

The UN Women have signaled the beginning of the Beijing+20 process



Almost 20 years ago, in 1995, more than seventeen thousand official delegates and thirty thousand activists from non-governmental organizations from all over the world, including Armenia, gathered in Beijing for participation in the UN Fourth World Conference on Women. Twenty-six women from Armenia participated in the summit: eight members of official delegation and eighteen representatives from non-governmental organizations. By the way, the Patriarch of All Armenians Catholicos Garegin A of blessed memory was one of those unique clergymen who, during the days of the conference, sent a message to the participants in the summit stating that injustices should be corrected and that women are equal to men before God and the Creator.

Delegates from 189 states to the summit made a commitment to ensuring equal rights of women and girls with those of men and equal opportunities in all spheres of life. This approach was reflected in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted at the summit and became a road map for the entire world in ensuring gender equality.

In May of this year, the UN Women announced the beginning of the Beijing+20 process, within the framework of which achievements and issues of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action will be summarized and future actions will be outlined. The title of the advocacy campaign is *Empowering women, empowering humanity: Picture it!*

“We are giving gender inequality an expiry date, by 2030”



This was the statement made by Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, UN Women Executive Director, in New York's Apollo Theater building during the ceremonial launching of the Beijing+20 global process held on June 26.

“No country in the world has reached absolute and full gender equality...I have no doubt this is a huge task but it is not a mission impossible. It is the mission of our time...We are giving gender inequality an expiry date, by 2030. This should be the end of gender inequality. We launch this Beijing+20 campaign!” stated Head of the UN Women.

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Two Proposals to Combat Prenatal Sex Selection



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Investing in Young People

This motto guides the celebration of the World Population Day this year

In Armenia, young people of 18 through 30 years of age make up about 27 per cent of the general population. According to the provisions of the 2013-2017 strategy for the RoA state policies on youth, young people are the important potential of society and they should be given opportunities to mature into free, versatile, healthy and responsible citizens.

Although one of the priorities of the program is ensuring youth employment, joblessness is a number one problem among the youth, and not only in Armenia, but in the whole world. According to the data of the UN Development Program report on *Youth Employment in Armenia* published in 2013, the level of youth unemployment in our country is more than 40 per cent (age group 15-24), which is about 2.5 times higher than the average level. Moreover, the unemployment level is higher among women as compared with men. By the way, the report had been developed within the framework of the process of speeding up the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals.



Photo by Lilian Galstyan

According to yet another report, this time by International Labor Organization (ILO) on *Global Employment Trends – 2013*, by 2017, the unemployment level in CIS will reach 18.3% among young women and 17.7% among young men. According to the report, the youth unemployment level is the highest in Armenia, standing at 39.1%.

Every year, about 21 thousand young people with higher education and 10 thousand with primary and secondary vocational training enter the RoA labor market. However, according to the *National Report on Young People in Armenia*, there are major discrepancies between our labor market and professional educational system. Specifically, 42.7% of young people with higher education and 66.0% of those with secondary vocational training are not employed in accordance with their professions. In addition to the absence of workplaces and unemployment, young people have to confront numerous other problems, including inaccessibility of education, absence of housing, unavailability of health services, including those related to reproductive health. Consequently, migration trends are on the rise among young people. Young people are especially very vulnerable to manifestations of social injustice. Experts estimate

that the state support for addressing youth problems is not sufficient although a number of targeted programs are being developed and implemented, albeit not very effective. Thus, for a number of years, RoA has been implementing the state special purpose program *Affordable Housing for Young Families*. Let us remind that only those young families can benefit from this program for whom the ages of spouses do not add up to more than 60, as well as single parents of 18 through 30 years of age. We confront this limitation at a time when the age threshold for marriage among young people has noticeably increased. Today, it is more frequent for people to get married after the age of 25-30. In addition, in order to get a credit, it is necessary to pay 30% of the apartment's price, which makes up quite a big sum. According to the most modest estimates, the monthly interest rate for credit repayment is 100-130 thousand drams. In this situation, young people should have a monthly income of at least 300-400 thousand drams so that they can acquire clothing, food, pay for the utilities and repay the credit sum. However, in Armenia, the average nominal salary stands at about 160 thousand drams. Under these circumstances, the dissatisfaction of young people with the introduction of additional deductions for mandatory cumulative

pension fund is more than understandable. Housing credits are provided with at least ten-year redemption period. The highest value for an apartment to be acquired is 16 million drams; the state refinances 300 credits annually.

