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The Social Responsibility of Women Leaders in Uzbekistan And the Mechanisms of Its Development: A Theoretical Synthesis and An Integrated Conceptual Model

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Abstract

This conceptual article examines which factors shape the social responsibility of women leaders in Uzbekistan and through which mechanisms it can be deliberately developed. Using a critical comparative literature review, it analyses 12 studies on the Uzbek context, 40 international sources and the national law on gender equality; no new survey, interview or experiment is claimed. The international literature treats social responsibility not as an innate quality of women leaders but as behaviour arising from ethical decision-making, accountability to stakeholders and organisational conditions. Uzbek research has focused on women's social activity, legal guarantees and education, but has not studied the social responsibility of women managers as a distinct, measurable construct, and most of it is descriptive. The article proposes a Multilevel Model of Responsible Women's Leadership (MRWL) that integrates psychological, educational, institutional and societal mechanisms, with measurement indicators and six testable hypotheses. The model is a conceptual proposal that requires empirical validation.

Keywords: women leaders, social responsibility, ethical leadership, responsible leadership, leader self-efficacy, gender equality, Uzbekistan

Introduction

Over the past decade, expanding women's participation in public life and governance has become a priority of state policy in Uzbekistan. The 2019 Law "On Guarantees of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men"

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established gender-legal review, gender audit and equal opportunities in personnel policy (Republic of Uzbekistan, 2019). Quotas and financial support have increased the share of women in higher education, including doctoral candidates (Kasimov & Farkas, 2025), and women's participation in science has grown in both quantity and quality (Kannazarova et al., 2025).

Increasing women's representation in leadership and strengthening leaders' social responsibility are related but not identical tasks. Representation alone does not guarantee ethical decisions or transparent governance, and the international evidence points in two directions. Fortune 500 firms with women CEOs or gender-diverse boards had stronger business and equity practices (Glass & Cook, 2018), and a meta-analysis of 87 samples found a positive, context-dependent link between women on boards and corporate social performance (Byron & Post, 2016). Yet the Turkish experience shows that gender alone does not determine good leadership (Inal, 2017), and in a study of 636 Turkish employees, leader gender did not moderate the link between ethical leadership and affective commitment (Demir & Elçi, 2023).

These results rule out the simple claim that "women managers are by nature more responsible". The better question is: under what individual, educational, organisational and social conditions do leaders, and women leaders in particular, make socially responsible decisions and sustain them in practice? The question matters in Uzbekistan, where traditional gender roles and modernisation reforms operate at the same time (Madalinska-Michalak & Mamadaminova, 2022; Khalikulova, 2025). Uzbek scholarship has discussed women's socio-political activity, legal guarantees and education (Musurmanova & Akhmadalieva, 2023; Fayzullaeva, 2025), but has not defined the social responsibility of women managers as a scientific construct or integrated the mechanisms that shape it into a model.

The aim of this study is to develop, through a critical synthesis of international and Uzbek literature, an integrated conceptual model of how the social responsibility of women leaders is formed in Uzbekistan. The research questions are:

RQ1. How does the international literature define and explain the social responsibility of women leaders?

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RQ2. Which aspects of the problem have researchers in Uzbekistan studied, and with what methods?

RQ3. How do Uzbek and international approaches differ, and which theories can be adapted to Uzbekistan?

RQ4. Which mechanisms remain understudied, and what conceptual model can be built on that basis?

The article contributes a working definition adapted to the local context, the first systematic comparison of Uzbek studies with international leadership theory, and a multilevel model with indicators and hypotheses ready for empirical testing.

