

MISSING GIRLS IN ARMENIA

Causes, consequences and policy options to address skewed sex ratios at birth



WORLD BANK GROUP

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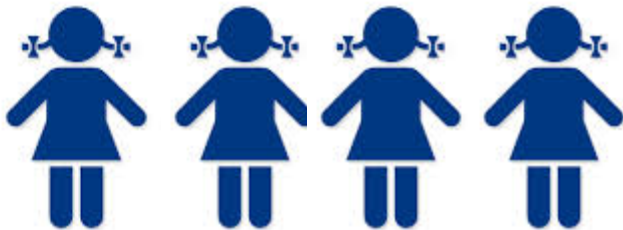
Poverty Global Practice

ECA regional team

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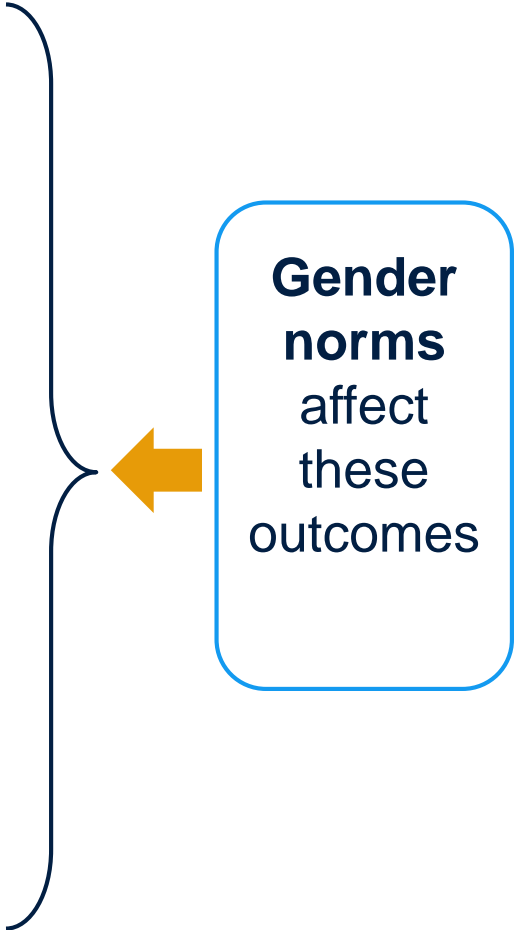
What do we mean by “missing girls”?

- “Missing girls” → those that were never born, due to sex selection
- A symptom of broader gender inequalities in society
- It manifests in birth ratios strongly skewed in favor of baby boys
→ higher ratio of boys to girls relative to what would be expected in a population under normal circumstances



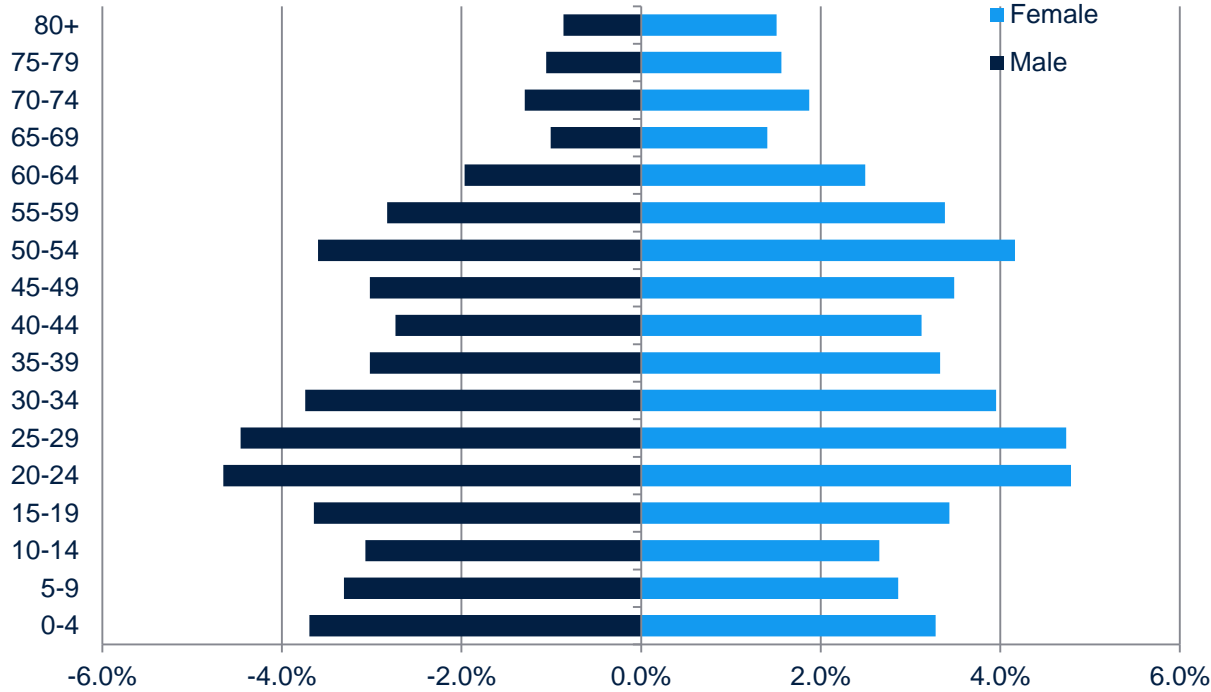
Some persisting gender inequalities in Armenia, particularly in terms of economic opportunities

- Large and increasing gap in **labor force participation**
- **Wage gap**, driven also by vertical and horizontal jobs segregation
- **Entrepreneurship** is limited among women
- Female headed households are at greater **risk of poverty**
- Gaps persist in **voice and agency**: women are less represented in political and public institutions