Let us also note that up to date 1,520 credits have been refinanced, although it was expected that 6,000 young couples would become potential beneficiaries of this program.

The position of young people on forming families is also determined by socio-economic circumstances. In this respect, many young people are beginning to be guided by a successful life model accepted in the modern world, according to which, a person should first get education, make a career, achieve certain success, and only after this consider forming a family.

According to the *National Report on Young People in Armenia*, more than one third of the young people in the 27-29 age group are not married, as well as every fourth of those of the age of thirty. In the 25-30 years age group, 39% of young women and 27% of young men are not planning to get married during the upcoming two years. Economic reasons for not getting married are very typical of men and cultural reasons of women. Twenty-five per cent of young women cite as a reason for not getting

married their desire to obtain education, 23% their age: they think it is still early to form a family, and 20% note that they have no beloved. In case of young men, 18% say that it is too early, 16% note that they have no good jobs and 14% that they do not have money.

One more detail directly related to young families. According to the RoA Statistical Service data, in our republic only 21.6% of children of preschool age go to kindergarten and in rural communities only 10.5 per cent. These official data demonstrate how difficult it is for young mothers to combine work with the family. Moreover, under today's socio-economic conditions, the option of women not working is not even deemed a possibility. Otherwise, young spouses will be able neither to make both ends meet, nor to have more than one child.

To what extent are Armenian young people ready to change the life? The report states that 53.1% of Armenian young people are interested in the internal political life; however, only 11.6% of the surveyed youth are members of parties or party youth branches. Seventy-six point two per cent of the young people believe that Armenia has no party which will express their interests. Six hundred youth NGOs are operating in RoA, however, only 60-70 of them are active.

Beijing+20

The Launching of the Advocacy Campaign Women's Issues Are Not Getting Old

Women and Politics and WomenNet.am website are launching the informational advocacy campaign **Women's Issues Are Not Getting Old**.

The goal of the advocacy campaign is to highlight and cover international processes related to Beijing+20 and the Millennium Development Goals, of which Armenia is a part.

The advocacy campaign will last until March 2015, when the 59th session of the Commission on the Status of Women will sum up the results of Beijing+20 and will outline future actions.

During our advocacy campaign *Women's Issues Are Not Getting Old* we will be presenting all those issues that clarify the Beijing+20 processes and are included in the twelve critical areas of concern in the

Beijing Platform for Action. These are Women and Poverty, Education and Training of Women, Women and Health, Violence against Women, Women and Armed Conflict, Women and the Economy, Women in Power and Decision-making, Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women, Human Rights of Women, Women and the Media, Women and the Environment, and the Girl-child.



Millennium 2015

Security, Human Rights, and Broadening Opportunities for Women

These three key issues are today viewed as factors ensuring sustainable development in the whole world, within the context of summarizing the results of implementation of the Millennium Development Goals in 2015.



What is the connection between Beijing Platform for Action adopted in 1995 and eight Millennium Development Goals declared in 2000? It should be noted that this connection is closer than what was declared by the third of the MDG goals, according to which, countries of the world, including Armenia, commit themselves to undertaking empowerment of women and promotion of gender equality. Back in 2000, during the summing up of the Beijing+5 results, the UN General Assembly special session adopted an important approach, according to which, all eight Millennium Development Goals should be viewed with consideration of a gender component. This same approach was reconfirmed in March of this year at the 58th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, which was devoted to discussion of the Millennium Development Goals beyond 2015.

Maternity in Numbers

Every day 800 women in the world die in pregnancy or at giving birth. Almost every minute a family in the world is shocked by the loss of a mother. Accord-



ing to the data of the World Health Organization, every year 350,000 women die while pregnant or at giving birth. Almost all of them (99%) live in poor developing countries and lives of many of them could have been saved.

The majority of women die of copious hemorrhages, infections, eclampsia, prolonged labor and consequences of out-of-hospital abortions. These are all reasons against which there exist very effective means.

The fifth Millennium Development Goal is improving maternal health. Within the framework of the Millennium Development Goals, the countries have undertaken to reduce mortality among mothers by 75 per cent; however, since 1990 up to date they have succeeded in reducing it only by 47 per cent.

The health of mothers is closely related to the health of children. Every year more than 3 million newborns die and 2.6 million more are stillborn. Every year about 1 million children grow without mothers. The mortality during the first year among newborns growing without mothers is ten times higher than among those who have mothers.