Review of the Literature

- **Ethical and responsible leadership**

Two related traditions explain a leader's social responsibility. Brown, Treviño and Harrison (2005) defined ethical leadership as normatively appropriate conduct in a leader's personal actions and relationships, promoted to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement and decision-making; drawing on social learning theory, they argued that ethical leaders must be credible role models who actively manage ethical standards. Brown and Treviño (2006) later linked ethical leadership to role modelling, organisational ethical culture and personal characteristics. Responsible leadership, in contrast, is described by Maak and Pless (2006) as a relational process in a stakeholder society, in which the leader balances the interests of employees, customers, communities and future generations. Maak, Pless and Voegtlin (2016) distinguished an instrumental, shareholder-oriented style from an integrative, stakeholder-oriented one and proposed that power distance and corporate governance shape which style leaders adopt, while Doh and Quigley (2014) traced how responsible leadership reaches stakeholders through psychological and knowledge-based pathways. Ethical leadership thus concerns the leader–employee relationship, and responsible leadership concerns social impact beyond the organisation; a woman leader's social responsibility requires both.

Both constructs face methodological criticism. Banks et al. (2021) showed that measures of ethical leadership conflate leader behaviour with its consequences, and Hoch et al. (2018) found that ethical and authentic leadership overlap substantially

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with transformational leadership. Lemoine, Hartnell and Leroy (2019) proposed distinguishing moral approaches to leadership by their underlying ethical frameworks. A model of the responsible woman leader must therefore separate its constructs clearly and keep behaviour apart from outcomes.

- **Transformational leadership and moral capacity**

Bass (1999) and Bass and Riggio (2006) defined transformational leadership through idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualised consideration, but noted that such influence is not ethical in itself. Avolio and Gardner (2005) placed self-awareness, self-regulation and positive role modelling at the centre of authentic leadership development. Hannah, Avolio and May (2011) argued that ethical action requires more than moral reasoning: leaders need moral ownership, moral efficacy and moral courage, which are capacities that can be developed. This view is supported by the broader shift from trait-based to behavioural and process models of leadership (Lord et al., 2017) and by meta-analytic evidence that behaviours predict effectiveness better than traits (DeRue et al., 2011). Explaining women leaders' responsibility by "natural empathy" is therefore insufficient; the focus should be on learnable, observable behaviour.

- **Gender and leadership**

Meta-analyses show that women use a slightly more participative style than men, with smaller differences in organisations than in laboratories (Eagly & Johnson, 1990), and slightly more transformational leadership, though the differences are small (Eagly et al., 2003). Small stylistic advantages coexist with disadvantages created by prejudice (Eagly & Carli, 2003). Role congruity theory explains this prejudice: because leadership is associated with agency and the female role with communality, women are rated lower as potential leaders and their assertive behaviour is judged more harshly (Eagly & Karau, 2002), and such stereotypes persist even in women's self-descriptions (Hentschel et al., 2019).

On effectiveness, Paustian-Underdahl, Walker and Woehr (2014) found no significant overall gender difference, with results varying by rater and context. The gap in leadership emergence has narrowed but persists (Badura et al., 2018) and findings depend on which criterion is studied (Shen & Joseph, 2021). Context also matters: women are more often appointed to precarious "glass cliff" positions (Ryan & Haslam, 2005), and their careers face both external barriers (culture, stereotypes, work-family conflict) and internal ones (confidence, ambition) (Galsanjigmed &

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Sekiguchi, 2023), the same two groups of barriers recorded in Uzbek studies (Kasimov & Farkas, 2025; Fayzullaeva, 2025).

❖ **Social cognitive theory and leader development**

Bandura (1977) showed that self-efficacy develops from mastery experiences, vicarious learning, verbal persuasion and emotional states, and later explained human agency through the reciprocal influence of person, behaviour and environment (Bandura, 2001). Machida and Schaubroeck (2011) analysed how leader self-efficacy shapes leader development, and Ruggs et al. (2023) showed that race affects the development of women's leadership self-efficacy, a reminder that women are not a homogeneous group. Ely, Ibarra and Kolb (2011) argued that women's leadership programmes must address "second-generation gender bias", the hidden barriers embedded in organisational culture, and help women build a leader identity rather than only teach skills. Kabeer's (1999) view of empowerment as a link between resources, agency and achievements provides a logic for connecting education, decision-making capacity and social impact.

