POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS ON EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR REDUCTION OF SEX-SELECTIVE ABORTIONS IN ARMENIA

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1.POLICY ON REDUCTION OF SEX-SELECTIVE ABORTIONS IN THE WORLD

There are various strategies related to sex-selective abortions (SSA) in the world. However, they may be divided into three main groups: strategies for prevention, response and elimination. The latter can be viewed as mixed strategies, as they were mainly developed for response and/or elimination purposes after proliferation of sex-selective abortions (China, India etc.). At the same time in a number of other countries the above-mentioned strategies may especially focus on prevention.

All strategies for elimination of SSAs have certain similarities, as provided below:

• Development and adoption of laws prohibiting SSAs (which may often have a preventive function),

• Development and implementation of separate strategies and programs targeted at gender equality and gender justice (which may ensure both prevention of the manifestation of the latter and response to the phenomenon in general) in different spheres (education, health care, protection etc.),

• Raising public awareness and modification or revision of cultural elements (also have preventive nature and focus on elimination).

Prevention of SSAs, in general, requires commitment as well as sustainable and concerted efforts by governments, civil society, international agencies and all other parties striving to achieve gender equality. A reasonable and detailed systemic approach involving stakeholders at all levels is required. It is especially important for putting in place legal and policy mechanisms for girls and women. The mentioned process should also include impartial and objective mass-media strategies, as well as other measures to encourage behavior change. Imbalanced
sex ratios are an unacceptable manifestation of gender discrimination against women and girls and a violation of their human rights\(^1\).

Various countries have adopted and introduced legislative and legal acts and have developed mechanisms in an attempt to somehow reduce sex-selective abortions or completely eliminate this phenomenon. Some vivid examples based on the experience of different countries are provided below.

**China**

Since 1970s the Government of China has been trying to prevent population growth though delayed marriages, longer gaps between births and lower fertility - a set of reproduction policies known as “wan xi shao” (later, longer and fewer). In 1979 the one child policy was introduced in China. In 1980s the number of families unhappy with this legislation and policy increased thus leading to formation of son preference. Meanwhile, legalization of artificial pregnancy termination and access to new technologies contributed to the proliferation of SSAs in the whole country thus leading to a “merger of Eastern philosophy and Western technology”\(^2\).

As a consequence, population cohorts born in 1980-2000 included 22 million more men than women, a phenomenon which later became known as the “missing girls” of China\(^3\). Further research showed that such a situation in China will result in increased number of single men, commercialization of sexual life, spread of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS. So, single men will occur in a more difficult

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3. Ibid.
economic situation, they won’t have children, who would take care of them at old age.

The alarming sex ratio indicators in China in 2000 made the government work towards the elimination of the issue and development of strategies for further prevention of SSAs. According to Ebenstein and Sharygin the government’s response can be classified into two primary strategies4.

1. Increasing the value of girls in the minds of parents and reducing the availability of sex-selection technology, where the “The Care for Girls” campaign played a significant role. The latter was implemented in 24 countries with extremely high child sex ratios, including new-born children, and provided a range of programs targeted at the reduction of the female deficit in the given country, including free general/public education for girls.

2. *Prohibition of SSAs under relevant legislation*; the first initiatives on this started in 1989. In 2002 the Government of China introduced the new Law on Family Planning, which bans the use of ultrasound or other technologies to determine child or fetal sex. As defined by this law, health professionals performing sex-selective abortions are penalized and parents forfeit any right to have another child in the future5: In 2006, the government shut down several medical clinics for violation of the law6.

Despite these efforts, however, the sex ratio at birth was 1.18 in 2005 in China. The modified mechanism of legislation was weak and allowed by-passing practices, thus putting forward the

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4 Ibid.


evident need for national plans and clear strategic approaches⁷.

Besides urban areas small programs were implemented for rural population as well. However, the programs were not sufficient especially for the social security of China’s aging population. In this respect Wang recommends policy strategies focusing on two main directions:⁸

1. First, in view of the current sex ratio, China must specify its policy for the elderly, especially taking into consideration the phenomenon of aging population,

2. It is necessary to revise the fertility policy: allowing births of more than one child will enable to ensure some balance between men and women for the coming several years meanwhile solving other demographic problems.

Concern on “secret” medical sex-selective abortions in the second trimester of pregnancy in its turn served as a basis for restrictions and ban on certain medicines in several provinces of China⁹.