Gender norms
affect
these
outcomes

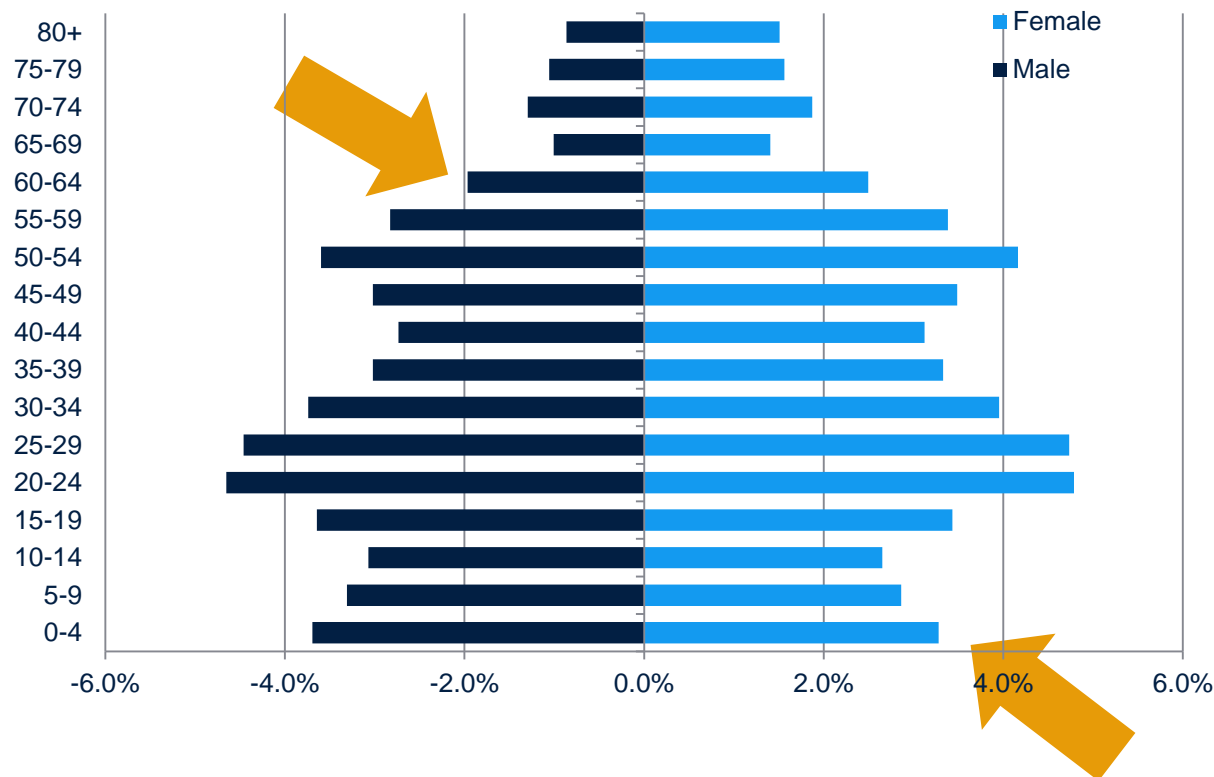
Population structure is out of balance, reflecting gender inequalities: more boys and fewer men



Women represent 62 percent of the 65+ age group, but only about 46 percent of the population aged 0-14

Here we focus on the bottom of the age-sex pyramid

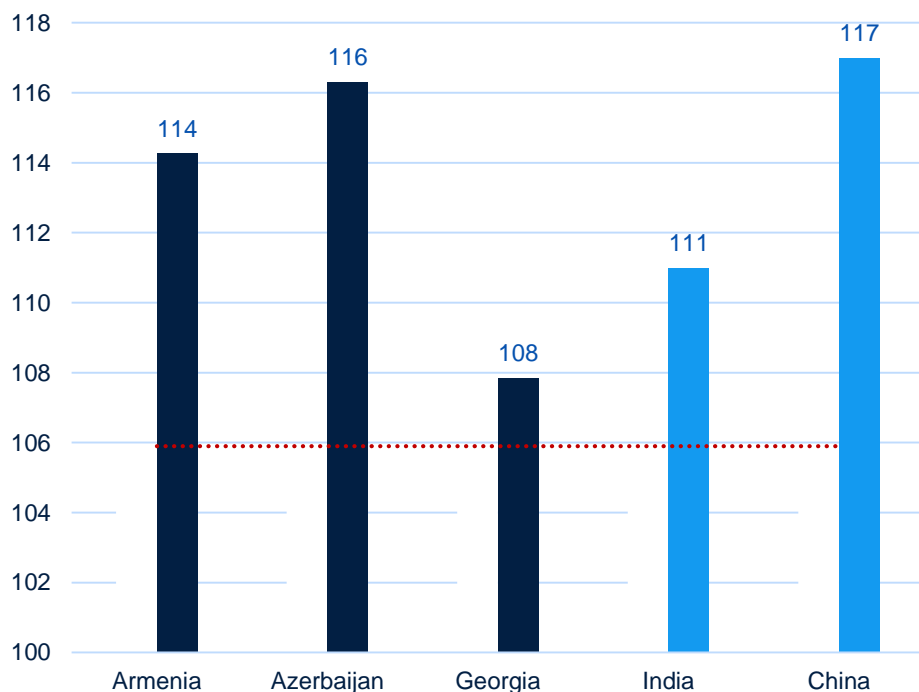
Early demise of men deserves further research and policy efforts



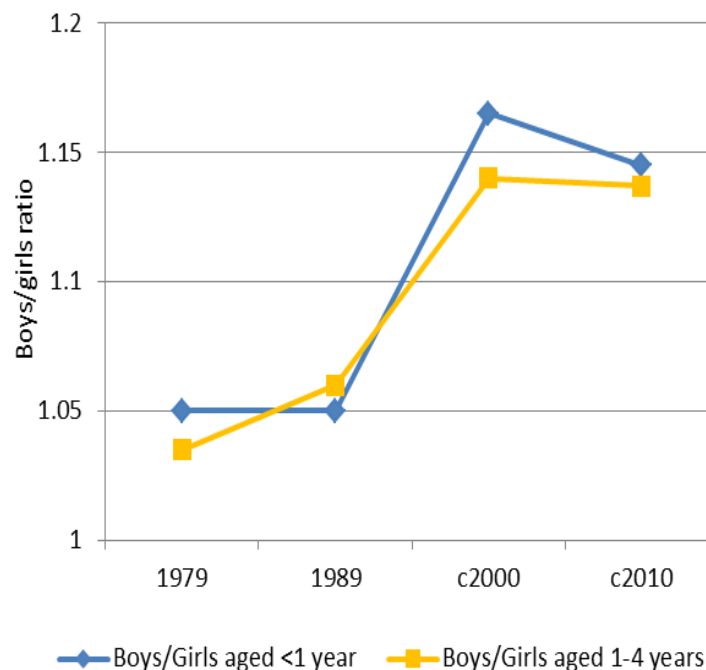
But here we focus on the younger cohorts, where boys outnumber girls

114 baby boys are born in Armenia for every 100 baby girls, which is comparable to figures in China and parts of India

Sex ratios at birth in Armenia, South Caucasus and selected Asian countries, 2009-2013 average



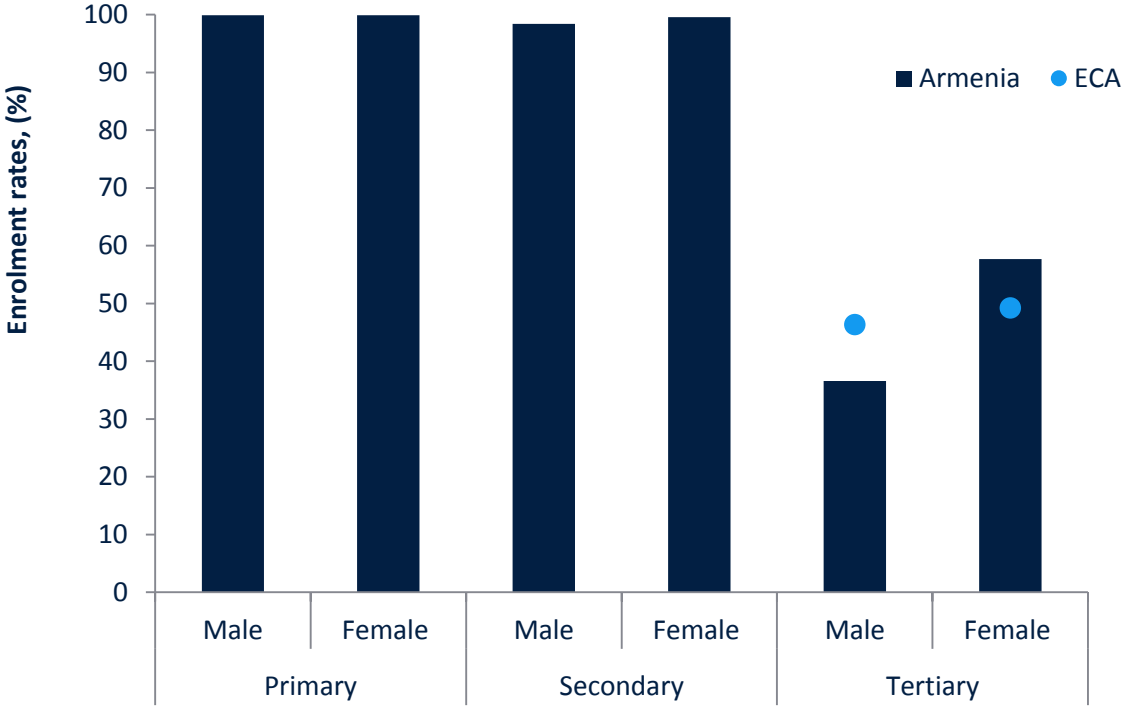
Trends in sex ratios of infants and children in Armenia, 1979-2010



Note: Sex ratio at birth (SRB) = number of boys born/number of girls born.
Sources: Birth registration, UN Statistics; Das Gupta (2014) from census data.

Yet, contrary to these Asian countries, there is no difference in gender outcomes among children

For example, girls have equal access to education, and even outnumber boys in tertiary education



Source: World Development Indicators.

What is behind this phenomenon?

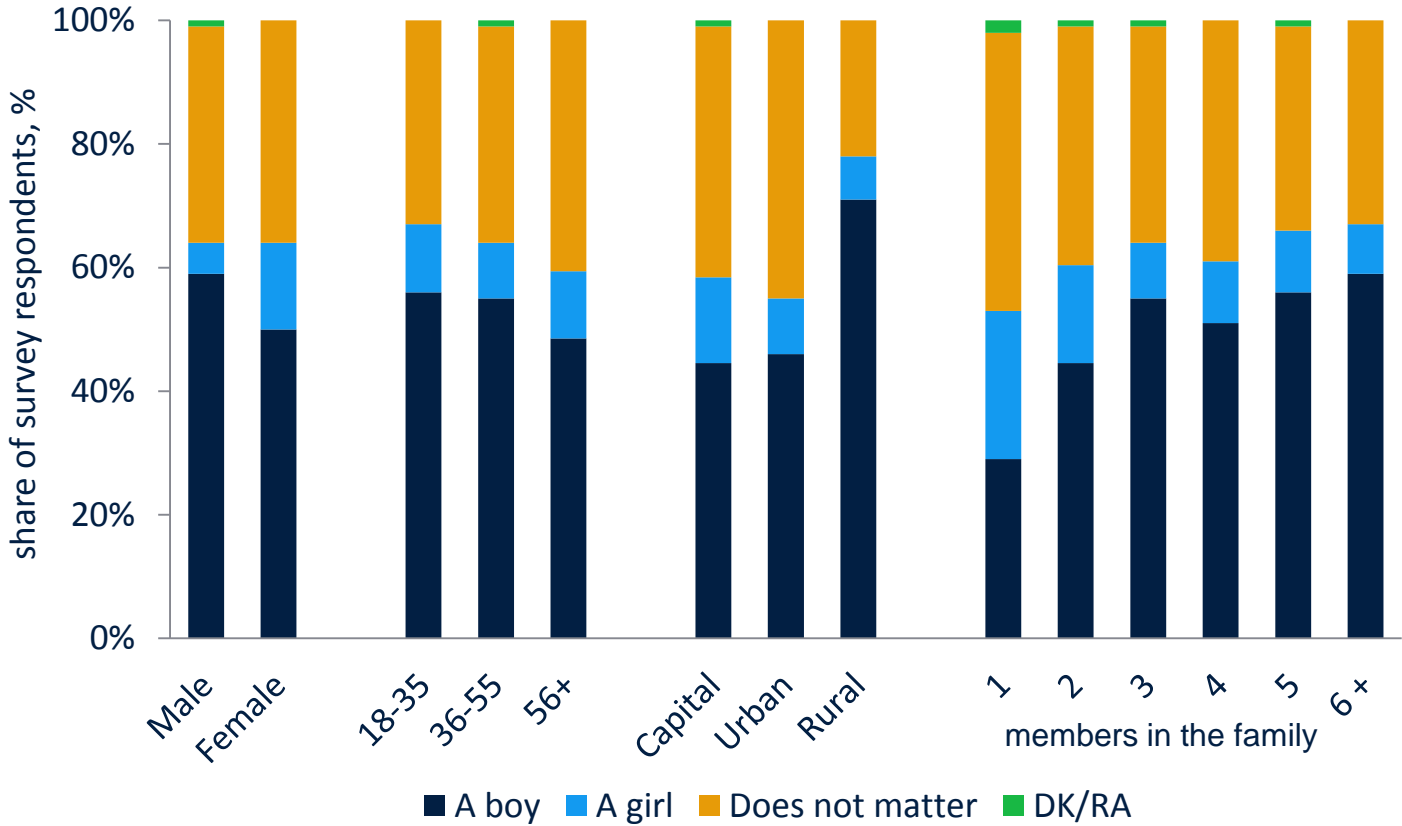
1. Son preference
2. Fertility decline
3. Transition and shocks
4. Sex detection technology

Son preference



Son preference is revealed in available surveys, and seems stronger in rural areas

“If a family has one child, what would be the preferred gender of the child?”



Source: Caucasus Barometer Survey, Armenia 2010.

Why do families prefer sons? (1)

Parental support

- Taking care of their elderly parents (e.g. financially, co-habitation)
- Boys more effectively deal with a whole range of difficulties in day-to-day life than daughters (e.g. government agencies, officials)
 - “At present whatever institution you enter and meet with a man, he doesn’t feel at ease communicating with women [...] It is easier for him to talk and negotiate with a man” (Yerevan woman)
- Girls are sometimes perceived as liabilities (e.g. lack control over their lives, more expensive to raise, worry about her future)
 - “When you realize that in case of having a daughter you would have to worry about her future you prefer to have a son whose future is in his own hands. A son is more likely to be happy than a girl” (Akhuryan woman)

Source: Dudwick (2014), based on qualitative survey.

Why do parents prefer sons? (2)

Parental support (continued)

- Girls belong to another family after they marry
[Parents] “...suffer tightness in the house of your daughter, always afraid your son-in-law will tell you are eating too much” (elderly woman in Akhuryan)
- Inheritance of property, now privatized compared to Soviet times, traditionally goes to sons as passing them to daughters would mean the property goes to another family.
 - “Why put so much energy into building a house when the son-in-law would enjoy it instead of one’s own son?”
 - “Only one from a thousand decides to leave something to the daughter”
 - “The parent who gives their property to the daughter might be unwise”
 - “I have two daughters and two sons, and it does not matter: if my son’s attitude is bad, nevertheless, I won’t leave [the property] to my daughter.”
(Dialogue among elderly women in Voskevaz)

Relationships might be changing, as daughters:

- (i) increasingly appreciated for taking care of parents than daughters-in-law, who are perceived as less submissive than decades ago;
- (ii) are becoming more financially independent in some cases;
- (iii) increasingly challenge inheritance customs.

Source: Dudwick (2014), based on qualitative survey.

Why do parents prefer sons? (3)

Continue patrilineage and protect family's social standing

- Carrying on the family name – sometimes even considered more important than the material support from sons
 - *“Having a son is an issue of pride rather than economic well-being.”*
 - *“The desire for having a name carrier does not depend on pensions”*
 - Parents without sons and only daughters may be labeled as childless
- Affirming the father's masculinity
- Enhancing their mothers' position in the household
- Maintaining a family's social standing in its community
- Protecting sisters

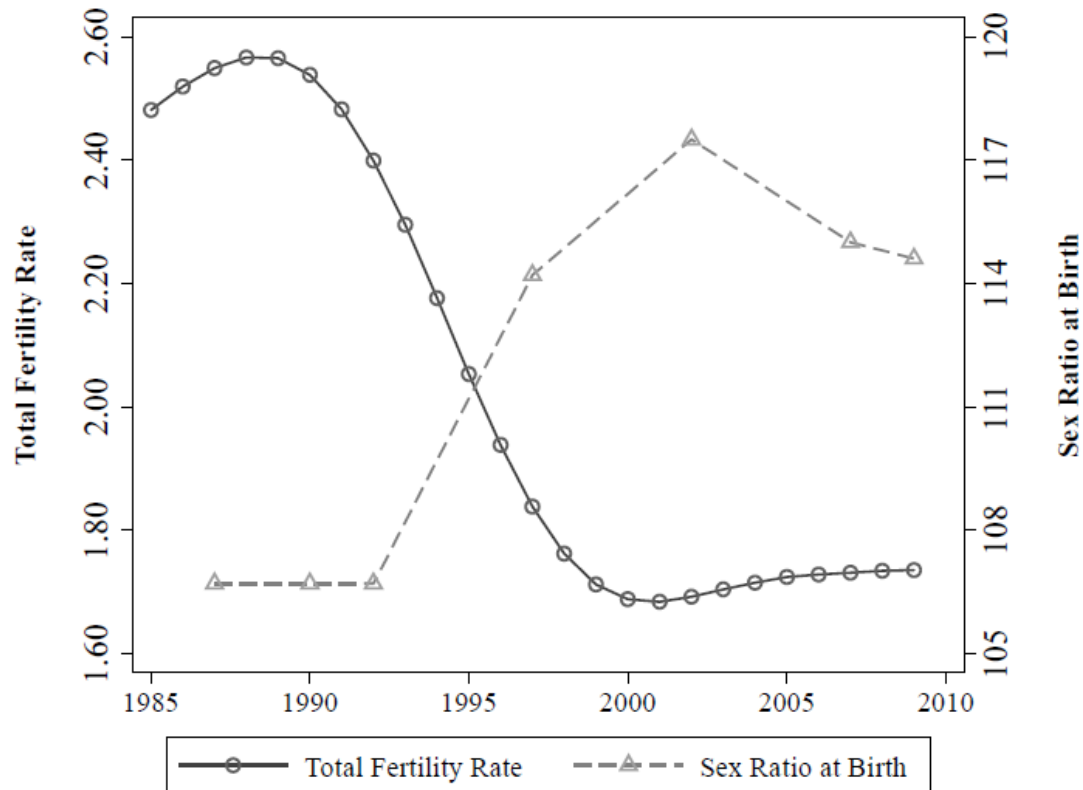
Source: Dudwick (2014), based on qualitative survey.

Declining fertility



The sex ratio at birth has been increasing since the early 1990s, just as the fertility rate declined

Trends in the Sex Ratio at Birth and the Total Fertility Rate in Armenia

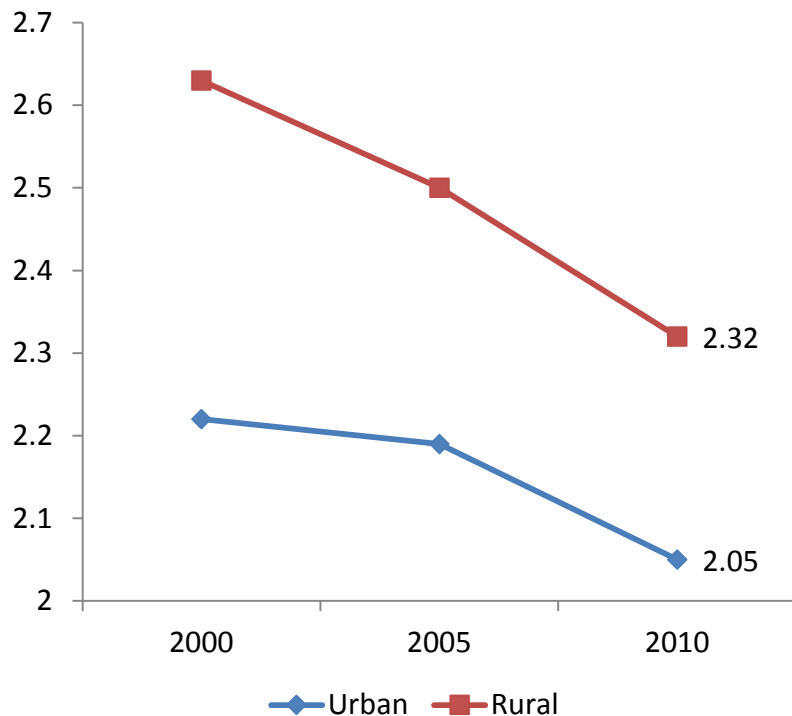


Note: Sex ratio at birth (SRB) = number of boys born/number of girls born.

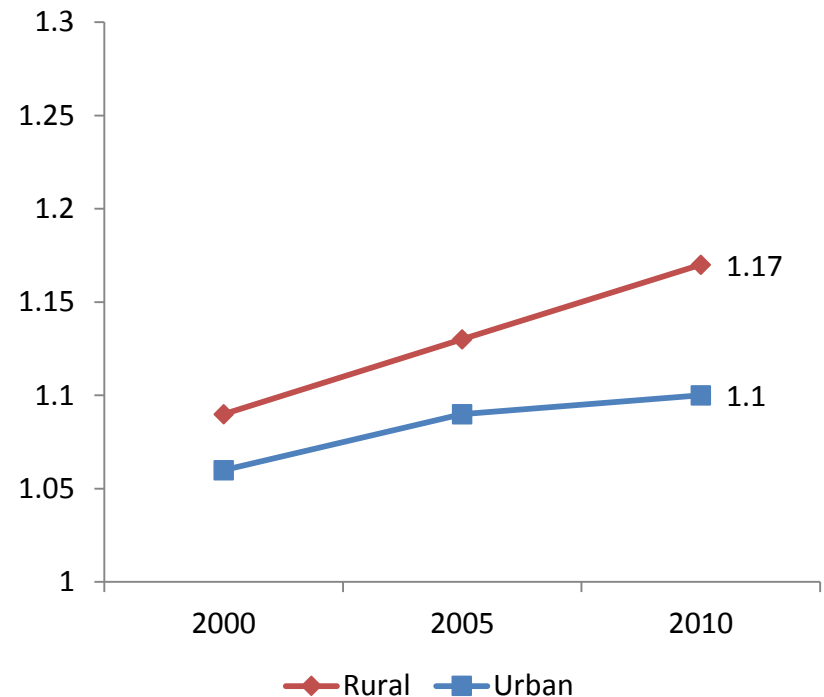
Source: Ebenstein (2013), based on United Nations, World Population Prospects (2013).

Both trends are visible across the country, but changes were greater in rural areas

Fertility declined both in urban and rural areas (children per family)



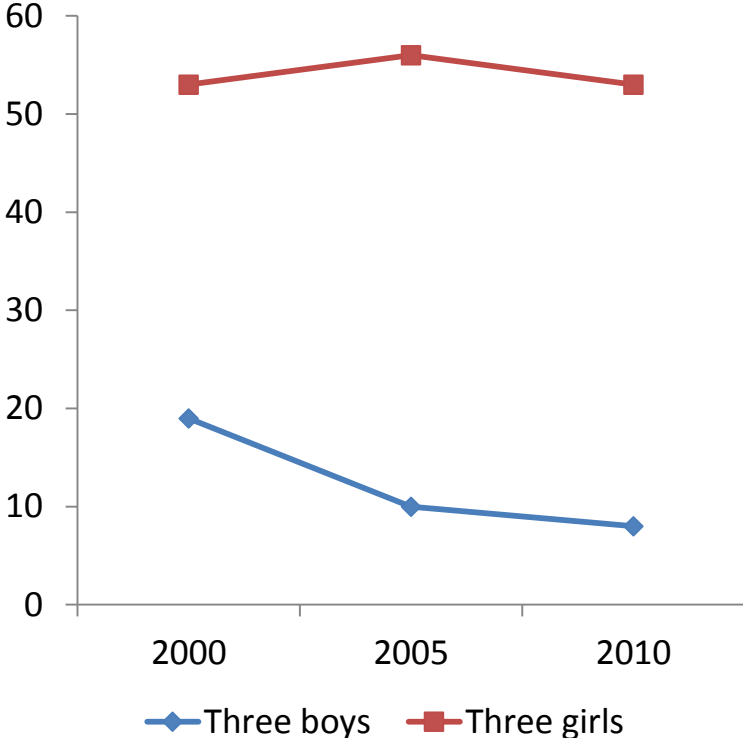
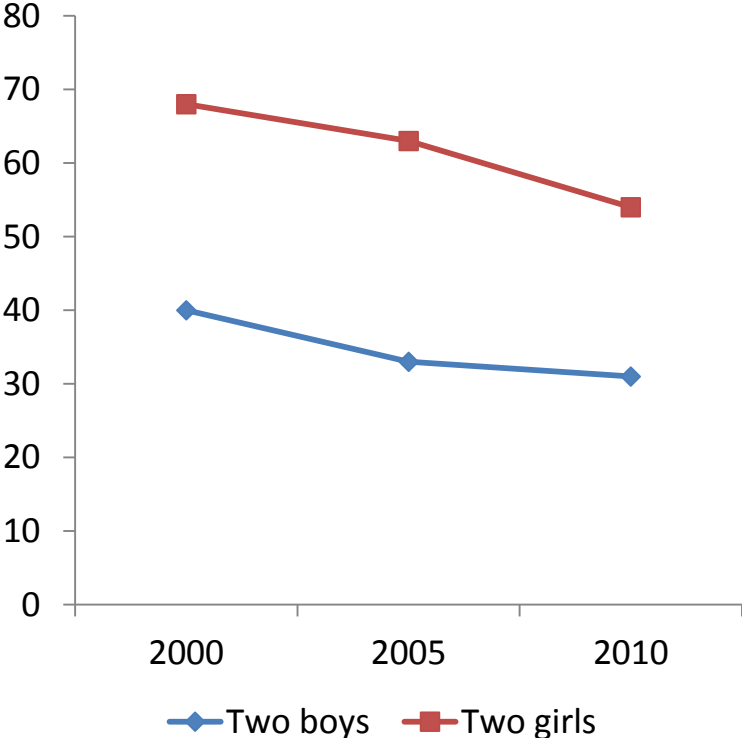
Sex ratio increased, being particularly high in rural areas



Source: Ebenstein (2013) based on DHS data.

As parents have fewer opportunities to have a son, they may alter their fertility decisions like their “stopping behavior”

Percent of families who have another child, by sex of existing children



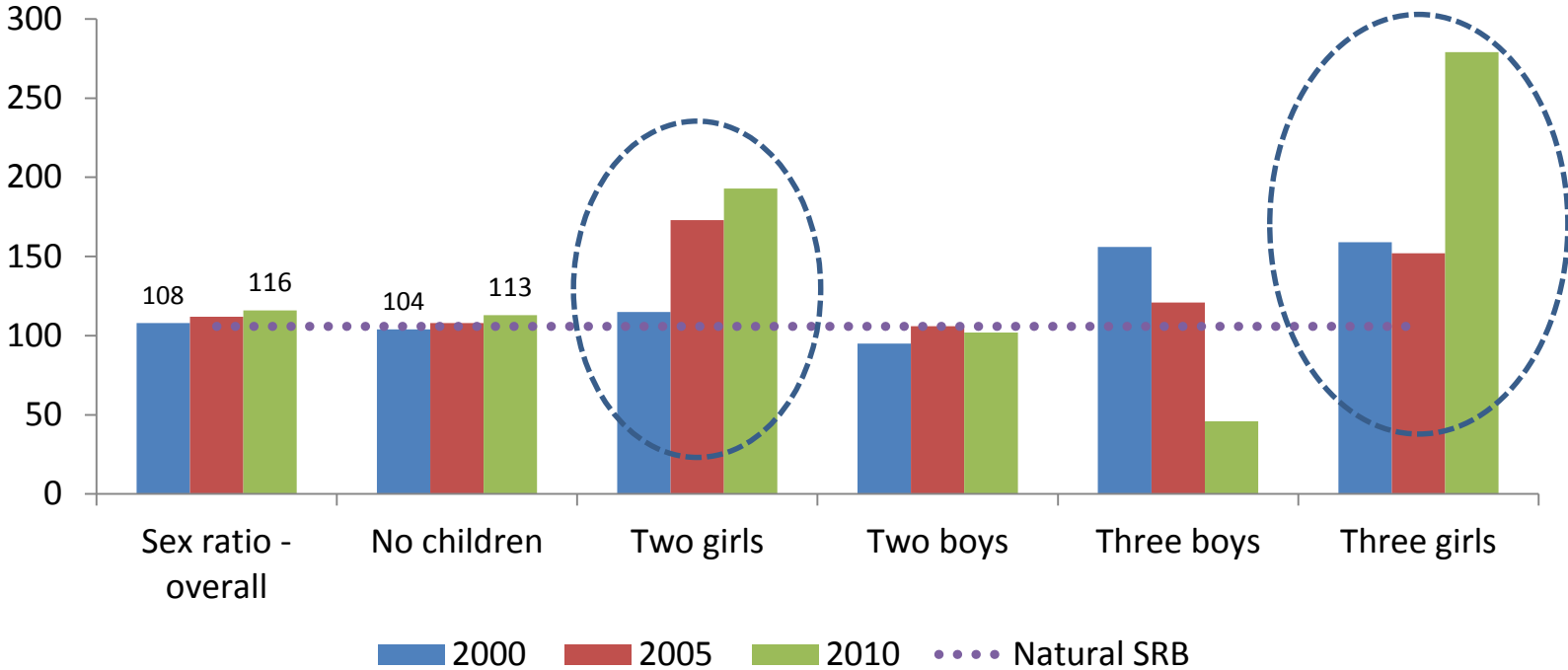
Source: Ebenstein (2013), based on United Nations, World Population Prospects (2013).

Sex detection



With fewer chances to have a boy, the availability of sex detection technology allowed parents to turn to sex selection

Sex ratio of next birth



→ 6.84% of girls were “missing” in 2010 among surveyed women; half from increased sex ratios among parents having their first child

Source: Ebenstein (2013), based on DHS.

Pressures to act upon son preference – going towards women in particular- come from several sources...

- The **husband** seems to have the last word as to whether to try for another child or terminate a pregnancy
 - *“If the man decided something, that is how it will be. It could be that a woman disagrees but the decision will be made by a man, and that's how it will be.”* (women in Voskevaz)
- **Mothers-in-law** are also a source of pressure
- **Son preference is strongly conditioned by community pressure**
 - *“Only a true man brings a boy to this world”* (man in Giumri focus group); men face *“inappropriate jokes”*

Source: x

Are women empowered to resist pressures for sex-selection? Often no...

- **Women are threatened with divorce and the vulnerability that it brings**
 - *“There are divorced families, they do not give anything to the women, since nothing is registered in her name. But she is living somewhere.”*
- **Physical abuse also takes places, with few resources for women to call upon**
 - *“Generally, women listen to them [the husband] because in most cases she has no other viable option”* (women in Akhuryan focus group)
 - *“Women undergo violence by their mothers-in-law and husbands. If violence stops, the number of sex selective abortions would decrease”.* (Man in Yerevan)
 - *There are no trained specialists to work on family violence cases. Police assumes that role. They have biased opinions and whenever they hear about such complaints from women, they immediately link it to prostitution and infidelity.* (Lawyer in Giumri)

Source: Dudwick (2014), based on qualitative survey.

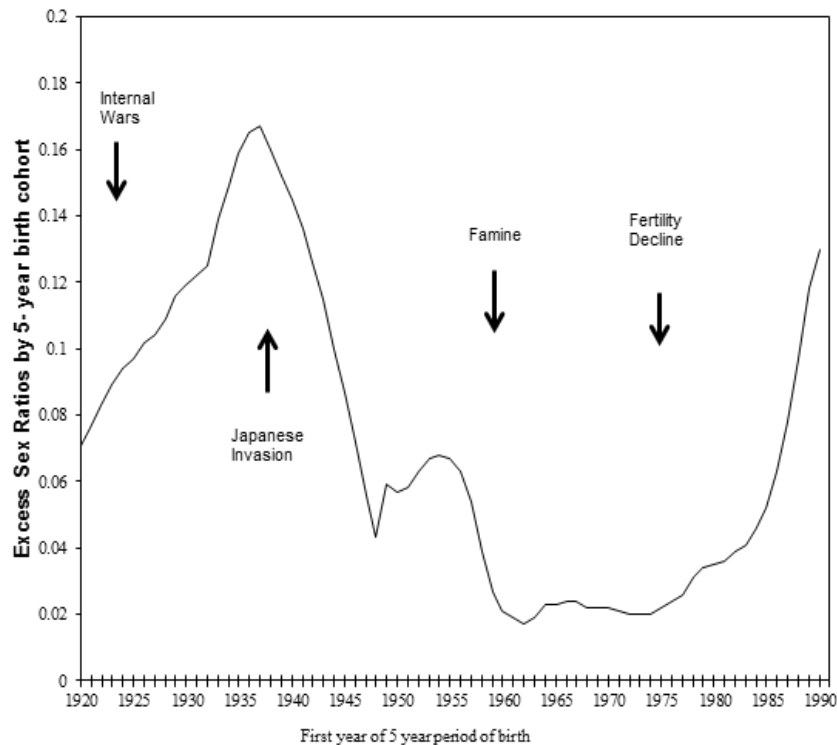
Shocks



Son preference rises in “bad times” as traditional systems kick in as coping mechanisms

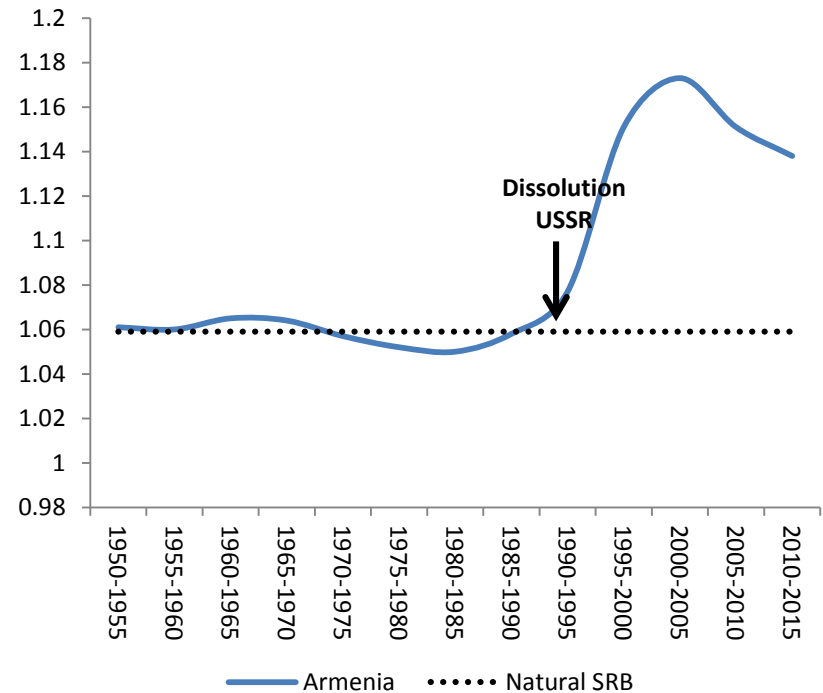
“The manifestation of son preference rises when people face severe stresses that force them to make hard choices about which children to raise” (Das Gupta, 2014)

Excess sex ratios in China, 1920-1995



Source: Das Gupta and Li (1999).

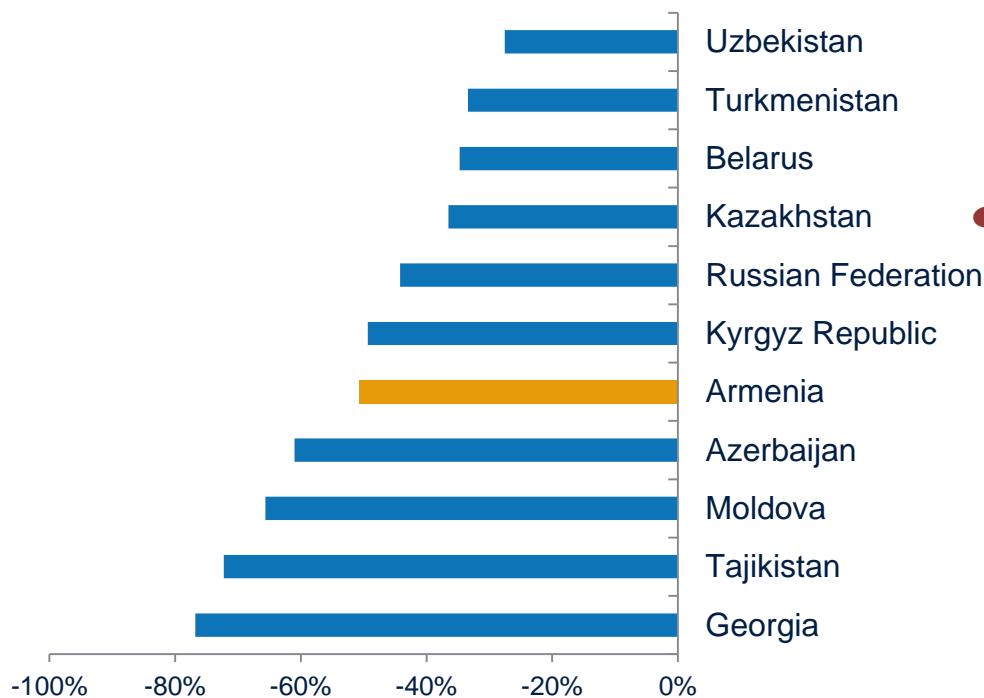
In Armenia, sex ratios rose with the collapse of the USSR



Source: Das Gupta (2014), with UN data.

The collapse of the USSR severely disrupted economic life and increased household vulnerability

GDP per capita, percentage change from circa 1990 to lowest point in the 1990s



Source: World Development Indicators.

Poverty increased

HIGH OUTMIGRATION

Internal displacement and conflict

Formal institutions collapsed, e.g. health sector

Many jobs disappeared, and social protection systems were affected

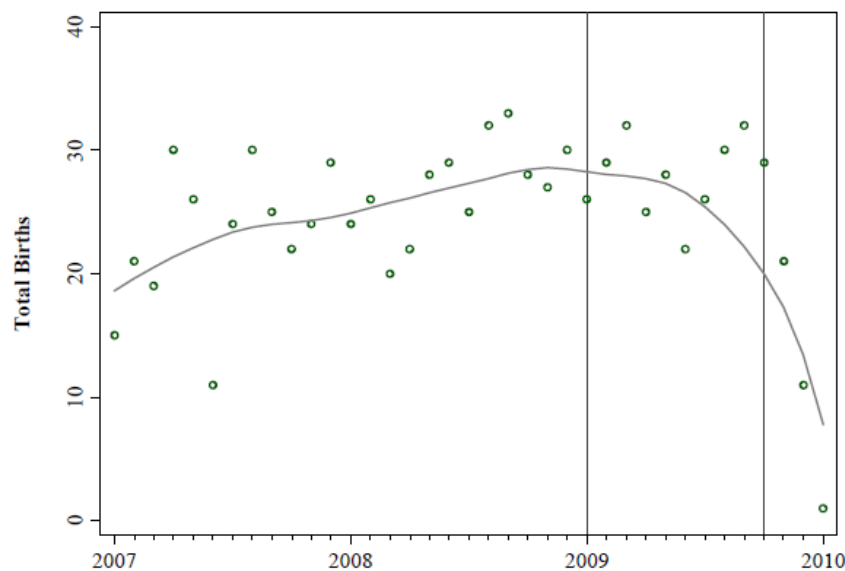
Source: Das Gupta (2014) and Dudwick (2014).

→ Resulting in increased reliance on kinship relations

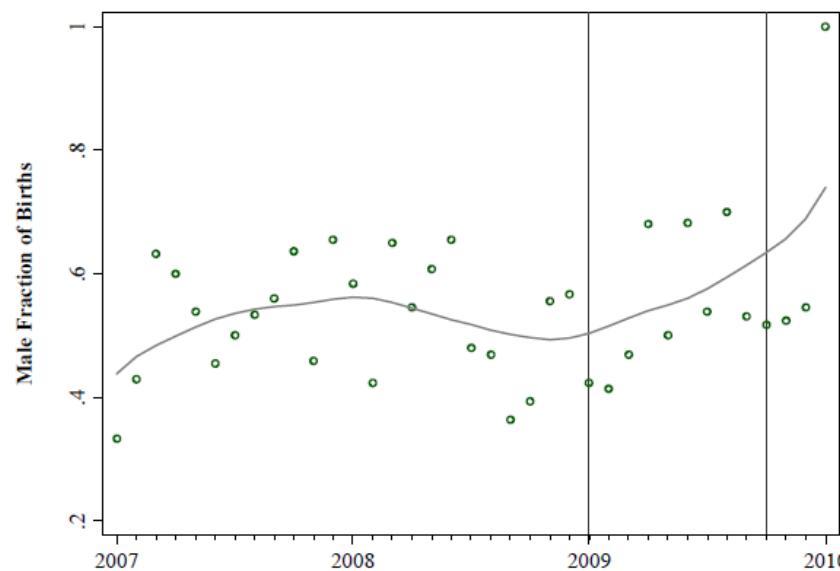
There is some evidence that the 2008-2010 crisis also impacted on fertility decisions in similar ways

Reaction to the 2009 Economic Crisis in Armenia

Fertility Trend



Sex Ratio Trend



Notes : The figure plots the monthly totals of births (left plot) and male fraction of births (right plot) using the Armenia DHS sample for 2010. The line is created using the Lowess smoothing command (bandwidth .50). The vertical line is placed in January 2009, the onset of the Armenian recession, and the second vertical line is placed at September 2009 (nine months after the beginning of the recession).

Source: Ebenstein (2013).

Policy options

What have other countries tried?

- **Ban prenatal sex-detection and/or sex-selection**

(South Korea, India, China)

- Not much impact, or uncertain effectiveness at best
- Can push women into using lower quality and more costly providers with the potential health threats posed by resorting to such providers

- **Financial incentives to have and bring up girls**

(India)

- Not much impact, or uncertain effectiveness at best
- Small financial incentives unlikely to alter behavior
- Difficulties with targeting families in which sex selection might occur

Source: Das Gupta (2014).

What have other countries tried?

Media outreach to influence people's aspirations, norms and behaviors

- Media exposure to influence attitudes of son preference (India)
 - Evidence on impact of media exposure (cable TV) on reduction of son preference, fertility and acceptance of violence (Jensen and Oster, 2009; Pande and Astone, 2007)
- Media exposure has proven effective to change fertility behavior and others:
 - Increase contraceptive use (Tanzania, Rogers et al. 1999)
 - Lower fertility (Brazil, La Ferrara et al. 2012)
 - Use of bed nets (Keefer and Khemani, 2012)
 - Cessation of smoking (McVey and Stapleton, 2000)

Source: Das Gupta (2014) and Dudwick (2014).

Policy challenges in Armenia

- **Little awareness and skepticisms** about sex ratio at birth trends and its linkages with selective abortion and gender inequality
- **Few voiced concerned** about sex imbalances → problem being exaggerated; long traditions of intermarriage so less perceived implications on marriage market (contrary to Indian and China)
- Many even expressed **a positive sentiment** related to men as protectors of the land and family, especially as many adult men migrated abroad
- More widespread concern about **abortion** than sex selection
 - Media coverage, public debate and religious institutions focus on this aspect in particular (CRRC, 2013)

Source: Dudwick (2014), based on qualitative survey

Thinking about policy in Armenia

“Changes in informal institutions and, through them, household behavior, are key to resolving this problem. And it can be done”

(World Development Report 2012)

Policy recommendations for Armenia: tackle the fundamentals

- **Banning disclosure of fetal sex or limiting women's rights to abortion is NOT recommended.** It hasn't worked in other settings and people on the ground perceive these measures as dangerous: they will provide a new source of bribery for practitioners, and are likely to drive abortion underground, with serious or fatal consequences for pregnant women.
- **Promote gender equality and increase women's resilience to pressure,** by increasing women's economic empowerment, access to assets and agency, as well as protection in cases of divorce or violence, and the provision of reproductive education to all.

Source: Das Gupta (2014) and Dudwick (2014).

Policy recommendations for Armenia: Tackle the fundamentals

- **Promote changes in informal institutions** regarding son preference, by fighting adverse gender stereotypes through **media campaigns** targeted at various population groups.
- **Provide sex education in schools and to men and women overall, to eliminate wrong beliefs regarding reproductive choices such as:**
 - *“The more children women have, the healthier the body is”*
 - On sex determination, *“calculations of my mother in law prove right 90% of the time”* (woman in Yerevan)
 - A medical professional noted that even educated people do not understand the basis for sex determination; if they did, men would have fewer reasons to reproach their wives for failing to conceive boys (Dudwick, 2014).

Source: Das Gupta (2014) and Dudwick (2014).

Thank you



Appendix

Team and original background work

World Bank Core Team: María E. Dávalos (Economist, TTL), Giorgia Demarchi (ETC), Nistha Sinha (Senior Economist)

Commissioned background work:

- Das Gupta, Monica (2014). *“Missing Girls” in the South Caucasus countries: trends, possible causes, and policy options.*
- Dudwick, Nora (2014). *“Missing Women” in the South Caucasus: Reasons, local perceptions and proposed solutions. (Based on qualitative surveys carried out in each country including focus groups, life stories and interviews.)*
- Ebenstein, Avraham (2013). *Sex Selection in Armenia: Causes and Consequences. (Exploring trends with DHS surveys for 2000, 2005 and 2010)*
- Caucasus Research Resource Center-Armenia (2013) *Missing Girls in the South Caucasus. (Literature Review, Media Review and Institutional Mapping).*

Qualitative survey: purpose and sample

Instrument developed by the World Bank to understand:

- **Factors** that are more or less important in encouraging sex selection in the local context, and whether and how these might be changing;
- If and how **pressures** for sex selection are changing;
- **Public awareness** regarding the skewed sex ratios in their country and possible consequences;
- Potential **policy options** for reducing sex selection.

Four communities sampled:

- Yerevan
- Giumri, the country's second largest city
- Akhuryan, small town in Shirak province, (near Giumri)
- A village in Aragatsotn province

Qualitative survey: methodology

Six sex- and age-disaggregated **focus groups** per community:

- Young, never married, 18-25 years old (men and women groups)
- ever married, 26-45 (men and women groups)
- Ever-married 60 and older (men and women groups)
 - ➔ Efforts taken to include diversity in education level, profession and family size and composition

Five individual **interviews** per community + additional five/capital, including:

- Informal community leaders or local officials, and religious leaders
- Representatives of NGOs working on gender issues,
- Education providers, lawyers, sociologists and demographers.
- Health care providers (gynecologists, obstetricians and/or ultrasound specialists)