

Our girl children



Currently around 422,000 girl children ranging the age from 0-18 years old live in Armenia.

Two of every five children, including girls, live in poverty (42.8%), of them 3.7% live in absolute poverty.

The ratio of families preferring a male child over a female one is 1 to 6<sup>th</sup>.

After the birth of the girl child the Armenian families treat them with the same care and affection as their boy children.

Each year, in average 1500 girl children are not being born as a result of sex-selective abortion.

The divergence of girls ranging the age from 0-18 is about 45,000 in our country and this process is ongoing.

In 2013 out of 41,906 children 19,570 were girls and 22,336 were boys. Thus, the sex-at-birth ratio is 114 boys to 100 girls; meanwhile the natural proportion should be 102-106 boys to 100 girls.

The most popular given names to newborn girls in Armenia are Nare', Mari and Mane'.

Alarming statistics

Each third woman in the world has been forced to early marriage during her childhood.

Each day 7 thousand adolescent girls are being forced to marriage in different parts of the world. Most frequently it occurs in Southern Asia (46%), sub Saharan African countries (37%), Latin America and Caribbean basin countries (29%). In European Union and NIS countries such marriages range 11%.

During the last decade 70 million early marriages have been registered as per the UNFPA data. "If this tendency continues on during the upcoming 10



years, by 2020, the number of girls marrying under 18<sup>th</sup> years old will become 142 million, furthermore, 50 million of these girls will marry under the age of 15. That is to say, annually 14 million 200 thousand girls under 18 years old will join the huge army of illiterate, unhealthy, violated and slavery victimized women".

A girl should have the right to choose

"Every girl, no matter where she is born, should have a chance to reach her potential. Every girl deserves to be welcomed to this world with the same joy and celebration as a boy. Every girl has the right to life and dignity. Every girl has the right to education...Every girl has the right to be a girl, and not a child bride. Every girl has the right to live free of female genital mutilation... Yet these rights continue to be violated worldwide on a massive and systematic scale", Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin, UNFPA Executive Director says.

# Woman & politics

Facebook Flash Mob "Have you got a daughter?"



October 2014

WomenNet.am



Photo by Lillian Galstyan

## October 11 International Day of the Girl Child

Many would question why did UNFPA segregate girl children and commemorate an International Day of the girl child? It has a sole purpose: to draw the attention of the international community to the specific problems that girls face around the world.

The specific problems experienced by the girls may vary and be diverse including early marriage and childbirth, deprivation of education, ritual genital mutilation and other

forms of discrimination. Today the greatest challenge for girl children in Armenia is perhaps the prenatal sex-selective abortions, which result to miscarriage of 1500 girls annually. If this dynamics

continues, by 2060 Armenia will lose 93.000 girls or its future mothers.

The first International Day of the Girl Child was marked in 2012 by calling for an end to child marriage. In 2013 it was entitled "Innovating for Girls' Education". This year it is called "Empowering Adolescent Girls: Ending the Cycle of Violence" which in fact involves violence against girls which have been

covered during the past years.

It is enough to read the international news to be sure the violence is everywhere. Each day the world media reports about rapes, kidnapping, maltreatment, abuse, and girl children that became victims of gender stereotypes. It is so disappointing, that the joint international community cannot fight the violence...



Meet this girl, whose name is NE'. Last year UNFPA in Armenia uniquely marked the International Day of girl child. Together with young volunteers UNFPA selected NE' as a symbol and sent her on a cartoon

### NE' in the Boys' World

journey to the boys' world. "NE' was the daughter of the Water Lady. She was a joyful little river that streamed down between the mountains. When Ne was born, her father took her to his town, Boytown. Boytown was situ-

ated on top of a hill, where there were no springs of water and no river was reaching it. The folk at Boytown was quite amazed when they saw NE', because she was the first girl in a long-long time to be seen in town."

### Beijing +20: Girl children

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action addresses the current challenges on severe discrimination including female genital mutation, child, early and forced marriages, sexual abuse and violation, as well boy child preference in general, which leads to sex selective abortions. The Program highlights the opportunity and importance of girls' education which may lead to prevention of child marriages and early pregnancies as well securing better future for girls.

