

MONITORING REPORT ON PUBLIC POLICIES AND PROGRAMS TO PREVENT GENDER-BIASED SEX SELECTION AND SEX-SELECTIVE ABORTIONS IN THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA



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



**Ճրագիրը ֆինանսավորվում է
Եվրոպական միության կողմից
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**Մարդկային զարգացման
միջազգային կենտրոն
International Center for
Human Development**

Monitoring Report
on Public Policies and Programs
to Prevent Gender-Biased Sex
Selection
and Sex-Selective Abortions
in the Republic of Armenia

This Monitoring Report was conducted in the frame of the “Combating Gender-Biased Sex Selection in Armenia” Project implemented by the International Center for Human Development (ICHD) in partnership with Save the Children, Armavir Development Center (ADC) and Martuni Women’s Community Council (MWCC) and funded by the European Union. The Monitoring was carried out in pursuance of Para 1.1. of the Program to Prevent Sex Selective Abortions approved by the Joint Decree of the Minister of Health of RA № 1129-A dated May 8, 2015 and the Minister of Labor and Social Affairs of RA № 75-A/1 dated May 13, 2015 and Memorandum of Cooperation among RA Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MLSA), RA Ministry of Health (MoH) and ICHD of June 17, 2015.

The monitoring was conducted by the Monitoring Group as commissioned by ICHD.

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Abbreviations

ADC	Armavir Development Center NGO
AMD	Armenian Dram
CoP	Communities of Practice of Local Participation and Non-Discrimination
EU	European Union
GIUSSEPPE	Gender-Biased Sex Selection Prevention Policy Experts
ICHD	International Center for Human Development NGO
MLSA	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs
MoH	Ministry of Health
MWCC	Martuni Women’s Community Council NGO
NSS	National Statistical Service
RA	Republic of Armenia
STC	Save the Children
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
USA	United States of America

Technical Introduction

1. The International Center for Human Development (ICHD) is pleased to present the second Monitoring Report on Public Policies and Programs to Prevent Gender-Biased Sex Selection and Sex-Selective Abortions in the Republic of Armenia to policy makers in the government, actors in civil society, stakeholders in academia and private sector, practitioners in local communities and international development partners.
2. Monitoring policy development and implementation is an integral component of the policy cycle. It is a central tool to manage interventions, improve practice and ensure accountability. Policy monitoring is a process by which stakeholders follow and assess policies to ensure they are developed, endorsed, enacted, and implemented as intended. It usually involves appraising the policy environment, gauging the level and quality of stakeholder engagement, documenting the progress of policy development and the legislative endorsement of policy, putting policies into practice through financing and implementation planning, and evaluating outcomes of implementation.
3. Policy change is a highly complex process shaped by a multitude of interacting forces and actors. Achieving specific, hoped-for changes is rare, and the work that does influence policy is often unique and rarely repeated or replicated, with many incentives working against the sharing of good practice. The production and use of policy information during and after an intervention is generally seen as a central plank in systems for reporting and accountability, in demonstrating performance, and for learning from experience and improving future work.
4. The first Monitoring Report has been prepared and published in late 2016, primarily focusing on public policies that would promote the value of girl for parents, families, and the society at large. It consolidated the policy analysis and review of national and sectorial public policies, strategic programmes, action plans and regulatory documents with specific focus on their impact on prevention of gender-biased sex selection in Armenia. It also provided policy recommendations to the policy makers in the Armenian Government, civil society, human rights defenders and international development community, further facilitating policy dialogue in the area of prevention of gender-biased sex selection in Armenia.
5. The current – second - Monitoring Report is focusing on five key dimensions of policy impact (Jones and Villar, 2008; Keck and Sikkink, 1998):
 - **Framing debates and getting issues on to the political agenda:** this is about attitudinal change, drawing attention to new issues and affecting the awareness, attitudes or perceptions of key stakeholders.
 - **Encouraging discursive commitments from the government and other policy actors:** affecting language and rhetoric is important as well, for example, promote recognition of specific groups or endorsements of international declarations.
 - **Securing procedural change at national or international level:** changes in the process whereby policy decisions are made, such as opening new spaces for policy dialogue.
 - **Affecting policy content:** while legislative change is not the sum total of policy change, it is an important element.
 - **Influencing behaviour change in key actors:** policy change requires changes in behaviour and implementation at various levels in order to be meaningful and sustainable.
6. The Monitoring Report further focuses on the comparative analysis based on data produced by UNFPA (2011) and ICHD (2017), while focusing on the above-mentioned dimensions.
7. The Monitoring is implemented by the Monitoring Group including the Chief Technical Adviser of the Project as the Chairperson of the Monitoring Group and area experts. The Monitoring Group extensively utilised the policy analysis and policy documents prepared and issued by the Gender-Biased Sex Selection Prevention Policy Experts (GIUSSEPPE) operating under the Project. The Monitoring Group closely worked with the Ministry of Labour and Social Issues of the Republic of Armenia, Ministry of Health of the Republic of Armenia, Ministry of Sports and Youth Issues of the Republic of Armenia, other relevant line ministries in the government, as well as with the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia, Human Rights Defender of the Republic of Armenia, Public Council, National Statistical Service

of the Republic of Armenia, Office of the President of the Republic of Armenia, commissions on gender issues in the provinces, civil society and international development partners.

8. Desk Review has been the main instrument for the Monitoring Group. In addition to desk review, the Monitoring Group interviewed several policy experts and practitioners in this area, including practitioners engaged in the Community of Practice of Local Participation and Non-discrimination (CoP) to capture both the national and local context of the situation and the trends on the ground. The Monitoring Group also consolidated the inputs provided by the Project partners: STC, ADC and MWCC, related to the result of the ongoing awareness raising campaign.

Foreword

9. Four out of five women in Armenia are expected to get married before the age of 24, which leaves them only with a deem prospect of having had a short period of work experience in the labour market. This is, in a case, if they were lucky not to fall into the large population of young females that find it hard to get their first job ever. Moreover, more than every third woman in Armenia is hoped to get married before even completing her higher education. Somewhere in between 21 to 23 years of their life women are to deliver their first child and carry the daily care throughout the early years of life and up until the early years of schooling.¹
10. This, in a situation of scarcity of care services, difficult access to affordable ones that forces every second mother in Armenia to take on a full-time caregiver's task and mostly do the housekeeping. This poses a number of challenges to the modern-day families and women that face the hard choice of either fully or partially giving up their entry into the market in favour of caring and rearing functions.
11. First, this adversely impacts the potential of parents, suppressing their fertility rates, therefore, also contributing to the aging of the population with a growing burden for those, that are currently entering the economically active age and are to work more than their preceding generation to sustain the larger portion of the retirees in the country. More specifically, almost every second individual living in the country is estimated to believe that having enough children is a firm ground for terminating a pregnancy.
12. Second, it limits the bargaining power of a woman that has less financial contribution to the household income, limiting her voice and agency in intra-household decision making processes, including her own reproductive choices.
13. Third, this adds to the vulnerability of the household as such, since the exacerbated understanding of rigid and limited delineation between breadwinning and housekeeping divided between a man and a woman, makes the entire family dependent only on one individual faced with the ups and downs of the market economy.
14. Fourth, women that had clearly followed the defined role of a housewife could find themselves vulnerable in their old age due to the unequal life expectancy, leaving many without their partner's limited pension.
15. Fifth, this adds an additional risk for the entire society through the vulnerabilities of one person's breadwinning norm, thus, higher risk of household poverty through the loss of employment and more public resources through benefits and pensions, as well as extra social programs aimed at the cushioning of the adverse impact of the same poverty that could have been dealt with much better, if there were more than one person providing for the family.
16. With rigid gender roles, keeping women in charge of private and men of public spheres, combined with the growing demands on households to provide for themselves and their children, it was not surprising that with the introduction of new technologies, family planning acquired a gender biased approach. In 2011, when the UNFPA raised the alarm around the prenatal sex selection, each year, leaving Armenia with around 2000 missing girls, for many, including the professionals in the field, it came across as something unbelievable.
17. From 2013 to 2016, upon the acceptance of the dangerously prevalent sex selection, the Government, along with key stakeholders, started implementing programs that aimed at the eradication of prenatal sex selection through a comprehensive set of inter-sectoral interventions. This policy monitoring review is an assessment based on the comparison of the UNPFA 2011 study on prenatal sex selection and the ICHD 2017 repeater study that gives firm foundation for building evidence based justification that could fulfil a number of functions, such as: (a) measure what has changed over 6 years and the possible reasons behind it; (b) evaluate the effectiveness of the ever conducted large-scale communication campaign and policy advocacy efforts that was building it referencing from the grass roots level; and, (c) assess the areas that remain the key challenges that policy makers need to address, if the reversed trend of sex ratio is to be maintained.

¹ Numbers cited are from the UNFPA Men and Gender Equality Report, Yerevan, 2016

Executive Summary

18. Persistent boy preference combined with the accessibility of advanced technologies, allowing the early identification of sex of the foetus led to anthropogenic interference into the natural balance of sexes at the time of birth. This was exacerbated by the drastic decline in the fertility rates of early 1990s, standing at 2.62 and by 2010 reaching 1.56 with a slight improvement in 2015, exhibiting on average a rate of 1.6 for the entire country. If left to the natural selection the ratio would have balanced somewhere at 1.02-1.06, whereas in Armenia it was showing clear signs of skewed nature, suggesting that family planning had also integrated the sex of the foetus into the variables that contributed to the decision of whether a given pregnancy would be continued or not.
19. In late 2014, following the successive policy dialogues and application of other effective mechanisms by development partners and civil society organizations, the Government adopted the first decree on the need to adopt measures aimed at the prevention of prenatal sex selection and sex selective abortions. Already in 2015, the 2015-2017 State Program on Sex Selective Abortions was adopted, being supported by the EU financing and the collective efforts of development partners, such as the ICHD, Stitching Save the Children Netherlands, Armavir Development Center, Martuni Women's Community Council and Save the Children International.
20. Understanding boy preference, thus, preventing the devaluation of girls and women is the other necessary step that would lead the society into a newly framed social reality and has been already started under the EU supported and ICHD implemented program in close collaboration with the other key partners and through the support network. The reasoning behind the preference is being redefined as not to lead to undervaluation of girls that with the introduction of new technologies is hard to regulate and prevent.
21. One of the successful tools developed within the program was the ICHD led Community of Practitioners of Local Participation and Non-Discrimination, a collective support network on prenatal sex selection that engaged more than 400 trained professionals that had been producing campaign tools, addressing prenatal sex selection, boy preference and improvement of perceptions in relation to girls. As a result, theatres, photo exhibitions, flesh mobs, short films produced locally through small grants projects, TV programs, articles and other campaign and media means were produced and employed with direct support provided by the Save the Children International, a project partner, in order to address the "pluralistic ignorance" and loosen the stereotypical understanding and belief systems of reference networks around any given individual, and most particularly, a couple of reproductive age, in order to weaken the unjustified expectations around the preference of a boy child.
22. The recently completed 2017 study on prevalence and causes of prenatal sex selection, essentially replicating the methodology of the 2011 study, looked at the dynamics of prenatal sex selection in Armenia.² The objective of the report was to analyse the reasons and coverage, as well as see if there are any improvements after several years of public policies and interventions. The initial comparison of sex ratios compared show signs of improvement.
23. In 2017, the data suggests that interfering behaviours occur during third pregnancy at a rate of 1.2. This is not only a matter of prenatal sex selection, but it is a good indicator of a break point, where families start intensively engaging in family planning as to stop their reproduction, thus, pushing down the fertility rate in the country. This so far has been beyond the reach of the state programs and policies, as well as development partner efforts.
24. The current analysis has compared the two, 2011 and 2017 analyses of root causes of prenatal sex selection, in an attempt to understand the possible underlying reasons for changes and their attribution to policy actions and/or inaction. Over these years, households have grown more dependent on pensions and benefits for their income. In 2017, 17 percent of respondents reported no or up to AMD 50,000 monthly household income unlike the 9 percent in 2011. The income of up to AMD 100,000 per month has decreased from 34 percent in 2011 to 24 percent in 2017.

² Reasons and coverage of selective abortions in Armenia, UNFPA, Yerevan, 2016.