❖ **Women leaders and organisational social responsibility**

Even a few women directors can influence corporate social responsibility practices (Cook & Glass, 2018), and the link between women on boards and social performance is stronger where shareholder protection and gender parity are high (Byron & Post, 2016). The relationship between leader gender and social responsibility differs by industry (Fernández-Muiños et al., 2022) and by the role women hold (Galbreath & Tisch, 2020). Studies of women CEOs stress self-awareness and building one's own style outside stereotypes (Athanasopoulou et al., 2018), and research on gender-transformative leaders identifies commitment to equity, empathy and learning as key qualities (Gonzalez et al., 2022). The closest regional evidence, from Kazakhstan, describes women's leadership as a relational process co-created with the social environment (Kakabadse et al., 2018).

❖ **Studies in the Uzbek context**

Twelve relevant studies were identified; works with foreign co-authors are marked in Table 1. In higher education and science, Kasimov and Farkas (2025) interviewed 32 stakeholders and found that post-2017 reforms increased women's enrolment and doctoral participation, while gender bias, work-life conflict and under-representation in leadership persist. This is one of the few Uzbek studies with a clearly described method, although its co-author is a foreign scholar. Madalinska-

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Michalak and Mamadaminova (2022), a joint Polish–Uzbek work, reviewed Uzbek and international literature on women's status, their perception of their own rights in the family and society, and the opportunities and challenges of women's leadership in higher education. Kannazarova et al. (2025), Uzbek authors with a Kazakh co-author, described the quantitative and qualitative growth of women's participation in science, the trajectory of reform and the views of women leaders in science.

On education, Fayzullaeva (2025) reported that education programmes strengthen women's leadership competencies and that gender is the main barrier to leadership positions; because the abstract does not report the sample or method, this is treated here as a descriptive observation. Mardieva (2021) proposed, but did not evaluate, training to develop responsible student leaders.

On legal foundations and social activity, Musurmanova and Akhmadalieva (2023) analysed the legal basis for women's socio-political activity and noted persistent stereotypes; Urinova and Abdukadirova (2024), Karimova and Todjimamatova (2024) and Dzhasanova (2015) examined gender equality, state policy and the factors that reduce women's social activity. Drawing on her own sociological survey, Ergasheva (2023) identified the mass media as the leading source of stereotypes about women and recommended using them as an educational tool to raise women's status. Taken together, these works establish the legal and policy framework well, but they say little about how individual leaders translate it into decisions.

On psychological and conceptual questions, Mahkamova (2025) found that women in the civil service face high neuropsychological strain, multitasking and time pressure during professional adaptation. Khalikulova (2025) described the modern Uzbek woman leader's identity as a "hybrid" of traditional values and professional autonomy, but also claimed that women bring distinctive qualities such as empathy to leadership; this claim sits uneasily with the meta-analytic evidence above (Eagly et al., 2003; Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2014) and risks gender essentialism.

- **Synthesis and research gap**

Four conclusions follow. First, internationally, social responsibility is explained by moral capacities, social learning, stakeholder relationships and institutional conditions rather than by gender (RQ1). Second, Uzbek studies concentrate on the macro and legal level; the meso level (organisational culture, personnel policy,

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accountability) is addressed only by Kasimov and Farkas (2025), and the micro level (self-efficacy, moral reasoning) almost only by Mahkamova (2025)) (RQ2). Third, international research relies on meta-analyses and validated measures, while most Uzbek work is descriptive and often does not distinguish "social activity" (participation) from "social responsibility" (the ethical quality of decisions and accountability for them) (RQ3). Fourth, women managers' moral efficacy and courage, the effects of mentoring and leadership programmes, the effect of gender audit and accountability on leader behaviour, and stakeholders' assessment of leaders' social impact remain unstudied (RQ4). This gap calls for an integrated, measurable model.

