

AZERBAIJAN

COUNTRY PROFILE

Global Programme to Prevent Son Preference and the Undervaluing of Girls: Improving the sex ratio at birth in select countries in Asia and the Caucasus

Baku 2018



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ABBREVIATIONS

ASAN	State Agency for Public Service and Social Innovations under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CSO	Civil Society Organization
HDR	Human Development Report
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
EU	European Union
GBSS	Gender-biased Sex Selection
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IDP	Internally displaced person
IMAGES	International Men and Gender Equality Survey
MMR	Maternal Mortality Ratio
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PACE	Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
SSC	State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan
SRB	Sex Ratio at Birth
TFR	Total Fertility Rate
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
SCFWCA	State Committee for Family, Women and Children's Affairs

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ADDRESSING THE HARMFUL PRACTICE OF SON PREFERENCE AND THE UNDERVALUING OF GIRLS

Until the early 1990s, the sex ratio at birth in Azerbaijan was mostly within the biological norm, which ranges from 102 to 106 males to 100 females. However, in 1990 it climbed to 107 boys per 100 girls, hitting 118 boys to 100 girls in 2003. This was followed by a slight decline to 114 observed during last several years (2015-2017).

Rigid notions of gender and gender equality are still pervasive and are deeply entrenched in the minds of Azerbaijani men and women. Evidence-based data shows that these deeply rooted gender stereotypes and misconceptions as well as customary practices that place a high value on sons play major role in the phenomenon of gender-biased sex selection in Azerbaijan. Son preference constitutes an endemic component of the Azerbaijan's patriarchal family structures and practices and evidence-based data reveals that the phenomenon has led to the skewed sex ratio at birth.

Deeply rooted preference for a son child is linked to a variety of socially constructed factors that continue to make male children more socially and economically valuable than daughters. The inheritance and land rights mainly pass through male heirs, greater male participation in the workforce allows them to contribute more to family income and aging parents depend on support from sons in the absence of effective social security schemes. Women are typically seen as "birds of passage" in Azerbaijani culture – they move from their biological family to another upon marriage, and have rather limited opportunities to provide support to their parents when needed given their socio-economic standing. Moreover, unwritten rules of the society dictate that only sons can ensure continuation of a family surname as well as carry out certain religious and cultural rituals. The vast majority of interventions aimed at addressing son preference and gender-biased sex selection to date have mainly targeted legal and policy initiatives that might eventually jeopardize the fundamental human rights of the women to choose abortion in cases of unwanted and unplanned pregnancies. To prevent this risk in the country, strategies aimed at ensuring gender equality and promoting the status of the women and girl children should be adequately addressed.

A coherent approach to preventing and addressing son preference and gender-biased sex selection must include a number of interrelated interventions including improving policy frameworks, expanding the knowledge base and data, sensitizing the population and decision makers and strengthening multi-sectoral approaches with active involvement of governmental partners (e.g. Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population, State Committee for Family, Women and Children's Affairs, the Ministry of Youth and Sports) as well as civil society organizations including faith-based organizations, the media and the State Agency for Public Service and Social Innovations (ASAN).

The Government has worked to address the problem of son preference and gender-biased sex selection with the support of UNFPA since 2011. Key measures include the provision of evidence-base information for informed policy and decision-making, awareness raising and advocacy for development of a policy framework on preventing and addressing the phenomenon.

BACKGROUND

AZERBAIJAN AT GLANCE

The territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan is 86.6 thousand square kilometres. ¹It shares borders with five countries: Russia in the north, Georgia in the north-west, Armenia in the west, Iran and Turkey in the south. Azerbaijan has water borders with four countries in the Caspian Sea: Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Iran. Baku, the capital and the largest city of the country, is located on the Caspian shore.

Azerbaijan is a secular country that constitutionally allows freedom of religion to its citizens. The prevailing religion in Azerbaijan is Islam. The peculiarities of the historical development of Azerbaijan, its geographical position and the national composition of the population have also created favorable conditions for the spread of different religions and beliefs.

Demographic information

Language: The primary and official language of Azerbaijan is Azerbaijani.

Ethnic breakdown: Azerbaijan has over 80 ethnic groups, with the 8,173,000 (2009 census) Azerbaijanis

constituting an overwhelming majority of the population (91.6 per cent). ² The most numerous ethnic minorities each constituting a population exceeding 100,000 people are Lezghins (2 per cent), Russians (1.3 per cent), Armenians (1.3 per cent) and Talyshes (1.3 per cent).

