

**THE ROLE OF MOTHERS-IN-LAW  
AND PRENATAL  
SEX-SELECTION  
(SEX SELECTIVE ABORTION) IN  
ARMENIA**

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# CONTENTS

Introduction .....	
1. RELATIONS BETWEEN DAUGHTER-IN-LAW AND MOTHER-IN-LAW IN A PATRIARCHAL ARMENIAN FAMILY .....	
2. PRESENTATION OF SOCIOLOGICAL SURVEY/STUDY RESULTS.....	
2.1. Childhood, Parental Family.....	
2.1.1. Manifestations of punishment and its gender-based characteristics.....	
2.2. EDUCATION AND PROFESSION .....	
2.3. WORK AND CAREER .....	
2.4. SELF-PERCEPTION, SUCCESS AND HAPPINESS.....	
2.5. FREE/LEISURE-TIME.....	
2.6. POSITIONS ON GENDER ROLES .....	
2.7. THE IDEAL OF A WOMAN .....	
2.8. MARITAL LIFE .....	
2.8.1. The Process of getting acquainted with future husband.....	
2.8.2. Expectations from marital life and relationships with husbands.....	
2.8.3. Relationships with mothers-in-law .....	
2.8.4. Pressure to have a baby boy .....	
2.8.5. Adaptation strategy in the husband's family .....	
2.9. RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MOTHERS-IN-LAW and DAUGHTERS-IN-LAW .....	
2.9.1. Violence against daughter-in-law .....	
2.9.2. Self-perception of mothers-in-law and their role in the son's family .....	

## INTRODUCTION

In societies with traditional mentality and in theoretical approaches of social focus, the family is observed as the main unit of human development, reproduction of generations and transfer of cultural values. It is in the traditional societies that within the limits of a family, which is the only and morally acceptable unit here, the intimate relationships, warmth and security, that are so significant for a human being, are developed and reinforced. The study of the family structure and the types of relationships existing within it in different societies is especially interesting, from the point of view of these relationships.

When speaking about the family unit of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is also necessary to reflect on its individual elements, i.e. on the participants and their biological and social characteristics. When referring to the most common forms of families, we can distinguish between nuclear and extended types, formed from parents of two sexes, that present today's family reality, as precisely, as possible.

In the Armenian reality where the supporters of traditionalism play a particular role, the family generally appears in its classical form (even though the number of nuclear families has the tendency to grow), comprised of the married parental couple, married young couple, children (grandchildren), in some cases-other relatives. In case if we deal with the first two generations, listed above, the existence of the two sexes is out of question, i.e. there is a biological man and a biological woman, who are supposed to create a new generation, as a result of the natural reproduction process. It is yet another question what the gender composition of the younger generation (children and grandchildren) will be.

Besides the above-mentioned function, it is also interesting to study the hierarchy existing in Armenian family: Who is the head of the family? What are the preconditions for the representatives of this or that sex to be or become the head of the family? Why is it important to supervise the woman's mobility and their behavior? These are questions that arise not only as a result of the multi-level and multi-sided manifestations of domestic violence, but also as a result of an uncontrollable practice, in other words, prenatal sex-selection (PSS), which is widespread in Armenia and which leads the country to serious demographic issues.

PSS presupposes a procedure whereas prenatal sex selection takes place, based on sex (whether it is a male or female) of the fetus. This procedure, as well as people who implement it, mostly target baby girls all over the world, given the fact that this type of abortion is based on gender. This circumstance has a series of reasons with subtle differences in various counties of the world,

including the USA, Singapore, Nepal, Albania, China, Korea, India and Armenia. Among the reasons, we can enumerate not only the socio-economic vulnerabilities of the family, the number of desirable children in the family, the rapid growth in migration flows, and conflict situations, but also a number of cultural traditions and stereotypes that give a preference to baby boys, as human beings and as main sources of income and financial safety in future, as compared to baby girls. The traditional and stereotypical standpoints often make the woman choose abortion, immediately after learning the sex of the baby, despite all the legal limitations and often not even letting the other family members know about it, since in a woman's view, living in an atmosphere of violence and pressure, it is the only acceptable decision that she would be expected to make. In this situation, questions arise, as to the kind of influence and role that the mothers-in-law have, if we are dealing with the PSS phenomenon, and as to how a mother-in-law, a woman of a significant role in the family, promotes or hinders the development of this phenomenon.

The purpose of the study, called "Role of Mothers-in-Law and Prenatal Sex-Selection in Armenia", is not only to understand the possible effect of the mother-in-law on selection of the child's sex, but also to understand the cause-effect relationships through collection of biographical stories. In order to ensure the diversity of data received from in-depth biographical interviews, an attempt has been made to also ensure the diversity of participants' places of residence. Thus, the study was implemented in seven out of the 12 administrative districts of Yerevan city, namely Ajapnyak, Avan, Erebuni, Center, Nor Nork, Shengavit, Qanaqer-Zeytun. The study sampling is based upon the education criterion: secondary, vocational education, and higher education. Besides, the sampling included women (in this case mothers-in-law) whose grandchildren were only girls, or only boys, or both- girls and boys. A total of 30 interviews has been taken. The report also reflects on the study of relationships between a daughter-in-law and a mother-in-law in a patriarchal Armenian family and in Armenian literature.