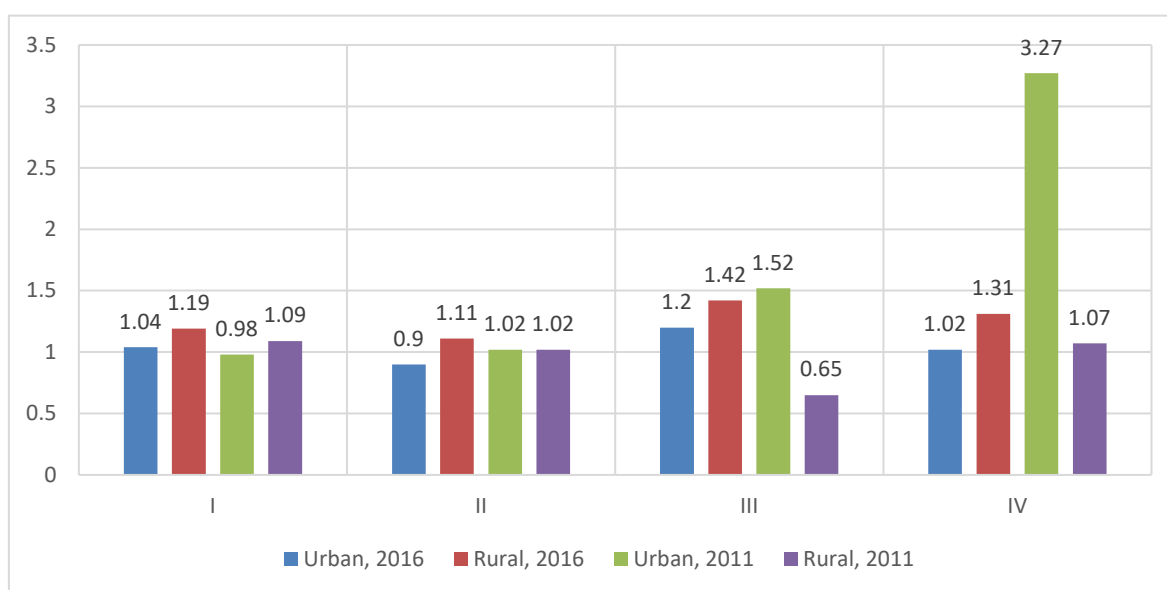
25. There is also a widening inequality. On one hand there are more respondents that have lost their previous standing and on the higher end, there are still more households that have increased levels of income. This could also indicate a deteriorating welfare state system, ensuing state policies geared towards social justice and rather equalitarian distribution of wealth.
26. Women contribute to the household income through their personal incomes, and thus, at times, also gain bargaining power in intra-household decision making matters. For this purpose, it is important to look at employment and income dynamics to see to what extent it could have influenced the voice and agency of women, suggesting that this could also have impact in deciding to terminate the pregnancy. The respondents that had claimed to have a main occupation of housework are on the rise. Unlike 2011, when only 40 percent of respondents claimed to be housewives with no income, now the figure stood at 68 percent. It is notable that they have not reported their status as unemployed, which was an option in 2017 questionnaire.
27. More women, currently, report making no income as compared to 2011. This is also in line with their reporting on being a housewife, which is more than unemployment and is indicating further deteriorating cultural norms, when the expectations of the women are to first of all raise children unlike men, who are supposed to be the main breadwinners.
28. The 2017 report stated that 71.2 percent claimed their husbands being main breadwinners. On the other hand, there is a 10 percentage point increase in women, who make an income of AMD 30,000-50,000 on a monthly basis. On the background of more respondents reporting 9 years of schooling as their highest level of education and the increase in the number of self-reported housewives, economic empowerment programs without sound campaign on overturning the growing norm of employment being secondary to care and housework would not lead to any successful results.
29. The women who consider themselves as breadwinners of their household have a significant decision making power. The question has been posed to those women, who had reported earning income. In very rare cases working women do report their husbands as being the sole decision makers. When women earn no income, they risk not participating in the decision making inside their household. In nuclear families, women that do not earn a living tend to have no personal voice inside their family. If women were to earn up to AMD 50,000 on a monthly basis in majority of nuclear families of rural areas, they would be able to contribute somewhere from 25 percent up to half of household income, leading to increased decision making power inside their families.
30. It seems that employment and care in the case of women stand at cross roads, forcing them to take difficult choice of either leaving the labour market or choosing to postpone or limit their pregnancies. This naturally, is one of the key factors contributing to the gender-biased planning activities that drive the skewed sex ratio up. Compared to 2011 survey sample, in 2017, except for the first and second pregnancy that had resulted in a life birth, the pregnancies with life birth as such have experienced a decline.
31. Most of the working women stated that care of their children was provided by their families 41 out of 100 working women surveyed in this study stated that their children have been taken care of by a family member. Closer to 49 women out of 100 respondents stated that they took care of their children. This meant that for at least 3 years they had opted to forego employment for the sake of childcare. Unlike early years of child care, working women with children of ages 3 to 6 had more options than only their family or themselves. However, every fifth working mother had opted for childcare of her children up to the age of 6, greatly risking her employment prospects or forcing her to take part time jobs.
32. Even with the beginning of schooling of children and especially during the early years, childcare still remains a function that needs institutional consideration in order to ease the burden of families and most specifically of working women. Almost half of working women reported that their family members had taken care of their children with half of them reporting themselves as being the main caregivers. The lack of early care facilities and services combined with a limited gender role of parents puts a heavy burden on women, first, jeopardizing their prospects in the labour market.
33. The reported boy preference has decreased significantly, being replaced by a response favouring no gender for any future child. Unlike 2011, when 59.3 percent explicitly reported believing that the environment (that is the reference network) preferred a boy over a girl, in 2017, this number has declined to a level of 36.7 percent. For the immediate family only 12.9 respondents have stated a boy preference, unlike the 45.3 percent in 2011.

34. Increasing women's financial standing and boosting their employment opportunities would place them in a situation, when they can have a significant impact on preference dynamics. This, of course, would render no results, if the campaigns reverting stereotypes that undervalue girls would not open up a window for them to exercise their voice increased through improved financial standing.
35. When looking at sex preference and personal income, or types of employment by sectors, women exhibited more boy preference than girl preference, suggesting that only increasing the personal income or education attainment level would not solve the issue. It has deeper roots that are conditioned by social norms framing and defining the behaviour of any individual regardless of gender, education attainment level and/or type of settlement.
36. There is a trend shown through the focus groups of 2011 and 2017 that pressures have loosened in five years, at least in urban areas, which is not that clear cut for rural areas. However, especially after the recent armed clashes along the frontline of Nagorno-Karabakh and the losses of young men, have reinstated the importance of more men that could keep the frontline intact. This and the emigration have boosted the importance of delivering more boys as to keep the balance in the country.
37. The 2017 survey in one of its conclusions has stated that birth of a girl is most of the times still associated with concerns, whereas the birth of a boy only adds to joy. This supports a no change in the structure of boy presence that was identified in 2011. Unlike boy presence, both in 2011 and 2017, the no preference in case of a girl was rather based on the avoidance of negative consequences. It seems that the entire structure of preference is built on concepts of "how good it is to have a boy" and "how bad it can be if one gets a girl". If the negative preferences in case of a girl child are not fully reverted through a thorough reframing of concepts that drive aversion, no intervention could create lasting results and any major shock could quickly reinstate the old circuits into full action, as only loosening the pressures in the immediate family and environment though contextually necessary would be insufficient for a conceptual change.
38. Over the last six years, the public perception around boy preference has been clearly changed in terms of being something quite normalized and acceptable to something that is now starting to come across as non-desirable. The 2017 results and larger number of respondents declaring no sex preference do speak for the shift in social desirability bias. Moreover, the collective ignorance around boy preference that would lead individuals to exhibit behaviours aligned to perceived expectations of the close and influential audiences in their lives, now faces a window of opportunity in terms of being less pressured, thus, with more space for actions that are not conditioned by existing social norms.
39. However, for the shift in social norms to occur and take a good use of the opened-up space, there seems a need for reframing of girl child that is still regarded as a loss, if parents get her. Instead, she should start being associated with the winner's image, very much like the winning, and most particularly the breadwinning image of the boy projects. Thus, it is crucial to tackle improvement of girls' opportunity base and function to provide more support to herself and her family. This immediately suggests, and the analysis, confirms it through the evidence, that supporting the already working women and helping the new entrants to the labour market to have secured combination of child bearing and breadwinning functions would economically empower women to (a) participate in household income generation and (b) gain more bargaining power in intra-household decision making.
40. For this not to occur at the expense of her either postponing her reproductive function, which is not an issue so far, but can become one in a generation's time, or not terminate it after the third pregnancy as to remain economically active, thus, greatly limiting the fertility rate and also driving the prenatal sex selection in favour of boys, it is of paramount importance to accommodate her care functions in favour of increased breadwinning. This is first of all, possible through the provision of a spectrum of child care services from the moment of child birth up to early years of schooling. It is also important to lift the double burden off the shoulders of working women, by loosening the parenting roles and inducing fathers to take greater participation in childcare. It is believed that with greater flexibility of gender roles around parenting and increased breadwinning function extended to women, their sense of security will gradually improve, impacting the elasticity of choice.

Background

41. Persistent boy preference combined with the accessibility of advanced technologies, allowing the early identification of sex of the foetus led to anthropogenic interference into the natural balance of sexes at the time of birth. This was exacerbated by the drastic decline in the fertility rates of early 1990s, standing at 2.62 and by 2010 reaching 1.56 with a slight improvement in 2015, exhibiting on average a rate of 1.6 for the entire country.
42. However, until 2011 the prenatal sex selection had mostly remained off the radar screens of policy makers, until the UNFPA report on selective abortions raised the alarm.³ If left to the natural selection the ratio would have balanced somewhere at 1.02-1.06, whereas in Armenia it was showing clear signs of skewed nature, suggesting that family planning had also integrated the sex of the foetus into the variables that contributed to the decision of whether a given pregnancy would be continued or not. Most specifically, in urban areas, where unlike the rural areas (2.0), the fertility rate in 2010 balanced at 1.3, the families engaged in prenatal sex selection during the third pregnancy, reaching an incredible pick during the fourth one (see *Figure 1*). For instance, during the fourth pregnancy 327 boys were born per each 100 girls. Further to the UNFPA report and based on the results of the national census it became clear that from 1996 the ratio of boys to girls on average stood at 115 and that led to 39,000 less girls than boys below the age of 15.⁴ The estimations of the UNFPA suggest that if this trend continues Armenia will miss 93,000 women by 2060.

Figure 1. Sex Ratio at Birth in Armenia



43. For three years after the 2011 UNFPA report the key stakeholders in terms of influencing policy making in Armenia remained sceptical of the fact that Armenia is one of the top 3 countries engaging in sex selection.⁵ However, in late 2014, following the successive policy dialogues and application of other effective mechanisms by development partners and civil society organizations, the Government adopted the first decree on the need to adopt measures aimed at the prevention of prenatal sex selection and sex selective abortions. Already in 2015, the 2015-2017 State Program on Sex Selective Abortions was adopted, being supported by the EU financing and the collective efforts of development partners, such as the ICHD, Stitching Save the Children Netherlands, Armavir Development Center, Martuni Women's Community Council and Save the Children International.

³ Reasons and coverage of selective abortions in Armenia, UNFPA, Yerevan, 2011

⁴ Skewed ration of newborns in Armenia, information brochure, UNFPA, Yerevan, 2013

⁵ See the Report on State Policies and Programs on Prevention of Sex Selective Abortions and prenatal sex selection in the Republic of Armenia, ICHD, Yerevan, 2016

44. The main components of the program planned to address the development of analytical tools in relation to sex selection, sensitization of the population in relation to the topic, for the purpose of prevention of prenatal sex selection the capacity development of medical staff, social workers and professionals in the field of education, as well as the development of an understanding that did not undervalue the girl child. The interventions were planned at local. i. e. community, regional and national levels. Multitude of tools and modes of operations gradually enlarging the grass roots reference base, sharing the same understanding and acknowledgement of the urgency of the issue, armed with appropriate means to tackle it, were built and networked to create one of the biggest stakeholder support networks that was over more than 3 years continuously engaged in campaigning for the change of attitudes, knowledge and behaviour with the hope to revert a social norm of boy preference.
45. A year later, the Law on Reproductive health and rights was amended to prohibit abortion based on sex preference during the second trimester of pregnancy. Apart from this, certain medicines previously used to induce abortions and being sold off the counter, were included in the list of medicines that had to be prescribed exclusively by the doctor. However, some of the key stakeholders believe that leaving sex selection on the shoulders of medical professionals would only give short term results and in the long run create unanticipated risks, if the root causes of the prenatal sex selection are not addressed fully.
46. Understanding boy preference, thus, preventing the devaluation of girls and women is the other necessary step that would lead the society into a newly framed social reality and has been already started under the EU supported and ICHD implemented program in close collaboration with the other key partners and through the support network. The reasoning behind the preference is being redefined as not to lead to undervaluation of girls that with the introduction of new technologies is hard to regulate and prevent. In this regard, the 2016-2019 Care for Equality program financed by the World Vision USA is working towards building a positive parenting aimed at reverting of existing stereotypes for an environment, where children are equally valued. Though not yet at the point to have had created an impact on perceptions around a girl or boy child, this work may complement the work that has been started by the ICHD and other development partners. Another future action, that would further complement the ongoing redefinition efforts around boy preference, is the experimental research commissioned by the UNICEF along with the Women's Resource Center, measuring the existing stereotypes of boy preferences through a dive into the implicit associations of women and men in Armenia, as well as stories that measure self and other expectations in relation to prenatal sex selection in Armenia.
47. Grass roots level engagement that was building all the messages and tools on a firm foundation of evidence driven knowledge transfer, was just one part of a wider array of campaign tools that had been employed throughout the years of the program supported by the EU. One of the successful tools developed within the program was the ICHD led Community of Practitioners of Local Participation and Non-Discrimination, a collective support network on prenatal sex selection that engaged more than 400 trained professionals that had been producing campaign tools, addressing prenatal sex selection, boy preference and improvement of perceptions in relation to girls. As a result, theatres, photo exhibitions, flesh mobs, short films produced locally through small grants projects, TV programs, articles and other campaign and media means were produced and employed in order to address the "pluralistic ignorance" and loosen the stereotypical understanding and belief systems of reference networks around any given individual, and most particularly, a couple of reproductive age, in order to weaken the unjustified expectations around the preference of a boy child. The full range of activities implemented during 2013-2017 is described in detail in the ICHD report on state policies and programs.⁶
48. A point that is worthy of being singled out is that fact of extensively researching the dynamics of policy actions taken in other countries that have had a similar problem in relation to prenatal sex selection. More specifically, the cases of China's state policy and devised tools were thoroughly studied among other examples along with the theoretical foundations that dealt with the talking of social norms, as the evidence base that instead of replication was rather kept as the reference depository for conceptualizing the main directions of programmatic interventions and policy advise shared with the key stakeholders in Armenia.