Economic variables: Azerbaijan's economy contracted by 3.8 per cent in 2016, driven by a fall of 5.4 per cent in non-oil sector output, according to the World Bank. Oil GDP showed no growth in 2016. The Government accelerated structural reforms, including the simplification of customs clearance and licensing to support private sector growth. In December 2016, the Government launched a "Strategic Roadmap for the National Economy and Main Economic Sectors" that outlined medium- and long-term goals.

Decision making: Women are significantly underrepresented in elective offices and the number of women appointed to senior decision-making positions in the Government is very low. Though there are no legal restrictions on women's participation in political life, women are impeded from taking a more proactive stance in political life due to structural and systemic barriers including their disproportionate burden of family and caregiving chores.

¹ About 20 per cent of the territory of Azerbaijan is occupied by Armenian military forces as a result of the Azerbaijan-Armenia conflict over Nagorno Karabakh.

² Reference is made to the ethnicity (Azerbaijani Turks) and not nationality in the meaning of citizenship. At the same time, all citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan are referred to as Azerbaijanis regardless of their ethnicity.

Indicator	Reported figure	Source, reported year
Total population (in millions)	9,810	SSC, 2017 ³
Urban population (in millions)	5,199 (53%)	SSC, 2017
Rural population (in millions)	4,611 (47%)	SSC, 2017
Men (in millions)	4,891 (49.9%)	SSC, 2017
Women (in millions)	4,918 (50.1%)	SSC, 2017
Population, female, aged 15-49 (in millions)	2,681.8 (27.3%)	SSC, 2017
Total fertility rate	2.0 children per woman	SSC, 2017
Population growth (annual %)	1.2	WB, 2016
Modern contraceptive prevalence rate	13.9	DHS, 2011
Total abortion rate (per woman)	2	DHS, 2011
Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 live births)	11.4	SSC, 2017
Maternal mortality rate (per 100,000 live births)	13.8	SSC, 2017
Sex ratio at birth	114 boys per 100 girls	SSC, 2017
Life expectancy at birth (years)	75.2 (Female: 77.6; Male: 72.8)	SSC, 2017
Healthy life expectancy (years)	Female: 67.7; Male: 62.8	SSC, 2017
Distribution of managerial positions in civil service, according to 4-7 classifications (%)	Female: 9.9; Male: 90.1	SSC, 2017
Members of National Parliament (%)	Female: 16.1; Male: 83.9	SSC, 2017
Judges (%)	Female: 12; Male: 88	SSC, 2017
Distribution of private entrepreneurs (%)	Female: 20.9; Male: 79.1	SSC, 2017
Distribution of persons received driving license (%)	Female: 6.7; Male: 93.3	SSC, 2017

³ State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan (SSC)

STUDY METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

This country profile was developed on the basis of the information available from different sources, including reports produced by the Government, international organizations and civil society as well as the documentation related to Azerbaijan's review by the CEDAW Committee and UPR Working Group.

The first comprehensive assessment of the skewed sex ratio in Azerbaijan was conducted by the State Committee for Family, Women and Children's Affairs (SCFWCA) of the Republic of Azerbaijan in close collaboration with the UNFPA Country Office in Azerbaijan. The assessment was exclusively dedicated to exploration of mechanisms behind this phenomenon, by using both available quantitative data and qualitative information. This study identified the socio-demographic factors behind the skewed sex ratio at birth and explored the underlying causes.

To present further evidence to the Government on the impact of the skewed sex ratio at birth on the future population structure (and the importance of prompt intervention to address the problem), UNFPA developed population projections on five different scenarios with the support of experts from Hacettepe University Institute for Population Studies.

More interdisciplinary research combining the perspectives of gender studies and behavioral sciences is needed in order to reveal the exact mechanisms impacting the formulation of particular gender roles unique to the Azerbaijani society. The sex ratio at birth is currently 114 boys per 100 girls; however, systematic observations and analysis are necessary to explain whether this decrease represents a temporary fluctuation or a trend towards normalization.