Methodology

The study has a theoretical and conceptual design based on a critical comparative literature review and integrative synthesis. No empirical fieldwork was conducted, and the article is not a PRISMA-compliant systematic review. The analysis draws on four theoretical lenses: social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977, 2001) for individual mechanisms, role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002) for the influence of stereotypes, ethical and responsible leadership theory (Brown et al., 2005; Maak & Pless, 2006) for the content of responsibility, and the empowerment approach (Kabeer, 199)) for the chain from resources to outcomes.

Sources were searched in October and November 2026 through Crossref, Google Scholar, publishers' websites, Uzbek journals and the official legal portal lex.uz, using English keywords (e.g. "women leadership Uzbekistan", "ethical leadership gender", "responsible leadership", "leader self-efficacy") and Uzbek keywords ("xotin-qizlar ijtimoiy faolligi", "ayollar liderligi", "ayol rahbar"). Works were included if they were directly relevant, had a DOI or stable official URL, had bibliographic data confirmed through Crossref or the publisher, and had an accessible abstract or full text. Foundational works (1977–2011) were analysed alongside studies from 2018–2025.

The analysis had four stages: (1) an analysis matrix recording each source's aim, approach, method, findings, limitations and relevance (Table 1); (2) deductive coding into five units: leadership competencies, ethical decisions and accountability, education and mentoring, organisational policy, and social impact; (3) comparison of international and Uzbek findings within each unit (Table 2); (4)

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development of the model, indicators and hypotheses (Table 3, Figure 1). Source quality was judged by publication type (meta-analysis, empirical study, theoretical review or descriptive article), transparency of method and whether findings could be checked. Because several Uzbek sources appear in journals with limited international standing or opaque peer review, they were used to describe the local discourse rather than to support causal claims, and interpretations of sources available only as abstracts stayed within those abstracts.

The study has four limitations: the search was purposive rather than systematic, so works without DOIs may have been missed; some sources were analysed only through abstracts; Scopus and Web of Science were not accessed directly; and the proposed model has not been tested empirically.

Results

❖ The literature corpus

The analysis included 12 studies on the Uzbek context (nine by Uzbek authors only, three with foreign co-authors) and 40 international sources. Only three Uzbek studies report primary empirical data (Kasimov & Farkas, 2025; Ergasheva, 2023; Mahkamova, 2025), and none operationalises "social responsibility" or "ethical leadership" as a measurable construct. Table 1 summarises the Uzbek studies and the key international works.

Table 1. Analysis of the scholarly literature

Author and year	**Title (abridged)**	**Country**	**Main finding**	**Relevance to this article**
A. Studies on the Uzbek context (* with a foreign co-author)				
Kasimov & Farkas, 2025*	Reforms, neoliberal policies and gender equity in higher education	Uzbekistan	32 interviews: participation grew; bias and under-representation in leadership persist	Institutional mechanism
Madalinska-Michalak & Mamadaminova, 2022*	Female leadership in higher education in Uzbekistan	Uzbekistan	Review of opportunities and barriers	Socio-cultural context
Kannazarova et al., 2025*	Women's leadership in	Uzbekistan	Women's participation in science grew	Reform trajectory

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	science in Uzbekistan			
Fayzullaeva, 2025	Education and mentoring in building leadership for women	Uzbekistan	Education strengthens competencies; gender as barrier	Educational mechanism
Mahkamova, 2025	Psychological aspects of women's professional adaptation	Uzbekistan	High strain in civil-service adaptation	Psychological mechanism
Khalikulova, 2025	The emergence of the "female leader" in Uzbekistan	Uzbekistan	"Hybrid" identity; stereotypes persist	Risk of essentialism
Ergasheva, 2023	Social aspects of increasing women's activity	Uzbekistan	Media are the leading source of stereotypes	Societal mechanism
Musurmanova & Akhmadalieva, 2023	Legal foundations of women's socio-political activity	Uzbekistan	Strong legal basis; stereotypes remain	Institutional foundation
Urinova & Abdukadirova, 2024	Gender equality and women's activity in research	Uzbekistan	Equality and research activity linked	Education-system context
Karimova & Todjimamatova, 2024	Theoretical foundations of women's social activity	Uzbekistan	Activity tied to state policy	Local discourse
Mardieva, 2021	Formation of leadership qualities in students	Uzbekistan	Training for responsible leaders	Educational tools
Dzhasanova, 2015	Women's participation in state and public administration	Uzbekistan	Trends and barriers in activity	Historical background
B. Key international studies				
Eagly & Karau, 2002	Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders	USA (theory)	Role incongruity produces prejudice	Stereotype barriers
Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2014	Gender and perceptions of leadership effectiveness	Meta-analysis	No overall difference; context matters	Against essentialism