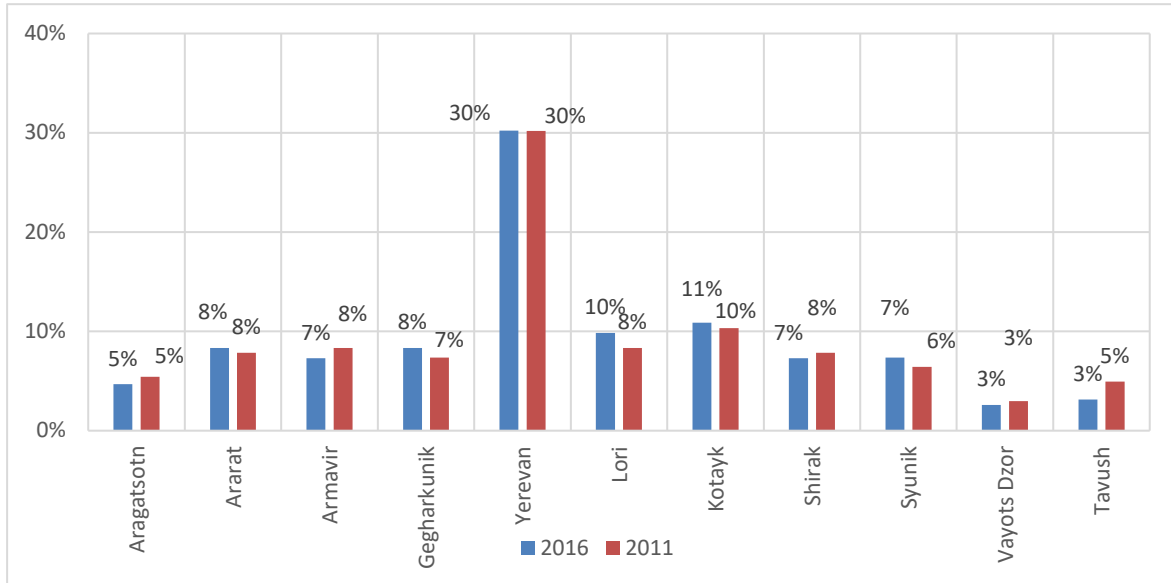
⁶ See the Report on State Policies and Programs on Prevention of Sex Selective Abortions and prenatal sex selection in the Republic of Armenia, ICHD, Yerevan, 2016.

Six Years in Retrospection: Main Comparisons and Changes

49. The recently completed 2017 study on prevalence and causes of prenatal sex selection, essentially replicating the methodology of the 2011 study, looked at the dynamics of prenatal sex selection in Armenia.⁷ The objective of the report was to analyse the reasons and coverage, as well as see if there are any improvements after several years of public policies and interventions. The initial comparison of sex ratios compared (see *Figure 1*) show signs of improvement.
50. It is interesting that unlike 2011, in 2017, the sex ratios in rural areas have deteriorated already at the first pregnancy exacerbating with each consecutive one, suggesting a possibility of sex selection with ratios of 1.19, 1.11, 1.42 and 1.31. In comparison to rural areas, urban areas show clear signs of positive change.
51. In 2017, the data suggests that interfering behaviours occur during third pregnancy at a rate of 1.2. This is not only a matter of prenatal sex selection, but it is a good indicator of a break point, where families start intensively engaging in family planning as to stop their reproduction, thus, pushing down the fertility rate in the country. This so far has been beyond the reach of the state programs and policies, as well as development partner efforts. If in 2010 rural areas had a rate of 2.0 compared to 1.3 in urban areas, in 2015, the picture has shifted with urban areas having a fertility rate of 1.7 compared to 1.5 of rural areas. However, there could be other program specific reasons that could have better targeted audiences and beneficiaries in urban areas, as well as select rural areas already tightly networked with adjustment cities, leaving out other remote and/or not well connected and communicated areas.
52. The current analysis will compare the two reports in an attempt to understand the possible underlying reasons for changes and their attribution to policy actions and/or inaction. For that purpose, the samples of two studies along with the methodologies will be compared as to exclude the data variations resulting from the differences in the pool of respondents included. In both cases the random selection of the households had been the initial step, targeting women of ages 15-49 that had at least one pregnancy by the time of the survey in 2011 and 2017. In 2011, the sample of households had been drawn from the database of the National Statistical Service, whereas in 2017, households had been selected from the voting registry of the police. The sampling had not been changed, in both cases the stratified sampling has been applied, creating a sound ground for comparisons.
53. The selection of households and their geographic distribution (see *Figure 2*) did not show any signs of difference that could impact the respondent pool. In both cases, the representation in all marzes has not shown variations beyond the level of 1 percent with exception of Lori, Syunik and Tavush regions, where the variation has equalled to 2 percent. Yerevan in both cases has taken a significant portion with one third of households coming from that city. However, there is a justification for such a significant representation, as in terms of the population it is the most densely populated area, absorbing more than the third of the entire population. On the other hand, the level of connectivity for this settlement surpasses the capacity of other areas manifold, thus, possibly creating unequal grounds in terms of access to services and means of communication that is instrumental for campaigns.

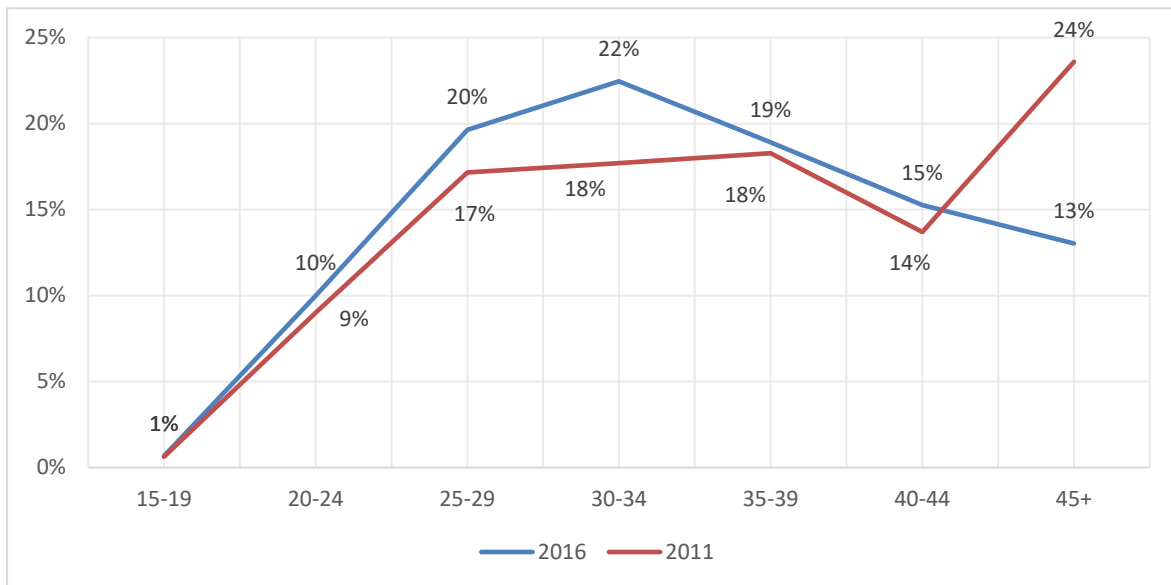
⁷ Reasons and coverage of selective abortions in Armenia, UNFPA, Yerevan, 2016.

Figure 2. Number of surveyed households and their geographic distribution



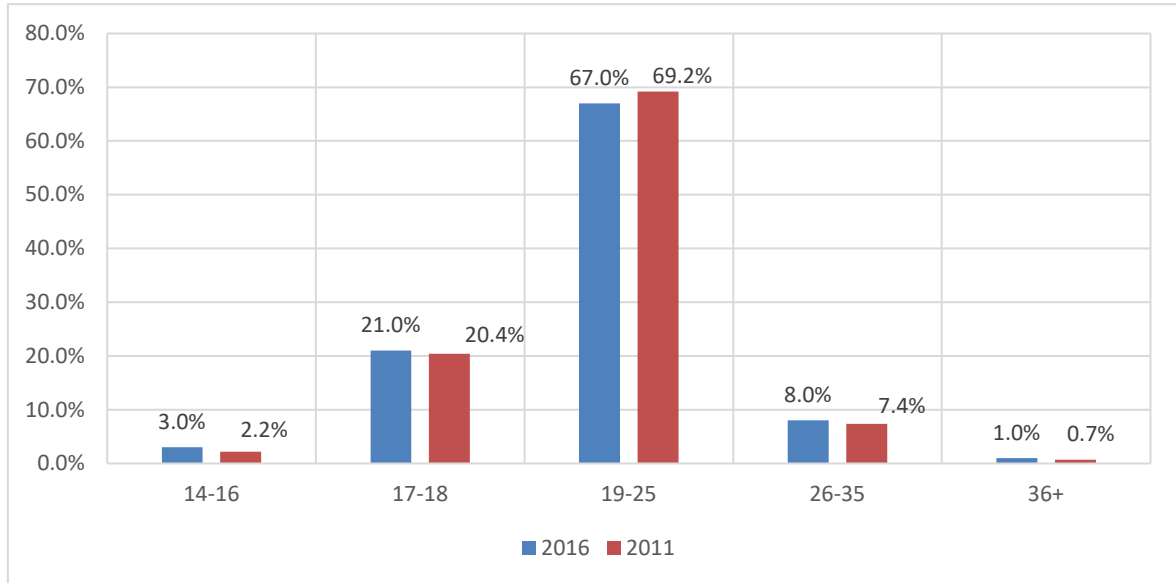
54. The age of respondents in both surveys has remained mostly similar with one exception, when women of age 45 and older comprised 24 percent of 2011 survey sample and 13 percent of 2017 sample (see Figure 3). More than half of the survey population is of ages 25 to 40.

Figure 3. Age distribution of respondents in both surveys



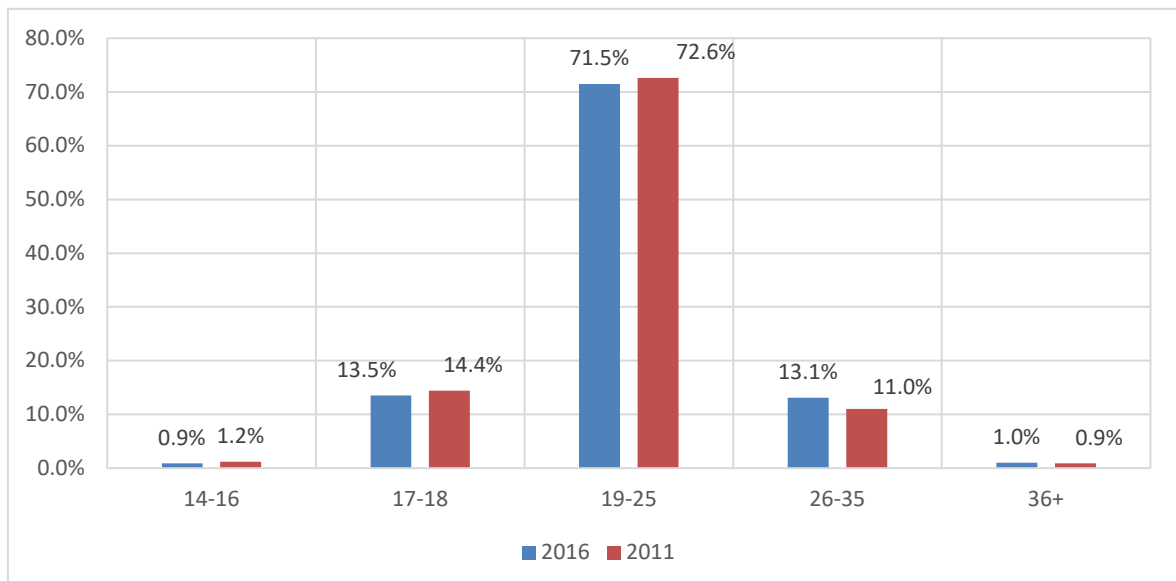
55. This follows the age of marriage, which according to the survey mostly occurs somewhere between the ages of 19 to 25. It is being confirmed by the statistical data of the National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia. It is also confirmed through the UNFPA 2016 report on men and gender equality, where nationally representative sample of respondents have comparable expectations around the desired age of marriage and childbirth. The average age of women in registered marriage was 25 in 2011 and 26.2 in 2015. (see Figure 4). Therefore, it would be natural to have the largest portion of survey respondents coming from the ages that coincide and closely follow the average age of around 25.

Figure 4. Age of Marriage



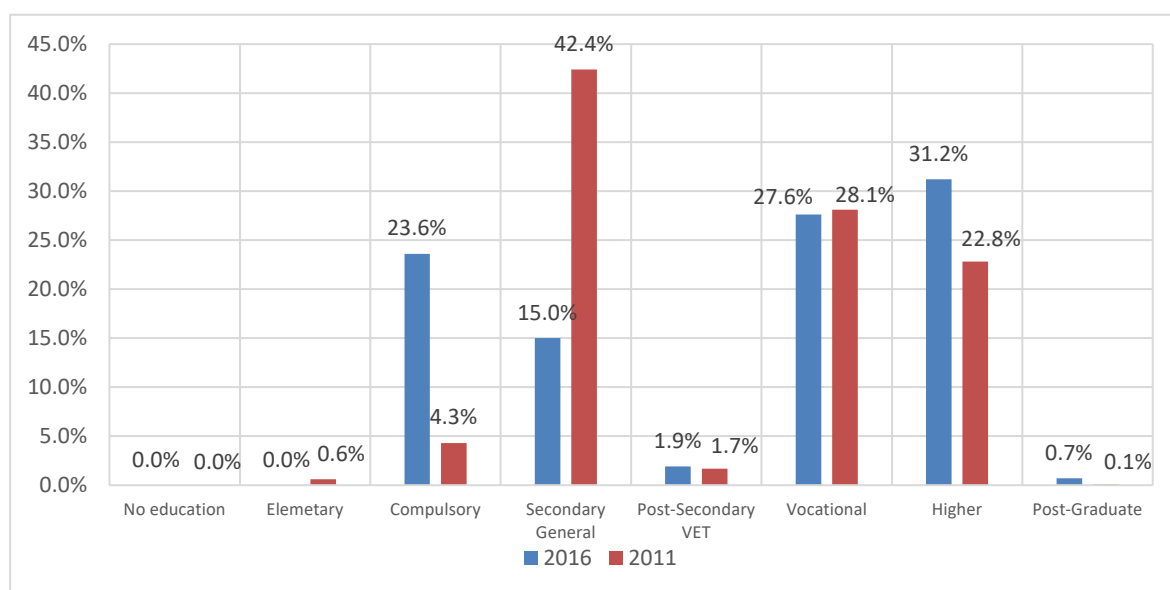
56. Both in 2011 and 2017, the majority of respondents were married at the time of the survey. More specifically, in 2011, 89.3 percent and 93.2 percent in 2017 reported that they are officially married, only 0.5 percent of the respondent population reported cohabitation. Single mothers comprised 0.3 percent in 2011 and 0.4 percent in 2017 of surveyed population, 4.4 percent in 2011 and 4.8 in 2017 were divorced by the time of the survey and lastly 1.8 in 2011 and 5 percent in 2017 were widowed. In addition, pregnancy appears to be closely tied to marriage, as the age of marriage and pregnancy are mostly in line with each other. It seems that the respondents' marriage is almost immediately followed by their first pregnancy (see Figure 5). Age specific fertility rates also confirm that the ages between 20 to 30 are the high points.
57. In 2010, the National Statistical Service reports that the average number of life births per 1000 women of the same age group peaks at 20-30. The same is reported for 2017. For the purpose of comparing the two samples, both in 2011 and in 2017 around 76 percent of respondent women had their first pregnancy at the age from 19 to 25. The married women included in survey sample lived either in nuclear, extended or families where apart from extended members of the kin others lived under the same roof. However, most of the women were either from nuclear (43.7% in 2011 and 44.3% in 2017) or extended (44.5% in 2011 and 39.1% in 2017) households.