CHAPTER



SON PREFERENCE AND GENDER-BIASED SEX SELECTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Significant efforts have been made to advance gender equality in Azerbaijan within the past several decades. The country's Constitution explicitly mentions the right to equality between all men and women and the provision is further reinforced through a series of normative acts adopted or revised thereafter. The most recent overview of the demographic situation in the country has highlighted several important areas of progress that include longer life expectancy for both men and women and higher literacy rates among women. The findings also indicate that the women are now more likely to marry at an older age as compared with the early 20th century, have fewer children, have nearly equal chances of residing in either rural or urban areas, are more engaged in income generating activities outside of the household. ⁴

Research also highlights that gender inequality continues to affect the formation of relationships within families, as well as society at large. Despite the existing legal provisions on equal rights, the access women have to resources (economic, cultural, information and social) is significantly restricted compared with that of men. Women's participation in decision-making processes in personal, public and political life is also at a low level. A complex interplay of different factors including interlinkages between gender and societal norms and institutions continues to confine women to the household, where they are valued primarily for their reproductive function. ⁵ The situation is further exacerbated by unequal distribution of household responsibilities that many women must shoulder in addition to earning an income to support the family. Traditional attitudes towards women and their stereotyped roles imposed by the customs and cultural practices prevalent in the country are seriously impeding the advancement and empowerment of

women, and are leading to revival of old and occurrence of new harmful practices. ⁶

1.2 SEX IMBALANCES AT BIRTH IN AZERBAIJAN

Since 1965, fertility in Azerbaijan has declined in accordance with the classic "compression" of the traditional family as part of demographic transition: third births become very rare and the higher order birth (four, five, etc.) disappear; at the same time almost all women marry and have their first and second child in a short time period. ⁷ The Soviet modernization project had a great impact on the structure of the Azerbaijani family. A change in the household composition to monogamous families was accompanied by an increase in the age of the spouses, primarily of women; a decline in birthrates; and a shift from arranged marriages to unions based on love and companionship. Still, Azerbaijan has retained and regained its own strong cultural traditions, which place a high value on community and family, and give a great deal of weight to the opinions of elders in the choice of life strategies and partners. The majority of young couples tend to live independently of their parents; however, extended families, in which several generations live under the same roof, are not the exception.

The findings of recent research reveal that rigid notions of gender and gender equality are still pervasive – what it means to be a man or a woman – and are deeply entrenched in the minds of Azerbaijani men and women. ⁸ Evidence-based data shows that these deeply-rooted gender stereotypes and misconceptions as well as customary practices that place a higher value on sons play major role in the phenomenon of gender-biased sex selection in Azerbaijan. The practice mainly stems from patriarchal notions of society that have been

⁴ UNFPA/UNDP (2015). Population Situation Analysis: Beyond the Demographic Transition in Azerbaijan Baku, Azerbaijan.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ UNFPA/SCFWCA (2017). Gender equality and gender relations in Azerbaijan: current trends and opportunities. Findings from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES). Baku, Azerbaijan.

⁷ UNFPA/UNDP (2015). Population Situation Analysis: Beyond the Demographic Transition in Azerbaijan Baku, Azerbaijan.

⁸ UNFPA/SCFWCA (2017). Gender equality and gender relations in Azerbaijan: current trends and opportunities. Findings from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES). Baku, Azerbaijan.

translated into son preference given declining fertility rates as well as widespread availability and use of ultrasound devices enabling determination of fetal sex.

UNFPA projects ⁹ that by 2050 there will be 12,000 to 15,000 more boys than girls born each year if the sex ratio at birth remains high. If such an increase in the number of men and boys continues or further deterioration is observed, the country will soon face its negative impact including, for example, a wider gender gap in education, reduction in the proportion of women in the labour market, less gender diversity (masculinization) in all spheres of public life. Such masculinization will impede promotion of women and lead to increased levels of crime, including human trafficking. The shortage of women is also likely to increase the pressure placed on women to perform the traditional reproductive duties, which will conflict with their prospects for individual development and their productive roles in society. ¹⁰

1.3 THE CAUSES OF SEX SELECTION

This section focuses on the causes of gender-biased sex selection (determinants) and gender inequality as the root cause of the problem of sex selection. Based on a rational behavior assumption, this section divides the causes of the problem into two broad categories – demand-side and supply-side factors. Demand-side factors examine social, cultural, spiritual and economic determinants of son preference and gender-biased sex selection practice, and explain why it is beneficial and desirable to have boys rather than girls in the Azerbaijani society.

The section tries to separately capture factors influencing gender-biased sex selection, although they are often strongly intertwined, leading to gender-biased sex selection harmful practices. The demand-side factor is related to the existence of preference in a society for a child of a particular sex and a low fertility rate that can lead parents to want to choose the sex of their child. ¹¹ The supply-side factors explain the availability of facilitating technology for performing sex selection and prenatal sex determination as well as the effectiveness, costs and accessibility of available methods, along with the legal environment in this regard.

