

Facts

Families with Many Children in the Clutches of Poverty



In Armenia, the percentage of families with four children is only 0.6%, and of those having five or more children 0.1%. The likelihood of being poor is higher among multi-member households with children. The poverty level of households with three and more (0-5 year old) children stands at 78%, i.e. they are doubly poor (35.0%) as compared to the republican average level (35%).

A Task Set to Bring the Birthrate Index to 1.8



Armenia's demographic indicators cause alarm among specialists. The birthrate indicator per one woman of reproductive age is 1.6 children, whereas an index of 2.1 is necessary for ensuring the simple reproduction of the population. The Government has targeted to increase the birthrate to 1.8 before 2017, which might be rather difficult taking into consideration that, according to the UNFPA research, two children is the limit for today's average statistical family. The majority of families prefer to be limited by one child, although they believe that ideally you should have three children. In addition to this, the 29% of all pregnancies in Armenia is interrupted through artificial means.

Woman & politics

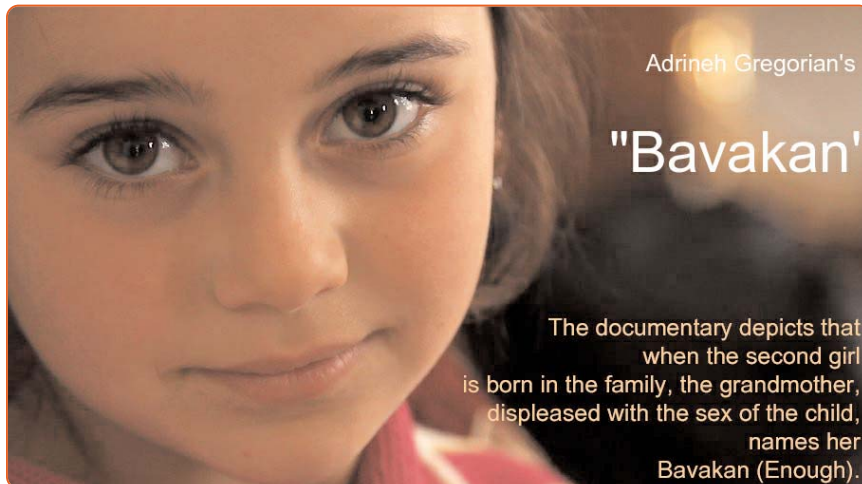
Armenian men say "no" to violence against women



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Adrineh Gregorian's

"Bavakan"

The documentary depicts that when the second girl is born in the family, the grandmother, displeased with the sex of the child, names her **Bavakan (Enough)**.

The film presents the problem of selective abortions through stories of those women who were pressured to take that step because the child to be born was a girl. "How can I not have a son? Who then is going to carry on the torch of my family; the girl is not ours, the girl is the smoke of somebody else's home," a part of Armenian women indeed thinks this way, but many resort to a sex-determined artificial interruption of pregnancy under the pressure of their husbands and other members of the family.

"There is no such thing that the light of the hearth depends on a female or male; it depends on a human being. Today the Armenian

people have distanced themselves from God through their ignorance and justify their criminal activity by a false folk interpretation," states the Most Reverend Archbishop of the Gugaratz Diocese Sepuh Chuljyan.

"This is simply a disgrace to our nation. I am confident that we all have things to accomplish, both the state, the Armenian Holy Apostolic Church, and civil society," recently wrote in his Facebook page President's Chief of Staff Vigen Sargsyan, responding to the issue of selective abortions in Armenia.

As shown by the data of the UNFPA Armenia Office, according to the indicator of disproportion of sexes among the newborn (114 boys, 100 girls) Armenia comes third in the world, after China and Azerbaijan. Meanwhile, the natural correlation between sexes among the newborn is no more than 106 boys and 100 girls...

In her documentary "Bavakan" ("Enough"), the young director Adrineh Grigoryan attempted to voice the issue of the artificial interruption of pregnancy depending on the sex of the fetus. Filming of the documentary was greatly assisted by the Holy See Etchmiadzin.

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Challenges

Armenia's Families Face Trials and Tribulations

What challenges is the Armenian family facing today? Poverty, in whose clutches especially families with many children find themselves; unemployment and emigration, due to which children often grow up without father's participation; domestic violence, which distorts not only the parents', but also the children's fates; wrong understanding of "traditional values", as a result of which women, humiliated and locked within the four walls of the house, forget about their personalities and the education they have received, stop feeling themselves full members of not only society, but also of their families... Is it all the same to you what the children brought up in such families are going to be like? Or is our state today in a position to allow itself to ignore the potential of women?