Figure 5. Age at the Moment of First Pregnancy



58. The survey has one peculiarity that goes against the enrolment levels in secondary education in Armenia. The respondents in 2017 had lower levels of secondary general education than the sample of 2011. However, women tended to be overeducated in terms of vocational and higher education. This means that there were two groups in 2017 sample: one that was undereducated and stopped schooling earlier than expected and second one, which was more educated than their husbands. This could be also explained by the small number of respondents with only compulsory education included in 2011 survey, which has grown in size by 2017. For example, the number of women with compulsory education compared to the total of the sample size was 4.3 percent in 2011, whereas by 2017 it equalled to 23.6 percent (see *Figure 6*). Given the fact that all the other previous steps in sampling the respondents have been kept exactly the same, this shift could be explained by the growing number of girls that have not opted for a high school after the separation of the schools, especially in the cases when they had to travel a sizable distance from their paternal home.

Figure 6. Education Attainment Levels of Respondents

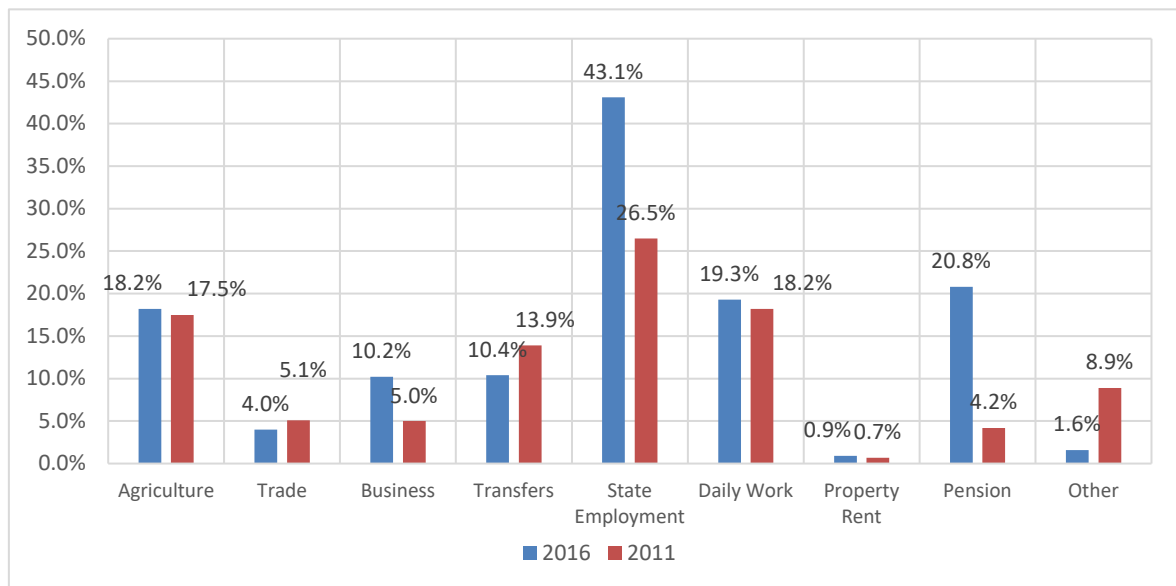


59. Another observed variation in 2017 sample is the larger number of respondents with higher education. For example, unlike 2011, when only 22.8 percent of respondent women had higher education, in 2017 their number increased to the level of 31.2 percent. This is the only significant variation, when comparing the two surveys that could impact the results of the survey. However, it suggests that there might be a growing divide, in terms of education and equal opportunities for women in Armenia, i.e. those that terminate their study at the point of compulsory schooling and those that continue their education in higher education institutions.

Household Income and Employment Dynamics

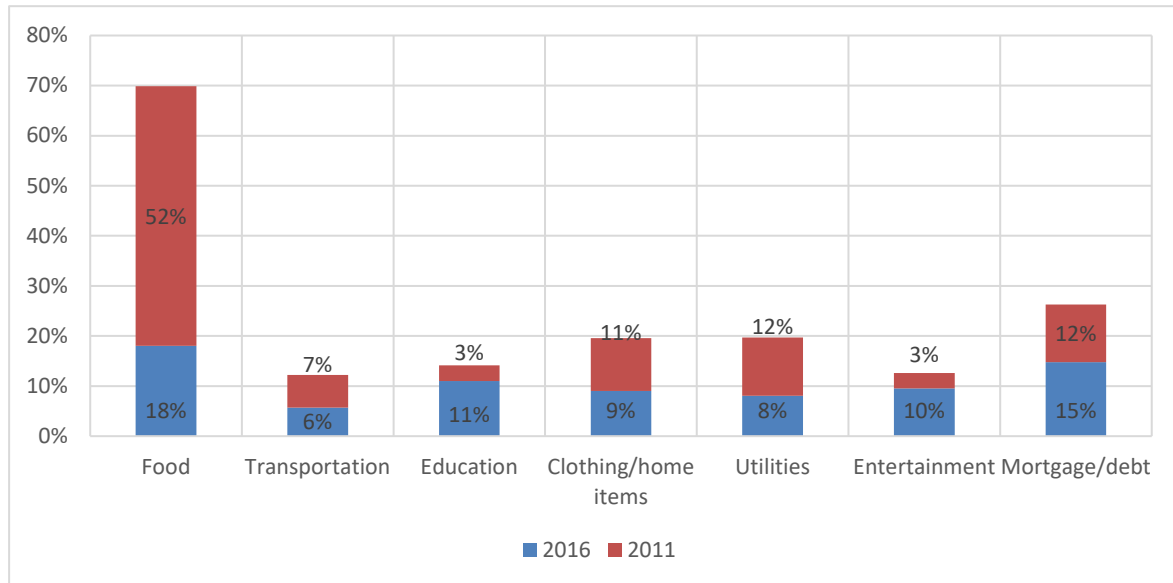
60. Almost every fifth household is dependent on agriculture for its overall income, which in itself is bound to be seasonal and as it is described through analyses of the World Bank, quite ineffective in terms of value added produced compared to the work hours going into the production of goods. Currently, more than every third household gains income through state employment as compared to 26.5 percent reported in 2011 (see *Figure 7*).

Figure 7. Household Income Source



61. There is also a sizeable increase in households that are dependent on pensions and benefits for their income. This could be an indicator of worsening economic environment that is mostly leaving the households on stable payments from such sources as the state employment and pensions/benefits. In 2017, 17 percent of respondents reported no or up to AMD 50,000 monthly household income unlike the 9 percent in 2011. The income of up to AMD 100,000 per month has decreased from 34 percent in 2011 to 24 percent in 2017. There is a 4 and 6 percentage point increase in incomes for the segment AMD 200,000-250,000 and more than AMD 300,000 household income. There is a visible shift on both ends of the sampled household income (see *Figure 8*).

Figure 8. Household spending a month before the survey

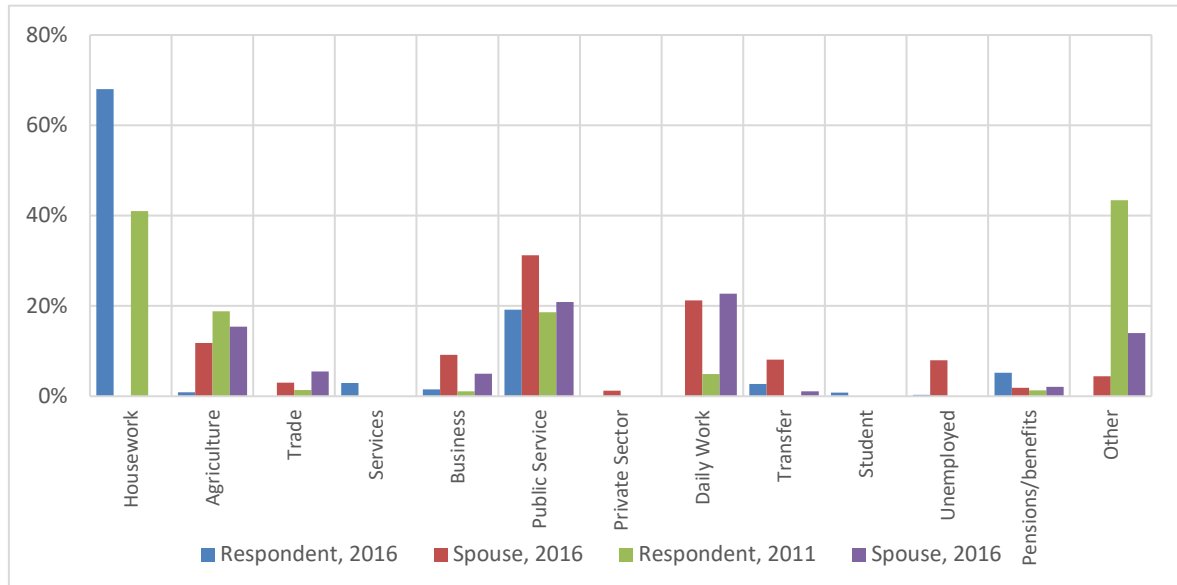


62. On one hand there are more respondents that have lost their previous standing and on the higher end, there are still more households that have increased levels of income. This could also indicate a deteriorating welfare state system, ensuing state policies geared towards social justice and rather equalitarian distribution of wealth. However, there is a need to further explore the economic environment in order to make firm conclusions.
63. On the other side, it is also interesting to examine the household spending as to understand if the sampled population has undergone any major changes in terms of the structure of their spendings. It is quite notable that unlike 2011, when most of the spending was absorbed by food items, in 2017 there was not any major item that took hold of most of the household income. However, this could mean a number of things.
64. First, this could indicate that the sample now has clearly set two groups of respondents, coming either from either only compulsory education background with a higher risk of unemployment and poverty or higher education background, which gives more security in terms of employment and sustained income.
65. Second, this could also be a reflection of the deteriorating social fabric in the country with exacerbating inequality on both ends of the spectrum, spending less on the food items, but because of different reasons. If for poorer households it would not be affordable to buy many items and would keep the overall amount low in absolute terms compared to the overall income, for the rich households it would mean that the share of income spent on food would be less in relative terms. This in both cases would generate percentage points leading to the picture shown in *Figure 8*.
66. Third, this could also mean that food consumption culture experiences changes with more purchase and less consumption giving ways to balanced purchase, as well as combination of outside catering services that could have been reported under the entertainment that is on the rise in 2017 sample. Another household spending item that is on the rise is education, that from its 3 percent of 2011 has come to 11 percent in 2017.
67. This again could have a number of explanations. First, the structure of the sample itself could be the reason with respondents on the higher end of educational attainment levels paying more attention and giving more resources to it. Second, this could also mean that the new structure of secondary general education with separated high schools is further increasing the burden on households in terms of educational expenses.
68. Women contribute to the household income through their personal incomes, and thus, at times, also gain bargaining power in intra-household decision making matters. For this purpose, it is important to look at employment and income dynamics to see to what extent it could have influenced the voice and agency of women, suggesting that this could also have impact in deciding to terminate the pregnancy. The respondents that had claimed to have a main occupation of housework are on the rise. Unlike 2011,

when only 40 percent of respondents claimed to be housewives with no income, now the figure stood at 68 percent (see *Figure 9*).

