

Fact Sheet

Telling Figures



There are 776.5 thousand children aged 0-19 years in Armenia, among whom 364.5 thousand, or 47% are girls.

37.3% of our children, including girls, live in poverty, among whom 3.3% live in extreme poverty. Every second child is poor in large families with three and more children (47.5%).

In Armenia per one family that wants a girl, there are six that prefer boys.

In 2014, 20,287 girls and 22,869 boys were born in Armenia, whereas the natural sex ratio at birth is estimated to be 102-106 boys to 100 girls.

About 47.5% of children in both public and private orphanages are girls.

In 2014, 5.4% of young girls among the 16-19 year-olds were married, and 0.1% were divorced.

In 2014, 500 girls in the age group 15-19 had an abortion.

As of December 31, 2014, 31.4% of disabled children were girls.

In 2014, the most popular names for newborn girls were Nareh, Marie, Milena and Maneh.

Better Future for the Children



On September 25, UNICEF Goodwill Ambassadors Shakira and Angélique Kidjo celebrated adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals with their performances at the 70th session of the United Nations General Assembly. Shakira took to the stage to sing John Lennon's "Imagine", an acclaimed dedication to peace: "You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one... Just imagine a better future for our children."



She dedicated this song, which has become the anthem of UNICEF, to Syrian refugee children, and urged world leaders and all the people worldwide to find a fair solution to the current crisis. She emphasized that "children should not pay for wars".

"I remember John Lennon's words: 'Imagine all the people sharing all the world. Why aren't we able to share this world? What hinders us?' questions the singer.

The renowned African singer Angélique Kidjo, a UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador since 2002, performed quite an emotional version of her song "Africa".

Woman & politics

Sex-selective abortion outlawed: Recommendations to introduce stricter laws



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WomenNet.am

Where are the girls?



The sex-at-birth ratio (SRB) in Armenia has been skewed since early 1990s, and today it comprises 114-115 boys to 100 girls. It is twice higher, than the accepted normal biological ratio, and is one of the highest in the world, third only to China (118) and Azerbaijan (116).

Birth masculinity tends to prevail, and the indicator ranges from 111 to 124 in different regions of Armenia. For instance, today in Aragatsotn and Gegharkunik it is higher, than in China (118). The only difference is that in Armenia sex-selective abortions are opted for mainly at third-order and successive pregnancies, and in this case the SRB level is 160:100, probably the highest ever reported in the world.

Photo: © Lilian Galstyan

International Day of the Girl Child

The United Nations officially celebrates October 11 as the International Day of the Girl Child (Day of the Girl). Many may question why the United Nations specifically highlights girls. The major goal is to have the interna-

tional community recognize the unique challenges girls face worldwide. These challenges differ from a place to another: somewhere it is about early marriages and births, in another it is the lack of access to education, and in the third, it is

about female genital mutilation...

As to Armenia, perhaps the major challenge girl children face is sex-selective abortion, in the result of which about 1500 girls are not born every year.

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INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE GiRL

"The Power of the Adolescent Girl: Vision for 2030"



This was the theme UNICEF chose to celebrate the Day of the Girl. It ties directly with the new sustainable development agenda approved by the international community in September of this year, which sets development targets to be reached by 2030. This means that in 15 years the generation of girls born in 2015 will be adolescents, and it is already today that we need to think of ensuring a better future for them.

Today there are 600 million girls of 10 to 19 years old in the world, and each of them has an incredible potential. However, there is a serious concern that this potential may be ignored and underrepresented on the international development agenda. Many of these girls are deprived of the right to education; they are persecuted and even killed for daring to learn.

Each day 7000 adolescent girls are forced to marry at different corners of the planet. The major reason of death among them, especially in developing countries, is pregnancy and childbirth complications.

UNICEF has called upon UN members to pay special attention to the challenges of adolescent girls through investing in their present and future. This will indeed have a significant impact on making the world a better place by 2030.

If during their adolescence girls are provided with quality education and other opportunities for healthy lifestyle and development, they will have the necessary potential to change the world as future mothers, teachers, doctors, entrepreneurs, businesswomen, politicians and other professionals.

Goal 4

Quality Education for All



The fourth goal of sustainable development is to:
- ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning.

