THE SYSTEMIC AND CULTURAL CAUSES OF SEX-SELECTIVE ABORTIONS IN ARMENIA

Gchar Shahnazaryan
Siran Hovhannisyan

YEREVAN – 2017
THE SYSTEMIC AND CULTURAL CAUSES OF SEX-SELECTIVE ABORTIONS IN ARMENIA

Gohar Shahnazaryan
Siran Hovhannisyan

YEREVAN
ASOGHIK – 2017
CONTENTS

PREFACE ................................................................................................................................. 3

1. SEX-SELECTIVE ABORTIONS AS A FORM OF VIOLENCE
   AGAINST WOMEN ........................................................................................................... 4

2. PREVALENCE OF SEX-SELECTIVE ABORTIONS IN THE WORLD .............. 6
   • Certain Positive Tendencies .................................................................................. 24

3. SEX-SELECTIVE ABORTIONS: SITUATION IN ARMENIA ..................... 26
   • Legislative Regulation of Sex-Selective Abortions in Armenia .................. 33
   • The Church and Sex-Selective Abortions in Armenia .............................. 36

4. REASONS OF SEX-SELECTIVE ABORTIONS IN ARMENIA ............... 38
   • Son Preference in the Immediate Environment and Family .................. 42
   • Cultural and Social–Economic Reasons of Sex-Selective Abortions 47
   • Migration and Sex-Selective Abortions ....................................................... 52
   • Conflicts and Military Situation as a Circumstance
     Justifying Sex-Selective Abortions .......................................................... 54
   • The Role of New Technologies in Sex-Selective Abortions ........... 55
PREFACE

The present report was developed by Yerevan State University’s Center for Gender and Leadership Studies with support of “World Vision Armenia” international relief and development organization. The report was developed on the basis of about thirty documents – results of surveys on sex-selective abortions in various countries, scientific articles and analyses, policy abstracts.

The first section of the report presents sex-selective abortions (SSAs) as an extreme form of violence against women – killing of women or femicide. The second section provides a detailed description and analysis of sex-selective abortions in various countries in the world, namely in places it has the highest prevalence; for instance in Asian countries and the South Caucasus refusing girls and favouring boys has deep cultural roots.

The third and fourth sections of the report focus on the description of the situation in Armenia. Various cultural and social-economic reasons for sex-selective abortions in Armenia are presented based on the analysis of the results of comprehensive sociological surveys conducted by different international and local organizations in the country. The section of the report focusing on Armenia attaches special importance to migration and sex-selective abortions, conflict and military situations as circumstances justifying sex-selective abortions and cutting-edge technologies as a factor contributing to their spread.
1. SEX-SELECTIVE ABORTIONS AS A FORM OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Violence against women takes different forms, femicide being the most extreme one. Femicide occurs in various ways:

- **Killing of women by their partners.** As surveys show, only in Europe 3500 women aged 35-44, become victims of their partners annually.
- **Mass rapes of women.** This type of femicide is most spread in India, where according to UN data, sexual offences of women occur every 22 minutes.
- **“Honour Killings”.** One of the forms of femicide is killing of women for the sake of “honour”, when the relatives of the woman consider her behaviour shameful for the family and compromising their reputation and decency. In some countries there are even so-called family councils, which should decide whether the given woman deserves to be put to death or no.
- **Deliberate elimination of women during armed conflicts.** This type of killings is often accompanied with rapes, is considered as a weapon of war and is aimed at humiliation of the adversary. This form of femicide was especially spread during the Bosnian conflict, where 200 000 - 500 000 girls and women were subjected to mass sexual offence with many of them being killed in the future, as well as during the genocide in Rwanda, when approximately 500 000 women became victims of cruel sexual violence.
- **Dowry deaths.** This type of femicide as a reflection of culture is still common in some countries, mainly in India. A woman can be killed if the family of her husband is not satisfied with her dowry.
• **Female genital mutilation (FGM),** when girls are subjected to circumcision so that they do not experience sexual satisfaction during their lives. This phenomenon is especially common in Africa, Asia and Middle East. According to the data of UN Population Fund (UNFPA) infant mortality rate is higher in countries where female genital mutilation is a common practice.

• **Murder of women for witchcraft and sorcery accusation.** This type of femicide is still practiced in the 21st century in countries such as Zimbabwe and Papua New Guinea. In these countries a community can put to death women suspected in sorcery through hanging, burning or even live burial.

• **Killing of women as a consequence of human trafficking.** In some countries, such as Mexico, especially women living in poverty easily become victims of organized crime being sold, abused and killed.

• **Murder of aborigine women and girls.** The surveys conducted in Guatemala and Australia show that the threat for violence, rape and murder is higher among aborigine women compared with non-aborigine ones. Missing girls, as well as their abduction and killings are rather common in the mentioned countries.

• **Killing of women and girls because of their sexual orientation and gender identity.** This form of femicide includes murder, hate speech and physical violence against women with homosexual, bisexual, transgender and other non-heterosexual orientation.

• **Sex-selective abortion (SSA)** is another type of femicide. The issue of SSA is common in various countries in the world – in India, China, different Asian countries, as well as in the South
Caucasus. Some researchers call SSA “the real war on women”\(^1\), which is the regular elimination of women and girls for various reasons, the cultural factor being the main cause. As per UN data, 25 000 girls are not born or are killed after birth annually in the state of Kerala, India. As stated by the Noble prize winner Amartya Sen over 60 million girls are missing in the world\(^2\): Not natural sex ratio, namely 109.9-117.6 boys to 100 girls is recorded also in Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Montenegro, Albania, Vietnam and Pakistan. As per different calculations, 12-15% of young boys in China and India will not be able to find their female partners in their countries\(^3\).

\[2. \text{ PREVALENCE OF SEX-SELECTIVE ABORTIONS IN THE WORLD}\]

Since 1980-1890s various international organizations (UN, World Bank, World Health Organization, as well as governments of various countries) started to address the issue of sex-selective abortion. The issue is most common in Asian countries, as well as in the South Caucasus. In all the mentioned countries rejecting girls and favouring boys have deep cultural roots.

\(^3\) Report *Missing Women and Bare Branches: Gender Balance and Conflict*, https://kar.kent.ac.uk/11409/1/WW-missingwomen-05.pdf.
The present statistics indicates that starting from 1980s the sex ratio in various countries is higher than the biologically defined level i.e. 105 boys/100 girls.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Sex ratio</th>
<th>Period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>117.6</td>
<td>2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azerbaijan</td>
<td>116.5</td>
<td>2008-2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armenia</td>
<td>114.8</td>
<td>2008-2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>113.8</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>111.8</td>
<td>2008-2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albania</td>
<td>110.9</td>
<td>2008-2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montenegro</td>
<td>110.2</td>
<td>2005-2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>110.1</td>
<td>2010-2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macedonia</td>
<td>110.1</td>
<td>2005-2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kosovo</td>
<td>109.6</td>
<td>2008-2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Korea</td>
<td>105.3</td>
<td>2013</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 2. Social, demographic and economic factors affecting SSA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Countries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Birth order</strong></td>
<td>• Sex ratio increases with higher birth order.</td>
<td>All countries, including diaspora</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Sex ratio higher when the number of births is greater.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reproductive health</td>
<td>• Sex ratio normal among women who have not performed an ultrasound test.</td>
<td>Vietnam, India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Sex ratio normal among women who did not know the sex of their child in advance.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender ratio in households</td>
<td>• Sex ratio highest in families with no son.</td>
<td>All countries, including diaspora</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Normal sex ratio among families with a son.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>• Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists have comparatively higher SSA rates.</td>
<td>India, North Korea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socioeconomic status</td>
<td>• In some countries sex ratio is higher among poor households, in some countries among families with high social-economic status.</td>
<td>China, India, Vietnam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The ratio of two genders is lower among women entitled to social benefits for having girls.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational level</td>
<td>• Sex ratio increases with educational level only in some countries.</td>
<td>China, India, Vietnam</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

Now, let’s refer to examples of various countries and try to understand the reasons of SSAs and their manifestations in different cultural contexts.

For example, in India female children are in general considered as a social and economic burden for families. Such approach towards girls is also reflected in different proverbs, i.e. “Grooming a girl is like watering a neighbour’s garden”, or “I wouldn’t wish it even on my enemy to have a girl”\textsuperscript{6}.

In compliance with the survey conducted in as early as 1980, in India from 450 women pregnant with female foetuses, 430 resorted to abortion knowing that they were going to have daughters. At the same time there were no cases of women pregnant with a male foetus resorting to abortion\textsuperscript{7}. Similarly, in Maharashtra state of India, one of six married women resorted to abortion right after finding out that she was going to bear a girl\textsuperscript{8}.