1.3.1 Demand-Side Factors: Factors Increasing Demand for Gender-Biased Sex Selection

Existing research indicates that son preference is strong and clear among both men and women from different generations, socio-economic backgrounds and regions of the country. Sons are preferred as "assets" since they can contribute to the family and daughters being, on the contrary, accepted as "liabilities". This position is based on traditional dependency on sons for family "continuity", acceptance of sons as the major bread winners of the family as well as the major supporters of elderly parents, and a view of girls as transitory members of the family.

Gender Differences in Education

Overall, Azerbaijan has high literacy rates for both men and women. However, girls in Azerbaijan are subjected to more limitations on their freedom of movement as compared with boys. One of the consequences of this situation is that in rural areas girls attend school less frequently than boys, especially if the school is far from their home. Indications are that attendance of girls at senior secondary levels is decreasing and gender segregation of courses at the vocational and tertiary educational level is further reinforced.

Moreover, as the cost of education grows, families are more likely to invest in the education of boys, rather than to invest resources in the education of female family members. ¹² A decline in the number of girl students after compulsory education – IX grade (out of a total of 11 grades) is attributed to several causes: girls get married, girls are not allowed to attend classes, and some girls attend institutions of specialized secondary education. ¹³

Gender differences in employment and entrepreneurship

According to the official statistics, while no statistically significant difference is observed in the number of employed men and women (51.9 per cent of men and 48.1 per cent of women) in 2017, the share of unemployed women significantly exceeded that of unemployed men (57.8 per cent of women versus 42.2 per cent of men).

⁹ UNFPA (2015). Population Projections, 2014-2050: Different Sex Ratio at Birth Scenarios in Azerbaijan.

¹⁰ UNFPA/UNDP (2015). Population Situation Analysis: Beyond the Demographic Transition in Azerbaijan.

¹¹ UNFPA Azerbaijan (2014). Mechanisms Behind the Skewed Sex Ratios at Birth: Qualitative and Quantitative Analysis. Baku: UNFPA.

¹² Oxfam Azerbaijan (2012). Gender Analysis in Azerbaijan

¹³ UNDP Azerbaijan (2016). Gender Assessment Report in Shamakhy and Ismayilly rayons.

Women engaged in paid labour are mainly concentrated in three sectors: education (39.2 per cent), healthcare and the social sphere (16 per cent), and commerce (11.5 per cent).¹⁴

These sectors have some of the lowest monthly average pay rates. In addition, women continue to be disproportionately affected in terms of the additional load of child care and domestic chores. Women's economic independence versus women's limited labour market participation are the main factors leading to sex selection in favour of boys. This is because in patriarchal societies, like Azerbaijan, families rely on boys to provide economic support and security in old age and thus place greater value on sons as compared with daughters.

Gender imbalance in decision-making

While national legislation has no explicit discriminatory provisions that directly impede women in this regard, women's representation at decision-making levels is still low. Azerbaijan is ranked 78 of 160 countries on the UNDP Gender Development Index (GDI) with a value of 0.940. In 2017, 16.1 per cent (20 out of 104) of the members of the Milli Mejlis, the supreme national legislative body, were women. Only two of 15 parliamentary committees – on human rights and on family, women and children's affairs – are chaired by women. Men also dominate the higher echelons of executive power. Only two positions out of all ministerial positions and heads of state committees are occupied by women: Chair of the State Committee for Family, Women and Children's Affairs and Chair of the State Commission on the Students' Admissions. Women are also marginally represented in the judiciary – only 57 of 480 judges¹⁵, 47 of 1,069 prosecutors and 6 of 41 judges of the Supreme Court are women.¹⁶

Gender and health

Research conducted in Azerbaijan over the last few years highlights correlations between women's health issues, poverty and inadequate state expenditures on health.¹⁷ The structure of the Azerbaijani family and the dependent status of women can be considered as another important obstacle for accessing health care services. The Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) reports that 20 per cent of married women make decisions on their own about their own health care; 52 per cent decide jointly with their husband/partner; and 28 per cent say that their husband or someone else is the primary decision maker about the woman's health care.¹⁸ DHS 2011 also identifies key barriers to the right of women to access healthcare: cost (including formal and informal payments), distance, a lack of transport, a lack of female providers, women not wanting to go alone, and women needing to seek permission by male or senior female family members as a traditional social norm.