Today, we have a serious problem of increasing the birthrate, but we also have the problem of fully involving the human resource of

educated women in the processes of the country's development. What should policies ensuring this golden middle be like to allow to simultaneously solving these two problems? Here are some statistics in this connection: only 21.6% of preschool age children go to kindergarten in our republic, and only 10.5% of those in rural communities. These official figures are indicative of how difficult it is for young mothers to combine work and the family. Moreover, under today's socio-economic conditions

the possibility of women not working is not even taken into consideration; otherwise, young spouses will be able to address neither the issue of the survival of their families nor that of having more than one child...

And here the state comes in: it should extend its helping hand to these young couples to create opportunities to combine household duties and work, otherwise, further reduction in birthrate becomes inevitable...The solution to the problem is not just having

sufficient number of kindergartens, but conducting pro-family policies, the inseparable part of which is the provision of equal opportunities for women and men...

We learned how this is specifically done in different countries in the world from Ralf Hakkert, the UNFPA international expert for demographic issues, whom we had the opportunity of meeting during the discussion of birthrate promotion programs held in Yerevan.

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"Aragil" ("The Stork")

The Appeal of Rita Sargsyan, the First Lady



The RoA First Lady Rita Sargsyan has made a national consolidation appeal proposing to focus the efforts of all Armenians and assist those families that feel the need for reproductive medicine.

"The same way as the ocean is reflected in a drop of water, our entire

nation is reflected in every Armenian family. We must provide assistance to any couple that has the desire to become a parent," confidently states Rita Sargsyan, urging all people of good will to unite around the Aragil-Fund for Assistance in Reproductive Medicine.

The AragilFund is a non-profit organization, which aims at assisting in the solution to Armenia's demographic issues and organizing reproductive medicine. The Fund was created in 2011 and is operating under the patronage of the RoA First Lady Rita Sargsyan.

For more details about the Fund, see the web site <http://fundaragil.am/>

"Ororots" ("The Cradle")

Make Others Happy and You Will Be Happy...



Photo by Harut Stepanyan

Hundreds of organizations and individuals from Armenia and abroad have joined this slogan of the Charitable Program the Cradle: Pan-National Care for the Newborn.

It is more than ten years since

this joint program of the Hayastan All-Armenian Fund and women's organizations has been assisting needy families having children of up to one year of age.

Over the past ten years, the Cradle has assisted more than 1,400 families in the border villages of Syunik, Tavush, Lori, and Shirak marzes (provinces) by providing special packages for the newborn. Every package weighing approximately ten kilos contains different things necessary for children of up to one year of age: clothing, care and hygiene means.

Do you want the country to prosper, do you want the future soldier to protect the country to

be born, do you want to have tomorrow's actor and athlete, tomorrow's writer and painter?

Let us today, with the entire nation and whole-heartedly, support our future and little citizens.

You can transfer your donation to the special account of the program Cradle: Converse Bank CJSC

26/1, V. Sargsyan Str. 375010, Yerevan, Armenia
SWIFT: COVBAM 22
1. 1930000081130300 (AMD)
2. 1930000081130204 (EUR)
3. 1930000081130101 (USD)

Selective Abortions

"We will lose almost 93 thousand future mothers by 2060."

The research carried out over the past two years on sex-determined abortions in Armenia by the UNFPA Armenia Office allows to make certain conclusions about the prevalence of this phenomenon, its causes and consequences. According to specialists, this is a serious demographic challenge for Armenia.



What is the situation like?

According to the clarifications of Gagik Hayrapetyan, the UNFPA Executive Representative, the correlation of sexes among the newborn in Armenia has deviated since the 1990s; specifically, in 2012 it stood at 114 boys versus 100 girls at the time when the correlation of 106 boys versus 100 girls is considered the norm. Moreover, in Armenia the disproportion of sexes among the newborn is especially striking not in the case of the first or second child, but in the case of the third child, when it makes a tremendous difference: 160 boys against 100 girls.

"We have also data for marzes (provinces of Armenia), according to which some marzes of Armenia - Gegharkunik and Aragatsotn - show the highest indicator in the world with their correlation of 124 boys versus 100 girls. By the way, an interesting observation has been made: these marzes have the highest emigration levels. As far as the region is concerned, according to the available data, Azerbaijan 116, Armenia 114, and Georgia 113, i.e. we are all in the same boat," notes Hayrapetyan.

What is the cause?

This phenomenon, according to Gagik Hayrapetyan, is based on gender inequality: exactly because of this very stereotypical attitude, we deprive the female fetus of its right to live. It is possible to combat this only by increasing the value and role of women in society.

What are the consequences?

The study by Doctor Kristof Gilmoto, who represents the Paris Development Research Institute's Center for Population and Development, demonstrates that if the flawed practice of having boys at the expense of preventing the birth of girls continues, Armenia will have lost almost 93 thousand future mothers by 2060, and the population of the country will reduce by additional 80 thousand people (this is just the number of births in Armenia for two years). Among those born since 1996, the surplus of boys stands at 39 thousand. "If this tendency is not curbed, part of the men of the most active marital age group -20-39 year olds -will soon begin having difficulty in forming a family, and not finding a wife, will be leaving the country, thus triggering emigration," notes the expert.