The state Punjab, India is distinguished with the highest SSA rate - 880 girls to 1000 boys, where bearing a girl is mostly associated with shame, unnecessary and unjustified expenses and, often, with mockery\textsuperscript{9}. Having studied the situation in Punjab, as a separate and specific case of sex-selective abortions, Mallika Kaur Sarkaria mentions that the given state is distinguished also with various forms of discrimination against women. Here women are not viewed as equal members of the society, they don’t inherit a property, the gender gap in the labour market and sphere of education reaches alarming numbers. For instance, only 18% of


\textsuperscript{8} Ibid.

women in Punjab are involved in the labour market and they earn considerably less than men. In rural areas the level of literacy among women makes 57 % as compared with literacy of men, which makes 71 %\textsuperscript{10}. Punjab state is also an interesting object for study because of its rather rapid economic growth in recent decades, although as we see social norms and values do not change in any way.

Family violence and the indifference among the society and the police towards SSAs play a significant role in their prevalence in Punjab. As stated by M. K. Sarkaria, parents prefer not to have a girl at all knowing that their daughter will potentially be subjected to violence in her husband’s family, which in its turn will threaten her life and thus will have a negative impact on their (parents) honour and reputation.

Looking at the causes of SSAs based on the example of Punjab, another contributing factor should be identified as well – armed conflicts going on in the state since 1980, leading to regular deaths among men; and parents want to have many sons for the purpose of self-defence as well.

As per surveys conducted in Rajasthan, another state of India, the justification to live for a woman and in general the meaning of her life is almost exclusively preconditioned by her role of a mother to a son\textsuperscript{11}. Moreover, she alone bears the responsibility for all her steps from the moment of impregnation to abortion in case of a female fetus. It’s only the woman who is to blame for not bearing a male child; she is also responsible for accessing medical ultrasound services and interruption of

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{11} Patel T. (2007), Informal Social Networks, Sonography and Female Foeticide in India. Sociological Bulletin 56 (2).
pregnancy in the future\textsuperscript{12}. In such cruel situation of social pressure women themselves try to get rid of unwanted new-born girls\textsuperscript{13}.

As the surveys show, depriving women of their right to inheriting property plays a critical role in the increase of SSAs. Even new laws entitling women to own their dowry do not influence the solution of the problem in any way, as parents are still concerned that their sons-in-law will take over their daughters’ dowry in the future. At the same time in case of birth of a son, the property of the parents will not only remain in the family but the son will have a possibility of taking over the dowry and the whole property of the future bride\textsuperscript{14}.

In China, having a girl means “investment for some income”\textsuperscript{15}, while a son on the contrary contributes to the economic and social status of the family – sons are responsible for taking care of parents, while daughters are considered as a part of the future husband almost from their very day of birth\textsuperscript{16}. Often valuation of boys leads to an evident discrimination by parents as well: boys are fed better; they get better education and inherit the whole property of the family\textsuperscript{17}. As stated by Chinese researchers, 160 million girls were not born only in China in the last decade because of SSAs\textsuperscript{18}.

In China patriarchal values and norms are accompanied with one-child policy, which reduces the possibility of having a daughter even more. In some provinces of China parents are allowed to have two

\textsuperscript{12} Patel T. (2007), \textit{Informal Social Networks, Sonography and Female Foeticide in India}. Sociological Bulletin 56 (2).
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
children, if the first child is a girl. This basically legalizes sex-selective abortions and the whole responsibility for this rests with women. Often women commit a suicide after they have a second daughter.

The issue of SSAs is common in North Korea as well. For centuries son preference was manifested in national fairy-tales, myths, songs etc. As stated by Doo-Sab Kim, son preference has an institutional value in Korea\textsuperscript{19}.

Failure to have a son may even become a reason for a man to leave and reject his wife. In an attempt to identify the factors preconditioning SSAs in various provinces of North Korea, Doo-Sab Kim states that no special criteria, including the size of households, reproductive behaviour, family planning or access to health care providers were recorded. However, in all provinces with high percentage of SSAs there were few protestant or catholic churches; besides, these provinces were historically distinguished with their culture of male political elites\textsuperscript{20}. In the meantime, since 1990s the sex ratio started to decrease to some extent reaching 108.7 from 115.5. The tendencies of decrease are mainly preconditioned by the following factors\textsuperscript{21}.

- **Serious intervention by the government.** Since 1992 the Government of North Korea has developed and implemented laws and measures, which prohibit the determination of foetus sex by corresponding equipment. Besides, strict sanctions were introduced for physicians who conducted illegal abortions based on the sex of the foetus.

- **National campaign.** The mass media campaign implemented in North Korea achieved significant success in changing the standpoints of the society.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
• **Long-term changes on policy level.** Alongside with legislative changes, comprehensive programs targeted at changing gender roles and values, as well as improvement of the status of women in education and the labour market were implemented.

The issue of SSAs is common in Vietnam as well. The average birth rate has significantly decreased in the recent decade reaching 3.1 in 1994 and 2.07 in 2006. Alongside with birth rate decrease the sex ratio dropped as well. Conducted surveys show that the reasons for son preference are the same in Vietnam like in other countries of the world, i.e. economic, social and symbolic. As in recent years the state started to restrict pregnancy terminations, it is difficult to evaluate the real number of SSAs. Vietnamese researchers mention that SSAs are conducted mainly in case of second and third children. Women prefer visiting private gynaecologists for sex-selective abortions, as this provides higher confidentiality. Women prefer applying to doctors for artificial pregnancy termination or even use old and dangerous traditional methods to cause abortion. Another reason making it difficult to get the whole picture of SSAs is that women applying for abortion hide their demographic data (marital status, number of children etc.) to avoid unnecessary criticism and blaming.

In 2007 the SSA issue was recorded in Nepal as well. However, as research shows SSA numbers are mainly higher in India, which has more developed technologies for determination of the sex of the foetus. According to surveys conducted in Nepal, every tenth woman interrupting pregnancy leaves for India for sex-selective abortion.

---


The UN Population Fund (UNFPA) survey data show that 72 medical centres were detected on India-Nepal border, which conduct sex-selective abortions especially for women from Nepal\textsuperscript{24}. Currently, SSAs are mainly recorded during second pregnancy. 81% of pregnant women who already had a daughter answered that they wanted to have a son\textsuperscript{25}.

SSAs are common in some parts of Russia as well, especially in the North Caucasus. For example in Dagestan the tradition of having a son comes from the history. Misogyny has such deep roots that even sayings like this are cited: “When a boy is born you spit on another house, if a girl is born you spit on your own house”, “When a girl is born the corners of the room become narrower, when a boy is born even the ceiling rises”\textsuperscript{26}. Hence, girls have always been viewed here as investment without profit and as a potential reason for danger, shame and blasphemy for the family\textsuperscript{27}. Historically women having delivered only girls were considered incomplete and they said the following about them: “It would have been better if they had delivered a stone”\textsuperscript{28}.

In North Caucasus, as in other countries in the world, there was even a widespread tradition of killing new-born girls and most terribly, they were even “awarded” with birth of a boy in the future for this act\textsuperscript{29}.

There is a tradition in Dagestan: in families with many girls they name the last girl \textit{Enough} (Kistaman in Chechen language), and this is considered a symbolic action, which will lead to having a son in the family. In Armenia this issue has a multi-layered and multi-faceted nature as well. In families with female children only, the youngest child is named

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid.
“Enough” (Bavakan in Armenian) by the parents\textsuperscript{30}. There are also many examples of cruel persecutions of women delivering girls, when pregnant women are chased out of home in winter with their small daughters as punishment for not giving birth to a boy, or even when pieces of glass are mixed with their food trying to harm them\textsuperscript{31}.

Among Eastern European countries Albania is the one with highest prevalence of SSAs. Son preference has deep and tooted sources in Albania as well. In compliance with data of UN Population Fund 15 000 girls were not born in Albania in 2000-2010 because of SSAs.

Referring to the reasons of sex-selective abortions in Albania, it should be mentioned that these reasons are present in other countries as well. Some of the most influential reasons of SSAs are provided below\textsuperscript{32}.

- Perception of the son as a value and the one who carries on the family name.
- Sons are a guarantee of the social-economic well-being of the family or ensure the prosperity of the family.
- Sons are protectors of the honour of the family and keep the moral values of their sisters under control. In some parts of Albania the set of unwritten laws – the Kanun is still being practiced, according to which only men can restore the honour of the family, if needed. This assumes also participation in cruel fights sometimes even at the cost of the men’s life. “A female child cannot take revenge, if something happens to our family. Kanun never gives us rest and doesn’t allow us to live in peace”, stated one of the participants of the focus group in the North of Albania.


Formation of the images of “a real man” and a “decent woman”, strong pressure from community norms assuming presence of a son.

In a range of countries the negative consequences of having girls are accompanied also with another practice common in patriarchal societies – a mandatory dowry to the family of the son-in-law. As some surveys indicate in India the size of dowry may amount to ten times an average salary. This cultural norm of giving dowry (streedhan) has caused the life of approximately 20000 young women since 1990s, as their husbands were not satisfied with the amount of the dowry paid\(^{33}\).

The economic independence and own income of women play a great role in sex-selective abortions as well.