Expert Opinions

Prenatal Sex Selection: causes and what needs to be done

If people in Armenia continue to pursue artificial interruption of pregnancies based on prenatal sex selection, then, according to the forecast of the UN Population Fund, Armenia will lose almost 93,000 girls or future mothers by 2060. Today, as a result of artificial interruptions of pregnancy based on prenatal sex selection, 1,500 girls are not born in Armenia each year, and every year till 2060 2, 000 children will not be born for the sole reason that their fetuses have developed into girls.

The forecasts are based on at least two nationwide researches commissioned by the UN Population Fund, in-depth studies of the issue and analysis of all possible statistical data. As a result, it has been confirmed that the discrepancy manifest in Armenia since the 1990s in the girl-boy ratio has become a major strategic problem over the past few years. In 2011, the ratio of the newborns stands at 114 boys versus 100 girls, and in 2012, 115 boys against 100 girls. The normal, natural ratio between boys and girls is considered to be respectively 102-106 and 100. Moreover, if there are no deviations in case of the first child, they start with the second child and are especially big in case of the third child. "In case of the third child, 160 boys are born versus 100 girls, which is a catastrophic figure," notes **Karine Saribekyan**, Head of the RoA Health Ministry Department for Maintaining the Health of Mothers and Children. "As of today, boys born in Armenia among those up to age 20 outnumber girls by 40, 000. Judging by the example of some countries, say China and India, this phenomenon will lead to lonely old age, as well as an increase in crime," says **Garik Hayrapetyan**, Executive Representative of the UNFPA Armenia Office, clarifying that lonely men are more aggressive and manifest this aggression through trafficking and commitment of sexual crimes. In his words, China has about 60 million men who are aging alone, and India has cases when 4-5 brothers share one woman in the family.

These disturbing facts were recently voiced again during the expanded discussion session held at the RoA Ministry of Health. Prior to that, a special working discussion also took place at the session of the National Assembly Standing Committee on Health, Maternity and Childhood Issues. In both cases, the topic of the discussions was the same: how to curb sex selective abortions.

Specialists note the main reasons for prenatal sex selection, which are three both in our and other countries. The first reason is the preference for a boy child in the family as one who carries on the family torch, perpetuates the family lineage, is heir, etc. The girl child, in terms of these expectations, is of less value. In reality, the roots of the problem are deeper: the problem is conditioned by the existing gender inequality, a lesser role ascribed to women in our society's perceptions. The second reason is the accessibility of relevant technologies in the country, which allows the parents to learn the sex of their future child before birth and to avoid having a girl. It is not accidental that artificial pregnancy interruptions due to prenatal sex selection started to increase especially after the 1990s, parallel to the replenishment of hospitals with ultrasound equipment.

Finally, contemporary couples prefer to have few children, which, naturally, decreases the probability of having children of



both sexes. As noted by **Karine Saribekyan**, in the past "women gave birth till victorious end, i.e. till they had a son, which increased the birth rate of the country." It is obvious that certain steps should be taken in the noted three directions. According to **Garik Hayrapetyan's** observation, the difficult part is that struggle against gender stereotypes conditioning prenatal sex selection, changing the discriminatory attitude towards women, increasing the role of women in society and in economic life require time.

"Although during the recent period possible sad consequences of prenatal sex selection have periodically been voiced from different tribunes, it is as a minimum naive to expect that this situation can change within one-two years since the phenomenon is rooted in the centuries-long tradition and mentality. Our research has shown that in Armenia the desire to have a boy child is on average six times bigger: peo-

« My colleague was expecting the second child; the first one was a girl, two years old. She was very happy. However, when her husband and mother-in-law learned that yet another girl was to be born, they forced her to interrupt the pregnancy. Later they regretted, but it was too late: the woman never became pregnant again... »

ple in cities and towns want to have boys four times more than girls, and in rural areas ten times more," says **G. Hayrapetyan**, noting that this attitude often reminds of an ordinary vagary that boys beget boys and that's it.

A policy to increase birth rate also requires time and resources from the state. Besides, this is unlikely to change the mentality and attitudes towards selective abortions. Thus, in terms of attaining quick results, the most effective path is to restrict the information about the sex of the future child. At the same time, according to experts, it is necessary to utilize advocacy mechanisms to promote intolerance among future mothers and fathers towards prenatal sex selection.