Brown et al., 2005	Ethical leadership: A social learning perspective	USA	Definition and measure of ethical leadership	Core construct
Banks et al., 2021	Ethical leadership: Mapping the terrain	Int'l review	Construct needs clean-up	Methodological caution
Maak & Pless, 2006	Responsible leadership in a stakeholder society	Int'l (theory)	Leadership as relational process	Societal mechanism
Hannah et al., 2011	Moral maturation and moral conation	USA (theory)	Moral ownership, efficacy, courage	Psychological mechanism
Bandura, 1977	Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory	USA (theory)	Four sources of self-efficacy	Educational tools
Ely et al., 2011	Taking gender into account	USA	Second-generation gender bias	Programme design
Byron & Post, 2016	Women on boards and corporate social performance	Meta-analysis	Link depends on institutions	Institutional moderator
Demir & Elçi, 2023	Gender, ethical leadership and affective commitment	Turkey	No gender moderation	Against essentialism
Kakabadse et al., 2018	Gender perspective on entrepreneurial leadership	Kazakhstan	Leadership as relational process	Regional comparison

- **Comparison of Uzbek and international approaches**

Both bodies of literature identify stereotypes and work-family balance as key barriers and see education as the main development tool (Galsanjigmed & Sekiguchi, 2023; Kasimov & Farkas, 2025; Ely et al., 2011; Fayzullaeva, 2025). They differ in level of analysis, construct definition, interpretation of gender and methodological transparency (Table 2).

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Table 2. Comparative analysis of Uzbek and international approaches

Criterion	**International approach**	**Uzbek context**	**Research gap identified**
Definition of social responsibility	Ethical and responsible leadership defined as clear constructs (Brown et al., 2005; Maak & Pless, 2006)	"Social activity" and "responsibility" often not distinguished (Karimova & Todjimamatova, 2024)	No working definition adapted to the local context
Gender and ethics	Gender differences small and context-dependent (Eagly et al., 2003; Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2014)	Some works stress women's "natural" qualities (Khalikulova, 2025)	Need for a behaviour-based approach free of essentialism
Psychological factors	Leader self-efficacy and moral efficacy measured (Hannah et al., 2011; Machida & Schaubroeck, 2011)	Professional adaptation and strain studied (Mahkamova, 2025)	Moral efficacy and courage not studied
Education and mentoring	Gender-sensitive programme design (Ely et al., 2011)	General importance of education stressed (Fayzullaeva, 2025; Mardieva, 2021)	Programme effectiveness not evaluated
Institutional environment	Governance and national context as moderators (Byron & Post, 2016)	Legislation and quotas; organisational barriers (Kasimov & Farkas, 2025; Republic of Uzbekistan, 2019)	Effect of gender audit and accountability on leaders unknown
Social impact	Pathways of influence on stakeholders (Doh & Quigley, 2014)	Role of media and the public (Ergasheva, 2023)	No indicators of a leader's social impact
Methodology	Meta-analyses, panel data, validated scales	Mainly descriptive and normative analysis	No validated Uzbek-language measures

Social cognitive and ethical leadership theories rest on relatively culture-neutral mechanisms such as observational learning and role modelling, and are the easiest to adapt. Role congruity theory is especially relevant where family roles are influential. Responsible leadership theory, developed for corporations, requires the set of stakeholders to be redefined for the public sector and the mahalla (neighbourhood community) system, and high-power distance may make its integrative style harder to practise (Maak et al., 2016).