In compliance with UN data, in other countries, particularly in Canada and the US, SSAs become common among the diaspora of people from Asian countries. As the results of surveys conducted in the families of migrants show, the number of boys exceeds the number of girls in these families as well, which assumes that SSAs are not restricted only inside a specific country, but are a greater cultural and demographic disaster\(^{34}\).

In literature the issue of SSAs is viewed from different angles. First of all human rights, particularly rights of women and children are taken into consideration. Sex-selective abortions affect the facts provided below.

- **Women’s health:** Numerous surveys indicate that the pressure made on women for having a son has a negative impact on their mental and physical health. Social pressure and restriction of the rights of women occur in all stages – prior to pregnancy, in


the first months of pregnancy (when a woman has to undergo an ultrasound test). Later women have to resort to artificial termination of pregnancy. Often these pregnancy terminations are undertaken under insecure and unreliable conditions, which pose an even higher risk to women’s health. Pregnancy termination itself has a serious psychological influence on the majority of women and in case of sex-selective abortions it is often accompanied with accusations and even violence. Moreover, even if the woman doesn’t decide to do an abortion and delivers a girl, whole responsibility for having a daughter and raising her lies on the mother only. On the one hand, the social status of a woman having delivered a daughter falls drastically and the woman can be regularly subjected to violence and humiliations for the mere fact that she failed to have a son. On the other hand, the whole life of the new-born girl is at risk, as she is raised as a burden, a useless and unwanted child. In such a situation of great social pressure mothers start discriminating among their children and abuse their daughters.

- **The quality of life of unwanted girls who were nevertheless born.** Ignoring girls in countries with high SSA rate indicates that girls in these countries mainly suffer from malnutrition, have no warm clothing in winter and do not get corresponding medical care. Surveys conducted in India show that dwarfism is widely spread among girls living in rural areas and having more than two sisters. As per the same survey female children receive significantly less immunization.

---

36 Preventing Gender-Biased Sex Selection, 2011.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
SSAs, naturally, have their negative impact on societies, in general. The following may be provided as negative impacts:

- **Decrease in population growth.** Sex-selective abortions apparently contribute to decrease in the number of population, particularly women. So, for instance, in some countries in the world where the mentioned issue is more vivid, the number of born girls amount to 900 and in some places even to 700 to 1000 boys (for example in Punjab state in India).

- **Increased militarism.** The surveys conducted in China show that increase in the number of boys, especially in lower socio-economic classes leads to a situation when the army becomes the “most suitable” and “acceptable” employment sector for men.

- **Increased violence.** Decline in the number of women can of course contribute to decrease in misogyny and discrimination against women as well as to valuation of women by societies. However, we are mostly talking about societies with abnormal sex ratio. Increase in violence, rape, prostitution and trafficking is recorded.

Analysing the results of surveys conducted in various countries (India, China, Korea, Vietnam, Pakistan, Caucasian countries) the following main reasons for sex-selective abortions may be identified:

- **A male child as a better and more profitable “investment”.** Despite the rather significant success women achieve in the labour market today, having a female child is, however, not associated with the financial security of the family.

- **A female child as an unnecessary and not justified “expenditure”.** In patriarchal countries where women are not considered a value, having a daughter is associated with
unjustified expenses and a reason for giving a dowry to the family of the future son-in-law.

- **Development of new technologies in medicine.** Surveys indicate that accessibility of ultrasound tests and other technologies (including medicinal) for determination of foetal sex have a great impact on the growth of SSAs.

It should be mentioned, however, that SSAs cannot be preconditioned only by discrimination against women or development of new technologies in the country, as even in some countries where the gender indicator improves, sex-selective abortions continue to be an issue of concern. So, growth in SSAs requires a combination of several reasons. The mentioned circumstance can be viewed using examples of three absolutely different countries. For instance, Tajikistan is almost always distinguished by its very low gender indicators, rather large scale discrimination against women and high rate of mortality among up to five years old girls. At the same time, artificial termination of pregnancy is rather accessible. Tajikistan has a high birth rate (3.3 children) as well. Iran stands out for its high indicators for discrimination against women as well. However, it has a low birth rate (1.87 children) and accessibility of abortions is low. In another country – Sweden, which also has a low birth rate (1.67 children), there are many possibilities for artificial termination of pregnancy. Sweden is also one of the countries, which lead in the protection of women’s rights and gender equality. As we may see, the mentioned three countries are in absolutely different situations, however SSAs are not practiced in any of them, as all three countries lack at least one condition required for sex-selective abortions39.

The report “Missing Women in the South Caucasus” by the World Bank in 2015 covers the issue of SSAs in the South Caucasus and presents the cultural-historical reasons for son preference.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union a deviation from the natural sex ratio occurred in the South Caucasus. Currently the sex ratio in Armenia (114.5), Azerbaijan (116.5) and Georgia (109.4) is the highest in the world. If in China or India the social impact of this may be not significant, in small countries of the South Caucasus the low fertility rate and the continuous choice in favour of boys may influence the future family model and fertility. Like in Asian countries, the deviations from the sex ratio in the South Caucasus are also accompanied with the patriarchal structure of the society and are preconditioned by the expectation that sons will be taking care of the parents at their old age, while daughters will leave their parents after getting married and will invest their work and earning in the families of their husbands.

In compliance with the data of UN Population Fund, in the Eastern European region currently the approximate number of missing girls as per modest calculations for recent years amounts to 171 000. A comprehensive report on the South Caucasus indicates that Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia have the same model, where the society was for long-time structured around big families and collective farms and where families with more male children were better positioned and had a better status in terms of protection of their interests. Planned marriages, when fiancées moved to the families of their husbands, enabled families to preserve or increase their wealth and improve the social-economic and financial status of the family40.

The situation is almost the same in the three South Caucasian countries and justifications for son preference are similar. The next section of the report provides a detailed discussion on the key issues of sex-selective abortions in Armenia, their reasons and consequences, while in this section some tendencies specific for the region will be generalized.

---

Distinguishing among the instrumental and symbolic bases of son preference the author of the report Nora Dudwick notes the following factors:

- **Sons bear primary responsibility for taking care of their elderly parents.** For instance, at a focus group discussion in Georgia one of the female participants mentioned: “Some boys annoy their parents. But if I had a boy, I might not be poor now. My daughters work now, but how can they help me? They have their own problems.” Often married daughters are not able to take care after their parents adequately and even visit them, as their husbands and mothers-in-law just don’t allow them. For example, in villages in Georgia you can hear the following viewpoint, which is also specific for certain parts of the South Caucasus: “… a wife should visit her parents once a month”. According to the results of the survey “Missing Women in the South Caucasus”, daughters who want to stay with their parents after marriage and help them face great obstacles, as the society doesn’t favour husbands who live with the parents of their wives, unless, of course, there are some justifying conditions.

- **Sons are more effective at dealing with a whole range of difficulties of the family,** including for example dealing with government agencies and officials.

- **Carrying on the family name.** One of the most often voiced expressions in focus group discussions in all countries of the South Caucasus is that “To carry on a lineage, at least one grandson is necessary”. In some regions clans that have no sons were even considered childless. For instance, as per a study, in...

---

41 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
Ajaria or Absheron grandfathers aren’t even considered grandfathers if they don’t have grandsons or mothers-in-law rebuke their daughters-in-law as “childless” until they deliver a son. The following statement of a participant in a survey is rather distinctive: “When my mom had her third child and it was a boy, only then did my grandpa tell her she was his daughter-in-law”. In Western Georgia men even don’t celebrate a daughter’s birth

- **A daughter as a bother.** In patriarchal societies, which include the societies of the South Caucasus as well, having a daughter can be viewed as an additional bother, as the reputation and honour of the given family greatly depends on her behaviour. One of the participants of a focus group among men held in Absheron explains: “You may forgive your son, even if he makes mistakes. But you cannot let your daughter make mistakes in moral matters”\(^{45}\). Likewise a woman in Dusheti region recollects how her sons hoped for having a brother, when she was pregnant with her third child. Her sons thought that in our days girls speak and dress in a shameful way and were afraid that if they have a sister they would be ashamed because of her. Another woman from Dusheti said that because of the “Georgian mentality” girls commit suicide, if they become pregnant and the boy rejects marrying them.

- **Hardships of being a woman in a patriarchal society,** restrictions and privation women face in traditional families and outside families. As the results of the survey show people in the South Caucasus realize the heavy burden of being a woman in their societies and that is why they consider that it is better to

\(^{44}\) Dudwick N. “Missing women in the South Caucasus: Local Perceptions and Proposed Solutions", World Bank, 2015

\(^{45}\) Ibid.
have a son, who can live a relatively easier life. “Girls have more problems, a boy seems to have an easier life. Being a mother is very important and a heavy duty. The only obligation a man has is to support the family financially, all other issues are solved by women” 46.

- **Having a girl as an additional expenditure.** Like in many Asian countries with high SSA rate most people in the South Caucasus also think that having a daughter is costly, as it requires much investment, especially in the form of a dowry.