According to UNICEF data, more than 140 million children and adolescents of school age do not have access to education.

On September 26, global leaders and prominent educators got together in New York at the Global Education First Initiative's (GEFI) high-level event, organized at the UN headquarters. The major theme of discussion was the United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's initiative under the mentioned slogan.

The 18-year-old famous Pakistani human rights advocate Malala Yousafzai, the Nobel Prize winner for 2015, and a victim of an attempted assassination by Taliban for advocating for women's right to education, addressed the heads of states with a plea for ensuring an opportunity for every child to exercise their right to education. "No child in the world should be deprived of an education opportunity, even in war conditions," Malala said.

"Education under Fire" UNICEF Report



More than 13 million children in nine countries of the Middle East and North Africa are prevented from attending school by surging conflicts and political upheaval, alerts a new report released by the United Nations Children's Fund in July of this year.

"A region which - until just a few short years ago - had the goal of universal education well within reach today faces a disastrous situation... Attacks on schools and education infrastructure - sometimes deliberate - are one key reason why many children do not attend classes," the UNICEF report says.



The road to school is a target @

"When the kid hears a sharp banging, he runs home terrified. He thinks it's hostile shooting. They shoot every day, every hour, night and day, non-stop. Now you'd rarely hear a rifle firing. They've started using mostly mortars and machine guns (Degtyaryov-Shpagin Large-Calibre)", residents of Chinari village of Tavush region, bordering with Azerbaijan, told "Aravot" daily.

According to them, the reanimated adversary targets the village kindergarten, the houses at the front line and people in little groups that get together at the village centre.

The school in Chinari has not closed down, and though frightened, children still keep going to school. Not a single kid has missed a class because of bombardments. Concerned with their safety, several windows at school which face the border, are covered with stones and "the sunlight does not get into classrooms". Even at daytime students are compelled to study in the electric light.

"The road to school is a target and it has become quite dangerous to go to school. They quickly run to the school and back," the villagers recount.

Where are the girls?

The findings of the UNFPA-commissioned study "Sex imbalances at birth in Armenia: Demographic evidence and analysis" show that if son preference continues at the expense of girl infanticide, by 2060:

- Armenia will have lost about 93,000 potential mothers;
- There will be about 2,000 unborn girls annually;
- The population of Armenia will decrease by additional 80,000 people (Currently, this is the sum of births in Armenia for two years.) and other things being equal, it will comprise about 2.6 million.

Sex imbalances at birth have been reflected in the number of girls attending first grade at Yerevan public schools for the academic year 2014-2015: among the entire group of first graders they comprise only 47%. In Gegharkunik and Vayots Dzor this figure is 44%, in Shirak and Lori 45%, and in Armavir and Aragatsotn 46%. The sex ratio among first graders is not skewed only in Tavush (49.6%), Syunik and Kotayk (48%).



Photo: © Lilian Galstyan

«Unless this tendency is stopped, the most active male population of marriageable age – 20-39, will soon face the challenge of building a family, and not being able to find a wife in Armenia, they will be compelled to migrate, thus promoting emigration. Moreover, this will result in other issues as well, such as lonely ageing, increase in criminal sexual conduct, etc. – ed.", clarifies an international expert of demographic issues Dr. Christophe Guilmoto.

Three Reasons

According to experts, there are three major reasons for prenatal sex selection:

- Son preference in families, which is explained by the prevailing gender inequality and a less important role of women in our social perceptions. The son is believed to continue the family lineage and to be a deserving heir to land and other property. The girl is valued less in this regard and she does not fully meet these expectations, as according to her parents she is to leave their home;
- Modern technologies of prenatal diagnosis, which allow parents to know the sex of their unborn child. It may sound sarcastic, but it is a fact that modern technologies today contribute to the preservation of backward traditions and stereotypes;
- Tendency to have one or two children in young families, which in Armenia is largely explained by social and economic reasons.

How to explain son preference?

The research study "Missing Women" in the South Caucasus: Local perceptions and proposed solutions" conducted by the Caucasus Research Resource Center Armenia, provides some answers to this question.

Surveys within the study have revealed the following reasons:

- Support and care of elderly parents (financial support, co-residence);
- Men are more effective in solving routine issues, than women;
- Girls are often perceived to be a source of more burden (It is difficult to follow their life; Bringing up a girl is more expensive, whereas the future is less predictable and thus worrisome).

The majority of respondents have emphasized that after marriage the girl belongs to another family: "... You tend to feel quite tense at your daughter's place. You're always worrying that her husband can tell you that you eat too much." Still, continuing the family lineage is believed to be even more important, than getting some tangible support from the son. There are even marginal perceptions, such as parents being

dubbed "childless" by the community if they have daughters only.

Son preference is largely explained also by the husband's wish for a son, whereas wives tend to obey the wishes of their husbands timidly. The opinion of the mother-in-law can be critical as well, and it is defined by the imperative norms of their social environment: "Only a true man will have a son..."

"Women are abused by their husbands and mothers-in-law, and they are forced to do an abortion. Annihilation of violence will result in decreasing the number of sex-selective abortions," one of the respondents told the research team.

Facebook Confessions

"Whoever would learn that I'm again pregnant with a girl, would immediately react with a pitiful "Wow"... I would just laugh this off"



Photo: © Lilian Galstyan

Gohar Ghumashyan: "At first I would be really offended, but now I'm used to it and I've grown resistant. I have three daughters. The third pregnancy was a nightmare. Whoever would learn that I'm again pregnant with a girl, would immediately react with a pitiful "Wow"... I would just laugh this off."

Ani Chidemyan: "During the mid-pregnancy ultrasound to identify the sex of the baby, the doctor turned the screen towards my husband and said, "Even humidity can give birth to a girl; yours is a boy!"... It's surprising that a doctor's values can be so distorted..."

Ruzanna Zazyan: "I'm just curious: if there were no girls, how would these boys be born? Who would give birth to them?"

Susanna Makaryan: "I already have a daughter, and I'm expecting the second baby. I don't ever think about the baby's sex. I just want it to be healthy. I will be happy to give birth yet to another baby girl and I don't feel embarrassed or sad for that. If you've noticed, today girls look after their parents better, than boys do."

Zara Hovhannisyan: "I have twin daughters and when I was pregnant with the third baby, everyone kept saying, "Of course! You've already made all the plans to have a boy" Whereas not

only did we not make any plans, but all the data were confirming that I would have a third daughter. During the last ultrasound, the doctor who knew both me and my twins quite well, turned to me and said: "Well, I believe you already know the baby's sex, right?" When she heard my negative answer, she was shocked: "How come? Are you seriously claiming that after two daughters you didn't know that you were going to have a boy?" What I'm trying to say is many would get rid of such wonderful girls, and here I am, ready for the third one. Today it's already my three daughters who're begging me for the fourth sister!"

Natasha Harutyunyan: "When I did not know of the baby's sex yet, everybody was certain that I would definitely have a boy... I did not care. Though honestly, I even preferred a girl. However, all my family was seriously expecting a boy. Already in the fourth month of my pregnancy, I learned that I'd have a baby girl... When the doctor told me that I was going to give birth to a girl, I was so overwhelmingly happy that the doctor got seriously surprised: "You're the first pregnant woman, who's genuinely happy having learned that the baby is a girl, especially the first born." Baby's sex is not important. What really matters is this incredible wonder happening within you..."

By the power of the law

How to save the unborn girls of Armenia?

● Outlaw prenatal sex discernment: This cannot be an effective measure as it is pregnant with significant risks of corruption. There will always be doctors ready to predict the sex of the baby for money. Instances of corrupt practices have been recorded lately, even in absence of such an impediment.

● Moreover, a legal ban on sex-selective abortions is considered unacceptable, because it restricts the rights and freedoms of women. Second, it may compel women to seek non-medical methods of termination of their pregnancies, which can result in serious health issues. Ban on abortions in the Soviet Union provides enough evidence for such a claim.

● Financial incentives offered for giving birth to and raising a girl do not yield significant results as well, and India's experience, where such financial benefits have been introduced, is a telling example. In addition, it provokes discrimination against baby boys.

● To increase the birth rate is a challenge for any country. According to experts, in order to gain even a one tenth increase, considerable investments are required.

● Raising public awareness of the issues through traditional and social media is a necessary prerequisite for addressing the mentioned challenge, especially considering the fact that the root causes of sex selection are largely based on social stereotypes. Thus, it is essential to transform the existing mentality, and subsequently affect people's behaviour.

● Research findings on prenatal sex selection in Armenia, as well as experts in the field suggest that enhancing gender equality and expanding opportunities for women are critical for prevention of sex selection. Still, people in Armenia are sceptical about the causal relations between sex-selective abortions and gender inequality. Many even side with such a choice, as they consider man to be the protector of the country and family, especially when so many adult men leave the country. The counterargument offered by experts is that in order to have future soldiers, first we should have mothers.

Sex-Selective abortion will be banned

The new bill on Reproductive Health and Rights, approved by the RA government in July of this year is a result of long and arduous research, which recommends amendments in order to prevent prevailing sex-selective abortions. It will be enforced only upon the adoption of the National Assembly. The bill is already on the agenda and will undergo hearings in the near future.

Ban is enforced by law

According to the Minister of Health Armen Mouradyan, the bill recommends imposing a legal ban of sex-selective abortion, and ensure additional legal provisions and mechanisms for bridging the gaps identified in this regard.

Thus, in the rationale provided for the suggested amendment, it is recommended to revise Article 10 of the existing law completely, and clearly define the ban on sex-selective abortion, infringement of which will be regarded as illegal and will entail penalty warranted by law.

Three days to make a final decision

According to Gayane Avagyan, Head of the Maternity and Reproductive Health Protection Unit of the Ministry of Health, there are several important clauses in the bill: "Though the woman can do an abortion until the 12th week of pregnancy at her choice, now she needs to apply to the hospital in writing. She is offered three days to think over her initial decision and confirm both her wish and choice. In the meantime, the doctor needs to provide psychological and social support and try to identify the reason for the termination of pregnancy. The doctor should do everything possible to show the woman that she carries a growing fetus in her uterus, which already has a right to life, a heartbeat and body parts that have already developed. With the doctor explaining such details and the mother seeing her future child, many mothers will shun an abortion," Gayane Avagyan says, adding that essentially, this bill attempts not only to decrease the number of sex-selective abortions, but the number of abortions in general. However, she emphasizes that the bill does not restrict women's right to abortion up to the 12th week of pregnancy, when it is not sex biased.

It should be noted that the wait period for the final decision on abortion varies. For instance, in Germany it is three days, in the Netherlands - five, in Italy and France - seven, in Belgium - six, and in the US from 18 hours to three days. Until now no wait time has been defined in Armenia.



Doctors will be fined

The recommended amendments clearly define the doctor's responsibilities both before and after the abortion. In parallel to the mentioned bill, respective amendments are anticipated in the Code of the Republic of Armenia on Administrative Infringements, according to which doctors who will have infringed the new legal provisions, will be held legally responsible.

According to the recommended changes in the bill, doctors who violate the law would face potential fines of 40-50 to 80-100 times the minimum monthly salary if they fail to make the mandatory registration, provide assistance and wait time.

Should parents have a right to determine the sex of the baby?

The Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine prohibits prenatal sex selection. Article 14 reads: "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."

Expert opinion

Women do not always confess...

According to the statistical yearbook "Individual and Public Health" recently published by the National Institute of Health (NIH), there were 8.379 abortions in 2014 of which only 2.212 were medically recommended. The other 6.040 were performed upon the woman's request.

Experts claim that for the recent 20 years the number of abortions in Armenia has decreased 3-4 times, and it is explained by a number of factors, such as the decreasing number of the population, the related decrease in the number of births, and the overall improved public awareness on the issue.

To our question whether 8.379 abortions per 45.713 births annually are normal or skewed, Gayane Avagyan, Head of Maternity and Reproductive Health Protection Unit, Ministry of Health,

reminds us that in 1980-90 we used to have 20-30 thousands abortions annually. There were even years, when one abortion would be registered per one birth. "Today we have only one abortion per five births, and this is considered a normal ratio," she notes.

However, we need to mention that in the yearbook we have data only on recorded abortions, i.e. the data do not include the cases of abortion which were done without medical supervision, such as induced abortions with Cytotec, a pill largely in use

recently, but banned by the Ministry of Health and thus not available over the counter since the last year.

As to how many women terminate their pregnancies because of sex selection, is not clear. Obviously, such a figure does not exist, because women do not always reveal the real reasons for abortion. "The doctor doing the abortion cannot know why the woman has really made that decision. Was it an economic, financial, personal or another reason? To their question why they want to terminate pregnancy, the usual answer is, "I don't have sufficiently normal conditions", says Gayane Avagyan, noting that the Ministry can obtain relevant information only through targeted research.

I dream

We have spoken to students at Yerevan School #115:



Lusine Babajanyan, 13

When a badminton club opened at school, I joined it on my mom's advice. Then I fell in love with this sport. I have participated in various contests and tournaments. I have won several prizes and I've decided to continue as a professional athlete.

Taguhi Tagvoryan, 14

I've been attending singing classes as a very young kid. I love dancing. I have performed with "Tsiatsan" band, and we've toured a lot. My dream is to become a singer, or an actress. I see myself on the Armenian stage.

Julietta Hakobyan, 15

I want to join the police, like my dad, and my family is happy with my decision. I definitely want to get into the police academy.

Mariam Tabatadze, 14

A couple of years ago all I wanted is to become a model. I really loved when girls would walk the runway, showcase these beautiful dresses, but now I've had a change of heart. I want to become an economist and perhaps find a job at a bank. I want to study abroad and get quality education.

Ani Khachatryan, 15

When I was little, my brother used to practise archery. I would look at him and dream of growing up real fast. I was nine when I also started practising archery: I've ranked second at a national tournament. I've competed in various tournaments and have won several prizes. I've not decided yet what I want to do in life.

Meline Nikoghosyan, 15

I'm going to a music school. I play piano, and sing in a band, but in the future I see myself in diplomatic corps. I want to study international relations. I want to learn many languages and I want to do something nice for our country for it to be a nice and prosperous place.

Lilit Manukyan, 15

Most of all I love French. I have participated in the Francophonie Days in Armenia and in various French Olympiads. I definitely want to study at Sorbonne University, become a diplomat and work at the Embassy.

Mary Galstyan, 12

I'm a member of the "Young Defenders of Homeland". I'm from the girls' regiment. I love military. I'm really good at disassembling and assembling an automatic rifle. I don't want to leave for anywhere. I want to stay and live in my country, and I imagine my future in Armenia. I wish girls could be recruited to the army as well. When you read the epic "Daredevils of Sasoun", you come across many examples of brave women who have defended their homes. I was the president of the students' council, but I'm really tight with time now. I'm cramming for entrance exams as I want to enter the department of philology at the Yerevan State University. In future I see myself as a university professor.

Gayane Evoyan, 13

I love playing piano, reading and watching movies. I want to become a psychologist, to try to understand and help people, so that they can have less worries and can live more happily.

Elmira Gulkanyan, 13

I prefer chemistry and biology. Unfortunately, I'm not very good at those, but I don't care, I'm still very interested in both, especially since I'm determined to become a paediatrician, help all the kids, so that they stay healthy. I don't want people to leave our country. If each of us does something good, our country will become a very good place. I am from Berdavan. It's been only couple of years that we've moved to Yerevan. My brother serves in the army now. I very much want peace! I want soldiers to return home safe and healthy. I want people to live in peace in my country.

Two Stories

Gohar was intentionally pushed to do hard work to induce miscarriage ...

Abortion was fatal for the 26-year-old Gohar (the real name is changed). It is two years already that this woman has been seeing different doctors. No matter what treatment the doctors recommend, how hard they try to keep the fetus safe, they fail. In the fifth or sixth month of pregnancy Gohar miscarries, and this has happened several times. Doctors tell her that the reason most probably is her abortion.

“I honestly did not want to do an abortion: I was both scared and thinking that if I became pregnant, it was the God's will. However, my mother-in-law was the one to make a decision both for me and my child. I would have perhaps fought with her, I would have objected, but my husband was not on my side,” Gohar says.

This woman living in Gegharkunik region tells that she has two daughters, and both her husband and his parents have been against having even the second daughter. Gohar says that she was just lucky to see a doctor late in her pregnancy, when the doctor simply refused an abortion.

Gohar says she does not get to see her husband for months. Most of the year he is in Russia as a labour migrant. After the birth of their second daughter, Mariamik, Gohar got pregnant again.

The doctors said the baby was again a girl. This time Gohar failed to fight for the life of the baby: she had to terminate the pregnancy compelled by her husband and mother-in-law.

“They told me, ‘Just like your mom, you give birth only to girls, but we have dignity: we can't just have three daughters! How can we bring them up? This home needs a man: shouldn't we have an heir to continue our lineage?’ Now, any time I get pregnant, the fetus dies and I have a miscarriage. I feel guilty - who knows, perhaps this is how God punishes me,” says Gohar.

Gohar is certain that regardless of whether there is a law against sex-selective abortions, or no, her mother-in-law and her likes will do anything possible, even illegally, to prevent the birth of a baby girl if they do not want one. “When my mother-in-law wanted

me to get rid of my Mariamik, she would intentionally push me to do hard work requiring physical exertion to harm my baby. For instance, she would ask me to carry the heavy sacks of potatoes to the cellar. She would make me wash all the windows at the house every month, and mind you, we have a big one! She would make me stand on the ladder and wash the lamps on the ceiling, but one of the rungs was loose ... She would proudly recall how she had got rid of her baby. She would boast that ‘I would lift the heavy container with pickles and move it from

one place to another; I would jump from a high place to miscarry, and eventually I did!”

According to Gohar, they wanted a boy, but ended up with two girls. The mother-in-law would grumble every day: “How are we going to marry those off? How can we provide dowry for them?” “It's as if she speaks of her enemy's kids, and not her grandchildren. She doesn't miss an opportunity to reproach me: ‘You're draining this hearth! Wish your uterus would dry up!’ And my husband seconds her: ‘For whom do I work so much? Shouldn't I have a boy?’”



I cannot understand

I am simply a mother

A mother of three daughters, the 31-year-old Lusine says that were she to get pregnant again and were it to be a girl for the fourth time, she would not terminate the pregnancy: “It's nonsense to claim that the son is the one to take care of his parents at the old age or continue the family lineage. These are just stereotypes of ignorant people. We are two sisters and we don't have a brother, but we are taking care of our parents better, than a son would have done. It's about education and bringing up. Having a daughter is as much joy as having a son. I have never understood women who being women would not want to have a girl. How can a woman terminate the life of another woman?”

Lusine says that giving birth to her third daughter has almost cost her life. The delivery was very hard. The pregnancy had been similarly difficult and the doctors had even recommended an abortion not to threaten her life, because she had heart problems. “We already knew that we were going to have a third daughter, but neither my husband nor I ever thought of abortion only because we already had two daughters. My husband has never even hinted that he has no son, how shameful that is, or such stupid things. We are happy parents of three daughters, and if I get pregnant again, and it appears to be a girl, I will not do an abortion. Eventually, as a mother you simply give life to a human being and why should it matter what their sex is?”



“No greetings are due when a baby girl is born”

Anahit is from a village in Syunik. She asked us not to publish the name of the village. She says everyone knows her story, so they will know her and she will become a topic of discussion and gossip. This 34-year-old woman has three children: two daughters and a son. She recalls that her first child was a girl, and everyone was happy in the family. They thought the eldest would help with house chores, and then a baby boy would be born. However, the birth of the second daughter changed Anahit's life. She was to go through a rough patch.

“It was 12 years ago, in October. I remember it like this day! It was incredibly cold, when I gave birth to my second daughter. When my family learnt of the second girl, I can't even describe what their reactions were... especially my mother's-in-law”, Anahit remembers.

According to her, everybody was certain that the second child would be a boy. However, it was her mother-in-law who could not come to terms with the birth of the second granddaughter.

“My mother-in-law did nothing to hide her disappointment. It is customary to visit a new mother at the

maternity ward, to bring her food. She never paid a single visit. She never sent any food. My mother would visit me every day, sometimes my husband as well.”

Anahit notes that when neighbours in the village would congratulate her mother-in-law with the birth of the new grandchild, she would reply, “No greetings are due when a baby girl is born”.

“When I was to be discharged, I could hardly keep from crying. I did not want to go back home. I felt like I am guilty for everything. When I came home with the baby in my hands, my mother-in-law did not even approach us to see the child. Two days later she took the

washing tub outside, for me to wash the baby's cloths in the cold. My husband told her, ‘It's just two days she's given birth. Why have you taken out the washing tub?’ and she goes like, ‘So what? Let her do her washing here.’ She wanted to punish me, and I would keep saying, ‘Am I guilty that a girl has been born?’ And I'm not an exception; there are many cases like mine”.

It has been 12 years since then. Anahit says that she has told her daughter about her grandmother's position, and that she has not been a desirable child.

“When my daughter remembers this story, she starts crying. She says, ‘You don't love me’. I'm asking my mother-in-law, ‘Of all your grandchildren she is the one who loves you the most. Why were you doing all those things?’ She persists, ‘All I did was right!’ Until now she has never told me that she was wrong. I think she would have never forgiven me if the third child had not been a boy. When he was born, she came to the hospital, kissed my forehead and said, ‘Thank you!’”

Voice of the fathers

My daughters...

This story was an entry to the contest for fathers “My Daughter”, jointly announced by the Armenian Office of the UN Population Fund and Mediamax Media Company. The authors are fathers who tell of their daughters. We were particularly interested in Tevan Poghosyan's submission, in the story of his family, because eight years ago in one of our issues we covered the story of this exciting family. Back then they were only six: the youngest was not born yet, Tevan Poghosyan was not an MP, and our paper was not printed in colour...

happen again. This moment, this mind-blowing sensation... I started yelling and clapping. The nurse told me I could see my wife. I ran. I ran to her. I wanted to squeeze her in my arms and never let her go. I wanted to run in circles and tell her how thankful I am.

Then I saw my baby girl - Adrine. She was tiny and weak, like a flower that has been just picked in the garden. She needed to be watered, just like that flower. I looked into my wife's eyes: I was sure they would be happy, but I saw uncertainty in them; as if happiness had been pushed to a corner where it was waiting for my approval to burst out. I kissed my wife and smiled. “So what? We don't have a boy, but I'm the happiest father on earth. We have a baby girl!” I screamed with the happiest tears running down my round cheeks.

It was a Sunday morning. I heard a knock: so gentle and weak. Then I heard the door sliding on the carpet. I turned abruptly to see who was stupid enough to dare wake me up on a Sun-

day morning, when I had to work all the week harder, than ever. What I saw at the door was a balm to my mad red eyes, like the spring sun is to the soil ready to get rid of the persisting snow. Kristina was holding the box of tea, Angel - the tray heavy with apples and oranges. Maneh was balancing herself with the tray holding sour cream and cottage cheese mixed with honey, and Adrineh was coyly having small bites of warm and soft bread. They were standing so quietly and seriously, as if they really got scared of my ‘mad’ glance.

I smiled. They smiled back. Good morning! There is no happier morning that can compare with the one when you wake up showered in the smiles of your little ones.

There is no other miracle, but the realization that there is a next generation that will continue your blood and Armenian roots, your identity and values. When Kristina starts teaching some sense to her sisters, “Don't fight! There's nothing more important in this

life than sisterhood!”; when Angel studies all day and all night; when Maneh turns off all the lights in the house that have been left on; and when Adrineh makes a funny figurine with the magnets on the fridge, I know that I am going to continue. Because I see my reflection, clear and crystal, in my daughters.

When after the most amazing greeting by a nurse - “Congratulations, it's a girl!” - I would enter the hospital room groggily to see my baby girl, I would immediately sober up. The realization that something very special had happened to me would suddenly make me alert. This is a special, a unique feeling that no one else but a father of a girl can empathize with. I was to be the one to take care of my daughter. I was to be the one to protect her and hate each and every guy that would dare to approach her, even throw a quick glance at her in the supermarket. I was to be strict with her, though she might not appreciate or understand this at the moment. She wouldn't understand that being strict, angry and controlling, was not really my choice.

I hope one day, when I'm old and gray, I would be sitting in front of the fireplace, with my wife by my side, and I will have my girls next to me - happy, self-sufficient and thankful for the kind of a father I will have been to them.

Source: Mediamax.am. You can find more stories of no less interest, where other fathers write about their daughters.



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