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❖ The conceptual model

The following working definition is proposed: the social responsibility of a woman leader is the set of capacities and behaviours of a woman in a leadership position directed at making fair, transparent and well-justified decisions that respect stakeholders' legitimate interests, being accountable for their consequences, and building lasting practices that serve the organisation and society. The definition is deliberately gender-neutral: what is specific to women leaders lies not in the content of responsibility but in the conditions under which it develops, namely role expectations, stereotypes and institutional opportunities. On this basis, the Multilevel Model of Responsible Women's Leadership (MRWL) was developed (Figure 1).

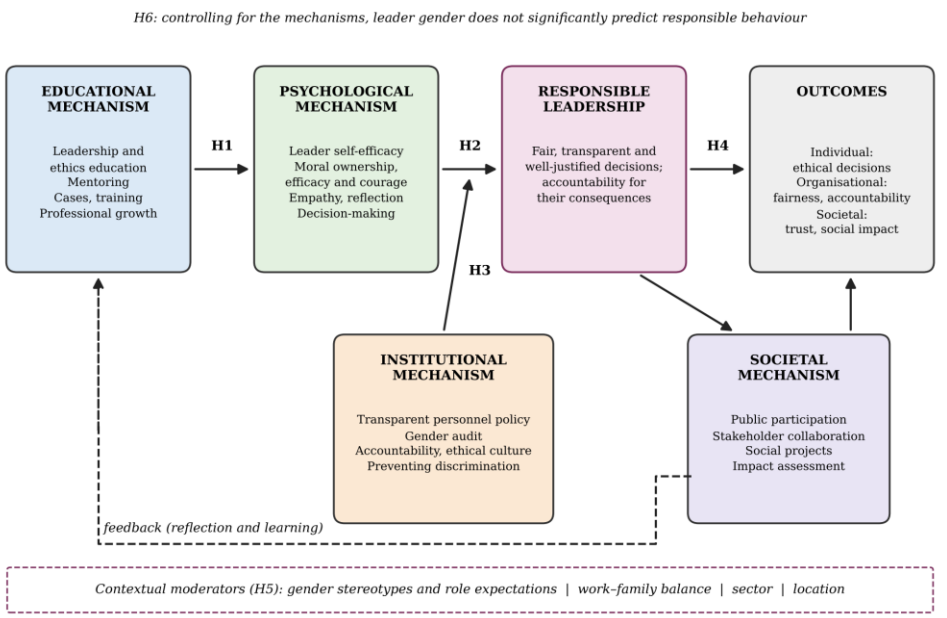

Figure 1. Multilevel Model of Responsible Women's Leadership (MRWL)

Note: developed by the author. Arrows indicate relationships hypothesised for empirical testing (H1–H6), not proven causal relationships.

Following Kabeer's (1999) chain of resources, agency and achievements and Bandura's (2001) reciprocal determination, the educational mechanism provides resources, the psychological mechanism turns them into capacities such as leader self-efficacy and moral efficacy, the institutional mechanism enables or limits their

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expression in behaviour, and the societal mechanism links behaviour to society and returns feedback. The mechanisms are connected through mediation (education acts on behaviour through psychological resources; Machida & Schaubroeck, 2011), moderation (institutions change how strongly capacities translate into behaviour; Byron & Post, 2016) and feedback (stakeholder assessments inform reflection and learning; Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Gender stereotypes, work-family balance, sector and location act as contextual moderators. Table 3 sets out the elements, tools and indicators of each mechanism; behavioural indicators are kept separate from outcome indicators, following Banks et al. (2021) and Shen and Joseph (2021).