Most of SSA related surveys refer to the numerous consequences of this issue. As information on SSA has become only known since 1985, the “excess” of men in the world is just starting to appear in its entirety. Based on some calculations the number of men in the world exceeds the number of women in 12-15% as a result of sex-selective abortions. There is a great probability that men will remain lonely, will not form a family or will not have a partner. SSAs mainly occur in classes with lower social-economic and education status, where forced marriages are common as well. So, for instance, in China 97% of single men have not even finished a school. Researchers dealing with the issue of sex-selective abortions predict that “excess” of men will lead to forced marriages as well as violence and conflicts in the societies47. Surveys conducted in China and India indicate a correlation between not only sex-selective abortions and the violence and even killings inside families but also between increased violence and crime in the society in general and the “excess” of men. As stated by researchers like Hudson and Den Boer, it is also possible that

---

46 **Dudwick N.** “Missing women in the South Caucasus: Local Perceptions and Proposed Solutions”, World Bank, 2015

47 **Hesketh Th., Wei Xing Zh.** (2006), *Abnormal Sex Ratios in Human Populations: Causes and Consequences* (Published online), [http://www.pnas.org/content/103/36/13271.full#ref-47](http://www.pnas.org/content/103/36/13271.full#ref-47).
young single men would start joining different militaristic organizations and engaging in violence on various levels - from domestic violence to international crime (trafficking, illegal sale of weapons and drugs etc.). Based on the predictions of the authors, “excess” of men in China and India (as well as in all the places, where this issue is present) will inevitably affect regional and global safety, especially if we take into account that countries neighbouring China and India, namely Pakistan, Bangladesh, Taiwan and Nepal also face sex-selective disproportion.

At the same time, surprisingly, SSAs have positive consequences as well. Namely, decrease in the number of women leads to their valuation, increase of their role and, as a result, decline in discrimination against them. In the future, no matter how impossible and unbelievable this would sound, families would strive for having more girls, as their role and value is gradually increasing in societies.

However, another group of researchers state that decrease in the number of women and the resulting increased role they will have in societies may lead to a situation when, for example, fathers and brothers can use this fact and start bargaining with their future sons-in-law about getting the largest possible amounts or other benefits for their daughters and sisters. Hence, lack of women may put them under even greater control and pressure thus contributing to the development of patriarchy, trafficking, namely sale of women, as well as increased sexual abuse⁴⁸.

**Certain Positive Tendencies**

In response to the mentioned situation, countries with high SSA rates develop different strategies and introduce policy changes, which already show notable progress. The experience and policy strategies of

⁴⁸ Hesketh Th., Wei Xing Zh. (2006), Abnormal Sex Ratios in Human Populations: Causes and Consequences (Published online), http://www.pnas.org/content/103/36/13271.full#ref-47.
various countries targeted at finding solutions for SSAs will be discussed in detail in the second report, while here general tendencies and areas of interference will be reviewed. Almost in all countries facing SSAs, the following direction of activities are outlined:

- **Ensuring gender equality on different levels.**
- **Legislative reforms focusing on restriction of sex-selective abortions.**
- **Monitoring of SSA tendencies.**
- **Awareness campaigns targeted at public criticism of SSAs and strengthening the role of girls.**
- **Trainings for health care specialists, especially gynaecologists and obstetricians.**
- **Development of policies in the sphere of social security, for example financial support to families with girls.**
3. SEX-SELECTIVE ABORTIONS: SITUATION IN ARMENIA

Currently there is an obvious increase in anthropogenic disasters and the ways they are committed – mass murder, terrorism etc. International reports and surveys conducted in recent years indicate that among the mentioned disasters violence against women has increased in particular occurring in a number of ways: mass rapes, domestic violence, femicide, as well as sex-selective abortions.

The mentioned issues are present in Armenia as well, where there are numerous and multifaceted gender issues, while the burden of eliciting response to these issues and finding ways to address them is on the shoulders of a restricted number of researchers and organizations. The analysis of demographic data in the study on Sex Imbalances in Armenia, 2013 prepared by Christophe Guilmoto, *indicates that starting from 1991 efforts towards impeding deterioration of the status of women encountered certain indifference*[^49].

As in a number of countries (India, China, Albania etc.), the South Caucasian region also has son preference as a traditional approach, and this preference continues to serve as a basis for some areas of life activities.

The “Health and Health Care” statistical yearbook of RA National Health Institute indicates that unlike 1990s when the official number of artificial pregnancy terminations was 33 158, in 2014 as per official statistics, they amounted to 12 019 cases, 6040 from which were conducted at the choice of women, 3640 were spontaneous abortions (miscarriage caused by different diseases, intoxications), 2212 abortions

[^49]: Guilmoto K. Sex Imbalances at Birth in Armenia: Demographic Evidence and Analysis, Yerevan 2013
were conducted as per medical indications, including 53 medicinal and 74 by surgical intervention through vacuum aspiration\textsuperscript{50}.

The statistics show that a decrease in the quantitative data of abortions was recorded for the past 25 years; however, we should bear in mind the decrease in the number of population caused by emigration and other social factors, as well as the decline in the proportion of pregnancy\textsuperscript{51}.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure1.png}
\caption{Percentage distribution of pregnancy outcome by pregnancy order, UNFPA 2011}
\end{figure}

In 2011 UNFPA conducted a study entitled “Prevalence and Reasons of Sex-Selective Abortions in Armenia”. The results of the study as well as the analysis of data on pregnancy showed that while first and second pregnancies ended for the most part in live births (95.2\% and

\textsuperscript{50} Danielyan A., Artificial pregnancy terminations: selective abortion, Armenian Center of Young Analysts, http://www.acoya.org/%D6%84%D5%A1%D5%B2%D5%A1%D6%84% D5%A1%D5%AF%D5%A1%D5%B6%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%A9%D5%B5%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%B6- hy% D5%B0%D5%B2%D5%AB%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%A9%D5%B5%D5%A1%D5%B6- %D5%A1%D6%80%D5 %B0%D5%A5%D5%BD%D5%BF%D5%A1%D5%AF%D5%A1%D5%B6- %D5%A8%D5%B6%D5%A4%D5% B0%D5%A1%D5%BF%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%B4%D5%B6%D5%A5%D6%80%E2%80%A4/;

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.

88.1% respectively), in the case of fifth and sixth pregnancies the number of births decreases for almost 5 times (20.6% and 16.8% respectively)\(^5^2\). As the Global Gender Gap Report 2015 indicates, Armenia’s sex ratio at birth is 0.88\(^5^3\) (in 0-1 rating scale, where 0 indicates inequality and 1 indicates equality).

Special attention should be attributed to the study on gender preference. In compliance with the data of the above-mentioned study even in first pregnancy irrespective of pregnancy order the number of women wishing to have a son was approximately 2.7 times higher than those preferring daughters (41.4 % and 15.5 % respectively), while every 2\(^{nd}\) woman respondent had a neutral attitude regarding the sex of the child (43.1 %)\(^5^4\).

In Armenia, basically, female mortality has never seemed higher than the male mortality rate. This is proved by the forecasted life expectancy of the new-born since 1950s – in case of females life expectancy has continuously been longer for 4-7 years than that of male. Fluctuations in infant mortality rate, as per the data of Civil Acts Registration Office, also indicate that mortality of both new-born and infant boys is 20-30% higher\(^5^5\). Nevertheless, this doesn’t serve as an explanation for the great number of sex-selective abortions in Armenia. According to Demographic and Health Survey Armenia (DHS) all 3


\(^{55}\) Danielyan A., Artificial pregnancy terminations: selective abortion, Armenian Center of Young Analysts, http://www.acoya.org/%D6%84%D5%A1%D5%B2%D5%A1%D6%84% D5%A1%D5%AF%D5%A1%D5%B6%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%A9%D5%B5%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%B6- hy/% D5%B0%D5%B2%D5%AB%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%A9%D5%B5%D5%A1%D5%BE- %D5%A1%D6%80%D5%B0%D5%A5%D5%BD%D5%BF%D5%A1%D5%AF%D5%A1%D5%B6- %D5%A8%D5%B6%D5%A4%D5% B0%D5%A1%D5%BF%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%B4%D5%B6%D5%A5%D6%80%E2%80%A4/:
surveys revealed that postnatal mortality recorded in 28 days after birth is higher among girls in Armenia\textsuperscript{56}.

Special attention should be paid to the fact that in view of the biological and genetic weakness of males as compared with that of females and for the sake of preserving the demographic balance it is already predetermined that boys should exceed girls, i.e. higher number of boys are born than girls (102-106 boys to 100 girls, the ratio - 1.02-1.06)\textsuperscript{57}.