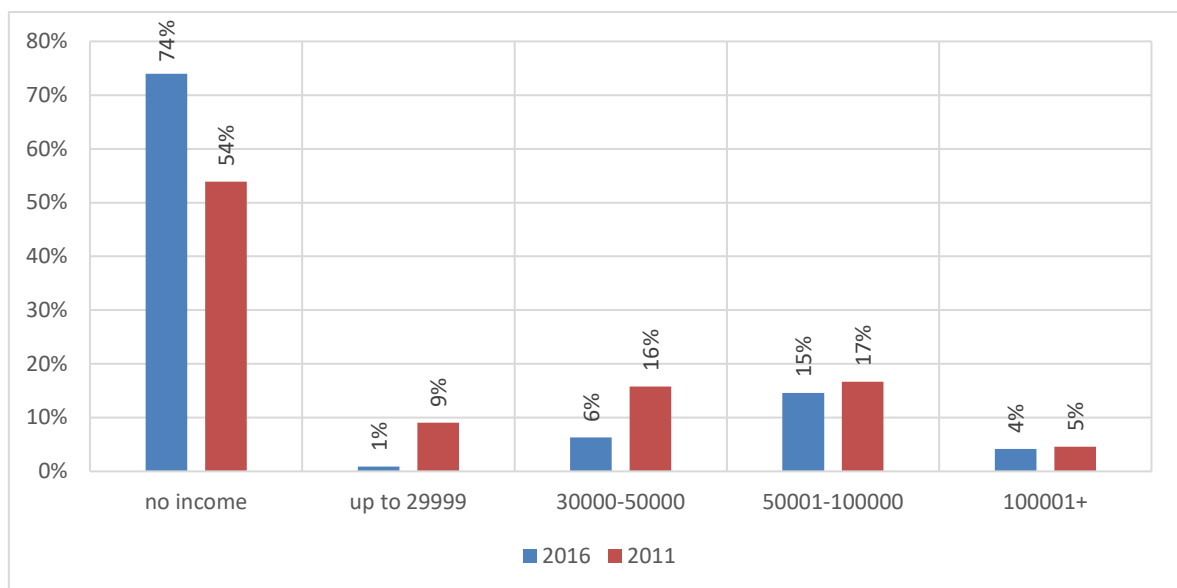
69. It is notable that they have not reported their status as unemployed, which was an option in 2017 questionnaire. This means, as it is suggested in the 2017 report that these women have not thought of entering the labour market. It also coincides with the national data on economic activity by gender. In Armenia, 2015 statistics suggests that only 55.2 percent women are economically active as compared to 73.2 percent active men. For the spouses, the employment in public service is on the rise, for women it is an unspecified area, combined under “other”, which does not allow identifying what kind of work do they perform.

Figure 9. Main Occupation of Respondents and their Partners



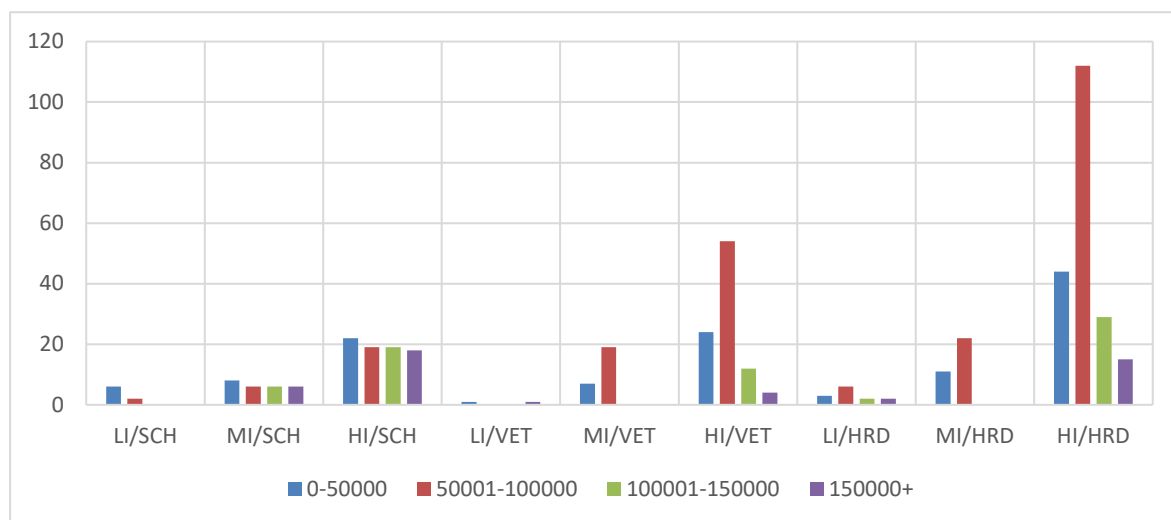
70. More women, currently, report making no income as compared to 2011 (see *Figure 10*). This is also in line with their reporting on being a housewife, which is more than unemployment and is indicating further deteriorating cultural norms, when the expectations of the women is to first of all raise children unlike men, who are supposed to be the main breadwinners.

Figure 10. Women's monthly income



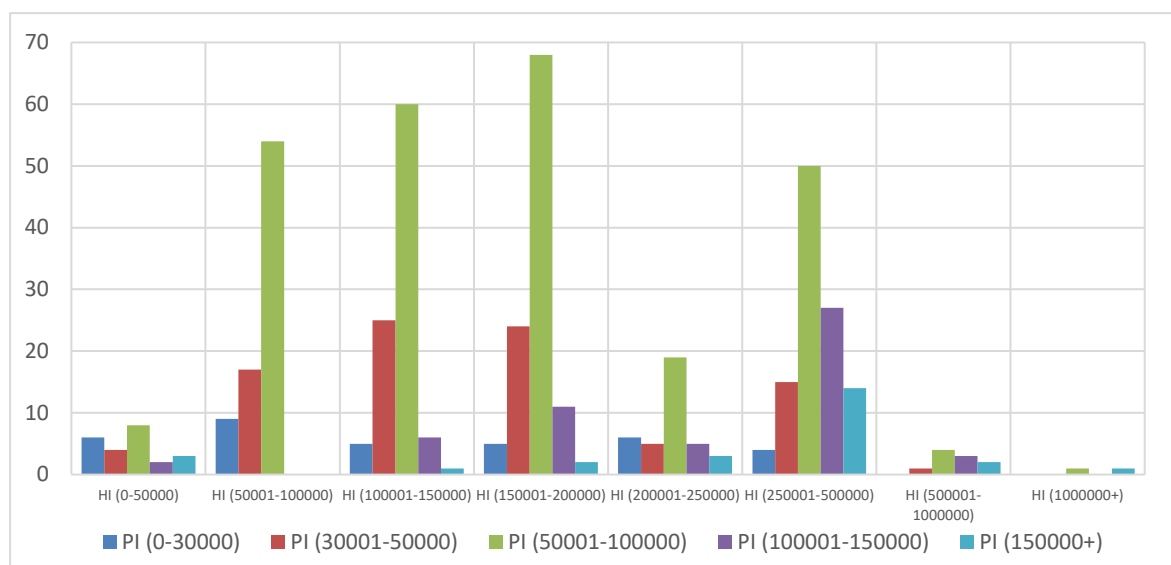
71. In fact, the 2017 report stated that 71.2 percent claimed their husbands being main breadwinners. On the other hand, there is a 10 percentage point increase in women, who make an income of AMD 30,000-50,000 on a monthly basis. On the background of more respondents reporting 9 years of schooling as their highest level of education and the increase in the number of self-reported housewives, economic empowerment programs without sound campaign on overturning the growing norm of employment being secondary to care and housework would not lead to any successful results.
72. There is a need to show how women's employment and personal income could greatly boost the sustained household income and security. It would also be, very important, to show, how important for secured household income would be the increased years of schooling for girls. For instance, very few women with only school education that reported having any income (this excludes the housewives) had a high household income (more than AMD 100,000 per month), (see *Figure 11*).

Figure 11. Personal Income (PI) and Household Income (HI) per Education Attainment Levels, 2017



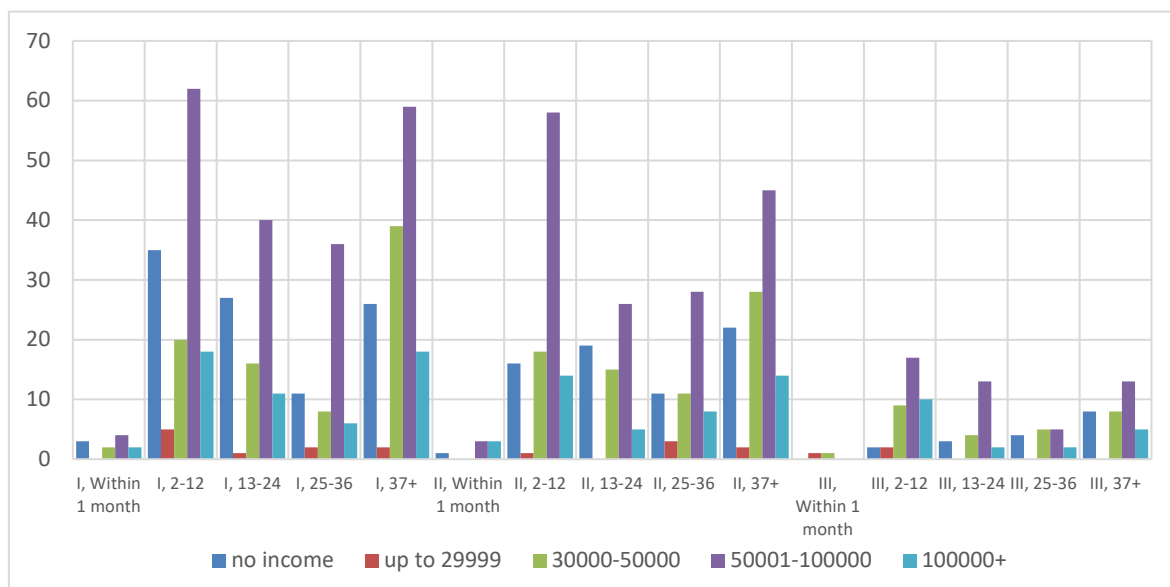
73. Most of the women with income of AMD 50,000-100,000 on a monthly base had a post-secondary education and reported high household income. In fact, women in this income group contribute up to 50 percent of monthly household income and are mostly represented in a range of households that have incomes from AMD 50,000 at the lowest end up to AMD 200,000 at the higher end. This suggests that they should have a more obvious advantage in terms of intra-household decision making as compared to those women that reported no income at all (see *Figure 12*).

Figure 12. Types of Households, Personal Income and Decision Making, 2017



74. With a correlation of household income and women's personal income, which in its turn is linked to education that from the very recent data shows some initial signs of shifts that if not attended to at an early stage, quite possibly, in a generation, could add structural barriers to the entry to more secured employment in a tight economic environment. This would mean that women with less years of schooling would end up having fewer prospects in the job market and thus, limited willingness to join the active work force, placing them and their households at greater risk of poverty and vulnerability.
75. Moreover, for a country with a low fertility rate and an aging population, as well as an emerging pension system that is shifting towards a pay-as-you-go system, women that have lower income would later on face poverty at an elderly age. This combined with a shorter life expectancy of men, which leaves many women alone after they enter the pension age, is adding to their vulnerability.
76. Already, now it is obvious that women, who do not view themselves as breadwinners due to obvious reasons highlighted here, loose their very limited standing in the labour market after each childbirth and care (see *Figure 13*). More women in the income group above AMD 50,000 show signs of early return to the work after the first childbirth and maternity leave. However, when looking at the dynamics of the same income groups for the third child, it is noticeable that the numbers decline. Given that the sample accommodates mostly women from age groups of 25 to 35, the decline in the numbers due to the structure of the respondent pool is ruled out.
77. The only sample relevant explanation remaining, is the fertility rate, that is the primary reason for lower levels of back to work reporting. Beyond this, however, next most obvious reason is the increased burden that women and their families face, when trying to combine female employment and care.
78. Another reason for this decline could be the deterioration of skills amid dynamically changing labour market, making women vulnerable to the reintegration into the working life. However, given that early child care institutions are not well developed and their service provision is limited to a level of having no impact, which is also confirmed by the high demand that is being absorbed by families at the age of 3-6 of their children, it is suggestive that reasons for going back to the labour market loose their initial power, giving way to the reasons of care provision becoming more pronounced, further deepening the divide between the men breadwinner and women housewives stereotypes.
79. On the other side, the high demand of care provision on the side of the parents (expressed in the absorption rates of care services for ages 3-6) and the almost total absence of up to 3 year old child care facilities and/or services directly contributes to the suppression of fertility for women that do want to stay in the labour market, especially for the ones that are calling themselves the breadwinners of their families. Thus, making sure that breadwinning is not bound to be a male function and is accommodated to combine the childcare expectations placed on women unavoidably has to look into the provision of services for this niche.