1.3.2 Supply-Side Factors

In 2017, the fertility rate was 1.9 children per woman. The Demographic Health Survey (DHS) data shows that induced abortion is the prevailing birth control method in Azerbaijan. Approximately one in two pregnancies is terminated through abortion. Abortion provisions in Azerbaijan are still among the most liberal in the world (United Nations, 2013). They allow women to obtain an abortion upon request up to the twelfth week of pregnancy and up to 22 weeks in case of any social circumstances. Abortion on medical grounds is legal without any restrictions as to the term.

According to DHS 2011, the contraceptive prevalence rate among currently married women was 54.9 per cent, a slight increase from 51.1 per cent reported in the DHS 2006. However, between 2006 and 2011 the use of modern methods of contraception remained unchanged at 13.9 per cent amongst currently married women.

¹⁴ SSC, 2018

¹⁵ SSC (2018). "Women and Men, 2018". Baku.

¹⁶ European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ), Scheme for Evaluating Judicial Systems (2013). Accessed 19 October at: www.coe.int/t/dghl/cooperation/cepej/evaluation/2014/Azerba%C3%AFdjan_2014.pdf.

¹⁷ See for example, "Mother and Child Mortality as One of the Problems in Azerbaijan Created by Poverty", Himayadar Humanitarian Organization (2007), quoted in "Budget Investments in Health and Education of Azerbaijani Children", AEU and UNICEF (2008).

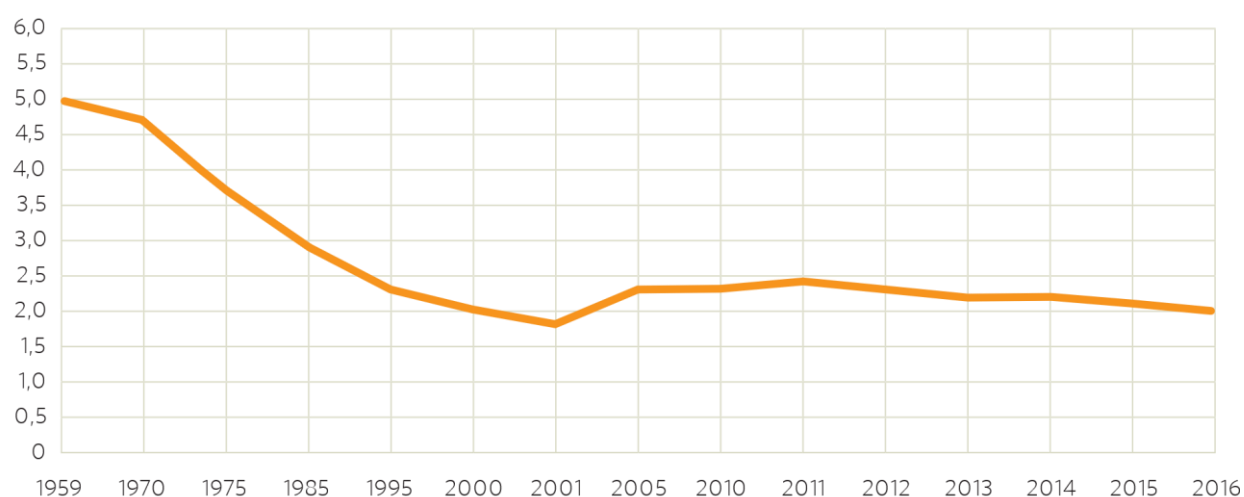
¹⁸ Azerbaijan Demographic and Health Survey (2006), p. 195.

The persistently low rate of modern contraceptive use, and limited access to counseling and information on family planning, are factors that contribute to the use of abortion as a major method of birth control. The abortion rate in Azerbaijan is one of the highest among

Central Asian countries and Turkey. Patriarchal attitudes and stereotypes on son preference also lead to the high level of sex-selective abortions.