In compliance with UNFPA “Prevalence and Reasons of Sex-Selective Abortions in Armenia” report of 2011 and statistical data, starting from 1993, the sex ratio of the new-born in Armenia has been 110-120 boys to 100 girls\textsuperscript{58}. In 2011, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe specified alarming levels of imbalance in sex ratio of the new-born in some of its member states. In Albania, Armenia and Azerbaijan this ratio was 112/100, while in Georgia it was 111/100\textsuperscript{59}.

Moreover, in compliance with the data in the report “Sex Imbalances at Birth in Armenia”, the following forecasts are made for Armenia in view of sex-selective abortions\textsuperscript{60}.

- Upon continuing sex-selective abortions Armenia will lose almost 93 000 women or future potential mothers by 2060.
- The annual number of missing/unborn girls will amount to 2000 by 2060.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{57} “Prevalence and Reasons of Sex-Selective Abortions in Armenia”, UNFPA, Yerevan http://www.unfpa.am/sites/default/files/Sex-selectiveAbortions_report_Arm.pdf:
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{59} “Sex-Selective Abortions are Discriminatory and Should be Banned” http://womennet.am/%D5%BD%D5%A5%D5%AC%D5%A5%D5%AF%D5%BF%D5%AB%D5%BE-%D5%A1%D5%A2%D5B8% D6%80%D5%BF%D5%B6%D5%A5%D6%80%D5%A8-%D5%AD%D5%BF%D6%80%D5%A1%D5%AF%D5%A1%D5%B6%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%A9%D5%B5%D5%A1%D5%B6-%D5%A4%D6%80/:
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.
Moreover, in three of 12 post-Soviet states – in the South Caucasus (Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia), the sex-ratio at birth was 116/100 in 2005-2009\(^6\).

As indicated by the data of further studies the situation deteriorated in 2012, when the gender balance at birth was 114 boys to 100 girls\(^6\). Due to the data from another survey conducted in the same year, the following balance was recorded in Aragatsotn and Gegharkunik marzes (regions) - 124 boys to 100 girls (ratio 1.24), which even exceeds the highest rate in the world recorded in China (118/100)\(^6\). Besides, son preference at birth also greatly depends on the number of children already born in the family. So, for example, in Armenia in the selection of the gender of the third or the next child sons get the right to live at the ratio of 160/100 with the recorded 1.6 ratio being the highest one in the world.

Due to the data of UNFPA for 2013, if in 1996-2001 the excess of boys during first and second births was less than 9% (wishing to have a son, women undertook sex-selective abortions starting from the third child), in 2001-2010 this indicator is over 26%. Based on the mentioned fact it becomes clear that sex-selective abortions are becoming a serious issue in case of first and second children as well\(^6\).

Based on the data from the Assessment of the Implementation of “Republic of Armenia Gender Policy Strategic Program, 2011-2015” and “2011-2015 National Action Plan to Combat Gender-Based Violence”, it may be stated that in the context of child birth as a result of the gender

---


\(^6\) UNFPA Armenia - Film on Sex Imbalances at Birth in Armenia Report, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Infc80ui0QI.


\(^6\) Sex Imbalances at Birth in Armenia”, UNFPA and RA Ministry of Health, Yerevan 2013.
gap, 92,932 girls will not be born by 2060, which in its turn will lead to a decline in the number of births and, consequently, in the number of population\textsuperscript{65}.

The data revealed from a number of qualitative surveys also indicate increased son preference in Armenia. In compliance with the results of the qualitative survey “Sex-Selective Abortions as Gender Discrimination in the Family in Armenia” conducted in 2014\textsuperscript{66} the positions of women and men related to the perception of the phenomenon and the acknowledgement of its prevention, can be divided into the following 3 main groups:

1. Women with higher education living in the capital are characterised with the viewpoint that sex-selective abortions are an issue for sure, which may and should be prevented and addressed. Interestingly, the opinion of women with higher education from Vanadzor and men with higher education from the capital also coincide with the mentioned statement.

2. Sex-selective abortion is a key issue, which would in general be desirable to prevent and eliminate but which, however, seems impossible in view of the unchangeable mind-set and the strong impact that traditions have on the society. An interesting fact is that the mentioned opinion in mostly common among women with secondary education in Yerevan, women with higher education living in Vanadzor and in rural areas, as well as among men with


higher education who live in Vanadzor and in several villages of Lori Marz\textsuperscript{67}.

Gender inequality and son preference are most often associated with the concept of “Armenian mentality”, which is something obscure from the point of view of sociology and which seems to be aimed at justification of somewhat marginal position of women in the country. However, it is necessary to break the stereotypes so that it becomes possible to analyse the main specifics of development of the gender situation present in Armenia and their possible relations to son preference\textsuperscript{68}.

1. Finally, from the point of view of work with research and target groups in the future it is especially interesting to note that all male respondents of the survey with secondary education, as well as women with secondary education living in rural areas consider sex-selective abortions natural and think that there is no special need to combat them\textsuperscript{69}.

In general the data show that sex-selective abortions in Armenia are a rather simple and accessible form of family planning. At the same time SSAs are not always conducted in medical institutions: in a number of cases they are undertaken using medicinal\textsuperscript{70} and/or traditional\textsuperscript{71} methods, mainly at home. Such cases, which are basically numerous in the practice

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{68} Guilmoto K. Sex Imbalances at Birth in Armenia: Demographic Evidence and Analysis, Yerevan 2013

\textsuperscript{69} Voskanyan A, Hovhannisyan S. “Sex-Selective Abortions as Gender Discrimination in the Family in Armenia”, materials from conference on “Gender Issues in Armenia: from research to politics”, Yerevan State University Center for Gender and Leadership Studies, YSU publication, Yerevan 2016, pages 214-234, http://ysu.am/files/Gender-2016.pdf:

\textsuperscript{70} For example using the medicine Cytotec the free sale of which without a prescription is prohibited since 2014.

\textsuperscript{71} For example in some rural areas practices, when a husband stands on the back or belly of the wife, or the wife jumping from high places etc. are still common.
of artificial pregnancy termination, are irreversibly not considered in the official statistics and hence, the real situation is not reflected. 

**Legislative Regulation of Sex-Selective Abortions in Armenia**

In compliance with clause 2 of Article 10 of RA Law on “Human Reproductive Health and Reproductive Rights”, artificial termination of pregnancy within the pregnancy period of up to 12 weeks shall be conducted at the request of the woman. Artificial termination of pregnancy within the pregnancy period of up to 22 weeks (when it is possible to determine the gender of the child more precisely) may be conducted as per medical-social indications with the consent of the woman. In compliance with clause 3 of Article 11 of the same law it is prohibited to plan the gender of the future child when assisted reproductive technologies are used in the process of birth planning, except for cases when there is a potential for inheritance of a disease. In compliance with the data of Demographic and Health Care Research Centre of Armenia artificial pregnancy termination was the main form and method of control over child birth in Armenia, like in other former Soviet Union republics. It was legalized in 1920, prohibited in 1936 and then legalized again in 1955.

As indicated by the results of the International Center for Human Development (ICHD) report, in Armenia the society at large, including the authorities are especially sensitive about the serious demographic consequences of this phenomenon, being mostly concerned about the

---

72 Ibid.
74 Bagrat Bishop Galstanyan, “Infanticide: Unborn Mothers of Armenia” http://www.qahana.am/am/articles/show/512008058:
75 Ibid.
post-implantation gender selection of the child i.e. the issue of selective abortions; as to child gender selection using assisted reproduction technologies, this issue is legally regulated (restricted), however, there is almost no wide discussion in the society on its ethical side, which, probably, is preconditioned by the fact that in view of the poverty level covering 1-3 of the country’s population, accessibility of these services remains very restricted for many groups of the population and some technologies are not even essentially accessible. Due to the same analysis the importance of arguments is preconditioned also by the size of the group of those who are willing to select the gender of their children in the country.76

The outcomes and achievements of the strategy of 2003-2015 were evaluated by international experts within the framework of assessment of Millennium Development Goals (MDG) for Armenia. Currently RA Ministry of Health is developing the National Strategy on Child and Adolescent Health Improvement, 2016-2020 and the National Plan for Improvement of Reproductive Health, 2016-2020, which were submitted to the Government in the first half of 2016. The previous assessment report on “Strategy for Gender Policy, 2011-2015” and “National Program to Combat Gender-Based Violation” clearly proposes to continue the implementation of programs targeted at the prevention of sex-selective abortions from the point of view of implementation of the next strategy and program for 2016-2020.77

It should be also noted that based on certain circumstances (which are basically not justified) the implementation of the above-mentioned programs was delayed until 2017 and the Republic of Armenia does not

have national mechanisms for combatting sex-selective discrimination and gender-based violence for 2016. However, to regulate the issue of gender disproportion at birth “Program for Prevention of Sex-Selective Abortions, 2015-2017” and Order on “Establishment of a Working Group to Approve and Implement the Program Implementation Actions” entered into effect. Currently activities for execution of the Order have started: support groups have been formed in Marzes and in Yerevan, comprehensive public awareness campaigns are being conducted focusing on strengthening of the role of women and valuing female children78.

