes from laboratory settings [16]. Any course would therefore benefit from piloting and evaluation, with measures of knowledge, recognition of scenarios and willingness to raise concerns taken before and after, rather than being assumed to be effective.

4.7. Discussion and implications

Three observations follow from the results. First, the results point to limited familiarity with the topic. Sizeable shares of respondents are not familiar with the concept, have had little training, and rate institutional responses favourably or do not know them. In such conditions, a small number of recognised cases says little about the number of actual cases, which is consistent with the observation that such matters are hard to measure and that awareness need not follow prevalence [11]. Second, sensitivity is associated with everyday administrative interactions, so attention need not be confined to specialist units. Gender-sensitive risk assessment could be built into the mapping of integrity risks in service delivery, complaint handling, inspections and personnel management, and gender-disaggregated data could be collected, as suggested in analyses of the international framework [3]. Third, willingness to raise a concern appears to depend on knowledge, social acceptance and trust together. Confidential, accessible and gender-sensitive channels are important [2], but may not be sufficient on their own.

For training, the data suggest a design that emphasises recognition alongside definitions: short modules in which participants consider realistic situations from service delivery, complaints, inspections and human-resource decisions, followed by practical guidance on appropriate channels and on the role of managers. Material on international standards, the most requested topic, could be linked to daily practice. The detailed

design of such a course and its evaluation will be reported separately.

4.8. Limitations

Several limitations apply. The sample is dominated by educational institutions and cannot be generalised to the whole public sector. The results are aggregated, so we cannot test whether training, tenure or sector explain differences in confidence or in perceived institutional performance, and we cannot assess associations at the individual level. The survey measures perceptions and self-reported knowledge, not experiences or prevalence, and is open to social desirability, which may be particularly relevant for a sensitive subject [11]. Responses may reflect the survey's own framing, since the concept was introduced to many respondents through the questionnaire. Multiple-choice items allow only descriptive comparison of options. Finally, cross-sectional data do not allow causal conclusions. Subsequent analysis of respondent-level data could cross-tabulate familiarity, training and perceived institutional response by sector and tenure, and model the determinants of the factors that make reporting difficult.

5. Conclusion

This article used a national survey of 30,535 public-sector employees in Uzbekistan to consider awareness and perceptions of gender-related integrity issues. Three observations stand out. Reported training is limited, while confidence in institutional responses is high. The concept is unfamiliar to more than two in five respondents and only partly familiar to about a third. Sensitivity is associated mainly with everyday administrative processes, and reporting appears to be influenced by limited awareness, concern about the opinion of others and uncertainty about confidentiality and procedures.

These patterns may be better read as pointing to a need for greater familiarity and attention than as evidence about prevalence. Some considerations for policy follow: gender could be incorporated gradually into integrity-risk assessment and data collection; reporting channels could be made confidential, accessible and gender-sensitive; awareness-raising could take prevailing social attitudes into account; and short, scenario-based training could be offered and evaluated before wider use. Future research could analyse respondent-level data, consider experiences as well as perceptions, extend coverage beyond education and the civil service, and examine which communication and training approaches support recognition and reporting.

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