UNFPA "Marrying too young. End child marriage" is a report published in 2012. The report highlights that girls living in rural areas of the developing world are twice as likely to wed before age 18 as their urban counterparts, and girls with no education are over six times more likely to

do so than those with secondary education. Thus education is the best strategy to struggle against early marriages and an excellent tool to be protected.



The girl children issues were also one of the 12 critical areas of concern highlighted in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action which offer the following steps:

- Eliminate negative cultural attitudes and practices against girls.
- Promote and protect the rights of the girl child and increase awareness of her needs and potential.
- Eliminate discrimination against girls in education, skills, and development training.
- Eliminate economic exploitation of child labor and protect young girls at work.
- Eradicate violence against the girl child.
- Promote girls' awareness of and participation in social, economic, and political life.
- Strengthen the role of the family in improving the status of the girl child.



## Rights and development

## ICPD Beyond 2014



In 2014 the 20th anniversary of International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) was marked in Cairo.

In 1994 ICPD, 179 countries ratified a program of action and adopted responsibilities towards reproductive health and rights provision.

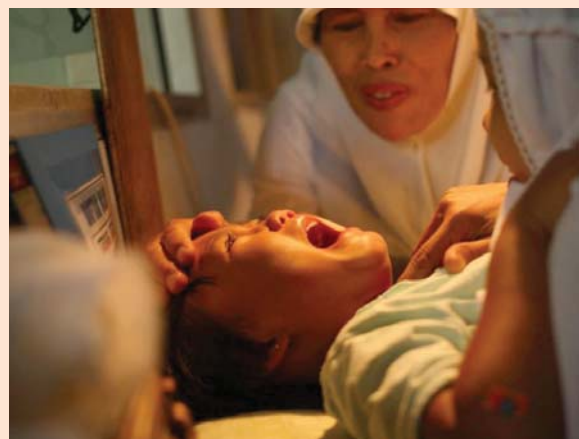
ICPD Beyond 2014 Global Report launched by UNFPA summarizes the outcomes of the Program of Actions.

"In Cairo it was emphasized that women and girls empowerment is the key for ensuring the well-being of families, development and welfare of the states", UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said commenting the new report.

He noted more than 1 billion people have escaped extreme poverty in the past 20 years and child and maternal mortality have been cut by almost one half and yet "much more work remains to be done" Secretary-General summarized while mentioning the matter of inequalities in the world revealed in the report.

Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin, Executive Director of the UN Population Fund added that there is no country today in which women are equal to men in political and economic power. Around 800 women die daily while giving birth; one in three women worldwide report having experienced physical or sexual abuse; and one in three girls in the developing world is married before the age of 18, despite the fact that marriage under 18 is illegal in 158 countries.

## UN against female genital mutilation



UN severely rejected the practice of "female genital mutilation" (FGM) since 1987. Nowadays this dangerous practice is decreasing, yet 30 million girls remain at risk of undergoing FGM in the next decade. According to a recent UNICEF publication more than 130 million girls and women have experienced FGM. It is a ritual surgery during which consists of the removal or damage of female genitalia. It is hard to describe the ritual and actions.

"First and foremost, it is painful, bleeding, shocking, immediate consequence of infections and infertility as well issues related to urinary system. Women undergone FGM surgery is at risk of bleeding, maternal / child morbidity and mortality during childbirth" the UNFPA expert explains. Female genital mutilation is generally performed at early age till 15 years old. How come the mothers approve such a painful and shameful surgery for their own daughters? Three million girls experience FGM annually! The phenomenon is widespread in African, Asian and Near East countries and as a result of immigration, the practice is being spread in Europe and North America. The surgery aims at girls' positive upbringing and is considered as an inseparable step towards their marriage. The most common explanation for FGM is the way of controlling a girl's sexual desire, preserve virginity and purity before their marriage. Furthermore, the UN experts report of frequent cases, when the Medical practitioners are engaged in the practice without any medical indication. Even the usage of the sterilized surgical instrument could increase the risks and dangers for women and girls during their childbirth, have a negative consequence on girls' and women's sexual, reproductive and emotional health.