The above-mentioned assessment report provides a clear description of the legal and legislative documents, which are targeted at the prevention of SSAs in the Republic of Armenia. So, for example, RA Draft Law on “Amendment of RA Law 474-N on “Human Reproductive Health and Reproductive Rights” Approved by the Government of the Republic of Armenia, December 11, 2002” was developed and submitted to RA National Assembly. According to the draft law, Article 10 was proposed to be edited to state that sex-selective abortions are prohibited79. The proposed changes have been discussed by National Assembly on September 2016 without changes in the mentioned Article 10.80

Based on the Law on “Human Reproductive Health and Reproductive Rights” a number of legal acts incurring from the requirements of the main articles of the law were developed and approved, main procedures were defined. In addressing the discriminatory sex-selection of the foetus, the survey of International Center for Human Development suggests that the right of adolescents to

78 Ibid.
79 Ibid.
accessible and comprehensive medical consultation provided in a friendly and private setting and to medical care related to puberty, sexual and reproductive health upon necessity specified in Article 5 of the Law should be complemented with a provision defining their right to receiving information on discriminatory sex-selection of foetus, its consequences and prevention81.

The Church and Sex-Selective Abortions in Armenia

The role of the church is considered especially important in terms of reflections on SSAs. In view of the fact that a human being was initially granted with the opportunity of having children and continuing the human race, termination of pregnancy in general and choosing to deprive a child of life based on gender in particular is considered unjustified and something equal to a sin. Depriving a human being of life is basically considered as an irrevocable sin and a criminal behaviour not only from secular but also spiritual viewpoint.

Moreover, a human being himself is viewed as a tool for realization of the will of God in the context of Christian faith and ideology. It is interesting to note that while serving as a tool the human being as a unique representative of the human race has the possibility of creating (having children), however at the same time when a human being “becomes weak” and is unable to take care of himself any more, he immediately turns to God (the main creator) for help82. Hence, a human being who is a tool for God does not have the moral right to deprive somebody of life.

81 “Analysis of Policy on Prevention of Discriminative Gender-Based Selection of Fetus and the Current Practice in the Sphere of Health Care”, Yerevan, 2016 page 30
82 Galstyan L. “Human Life is Sacred From the Moment of Conception”, Ordinariat of the Armenian Catholic Church in Armenia, Georgia, Russia and Eastern Europe, http://armenianchurchco.com/987.html:
From the point of view of spiritual analysis it is important to consider the fact that a father or mother resort to artificial pregnancy termination and are ready to kill, dissect their unborn daughter for the sake of the stereotype that the son is the one to carry on the name and continue the business of the family or to take care of them when they are old not their daughter. From spiritual point of view this approach is “at least a funny selfishness, a valueless vainglory and wrong patriotism”\textsuperscript{83}.

The issue of SSAs is multi-layered and comprehensive involving the wrong mentality of preference for sons versus daughters, physician-patient corruption risks, irrelevant and uncontrolled application of modern health care technologies, absolutization of human rights and neglect of responsibility, violation of women’s rights and discrimination against them, theological, anthropological, moral, demographic, legal terms and, finally, the utmost importance of the country’s safety strategy\textsuperscript{84}.

In spiritual aspects an important fact is that a woman should have her own position and should play an equal role in all spheres of public life and cannot be viewed and perceived as a mere tool, factory and means of reproduction. Through the image of the Blessed Virgin women complement the “Love theology” owing to her maternity, endless love, care and sympathy. So, artificial pregnancy termination, especially sex-selective abortion, is a sin and is blameworthy whether it is committed at the mother’s will, is imposed by the father or family or is conducted by a doctor for various reasons\textsuperscript{85}.

\textsuperscript{83} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{84} Bagrat Bishop Galstanyan, “Infanticide: Unborn Mothers of Armenia”, http://www.qahana.am/am/articles/show/512008058.
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid.
4. REASONS OF SEX-SELECTIVE ABORTIONS IN ARMENIA

The reasons for sex-selective abortions make a long list and have social-economic, psychological and cultural-historic bases. However, the analysis of all these bases leads us to the conclusion that there is an extremely “instrumental” approach towards children in Armenian families, which is directly related to present perceptions on gender “functions”. A child is more often viewed as a means of economic security, continuation of the nation or the high self-esteem and “masculine” self-satisfaction for fathers rather than an individual who is independent and has his/her own values, needs and development process.86

In compliance with data of the survey implemented by UN Population Fund in 2011, 0.8% of 2925 women at reproductive age (15-49) in surveyed households terminated their pregnancy based on the unwanted gender of the foetus within the last 5 years. Since the survey sample is representative of the entire country, we may assume that 0.8% of approximately 900 000 women at reproductive age in Armenia conducted sex-selective abortion within the past 5 years. Accordingly, Armenia potentially loses almost 1400 future mothers annually on average.87

Starting from 2020 young men will significantly prevail among the adult population. If the sex proportion at birth remains on the current

88 Ibid,
level, the number of men will prevail by 30,000 until 2040, while this number would have been less for 10,000 if the predominance of male new-born children remained within the norm. Decrease in the number of young women will inevitably effect the country’s so-called “marriage market”. This gender disproportion can serve as an additional “motive” for migration of men; “excess” of men will most probably lead to delayed marriages and will increase the number of singles among those men who would prefer staying in Armenia\textsuperscript{89}.

As stated by the World Bank Country Manager in Armenia Laura Bailey: “Reasons for “son preference” are complicated for sure. Armenians point out a number of reasons, namely financial and physical support to parents, protecting the nation, carrying on the name of the family and protecting the social status of the family”\textsuperscript{90}.

The expression “missing girls”\textsuperscript{91} was first used as a term by Noble Prize winner Amartya Sen to describe those girls who are not born as a result of sex selection before the birth of the child or interventions during pregnancy. More broadly this outlines the situation with gender inequality in the society and is manifested in a serious and measurable manner. The ratio of new-born boys to new-born girls is higher than expected under the natural biological circumstances\textsuperscript{92}.

\textsuperscript{89} Guilmoto K. Sex Imbalances at Birth in Armenia: Demographic Evidence and Analysis, Yerevan 2013


\textsuperscript{91} The Mystery of Missing Female Children in the Caucasus: An Analysis of Sex Ratios by Birth Order, 03.06.2013, https://www.guttmacher.org/about/journals/ipsrh/2013/07/mystery-missing-female-children-caucasus-analysis-sex-ratios-birth

In compliance with the data of the survey “Missing Women in the South Caucasus” prepared by N. Dudwick\textsuperscript{93} there are several reasons which should raise concerns among the populations and governments of the countries in the region. Some of them are provided below:

- First of all the issue of SSA indicates about the strengthening of gender inequality already present in the given country (countries).
- Besides, gender-based selections make women have more kids than they want or they may terminate pregnancy against their will, which is a violation of their fundamental freedom for reproductive choice.

Due to the results of the same survey men and women having expressed their preference for a child gender obviously prefer sons instead of daughters. It should be noted that men at all ages were more steadfast in their preference for sons as compared with women\textsuperscript{94}.

Traditionally, Armenians expect that the first child in their families should be a boy: this symbolizes the power and masculinity of men. It is also considered that sons carry on the lineage, are the protector of the family and if a daughter is born to the family the latter remains “without its head”. The gender of the new-born child often becomes crucial for the well-being and peace of the family. That is why people often resort to sex-selective abortion, while it is prohibited by the law\textsuperscript{95}.

The Armenian Centre of Young Analysts\textsuperscript{96} presents the main impact or factors, which cause sex-selective abortions:

\textsuperscript{93}Dudwick N. “Missing women in the South Caucasus: Local Perceptions and Proposed Solutions”, World Bank, 2015

\textsuperscript{94}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{95}Meliksetyan E. “Sex-Selective Abortion”, http://asyou.pinkarmenia.org/sexualhealth/2012/sex-selective-abortion/

\textsuperscript{96}Danielyan A., Artificial pregnancy terminations: selective abortion, Armenian Center of Young Analysts, http://www.acoya.org/%D6%84%D5%A1%D5%B2%D5%A1%D6%84%D5%A1%D5%AF%D5%A1%D5%B6%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%A9%D5%B5%D5%B8%D6%82%
1. The “desire” of having a son is rooted in the national mentality, which is preconditioned by the need for carrying on the lineage, the wish to have a heir, etc.

2. The economic and social activity of men is more valued, and hence, a discriminatory attitude incurs towards women in general.

3. Given lack of finances and poor social conditions, after having 1 or 2 daughters families do not want to have a third daughter giving preference to a son instead.

4. Having a son is associated with honour, dignity and pride. As a result, the family of the husband puts moral and psychological pressure on the wife as a result of which the woman resorts to artificial pregnancy termination.

5. Accessibility of corresponding medical equipment (for example ultrasound tests, instrumental gender determination etc.) allows to detect the gender of the child in advance and conduct the corresponding intervention.