What is to be done?

In the opinion of Werner Haug, Regional Director of the United Nations Population Fund for Eastern Europe and Central Asia, without improving the status of women and girls and promoting a positive view of them in society the practice of selective abortion will continue, with devastating consequences for future generations.

"In our society, the role of the woman is much lower than that of the man. If we continue thinking this way and do not uproot this attitude in society, as well as no changes are introduced in terms of gender equality, for example, why should a woman, having the same position, receive lower salary and so on, then the situation will remain the same and our country will have to face a serious disaster in a few decades," says G. Hayrapetyan, noting that the Government has taken certain steps in this direction, specifically by adopting the law on Ensuring Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men.

"The Government cannot solve this problem by decrees since much more serious and in-depth work must be carried out by changing the mentality of society and behavioral models," notes Doctor Kristof Gilmoto.

Lia Khojovyan

Armenia's Families Face Trials and Tribulations

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The secret, according to the expert, is creation of such conditions that will allow to evenly distribute the burden of taking care of the child by the parents.

"If today the woman enters the labor market which is not adapted for a worker with children, the solution to the problem is not that women should be made to leave the market, but on the contrary, conditions must be created so that any worker can combine work and child care. In a word, one should not look back but forward adjusting to the challenges of the time," says Hakkert (Senior Advisor on Data and Research, Population and Development Branch Technical Division, UNFPA, New York), noting a series of those activities that have been applied in different countries and have yielded certain results. These include not only kindergartens operating at the proper level, extended days at schools, and the existence of other institutions taking care of the child, but also a flexible work schedule for those with families, and the possibility for both fathers and mothers of having paid vacations for care of children.

"In Holland, for example, in case of 35-hour weekly work schedule, the parents have, in turn, the opportunity of a day-off and as a result can use the additional days to take care of children," noted Hakkert in response to our observation that it is probably not advantageous to have such a worker from an employer's perspective, the expert said that in reality it was not important how much you worked, but how you worked. That is to say, the important thing is work efficiency and productivity; this is the key criterion and Holland is one of the leading countries in terms of this criterion.

At the same time, in a number of countries such as Spain, Italy, and Greece, though a mechanism for father's participation in childcare is legislatively secured, it is not functional. Men practically do not use the opportunity provided

to them since a concern that they might lose their jobs is much greater among them than among women. We have the same picture in Armenia.

According to the observation made by Gagik Hayrapetyan, Executive Representative of the UNFPA Armenia Office, only two men have made use of this opportunity envisioned by the RoA Labor Code, and both are from marzes. They have gone on vacation to take care of their children. As regards mentality obstacles assuming that it is shameful for men to go on "maternity leave", these, in his conviction, are surmountable if you are concerned about the well-being of your family.

There are also other quite interesting ideas. For example, childcare allowances can be given to grandmothers and grandfathers, thus solving the employment problems of the elderly. This mechanism can be especially effective in case of Armenia.

As far as the allocation of lump sums for a childbirth is concerned, although it is utilized, it is not considered an effective measure, according to Ralf Hakkert's assessment. Long-term assistance yields better results.

"It is difficult to persuade young families to have many children if they are not confident about their future. Provision of a lump sum does not address this problem; however, for example, subsidizing a child from birth up to fifteen years of age or the state's assistance to young families in improving their housing conditions are more effective means. For example,

« The Minister for Labor and Social Issues has announced that in 2014 the lump sum assistance for the third and fourth child will stand at 500, 000 drams, and for the fifth and more children one million drams. The Government's policy promoting birthrate would be more effective if the lump sum assistance was provided not in case of "the third and more children", but in the case of "the second and more" since today, as far as the birthrate is concerned, having the second child is more problematic. Moreover, without steps taken to promote the birth of the second child it is difficult to expect families to have three and more children.

Tigran Abrahamyan, an expert



Photo by Davit Makichyan

in Macedonia the state pays an allowance of 150 dollars for ten years for each third and next child," says the expert, noting that in reality the point is about a stable and many-sided policy based on activities not only encouraging a childbirth, but also easing the care of children.

"Perhaps, it is more correct to improve our Labor Code and to allow people to be confident about their future. For example, retaining 80-85% of the salary when on maternity leave; in this case even without allowance people will have children. Such conditions must be created so that people desire to have children and not do it for money," opines Gagik Hayrapetyan.

When the breadwinner of the family is the woman...

"It remains to put on an apron and to write on it 'Nina's wife'...."

The man is the chief in the family, the money bringer and breadwinner; this is a perception typical of not only Armenian mentality. At the same time, today families where women are money bringers and breadwinners are not few. This is life, anything can happen, the important thing is that the children are not hungry. It remains just to appreciate the woman in the family and to respect her, and if not...