At least eight main shortcomings may be identified when solving the issue of SSAs with state intervention¹⁰:

1. Neglect of reproductive liberty and reproductive rights.
2. Neglect of hidden dangers of state power.
3. Inconsistency of current policy on artificial pregnancy terminations, contradictions.
4. Practical ineffectiveness.
5. The cost of restrictions and resistance against them.
6. Simplification and misrepresenting the key issues.

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⁸ Ibid.
¹⁰ ICHD Analysis of Policy, 2016.
7. Lack of sufficient public discussion and dialogue.

8. Ignoring the moral and political principles established by traditional Chinese worldview.

Harsh and compulsive intervention by the state may indeed turn into a greater tragedy than the problem this intervention aims to address. In general China’s legislation has a number of other shortcomings in terms of decision-making and control over the fulfillment of these decisions, including domestic violence and failure to observe the laws on its elimination.

India

The Indian Constitution guarantees equality of women before social protection laws (Article 14) and prohibits sex-based discrimination (Article 15). The Indian Constitution assumes special measures for women and children. Despite these guarantees, the position of women in India remains unequal mainly due to the strong impact of other laws.

In 1971 India passed the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act, which legalized abortion. However, due to the proliferation of sex-selective abortions which were not criminalized by the mentioned Act, the Government adopted a new Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal...
Diagnostics Techniques (PCPNDT) Act, which sought to criminalize sex-selective abortions.

However, the PCPNDT Act is poorly enforced, largely due to neglect by officials and health professionals and lack of willingness to implement it effectively.

Ultrasound sonography is widely used by medical practitioners and the families of pregnant women, which is considered a violation of PCPNDT Act. Such use of technology suggests that control mechanisms at national and state levels are ineffective or even dysfunctional. The prohibition on informing parents about the gender of their child under the law is unlikely to solve the issue of SSAs unless corresponding punishment is administered against health professionals and other related specialists for violating the law.

India introduced a ban on medical tests for foetus gender determination in 1994. Their use during family planning and conception was also banned in 2002. Sanctions for SSAs included confiscation of equipment, fines, imprisonment for different periods, as well as suspension of license for medical activities.

The experience of Hisar is of special interest in terms of its strategy to combat the practice of SSAs. Hisar is one of the most important district towns in Haryana. It has made rapid and active progress in education and industry, namely in steel and cotton industries over the past several decades. In 2011, the average literacy rate in Hisar increased by 9.4% reaching 73.2%. Nevertheless, there are significant discrepancies between male and female literacy rates with male literacy reaching 82.8% compared to...
62.3% of female literacy. Moreover, the situation with the sex ratio is not better either. In 2001, it was 851 women to every 1000 men; however it improved in 2011 reaching 871.

To combat sex-selective abortions in Hisar, Haryana State and the organization “Childreach India” started to implement the “Save the Girl Child” project since 2011, which is also focused on the general improvement of the situation of women and girls\textsuperscript{18}. The project mainly focused on physicians and other medical staff. It didn’t aim to restrict and/or prohibit use of ultrasonography equipment. The main goals were \textit{to raise awareness on importance of child rights and gender equality}. The final goal and outcome of the project was \textit{elimination of son preference and gender-based discrimination}.

The above-mentioned project of Hisar was rather effective and successful in terms of improvement of the situation of women in the given region. Within this period a decrease in the number of SSA cases was recorded as an impact of the project. Achievement of such success in the whole country requires activities at national and state levels\textsuperscript{19}.

\textbf{Other Countries in Asia: South Korea, Pakistan, Nepal}

South Korea’s strategy to combat sex-selective abortions is an example of a more or less effective effort. It achieved really significant success in combating the gender imbalance at birth\textsuperscript{20}. To address the issue South Korea used a wealth of economic, social and legal tools. Although the state was consistently pursuing the adoption and enforcement of laws against prenatal gender determination, the majority of researchers argue that the main impact on prevention of this phenomenon was made by the country’s institutionalization, urbanization and rapid economic growth, the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{18} Roisin Stallard, \textit{Sex-Selective Abortions in India}, Child Reach International.
  \item \textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
combined effect of which led to fundamental transformation of the social
norms lying behind the issue21.

In 1980s the gender imbalance in South Korea was uncontrollable, while in 1990s its highest indicator i.e. 116/100 was recorded22. This indicator gradually decreased reaching 107 by 2007 (the indicator remained the same by 2015)23.

It is interesting to study the situation in Pakistan as well. UNFPA report of 2015 24 on sex-selective abortions shows that only 20% of women are in the labor market in Pakistan. This means that a great number of women are not able to be independent financially and support their parents after they retire. As the Government of Pakistan devotes little attention to the elderly people and to development of a policy related to their issues, the “burden” of taking care for them and supporting them financially is mainly carried out by sons. Here having a son guarantees a careless old age for parents – a “pension plan”, while in case of a daughter parents live with the concern of significant expenditures on her dowry25.

25 Ibid.
Artificial pregnancy termination is legally prohibited in Pakistan, except for cases when pregnancy threatens a woman’s health. Basically, the law on artificial pregnancy termination does not impact in any way the physicians and other medical staff conducting abortions. The results of the survey conducted by the Population Council in Pakistan indicate that prosperous and educated women are also inclined to sex-selective abortions to have a son

Unlike Pakistan, the situation is different in Nepal. The analysis of the literature on SSAs in Nepal revealed a lack of information about programs or strategies implemented on government level. However, the public sector implements large-scale programs and events. The mentioned programs are fulfilled in the following directions:

- **Initiatives to build gender equality.** In 2007 according to the Interim Constitution of Nepal women were considered as a marginalized and vulnerable group thus needing special protection. Provisions in the Constitution that highlight gender inequality are related to positive discrimination against women, rights of women on ancestral property and reproductive rights, as well as the right to social justice on the basis of representation of women in state structures (Articles 13, 20, 21).

- **Advocacy and communication activities.** Though such initiatives are a very recent phenomenon in Nepal, they are becoming rather popular especially via mass media. So, for example, in 2013, Nepal Peace Fund and Nepal Television jointly made a short video, which was broadcasted every day at different times with a message “No gender preference during childbirth”. Besides TV companies, similar initiatives were undertaken by the radio as well.

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28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.
Centre for Awareness Promotion (CAP) Nepal is an NGO, which has been implementing “The Daughter Project” since 2012. The main objective of the project is to fight against cultural preference for sons by activities raising gender awareness among women and pregnant women at major medical facilities in Kathmandu. Several creative approaches are undertaken as well, such as organization of awareness events for the young generation via art and theatre\(^{30}\). Under “The Daughter Project” is a program called “A Sisters Network” which seeks to decrease the value of masculinity in religious rituals.

**South-Eastern Europe: Albania**

According to the data from birth registrations and the European Statistical Service Eurostat, in 2008-2011 the sex ratio at birth in Albania and Montenegro was respectively 112/100 and 110/100\(^{31}\). The data on birth registrations for recent years in Macedonia and Kosovo indicate that the sex ratio of children is above 180, for instance in 2011 the child sex ratio in Macedonia was 108/100; while in Kosovo it reached 112/100\(^{32}\) in 2010.

Special attention should be paid to the situation in **Albania**, which according to general data on reproduction processes and SSAs fully corresponds to the situation in countries with rapidly spreading SSAs alongside with decreasing fertility indicator. Albania is characterized by a patriarchal family system where all processes focus on men. Therefore, sons are an absolute guarantee for perpetuation of the family\(^{33}\). On the contrary, girls are seen as “temporal” members of their native families as they will leave it after marriage. From the point of view of economic and social environment

\(^{30}\) Ibid.


\(^{32}\) Ibid.

sons are viewed as a source of security and support, especially since 1990s – after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In Albania as in a number of other countries growing use of technologies, development of the private health care system, as well as the liberalization in terms of sex-selective abortions allow parents to apply contemporary methods of gender selection\textsuperscript{34}.

The survey conducted in Albania by UNFPA provides the following recommendations regarding the problem of SSAs:

- To double efforts towards improvement of the quality of birth registration,
- To ensure the regular publication of birth registration data (including births by sex, parity and region),
- To encourage the comprehensive statistical analysis of existing sources (including registration of births and their balance),
- Support activities targeted at building the capacities of the country in analysis and interpretation of data\textsuperscript{35}.

**United States of America**

In the USA discriminatory gender selection doesn’t go beyond certain non-significant groups of population; moreover the selection includes both boys and girls\textsuperscript{36}.

In 2008 SSAs were prohibited in several states after publication of the results of a survey conducted by Almond and Edlund on discriminatory gender selection and son preference in families of Chinese, Indian and Korean parents in the US. Besides, in more than twenty states and in the US Congress a number of bills prohibiting sex or race selective abortions were discussed.

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{35} Sex Imbalances at Birth in Albania, UNFPA, 2012.
For instance, in 2009-2013 over 60 bills were submitted on federal and state levels for criminalization of SSA practices by physicians\textsuperscript{37}. Eight such laws have been passed by the lawmakers of the states so far\textsuperscript{38}. Under state laws banning sex-selective abortions, doctors who perform artificial pregnancy terminations should face various types of sanctions from imprisonment and fines to restrictions on professional activities and compensation for damages (provided there is a lawsuit from a patient or her family). A number of bills which haven’t been passed yet even call to account individuals who merely assisted a woman seeking a sex-selective abortion. On the federal level, a number of bills on sex-selective abortion bans were proposed four times in the House of Representatives\textsuperscript{39}.

**Countries in the South-Caucasus**

Ethnographic data indicate that patrilineal kinship systems are very characteristic of the main ethnic groups in the South Caucasus (Armenians, Azerbaijanis and Georgians). The experts of the World Bank concluded that in this region daughters are transferred to the husband’s families at the time of marriage and that mutual support is provided among relatives through the male line\textsuperscript{40}. For instance a number of Azeri sources indicate


that soviet policy was to play a revolutionary role in terms of the position of women in social life. However, this doesn’t mean that such policy was to intervene with family life, where the status of women would continue to be controlled by elderly members of the family41.

According to World Bank experts it is evident that gender equality especially in education, labor market, crediting, fair distribution of ancestral property, political representation can help women be economically productive and active in the public sphere.

The patrilineal kinship systems and several studies in the region of the South Caucasus indicate a definite tendency for son preference. The Soviet social protection system slightly reduced the dependence on men and urbanization processes gradually eroded the influence of male groups. As it was already noted several mechanisms promoting gender equality were used, however men continued to hold the monopoly over control inside the family. Recent surveys indicate a direct correlation between kinship norms and son preference42.

Regional studies on SSAs show an increase in gender selection indicator in Armenia and Georgia, while in Azerbaijan it decreased. A question arises as to what policy and approaches are required for the solution of this issue in the South Caucasus. SSA banning approaches or actions, including legislative regulations43 or monetary penalties are clearly not effective. The fact that sex-selective abortions became more common in the region after the collapse of the Soviet Union shall motivate governments to emphasize the safety of people in this part of the world44.

42 Das Gupta M., 2015.
43 As, for example, in Armenia SSAs are prohibited under RA Law on Reproduction enforced in 2016
44 Das Gupta M., 2015.
In general, based on a number of observations and survey results the World Bank experts identify several factors required for the South Caucasus to reduce and prevent sex-selective abortions\textsuperscript{45}:

- Sustained security,
- Transition from socialistic to market-based institutions,
- Reliable basic institutions of governance

During the 2000s a number of activities were implemented towards economic growth and development of social protection (economic growth, poverty reduction tendencies, pension reforms etc.). Despite this, the cultural situation when parents become dependent on their children at old age still persists. Basically, reforms were implemented in the spheres of health care and education, the positive outcomes of which are, however, not visible especially from the point of view of sex-selective abortions\textsuperscript{46}.

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\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.
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2. STRATEGIES ON MITIGATION OF SEX-SELECTIVE ABORTIONS IN ARMENIA
(Expert survey outcomes)

They ask a child in Artik
- What is your name dear kid...?
He answers:
- A boy...
(from interview with expert)

According to the results of the expert survey activities and programs implemented in Armenia in recent years have produced positive outcomes. According to experts conducted activities may be appraised on the basis of statistical data. In compliance with official data 2-3 years ago the proportion of births in Armenia was 100 girls to 114 boys, while the recent data indicate 113.

In view of experts professionally organized awareness campaigns and coverage of the issue by mass media serve as the main precondition for the effectiveness of conducted activities.

As to the main activities, which may impact the solution of the problem with sex-selective abortions, experts highlight the phenomena and spheres provided below:

**Maternal welfare**

“I think yes, there are several things. The first is the social security of women in terms of maternal welfare... there are steps undertaken towards improvement of maternal welfare, legislation on the institute of motherhood, which will mitigate economic vulnerability of women and will facilitate the processes related to motherhood and maternal welfare. We think we will give them lump sum amounts... But this won’t solve the
problem because even simplest observations show that a woman will not be able to take care of her child till the age of 3 unless her monthly salary is above average and she is supported by her own or her husband’s parents. Otherwise the child is a great “burden”… In fact the woman is out of the labor market for three years… I think if I am out of labor market for 3 years, it will be impossible to return there afterwards”.

(from interview with expert)

**Changed System of Values**

According to experts the main gap in the solution of the problem of sex-selective abortions is the slow change in the mindset of people, which is preconditioned by profound social-psychological changes in the system of values, attitudes and perceptions.

“As we are talking about a very important phenomenon – change of mindset, which also leads to behavioral changes, we should note that it has deep roots. We can anyhow notice some change before even starting the research, as something started to move. However, we should persist and continue all this and the projects being implemented. I mean they should be long-term. For instance the duration of our project is 2 years, but two years are a very short period to incur changes in mentality. Probably we are also talking about cultural changes and we know that such changes cannot provide sustainable outcomes within a short period. We will have results for sure but it’s difficult to forecast how long such short-term projects will last”.

(from interview with expert)
From the perspective of change of mindset, experts also consider that it is important to change the attitude that a son should stay and live with parents and take care of them till the end of their life.

«….Our parents think that their son should live with them. But in the modern world all children, irrespective of their gender leave the family and start living alone when they get 18. Our parents take this close to heart. When we have a culture allowing an adult person to live away from parents both sons and daughters will live alone but will take care of their parents and such an issue will not arise. All this is based on culture… i.e. the question on who shall live with parents will not arise. We still live in a society which doesn’t have completely formed nuclear families and parents try to keep their sons close to them”.

(from interview with expert)

The survey allowed identifying specific areas for mindset change, which may have a positive impact on reduction of SSAs. One of them is the change in the perception of the society about carrying on the name of the family.

“For instance, the priority reason is to carry on the family name, lineage. People are concerned that if they don’t have a son, they will lose their lineage and themselves as well. If a specific policy is introduced this mentality will change and people will stop thinking that if they don’t have a son to carry their name the world will end…”.

(from interview with expert)
In the given context rooted perceptions of the society on gender distribution of ancestral property serve as another important factor. According to experts a radical change in the attitudes of the society towards this issue will reduce the current importance of having a son.

“We are in an absurd reality now. RA legislation doesn’t practice any discrimination in terms of ancestral property, but people are used to the situation when their property is inherited by their son and not the daughter. If we could use some policy and achieve a situation when leaving the property to both sons and daughters becomes a common practice, significant changes will occur”.

(from interview with expert)

Care after parents was also identified as an important factor. The majority of the society thinks that taking care of parents is something to be done by sons. However, the surveys of UNFPA indicate that this is not true, as elderly parents are mainly cared by daughters.

Talking about this reality and making it public may contribute to a decrease in sex-selective abortions.

“Another reason are elderly parents. People want to have a son so that he takes care of them at old age. But, unfortunately, in today’s reality sons don’t look after their parents. Today we have serious emigration of men and basically parents are cared either by their daughters or daughters-in-law. In Armenia the main burden of looking after parents is on the shoulders of women. This is the problem... We live in a reality which doesn’t
correspond to our ideas. If we succeed in changing something through a policy, it will be useful”.

(from interview with expert)

Ensuring Safety and Transformation of Military Discourse

Referring to the change in mentality experts also attached great importance to the fact that given the current situation of war the society continuously discourses on the need for soldiers. However, they do not talk about who will give birth to these soldiers in view of the fact that the Armenian society is very matrifocal and is characterized with adoration for mothers.

«...we keep on saying: “We need boys because the country’s safety is important”..., but we also need the other side – mothers, so that they can give birth to sons. So, there is this strange perception in our nation on preferring sons and not daughters who will later deliver these boys, i.e. we miss something here”.

(from interview with expert)

At the same time, according to experts there may be some decline in SSAs upon solution of the problem of Nagorno-Karabakh.

....Upon solution of the problem of Nagorno-Karabakh the safety issue will not be that critical. It is possible that this obsession, this militaristic discourse will become no longer relevant, it is very likely”.

(from interview with expert)
Experts having participated in the survey agree that legislative changes are not enough for a decrease in the number of SSAs.

“Changes in mentality, mindset should proceed legislative changes. Experience shows that a law will not be effective and will remain on paper if it’s not accompanied with a corresponding perception, insight in the society. Moreover, lack of efforts towards changes in the perception, mentality and hence behavior and the mere enforcement of the law and emphasis on its application may in this case incur corruption risks. It may lead to various risks. Besides, by this we allow people to start thinking of ways to bypass the law. And so physicians and groups of other people and specialists are getting involved in this process”.

(from interview with expert)

Moreover, experts see a threat in rigid legislative changes, as for example artificial pregnancy terminations may even cause increased maternal mortality when women resort to illegal abortions.

One of the mechanisms against SSAs is involvement of women in the armed forces, which will lessen the manliness of the army and having a son for safety reasons will not be speculated in the society that often.

Among other spheres of intervention the experts identified increasing the role of women and poverty reduction.

The results of the survey allowed specifying policy interventions on different sectoral levels.
State Sector Functions

According to experts it is very important for the Ministry of Health to conduct regular training sessions for physicians especially focusing on the way they should discuss sex-selective abortions with pregnant women and their families, upon necessity.

The Ministry of Science and Education shall include sessions on SSAs in the training of future physicians, as well as sessions on gender equality and sexual education at schools.

The Ministry of Labor and Social Issues shall motivate families to have more children through various benefits and support. As per experts, higher birth rate may contribute to decreased number of SSAs.

The experts see the mission of the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs in implementation of large-scale awareness campaigns among the youth on the risks of sex-selective abortions on macro and micro levels.

The recently established Academy of Justice was viewed as an institution, where lawyers can get training on SSAs so that they can make effective proposals/recommendations in the future.

In view of the experts the intervention of the public sector shall be demonstrated in implementation of public awareness programs, including through creative approaches - mobile and interactive museums, debates, movies and discussions.

The role of international organizations is considered important in terms of provision of financial and expert support as well as putting some pressure on the Government to implement legislative reforms and policy changes.

The Role of Mass Media in Reduction of SSAs

Referring to the important function of mass media in addressing SSAs the experts first of all prioritized programs increasing the role
of women. Although such programs, which aim to expand the role of women, will not have a direct impact on the decline of SSAs, indirectly they will contribute to a change in the system of values of the society, which will in its turn influence the decrease in SSAs in a long-term perspective.

“I would like to talk about entertainment TV programs, including soap operas and ads. Soap operas contain scenes of violence and I call upon you (I don’t know if they would get this through you) to take out all scenes of abuse starting with abusive speech. When making these soap operas and programs attention should be paid to every detail. It seems that it’s just one word, one episode and it’s gone but this is not so. When all this continues in the same way every day, it is already bad. All this creates an environment which is the contrary to the supportive environment about which we were talking. Children also watch these soap operas and programs together with family members and the style and approach they see since childhood is perceived as the right behavior. Children grow up and we can see the consequences. So, we should seriously focus our attention on this”.

(from interview with expert)

The representative of the UN Children’s Fund considers that raising the issue via TV shows may be one of the ways to eliminate sex-selective abortions.

“There are a great number of surveys about the ways to break common gender stereotypes, but experience showed that serials are the most effective tools in media. There is rich experience
in Africa and Latin America in overcoming these stereotypes within years as people regularly watch them. People started to gradually take the correct attitude. You watch a film once or twice but the effectiveness of serials is that you watch them for a long period and from emotional aspect you start to follow the story of the hero or his family and try to discuss it and find solutions. These discussions break your stereotypes as well”.

(from interview with expert)

Another not less important factor identified by experts is social advertising.

“I think that the previous experience of social advertising was very successful but today it may seem very distressing. We can make ads not only “involving unborn girls” but have positive ads as well, which are not focused on prohibitions but tell how good it is to have a daughter, that the gender of the child doesn’t matter and it is more important to be a happy parent with a happy child no matter a son or a daughter”.

(from interview with expert)

In working with mass media the experts highlighted the interaction with chief editors as decision-makers. According to experts the experience shows that gender trainings among ordinary journalists do not produce the desired results because journalists cannot make decisions.

It was even recommended to establish a professional team of journalists, who would visit the marzes to raise the issue. One of the experts also mentioned that today public organizations/NGOs more often struggle against scenes of violence against women, while efforts should be made towards presenting positive images of women in TV programs as well. For example, one of the experts stated the following:
“I will repeat that attention should be paid to everything… For instance, during the ad on the TV program “The cleverest” I accidentally noticed that only boys were sitting there. I don’t underestimate boys in any way, but girls should have equal opportunities as well. All this seems not very significant, but there is a gap already and it’s not natural”.

Mothers-in-law were also identified among target groups.

“We think that mothers-in-law make the group that would be effective for sure. They have a serious role both negative and positive in the life of young families. We have conducted a small survey, which shows that mothers-in-law have significant involvement in divorces in Armenia. And this may be considered a negative factor in some sense”.

(from interview with expert)

The other target group identified by experts consists of health professionals, particularly ultrasound specialists and gynecologists.

“This is another group requiring interaction for sure. It is also necessary to involve clergymen, because experience shows that their participation is very influential especially in terms of offering advice to young couples”.

(from interview with expert)

Interaction with men was identified as an effective strategy for reduction of sex-selective abortions paying special attention to communication of accurate information to men related to fetus gender. From this point of view one of the experts gave a distinctive example:
“In Goris a woman had a meeting with 56 fathers in a kindergarten. They participated in this 2-hour meeting and at the end during discussions they confessed that they didn’t know a lot and learned new things. When you are talking about chromosomes, they say: “… O, so it’s the man’s fault…” They left the meeting taking with them the correct information. There are many questions…. Army can serve as one of the areas for raising awareness among men, according to experts”.

(from interview with expert)

Families with above average economic status were identified as well, because as per experts, poor families often cannot afford an artificial pregnancy termination.

In compliance with the results of the survey activities towards reduction of SSAs shall include Marzes and shall be implemented locally via active institutions instead of being coordinated only by organizations based in Yerevan.

The survey allowed identifying the types of specialists who should be involved in SSA reduction processes. According to experts priority should be given to training of gynecologists, teachers, psychologists and social workers. Referring to the importance of the role of gynecologists, one of the experts brought the following example:

“The most important group in addressing the issue are gynecologists. I consider their role very important and I will tell you why… Today in one of the polyclinics a pregnant woman told that when she had a test to determine the gender of the child the medical specialist informed her with a very sad expression that she would have a daughter. When she asked the medical
specialist why she was so sad instead of her, the latter answered that in this situation the woman would have to deliver one more child, namely a son… I wanted to find out who that specialist was, but the woman didn’t tell me”.

(from interview with expert)

Employees of Civil Acts Registration Office were identified as another important target group, as according to experts they can have informal discussions with new families talking about the issue of sex-selective abortions.

At the same time experts had a reservation regarding paid services. “... they don’t have financial means and can hardly get these 30000-40000 drams for abortion, now how can they consult a psychologist”, states one of the experts.

Taking into account the role of cutting-edge technologies in addressing various social issues, we had a survey to understand the extent of impact these technologies can make on reduction of sex-selective abortions. According to experts who participated in the survey various games, applications can be more effective tools for reduction of SSAs.

Talking about international experience and the perspectives of its adoption in the Armenian context, experts highlighted the example of South Korea, which increased the value of the role of women, which then influenced the decrease in the number of sex-selective abortions.

“... South Korea is a vivid example, as they had a significant change related to this issue, which resulted from a drastic economic growth recorded in the country leading to significant engagement of women in the labor market. Now we are talking about raising the role of women, while they have already given
One of the main goals of the mentioned survey was to understand the psychological, economic and social consequences of SSAs for the society from short and long term perspectives.

Among psychological consequences the pressure of the society on women and unborn daughters was identified. One of the experts provided an example when in one of the Marzes someone asked a pregnant woman about the gender of her future child and learning that it was going to be a girl stated: “That’s ok, the next child will be a boy…”.

There was another example from the town of Yeghegnadzor, where a young girl told a story during one of the surveys:

“When my sister was born we became three daughters in our family and I was ashamed and didn’t go to school. Now years have passed, I love my sister very much and I don’t know how to tell her that I didn’t want her to be born”.

(from interview with expert)