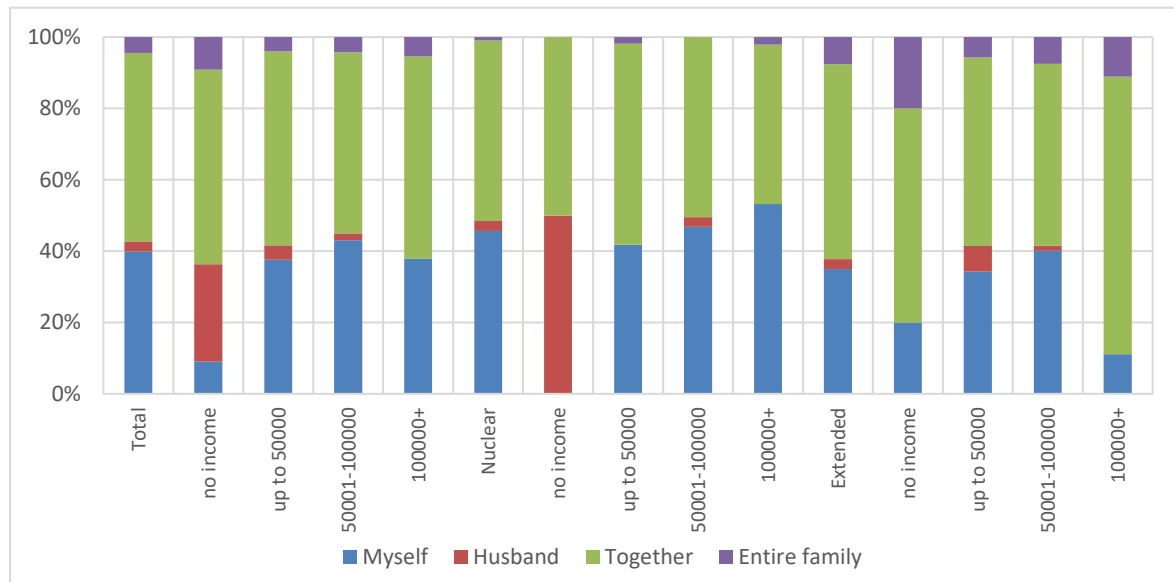
Figure 13. Going Back to Work after Each Maternity Leave per Income Group, 2016



Voice and Intra-Household Decision Making

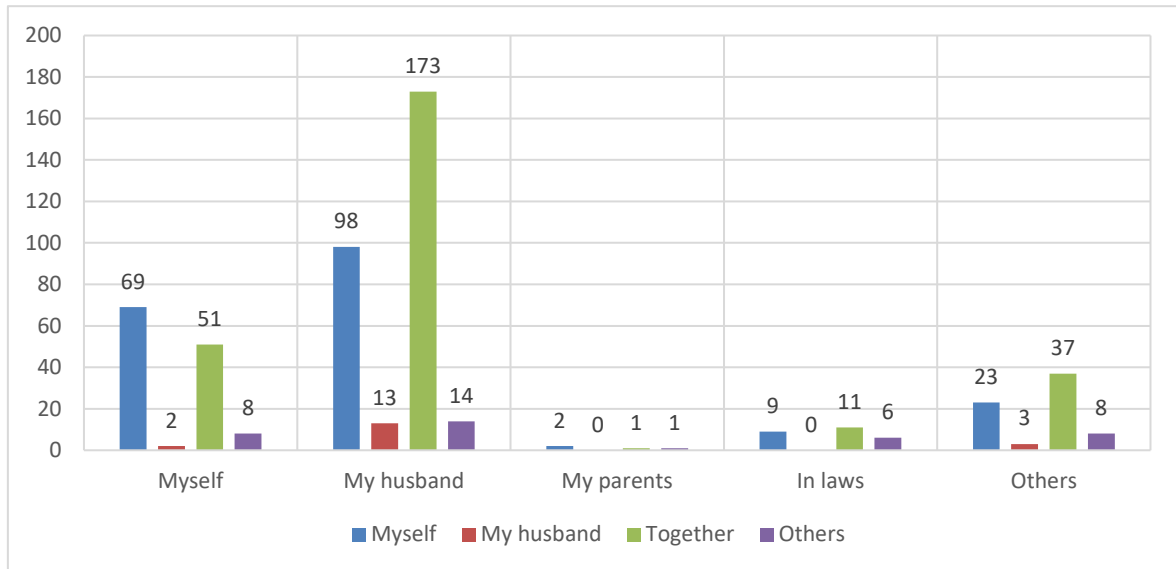
80. The women who consider themselves as breadwinners of their household have a significant decision making power. The question has been posed to those women, who had reported earning income. The horizontal axis on *Figure 14* shows the reports of respondents to the question of who they would consider as the main breadwinner in their household. The legend shows the actual decision makers per answer options of respondents. The results of cross tabulation of those two questions show clearly that when women clearly consider themselves as the main breadwinners in their household, they also prevail in making the decisions, whereas in other cases reported joint decisions prevail. The answer option “together” is mostly an elusive option, and needs further analysis in order to understand to what extent and how each of the parties has contributed to reaching a final decision on any given issue, including the sex preference of the future child.

Figure 14. Household Decision Making vs Personal Income, 2017



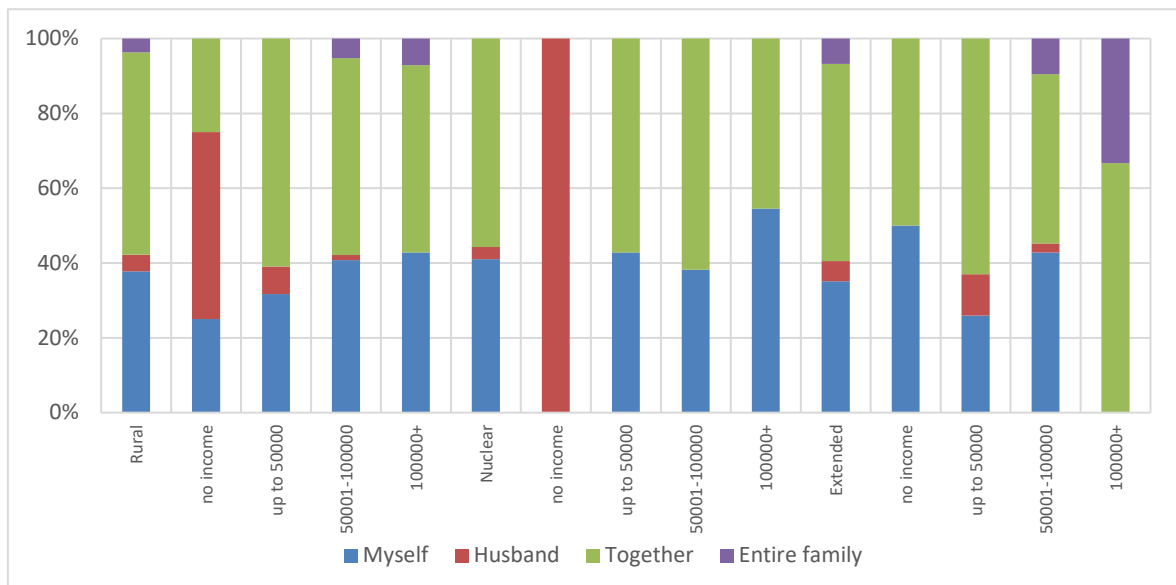
81. When looking at the personal income of respondents that in most of the cases balance around AMD 0-100,000 the decisions is either being taken by themselves or along with their partners. In very rare cases working women do report their husbands as being the sole decision makers.
82. Therefore, it would be important to further improve working conditions as such and most particularly of women, who in Armenia on average receive 35% less income than men due to a number of structural inequalities in the labour market.
83. In addition, it would be important to further understand the reasons behind the reporting of being a housewife that could occur, given that child rearing functions and facilities are fully left on their shoulders, both institutionally and culturally, as well as resulting from women still being perceived as main care takers of their family, thus, depriving them of work outside the household. However, before moving on to the section on exploration of care functions and facilities, it is still important to exhaust the decision-making powers by types of households, i.e. nuclear and extended, as well as look at the dynamics in the urban and rural areas.

Figure 15. Decision making per Breadwinner



84. When women earn no income, they risk not participating in the decision making inside their household. In nuclear families, women that do not earn a living tend to have no personal voice inside their family (see Figure 14). Most of the decisions are taken by their partners and/or together. Here the option “together” needs further deconstruction and examination in order to understand the quality of that joint decision-making. That trend is applicable to nuclear households in urban areas as well, whereas in rural areas women that report no personal income have neither personal voice nor a collective say in any decision making inside their families (see Figure 16). If women were to earn up to AMD 50,000 on a monthly basis in majority of nuclear families of rural areas, they would be able to contribute somewhere from 25 percent up to half of household income, leading to increased decision making power inside their families.

Figure 16. Types of Rural Households, Personal Income and Decision Making, 2017

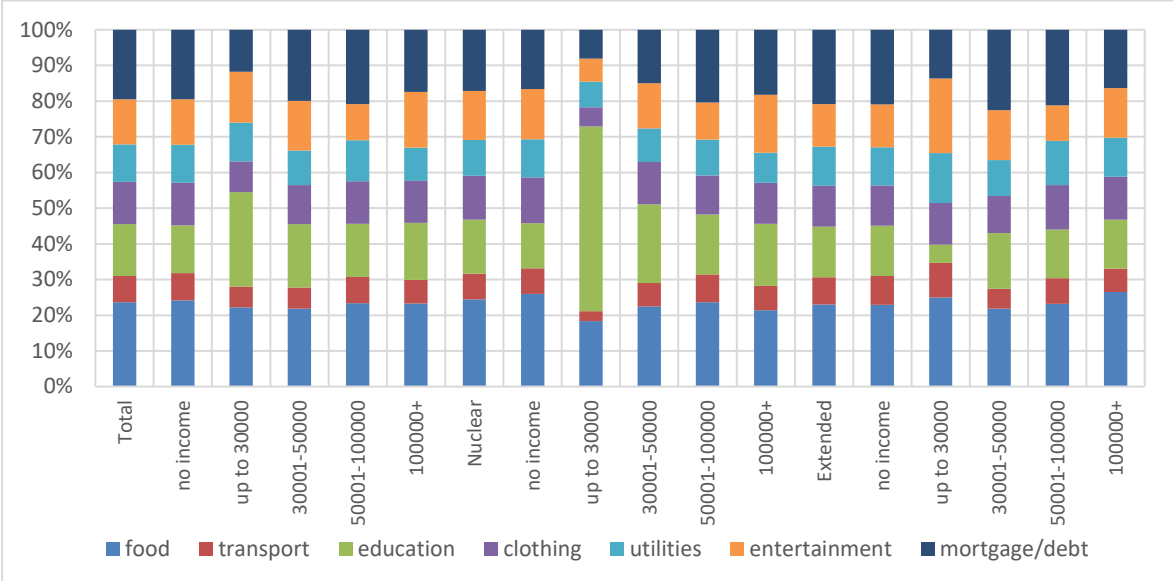


85. In comparison to extended families, women in nuclear families report more education related household expenditures. This could be explained through a number of arguments (see Figure 17). First and most probable explanation could be a rather privatized early childhood development services or their limited and non-suitable nature that does not cater to the needs of income earning mothers. That is why, unlike extended families, where parents of a couple would be providing the service most of the times, women

in nuclear households most of the times have no choice, but to resort to the services of private institutions or baby sitters.

- 86. Second, there is a possibility that in extended families, personal income, especially in cases of personal income lower than AMD 30,000 on a monthly basis lead to a spending that further accentuates food and other immediate need based expenditures, leaving education to other non-financial ways of accommodation.
- 87. Both in urban and rural households, extended families can afford to consider the education of the child, especially the early years, as an elastic commodity, thus, either partially or fully forgoing it. Unlike the extended families, the women from nuclear households contribute more than one third of their entire income to education, with the only exception being the income group of up to AMD 30,000 in rural areas, reporting no spending on education at all.
- 88. The combination of low income and unaffordability of care services could drive many women to forego employment for care and child rearing during their most fertile years. On the other hand, this could, actually decide, especially for women from urban nuclear families to forgo bearing additional children in order to remain in the labour market.
- 89. It seems that employment and care in the case of women stand at cross roads, forcing them to take difficult choice of either leaving the labour market or choosing to postpone or limit their pregnancies. This naturally, is one of the key factors contributing to the gender-biased planning activities that drive the skewed sex ratio up.

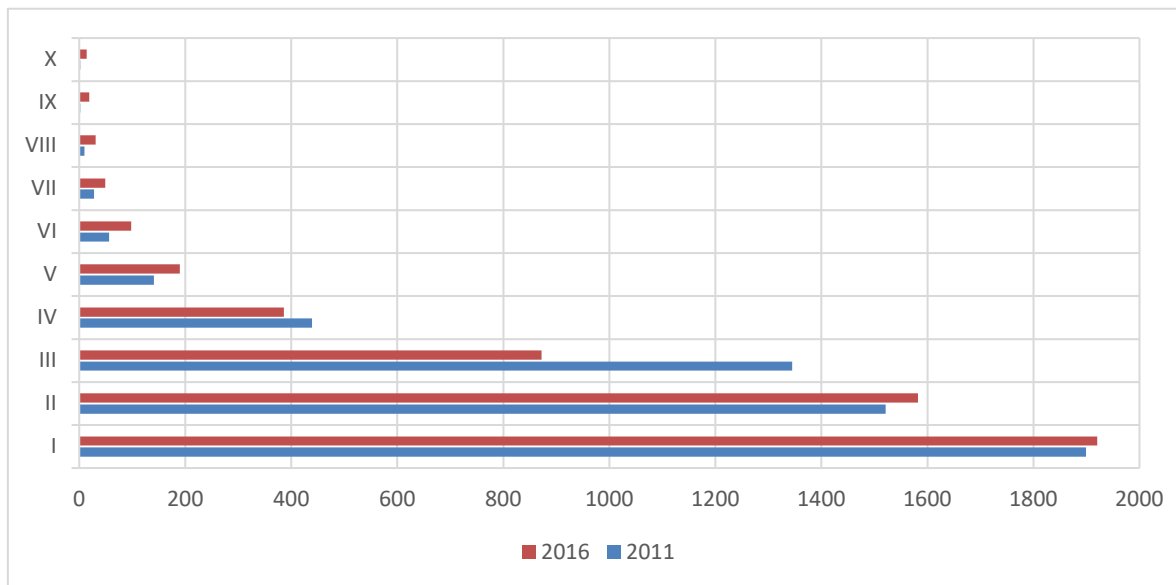
Figure 17. Personal Incomes of Women and Spending per Type of Household, 2017



Childcare Responsibilities and Facilities Available to Families

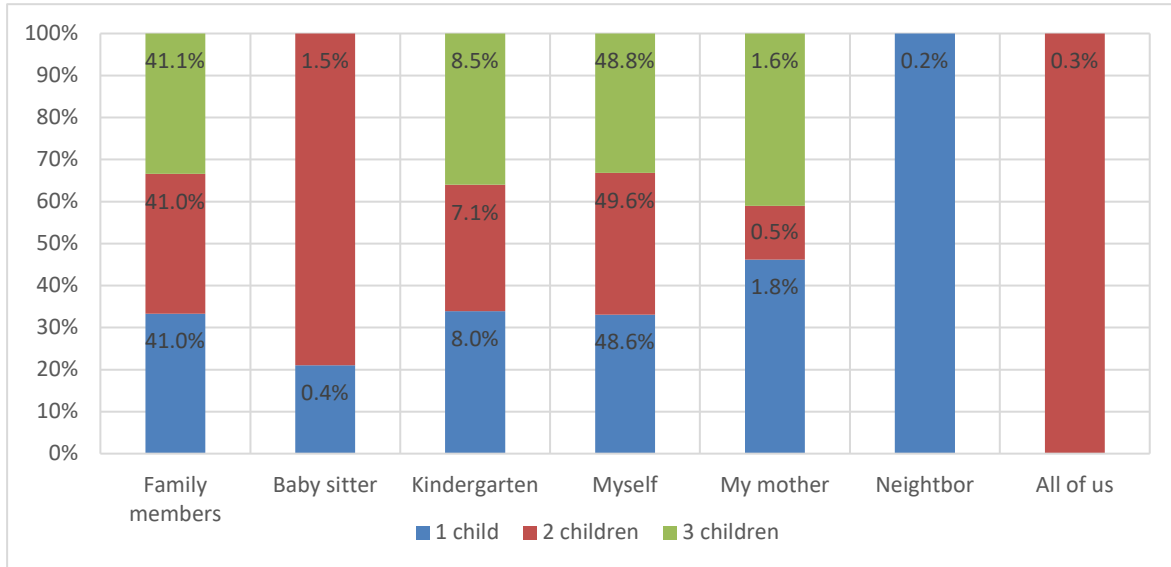
90. Compared to 2011 survey sample, in 2017, except for the first and second pregnancy that had resulted in a life birth, the pregnancies with life birth as such have experienced a decline (*Figure 18*).
91. However, there is a slight increase from fifth pregnancy onwards. This could be attributed to the shift in the structure of sample, whereby 2017 sample has respondents that either are mostly concentrated towards the compulsory education or higher education ends, which was not the case in the previous sample. Nevertheless, overall surveyed women prove that the fertility rates remain below the levels suggested by the data of the National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia.
92. Although, there are more reasons for this, in this section it is interesting to highlight the availability of care services to families that greatly determine the willingness of women to combine care and employment, knowing that it would not lead to unaffordable compromises.

Figure 18. Number of Pregnancies



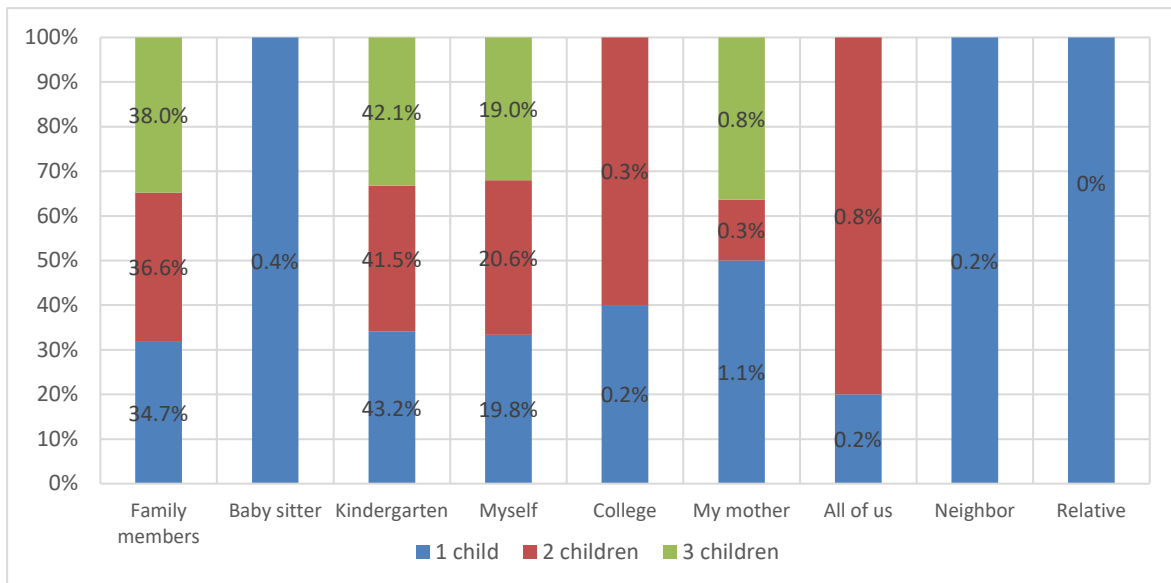
93. Most of the working women stated that care of their children was provided by their families (see *Figure 19*). 41 out of 100 working women surveyed in this study stated that their children have been taken care of by a family member. Closer to 49 women out of 100 respondents stated that they took care of their children. This meant that for at least 3 years they had opted to forego employment for the sake of childcare. Kindergartens were accessible to only 8 women out of 100 surveyed women. Finally, very rarely, 1 in 100 respondents stated the option of a baby sitter being considered, which could be explained by the fact of modest average income reported by women, oscillating somewhere between AMD 50,000 to 100,000 on a monthly basis, making the services of baby sitter completely out of reach for most of the working mothers.

Figure 19. Provision of Care for Children of up to 3-year-old Age, 2017



94. Unlike early years of child care, working women with children of ages 3 to 6 had more options than only their family or themselves (see Figure 20). 34 to 38 working women out of 100 respondents still resorted to the support of a family member in provide childcare services. In this case kindergartens provided services to children of 42 women out of 100 respondents. However, every fifth working mother had opted for childcare of her children up to the age of 6, greatly risking her employment prospects or forcing her to take part time jobs.

Figure 20. Provision of Care for Children of 3 to 6-year-old Age, 2017

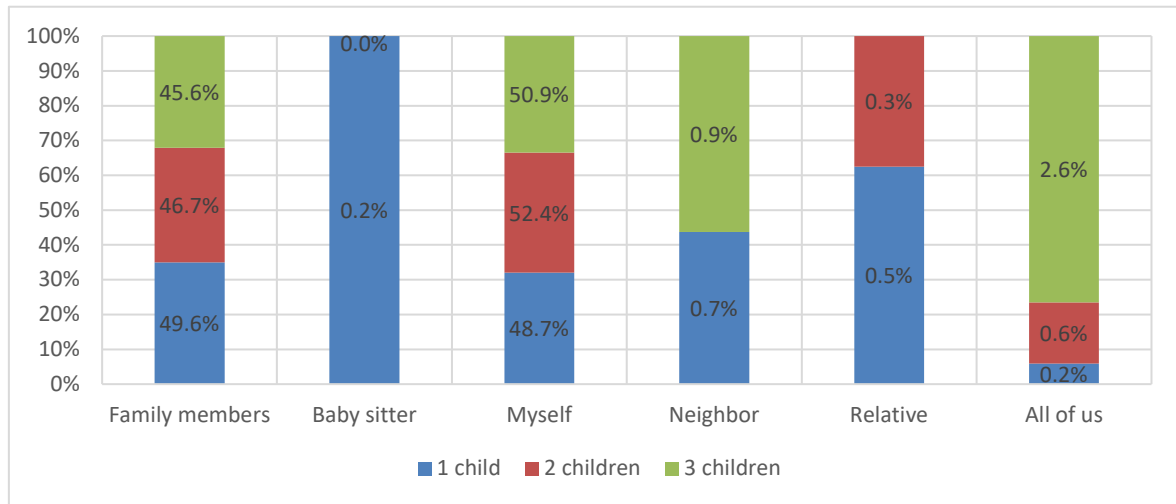


95. Even with the beginning of schooling of children and especially during the early years, childcare still remains a function that needs institutional consideration in order to ease the burden of families and most specifically of working women (see Figure 21). Almost half of working women reported that their family members had taken care of their children with half of them reporting themselves as being the main caregivers. This is in line with 2016 UNFPA report on Men and Gender Equality in Armenia⁸. According to it, 54.8 percent of fathers agree or strongly agree that they spend too little time with their children on account of their jobs, as 89.9 percent strongly agree or agree that their main function is to

⁸ Men and Gender Equality on Armenia: Report on Sociological Survey Findings, UNFPA, Yerevan, 2016

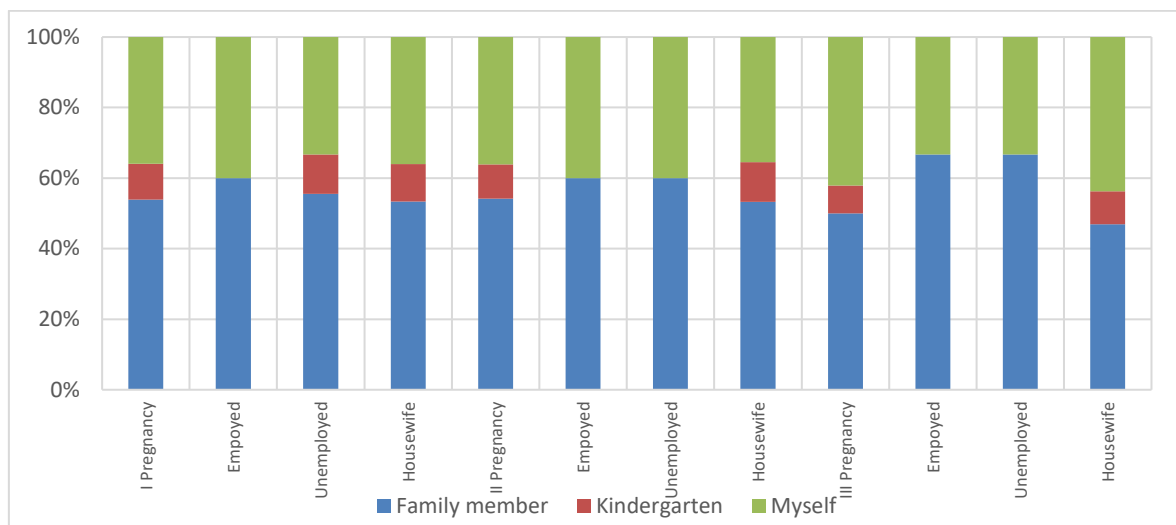
provide for the family. Moreover, only 11 percent of fathers have been reported to collect the child to/from school or daycare centre.

Figure 21. Childcare during Early Years of Schooling, 2017



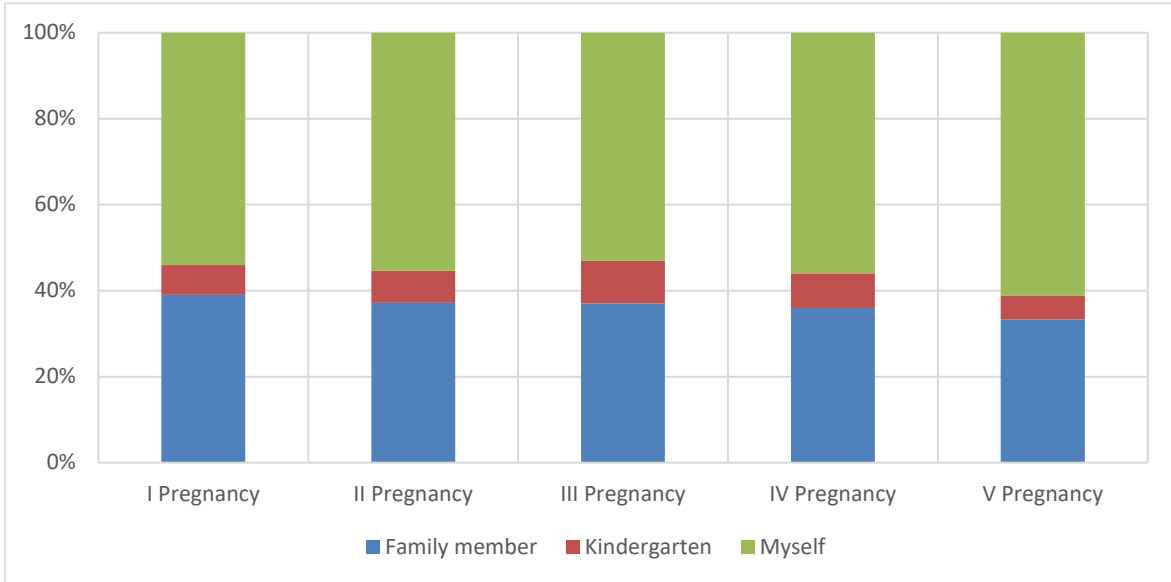
96. The lack of early care facilities and services combined with a limited gender role of parents puts a heavy burden on women, first, jeopardizing their prospects in the labour market by forcing them out and into the private domain or limiting their interest in part time non sustainable jobs, as well as it places a limit on an expected pregnancy given that with each additional child the care burden further loads the mother, leaving no space for her personal security and economic independence that are needed for the exercise of voice and individual decision making.
97. Unlike working mothers, staying home and being a housewife does not necessarily mean a greater assumption of care giver role. Although, in absolute terms housewives constitute the largest share of women reporting first three pregnancies, they in the meantime, do show comparable levels of personal caregiving with mothers that consider themselves employed or unemployed, but earn no income. This makes them comparable to those respondents that had considered themselves as housewives, earning no income (see Figure 22). It is interesting to observe that for the first 3 pregnancies, born children were mostly cared for by a family member. This is to suggest that a share of housewives is staying home not out of necessity, in terms of providing for the childcare in an environment, where childcare services are not accessible and affordable, but are home for reasons that are more embedded in cultural norms, as well as of possible missed opportunities in terms of early termination of schooling as to conform to the norm of early marriage and child bearing.

Figure 22. Child Care of Housewives, Employed and Unemployed Women with no Income, 2017



98. Women that earn income, do manage to have fewer children compared to their housewife peers, but surpass in childcare services (see *Figure 23*). If only 32 to 43 percent of housewives report being the care givers of their children, 54 to 61 percent of working mothers of all income groups do claim that they care for their children during the first 3 years. Therefore, if working women are provided with support care services, especially during the early years of child’s life, they will be willing to consider extending their reproduction beyond the break point coming with the third pregnancy. This will also ease pressures of prenatal sex selection that was surprisingly quite high among more educated mothers that unlike their housewife peers cannot afford to extend their family planning beyond the third child.