6. Couples prefer having 1 or 2 children, which serves as a precondition for increased number of SSAs.

As per the results of the survey “Prevalence and Reasons of Sex-Selective Abortions in Armenia” conducted by UN, 39% of artificial pregnancy terminations was based on the unwillingness of women to have any more children. 15% of artificial termination of pregnancies was caused by social-economic reasons or the wish to delay the birth of the next child. One of 9 terminations was based on concerns about the health of the mother (11%). The reason for 9% of terminations was the sex of the foetus. The majority of women who decided to have artificial pregnancy
termination (8%) wanted to have a son. Both refusal of the partner to have a child and the risk of delivery of a child with development defects have become indications for 4% of artificial pregnancy terminations.

Son Preference in the Immediate Environment and Family

The data of the report by Dudwick N. “Missing women in the South Caucasus” show that in the South Caucasus both women and men consider male children as “supporters at old-age”. However, women were more tend to mention that the important reason for having a son was their wish “not to let down” their husbands. Women at reproductive age mentioned about having a son because of pressures and even threat of violence. In such cases delivering a son is an issue of “protecting or strengthening her position” in the husband’s family for the woman and not a manifestation of the rooted son preference.

Due to the results of “Gender Barometer Survey, Armenia” son preference is a vivid indication of gender inequality, which is reflected in both state statistics and a number of studies. In case of only children 32.3 % of respondents preferred having a son, 16.0 % preferred daughters and 51.8 % were indifferent about the gender of their only child. Moreover, son preference is more common among men. 45.1 % of respondent men wanted to have a son versus 26.2 % of women (Figure 2).

99 Ibid.
100 “Gender Barometer Survey, Armenia” summary of outcomes, Center for Gender and Leadership Studies, Yerevan 2015, http://www.yusu.am/files/%20%D5%A3%D5%A5%D5%B6%D5%A4%D5%A5%D6%80%D5%A1%D5%B5%D5%AB%D5%B6%20%D5%A2%D5%A1%D6%80%D5%B8%D5%B4%D5%A5%D5%BF%D6%80.%D5%B0%D5%A1%D5%B5%D5%A5%D6%80%D5%A5%D5%B6.pdf:
101 Ibid.
One of the reasons of the phenomenon, as stated by N. Dudwick, is that families consider that sons are more effective in solving some problems. Such a position is related to the fact that in communication with a number of state agencies and officials’ preference is given to men.  

“At present whatever institution you enter and meet with a man, he doesn’t feel at ease communicating with women, he is more relaxed with men; he gets embarrassed. But when there are two people of different sexes he automatically looks at the man while speaking, even if the question was asked by a woman. From an ordinary shop to the highest authorities.

When the man speaks to a woman he falls short of striking a deal, it is easier for him to talk and negotiate with a man. And the woman feels humiliated and offended in such cases, as it looks as if she is not

---

considered a person and that itself is not normal. That’s what the issue is about—about the psychological aspect, and not about legislation”\textsuperscript{103}.

(a woman, Yerevan)

Son preference, in general, is present in the positions of both families and people in their immediate environment. So, for example, the results of UMFPA survey show that in the interviewed women’s immediate social environment the number of people who have son preference (59.3 \%) is approximately ten times greater than the number of those with daughter preference (5.6 \%). 35.1 \% of respondents note that the child’s gender didn’t matter to people in their immediate environment\textsuperscript{104} (Figure 3).

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure3}
\caption{Does your immediate social environment have more preference for sons or daughters? UNFPA 2011}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid.

The majority of woman respondents from rural areas (70.4 %) consider that preference in their immediate social environment is given to sons and only 1.6 % believe that their social environment has daughter preference (in the opinion of 28 % of respondents people in their social environment have no preference on child’s gender). 50.5 % of respondents from urban areas think that - in their immediate social environment preference is given to sons, while 8.8 % think that it’s given to daughters.105

In general the number of families with son preference is approximately six times greater than those with daughter preference (43.8 % and 7.6 % respectively), in rural areas this difference is ten times greater (51.8% and 4.5% respectively) while in urban areas the difference is about fourfold (37.6 % and 10.0 % respectively)106.

---

105 Ibid.

The analysis of the data for the Marzes also indicates a clear attitude of son-preference in all Marzes. Son preference is relatively higher in Lori (93.7 %), Tavush (50.7 %), Shirak (46.2 %) and Gegharkunik (45.6 %) Marzes. The attitude is relatively equal in case of the first child in the Marzes of Aragatsotn (82.4%), Ararat (71.3%) and Syunik (69.6 %), where the overwhelming majority of respondents mentioned that during the first pregnancy the child gender didn’t matter for them\textsuperscript{107}.

In Armenia sex-selective abortions may be viewed as one of the most vivid forms of discrimination against women, as a child doesn’t deserve to live only because she is of female gender. Prevalence of SSAs in this case is considered as a sign of extreme masculinization of the society. The fact that to date this issue is not included in the list of most important issues requiring strategic solutions or that it is viewed on a very formal level, indicates that both the state and the society approve this situation. The current situation will have a devastating effect first of all from the point of view of human rights development. The other consequences, such as gender inequality and, consequently, potential difficulties with the birth rate among the future generations directly complement the range of key issues. Very often this is a war for women “when she fights alone against the whole world”\textsuperscript{108}.

\textsuperscript{107} Ibid.

Cultural and Social-Economic Reasons of Sex-Selective Abortions

In families with daughters sons are valued for protecting their sisters.

“The sister said she had a brother, the brother didn’t say he had a sister”\textsuperscript{109}.

(a woman, Aragatsotn)

Honour was always very important in a patriarchal society and the perceived and actual “purity” of women was considered an essential component of the family’s honour. The above-mentioned citation clearly reflects the cultural role of brothers for protecting the honour of their sisters and hence the whole family. Basically, protection offered by brothers to their sisters is not and doesn’t need to be reciprocated. It is specific of the culture of countries in the South Caucasus that this “protection” is mainly of pressing nature. Young women complained that their brothers were more concerned with the neighbours’ opinion about their behaviour rather than their safety\textsuperscript{110}.

\textsuperscript{109}Dudwick N. “Missing Women in the South Caucasus: Local Perceptions and Proposed Solutions”, World Bank, 2015

\textsuperscript{110}Ibid.
Even in families with son preference there was no pressure after the birth of the first child so that the next child should also be a boy (88.4%). In those families where there was some pressure (11.6%), it was exerted primarily by husbands (82.6%), whereas in every fifth case the greatest pressure was put by mothers-in-law (17.3%). After the birth of the most recent child there was no pressure in 89.4% of cases either. According to the quantitative survey results of the study “Prevalence and Reasons of Sex-Selective Abortions in Armenia”, in 99% of families no family member voiced discontent when the firstborn child was a girl.\textsuperscript{111}

According to the result of the qualitative survey “Sex-Selective Abortions as Gender Discrimination in the Family” conducted by Anna Voskanyan\textsuperscript{112}, the conviction that “a decent man should have a son”\textsuperscript{113}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure5.png}
\caption{Why does your family prefer sons rather than daughters, UNFPA 2011}
\end{figure}

\begin{itemize}
\item Daughter cannot provide financial...
\item Daughter is not a support for her...
\item Entire burden of household is on...
\item It pains a parent to see the...
\item Girls have fewer opportunities
\item It is psychologically difficult to give...
\item Sons personify authority and strength
\item After she gets married, the...
\item Sons can provide financial support
\item Boys are defenders of homeland
\item Sons are guarantors of material...
\item Sons are inheritors of property
\item Sons continue family lineage
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{111} Prevalence and Reasons of Sex-Selective Abortions in Armenia” UNFPA, Yerevan, 2011, \url{http://www.unfpa.am/sites/default/files/Sex-selective_abortions_report_Arm.pdf}:
\textsuperscript{112} Voskanyan A, Hovhannisyan S. “Sex-Selective Abortions as Gender Discrimination in the Family in Armenia”, materials from conference on “Gender Issues in Armenia: from research to politics”, Yerevan State University Center for Gender and Leadership Studies, YSU publication, Yerevan 2016, pages 214-234, \url{http://ysu.am/files/Gender-2016.pdf}: 

48
predominates in the society, which establishes a direct relation between the successfulness and positive image of the man and the birth of his son.

Very often parents of girls are “sympathized”. One of the respondents states the following: “Very often you see that people say “that’s ok, the next will be a son” to a couple whose first child is a girl instead of congratulating them heartily”. This approach is vividly expressed among men respondents living in rural areas (irrespective of education) and those from urban areas with higher education114.

“I went to the hospital and they said that they had something to tell me but were not sure it would make me happy. I told them – it didn’t matter to me, the only thing that was important was to have a healthy child and they got surprised. They told me I am one of exceptional fathers. People come to the hospital and start a brawl and it is very hard to take them out of the hospital”115.