## United Nations: Child marriage is SLAVERY

No girl has to be forced to marriage. Early marriage violates child rights and robs their childhood and it should be seen as a kind of slavery, constantly keep on saying the human rights international defenders.

Forced to early marriages jeopardize the girls' health and most often cut short their education and destroy potential of prosperity. They become slaves, sexu-

al servants and suffer from physical and psychological violence.

Early marriage often leads to early pregnancy which harms the still developing girls' bodies.

UNFPA scrupulously struggles against early marriages and describes it as an inhumane and barbarian act. The most joyful and important occasion for the woman's life must not turn into a tragedy for millions of girls in the world.

« Can you imagine 8 years old bride marrying a man five times her age -not even the age of the father but the age of her grandfather. The media reports an 8-year-old Yemeni girl has died after sustaining internal bleeding on her wedding night and the human rights defenders call on for detaining the groom. »

## What should be done?

UNFPA calls on the governments to end up the harmful tradition of early marriages of girl children:

Ratification of adequate legislation defining 18 years-old as a legal marriage age for girls, as well as public awareness raising activities on early marriages of girls as a violation of human rights.

Elimination of gender disparities among students and provision of good quality primary and secondary education.

Assistance to women and girls with marital status offering them school education, provision of services and protection mechanisms from domestic violence, sexual and reproductive healthcare.

Elimination of root causes of early marriages including gender based discrimination, law self-esteem of girls, poverty, religious and cultural discriminatory norms.

## Yesterday and today

## In Armenia the legal age for marriage is 18

Last year, the Armenian Family Code has been updated based on which the legal age for marriage for both male and female in Armenia became 18 years old (the minimum legal age for women in Armenia was raised from 17 to 18 years, meanwhile for men the legal age was 18).

Yet, some national minorities residing in Armenia state that the exceptions evolved in the Law permits "an individual may marry at 17 years old if consent from parents, care givers and foster families is ensured. An individual may marry at 16 years old, if consent from parents, care givers and foster families is ensured and the other marrying person reached at least 18 years old".

"As per the proven ethnographic differ-

ent sources till the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century the marital age for girls in Armenia was 11-12 years old. Later during the Soviet Union the Law regulated the minimum age for marriage which was raised to 17 years old" Aghasi Tadevosyan, Ethnographer states, meantime mentions, that early marriage was not necessarily accompanied with sexual life.

"During certain period of time the brides were getting familiarized with the groom's family, they were being treated as the family daughters and were grown up like "family girls". Only after maturation they started their sexual life" the Ethnographer adds.

As per the data of National Statistics Service (NSS) of the Republic of Armenia,

the de-facto median marriage age for women is 24.5 years old; meantime, the median age among men is 28 years old.

The cases of 17 years of women marriages tend to decreasing during the recent three years, the Head of Population Census and Demography Unit at National Statistical Service of RA Karine Kuyumjyan states. In 2011, 73 marriages with involvement of 17 years old women were registered; this number was decreased to 41 in 2013. As well marriages of 18 years old women is decreasing: in 2011 around 524 marriages involving 18 years old women were registered, and in 2013 the number decreased to 338 cases. Note: the legal age for marriage for women was raised to 18 in Armenia in 2012.

## Expert's opinion

## Motherhood in Childhood

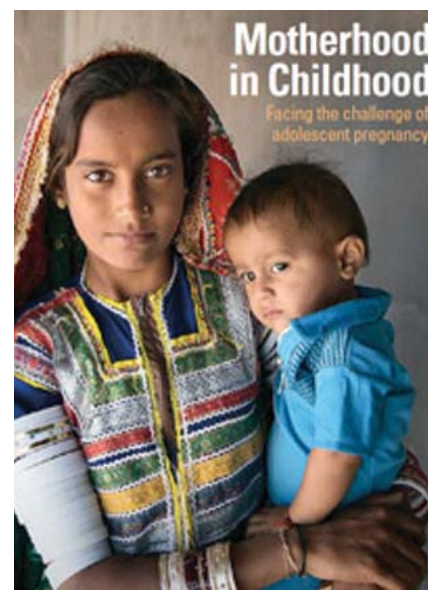
Every day, 20,000 girls below age 18 give birth in developing countries. Girls under 15 account for 2 million of the 7.3 million births that occur to adolescent girls under 18 every year in developing countries. Births to girls also occur in developed countries but on a much smaller scale.