Table 3. Mechanisms for developing the social responsibility of women leaders

Mechanism	**Structural elements**	**Implementation tools**	**Assessment indicators**
Psychological	Leader self-efficacy; moral ownership, efficacy and courage; empathy; reflection; decision-making	Development plan; reflective journal; moral dilemma cases; coaching; stress management	Self-efficacy scale; moral efficacy score; decision quality in 360-degree feedback
Educational	Leadership and ethics education; mentoring; practical training; professional development	Gender-sensitive programmes; mentor–mentee pairs; service-learning projects; training modules	Completion rates; mentoring relationships; pre–post competency gains; promotion of graduates
Institutional	Equal opportunities; transparent personnel policy; ethical culture; accountability; anti-discrimination	Open selection criteria; gender audit; conflict-of-interest policy; complaint channels; flexible work	Women in leadership positions; gender balance of talent pool; audit follow-up; perceived fairness
Societal	Public participation; stakeholder collaboration; social projects; evaluation of outcomes	Public consultations; partnership with mahallas and NGOs; public reports	Stakeholder satisfaction; reach of social projects; regular public reporting; independent impact assessment

Expected outcomes are more ethically grounded decisions and stronger self-efficacy at the individual level, fair procedures and a culture of accountability at the organisational level, and stakeholder trust and sustained representation of women in leadership at the societal level.

❖ Hypotheses and application in Uzbekistan

The model gives rise to six hypotheses:

H1. Participation in gender-sensitive leadership education and mentoring is positively related to women managers' leader self-efficacy and moral efficacy.

H2. Moral efficacy and leader self-efficacy mediate the relationship between education and responsible leadership behaviour.

H3. Transparent personnel policy and accountability strengthen the relationship between psychological resources and responsible behaviour.

H4. Responsible leadership behaviour is positively related to stakeholder trust and the results of social projects.

H5. Stronger role expectations and gender stereotypes weaken the link between responsible behaviour and its positive evaluation by stakeholders.

H6. When the mechanisms are controlled for, leader gender does not significantly predict responsible leadership behaviour.

H6 states the model's central claim in a falsifiable form. Testing is proposed through a mixed-methods study in public administration, higher education and business, combining paired leader–employee surveys, multilevel structural equation modelling and interviews, with international scales adapted into Uzbek and men leaders included for comparison.

Existing institutional infrastructure in Uzbekistan supports application of the model. First, the gender-legal review and gender audit required by law (Republic of Uzbekistan, 2019) offer a ready channel for collecting institutional indicators such as the gender balance of the talent pool and the openness of selection criteria. Current audit practice focuses mainly on representation; the model proposes adding qualitative measures of the transparency and accountability of leaders' decisions.

Second, higher education reforms and the growing number of women doctoral candidates (Kasimov & Farkas, 2025; Kannazarova et al., 2025) make universities a suitable setting for piloting the educational mechanism. A mentoring programme for women heads of department, deputy deans and early-career researchers could measure participants' leader self-efficacy and moral efficacy at the start and end,

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turning the effect reported by Fayzullaeva (2025) from a descriptive observation into a measurable outcome.

Third, coaching and psychological support during the adaptation period for newly appointed women civil servants would put the psychological mechanism into practice; given the strain reported by Mahkamova (2025), stress management and reflection can be treated as conditions for sustaining the quality of ethical decisions. Fourth, partnerships with mahalla institutions, NGOs and the media can make women leaders' social projects visible through public reports, strengthening stakeholder trust and multiplying role models (Ergasheva, 2023). The model should be introduced in stages: adapting measures, piloting in one sector, revising and then scaling.

Discussion

The main conclusion is that the social responsibility of women leaders is a product of developable capacities and institutional conditions, not an automatic consequence of gender. The model confirms the social learning account of ethical leadership (Brown et al., 2005) and extends it in two ways. It recognises that observational learning is limited where women have few role models, and it links moral efficacy and courage (Hannah et al., 2011) to stereotype pressure: under role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002), a woman who takes a firm ethical stand may be judged more harshly than a man, so moral courage may carry an extra social cost for women. This intersection, expressed in H5, is little studied internationally. The model also adds developmental mechanisms to responsible leadership theory (Maak & Pless, 2006; Doh & Quigley, 2014), which has said more about what responsible senior executives do than about how leaders acquire these capacities. Because ethical leadership overlaps with transformational leadership (Hoch et al., 2018), future studies must test whether responsible leadership explains additional variance.