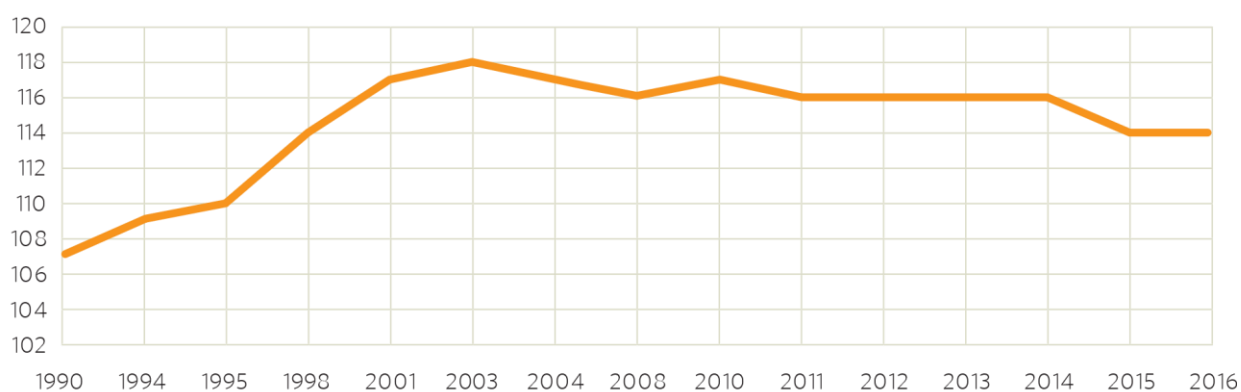
1.4 FERTILITY DECLINE AND VARIATIONS IN SON PREFERENCE

Figure 1: Total fertility rate, 1959–2016



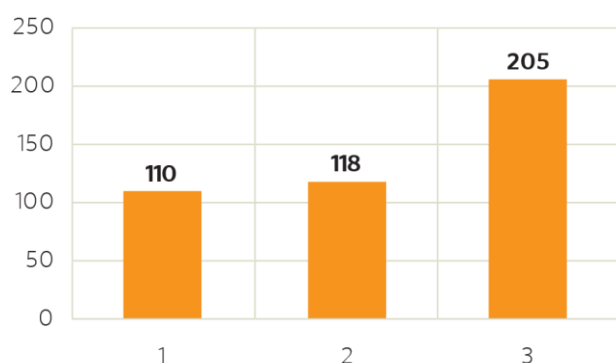
Source: State Statistical Committee, Republic of Azerbaijan

Figure 2: Sex ratio at birth, 1990-2016



Source: State Statistical Committee, Republic of Azerbaijan

Figure 3: Sex ratio at birth by birth order, AzDHS 2011



Source: Azerbaijan Demographic and Health Survey 2011

Fertility has declined dramatically in Azerbaijan over the past 50 years. The total fertility rate was 4.7 children per woman in 1970 and 1.9 in 2017. Abortion is more likely to be used by married women to control fertility after their second birth. While only 2 per cent of first pregnancies end in abortion, this percentage climbs to 80.4 per cent of fifth or higher order pregnancies.¹⁹

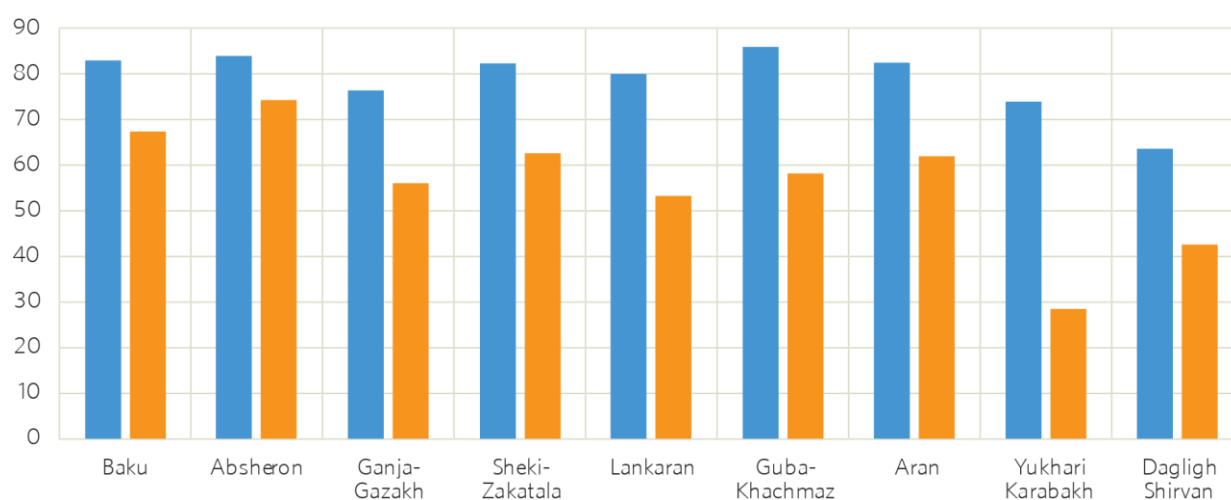
More than half of currently married women (54.8 per cent) have had at least one abortion. The percentage of women having had an induced abortion increases as the number of living children increases. The prevalence of induced abortion among women with two male or three male children is significantly higher than for those with two or three female children.