"My husband always argues that there is no suitable job for him and he has not worked for five years already, tells Nina, whose husband is a graduate of the Yerevan Institute of Physical Culture and worked at school for many years, and then held other jobs. The most recent job he held was at sports school, which he gave up because of, in his words, low salary. As a result, Nina bears the full brunt of household concerns. During these years, Nina has performed a great diversity of work - dish washing, cleaning and for the past three years, she has been working as a cashier at one of the fast food outlets.

"At first, when my husband remained without a job, I thought that he would soon find a new one," tells Nina, "In the begin-

ning, he made attempts, but when finding a new job delayed, I had to, at least to earn money for food, to work as a cleaning lady at a wedding saloon, then I washed dishes, I also worked in a shop and so on till I am where I am now." However, Nina's husband has not found a job and has given up even trying.

"In reality, he does not want to do anything," says Nina, "He feels comfortable this way and has found a good reason for that, saying that he will not bend his back before any unworthy person just for a few cents, that it is similar to asking for alms and that he is not a worker to just fill up his stomach. He says that he wants to have his own business, but for that he needs a lot of money and who is going to give him that sum."

While Nina's husband dreams of having his own business, all household expenses are taken care of by his wife: eating, clothes, all expenses connected with children's schooling, the utility bills and even buying cigarettes for her husband.

Nina tells that she never dares to speak about her husband's employment, there is a row every day as it is, once she comes back home from work. Her husband feels offended about everything: now his wife scowled; now she made a wrong

movement with her hand, now she said something intending something else and thousands of other existing or not existing trivialities.

"All this is simply unbearable, I do not demand anything, just respect," falls through Nina who has recently noticed that even her children (the daughter is 16, and the son 13) have begun showing signs of disrespectful attitude towards her. When she tried to reprimand her children asking them why they did not help her, this too became an occasion for her husband to remind her that she was a woman and mother and any household work was her responsibility.

"Once when I came home, there was smashed potatoes, this was a rare case. When I got surprised as to where it was from, my husband got offended and told with irony, 'Well, I have already become a housewife and make dinner, wash the dishes, meet the children from school, and from tomorrow I will start to do the laundry too...It just remains to put on an apron and write on it 'Nina's wife', and I am giving you a privilege: starting tomorrow you will come home, shout, break things and curse me..."

Karine Petrosyan

Domestic Violence in Figures

According to the data of the RoA police, 532 cases of domestic violence were recorded in Armenia during the first nine months of this year. In 308 cases, the woman was subjected to violence by her husband. Eleven cases were registered when women were the violators. In 30 cases, children were subjected to violence by

their parents, and in 70 cases, the parents were subjected to violence by their children.

"During the six months, about two thousand women appealed to the police submitting complaint letters about the violence against them," report the police.

Behind the Closed Doors

Violence is not a Tradition; Love and Respect are the Foundations of a Strong Family

"Is the smell of the paint too strong? Would you like to go and sit in the adjacent room," asks Valya and adds, "I have no sense of smell, when I was young Volod hit me, hit my nose, and I lost my sense of smell." The over-fifty-year old woman told this small episode of her life in such a calm and easy way as if no pain had remained in her memory from this beating by her husband.

Valya had just finished painting the walls of the room when I visited her at her home located in a border village. "I want to put the house in order a little bit, my youngest son is to be married," says the woman with her hands in paint and shows how much work she has already accomplished, "I have sent the neighbor's child to fetch the hand-drill, I have to put up a new mirror, Volod cannot work with a drill..." Volod, standing next to his wife, silently listens. In his presence, I feel constrained to ask the woman as to why in her younger age she was subjected to violence by her husband.

"Volodya, why did you beat your good wife when you were young?" I say trying to engage the husband in the conversation. "Do not ask such questions," he leaves the house waving his hand. "He is now ashamed supposedly, but when I was young he beat me often, he broke my arm two times," Valya now finds it difficult to remember the cause of the beating, and says that he would find an excuse

each time: one day Volod was drunk, another day he had quarreled with her mother-in-law.

At the time Valya told nobody about the violence she was subjected to by her husband, even her own mother, however, years after she is not constrained to talk about it, "You write that in the past it was different, now the times have changed, many girls turn to the police when beaten by their husbands..."

To understand to what extent the times have changed we had a conversation with an expert on domestic violence issues, Director of the Women's Support Center, Maro Matosyan: the data presented by her are not especially reassuring. Only during 2013, seven cases of death outcome have been recorded in Armenia because of domestic violence.

"These are official data, however, it is not ruled out that there have been more cases which have not been looked at as domestic violence or the violators have succeeded in concealing the reality. Only small part of women subjected to domestic violence appeals to the police and for this reason it is very difficult to have accurate data and to see the true picture of the violence," notes Maro Matosyan.

In many cases, even women victims of brutal physical violence do not realize that they can defend their rights since they are not aware of them.

"Not only society is not informed of this problem, but there is also no law on



domestic violence which will clearly define what domestic violence is and what its manifestations are," says the Center Director and adds that women are brought up in a wrong way in their families stressing the fact that they must submit to and be tolerant of everything that men will do and say.

In the expert's words, from younger age girls and boys should be informed of what healthy family relations are. When young people understand how they should show correct attitude to each other, express love and respect, then they will understand that violent relations are not normal.

It would be good if our television programs, which are watched by many, also advocated respect towards the woman, condemned violence and refrained from showing images humiliating women."

Arman Gharibyan

Voices of Children

Fourteen out of the twenty cases of domestic violence revealed by the rapid-response group of the NGO Society without Violence are cases of physical violence with seven of them ending in death. Most of these cases have taken place in the presence of children...

"It happened so many times, we slept on the roof, or in somebody else's house... We were tired. He was drunk almost every day and when drunk he would fling anything at hand at us; nothing has remained intact in the house, he has broken everything...When he beat our mother, we would interfere and he would hit us too. Mother, with these injuries, would go and complain, but she was told that she did not complain well enough: what does it mean to complain well? I do not know what they wanted," Marine tells about her father Levon A. Levon did not work. According to Marine, Levon together with mother collected berries in the forest, sold them in the market, and would spend all the money on drink...In October of this year, doctors saved the life of her 54-year old mother Siranush by miracle, after knife wounds inflicted by her husband...

"I was sleeping; I woke up at four from the shouts of my mother. My sister, Arpine, was still sleeping. I ran quickly and saw that the dining-room door was locked and Volod (her stepfather) was pushing my mother uninterruptedly from the other side. Mother was shouting to me to open the door. I ran to the kitchen, took a spoon and opened the door with ease. I entered and saw that he had taken the vase and was hitting ... I tried to help my mother escape, but he managed to hit her again from behind. Then he forcefully pulled my mother to the kitchen and began hitting her with a knife. We called for help, we requested that he not do it, but he would not listen to us and was killing our mother in front of our eyes," tells 17-year old Anahit, who has become mature within few days from pain and grief.

The other sister, 14-year old Arpine, does not talk at all. In the presence of the minors, the stepfather has killed his 35-year old wife by inflicting 21 blows with a knife...

"He would send us to bed and would start beating our mother; I understood from their voices that he was beating. Once I woke up and saw that he was holding a knife against my mother's neck," tells Hovhanness, a ten-year old son of Tatevik N. Tatevik's seven-year old daughter tells how her father took her mother and herself by car to a deserted and stony place and put a knife against her neck: only after the child's request and cries 'papa, please, do not do it', father came to his senses and did not hurt. For ten years, Tatevik was subjected to violence by her husband in the most brutal ways: he burned her hands with a white-hot screwdriver, beat her with a rubber pipe and in the end, when his wife, already unable to put up with this torture, had left home together with their children, the husband followed her and knifed her 25 times in the main entrance...

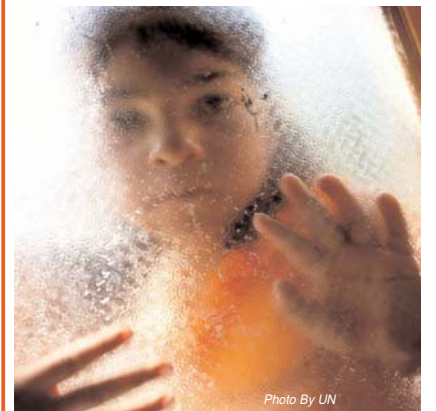


Photo By UN

...the 15-year old Susie saw, through the room's glass door, how her father hit her mother with his fist and then knifed her. "I shouted that papa was killing mama, but before people came my mother had already fainted; before an ambulance service arrived my mother had been taken to hospital in a different car, but..." The five-year old Arman did not see how his father was knifing his mother, his sister Susie managed at that time to close her brother's eyes with her hand, but when his mother, covered in blood, was being taken to the sitting -room and later from conversations of adults he understood that "mother was hit by father"; he told his grandfather, "When I grow up, I will kill him..."

The spouses of 16 years had rarely lived in peace; once the husband drove out his wife with her baby in her arms into the winter cold, supposedly punishing her, or made Lusine stand on one foot in the corner for hours. He would not allow his wife to leave the house, socialize with their neighbors and forbade her to work anywhere. Before being killed, Lusine decided to put an end to her sufferings and told her husband that she would get a divorce...

P.S. If you have witnessed a domestic violence case, call the rapid-response group at <http://rru.swv.am/>.

Based on the materials of Nelly Babayan

Expert Opinions

Why Are Women Keeping Silent?

Fenya Bazoyan, a psychologist-consultant at the NGO Women's Support Center, notes that the main obstacle to bringing the woman subjected to domestic violence out of that situation is very often the woman herself since she has got used to that pressure so much that she has lost the awareness of her ego and cannot even imagine that she can live a different life.

The prevalent type of violence that most women are subjected to is psychological. "This is the case when the woman in the family always hears that she is bad, guilty about all issues, that she is a bad wife and a bad mother," explains the psychologist. It is for this very reason that they begin to suffer from low self-esteem, stop feeling themselves as women and as persons of value and full members of the family. "Many women unaware of their rights say that if my husband beats me, it means I have done something wrong," notes F. Bazoyan.

Although under these circumstances



relations in the family are unhealthy, spouses continue living together for years. Women take up measures only when the children are subjected to violence.

And why women keep silent during violence has different reasons. "Violent relations evolve through different stages. In the beginning, the relations become more conflicting, then apparent cases of violence: rows, beatings, fights, follow, which

are succeeded by the honeymoon stage, when the husband becomes regretful and remorseful, which strengthens in women the hope that not everything has been lost and she can save the family. And this is repeated for years on end."

The second reason, according to her, is that many women are afraid to be divorced, being scared of societal criticism leads to the preservation of these relations. In addition, women also have an economic dependence. Having no financial independence right from the start they do not see a way out by giving up those relations.

The research conducted by the NGO Women's Resource Center demonstrates that many women believe violence towards them is justified in many cases, for example, when the woman does not submit to the husband, when she ignores the children, when she is not faithful. "This means that women too find justifications for such conduct towards them, which lays the foundations for the prevalence of the phenomenon of violence," notes the psychologist.

"Women Tolerate Domestic Violence Having No Other Way Out..."

"One of the reasons of domestic violence today is that women try to simply tolerate all this since they are dependent on their husbands, they do not work, they have no other place to go, there are no shelters, there are no state rehabilitation programs to help women...For these reasons, they have to be tolerant," believes Anna Safaryan, Ombudsman's Advisor for Women's Issues.

"Once a woman, beaten, in home clothes and carrying a two-month newborn in her arms, came to our office. She had come to our office from the region and had no other place to go; she was afraid to turn to the police, had no relatives whose assistance she could rely on. We were able to at least find a temporary shelter for her through the assistance of NGOs," told Safaryan.

"The task of our office is to reveal and prevent violations and abuses in state bodies. So, violations have been recorded within the police system, when the police did not properly treat a woman subjected to violence. There were also cases when

the police had refused to accept violence complaints. Such cases are typically recorded in marzes. There, everybody knows each other and, coming to an agreement with each other, they try to persuade women to take back their complaint letters. We had cases when we accompanied women to police stations to submit complaint letters since the latter were afraid," she noted.

In this respect, Safaryan ascribes importance to the necessity of adopting the RoA draft law on Domestic Violence. According to her, the draft defines specific measures and clear-cut mechanisms, which will help, prevent cases of domestic

violence and will help provide the necessary assistance to those subjected to violence.

Let us remind that in January of this year, the Government rejected the expediency of adopting a law on Domestic Violence arguing that instead of that separate provisions of the law would be included in the Criminal, Criminal Procedure, and Administrative Violations Codes currently under review. The coalition Against Violence towards Women, which unites seven NGOs dealing with the issue, organized a demonstration of protest expressing its disagreement with such an approach and insisting that it had not justified itself up to date. Moreover, adoption of a separate law has a preventive role in combatting domestic violence. The NGOs have announced that they will continue to struggle for the adoption of the law.

Arev Hakobyan

Migration and Women

"And This is Our Virgin Lands"

Today numerous Armenians live in the town of Gagra, which has a population of 16 thousand people and is located in Abkhazia bordering with Russia. In Abkhazia, Armenians come second in their number after the Abkhaz.

"Very few people from Armenia come here for their rest, but we do not feel lack of Armenians from Armenia," says Lusinar Grigoryan, who has lived in Gagra for 40 years. At first, I did not understand what Lusinar said, but everything became clear on the third day: Armenians travel from here to Gagra to work and the majority of them are women.

Alvard Aralelyan, a resident of Gyumri, has been travelling to Gagra in spring, in May, and returning home in October for four years now. She sells maize, sweets, beer, etc. at the seaside. "Since eight o'clock in the morning till the evening I walk, heavy loads on my shoulders, along the seaside and, advertising, sell my goods. Very often it depends on the tone of my voice whether my goods sell well on a particular day or not," says Alvard in a conversation with us and adds that the stronger and more powerful her voice and the more convincing her form of presentation, the more of her goods customers will buy.

Alvard told us that she had learned about this job by chance. "It is one thing to hear about it from afar and it is a different thing to actually see it. When I arrived the first year and the next morning took my twenty-kilo bag and went to the seaside, I thought that I would definitely not manage this way for a long time, but since I had come from Armenia, it was a matter of honor: I had to stay and work even if I might die."

Alvard's duffel bag contains a few bottles of beer, sweets, and smoked fish; in one hand, she carries a ten-liter bucket with warm maize and in the other hand, she has a box with a variety of pastry.

"You cannot fancy how difficult it is to carry all this from one end of the seaside to the other end



from morning till evening...and at the same time shout with all the force you have," says Alvard.

While we were talking with Alvard, another woman vender approached us; she too was from Armenia. It appeared that only Armenians from Armenia, and at that only women, were working at the seaside.

"And this is our virgin lands," joining our conversation, said Anahit, who has been selling things at the seaside for three years, "If I can earn half of this in Armenia, I will definitely not come again. Why should there not be work in Armenia and we should become vagrants like this and have no job in our country? I do not understand when this power is going to change. We too are human beings, we too want to have lives worthy of human beings, but on our own soil," said Anahit.

When I saw the women, the first question that occurred to me was whether they had husbands. And, frankly speaking, I felt uncomfortable to ask them about it. However, they came out with it ahead of me.

Ten years ago, Anahit's husband left for the Russian Federation to seek employment there. In the beginning, he regularly sent money to his

family, but after some time the amount of the sum gradually reduced, and during the past few years, the sending has completely stopped. It turns out that her husband, as Anahit says, "finds a beautiful Russian blonde" and altogether forgets about their existence.

"Well, my dear girl, before getting married I could never imagine that the day would come when I would earn money to provide for my children in such a hard way, and at that so far away from my family and homeland," says movingly Anahit and explains what a real family is like. "You have a real family when in the evening everybody comes together, talks and eats together, and my family... I spend six months in a year here, and six months there, but I have no other possibility.... I can only say that the virgin lands have broken down my home."

While Anahit was telling the story of her family, Alvard managed to sell some of her goods and approached us, "If we talk and tell you about us, what is the use of it?" and not waiting for my response she continued, "When I got married, my husband would not allow me to even go shopping, he was jealous, not to mention working. He would stay at home and do nothing. And I became speechless... Then my husband's affairs worsened, he told me that he was going to seek employment outside Armenia and left... I have not heard from him since then... In the beginning, my relatives, friends, neighbors helped me, and then I felt ashamed, they were not obliged to do that... Let me not speak about it. Now, it is true that I earn it hard way, but my children do not go hungry," said Alvard and added, "Remember what I will tell you now, the Russians will stop supporting him and exhausted and worn out he will come back, and then I do not know what I will do."

P.S. The sun was already setting, only few people remained at the seaside. However, Alvard's and Anahit's voices were still heard: "hot corn, beer, fish, ringlets..."

"I did not hear from him for exactly 20 years, I knew neither whether he was nor whether he was not"...

"Morik, Sheko, Marus, move a little bit quicker, for God's sake. They eat the best grass and yield so little milk...." Sarah's voice resounded in the entire village for ten minutes. It was seven in the morning. As they say, the process of driving cows out of the cattle-shed was in progress. "See, my dear girl, the amount of milk has rather reduced; I managed to milk only ten liters from the three cows, and these other two have dried up," Sarah shows the milk in the buckets and quickly drives the cows to the village center. Sara has raised four children alone and as the villagers say, "leading a dog's life and on top of all with constant grumbling by her father-in-law and mother-in-law."

Those were cold and dark years of the 1990s. Sarah's husband Garnik, like many others, leaves Armenia to earn money. Sarah's eldest son was only nine years old, and the youngest daughter two. Sarah was living with Garnik's parents. In the initial period, they received regular sums from Garnik, but after some time the course of events changes.

"I did not hear from him for exactly 20 years; I knew neither whether he was nor whether he was not. The villagers would say that he had definitely got married, and I, frankly speaking, did not want to believe that because my Garnik loved me very much... Whereas, he was carried away by a Russian; would he remember then that every evening, in a distant and deserted village, Sarah was waiting for him?" tells Sarah her story with tears in her eyes and adds, "I thought okay he has forgotten me, the children, but what about his elderly parents; has he forgotten them too?"

Sarah tells that she took care of her husband's parents. Although her husband had brothers and sisters, they would say, "You are the daughter-in-law and so you have to look after them."

"Sometimes, I thought okay if my husband had left and was not here, what I had to do with this house, why I took care of his parents, but I could not find an answer."

Sarah tells that when her mother-in-law died she had a secret hope that perhaps Garnik would hear of that and would come, but in her words, she was mistaken...

"I did not know whether I had a husband or not. My mother-in-law would follow me like Gestapo. I socialized with neighbors secretly from her, when I saw a male neighbor, I should lower my head, and if she was next to me, I should not say hello to him because I knew what would come down upon me. She would say, 'Garnik is not here and you feel free, don't you, bitch?' And this way many other things," said Sarah and quickly crossed herself saying, "Oh my God, may the earth not tell her about this."

Hardly had a year passed since the death of her mother-in-law, when her father-in-law decided to get married. "Can you imagine? I went to the nearby village to arrange a match for him..." [She laughs].

Sarah tells that those were very difficult years. She could hardly manage to provide food for the children. Neighbors would give shoes and clothes. "But I was not so much resentful of these difficulties as of my father-in-law's grumbling."

Sarah says that her father-in-law did not want her to work in the village shop; he said that the villagers would gossip and would say that Garnik's wife... "One day I could not stand this any longer and told them that instead of being grateful and praising your daughter-in-law for taking care of yourselves at the time when even your son would not do it you thought of God knows what." However, Sarah's outburst does not help anything. All the same, her father-in-law would not allow her to work.

Years pass, Sarah's father-in-law dies too, and all of a sudden, to Sarah's surprise, Garnik appears.

"He came as a stranger, my daughter asked mom who that man was, my sons did not want to let him in, I persuaded them by saying that it was disgraceful not to do so. He did not even approach me, did not say thank you to me; he could have at least said good for you for taking good care of his parents. The hell with me, although I have not felt myself a woman my entire life, but a man with a woman's appearance"

Sarah tells that after such an attitude by her husband a lot changes in her life. "His behavior made me gather strength. I told myself, 'Sarah, you can do anything; you should stand on your own feet and should prove it to everybody.'"

Years have passed since then. Villagers have given Sarah the nickname of "Farmer Lady". Today, she has a small farm: five cows and thirty sheep.

"My sons help me a lot. They can see that I have done everything for them."

Sarah's eldest son has a beloved and is going to get married. "Once my son said, 'Mom, I will get married and go abroad to look for a job', I told him, 'My dear son, I hope you are joking since you know better than me that going abroad for employment has ruined our home, and if you go, you will take your wife with you.' After these words, Sarah began to quickly look for something. I asked her what she was doing. She said, 'My dear girl, I will give you a bowl of cream, take it and eat it, it is from natural milk.' While I was thinking of turning down her offer, she suddenly started to laugh loudly saying, 'Well, Sarah, you could not do such things when your mother-in-law and father-in-law were alive...they would put you to shame in front of the entire village.'"

By Armine Gevorkyan

The White Ribbon

Armenian men say "no" to violence against women

The famous wrestler, the winner of the silver medal in the 2012 Olympic Games, Arsen Julfalakyan is one of the firsts knight of the "white ribbon", in Armenia, symbolizing the struggle against violence towards women and as such he calls on men who lift up their hand against women to apply their force elsewhere, for example, in sports.

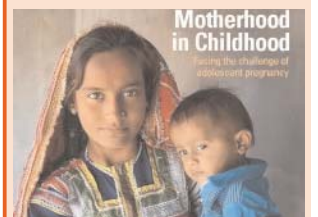
Together with Arsen, many famous men from Armenia: Arsen Grigoryan (Mro), Andre, Hayko, Martin Vardazaryan, Rafael Kotaniyan, Sos Janibekyan, representatives of the chess combined team and others say their "no" to domestic violence: "Even one case of domestic violence is enough to dishonor us," "It is a painful reality," "It is terrible," "Violence is a cave-age manifestation," "I condemn," "The man that can beat his wife cannot be called a man in my opinion"...



We met many of them at the presentation of the film No to Domestic Violence held at the Chamber Music Hall in May of this year. The presentation was organized by the Women's Rights Center and members of the network Men against Violence towards Women, which operates under the auspices of the same NGO. The main character in the film is a child who tells about violence against his mother and himself.

Publications

"The World Population"- 2013



The UNFPA's this year's report has been published. The report dwells on the problem of pregnancy among juveniles in the world and juvenile motherhood, which is especially typical of developing countries. According to the report, 8% of live births in Armenia is by mothers younger than 20 years of age. As regards minors, the number of births by them stands at 28.3% per each 1,000 women. The report informs that in Armenia the number of abortions among those up to 20 years of age is 189 per each 1,000 live births.

The issue has been published through support of the UNFPA and UNHCR Offices in Armenia within the framework of the 16 Days of Activity against Violence towards Women.

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"I am the lord" (Ter em) "I submit" (Hnazand em)



The message of the marital vow is often misperceived not only by ordinary people, but also even by some legislators. Here is how the clerics of the Armenian Apostolic Church interpret it:

In reality, the expressions "I am the lord" (words said by the

bridegroom during the wedding ceremony) and "I submit" (words said by the bride during the wedding ceremony) have nothing to do with humiliation. Being the lord means to love, to take care, to protect, and not to dominate and to issue orders. "I submit" means to respect the

husband, to support him and to hold the same views, and not to blindly carry out orders. Both husband and wife have equal obligations and responsibility in marriage, but different roles. And they should be masters of their mission and submit to it.

Source: Qahana.am