The evidence is mixed. Positive links between women leaders and social responsibility (Glass & Cook, 2018; Cook & Glass, 2018; Byron & Post, 2016) sit alongside null or context-dependent findings (Demir & Elçi, 2023; Fernández-Muiños et al., 2022) and warnings against equating gender with moral superiority (Inal, 2017). Two explanations fit both patterns. The first is a selection effect: because women pass through more barriers on the way to leadership, those who reach senior

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positions may on average be more highly qualified. The second is a diversity effect: positive results may arise not because women are "more ethical" but because varied perspectives in a management team improve decision quality, and Glass and Cook (2018) themselves note that diverse teams outperformed homogeneous ones. Both explanations support the model's claim that diversity and fair institutions, rather than gender itself, create conditions for responsible decisions. The glass cliff (Ryan & Haslam, 2005) adds a further caution: if women are appointed to precarious positions during crises, weak results may reflect organisational problems rather than their leadership, and may then reinforce the stereotype of the ineffective woman manager. Evaluations of women leaders' social responsibility must therefore control for the organisation's starting conditions and resources.

Adaptation to Uzbekistan has limits. Most international evidence comes from Western corporations, whereas Uzbekistan has a large public sector in which "stakeholders" and "accountability" mean different things. Family roles and collectivist values make work-family balance a cultural as well as an organisational issue (Madalinska-Michalak & Mamadaminova, 2022; Kasimov & Farkas, 2025), and the "hybrid" identity described by Khalikulova (2025), which asks women managers to meet traditional and modern expectations at once, may intensify role conflict. Although the legal foundations have been strengthened (Republic of Uzbekistan, 2019; Musurmanova & Akhmadalieva, 2023), their implementation inside organisations and their effect on leader behaviour have not been studied. Organisation-level gender data may also be limited, so testing the institutional mechanism will require researchers to work directly with organisations. Measurement is also difficult: self-reports of ethical behaviour are prone to social desirability bias, so the model combines self-ratings with ratings by employees and stakeholders and with document-based indicators, and it separates behaviour from outcomes to avoid circular reasoning (Banks et al., 2021).

The novelty of the article lies in distinguishing "social activity" from "social responsibility", combining ethical, responsible, role congruity and social cognitive theories in one model, and offering specific indicators and falsifiable hypotheses for Uzbekistan. This novelty is conceptual; its practical value will be established only through empirical testing.

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Conclusion and Recommendations

The study reached three main conclusions. First, international research links the social responsibility of women leaders to moral capacities, social learning, stakeholder relationships and institutional conditions rather than to gender. Second, research on Uzbekistan has focused on social activity, legal guarantees and the general role of education, and has not treated the social responsibility of women managers as a distinct, measurable construct. Third, Uzbek literature lacks empirical evidence on psychological resources, the effectiveness of leadership programmes and mechanisms of organisational accountability. The proposed MRWL model connects psychological, educational, institutional and societal mechanisms through mediation, moderation and feedback, and locates what is specific to women not in the content of responsibility but in the conditions under which it develops. In practical terms, it offers a ready set of indicators for designing and evaluating leadership programmes and organisational policy. The following recommendations are made:

- Higher education institutions should add modules on moral dilemmas, the consequences of decisions and stakeholder communication to leadership programmes, and evaluate mentoring for women academics with pre–post measures.
- Government bodies and organisations should publish open selection criteria, link gender audit results to appointment practice and introduce flexible working arrangements.
- The in-service training system should include sessions on managing stereotype pressure, reflection and moral courage.
- Researchers should adapt and validate ethical and responsible leadership scales in Uzbek.

The model has not been tested empirically, the search was purposive, some sources were examined only through abstracts, and much of the international evidence comes from different institutional settings. Future research should validate measures based on the indicators, test H1–H6 across sectors with multilevel modelling, evaluate leadership and mentoring programmes with longitudinal or quasi-experimental designs, and compare urban and rural regions and Central Asian countries.

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