Fertility preferences are directly related to a skewed sex ratio at birth. As expected, the desire to limit fertility increases with the number of living children. However, the sex also makes a difference and this can be interpreted as an indicator of son preference. Overall, 81.4 per cent of women with only two male children want no more children. However, a desire to cease childbearing drops to 62.1 percent among the women with only two female children. The gap decreases between women with three male children and those with three female children (92.4 and 83.7 per cent respectively).

1.5 REGIONAL DIFFERENCES

The sex composition of living children and the desire to limit fertility suggests that son preference is almost identical in both urban and rural areas. The percentage of women with two male children who wish to cease childbearing is around 16 percent higher than women with two female children in both urban and rural settings. Regional variations are also noteworthy. Based on the fertility preferences of women with two male children versus those with two female children, it is seen that son preference is more prominent in Lankaran, Guba-Khachmaz and Yukhari Karabakh regions. Education also seems to be an important variable. Based on the same variables, results suggest that a preference for having two sons is highest among women with a basic secondary education or less, and among women living in the poor and poorest households.

Figure 4: Regional differences: Fertility preferences of women with 2 male children versus those with 2 female children, by region (AzDHS, 2011)



Source: Azerbaijan Demographic and Health Survey 2011

¹⁹UNFPA Azerbaijan (2014). Mechanisms Behind the Skewed Sex Ratios at Birth: Qualitative and Quantitative Analysis. Baku: UNFPA.

CHAPTER



THE RULE OF LAW AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Since regaining independence in 1991, the Republic of Azerbaijan has become a State party to a range of international human rights treaties, including the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women and its Optional Protocol on individual complaints and inquiry procedures. For the last decade, the national legislation has also seen major developments to tackle gender inequality and gender-based discrimination and violence in all spheres of life.

Nevertheless, a series of substantial gaps still remain in regards to adequate legal protection for women. As in many other countries, there is a discrepancy between legislative acts and their realization. Despite the fact that the equality of men and women is affirmed in the Constitution and in other pieces of national legislation (including the recent Law on the Provisions of Gender Equality, 2006), there is still considerable de-facto gender inequality in many spheres of social, economic and political life. Women in Azerbaijan face a range of difficulties in access to quality education, healthcare services and employment.

2.1 INTERNATIONAL CONVENTIONS AND AGREEMENTS

Positive signs of improvements regarding the human rights and gender equality situation in the country emerged after Azerbaijan regained its independence (1991), and following its accession to various international and regional intergovernmental organizations such as the United Nations (1992) and the Council of Europe (2001). Of note are the UN interagency statement, Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), among other relevant international agreements). Eight of the nine core international human rights treaties were ratified. These treaties give rise to obligations that are binding under international human rights law, to give effect to the human rights protected therein.

2.2 NATIONAL LEGISLATION

The Constitution of Azerbaijan (1995) has a separate chapter on protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Article 25 reaffirms the principle of equality and inadmissibility of discrimination of any kind.

Parliament has enacted a major law “On the guarantees of Gender (men and women) Equality” (2006) with a focus on preventing gender-based discrimination and its negative consequences. It seeks to ensure equal rights for both women and men and tackle and prevent challenges with the provision of gender inequality. The law stipulates the main responsibilities of state institutions for guaranteeing equal rights and opportunities for women and men in all spheres, including political, economic, social and cultural. Moreover, the law has a discrete provision on gender equality in the field of economic and social relations. Most importantly, this law recognizes that there are some entrenched forms of discrimination against women, both past and current, that impede women’s enjoyment of their human rights and fundamental freedoms. Accordingly, Article 3.2 provides for the adoption of special measures whenever necessary to accelerate equality for women.

According to the Law on the Amendments to the Family Code of Azerbaijan Republic (2011), the necessary changes have been introduced to the Family Code on equalization of the minimum marriage age for men and women (18 for both).

The Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence (2010) establishes and regulates measures aimed at prevention of violence, legal redress, as well as elimination of reasons for domestic violence. The National Development Concept “Azerbaijan 2020: Look into the Future” identifies gender equality as one of

the priority areas for action. The conceptual framework of the document also envisions development of series of policy documents such as the Family Strategy, National Action Plan for Gender Equality, Child Code and National Children's Strategy.