(a man, Yerevan)

Nevertheless, the majority of men at least deep down inside do not consider women equal to them. They treat girls with love and tenderness but in a way you would treat your favourite pets116. Some men have such an unequal attitude towards their sons and daughters that consider the children of daughters as second class grandchildren giving the priority to sons and their children. This happens even in cases, when daughters are cleverer, more loving and devoted to their fathers than sons. This

113 Ibid.
114 Ibid.
115 Ibid.
happens even when sons cause only problems and create inconveniences for the family\textsuperscript{117}.

The following statement on double standards also manifests cultural restrictions and traditional approaches regarding women:

\begin{quote}
\textit{``The society forgives a boy, who has 50 girlfriends, smokes, drinks, brawls, engages in sexual relations, but when a girl loses her virginity, she is never forgiven''}.  
\end{quote}

(a woman, Gyumri)

When viewing the issue from economic point of view it becomes clear that the \textbf{social opinion on girls being migratory birds is still present}. Even in cases when women and men want to have both a son and a daughter, some families consider their daughters as a burden. In compliance with the data of the survey \textit{``Missing Women in the South Caucasus''} by N. Dudwick men respondents at all ages expressed their concern on raising daughters in a rapidly changing cultural and social environment and on influence of the western model of behaviour on women\textsuperscript{118}. At the same time, in their opinion both daughters and sons cause problems, however the mistakes of daughters are irreversible.

\begin{quote}
\textit{``If a boy … gets arrested by police once or twice, you will pay about 10,000 dollars and set your son free. Do you think it’s more difficult than having a daughter who has behaved immorally and has left a big stain on your name, your personality, your house?''}\textsuperscript{119}  
\end{quote}

(a man, Akhuryan)

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{118} \textbf{Dudwick N.} \textit{``Missing women in the South Caucasus: Local Perceptions and Proposed Solutions''}, World Bank, 2015  
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid.
An interesting point is that the amount spent because of the criminal or deviant behaviour of a son is not considered as an **additional expenditure**, while raising a daughter is considered a costly process.

According to the results of the same survey, objectification and sexist attitude towards women is vividly manifested among men. So, for example, men complained that girls are more expensive to raise than boys because of the importance of providing them with attractive clothing and a good education, both of which reflect on the family, especially on its financial status. Boys may inherit the house or another property, but parents must provide dowries when their daughters marry\textsuperscript{120}.

The survey reveals a situation when a young woman in Gyumri complained that parents like boys because the boys will eventually take care of them, but they don’t see girls as useful because they have to give her a dowry and organize her wedding\textsuperscript{121}.

> “A boy is a working hand, someone who preserves the family hearth\textsuperscript{122}.

(a men living in a rural area)

In general, the attitude that a son is needed in the family as a labour force, without whom the family will not be able to take care of the household and conduct agricultural activities is characteristic of rural areas\textsuperscript{123}.

\textsuperscript{120} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{122} Voskanyan A, Hovhannisyan S. “Sex-Selective Abortions as Gender Discrimination in the Family in Armenia”, materials from conference on “Gender Issues in Armenia: from research to politics”, Yerevan State University Center for Gender and Leadership Studies, YSU publication, Yerevan 2016, pages 214-234, \url{http://ysu.am/files/Gender-2016.pdf}.
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid.
Migration and Sex-Selective Abortions

Other reasons for prevalence of SSAs and son preference are working abroad and the active migration flow, very common for Armenia. Data from the research “Sex-Selective Abortions as Gender Discrimination in the Family” indicate that groups formed from men with secondary education mentioned for several times that “the father of the family” who is not in the family because of working abroad strives for having a son, so that the latter “takes care of the household, acts as the men of the family and the head of the household”\(^{124}\).

As per the results of the survey “Missing Women in the South Caucasus” Migration has intensely undermined traditional gender roles. The problem is especially vivid in the countries of the South Caucasus, which face the issue of sex-selective abortions. Even as breadwinners women not always enjoy equality in the family\(^{125}\).

Interestingly, the results of “Gender Barometer Survey, Armenia” implemented by the Center for Gender and Leadership Studies in 2014 come to prove the “necessity” of migration of men and their artificial obligation of securing the family financially. According to these results 92% of men and 90% of women agree with the judgement that a man should do any work in order to guarantee his family’s material well-being\(^{126}\).

---


\(^{125}\) Dudwick N. “Missing women in the South Caucasus: Local Perceptions and Proposed Solutions”, World Bank, 2015

\(^{126}\) “Gender Barometer Survey, Armenia” summary of outcomes, Center for Gender and Leadership Studies, Yerevan, 2015, http://www.ysu.am/files/20%D5%A3%D5%A5%D5%B6%D5%A4%D5%A5%D6%80%D5%A1%D5%B5%D5%AB%D5%B6%20%D5%A2%D5%A1%D6%80%D5%B8%D5%B4%D5%A5%D5%BF%D6%80.%D5%B0%D5%A1%D5%B5%D5%A5%D6%80%D5%A5%D5%B6.pdf.
Besides, 38% of men and 55% of women think that securing the family financially is very important for a woman. While comparing the positive impact of migration of women and men, increased financial security of the family was mentioned very rarely when talking about women migration\textsuperscript{127}. Such judgements, in general, allow to once again consider the instrumental importance of a child (especially a boy) and the incurring consequences. Moreover, research on the situation indicates that \textbf{even if parents are not able to rely on their sons, they feel uncomfortable relying on the family of their daughter’s husband.}

\textit{“It is already 20 years that my brother has lived in Russia with his family. It is true that financially they sustain my mother in a very good way but that is too little for a son to do toward his mother. She needs her children, and she needs her son. Often she can come to my place and live together with me; there is nothing hindering. But when she comes to my place she stays there only for an hour. She says, “I cannot stay; it would be better if you come and stay with me”\textsuperscript{128}.}

\textit{(a woman, Aragatsotn)}

Alongside with migration another important issue is the cultural aspect of the problem. Special attention should be attached to the fact that old parents are reluctant to move to the house of their married daughters and live with them, because they consider that they would live with “strangers” (sons-in-law), \textbf{who are not obliged to take care of them.}

In case of migration, virtually, in villages adolescent boys very often get the \textbf{status of their father’s “substitute” and control over the

\textsuperscript{127} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{128} \textbf{Dudwick N.} “Missing women in the South Caucasus: Local Perceptions and Proposed Solutions”, World Bank, 2015
behaviour of their mother, sisters and younger brothers, especially if there is no elder male, like grandfather in the family. This, as a rule, becomes a rather serious test for the child, who is not ready to bear this burden either physically or psychologically, but has to do that, as he has to meet the expectations of his father and the community.\textsuperscript{129}

Conflicts and Military Situation as a Circumstance Justifying Sex-Selective Abortions

The majority of Armenians still consider that sons had saved their nation right up to the 21st century.\textsuperscript{130} Some people, including a number of experts, considered the preponderance of boys to be a positive development, emphasizing the importance of boys to “defend our borders,” “protect the homeland,” and “create a strong state”. It is especially specific for the three countries of the South Caucasus that the respondents were unanimous in pointing out that no one wanted to send their sons to war. At the same time the need for national defence enhances the value of sons.\textsuperscript{131}

On the one hand, having more children is common in post-war period and during a war. In Soviet times, namely under Stalin rule, sex-selective abortions were basically legally prohibited in the South Caucasus and in other countries (up to 1955, the Khrushchev period). While the mania of “having a soldier” assumes that a number of public and cultural processes and rules are of control.


\textsuperscript{130} Dudwick N. “Missing women in the South Caucasus: Local Perceptions and Proposed Solutions”, World Bank, 2015

\textsuperscript{131} Ibid.
In general, the practice shows that in former Soviet countries, namely Armenia and Azerbaijan (but not in Moldova) the ethnic conflict and the sense of mistrust and insecurity incurring from it significantly diminish the value of women and their possibilities for gaining power and engaging in public and private sectors, which in its turn determines son preference as couples’ reproductive and family planning practices\textsuperscript{132}.

**The Role of New Technologies in Sex-Selective Abortions**

Awareness on technologies for determination of child gender and pregnancy termination (medicinal, medical intervention), as well as accessibility of these services are among the reasons for SSA prevalence.

So, for example, according to the results of the quantitative survey of 2011 implemented by UNFPA\textsuperscript{133} 91.7 % of women had heard about one or more methods of prenatal sex determination. Their 88.9 % were aware of ultrasound tests, 15.9 % of traditional methods and 1.5 % about amniocentesis\textsuperscript{134}. The main sources of information about those methods are the personnel of medical institutions as well as friends and relatives. The qualitative data of the same survey also indicate that women are rather informed about prenatal sex determination testing. The main sources of information are parents, the internet and medical personnel and in this regard there are no limitations on this information as such\textsuperscript{135}.


\textsuperscript{134} During amniocentesis a small amount of amniotic fluid is sampled using a special needle accompanied with an ultrasound test. The amniotic fluid contains fetal tissues; diagnostics is conducted via DNA analysis. The procedure is done starting from the 15th week of pregnancy. Source: http://www.doctors.am/hy/prenatal-screening-naira-vardanyan:
