

Պտղի սեռի խտրական ընտրության դեմ պայքար  
Combating Gender-Biased Sex Selection in Armenia

## Monitoring of Online Print Media on Sex Selection in Armenia

A project implemented by:

International Center for Human Development, Armavir  
Development Centre, Martuni Women's Community  
Council and Stichting Save the Children Nederland.

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## Foreword

1. “I can say one thing, currently, the word “mother” is holy for all men, and I don’t think that anyone could have allowed such swearwords...” is a quote from one of the web based media outlets researched retrospectively when monitoring online print media on sex selection in Armenia. Nobody could, today, provide any evidence supporting the statement, yet, the journalist had chosen this quote, even though the news was about a quarrel around volleyball federation appointment. There is a recurrent practice, when non-relevant quotes loaded with stereotypes find their way to the front pages of newspapers and get another life by being recycled back into the society.
2. “...Persistence of discriminatory stereotypes concerning the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the family and in society, undermining women’s social status and their educational and professional careers” was one of the concerns recently raised by the UN Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The committee also stated about its awareness that “such stereotypes and degrading images of women are conveyed through school textbooks and the media without sufficient monitoring.” Among other things the committee called to “eliminate gender stereotypes, and ensure that the media promote positive images of women as active participants in social, economic and political life.”
3. The current policy brief aimed at analyzing the monitored online print media outlets in cases when they covered the topic of sex selection and articles that were broadly linked to the value of girls and women. The content of web-based media outlets have been scrutinized to identify any statements or reporting that could have had distorted, untruthful or prejudicial elements against women or men. All these aspects were separately analyzed, quantified and also handpicked, allowing analyzing the level of stereotypical reporting either as a media intention or as an absence of intention, leading to unobstructed penetration of prejudicial statements widely circulated in the society and back by reinstating the current state of the affairs.
4. The findings that are discussed in the report, show the strong and weak points of media outlets under consideration and suggest policy actions to make sure that unintentional framing at the detriment of any of the social groups does not penetrate the news media and provide opportunities for all stakeholders to deliberate topics of public concern in the most accurate and credible ways possible.

## Executive Summary

5. The reality as such is not within the limits of cognition. It is rather a subject of public discourse that acquires symbolic meaning through the negotiations and as a result of communication of individual and group relations. Framing, thus, is key to constructing publicly accepted objective reality, as it allows developing worldviews. In general, it entails *selection and highlighting*, i. e. selection of certain perceived segments of so called reality and their highlighting in communication specifically aimed at the presentation of perceived issues within that reality, their cause-effect interpretations, development of normative assessments and/or suggestion of certain solutions.
6. Frames and framing in mass media are of key importance in terms of (a) providing the publicly available space for the realization of fundamental freedoms and human rights, (b) renegotiating the existing unequal relations (i.e. political, cultural, class specific, ethnic, gender specific, etc.) through guaranteed mechanisms for renegotiation, intrinsic to democratic societies, and (c) exclusion of any possibility for any given group to monopolize the public discourse, and thus, take over the public goods. The study of framing through lenses of critical discourse analysis of mass media can to certain degree identify those groups that have influence in a given society, as well as can allow highlighting the fine line between the mass media as a domain of discourse from mass media as an active subject influencing the discourse itself.
7. The United Nations Population Fund's report results on sex selective abortions in Armenia framed the issue. It became clear that for the first and second newborn girls and boys the boy to girl ratio was close to the biologically set ratio of 1.04 to 1.07, whereas for third and fourth newborns the variations were significant, balancing at 160 and 170 boys for 100 girls correspondingly. These results placed Armenia among the countries with the highest rates of sex selection, with an average that stood at 114.5. The report also identified great variations geographically, where some regions experienced higher levels of sex selection, such as Shirak and Gegharkunik marzes. With its average ratio Armenia was still ranked after China with 118 and Azerbaijan with 116.5. Among a number of identified factors that could influence the boy preference in Armenia, it could be a deeply embedded cultural framing, which speaks of a lower value of women and girls, making them more vulnerable through stereotypes and other discriminatory practices.
8. The discourse on sex selective abortions that started right after the release of the report and became one of the main agenda items of main media outlets within 2013 up to the first part of 2016 can examine the frames and the framing process with the objective to identify to what extent have girls and women had the opportunity to participate in the reframing process of the boy preference and sex selection by examining the institutional level framing processes in the mass media. The analysis also allowed identifying the frames reflected in the mass media that impact the value of girls and women. For the purpose of this study, web-based media outlets were identified based on their indicative monthly circulation. The dataset has included all the articles from 2013 until the first half of 2016.
9. Within the studied period, overall 894 articles have been selected to be included in the dataset, as a result of searching the selected 15 web-based media outlets. The lion share of articles on sex selective abortions, 46 percent, has occurred in 2014 and the topic has persisted throughout all the months of all the studied years. From the perspective of framing it was interesting to understand how the sex selection as a topic was being presented by the media itself. In case of sex selection, the Armenian public was not aware of it happening before the United Nations Population Fund's report revealed the results.
10. The overall frame of the news coverage on sex selection in Armenia was on the positive side. In rare cases only, there were negative frames associated with any given news article. In 86 percent of the cases, the media and the journalists adhered to principles of even-handed, non-sensational reporting when covering sex selection, selective abortions, as well as fertility pressure and boy preference. Both in originally produced, as well as in selectively shortened recycled articles, journalists, most of the times, presented the issues in a positive tone.
11. In almost half of the even handed and non-sensational news reporting the journalists and media chose to only identify the problem of sex selection, selective abortions and boy preference. In the other half of the cases, there were also attempts to create a public forum in order to understand the issue at hand and its root causes. It is not surprising that in a situation of few journalistic investigations journalists and media took sides when reporting sex selection, selective abortions and boy preference. The frames suggested from outside media and the possible personal preferences of reporting individuals actually could have greatly contributed to one sided, but still positive reporting on these issues.

12. It was quite interesting that most of the studied news articles had chosen to present only one side of the story, meanwhile in a way trying to adhere to even-handed and non-sensational news making principles. Most of this revealed itself in heavily quoting this or that professional that had a previous knowledge and/or a clear opinion on the topic of sex selection, selective abortions and boy preference. Journalists rarely confronted the data and statements of officials with questions and proper fact checking. In the overruling majority of cases the statements made by other stakeholders went unchecked and questions that could further touch on controversial issues were not posed.
13. Either the anti-abortion or abortion rights campaigners' voices seemed to go missing in the news reporting on the topic. The journalists from the web-based media outlets chosen for this study were genuinely trying to cover the framed issue that had apparently taken the stakeholders by surprise. In all of that they were trying to be as even-handed and non-sensational, as possible. However, in doing so, they rarely questioned the statements that came their way and somehow tended to omit the two far right and left opinion holders of the spectrum.
14. The intensive discussion of sex selection and selective abortions had magnified the frame suggested by the United Nations Population Fund's study on the potential risks of engaging in sex selection from the perspective of national security and demographic balance, in most of the times. The overall analysis of the news articles has shown that journalists had mainly adhered to the technical discussion of the issue at hand and in most of the cases had avoided to further navigate the rather controversial aspects of sex selection, such as stereotypes and one of the fundamental rights, i. e. choice. It was clear, that when discussing abortion journalists had difficulty discriminating between the cases pertaining to choice from the ones that clearly depicted discriminatory practices.
15. In the process of monitoring the news articles, the content of web-based media outlets have been scrutinized to identify any statements or reporting that could have had distorted, untruthful or prejudicial elements against women or men. All these aspects were separately analyzed quantified and also handpicked, allowing analyzing the level of stereotypical reporting either as a media intention or as an absence of intention, leading to the unobstructed penetration of prejudicial statements widely circulated in the society and back by reinstating the current state of the affairs. Overall, the news articles in the web-based media outlets did not resort to charged language in relation to men and women. In addition, there were very rare cases of attacks on women that had chosen to abort their child.
16. One of the main responsibilities that journalists should exercise and be censored for by the news media, is the language free of clichéd references to gender, ethnicity, appearance, age and sexual orientation. Most of the stereotypes and gender-specific tags penetrated into the studied news stories by journalists quoting various stakeholders through direct speech or re-narration. When studying the structure of the text, there were a number of issues that were salient enough to be considered. First, in many instances there was no need to quote the stakeholder's statement, as it was not helping the story to evolve. Second, there were frequent cases when the highly stereotypical statements were being inserted into the text through quotes, which was either unintentional or was a way of playing safe. However, given the fact that in the story itself the stereotypes and gender-specific tags were extremely rare, instead they were highly common in the speech acts of the others, one can safely assume that it rather qualifies to be tagged as "playing safe" on the side of the journalists. Third, there were a number of gender-specific tags with the most commons being "Armenian woman" and "manly something" either an action or quality that if analyzed as a word in Armenian did not have any gender-specific signifier, but had acquired it through the frequent use and recycling of the words of the others.
17. The selected web-based mass media outlets discussed the sex selection, selective abortions and boy preference throughout 3.5 years, right after the United Nations Population Fund's report framed the existence of the issue in Armenia. Most of the discussion picked up by journalists was rather on a positive and neutral side. A quite small share of articles had negative framing of the issue. The factors that could have contributed to this, were (a) the specificity of the majority of journalists being women, (b) the way the issue was framed as something of national importance rather than only rights based issue of denying life to a child based on a certain gender and (c) the fact of it being an issue centered on the child. Although, apart from identifying the problem, the media also presented possible solutions, the rather conservative approach to exploring the options had balanced the distribution of the possible solutions at tightening the reproductive healthcare service provision, missing out on wider policy options that could possibly include addressing stereotypical gender specific expectations and changing deeply rooted cultural narratives.
18. The analysis of the selected web-based media outlets suggested a needs for a number of public policy relevant actions and interventions at institutional and individual levels, such as the development of (a)

strategies for working with opinion makers in those areas, where policy change is needed, (b) the capacity of opinion leaders to make strategic pitching on policy change, (c) a communication campaign on sex selective abortions, (d) individual profiles of media that covered sex selection in the news to further support them with improving their news coverage practices and styles, (e) legal regulations that require the media to have internal quality control mechanisms, (f) strategies that are linked to the mission and formulate detailed guidelines for journalists, (g) in house training and capacity development practices for journalists and the media along with externally provided trainings, (h) internal quality control mechanisms for the media, (i) a mechanism for the continued update and operation of the style manual and ethics guidelines, (j) reforms and accreditation of education programs for journalists provided by universities.

# Theoretical Foundations of Framing and Critical Analysis of Discourse in Mass Media

19. The reality as such is not within the limits of cognition. It is rather a subject of public discourse that acquires symbolic meaning through the negotiations and as a result of communication of individual and group relations. Instead of objective reality the constructivist approach claims that images in the minds of individuals concerning certain objects and objective reality in their intricate interrelations create the meanings, (Lippmann, 1922): Therefore, any means that deal with the construction of meaning and reflects the relations and communication of various groups and individuals in the process of signification participates in the construction of that same meaning by establishing or re-establishing these or those meaning systems.
20. Framing is frequently used methodology for assessing the thoughts circulated publically and positioning of audiences in relation to those thoughts, (Hallahan, 1999). It is being used to study the patterns of communication and behaviors interrelated to the specific communication, (Rendahl, 1995), where mass media plays a key role in terms of agenda setting, format of presentation of certain topics and themes, adopted criteria applied when developing the content, perceptions of journalists and their balancing act of publicly held values.
21. Framing, thus, is key to constructing publicly accepted objective reality, as it allows developing worldviews, (Hallahan, 1999). In general it entails *selection and highlighting*, i. e. selection of certain perceived segments of so called reality and their highlighting in communication specifically aimed at the presentation of perceived issues within that reality, their cause-effect interpretations, development of normative assessments and/or suggestion of certain solutions, (Entman, 1993). Therefore, the examination of the mass media, as a domain and acting institutional subject through its various actors, such as journalists and stakeholder audiences that participate in the construction of an "objective" reality is of key importance.
22. Frames and framing in mass media are of key importance in terms of (a) providing the publicly available space for the realization of fundamental freedoms and human rights, (b) renegotiating the existing unequal relations (i.e. political, cultural, class specific, ethnic, gender specific, etc.) though guaranteed mechanisms for renegotiation intrinsic to democratic societies, and (c) exclusion of any possibility for any given group to monopolize the public discourse and thus, take over the public goods. Therefore, frames reflected in the mass media and its core process of framing can become the basis for the critical analysis of the public discourse, thus, also allowing to examine the extent to which mass media is only a domain for framing or is also an institutional actor, by assessing the level of the bearer of different influences or level of being an active player in molding those influences.
23. Framing in conjunction with the critical analysis of discourse juxtaposes complex relations of acting groups and individuals in the process of framing, highlighting the overrepresentation of certain groups and individuals in that process. From this perspective the establishment of the link between domination and discourse takes center stage, (Van Dijk, 1993). The analysis of discourse allows identifying the reproduction of inequalities and its structure through the analysis of inequalities in the discourse itself, (Van Dijk, 1993). In all of this, mass media is the acting subject or an active stakeholder, where the discourse relevant to the public at play in constructing the "objective" realities is reflected, as a result of complex interrelation of various acting groups and individuals and an adopted methodology of reflecting those interrelations.
24. In order for subjects or certain social groups to sustain their domineering status, it is important to reinforce their privileged access to resources, such as income, social status, wealth, education and knowledge, including privileged access to outlets of information as a means to shaping of meanings and presenting certain worldviews in terms of objective realities, (Van Dijk, 1993). The re-establishment of privileged status and power is greatly dependent on the control over other social groups. The placed limitations over fundamental freedoms enjoyed by others are among other means reached by dominating the thoughts of the others by the privileged ones. Therefore, the modern day domineering is mostly contingent on effective means of controlling the cognition, i. e. employing strategies of persuasion, influence, manipulation of thoughts of others into shifting their mind frame towards a conducive worldview aimed at the conformity with the worldview of the domineering class or group, (Van Dijk, 1993):
25. The study of framing through lenses of critical discourse analysis of mass media can to certain degree identify those groups that have influence in a given society, as well as can allow highlighting the fine line between the mass media as a domain of discourse from mass media as an active subject influencing the

discourse itself. Thus, within the frames of the current analysis of discourse in the mass media, three levels, macro, which is the public and national, meso, which is the institutional and micro, which is the individual levels, have been identified. The macro level of frames deals with deep cultural meanings (Bacchi, 2009), and predetermines the possible array of framing, serving as the frontier for potential public discourse (Ferree&Gamson, 2002), beyond which it is inconceivable of imagining any feasible or effective framing process of construction of meaning. This is the level, where all the social groups function and are forced to take into account the objective limitations imposed by these deep cultural meanings. Here the intentions of acting groups are subjected to the frames that are superimposed by deep cultural meaning structures upheld for a given space and in a given time. In short, this is the limit of the possible universe that carries a conceivable, thus, acceptable meaning and serves as a reference point for all other possible combinations of meanings.

26. The meso or institutional level regards framing as a process, where a certain group with a specific institutional structure applies deliberate actions and makes decisions in relation to the construction of meanings, when those actions are either compulsory or recommended for application, (Dombos et al, 2009). The compulsory or recommended nature of those actions can have both cognitive, as well as normative components, (Dombos et al, 2009). In the public domain the circulation of dominant discourses by various social groups at an institutional level allows adopting strategic approaches when reflecting them, (Dombos et al, 2009). From this perspective, the level of application of certain criteria in the mass media can identify those outlets that have adopted strategic approach to the process of reflection in constructing meaningful experiences and realities and separate them from such outlets that have merely served as domains for the public discourse. The role of the mass media in terms of trying to renegotiate and thus, prevent certain social groups from concentrating power through mind domineering is in being able to strategically apply cognitive and normative frames in order to reflect competing frames in a given deeply seated cultural topography along with the groups that are the carriers of those competing frames.
27. The presence of strategic approach at meso level carries an important function for the micro level in order for instance, to neutralize the possible impact of deliberate framing at this level. Framings at micro level are made possible within the provided domain of public discourse at meso level, whereby the deliberate actions at micro level, for instance by a decision of a journalist to willfully participate in the framing process via choosing from the array of competing frames based on personal choices of cognitive and normative functions, (Dombos et al, 2009). In other words, depending on how strategically cognizant the actor of meso level is, an actor at a micro level, such as a journalist can intentionally or unintentionally interfere with the framing of the discourse, thus, objectifying the given mass media. For the purpose of this study, the macro level that deals with culturally deeply embedded meanings and micro level, where individual choices of actors interfere with the renegotiation of meaningful realities is not examined.
28. For the macro level examination, one had to at least compare two locations that discuss the same topic, but have very distinct cultural meaning arrays, such as for instance cultures with pronounced legacy of prolife approach that if examined in terms of discourse would have identified the variations, remained outside the scope of this study. In case of micro level examinations, even though the collected data allowed for the observation of individual journalist's inclinations in choice of topics to be highlighted within the same theme and employed strategies to convey meanings, it was not included within the scope of this study and could be later on examined in a separate paper. Instead it was strategically decided to zoom into the meso level and identify the level of deliberate application of cognitive and normative institutional criteria to the process of framing, as it could potentially reveal the shortcomings for micro level interference and suggest further research, meanwhile, in the short term, assuming that deeply embedded cultural meanings take a long time to change, thus, are declared invariable for the purpose of this study.
29. At meso level, which was in the center of this study, the strategic approach compulsory or recommended to framing, if not accessible to all the stakeholders, could end up generating various results. *First*, in a situation of weak institutional mechanisms of rules for cognitive and normative framing operational in mass media can create ample opportunities for any given journalist to upload his/her individual or seemingly individual cognitive or normative frames either unintentionally or intentionally, thus, allowing any given social group to get privileged access to construction of meaning and re-establishment of the power relations. *Second*, in a condition of weakly pronounced rules the process of individual framing could become scrutinized and/or controlled by certain social groups that either hold a privileged status or aim at shifting the power balance. *Third*, weakly pronounced institutional rules can provide ample entry points for dominant social groups to shift attention within a given array of deeply embedded cultural meanings towards those that are of service to the cognitive and normative power of the privileged classes, mostly, it is being exhibited by such technics as agenda setting at meso level. *Fourth*, from the perspective of

individual framing at micro level, the journalists can without any prior knowledge and intention reflect disproportionately the cognitive and normative frames of any given social group. This one is different from the option described in the first one in its being proactive stance rather than being reactive one. Thus, actually, studying the structure of discourse at meso level can reveal quite a number of possible risks of macro level disproportions carried into the public discourse through deliberate or unintentional actions at micro level.

## **The Framing of Sex Selective Abortions in Armenia**

30. The United Nations Population Fund's (UNFPA) report results on sex selective abortions in Armenia framed the issue. The methodology adopted in the report had compared the statistical data on the gender of the newborns consecutively. It became clear that for the first and second newborn girls and boys the boy to girl ratio was close to the biologically set ratio of 1.04 to 1.07, whereas for third and fourth newborns the variations were significant, balancing at 160 and 170 boys for 100 girls correspondingly (UNFPA, 2012). These results placed Armenia among the countries with the highest rates of sex selection, even though the average stood at 114.5. The report also identified great variations geographically, where some regions experienced higher levels of sex selection, such as Shirak and Gegharkunik marzes. With its average ratio Armenia was still ranked after China with 118 and Azerbaijan with 116.5. Among a number of identified factors that could influence the boy preference in Armenia, it could be a deeply embedded cultural framing, which speaks of a lower value of women and girls, making them more vulnerable through stereotypes and other discriminatory practices.
31. Overall, discriminatory and certain social norming practices towards girls and women bear negative consequences for a given society's development (OECD, 2014). Their unequal participation to the communicative events as an independent framing process, when developing meaningful realities places a pressure on women and girls into conforming with negotiated meanings and values. Hereby it minimizes their active participation to the extent of impacting their overall value as compared with other more privileged groups of the society, that have acquired the entitlement to participate in the making of "objective" reality. Numerous studies carried out in Armenia in terms of depiction of women in the mass media confirm the undervalued position and marginal representation of this social group. Interestingly enough, the analysis of social norms and practices among 108 countries has placed Armenia among highly discriminatory states, (OECD, 2014). The value of the index with highly discriminatory practices falls within the range of 0.22-0.35. These countries exhibit highly pronounced discrimination in their social norms, their application, as well as in their legislation. Among other things, these countries have higher levels of gender based violence, as there are no explicit rules and regulations that prevent violence from occurring, as well as there are significant levels of tolerance towards domestic violence. Moreover, the highly discriminatory countries have higher levels of boy preference and their birth ratio is skewed from the normal distribution of sexes. Finally, in these countries women face significant limitations to their freedom of movement and are limited in their resources. In all of this, the main challenges for Armenia are the sex selective abortions and the absence of the domestic violence legislation, (OECD, 2014).
32. From the perspective of social norming it is interesting to understand the deep intentions that are bound by stereotypes as cultural constructs carried from the framing processes of the past. Forty percent of surveyed women place a value on boys as the agents of sustained bloodline, (UNFPA, 2012). Apart from that, the studies suggest that the role of women in the household, including their intra-household bargaining power can be augmented with the arrival of male child, (Li, L., Wu, X. 2010). Those women, who have not delivered a male child, have been at a greater risk of being subjected to discrimination and unacceptable treatment within their households, (Li, L., Wu, X. 2010). In a reality with an actively involved institutional actor, such as the mass media with deliberate rules and regulations applied towards the cognitive and normative framing, the latter can greatly influence the process of renegotiation of social norms through the reframing of previously framed meanings, that have carried on their function to a reality whereby they have become rather disserving agents in a form of stereotypes, having been lost the functionality of their initial meaning. In all of this, one of the key regulatory functions that the mass media can play is to make sure that there is a rebalancing act of marginally represented social groups in the framing process.
33. The discourse on sex selective abortions that started right after the release of the UNFPA report and became one of the main agenda items of main media outlets within 2013 up to the first part of 2016 can examine the frames and the framing process with the objective to identify to what extent have girls and women had

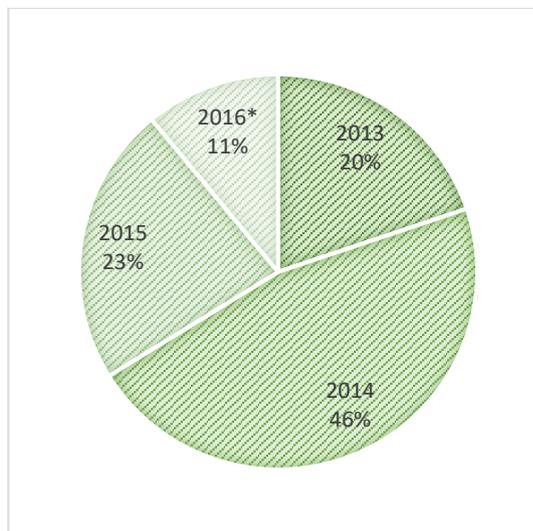
the opportunity to participate in the reframing process of the boy preference and sex selection by examining the institutional level framing processes in the mass media. The analysis will also allow identifying the frames reflected in the mass media that impact the value of girls and women.

### **The Analysis of Sex Selection in the Mass Media**

34. Following the 2012 report on sex selection the topic entered the public agenda via lengthy discussions in the mass media among other public domains. For the purpose of this study, web-based media outlets were identified based on their indicative monthly circulation. The dataset has included all the articles from 2013 until the first half of 2016. However, it has also searched the years of 2012 and 2011 with only one article in 2011 and no content in 2012. Therefore, the analysis is based on 2013-2016 and it is considered that the UNFPA report has been the major initiating framing for the reframing of boy preference in Armenia.
35. Within the studied period, from 2013 to 2016, overall 894 articles have been selected to be included in the dataset, as a result of searching the selected 15 web-based media outlets. The lion share of articles on sex selective abortions, 46 percent, has occurred in 2014 and the topic has persisted throughout all the months of all the studied years (see Figure 1). However, there were certain spikes that naturally occurred during the months that are traditionally associated with women. March and April, being the so called “women’s month” had an expected increase in the discussion of sex selection in the studied media outlets. There were few studied outlets that still kept the topic in their agenda, despite the overall declining trend on average in all of the outlets. However, this study does not specifically target the phenomenon, which could have revealed interesting nuances about a given outlet and its micro to meso level interrelations.

<b>Media Outlet</b>	<b>Indicative Circulation</b>
News.am	18.334.004
1in.am	6.400.000
Tert.am	6.272.162
Aravot.am	4.797.81
168.am	2.741.984
Hraparak.am	2.130.067
Lragir.am	1.800.000
Hetq.am	1.637.895
Times.am	1.184.980
Panorama.am	1.118.835
Panarmenian.net	970.000
Yerkir.am	820.000
Galatv.am	670.000
Civilnet.am	650.000
Mediamax.am	430.000

Figure 1 Overall coverage in selected web-based media outlets, 2013-2016\*



36. For the purpose of this study two methods have been employed, i.e. quantitative and qualitative. The main analytic techniques used in quantitative analysis were aggregation and cross-tabulation. A more complex analysis showed the association between the topics reported by the media and the sources that they used. The possibilities for crossing variables are extensive. However, for the purpose of this report a limited combination technics of cross-tabulation have been employed in order to reveal the main issues and keep further exploration of the datasets based on identified stakeholder needs. The qualitative part has placed importance on a certain selection of words and phrases that have been frequently associated with and attributed to any of the genders. The purpose was to identify, if gender neutral words over a course of framing had acquired certain gender specific function and meaning and thereby had created and/or perpetuated stereotypes that socially normalize certain behaviors and limit the choice of a given social group.

### **The Selection of Datasets and Coding of Articles on Sex Selection**

37. In developing the dataset a group of monitors searched the content of web-based media outlets from 2011 to first half of 2016 retrospectively, applying a number of identified rules that had been checked for reliability and validity. *Reliability* meant that the indicators should be consistently identified by any trained monitor. As such, assigning each code would always produce the same result regardless of who was doing the monitoring. In order to make sure that this was the case, an initial pilot monitoring was conducted in a group of monitors, where each selected article was being assessed collectively under the supervision of the gender expert and the research team leader. Moreover, keyword-related indicators were clearly objective,

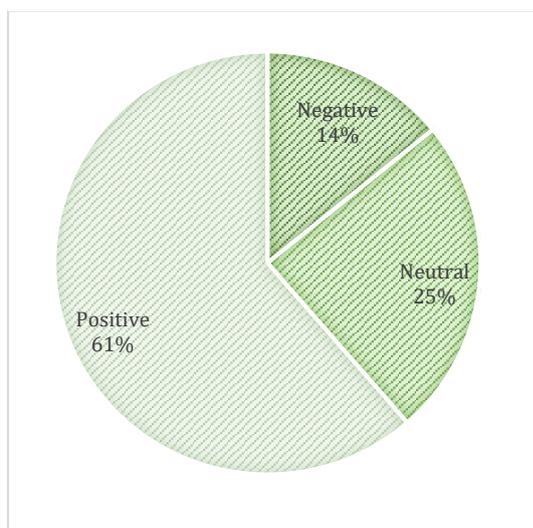
as were pre-determined lists of codes that identified different topics which appeared in the news. Consistency was achieved by a systematic and thorough training during the piloting phase, mentoring and practice. The predetermined list of codes were developed in conjunction with a list of key questions provided as follows (see Annex 1).

38. The monitors looked for broad forms of emphasis and selection, such as headlines, images and charts, stylistic clues, i.e. language choices, modes of reference, use of quotes and attribution. The monitors assessed behaviour of media outlets, not the monitored subjects. Positive and negative evaluation referred to whether or not a reader or a viewer was offered a positive or negative impression of the subject or topic. If there was no positive or negative evaluation, the message was rated as neutral. It was also important to understand the context in which the message was reported, giving the message positive or negative light just by the nature of the story or event reported. The tone of the coverage was rated positive, if the way the message was presented and the nature of the message were both positive. Similarly, if both factors were negative, the tone was negative. The neutral tone was the result of both factors being neutral. If the way the message was presented and the context of the message did not match, monitors had to determine the tone according to what was the prevailing factor (so it could be either the content of the story or context). Thus, *validity* meant that the selected indicators actually showed what they were intended to show. Indicators were selected for a clear purpose and not interpreted to show more than they actually indicated. For example, counting the number of times women were cited as sources would not necessarily indicate that the media had a gender bias. If women’s voices were under-reported there could be several possible explanations for this. It might have been media bias, but it could have equally been that institutions of government, political parties and businesses did not choose women to represent them. These data were recorded for all stories and presented graphically to illustrate differences between outlets and differences over time.

## Discussion of Findings

39. In the qualitative part of the assessment the monitors evaluated the selected news articles pertaining to the topic under consideration based on the neutrality, positivity or negativity of the content presented. Positive or negative marks were provided in cases, if the reader was offered positive or negative impressions about the subject matter. From the perspective of framing it was interesting to understand how the sex selection as a topic is being presented by the media itself. In case of sex selection, the Armenian public was not aware of it happening before the UNFPA report revealed the results. Thus, it is a special case of when the public is unaware and has no certain frames about the topic, the entire question on “what is being presented” is as close to “how it is being presented”, making the media outlets a key player in formulating the agenda for setting the frames in a given society.

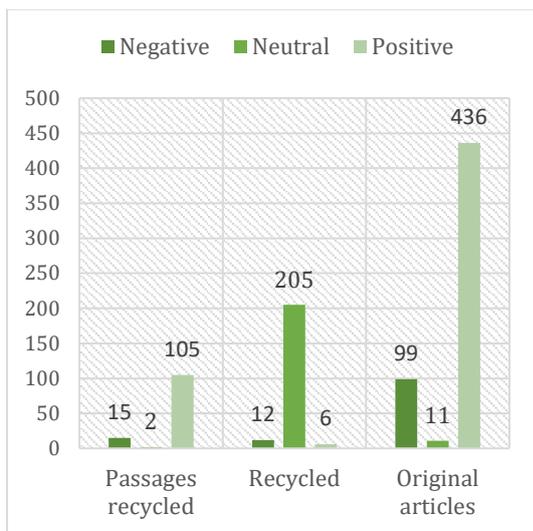
Figure 2. The Tone of Frames in Web-based Articles



40. The overall frame of the news coverage on sex selection in Armenia was on the positive side. In rare cases only, there were negative frames associated with any given news article. In 86 percent of the cases, the media and the journalists adhered to principles of even-handed, non-sensational reporting when covering sex selection, selective abortions, fertility pressure and boy preference (see Figure 2). Only in 14 percent of cases judgments and assessments were detached from the factual knowledge and in some cases there were emotionally charged statements. There could be a number of factors contributing to this picture. First, the news on sex selection came as a surprise to the overall public, as well as to journalists. There was no previous discussion on it and thus, no predetermined frames to be dealt with, in renegotiating them. Second, the soviet abortion rights campaigner state established legacy that for many women has served as one of the main family planning tools and the weak legacy of anti-abortion campaigners’ voices in

the country could have been another reason, whereby the Armenian reality had a rather unspoken abortion rights accepted cultural frame that predetermined the array of possible discussion themes. Third, 73 percent of journalists that covered the topic were women with some of them possibly already being

Figure 3. Frames in Original and Recycled Articles



This was the case for 14 percent of all the content published (see Figure 3).

Figure 4. Original Stories of Web-based Media Outlets

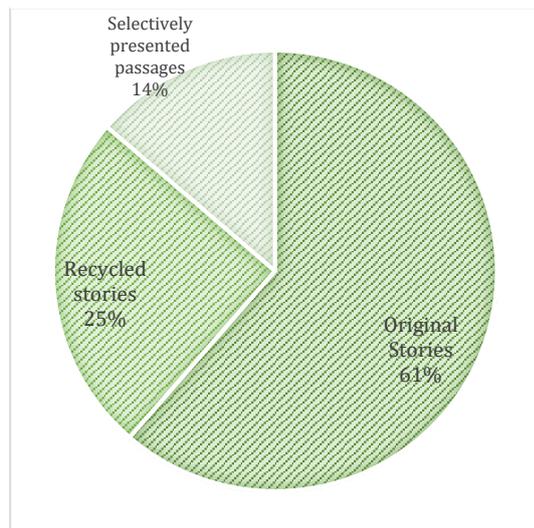
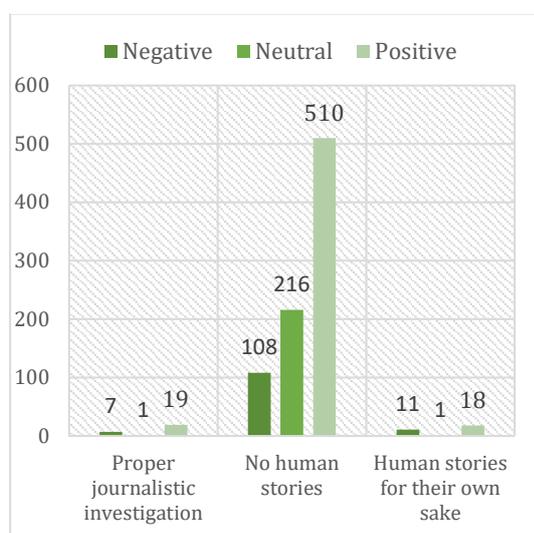


Figure 5. Human Stories in Web-based Media Outlets



mothers (see Annex 2). Thus, it could have contributed to the fact of a thematically engaged and associated stakeholder group, also having a privileged access to mass media. Fourth, the topic at hand, being intrinsically linked to children, a theme that is nominally a highly valued frame, could have contributed to the fact of in depth, either positive or neutral reporting with the aim at getting to the bottom of the issue.

41. Most of the content presented in the studied web-based media outlets were produced by journalists and the media. The articles published from 2013-2016\* were most of the times, in 61 percent of cases, the original articles of journalists. Only 25 percent were articles taken from other local and/or international media outlets. There were cases, when the articles taken from other sources were not presented in full or the logic of the storyline had suffered a type of shortening that had partially or fully lost the overall spirit of the original story.

42. The journalists and the media had an overall positive inclination when covering the themes on sex selection, selective abortions, fertility pressures and boy preference. Both in originally produced, as well as in selectively shortened recycled articles, journalists, most of the times, presented the issues in a positive tone (see Figure 4). Only when recycling articles fully, without any shortening and selection, the neutral tone prevailed. This can once again, support the assumption that the absence of initial frames on sex selection in the society, as well as the majority of journalists being women, covering issues of professional interest that could have also been of direct personal interest, the inclination had been towards the positive side.

43. In covering sex selection, selective abortions and boy preference journalists and media most of the times did not use human stories to convey their message and/or conduct a proper investigation. Either it was not a style usually used in their journalist work or the topic had sensitive aspects that made the authors to avoid the given style. In majority of the articles (see Figure 5) the content did not have any mention of human stories. However, in very rare cases when human stories were presented either as part of a proper journalistic investigation or for their own sake, the tone of the coverage was mostly positive. There is a possibility that journalists and media when developing content do rely on other professional sources most of the cases, which could explain the scarcity of human stories linked with journalistic investigation.

44. In almost half of the even handed and non sensational news reporting the journalists and media chose to only identify the problem of sex selection, selective abortions and boy preference. In the other half of the cases, there were also attempts to create a public forum in order to understand the issue at hand and its

Figure 6. Problems identified and Solutions Provided in Articles

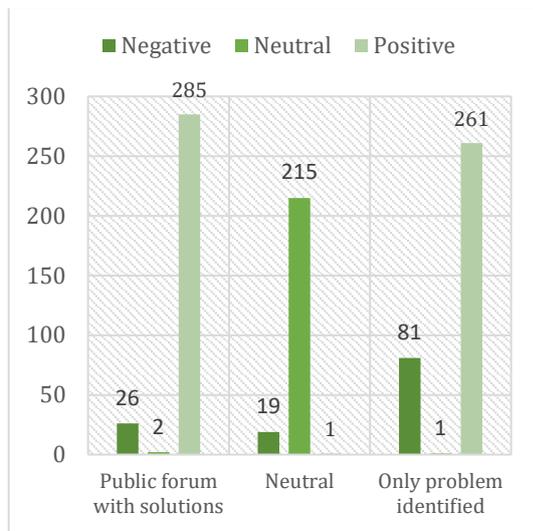


Figure 7. Taking Sides when Reporting

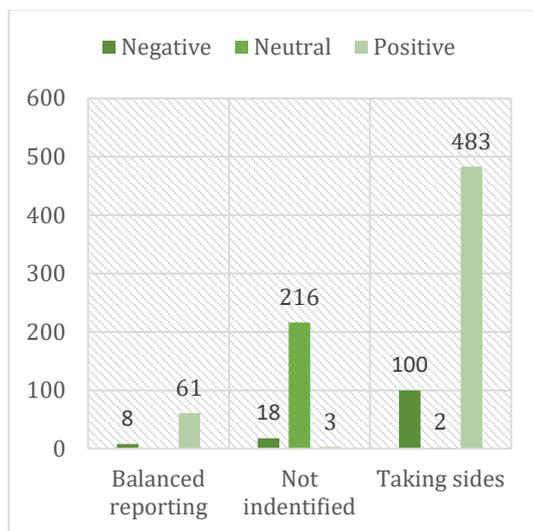
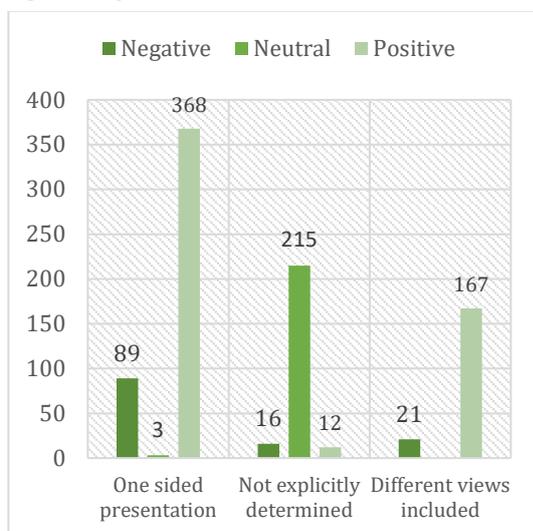


Figure 8. Opinions in Web based Articles



root causes (see Figure 6). It is here that is very important to understand, if the journalists that were not in the liking of doing journalistic investigations most of the cases, were able to create a balanced public forum, where all the challenging and controversial issues were examined and voiced.

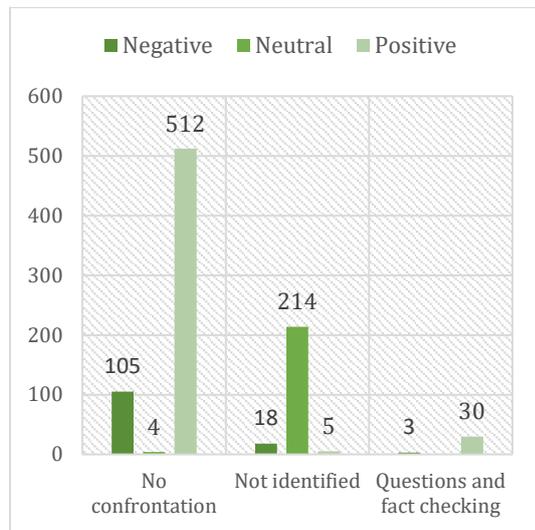
45. It is not surprising that in a situation of few journalistic investigations journalists and media took sides when reporting sex selection, selective abortions and boy preference (see Figure 7). The frames suggested from outside media and the possible personal preferences of reporting individuals actually could have greatly contributed to one sided, but still positive reporting on these issues. It indicates that the media as an institutional subject with deliberate cognitive and normative criteria has exhibited weak qualities, thus, allowing for certain outside and inside groups to dominate the agenda and the tone of reporting. If not for the fact of 73 percent of journalists being female and certain initial frames strongly dominating the public landscape, the outcome of the reporting and its tone could have varied greatly. For instance, on rather controversial topics further down the spectrum of human rights, the reporting would have excluded women as a social group in voicing controversial opinions. The fact of the child centered issue that was mostly presented from the side of demographic catastrophe rather than a fundamental human right to life, thus, showing how discriminated women and girls are, created the forum, where journalists echoed those concerns and did not dig into the root causes of denying right to the life, that is more of a feminist stance and was rarely framed in the news articles from that perspective.

46. It is quite interesting that most of the studied news articles had chosen to present only one side of the story, meanwhile in a way trying to adhere to even-handed and non-sensational news making principles. Most of this revealed itself in heavily quoting this or that professional that had a previous knowledge and/or a clear opinion on the topic of sex selection, selective abortions and boy preference (see Figure 8). This yet again, shows that the media as an institution most of the times had not applied deliberate cognitive and normative criteria to news making, and both journalists and outside groups had successfully dominated the agenda and the tone of reporting.

47. Journalists rarely confronted the data and statements of officials with questions and proper fact checking (see Figure 9). In the overruling majority of cases the statements made by other stakeholders went unchecked and questions that could further touch on

controversial issues were not posed. It is not surprising that in a country with a legacy of common practice of abortions and demographic pressures, the topic balanced at discussing the need to save girls in order to

Figure 9. Practice of Questioning Officials in News Making

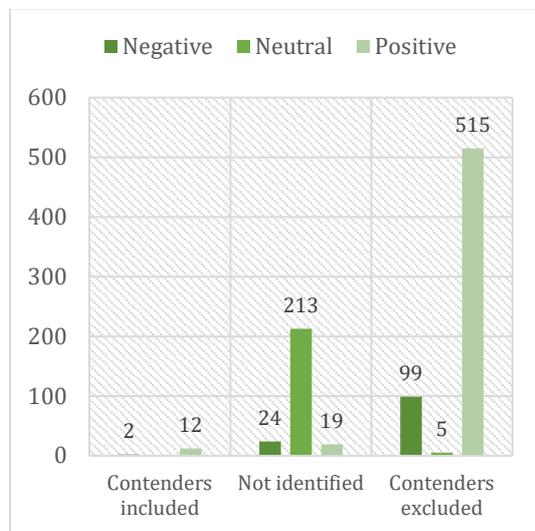


make sure that by 2025 Armenia is not faced with a situation of boys not being able to find pairs and migration further exacerbating. The forum rarely went towards discussing the deeply embedded cultural stereotypes, laying a foundation for discriminatory practices. In most of the cases, the need to clinically manage the process of sex selection was being discussed, placing a heavy burden on a small number of professionals and creating double emotional burden on mothers that are left alone in making a decision after visiting the doctor with the intention to remove the fetus. Another concerning observation that could also apply to other topics of public interest, but needs further study, is the possibility of not questioning being a general practice among journalists as a result of weakly operating institutionally imposed cognitive and normative criteria on news reporting. If this is the case, then any privileged group, pertaining to this or that elite, could get a disproportionate space in the public forum with almost no attempt to be countered by alternative statements and questions. That in itself could

create and maintain the imbalance in the society by providing a privileged access to discursive public practices and further marginalizing other social groups of the same society.

48. Either the anti-abortion or abortion rights campaigners' voices seemed to go missing in the news reporting on the topic (see Figure 10). Frequently, it was the expert style technical perspective presented with controversial aspects of the issue left mostly unreported.

Figure 10. Contenders Included in Articles



When talking about the macro level framing, one can imagine that in a country with a strong Catholic legacy or church influence it would not have been possible not to include that perspective. However, given the Soviet legacy and prolific abortion practices still frequently viewed as a family planning option, this side of the spectrum was not prominently presented. In addition, the other far side of the spectrum was also mostly missed out, i. e. the strong abortion rights campaigner voices in the society were not regularly sought out and presented. The issue of "my body, my right" that was always propagated by the adherents to the feminist movement and/or thoughts was not discoursed. It is not surprising to see that the aspect of stereotypes and patriarchy was almost never debated within this range of the news coverage in the studied web-based media outlets. It was rather a safe, child-centered demographic issue of national importance that was being framed.

Figure 12. Media Effects in Studied News Articles

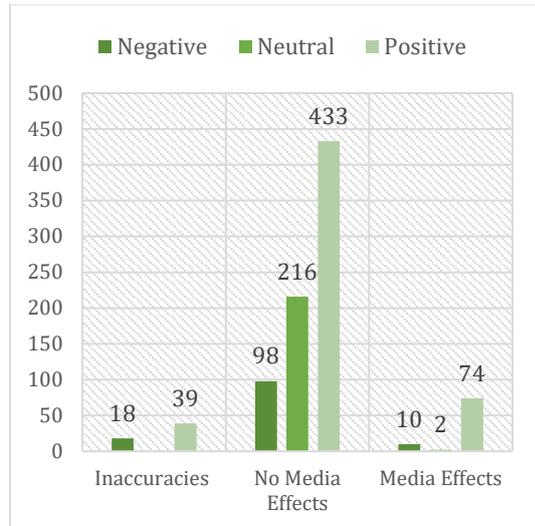
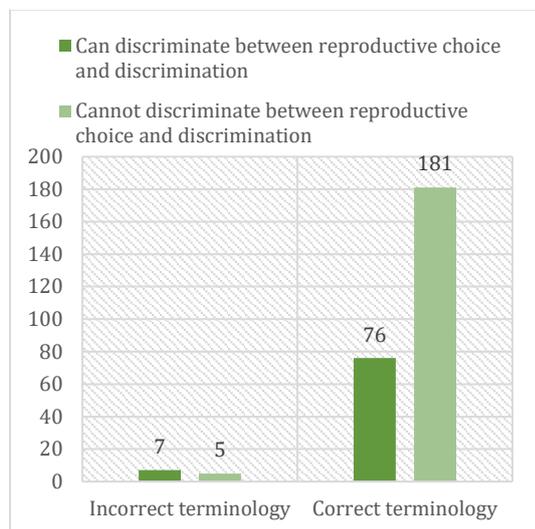


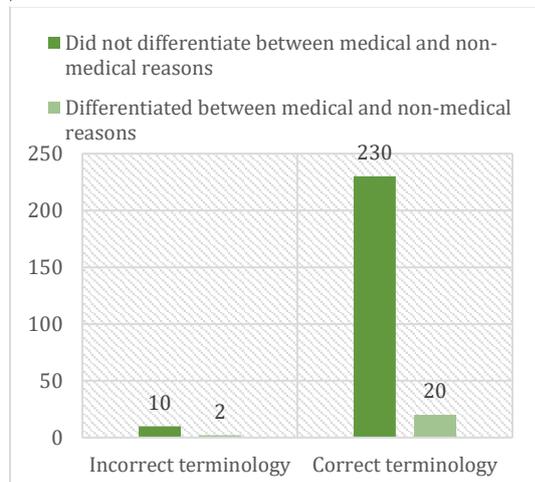
Figure 11. Identifying Choice and Separating it from Discrimination in News Articles



studied timeframe.

51. Another feature that adds to the vague knowledge of when choice becomes a discrimination was the

Figure 13. The Differentiation of Medical Reasons from the Others



49. The journalists from the web-based media outlets chosen for this study were genuinely trying to cover the framed issue that had apparently taken the stakeholders by surprise (see Figure 11). In all of that they were trying to be as even-handed and non-sensational, as possible. However, in doing so, they rarely questioned the statements that came their way and somehow tended to omit the two far right and left opinion holders of the spectrum. In all of this, they had rarely resorted to employing any media effects that could indicate either bias or distortion and manipulation. The absence of initial frames and their possible natural alliance with the framed problem at hand that had been presented as a jeopardy to a child and to the national interest had made them eager to cover as much as possible. However, the weak institutional cognitive and normative framing criteria had left them without any formalized deliberation process that could prevent both options, i. e. taking over the agenda by outside stakeholders and carrying personal agendas into the discursive area, creating possible risks that in this case, just ended up in not fully exploring the topic at hand and seeking a wider range of solution options.

50. Although journalists reporting sex selection, selective abortions, fertility pressure and boy preference were overwhelmingly aware of and knowledgeable about the correct terminology pertaining to the subject of interest, they were still having difficulty differentiating between the cases, when the abortion was a choice from the cases, when it had a clear indication of discrimination (see Figure 12). This could have been avoided, if the journalists have had explored the further extremes of the topic and have had familiarized themselves with the key frames of anti-abortion campaigners and abortion rights campaigners. That would have allowed them to further identify the nuances when the choice has elements of discrimination, and could have opened a whole range of possible topics for discussion that did not occur within the

blurred understanding of medical reasons for abortion. The monitors prior to rating this question had familiarized themselves with the legislated list of social and medical reasons that allowed the mother-to-be to undergo an abortion and had based their ratings on the evaluation of the content and discussion based on that list. The coding suggests that in cases, when journalists were discussing abortions they mostly had hard time identifying the medical and non-medical reasons in their coverage and statements. The weakly pronounced institutional criteria applied towards the cognitive and normative frames had left the journalists alone in confronting the frames suggested by other stakeholders playing in the field.

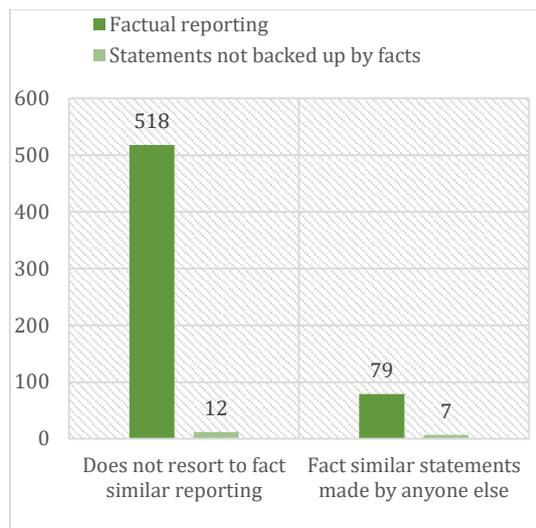
## Prejudice and Distortion when Covering Either of the Genders

52. The intensive discussion of sex selection and selective abortions over the period of 2013 until first half of 2016 had magnified the frame suggested by the UNFPA study on the potential risks of engaging in sex selection from the perspective of national security and demographic balance, in most of the times. The overall analysis of the news articles has shown that journalists had mainly adhered to the technical discussion of the issue at hand and in most of the cases had avoided to further navigate the rather controversial aspects of sex selection, such as stereotypes and one of the fundamental rights, i. e. choice. It was clear, that when discussing abortion journalists had difficulty discriminating between the cases pertaining to choice from the ones that clearly depicted discriminatory practices. Overall, the news coverage balanced around the issue as a demographic issue and the solutions discussed had magnified the attention to the medical practices mainly, excluding the other deep rooted causes, thus, leading to a certain policy option instead of a wider range of policy interventions.
53. It is quite natural, that further to the framing of the issue and its magnified presentation through the mass media, the amendment to the Law on Human Reproductive Health and Reproductive Rights in August 2016, prohibited sex-selective abortions, introducing counselling, as well as a three day period of reflection before the final decision for women who applied for abortion and defined procedures for medical staff acting against this legislation. Although, a positive step, it still addressed the issue one handedly, missing out on the underlying foundations that had led to the prevalence of sex selection.
54. The range of non-medical reasons available to the mother-to-be still allow women to opt for abortion that could go unreported in terms of an act of sex selection, but would still keep the practice active. Although, the news articles helped to raise the issue and gave a push to it to qualify to be included in the public agenda, the solution still has created opportunities for women to undergo abortion under other classified and legal options. The news articles, on the other hand, could have, but did not explore the opportunity of covering the entire range of issues, that impact sex selection as something that is a clear indication of discrimination against women and girls. The reasons for that could have been numerous, apart from the already discussed weakly pronounced institutionally applied cognitive and normative criteria to discursive practices.
55. The recent observations of the UN Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women noted its concern about “persistence of discriminatory stereotypes concerning the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the family and in society, undermining women’s social status and their educational and professional careers”. The Committee also stated about its awareness that “such stereotypes and degrading images of women are conveyed through school textbooks and the media without sufficient monitoring.” Among other things the committee called to “eliminate gender stereotypes, and ensure that the media promote positive images of women as active participants in social, economic and political life<sup>1</sup>.”
56. In a situation, when the institutionally applied cognitive and normative criteria of mass media are of weak nature, making the mass media more as spaces of discursive practice rather than actors of it, the journalists bearing the frames of the given culturally determined location had possibly carried their personal frames into the discourse on sex selection, selective abortion, thus, in most of the cases, avoiding deep and debated discussions of underlying cultural causes of boy preference. It is quite possible that in employing certain technics they have played it safe and in adopting language they have unintentionally reiterated the existing stereotypes that are widely used in educational system and the mass media, and are noted in the concluding observations presented above.
57. In the process of monitoring the news articles, the content of web-based media outlets have been scrutinized to identify any statements or reporting that could have had distorted, untruthful or prejudicial elements against women or men. All these aspects were separately analyzed quantified and also handpicked, allowing analyzing the level of stereotypical reporting either as a media intention or as an absence of intention, leading to the unobstructed penetration of prejudicial statements widely circulated in the society and back by reinstating the current state of the affairs.

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<sup>1</sup> Concluding observations on the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Armenia, CEDAW, November 18, 2016

Figure 14. Fact Similar Reporting in Studied News



59. Overall, the news articles in the web-based media outlets did not resort to charged language in relation to men and women (see Figure 15). In the 81 percent of the cases the description or language used did not explicitly exhibit any signs of bias and/or incorrect wording.

Figure 15. Style of Wording in News Articles

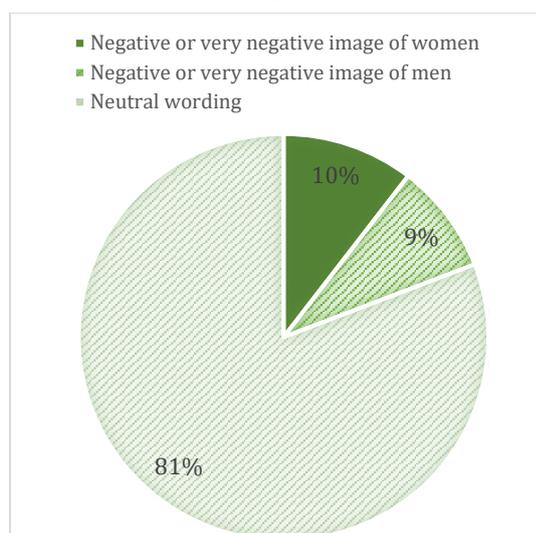
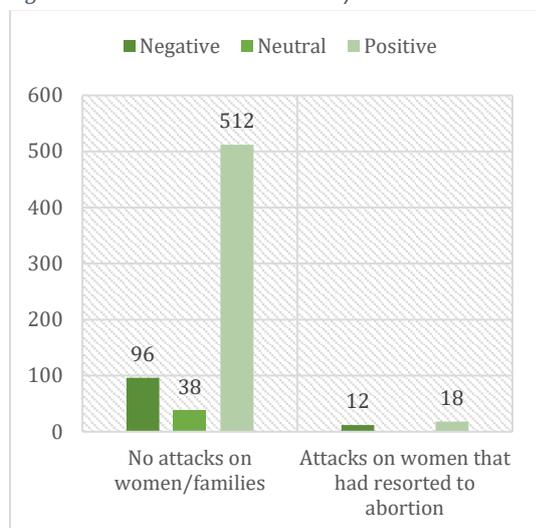


Figure 16. Attacks on Women and/or their Families



58. Overwhelmingly, journalists tried to report facts, even though they resorted to the presentation of the facts and statements of other stakeholders and did not embrace the entire range of issues of sex selection, selective abortions, fertility pressure and most importantly boy preference. In cases, when they did resort to fact similar reporting, i. e. provided statements that were in a format that could confuse the reader into a previously studied and factual knowledge, they did it through the wording of the others (see Figure 14). More specifically, all fact similar reporting occurred, when journalists quoted other stakeholders and did not confront them with facts or questioned their statements in anyway. Instead they chose to present those statements in quotes. This could further indicate, but need additional research, that those statements quoted had a certain personal resonance and thereby got reported.

The monitors had assessed the power of negative or positive wording, if present, in a scale of five, from very negative to neutral and very positive. Men and women were equally presented in a negative light, but when it came to positively addressing any of the gender, only in 4 percent of cases women were referred to with positive wording as compared to virtually none in the case of men.

60. In covering the sex selection and selective abortions in the news articles, the journalists did not engage in putting the blame on a person or a family. They technically understood the complexity of the issue and/or presented the technical knowledge of those stakeholders that were aware of the intricate nature of it. Overwhelmingly, the news articles did not have any statements that could have been interpreted as attacks on women who underwent abortion and/or their families (see Figure 16).

61. Nevertheless, there were very rare cases of attacks on women that had chosen to abort their child. One of such cases that were chosen to be included in this analysis had a number of features that were of interest to the research objective. A media outlets had chosen to reprint (recycle) a blogpost from a religious website, namely Qahana.am. It was presented in the news section and could not have been confused with the content that as a rule occurs in the section on opinions. Moreover, it was a blogpost from a religious organisation that though legitimate in its own right, was quite strange as an essay that was printed in a public news outlet in a democratic country, where the constitution has separated the church from the state. Finally, the entire essay was placing the blame on the soul of the individual that had chosen to "kill the baby". This case was a classical example on how the weakness of media outlet's institutionally applied cognitive and normative criteria had made it possible for

a private voice in an essay format to gravitate into the main news section, which would not have been the case, if the media was an actor instead of only being a discursive domain.

### ***Playing it Safe: Forms of Sex-supremacism and Sex-stereotyping***

62. Although, sound reporting most of the times requires quoting to “source the story or add color<sup>2</sup>,” most of the times their objective is to help the story to evolve, not to replace the news making exercise itself. Moreover, there are certain rules to the way statements should be made. For instance, obvious ones should be avoided to be presented in a direct speech or there should be an entire glossary of terms that should be upheld, even when guiding the decision whether to put the quote or not. The quotes should not go uncensored under the premise of being acts of freedom of speech, as the reputation for accurate and balanced reporting is the guiding principle, then in reality, which by itself suggesting certain deliberate institutional actions based on cognitive and normative criteria that do not censor the content, but censor the style of presenting the news story.
63. One of the main responsibilities that journalists should exercise and be censored for by the news media, is the language free of clichéd references to gender, ethnicity, appearance, age and sexual orientation<sup>3</sup>. While trying to use language that is neutral, reporters should still keep it natural. The guiding principle is to avoid stories and segments that promote stereotypes. Another guiding principle is to examine the potential news story and parts that the reporter wants to present for their relevance. Another *faux pas* is using gender-specific tags. All this required to make sure that media outlets do not perpetuate the existing stereotypes, thus, reinforcing them to the detriment to a group that is being targeted. It is a good guarantee for the media outlets not to allow for frames in circulation that do limit the actions of certain groups by existing unfounded belief systems that are well reflected in stereotypes, to build enough public support and keep the marginalized status of those groups under consideration or give certain privileged status to other groups, once again based on widespread unfound beliefs and their circulation.
64. Most of the stereotypes and gender-specific tags penetrated into the studied news stories by journalists quoting various stakeholders through direct speech. When studying the structure of the text, there were a number of issues that were salient enough to be considered. First, in many instances there was no need to quote the stakeholder’s statement, as it was not helping the story to evolve. Second, there were frequent cases when the highly stereotypical statements were being inserted into the text through quotes, which is either unintentional or is a way of playing safe. However, given the fact that in the story itself the stereotypes and gender-specific tags were extremely rare, instead they were highly common in the speech acts of the others, one can safely assume that it rather qualifies to be tagged as “playing safe” on the side of the journalists. Third, there were a number of gender-specific tags with the most commons being “Armenian woman” and “manly something” either an action or quality that if analyzed as a word in Armenian did not have any gender-specific signifier, but had acquired it through the frequent use and recycling of the words of the others. All of the clichés and stereotypes could have been avoided, if only the media outlet had strict rules on how to use the direct speech of the others, in order, on one hand, still uphold the freedom of speech, on the other hand, make sure that existing stereotypes are not recycled through the media and reinforced as accepted constructs.
65. In more than one third of the cases, within the stereotypical statements, the word pair “Armenian woman” was present. It prevailed throughout all themes ether in lengthy or brief format. When trying to compile the meaning of the pair, it became clear that “Armenian woman” is someone who is the foundation of the family and the main care giver. She has a special place, i. e. in the family, closer to the hearth, and in cases

“I am an orphan, who has parents and whose mother is alive. She threw me into the eternal darkness, even without looking at my face. But you are even unhappier than me, when the slaughterer was cutting me into pieces, your heart died, but you did not realize. You not only deprived me of my life, but also you deprived me of the Godly Heavens.”

“Mother, mother do not kill me, have a pity on me. But you did not hear the inhabitant of your heart and your womb became my scaffold. Mother, why did you kill me? Didn’t you know that you are the bearer of the most saintly of the titles? Maybe you did not know how much I loved you, when I was within you, and one with you.”

*Attacks on Women found in the Media*

<sup>2</sup> Reuters Operations Guidebook,

<http://handbook.reuters.com/index.php?title=Reporting and Writing Basics#Basic story structure>

<sup>3</sup> Reuters Operational Guidebook, Section on Stereotypes and Value Statements,

<http://handbook.reuters.com/?title=Reporting about people>

when there was a space for her in the public, it was still charged with tones of care and consideration. “Armenian woman” is beautiful, humble, obedient and tender, when deviating from that accepted range, the “Armenian woman’s” status is challenged, as one of the protagonists of the news stories recounted in a number of media outlets, contended that “the Armenian woman does not yell like that.” The “Armenian woman” is the one whose major role is the mother-to-be, another widely used notion that is being compared to sainthood and is a “godly gift.”

66. Journalists more frequently than in case of women, recycled clichés through quoting others, especially when the protagonists were men. In general men appeared in texts quoted by journalists almost 3 times more frequently than women. Moreover, in all of the quoted texts that were about men, almost in half of them, the key discussion thread was evolving around the line of masculinity, its ways and qualities. Though, through the others, masculinity was being referred to in very stereotypical ways. The highest frequency of reference was to the concept of masculinity, the manhood, especially when someone that was being discussed through his actions had come to the limit of losing it. In other instances, the inherent quality of masculinity was being quoted as a call to “manly action”. Another, quite common cliché was the “manly something” that was presented in a form of a noun and in most of the cases was linked to such gender neutral words, as deed, promise, responsibility, agreement, dispute, authority, debate, dinner, dignity, and even a party. In all of this, the “manly promise”, “manly debate” and “manly dignity” were the most frequently used ones, even though in the overwhelming majority of the cases those occurred via quotes. In addition, there were verb forms that were being associated with and linked to the males to and the “manly action”. Verbs like to act, to utter, to negotiate, to promise, to agree (strike a deal) were the recurrent ones. These nouns and verbs through the repeated combined use had over time given a certain gender specific touch to the otherwise gender neutral parts of the speech, and in recycling them, the journalists reinstate those clichés without any function to the story telling and news making and in detriment to various social groups in the society.

“I can say one thing, currently, the word **“mother”** is holy for all men, and I don’t think that anyone could have allowed such swearwords...”

**“Motherhood** was and still is the highest purpose for each Armenian woman.”

“The nature has bestowed the woman with the genius to become a **mother**, which allows us to constantly feel the beauty of the godly conception.”

“The **Armenian woman** was and still is the unwavering foundation of the traditional Armenian family. In the most challenging of times, while bearing all the difficulties, she has supported her husband, father, brother and the son, thus, becoming the guarantee for the permanence of our people.”

“Women play a big role in life, especially the **Armenian women**, they pay that role as mothers, sisters and wives...Generally speaking, and men could not have succeeded without women. The woman is everything for a man...”

“Wearing short skirts is a shame for a **woman**, do you get me? Wearing men’s clothing is a shame as well. Although, it is written that before the end of the world, women are going to fail to be chaste before marriage, men are going to be humbled before women, such things are written...”

*Journalists Quoting about Women*

## Conclusion

67. The selected web-based mass media outlets discussed the sex selection, selective abortions and boy preference throughout 3.5 years, right after the UNFPA report framed the existence of the issue in Armenia. Most of the discussion picked up by journalists was rather on a positive and neutral side. A quite small share of articles had negative framing of the issue. The factors that could have contributed to this, were (a) the specificity of the majority of journalists being women, (b) the way the issue was framed as something of national importance rather than only rights based issue of denying life to a child based on a certain gender and (c) the fact of it being an issue centered on the child. Journalistic investigation was not the common practice, rather the agenda was set and then retranslated by other key stakeholders that had knowledge about the issue. In reporting it was a common practice to provide one side of the story and rarely question and confront the statements made by other stakeholders. The anti-abortion and abortion rights campaigners were not as represented as other technical experts, discussing the issue from the demographic and medical perspectives. Although, apart from identifying the problem, the media also

presented possible solutions, the rather conservative approach to exploring the options had balanced the distribution of the possible solutions at tightening the reproductive healthcare service provision, missing out on wider policy options that could possibly include addressing stereotypical gender specific expectations and changing deeply rooted cultural narratives. Besides, the media itself was a channel for recycling existing stereotypes and clichés as a result of the unregulated style of quotation of direct speech acts of other stakeholders. Overall, the studied mass media came across as rather spaces of discursive practice, instead of being actors in managing the process of deliberation in a democratic society. In a given reality, the conservatively framed concept from the macro level was successfully picked up by the actors of micro level and presented to the fullest of their knowledge and intention, given the weakly pronounced deliberately applied cognitive and normative criteria, that if fully in placed would have helped the audience to experience the full exploration of the layers of the issue at hand, which seemingly was not the case.

## Recommendations

68. The analysis of the selected web-based media outlets suggests a need for a number of public policy relevant actions and interventions at meso (institutional) and micro (individual) levels:
69. **Develop strategies for working with opinion makers in those areas, where policy change is needed:** The study revealed that an informed process of opinion sharing can have a significant impact on agenda setting in the mass media. The think tanks and other CSOs, when working on policy relevant interventions, should consider on developing a sound communications strategy for that particular case. It would mean that within that strategy a number of tools that would make sure that journalists cover the topic accurately and comprehensively should be developed and regularly shared with the media.
70. **Develop the capacity of opinion leaders to make strategic pitching on policy change:** The study of the web based media outlets showed that when the society has no framing of a certain issue and the presented idea is within the culturally embedded frames, with it being presented in a balanced way, as to avoid starting the conversation on either ends of the spectrum, the media is eager to pick it up and explore further to the extent its journalistic style and culture allows exploring the extremes as well. It is of strategic importance to provide the knowledge and develop the skills of messaging that could be more appealing to the media to get to the agenda. Therefore, the CSOs can think of developing projects and/or modules of learning for opinion leaders to help them develop the needed set of the skills.
71. **Develop a communication campaign on sex selective abortions:** The study showed that the human rights angle was not explored fully and not surprisingly the policy change balanced at further regulating the medical practices in this sphere. However, the social norms that are the precondition of wanting to have at least one boy operated based on stereotypes that drive this behavior. A simple policy intervention could not fully eradicate the practices of selecting the sex of the fetus, if those stereotypes circulate in the society and get recycled through the media. The Government needs to tackle this issue by initiating an aggressive campaign on social change, specifically targeting the stereotypes and changing the popular beliefs. It would be highly recommended to also work with journalists, as they are the main actors that recycle the stereotypes that are widely accepted in the Armenian society.
72. **Develop individual profiles of media that covered sex selection in the news:** The existing dataset allows further developing profiles of media that covered sex selection in order to identify the aspects of non-balanced, stereotypical approach, as well as identify to what extent a set of explored problems were typical for the given news media, including the writing styles of individual journalists. The think tanks can help, thus, the media to improve its writing practices and devise internal regulations that could ensure the gradual minimization of the identified problems and guarantee that the given media is more of an actor instead of being a news domain, where outside players can acquire a dominant standing.
73. **Develop legal regulations that require the media to have internal quality control mechanisms:** It is of absolute importance to ensure that the media stands as the guarantor of the freedom of speech and in all of those the Government should feel responsible for making sure that the media has the regulatory capacity and the demand to enact that entitlement. Moreover, again as part of this entitlement of being the bearer of the freedom of speech, and as a result of the analysis, it was obvious that in certain cases, privileged groups got more coverage, thus, indirectly leaving less space for all the relevant stakeholders to participate in the public discourse. That said, it would be highly desirable to help the media develop those necessary mechanisms that ensure the equal and represented participation of all stakeholders. Therefore, further exploring the policy options on the revision of regulatory framework of mass media without curbing the freedoms to report and exercise the responsibility of the free speech, the CSOs in conjunction with the Government and in close collaboration with the media can consider revisiting the regulatory framework with the objective to introduce quality reporting and media regulated quality control mechanisms.
74. **Develop strategies that are linked to the mission and formulate detailed guidelines for journalists:** Though not analyzed within the scope of the study, there might be a need for media outlets to revisit their mission statements and declared purpose, in terms of clearly linking those statements with operational procedures and regulations, that could be translated into various manuals of style and guidelines for developing news. It will also make sure that the audience is clear on the set of normative frames that the given media adheres to in terms of the values that are declared and practiced.

75. **Develop in house training and capacity development practices:** From the analysis it could be picked up that there is a lack of clearly defined institutional guidance on how to cover the news and have a trained eye for identifying events that the institution deems worthy of being covered, thus, among other things, greatly jeopardizing the neutral and impartial way of setting the public agenda. The media might want to consider in house trainings, discussions, mentoring and other capacity development activities for their journalists, especially the ones that have joined them recently.
76. **Initiate the development of the internal quality control mechanisms:** It seems that there are weakly developed internal quality control mechanisms that could easily identify those news stories that are one sided, resort to unnecessary citation, do not question the statements, do not provide the entire range of perspectives in relation to any given or framed issue, do not provide the overall picture and history of the issue at hand among other things. This suggests that there is a need to collectively with the mass media representatives and among themselves, initiate the negotiation and development of internal quality control mechanisms that could ensure the independence of quality news making.
77. **Develop a mechanism for the continued update and operation of the style manual and ethics guidelines:** Without questioning the freedom of speech and information, the evidence still suggests that many aspects of coverage would have been either edited or excluded all together, if there was an institutional function of stylistically and ethically filtering the potential stories. This suggests that there is a need to develop a style manual, as well as a glossary over the time that could synchronize the journalistic jargon in a justified manner, without unnecessarily curbing the freedom to report news. However, on the other hand it could save the players from unnecessary recycling of stereotypes and clichés that do segregate against certain groups and at least limit their actions in an unjustified manner.
78. **Along with in house training, there is a need for externally organized trainings for journalists:** Along with the development of guidelines and manuals for the use of the editorial team and the journalists, various in service training endeavors, such as short visits to other agencies within and outside Armenia, short courses, development assignments, short thematic trainings could be devised to help journalists in getting hands on skills on how reporting is being done and what are the main similarities and differences from place to place. This will also help the journalists to identify the basic minimum that is a requirement for good reporting and is not in any way considered a limitation of freedom of information.
79. Universities and higher education institutions that have courses of study for journalists need to undergo reforms, benchmarking and programmatic accreditation: Linked to the trainings, it seems necessary to revisit the curricula in courses of study that prepare journalists, as well as there is a need for retraining and study visits of those professionals that teach in those programs. The support could also be designed in a way as to help the universities that provide the specialization to conduct a programmatic accreditation of those courses of study.

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## Annex 1: List of Questions Used by Monitors

- 1) Do journalists/media adhere to principles of even-handed, non-sensational reporting when it comes to reporting on SS-SA-FP-BP? Are journalists providing analytical coverage of issues related to SS-SA-FP-BP, looking deeper into some of the more difficult or even controversial issues, or are they playing it “safe” instead? (A leading question for the assessment: Are the facts and judgements in a sound cause and effect relationship? Or the judgements and assessments detached from the factual knowledge? Is there an emotionally charged statement(s) in the article?)
- 2) Are ‘human stories’ incorporated for ‘human face’ element sake or do they lead to a proper journalistic investigation?
- 3) Do journalists/media only identify the problem (with SS-SA-FP-BP) or do they attempt to establish a public forum at family, community and society levels, aimed at solving the problem?
- 4) Are journalists/media producing their own original stories or do they simply use (“recycle”) stories taken from news wires or “international” media? (When taking from international media do the journalists adhere to the facts and the overall spirit of the article? When shortening the article do they keep the logic of the storyline or there are elements of selective reporting?)
- 5) Are journalists ‘making a point’ on a particular side rather than providing a balanced objective view on the issue or problem in question?
- 6) Did the media outlet appear to make an effort to include different points of views and information in the items about SS-SA-FP-BP? Are journalists/media able to work with a range of different sources of information (diverse sources of expertise)?
- 7) When using data or statements from officials, do journalists/media confront & question them? Do they use proper fact-checking?
- 8) Are media preserving correctness in the terminology they use while reporting on SS-SA-FP-BP?
- 9) Are media able to differentiate between reproductive choice and discrimination?
- 10) Are media able to differentiate between medical and non-medical reasons?
- 11) Were any contenders in connection with the SS-SA-FP-BP coverage excluded from this broadcast? *Over time, does this indicate a pattern by this media outlet?*
- 12) Did you note any “MEDIA EFFECTS” that could indicate bias, distortion or manipulation by the media? (PLEASE BOLD THE TEXT) Do the video images, photos, or graphics used in the article present the subject fairly and relevant to the subject of the article. Do the images presented appear to accurately reflect the facts of the situation?
- 13) Please note any statements or reporting you feel were distorted, untruthful, or prejudicial against women/men (PLEASE COLOR THE TEXT)

- a. Does a journalist make statements that are not factual? (Leading question: are there any statements in the article that are not backed up by facts?)
- b. Does a journalist use language or descriptions that is expressing sex-supremacism or sex-stereotyping?

Choose an item.

- c. Does a journalist report as fact similar statements made by anyone else?
- d. Does a journalist make statements that may be attacks on women who had abortion and/or their families?

14) Was there any description or language used that you feel was biased or incorrect?  
(PLEASE HIGHLIGHT THE TEXT). Does the journalist use specific words or descriptions that give a negative or positive image of a particular gender?

Male -

Female-

## Annex 2: List of Journalists

Name of the Web-based Media Outlet	Journalist's Name, Surname
<b>Aravot.am</b>	1.Nelli Babayan <a href="http://goo.gl/hj6PvI">http://goo.gl/hj6PvI</a> 2.Elya Hovhannisyan <a href="http://goo.gl/3TiFJE">http://goo.gl/3TiFJE</a> 3. Hripsime Jebejyan <a href="http://goo.gl/pcNXSG">http://goo.gl/pcNXSG</a> 4. Ani Eghiasaryan <a href="http://goo.gl/EzSmZM">http://goo.gl/EzSmZM</a> 5.Tatev Harutyunyan <a href="http://goo.gl/78ASEh">http://goo.gl/78ASEh</a> 6. Armen Petrossian <a href="http://goo.gl/M7XHTS">http://goo.gl/M7XHTS</a> 7. Aram Abrahamyan <a href="http://goo.gl/rwyFPT">http://goo.gl/rwyFPT</a> <a href="http://goo.gl/tB9IUN">http://goo.gl/tB9IUN</a> 8.Bavakan Apitsaryan <a href="http://goo.gl/0xjVyc">http://goo.gl/0xjVyc</a> 9.Nazeni Baghdasaryan <a href="http://goo.gl/sQ0KY6">http://goo.gl/sQ0KY6</a> 10.Anush Bulghadaryan <a href="http://goo.gl/j79FSk">http://goo.gl/j79FSk</a> 11.Lusine Budaghyan <a href="http://goo.gl/cPVusJ">http://goo.gl/cPVusJ</a> 12.Ashot Hakobyan <a href="http://goo.gl/v4hq8m">http://goo.gl/v4hq8m</a> 13. Hovhannes Ishkhanyan <a href="http://goo.gl/RH8ED0">http://goo.gl/RH8ED0</a> 14.Amy Chichakyan 15.Mariam Avetisyan <a href="http://goo.gl/yxOEnU">http://goo.gl/yxOEnU</a> 16.Melanya Barseghyan <a href="http://goo.gl/aWk3n">http://goo.gl/aWk3n</a> 17. Sinaush Hayrapetyan <a href="http://goo.gl/IyUl6p">http://goo.gl/IyUl6p</a> 18.Perchuhi Gevorgyan <a href="http://goo.gl/L6DW7X">http://goo.gl/L6DW7X</a> 29Ashot Israelyan <a href="http://goo.gl/RgSHxV">http://goo.gl/RgSHxV</a> 20.Luisa Sukiasyan <a href="http://goo.gl/zpUjlq">http://goo.gl/zpUjlq</a>
<b>Civilnet.am</b>	1. Mher Arshakyan <a href="http://goo.gl/xht1XB">http://goo.gl/xht1XB</a> 2.Suzanna Hovhannisyan <a href="http://goo.gl/nvA2lz">http://goo.gl/nvA2lz</a> 3. Seda Grigoryan <a href="http://goo.gl/1bePW0">http://goo.gl/1bePW0</a> 4. Armen Grigoryan <a href="http://goo.gl/M8uKFW">http://goo.gl/M8uKFW</a> 5. Derenik Malkhasyan

	<a href="http://goo.gl/UskWjm">http://goo.gl/UskWjm</a> 6. Gegham Baghdasaryan <a href="http://goo.gl/jix0EF">http://goo.gl/jix0EF</a>
<b>Galatv.am</b>	1. Paylak Fähradyan <a href="http://goo.gl/RJTIVY">http://goo.gl/RJTIVY</a> 2. Varduhi Arzumanyan <a href="http://goo.gl/7tGXF7">http://goo.gl/7tGXF7</a> 3. Armine Vardanayn <a href="http://goo.gl/L1QZAf">http://goo.gl/L1QZAf</a> 4. Hermine Mkrtchyan <a href="http://goo.gl/RO6kR7">http://goo.gl/RO6kR7</a> 5. Ludmila Gareginyan <a href="https://goo.gl/7kOn1L">https://goo.gl/7kOn1L</a> 6. Christina Mkrtchyan <a href="https://goo.gl/0yz5qM">https://goo.gl/0yz5qM</a> 7. Hasmik Meliksetyan <a href="https://goo.gl/PPLrpg">https://goo.gl/PPLrpg</a> 8. Arshak Baghdasaryan <a href="https://goo.gl/dZFQqf">https://goo.gl/dZFQqf</a> 9. Armine Vardanyan <a href="https://goo.gl/ZM98py">https://goo.gl/ZM98py</a> 10. Araqs Mamulyan <a href="https://goo.gl/VSoxH7">https://goo.gl/VSoxH7</a> 11. Zara Ghazaryan <a href="https://goo.gl/LEr9fT">https://goo.gl/LEr9fT</a> 12. Derenik Malkhasyan <a href="https://goo.gl/mYD4K2">https://goo.gl/mYD4K2</a>
<b>Hetq.am</b>	1. Armine Ghukasyan <a href="http://goo.gl/4xKPJI">http://goo.gl/4xKPJI</a> 2. Gayane Sargsyan <a href="http://goo.gl/BRVWDI">http://goo.gl/BRVWDI</a> 3. Anna Shahnazaryan <a href="http://goo.gl/5yfWfR">http://goo.gl/5yfWfR</a> 4. Emma Petrosyan <a href="http://goo.gl/JRPAOi">http://goo.gl/JRPAOi</a> 5. Anna Muradyan <a href="http://goo.gl/NXxPMz">http://goo.gl/NXxPMz</a> 6. Arman Gharibyan <a href="http://goo.gl/vN3E86">http://goo.gl/vN3E86</a> 7. Liana Sayadyan <a href="http://goo.gl/sptPMK">http://goo.gl/sptPMK</a> 8. Meri Mamyán <a href="http://goo.gl/KxTNIE">http://goo.gl/KxTNIE</a> 9. Christine Aghalaryan Grisha Balasanyan <a href="http://goo.gl/STvZi7">http://goo.gl/STvZi7</a> 10. Daniel Ionesyan <a href="http://goo.gl/z0feVm">http://goo.gl/z0feVm</a> 11. Suzana Shahnazaryan <a href="http://goo.gl/IXB9pj">http://goo.gl/IXB9pj</a> 12. Ani Hovhannisyán <a href="http://goo.gl/oqxSzu">http://goo.gl/oqxSzu</a> 13. Eranuhi Soghoyan <a href="http://goo.gl/OikvNk">http://goo.gl/OikvNk</a>

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