Discrimination

International approaches to prenatal sex selection

The 1995 Beijing **Fourth World Conference on Women** characterized artificial interruptions of pregnancy based on prenatal sex selection as an act of violence against women. Three years later, in 1998, the UN General Assembly, by adopting resolution # 52/106 on the Girl Child, called upon the states "to enact and enforce legislation" in such cases.

The **Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)** and the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers made an appeal to Governments to adopt national legislation to prohibit sex-selective abortions.

PACE resolution 1829 (2011) emphasizes that "the social and family pressure placed on women not to pursue their pregnancy because of the sex of the embryo/foetus is to be considered as a form of psychological violence and that the practice of forced abortions is to be criminalized."

The **European Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine** prohibits prenatal sex selection. Article 14 of the Convention stipulates "The use of techniques of medically assisted procreation shall not be allowed for the purpose of choosing a future child's sex, except where serious hereditary sex-related disease is to be avoided." Only 29 out of 47 Council of Europe member states

have joined and ratified the convention, including Albania and Georgia, however Armenia and Azerbaijan have not.

On January 15 of this year, the Council of Europe Human Rights Commissioner **Nils Muižnieks** made a statement

noting that widespread artificial interruptions of pregnancy based on prenatal sex selection in Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Albania and a number of other countries are discriminatory and should be banned, specifically through criminalization of the practice.

By the way,

Only South Korea has manifested a positive trend in the struggle against prenatal sex selection, where cases of artificial interruptions of pregnancy based on prenatal sex selection are punished by up to six years of deprivation of freedom or a fine in the amount of 13,000 dollars. As a result, over the past 15 years the indicator of the ratio of sexes among newborns has shifted from 116 to 107. However, as noted by **Garik Hayrapetyan**, Executive Representative of the UNFPA in Armenia, the success is determined not only by criminalization of abortions and big fines, but by a number of other factors, including rapid economic development, urbanization, a rise in the educational level of women and an advancement in women's status and role in labor market, etc.

Draft Law

What is the RoA Government proposing?

As of now, there are two proposals concerning combating prenatal sex selection. This spring the RoA Ministry of Health presented a draft law, which proposed to prohibit informing the parents of the sex of the future child until the fetus is thirty-week old. This proposal triggered a wave of different opinions: many believed that the adoption of this draft law would increase corruption risks, and abortions would become illegal. Some argued that the right of information would be violated, although the authors of the draft law explained that the right of a child to life is more fundamental than the right to information (in this case, being informed of the sex of a child).



The second proposal, which the Ministry of Health has recently been discussing, is to reduce the permissible threshold for artificial interruptions of pregnancy up to ten weeks since, within this period, it is impossible to determine the sex of a child through ultrasound examination. This context implies stricter oversight over artificial pregnancy interruptions during a longer period, as well as regulation of the sale of medicine causing miscarriages. That is to say, certain corruption risks are inherent in this case too.

In essence, these two proposals do not

restrict women's right to give birth or not, however, they should not decide whether to have a daughter or a son. Though this is often the case, the woman's husband or his relatives should not have that right either.

"Pregnancy interruptions based on prenatal sex selection are more of a social problem, rather than one of health: the draft law on withholding information about the sex of fetuses is first of all an appeal to society and extends support to those women who are compelled to pursue artificial interruptions of pregnancy under family pressure," opines Garik Hayrapetyan, Exec-

utive Representative of the UNFPA in Armenia and also notes that, as regards this issue, prior to enforcing any legislative approach, it should be thoroughly weighed and seriously studied so that prohibitions or restrictions do not lead to an increase in corruption risks, but make it possible to manage the situation and obtain desirable results. He further invited our attention to the fact that in our country it is even impossible to maintain accurate statistics on abortions since you can easily obtain the necessary medication in the pharmacies and use it at home to induce a miscarriage.

Millennium 2015

Armenia has made a commitment

One of the twelve directions of the Beijing Platform for Action and two of the eight goals of the MDG are concerned with the problems of reproductive health.

MDG 5. Improve Maternal Health

To reduce maternal mortality rate by three-fourths by 2015, as compared to the 1990s (it should be lower than 13 promille);

To ensure widespread availability of reproductive healthcare by 2015.

MDG 4. Reduce Child Mortality

To reduce child mortality rate by two-thirds by 2015, as compared to the 1990s (up to the age of 5 years – lower than 10 promille; up to the age of one year – lower than 8 promille).

Maternity in Armenia

In Armenia, maternal mortality rate (per 100 thousand live births) is 19.2, which is lower than the average rate (29.3 on average) in the CIS countries, but is significantly higher than that of the European Union countries (8 on average).



Photo by Lilian Galstyan

In absolute numbers, over the past three years overall 22 maternal deaths have been recorded in the country: there were 4 cases in 2011, 10 in 2012, and 8 in 2013.

As compared to the 1990s, child mortality has also significantly declined. Last year it was 9.8 promille (per 1,000 live births). By this indicator, Armenia is in a more favorable position than other CIS countries, but compared to European countries, where this indicator is 6.9, Armenia has yet much to accomplish.

In absolute numbers, in 2013, the republic recorded 463 cases of death among children of the age group 0-4 with incidence of death among children of up to one year of age making up 88.8%.

According to the data of the RoA Ministry of Health, in Armenia, approximately 20% of the children of up to 5 years of age, i.e. every fifth child, have a problem of chronic malnutrition and that affects their physical and mental development. Consequently, the height of these children is short and weight is lower than average indicators; they also have a problem of anaemia.

Number of births is in decline

Over the past four years, the number of births in Armenia has been declining. According to the recent data published by the National Statistical Service, in 2013 Armenia had 41,770 births, which is less than in 2012 by 1.7% when 42, 832 children were born. It is noteworthy that in 2011, 43, 297 children were born in the Republic, and in 2010 – 44, 737 children.

Fertility (summary coefficient of birth rate) indicator, according to the RoA National Statistical Service, stands at 1.6 children per one woman, at a time when it is necessary to have 2.1 children for simple reproduction of the population.

At the borderline of infertility

In Armenia, the infertility factor is quite high and stands at 17%. According to the data of the World Health Organization, infertility higher than 15% is an indicator of a crisis. This means that approximately one of every six couples is unable to have a child.

Moreover, primary infertility in Armenia is 5%, and secondary is 12%. For comparison, primary infertility in the world is 1.9% and secondary is 10.5%.

The main reasons for infertility in Armenia are abortions and sexually transmitted diseases. Specialists warn that every sexually transmitted disease, if it has not been treated in a timely manner or has not been treated fully, can later lead to complications, including infertility.

At the same time, today in Armenia 3-4 thousand children are annually born through artificial insemination and in vitro fertilization.

A Crossroad of Opinions

Should it be prohibited to inform of the sex of the fetus? The pros and cons

The Ministry of Health draft law, according to which, informing the parents of the sex of the future child should be prohibited (up to the age of thirty weeks) has caused a controversy in society. Even citizens fighting against gender inequality do not show an unequivocal attitude to this draft. However, irrespective of the fact whether the draft will be adopted or not, it has already started "to work" by focusing the attention of Armenian society on the issue of pregnancy interruptions based on prenatal sex selection. We have had conversations with women and men familiar with and concerned about this issue.

The prohibition to inform of the sex of a child can simply be a salvation for women like me, believes the 26-year old A.K. "My husband and mother-in-law want to have a boy child very much. In addition, our financial situation is such that we cannot afford to have more than two children. Now, if, during the second pregnancy, it becomes clear that it is yet another daughter, they will probably force me to get rid of her. But I do not want to have an abortion, it is a murder," says A.K.

The young woman noted that she would not dare to contradict the will of her husband and mother-in-law, and if there were such a law, such a problem would not arise since they would not force her to remove a thirty-week-old child. "If such a law really comes into force, I am sure that I and many other women like me will simply get rid of the problem of having to have an abortion, and there

will not be quarrels on this issue in the families any more," says the young mother.

Yet another young mother, photo reporter Anahit Hayrapetyan, is of quite a different opinion, "The adoption of the law will not change much. I have heard many stories from my mother that in certain villages certain people can make a correct prediction of the sex of a child. They will definitely find ways of finding out the sex of a child; will do calculations or other things. This [law] will not improve relations within families since if the woman gives birth to yet another girl, she will always be rebuked for having girls."

In a conversation with us the violoncellist Alex Mirzoyan, who, last year, co-authored a short documentary on sex-selective abortions, noted that he found it difficult to express an unequivocal opinion on the draft, "On the one hand, I think that it is wrong since people are deprived of the right to

learn the sex of the future child; on the other hand, it will save female children."

Thirty-two-year old Aram Madatyan thinks that the law will not be effective for the simple reason that our society is corrupt. "Is there a doctor who upon receipt, into his/her pocket, of a ten-thousand-dram bill, will not tell you the sex of your child? Until the awareness of our society has not risen, no law can solve this problem."

Future father Suren Barseghyan believes that the psychological impact of such a law is important. "...When parents are deprived of the right to learn the sex of their child, they will ultimately come back to their senses and will understand what cruel steps they or their neighbor, friend have taken and I think that the public opinion will change, people will perhaps be afraid of resorting to an abortion. If such an issue is regulated by law, citizens understand that there is a state approach and that eliminating their children is not just their personal business, but affects our society and the state." Twenty-nine-year-old Suren knows the sex of his first child: they will be having a daughter. "I am very happy that it is a girl; were it a boy, I would still be happy; a child is a child, irrespective of sex."

"...We do not have any other way"

According to the new proposal to combat prenatal sex selection, the permissible threshold for artificial interruption of pregnancy is to be set at ten weeks, since it is not possible to determine the sex of the fetus through ultrasound examination during this time period. Let us remind that according to the existing Armenian law, an interruption of pregnancy is allowable until the twelfth week of pregnancy, if wished so by the mother. An abortion is possible until the twenty-second week of pregnancy, based on doctors' recommendations. After this time, abortions are forbidden.

In a conversation with us, Angela Lekhlyan, a gynecologist at the *Nairi* Medical Center, confirmed that the reduction of the threshold from twelve to ten weeks rules out the possibility of finding out the sex of the fetus. "If an abortion is done within this time period, one can be certain that this is not conditioned by the fact whether the fetus is male or female," noted Mrs. Lekhlyan. At the same time, she expressed an opinion that if a woman wants to have an abortion, it is very difficult to talk her out of it and if a doctor does not help the woman in that matter, she might hurt herself by taking independent incompetent steps. So, it is not ruled out that after the noted time period, the woman, knowing the sex of her fetus, will still resort to an abortion and this time not under the

oversight of a doctor, but by utilizing folk methods or using the services of quacks.

To our question that probably supermodern technologies enable to determine the sex of the fetus earlier than after ten weeks, the specialist responded by saying that the problem was not with technologies, but with the development of the fetus: the sexual organs of a future child develop by the twelfth-thirteenth week and the sex can be clearly determined only within this time period.

Speaking about the new proposal, Hermine Naghdalyan, the Deputy Chairman of the National Assembly, said that it should undoubtedly become a subject of serious discussion, and that the problem is indeed very worrying and it is commendable that the Ministry of Health is taking steps in that direction.

"The problem of selective abortions is in reality stereotypical and I believe what the Ministry is proposing today is just a small step, but, certainly, a priority one," noted the deputy reminding that a month ago, at the National Assembly, women deputies and UNFPA representatives discussed another proposal, which means that the Government demonstrates willingness and readiness to address the problem of selective abortions. H. Naghdalyan ascribed a lot of importance to the fact that the threshold reduction should be protected against corruption risks so that a slightly encouraging treatment of a doctor does not serve as a reason to replace the twelve-week time period by a ten-week one. "We should think about how we can prevent such possibilities so that our struggle is effective. I understand that any prohibition can trigger counter response mechanisms, but, I repeat, we do not have any other way, we should apply this," she added, also highlighting the importance of relevant advocacy efforts among young people.

Stereotypes

“A boy begets a boy; a good boy begets a girl”

Gender pressure is bipolar. In a society where females are suppressed, males cannot help but feel pressured too. A father of three children, who refused to divulge his name, is telling exactly about this pressure.

“When my first child was born, we knew that it was going to be a girl and I took it very calmly. I thought that the next one would be a boy. But it was imprinted on my mind how my relatives and friends asked me what I had had and when I responded that it was a girl, instead of congratulating me, they would say, ‘Take it easy, the next one will be a boy.’ It sounded like a misfortune had happened and they comforted me. It is not easy to father daughters in our society. We strive to have a boy child too much. There is this saying, they say ‘a boy begets a boy.’ This expression by itself is a huge pressure on fathers. Can you imagine that if the man is not mature enough, he can feel deficient only for the reason that his child is female? I do not know whether I should rank myself among them or not, but I wanted it very much to have a son. When during the second pregnancy, we had an ultrasound examination and were told that it was a girl again, I became very sad. I wanted a son, I already



Photo by Lilian Galstyan

had a daughter. My wife too was upset, she felt somewhat guilty. Then I thought that we were still young and could still have a boy later and I resigned myself to the thought that we were going to have a daughter. My second daughter was very beautiful and more vivacious. The moment I saw her I immediately understood that I was happy to have that little wonder. However, people showed the same attitude. We came together on the occasion of the birth of my child and the majority of toasts were devoted not to my daughter, but to my future boy child. On that day, I said that the third one would certainly be a boy and we would name him Aram. During the third pregnancy too it became clear

that it was a girl. This was the most complicated period in my relations with my wife. I wanted my wife to pursue an abortion and us to try again, thinking that we might have a boy. But my wife had seen the heartbeat of our child on the screen and was much moved. She said that our daughter’s heart was beating, how could we stop that heart’s beating?

It truly was very complicated; my parents too put pressure on me. My mother would say that in my wife’s kin no boys were born because the first child of the daughter of my wife’s aunt was a girl too. I tried to convince my wife and she would cry every night. I saw how difficult it was, but I tried to persuade her promising her

good things, saying that if we had a son, I would become a better, more considerate husband. And my wife would say ‘you do not change, and let our child live.’ She was sure that it would be a murder. I and especially my parents thought differently. Days, weeks passed, my wife had another ultrasound examination and saw how the child’s organs were developing. She came home, said that she was a developing person, and ‘if you are going to kill her, kill me too.’ What could I say after all this? I firmly embraced my wife and we did not say any other word about it. Now, I am father of three daughters, three angels, and three walking good fortunes. You cannot even fancy how happy I am and when I imagine that one of my daughters may not be in my family, I go crazy. And I am not going to force my wife to have the fourth child. After giving birth to three children, her immune system has weakened a lot and she often has problems with her health. Besides, it is complicated to take care of four children. I had better do everything possible for my girls to help them achieve their aims. And I am not concerned any more about the expression ‘a boy begets a boy’; I found an answer to that a long time ago. I say ‘a boy begets a boy and a good boy begets a girl.’

Figures and Facts

Women’s reproductive health is deteriorating

Statistical data demonstrate that despite the undertaken measures women’s reproductive health has been deteriorating over the recent years. Pregnancy and childbirth complications are more frequent.



The number of spontaneous abortions and doctor recommended abortions, as well as of premature childbirths is increasing. Caesarean section is applied for 20% of births. One of the main factors that causes deterioration of women’s reproductive health are abortions, which are widely used as a means of getting rid of undesirable pregnancy.

The differences in the medical assistance quality and accessibility between the capital city and regions continue to apply. Not all villages in Armenia have outpatient clinic services. Frequently, one doctor services the population of several villages located at the distance of 10-15 kilometers from each other and having no transport communications, which restricts the population’s and especially women’s chances to benefit from medical assistance.

Approximately 7 thousand abortions and 4 thousand spontaneous miscarriages per year

According to the RoA Health Ministry data, in Armenia, the number of abortions fluctuates between 6.5 and 7 thousands per year. In addition, according to rough estimates by experts, about 4 thousand spontaneous miscarriages happen in home conditions, including abortions not recommended by doctors, which are respectively done without doctors’ oversight. It should be noted that 47 per cent of women who have ever resorted to abortion have had 2-3 abortions, and 12 per cent – 4-5 abortions. Five per cent of women has had six or more abortions.

“Fortunately, over the past ten years no woman has died of an abortion in our country,” says Gayane Avagyan, Head of the RoA Health Ministry Department for Maintaining Maternal and Reproductive Health, expressing concern that there is a very dangerous trend of passing medicinal schemes to each other, which can bring about unpredictable dangers.

“My primary appeal to the population is that if a pregnancy is nevertheless undesirable, and the woman is going to protect herself from this prospect, the best option is contraceptives. And if the woman has become pregnant and wants, for some reasons, to interrupt the pregnancy, my advice would be to turn to specialized medical assistance because if a pregnancy is interrupted under improper conditions and by a specialist without proper knowledge, complications are unavoidable,” she says.

Over the past ten years, the number of abortions has decreased. At present, 30 per cent of pregnancies end through artificial interruptions; ten years ago, this number stood at 55 per cent.

No comment

-Who was born? Did you have a boy?

-No

- What else then?

Such a dialogue is very typical of Dagestan.

The first thing that a Dagestanian should do to become firmly established and gain the respect of his friends is to have at least one heir. This comes from a distant past: It is in a son that the father of a family saw the perpetuation of the family lineage and defender of the home and country. However, for this very reason, thousands of girls are not born in Dagestan and many young women become dis-

“Investment in somebody else’s home?”

abled. There is this saying that when you have a son, you spit in somebody else’s house, and when a daughter is born, somebody else spits in your house. In the modern language, they say a girl “is an investment into somebody else’s home.” Not in the distant past, the woman who had given birth only to girls was considered deficient and she was humiliated in any possible way. Men would uncaringly abandon their women when they gave birth only to girls saying, “You’d better have given birth to a stone.”

Some Caucasian peoples had even a tradition of killing female newborns. It was believed that people would be rewarded by having a son as their next child. Frequently, men, with the consent of their relatives, would divorce their wives, who did not give birth to a son. In addition, the birth of children out of wedlock was encouraged so that fathers could have a son.

Source:

the Daptar magazine, Dagestan

Accessibility of Health Services

The Beijing Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals ascribe special importance to the issue of funding health services and making them accessible to women. Yet, in Armenia, expenditures in the health area within the structure of DGP and state budget have steadily been decreasing over the recent years. Insufficient funding of the health sphere and expansion of paid services has led to the decrease in overall health service quality and its availability, and increase in women’s deaths and morbidity from cardiovascular diseases and malignant tumors. Oncological diseases especially frequently hit women of reproductive age: 63.7% of all oncological patients fall to the lot of 20-40 age group, chiefly with a diagnosis of breast and cervix cancer. The prevalent reason for not getting medical assistance in a timely manner remains to be financial constraints. According to the 2012 data, only 14.8% of women underwent a mammographic examination and 78% of them were examined on a paid basis. It is noteworthy that the introduction of the state certificate system for free assistance in child delivery in 2008 has allowed to reduce the amount of non-official payments for childbirth by ten times, decreasing it from 82.4% to 7.9%.

Prevention of Miscarriage is Expensive



When it was my turn, I could not suppress my curiosity and asked the pharmacist what medicine he had bought and what had happened. “It is used to prevent a miscarriage,” responded the employee.

The other day I was standing in a line at a drugstore of the 911 network. A man, gasping for breath and with his face distorted, entered the drugstore and requested to let him pass first. He bought three tablets, paid 1,200 drams and left the drugstore as quickly as he came in.

Later, in conversations with women, I found out that many had used this drug during pregnancy and that it relaxes muscle tension and brings down the tonus. I found out the price too: one tablet costs 410-450 drams. G. Manukyan, whose child will soon be turning three, passed her entire pregnancy period under the control of doctors and took this drug for three successive months, starting with three tablets a day and later shifting to two. In addition, she used other drugs and vitamins.

The example of this woman shows that in order to sustain the fetus, this woman and her family had to pay 100 thousand drams only for one medicine. Add to this the price of other drugs.

The state does not provide

medicine to pregnant women. Yet specialists confirm that today cases of miscarriage have increased and note that the main reasons for this are incorrect food regimen, stresses, as well as illnesses acquired as a result of dark and cold years. In Armenia, there are many families that can hardly make both ends meet and yet one day they “dare” have a child. God forbid, but if a woman develops such complications, she will have to either buy only medicine instead of bread, or borrow money, or lose her child.

Thus, the fact of free childbirth in Armenia does not insure women against those expenses which they incur during pregnancy buying expensive medicine to prevent the danger of miscarriage.

Child Benefits for both Employed and Unemployed Mothers

This year the National Assembly at its spring session refused, by prevailing votes, to adopt a draft law on introducing changes to the law on State Benefits. The draft envisaged elimination of discrimination between working and not working mothers and provision of family allowances to all mothers taking care of children of up to two years of age. In case of the adoption of the proposed change, it would be necessary to allocate additional 15.7

billion drams from the state budget for the purpose. However, the Government was unable to appropriate this sum.

“If working mothers receive a certain sum envisioned for taking care of children of up to two years of age, I believe that logic prompts that those mothers who do not work need it even more,” says the co-author of the draft law Naira Zohrabyan (Prosperous Armenia faction), noting that the bill will not only eliminate the injustice, but will also promote an

increase in birthrate.

It should be noted that before that the Government, discussing this initiative, proposed to the authors of the bill to consider the problem during the discussion of the 2015 RoA state budget draft since this year’s budget does not have the needed sum. Thus, the parliamentary majority turned down this bill. The women deputies voted for this law in line with their political affiliation.

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