"Motherhood in childhood: facing the challenge of adolescent pregnancy" report (released by UNFPA 2013) offers a new perspective on adolescent pregnancy, looking not only at the girls' behavior as a cause of early pregnancy, but also at the actions of their families, communities and governments.

"Too often, society blames only the girl for getting pregnant. The reality is that adolescent pregnancy is most often not the result of a deliberate choice, but rather the absence of choices, and of circumstances beyond a girl's control. It is a consequence of little or no access to school, employment, quality information and health care", said UNFPA Executive Director, Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin. "

## The voice of girls

"When I was 14 years old, I was being periodically pushed to marry. But I knew it would harm my health and future. The girls that experienced early marriage in our village dropped out the school and some died during childbirth. I want to continue



my schooling and become a midwife" Salamatu Aghali Isuda, a young lady from Nigeria says. She was able to persuade her parents and avoided an early marriage.

## What is the situation in Armenia?

According to the report, in Armenia only 8 per cent of live births is attributable to mothers of age 20, while adolescent birth rate is 28.3 (per 1000 women). The report reveals that abortion rate (abortion per 1000 live births) among women below 20 years old in Armenia is approximately 189.

Most teenage pregnancies happen due to lack of knowledge and information, meantime abortions consequence to secondary infertility.

"UNFPA survey reveals that the threshold of individuals starting sexual life went down and the nuptial / first childbirth age threshold went up in Armenia. It also discloses the importance of sexual behavioral upbringing amongst adolescents since they are the ones of utmost risk" says Garik Hayrapetyan, UNFPA Assistant Representative.

Gayane Avagyan, the Head of the Department of Maternal and Reproductive Health Care, Ministry of Health of RA states that 90% of pregnancy among minors in Armenia is a result of early marriages most often in rural areas. The professional assures that these adolescent girls are not yet ready to carry out child upbringing and education accordingly. "If the woman became a mother, we wish her a happy motherhood, yet she cannot be either biological or psychological mother even we look from the legal aspect", says Gayane Avagyan.

She also mentions that early marriage and pregnancy leads to school dropouts and scarce opportunities for further education which has an immediate impact on child healthcare and upbringing.

The World Health Organization reports 16 million girls ranging the age from 15-19 become mothers annually, another 3.2 million prefer abortions.



Key to success

## DigiTec Princesses

The number of women involved in high tech sphere in Armenia is rather respectable. In the developing countries the number of women involved in the IT sector is only 10%, in Armenia the number exceeds 40%. Although the number of female programmers is growing annually, yet a few women occupy high ranking posts at IT sector. It is rather possible that we will be soon having "network queens", the ones like *Sheryl Sandberg*, Facebook Executive Director, *Marissa Mayer* and *Susan Wojcicki*, Vice Presidents of Google, *Carol Bartz*, executive of Yahoo, *Mitchell Baker*, the Executive Chairwoman of the Mozilla Foundation and Mozilla Corporation, *Esther Dyson*, Yandex member of Board of Directors, *Caterina Fake*, the co-founded the Flickr and Hunch websites.



The interview is with DigiTec Expo-2014 participant girls who study at the Armenian State Architectural University College and are the future programmers.

**14 years old Greta Aleksanyan** is the youngest among the DigiTecExpo 2014 participants. She designed and engineered a robot machine that distinguishes colors. Greta presents her work to the exhibition attendees.

"This is my first concept. I have

attended three-month long robotics engineering classes and this machine was ready on the last third month. I will engineer robot machines later on as well, I recently realized that it became my hobby", Greta tells. She is the future programmer and her parents are very eager for the decision she made.

**17 years old Lusine Maghakyan's** parents are programmers too. Moreover, her elder sisters have already graduated from the University and work as programmers.

"I belong to the first generation of this College; I entered it 6 years ago and only a few of us were girls. I want to become a computer security technician", says Lusine who lives in Hrazdan city. She also made attempts in robotics engineering and this year she presented a Eco Robot machine made of junk. The machine has been created as a result of teamwork. The machine takes funny pictures with the help of convex and concave mirrors effects.

**17 years old Lilit Nazaryan** lives in Yerevan and has already managed to engineer a couple of robot machines. The machines are engineered to perform different tasks. The one presented past year could construct bridges when meeting an obstacle. It was moving forwards without any challenge.

"I wish I could become a cyberneticist or radio-technician. I am a future programmer; I deeply admire and live with mathematics and physics. There was a time I used to play piano, I still like music and currently I collect money for buying a synthesizer" Lilit says.

**16 years old Anna Avetisyan** succeeded in both information technologies as well in diplomacy. She attended trainings and participated in the contests by UN Armenia and currently voluntarily assists the personnel in organizing competitions.

"I have engineered many robot machines and during the past year Expo we demonstrated a Scorpion-like machine, which could hit the object in front and changed its way. The robot machine was mainly designed for children's entertainment".

It was due to Anna's brother who recommended her to study at the College. Of 21 students only 6 are girls in her course, but the number of girls entering the College is increasing annually, the future programmer added.

I do dear to study

### Malala wins Nobel Peace Prize

The 17-year-old girls' rights activist Malala Yousafzai has been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for 2014. Malala Yousafzai is a Pakistani girl who was shot in the head by the Taliban. Miraculously, she survived and recovered and became the symbol of guardian for the right of girls' education. Two years ago Taliban gunmen intended to assassinate her for her desire to study. Today she speaks out for 66 million girls deprived of school education opportunity. The UN program that aims at provision of school education to all girls by 2016 is named after Malala.



### I Want to Go to School...

... I want to finish my university and get my degree. I want to be a good wife who will support both her family and the community. How then will this be possible if I get married at 15?" - Salomy, age 13.

One of the 1750 responses Girls Empowerment Network-Malawi (GENET) received for their "I Will Marry When I Want To" girl-centered campaign to try to reform the minimum marriage-age law in Malawi, which stipulates that girls can legally marry with parental consent at 15.

### Give our Daughters Back



Boko Haram Islamic extremist gunmen militants took the girls from a secondary school in the village near the Cameroon border in April and abducted 270 school girls. The group threatening to arrange marriage the kidnapped girls and sell them off at the market troubled the world and immediate steps were to be taken. The UK and USA special troops with great assistance by Interpol tasked to find the girls were sent to Nigeria. All the efforts were in vain and the girls yet remain in captivity.

Nigeria women organizations also try to push the government to reinforce its mechanisms and initiate steps in finding the girls. Global Fund for Women joined the "Give our daughters back" invocation document which was signed by millions of people.

"Education is the only solution for these girls to overcome the poverty. The incurring attacks kill their hope and desire. Due to terror and sexual violence the families who are not keen for education for their daughters restrain from sending them to school at all", Nigeria women organization activists say. By the way "Boko Haram" means "Western education is forbidden".

### Massive Rapes in Iraq

The international community qualified the cruel violence in Iraq by "Islamic state" (formerly ISIS) extremists as a crime towards humanity. The media reports children's and women's daily rape cases that occur around the country. Kurdish and Yazidi girls after shock and terror committed en masse suicide.

Rudaw TV reported a story about three Yazidi girls, who returned home after being kidnapped and raped. Traumatized by the incident, the girls decided to end their lives by jumping off a Sinjar cliff, where the refugee camp was situated. The mother of one of the girls reportedly told of how in their desperation the girls begged other refugees to kill them, but when no one would comply they killed themselves jumping off the cliff.

"We know what has happened to women in Iraq - a lot of murders and violations - and we have already suffered to an unbearable extent. Women are used as a weapon for retaliation", according to Global Fund for Women ally in Baghdad.



### Refugee Girls Experience Early Marriage

During conflict and crisis, adolescent girls are particularly vulnerable to early marriage. UNICEF experts report that the number of marriages of Syrian refugee women includes girls under the age of 18. Early marriage is viewed by parents as the best way of salvation for their daughters' lives.

A woman's story

## "My mother threw me away like a junk"...

"Churchkhela , Churchkhela ..." during one or two minutes the voice of a lady could be heard throughout the beach. I stood up and came close to her and discovered that she was selling sweet sujukh. She had Armenian face lineament - hooked nose, black eyes. She looked at me, immediately predicted my question and said "I am an Armenian and I am from Artik region".

It is already 12 years Gayane Avagyan (the name is changed) lives in Russian Taganrog city. Here she is famous for making best sujukh.

"It is already 10 years I am doing this business. During the summer times I sell sujukh on the beach, during winter times I sell it in the market and stores. I have no complaints on my income".

Gayane was glad for meeting Armenian and started to questions us about Armenia. As a journalist I immediately started my interview and forgot that I was on my leave. We talked about her livelihoods, earning, family, children, the language they speak, etc. My last question made Gayane's gloomy and she left without saying a word. The friend of mine criticized me for assaulting and making Gayane feel uncomfortable with my questions. She didn't show up on the beach the next two days.

After a couple of days the same voice spread on the beach. I stood up immediately and run towards the voice familiar to me. She blushed when noticing me and I started to apologize for insulting her. She listened to me and unexpectedly added "wait a little bit, until I sell sujukh. I will come and we will talk then".

"I was a 17 years old girl and was studying at the Pedagogical College after Bakunts. I wanted to become a teacher, but ... I used to live in a rented apartment in Yerevan. During the summer vacation I

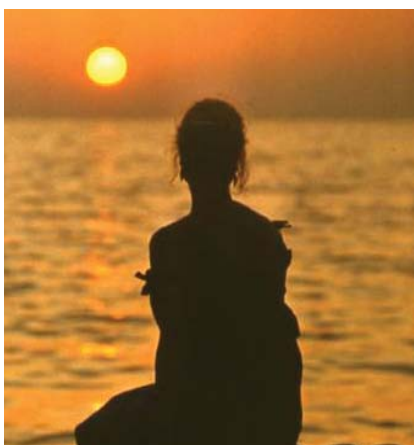
went back to my native village...I wish I didn't go. I attracted the neighboring boy who was a combine operator, the best combine operator in our village (she started to laugh). He was following me wherever I would go, he could stand on the street for hours to see me. I also liked him, he had very beautiful eyes. Sometimes later we started to meet secretly because the village people would gossip if they knew of our relations. He even was coming to Yerevan to meet me and during one dating in Yerevan we drank a bit and ... my life changed since then...

I got pregnant ... the tough and black days began for me. The boy abandoned me saying the following: "if you were a good girl, you wouldn't have allowed me. I must take a virgin to my house". In fact I gave my virginity to him. I didn't know what to do, what to think, what to say my parents. They would have killed or throw me to the street, but something was to be done".

Despite everything, Gayane decides to tell the reality to her mother. When hearing the "shameful" fact, the later offers the girl to choose between two options: either to be thrown to the street or get rid of the child.

"You dishonored our family and you were not able to study in Yerevan", the mother said.

Gayane makes a fatal step and gets rid of the baby. Later the family forced



Gayane to move and live in Russian Federation, Taganrog city where her distant relative was living in. This way the "shameful trace" was wiped off the family name.

"I believed I could change my life if I lived far from everyone. My Taganrogi relative knew my story and in order to protect me from "falling from one hand to another" she decided to marry me to an old widower, whose two children remained without care after his wife passed away. I married him hoping to have a baby and get released from my feeling of guilt and remorse. But perhaps my sin was immense and God couldn't pardon me. I was unable to get pregnant anymore and was deprived of enjoying motherhood".

Gayane takes care after her husband's two children as their mother but never forgets of her unborn child.

"I keep relations with my sister only and I don't even want to hear anything about my mother, who threw me away like a junk".



Flash mob



“Have you got a daughter?”

Within a short period of time the “Do you have a daughter” Flash mob campaign against sex-selective abortions joined number of Armenian active users on Facebook. The mothers and fathers have been actively sharing photos of their girl children this way protested sex selective abortions.

The initiator of flash mob “Against selective abortions” in Facebook social network Aramazd Ghalamqaryan explained us how the idea of flash mob started and spread.

“The occasion was debated out of social network, once we had a dispute with my classmates in the café when we were discussing the statistics. Then I posted my daughter’s photo in Facebook but I did not expect such a reaction. My friends began to share and actively participate in the flash mob”.

Aramazd can’t understand the reason why people perform sex selective abortions, but he believes that if even one person steps back from her decision

it worth starting a flash mob. The father of four children is against banning abortions or restriction for doctors revealing the sex of a fetus before the 30th week of pregnancy: more importantly, we need to change people’s mindset and way of thinking.

“People will find ways and approaches, through bribing the doctors or something else, if abortion is forbidden. In fact we challenge to find the right way to change the people’s mindset. People should see someone else’s role model, good example and experience and have a moment to think it over” says Aramazd and adds that despite the negative topic, people’s reaction was very positive to flash mob.

The voices of the many

Often it sounds like a war to a woman  
“All alone against the whole world”

“When my grandmother gave birth to her fifth daughter, village women came to her and recommended to take and “turn the child down”. Those days, if people didn’t want that child, they took the newborn to the wood and turned the baby face down to the ground. The baby was drowning to death. On her way to the wood my granny could see many “turned down” children.

This incident happened sometimes in 60s of the past century. The researcher Anna Voskanyan heard the story in Vanadzor told by a young woman, who was also forced to experience sex selective abortion. Her husband and mother-in-law were against the second to be born daughter. This is only one of the cases for Anna Voskanyan’s research on “Sex selective abortion as an expression to gender discrimination in the family”. The research was conducted in Yerevan and Vanadzor cities, as well in 3 villages of Lori marz. The research was supported by Center for Gender and Leadership Studies at Yerevan State University.

As a result Ms. Voskanyan concluded that sex-selective abortions are rather widespread in the Armenian reality and it is the easiest and most accessible method for family planning.

Meantime, abortion is not always being done at the healthcare facility and women can perform it at their houses with the help of drugs, medications or traditional methods. As a rule these cases are not registered and thus the statistics can’t in fact reveal the real situation”.

The interviewed women presented the researcher only 11 terrifying ways for in-house abortions, starting from hormonal medications to hitting the pregnant woman’s belly. The mentioned abortion methods especially in the rural areas show the real danger and harm to women’s healthcare.

Boy child preference in the family is a result of several circumstances and the main precondition is “continuation of the family” as the baby boy usually carries on the family name and transfers it to his sons.

“The interviewed people stated that the

expression “good boy should have a son” is rather dominating in the society. Accordingly, fame, positive character and masculinity are associated with the son’s birth” the research reveals. The data gathered during the research also reveals that forcing women to sex-selective abortions is rather widespread phenomena; furthermore the pressure is carried out through physical and psychological violence, threatening, blackmailing.

“In such cases, the woman’s parents and relatives are not always supportive, and sometimes it becomes a war “all alone against the whole world” adds the sociologist.

“Overall, these pressures and forcing can lead to one phenomenon which could be called “serial abortions”. Often cases women perform numerous sex-selective abortions until they get pregnant with a baby boy. During the interviews I met people who had four, seven and even 11 sex-selective abortions. That is to say women jeopardize their health, in some cases endanger their lives to satisfy the demand of having a baby boy” concludes Anna Voskanyan.

The old and the new

“Happy for the newborn baby boy, how about the baby girl ...”

Sex-selective abortions date back in the past. Women who delivered only girls and were not able to have a son for the family were outrageous especially in the rural areas. 85 years old Araksia granny tells how the villagers got rid of their baby girls in Togh village, Goris area, and how shameful should the woman feel for not giving birth to a son.

“People were happy for every newborn baby boy. The ones, who delivered girls, were recommended to take the baby and turn her down onto her face. How could the parent perform it?” granny Araksia tells. She also adds that when several daughters were already born in the families, the mother-in-laws were putting pillows onto the face of the newborn and all this was happening away from the baby’s mother.

“There was a hypothesis, that no matter who

the son becomes, he would be the owner of the house, the father of several generations. The one, who delivered fifth or sixth daughters, the family just had to get rid of the baby. Those days the life was very tough: there was nothing to eat or wear. It was mainly elders of the family who were against birth of baby girls. They used to repeat that the girls were not the family name carriers. But if not girls, how could boys have sons? Those days both boys and girls had their responsibilities in the family, yet girls were not tasked for much and hard work. They were allowed to do their lessons and housework”, says Araksia granny.

Those days, she says boys were not sent for education, and they assisted in cattle farming and hay harvesting. Araksia granny notices, that much has been changed nowadays and daughters are more loved by parents.



“Boy grows up, marries and leaves the house. The daughter as well marries and leaves the house with her beloved husband and do not take care of the parents. The youth is changed, live with an ease, do whatever they want to do”, says Araksia Granma.

Conference



The Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin is concerned

On September 12, His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians; presided over the opening of the conference entitled “Family, Society and the Church - Contemporary Challenges”. The conference was organized jointly by the Office of Religious Conceptual Affairs of the Mother See in cooperation with World Vision, the WCC Round Table Charitable Foundation and the United Nations Population Fund of Yerevan (UNFPA). It was attended by clergyman, academics, and representatives of relevant sectors of the Armenian government and non-governmental organizations

The Conference touched upon the sex-selective abortions as well and the

Church expressed its view on the concept.

“Abortion, and especially the one

on the basis of sex-selection is a guilt and is condemned for the mother, who voluntarily makes this step, for the forcing father and fami-

ly as well the doctor who performs it”, says His Grace Bishop Bagrat Galstanian, Director of the Religious Conceptual Issues Office.

Retrospective

Browsing Raffi’s article entitled “The Armenian woman”

The “women’s issue” elucidating article by a prominent Armenian novelist Raffi was published in 1879 in “Mshak” Newspaper

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...If the boy was born, his bed was being surrounded by a group of oldwives, who invested their entire magical arts to protect the mother and the newborn child from “the evil”, “the devil”, “demon”, “Satan”, etc. The baby’s bed was being bounded with mascots, amulets, ornaments and even priest’s “magical prayer”. The girls were deprived of this attention and the village people didn’t even look at her as a natural phenomenon but instead had numerous prepositions about her.

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“Nothing would happen to the girl – say the villagers – if you put her down the mill stone, she would come out from it”. This is the reason she is often left to the own fate. Care after the girls and boys are different starting their naissance. She is often left alone, tied in the cradle, and the mother doesn’t take her to the field. The poor cries the all day long, yells and shouts unless loses her voice. It rarely happens that the neighbor woman comes to help. It also happens that the little baby has no cradle and she is left to sleep on a piece of fabric on the ground. Suddenly she wakes up, starts yelling but the mother is away. She starts crawling hoping to find the mother and reaches the edge of tonir. One movement is enough for her to fell into the flaming hole...I had a chance to see half burnt children or adults, whose hands and face are covered with scars. If asked, they respond that fell into the tonir during childhood. In majority of cases children were burnt to death. Whatever the girl’s death might be, it brings an internal satisfaction to her parents. The additional burden is removed from the family”.

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“When the child turns is one year anniversary, the mother takes her to the fieldwork and the baby likes it a lot. She sits on the grass under a tree, and with her calm and exciting eyes she watches her working mother... Every time the baby cries, the mother tries to make her calm through slapping and repeating “hush”, “hush”. Once I asked the mother the reason for severely biting the child. Callously she responded “I bit her so she shuts up”. Although the child was crying even more from pain, but the mother didn’t want to understand that it was due to biting. But soon, the girl gets accustomed with her situation: since her childhood the girl knows she has no right to demand calm and sweet attitude towards herself, because she is a girl ...”.

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