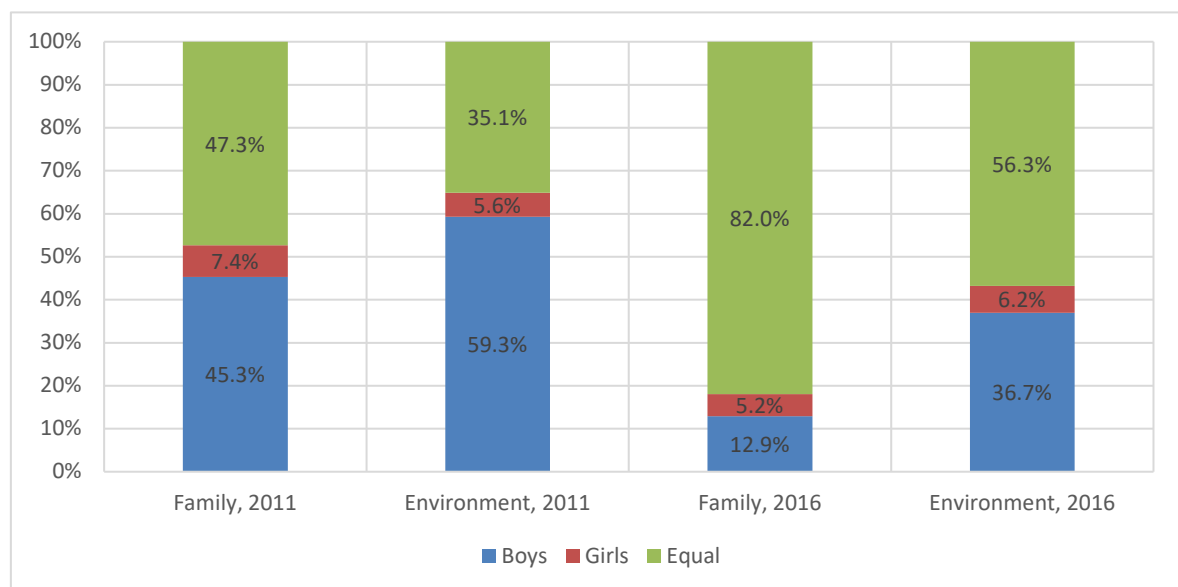
Figure 23. Working Mothers of all Income Groups and Care Provision, 2016



Sex Preferences in Armenia

99. The reported boy preference has decreased significantly, being replaced by a response favouring no gender for any future child (see *Figure 24*). Unlike 2011, when 59.3 percent explicated reported believing that the environment (that is the reference network) preferred a boy over a girl, in 2017, this number has declined to a level of 36.7 percent. For the immediate family only 12.9 respondents have stated a boy preference, unlike the 45.3 percent in 2011.
100. Meanwhile, when looking at the preference of a girl, there is no significant change. More specifically, the girl preference has gone down as well, when reporting about the intra-household preference. Instead, it is the no preference that has increased significantly, especially when reporting preferences within a family.

Figure 24. Sex Preferences

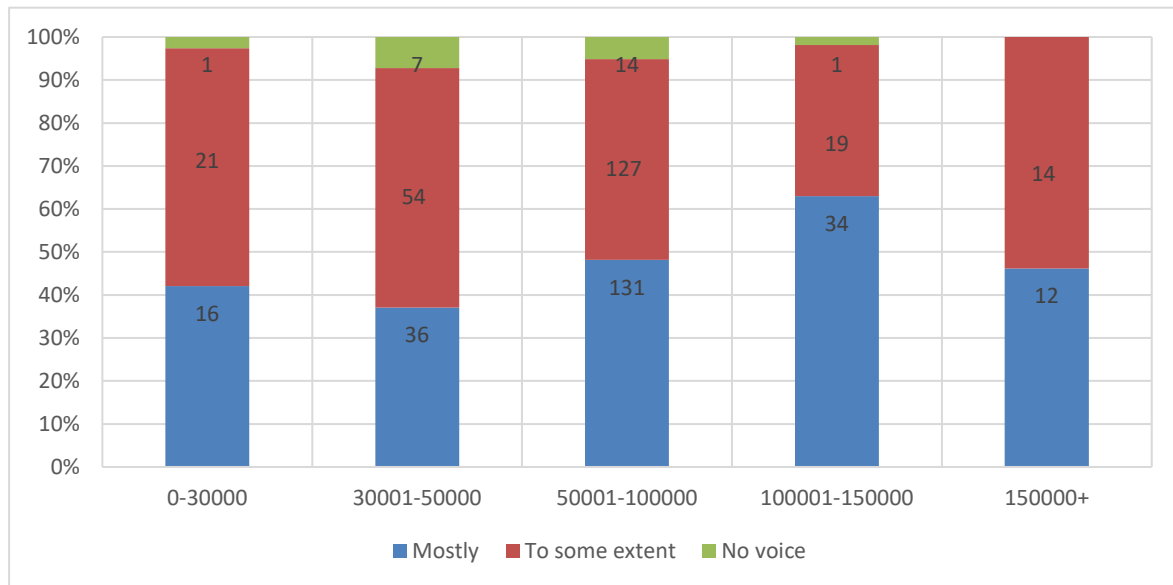


101. This could be attributed to the social desirability that actually drives respondents to give answer options that they believe are expected of them in order not to lose their standing. This also suggests that the various campaigns implemented since 2013 had reached most of the respondents through various communication media and tools and had induced them to at least show in the public, even during privately administered questionnaires, that they actually don't have any preferences, as this was the main slogan of the campaign.
102. For final conclusions, there is a need for the employment of other behavioural research tools as to identify to what extent individuals have reversed their accepted behavioural constructs. Nevertheless, one thing is clear, that the campaigns employed have loosened the reference networks of respondents, targeting the pluralistic ignorance on boy preference and opening up more space for individual choice and decision making.
103. Working women had more say in the selection of the sex of their future child than those without any personal means. When asked to what extent they had a say in determining the sex of their child, the woman's say in final decision increased along with the increase in their income (see *Figure 25*).
104. Although, most of working women reported having no more than AMD 100,000 of personal income and their contributed share to the household income coming up to half of the means had placed women in a situation, when their voice had more power than, lets say, the personal income of AMD 150,000 in a household with more than AMD 300,000 of monthly income.
105. Increasing women's financial standing and boosting their employment opportunities would place them in a situation, when they can have a significant impact on preference dynamics. This, of course, would

render no results, if the campaigns reverting stereotypes that undervalue girls would not open up a window for them to exercise their voice increased through improved financial standing.

106. Nevertheless, the financial standing is the necessary precondition for providing free choice to a woman. For instance, the 2016 UNFPA report on men and gender equality reveal that in 92.9 percent of cases male partners provided support to the woman for the abortion. This actually explains why many of the decisions are taken together. Even in this case, the woman is induced to approach her partner for financial means in order to undergo the abortion. If a woman had employment and/or more financial means available to her, her personal independence would increase, given that the stereotypes do not significantly limit her options due to highly controlling social norms.

Figure 25. Woman's say in the sex of the child per personal income, 2017



107. When looking at sex preference and personal income, or types of employment by sectors, women exhibited more boy preference than girl preference, suggesting that only increasing the personal income or education attainment level would not solve the issue. It has deeper roots that are conditioned by social norms framing and defining the behaviour of any individual regardless of gender, education attainment level and/or type of settlement.
108. There is a trend shown through the focus groups of 2011 and 2017 that pressures have loosened in five years, at least in urban areas, which is not that clear cut for rural areas. However, especially after the recent armed clashes along the frontline of Nagorno-Karabakh and the losses of young men, have reinstated the importance of more men that could keep the frontline intact. This and the emigration have boosted the importance of delivering more boys as to keep the balance in the country.
109. The 2017 survey in one of its conclusions has stated that birth of a girl is most of the times still associated with concerns, whereas the birth of a boy only adds to joy. This supports a no change in the structure of boy presence that was identified in 2011 (see Figure 27). Unlike boy presence, both in 2011 and 2017, the no preference in case of a girl was rather based on the avoidance of negative consequences (see Figure 26). It seems that the entire structure of preference is built on concepts of “how good it is to have a boy” and “how bad it can be if one gets a girl”. If the negative preferences in case of a girl child are not fully reverted through a thorough reframing of concepts that drive aversion, no intervention could create lasting results and any major shock could quickly reinstate the old circuits into full action, as only loosening the pressures in the immediate family and environment though contextually necessary would be insufficient for a conceptual change.

Figure 26. Reasons for not wanting a girl

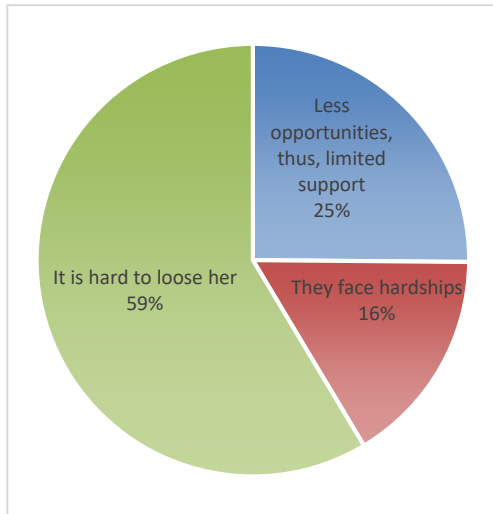
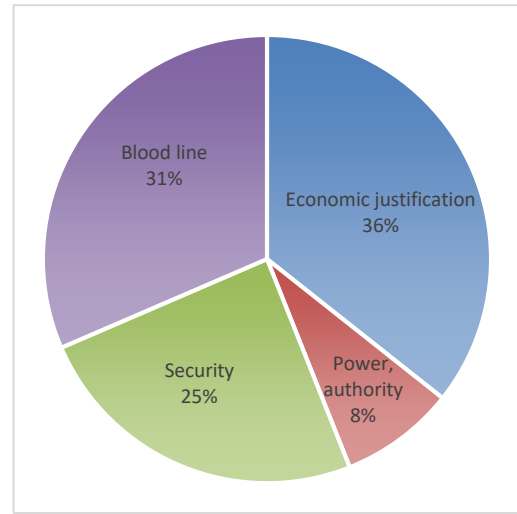


Figure 27. Reasons for Boy Preference, 2011



Conclusions

110. Over the last six years, the public perception around boy preference has been clearly changed in terms of being something quite normalized and acceptable to something that is now starting to come across as non-desirable. The 2017 results and larger number of respondents declaring no sex preference do speak for the shift in social desirability bias. Moreover, the collective ignorance around boy preference that would lead individuals to exhibit behaviours aligned to perceived expectations of the close and influential audiences in their lives, now faces a window of opportunity in terms of being less pressured, thus, with more space for actions that are not conditioned by existing social norms.
111. However, for the shift in social norms to occur and take a good use of the opened-up space, there seems a need for reframing of girl child that is still regarded as a loss, if parents get her. Instead, she should start being associated with the winner's image, very much like the winning, and most particularly the breadwinning image of the boy projects. Thus, it is crucial to tackle improvement of girls' opportunity base and function to provide more support to herself and her family. This immediately suggests, and the analysis confirms it through the evidence, that supporting the already working women and helping the new entrants to the labour market to have secured combination of child bearing and breadwinning functions would economically empower women to (a) participate in household income generation, and (b) gain more bargaining power in intra-household decision making.
112. For this not to occur at the expense of her either postponing her reproductive function, which is not an issue so far, but can become one in a generation's time, or not terminate it after the third pregnancy as to remain economically active, thus, greatly limiting the fertility rate and also driving the prenatal sex selection in favour of boys, it is of paramount importance to accommodate her care functions in favour of increased breadwinning. This is first of all, possible through the provision of a spectrum of child care services from the moment of child birth up to early years of schooling.
113. It is also important to lift the double burden off the shoulders of working women, by loosening the parenting roles and inducing fathers to take greater participation in childcare. It is believed that with greater flexibility of gender roles around parenting and increased breadwinning function extended to women, their sense of security will gradually improve, impacting the elasticity of choice.

Recommendations

114. There is a need to keep working mothers in the labour market. This means that an analysis of the existing legal framework that supports the re-entry into the workforce should be used to benchmark the current practices in private and public sectors. It is important to understand, if women are in reality protected and are not forced to postpone or terminate their pregnancies as to make sure they do not lose the footing.
115. Childcare functions should have a supply of a chain of services that lift the weight off the mothers themselves. The absence of those services or their non-flexibility, non-affordability or non-accessibility leads to longer periods of absence from the market, harder re-entry into it and greater willingness to accept volatile and risky jobs that are more on the part time side. It also means that women are willing to accept jobs that either pay less or have periods with no income generation.
116. Childcare institutions, especially the private ones should be assessed as to develop the evidence of the demand base, which later on could inform the development of co-financing and co-shared, public-private, community based and other possible arrangement options that could be made available without necessarily adding sizable burden on the budget, but instead would lead to the improved combination of care and work functions.
117. For a successful entry into the labour market, there is a need to make sure that work for women is not viewed as complementary to the breadwinning function of their future or otherwise existing husbands. This means that early orientation of girls into competitive professions should become a key function embedded in the higher grades of the education system.
118. Roles for parenting need to undergo significant transformation. Currently, women bear a double burden of motherhood and employment. This actually contributes to the early family planning practices that terminate the reproductive function, as the combination of almost 90 percent care provision with full time employment pushes women to choose for one of the functions. Working women tend to forego their third, but most definitely fourth potential pregnancy. This was less of the case among their non-working peers.
119. A new social norm formulation is urgently needed as to support and further loosen the environment around the boy preference. It is still at a volatile point, where any drastic event, such as a conflict, could reinvigorate the norms around it. This entails presenting role models in terms of successful breadwinner women, egalitarian parenting examples that feature individuals with double tracks of employment and care regardless of their gender.

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The overall objective of the project is to contribute to reduction of gender-biased sex selection in Armenia.



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