2.3 NATIONAL FRAMEWORK

After the release of research findings on the mechanisms behind the skewed sex ratio at birth, UNFPA supported the Government with the development of a policy framework on preventing and addressing the phenomenon. The need to address this problem was articulated in the draft State Programme on Population and Demography (2018–2030) as well as

provisions on relevant interventions and monitoring of trends. UNFPA is currently engaged in the process of negotiations with all relevant stakeholders for endorsement of the State Programme. The Government has solicited UNFPA's support for development of the National Action Plan (NAP) on Prevention of and Response to Gender Biased Sex Selection in Azerbaijan. A team of international and national experts commissioned by UNFPA developed this plan in close partnership with the Government. The official presentation of the NAP took place in October 2018. Once endorsed, the document will present a comprehensive roadmap for effective intervention strategies to reduce gender-biased sex selection in Azerbaijan.

CONCLUSION

Challenges

In recent decades Azerbaijan has achieved progress in protection and promotion of gender equality. A series of legally-binding international human rights treaties have been ratified and constitute an integral part of an effective legal framework for empowerment of women in the social, economic and political spheres.

As the level of gender-biased sex selection indicates, laws and policies require further implementation to prevent the harmful practice of son preference. In order to eliminate the cases of gender-based discrimination in general and the phenomenon of son preference in particular the issues of protection and promotion of women's rights should be addressed in a wider context of social justice.

The above analysis suggests that there is room to scale up the strategic interventions to ensure improved availability of data and evidence on son preference and gender-biased sex selection and its causes and consequences. There is also room to foster development and improvement of national legal and policy frameworks to address gender-based discrimination in the country.

Recommendations

Data and evidence

- Conduct systematic observation and analysis of the skewed sex ratio at birth in the population;
- Initiate and conduct qualitative studies on interlinkages and causal relations between different socio-economic factors, demographic determinants and fertility preferences of the population;
- Conduct gender assessment of social policies and laws having impact on son preference and undervaluing of girls;
- Initiate and conduct interdisciplinary research combining the perspectives of gender studies and behavioral sciences to reveal the exact mechanisms impacting the formulation of particular gender roles unique to the Azerbaijani society;
- Review the educational curricula including teaching resources/materials to present further evidence to end gender-based discrimination and stereotypes that reinforce gender stereotypes in the country.

Advocacy for improved legal and policy framework

- Continue advocacy for improving the national legal frameworks on gender equality by ensuring full compliance with the applicable provisions of international human rights law;
- Continue advocacy for introduction of special temporary measures to contribute to advancement of the rights of women and girls;
- Initiate advocacy for state-supported childcare and family care that supports women's economic empowerment, including through legal amendments to ensure paid, flexible and non-transferable parental leave policies for men;
- Advocate for mainstreaming gender equality perspectives into the design, development, implementation and evaluation of all relevant policy frameworks;
- Continue advocacy for the endorsement of the draft Law on Family Planning and Reproductive Health;
- Continue advocacy for the endorsement of the National Action Plan on Prevention of and Response to Gender Biased Sex Selection in Azerbaijan.

Community mobilization and advocacy for social norms change

- Engage with diverse stakeholders to “unpack” the results from the available research studies including the most recent International Men and Gender Equality Survey. Share the results with youth, parents, community members, media personalities, government ministries and civil society organizations. Discuss perceptions of what it means to be a man or a woman in society;
- Work with media companies to develop attractive infographics and short cartoons about the main findings from the relevant studies;

- Partner with media representatives to increase the number and quality of media products/articles on gender equality in general and gender-biased sex selection in particular;
- Partner with civil society organizations to engage men and boys for gender equality. Engage them in developing gender-transformative awareness-raising campaigns on fatherhood, healthy relationships, and sexual and reproductive health and rights. Such campaigns should be specific and targeted towards a specific set of social and gender norms;
- Partner with government, civil society, community members and other stakeholders to develop and launch public awareness raising campaigns promoting the value of the girl child.

Monitoring and evaluation

- Work with the Government and other stakeholders to establish a system to monitor and evaluate the effects of measures adopted and introduce additional measures if necessary. This monitoring and evaluation system should include the following indicators: Sex ratio at birth, induced abortion rate, number of late term abortions, rates of contraceptive use, women's rate of participation in the labor force, size of population covered by gender education programmes, percentage of population covered by health insurance scheme, and other related indicators.



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