## 1. RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN A DAUGHTER-IN-LAW AND A MOTHER-IN-LAW IN A PATRIARCHAL ARMENIAN FAMILY

The relationship between a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law has always presented one of the characteristics of a patriarchal Armenian family, and has mirrored the whole spectrum of prevailing gender relationships in an Armenian society.

As R. Nahapetyan mentions in his article “The woman in the traditional Armenian family”, only after many years [of marital life] the Armenian woman would acquire some freedom and rights. “Whenever an old woman, having many children, walked through the village, as a sign of respect, the young men would stand up and bow, and would stop any kind of fight or quarrel, whenever she intervened. A significant difference was observed between the women’s lifestyles and roles in the household, living in mountaneous areas and valleys”. The housewife also played a significant role in marriages of her sons, especially in the choice of the future bride. Also, it was the housewife’s responsibility to ensure the economic equality among the sons’ families!<sup>1</sup>

In the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries when men, following the breakdown of matriarchy, started to also rule the family, besides ruling the rest of the social life spheres, the interrelations between women in a patriarchal Armenian family became hierarchic. The newlywed daughter-in-law was in the lowest level of the hierarchy, while the mother-in-law, the housewife (Great Nane/Grand Lady) was in the highest level. The woman’s role and place in the family was determined, according to this grading. The grand lady was the full-fledged housewife and distributed work among women and daughters-in-law. She was the focal point around which the whole family got united. The landlord (the headman) who was the head of the family would not interfere in her affairs. Noone could initiate anything without having the housewife’s permission. She held the keys to the cellar. The eldest daughter-in-law could replace the headman’s wife. The mother-in-law would prepare her for this role before death. The second daughter-in-law would help with knitting rugs and carpets, the third would do the laundry, would clean the house and the yard, and so on and so forth. The youngest daughter-in-law was in the worst situation. She would wake up the first and go to bed the last. It is noteworthy that the youngest daughter-in-law would do the housework, and the laundry, but did not have the right to wash her husband’s clothes, she

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<sup>1</sup> R. Nahapetyan “The Woman in a traditional Armenian family” Ռ. Նահապետյան, «Կինը հայոց ավանդական ընտանիքում», [http://hpj.asj-oa.am/2621/1/2009-1\(71\).pdf](http://hpj.asj-oa.am/2621/1/2009-1(71).pdf)

would lay the table, but again did not have the right to serve a meal to her husband: these were within the rights of elder daughters-in-law.<sup>2</sup>

H. Meghavorian, in his work of “Ethnographic and legal study on Armenian family and marriage” mentions that “The housewife and other married women occupied a higher place in a patriarchal Armenian family, as compared to their ancestors in Roman and Greek families. The housewife was absolutely independent in the household affairs. She was an economically independent person, and in many cases her husband would even ask for her advice and very often would follow it”<sup>3</sup>

The restrictions for girls, even though not very strictly, yet started to be set still in childhood, then they became extremely harsh in the lives of daughters-in-laws, and at a later stage diminished gradually, as the woman became a mother of a few children. This was especially the case, if the woman appeared in the role of the family leader, i.e. in the status of the headman’s wife, with the privilege of having permission to talk, and hence taking the lead on managing all other women in the family. The upbringing of all younger girls in the family was under the control of all daughters-in-law and women, especially that of the grand housewife. In the age of 4–5, they were taught to clean the house and the yard, wash the dishes, carry out tasks at the request of the elderly. In the age of 7–8, they were taught to wash the feet of men returning from work. “Nonetheless, in this age, they were not given hard work to do, saying that “She is a young girl and her navel can be damaged (her navel will fall down from its place)”. They were free to play with boys, but were deprived of the opportunity and the right to attend school. Due to the existing traditions, it was forbidden for the girls of the 8–12 age to attend school. “What does a girl have to do at school?”<sup>4</sup>

Also, in a patriarchal family the daughter-in-law was expected to definitely have a baby boy. For example, in a family of Armenians from Aghdznig, the birth of a baby boy was much more desirable and encouraged. In order to decide the sex of the baby to be born, different types of fortune telling methods were used. There was a belief that if the wife slept in the right side of the husband, a baby boy would be born, if she slept in the left side, then a baby girl would be born. If the pregnant woman’s face was bright, then she was expected to have a baby boy, if she was gloomy, the child that she expected would perhaps be a girl. If after taking a bath her belly swelled, it was believed that she was expecting a boy, in the opposite case, the child she expected was believed to be a girl. If the pregnant woman’s nipple was dark, then the fetus in the belly was believed to be a girl, if it was red, then it was believed to be a

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<sup>2</sup> Նույն տեղում Same place

<sup>3</sup> Ա. Պարսամյան, A. Parsamyan “The First Attempt of Marxist Study on the Armenian Ethnography And Law”, «Հայ ազգագրության և իրավունքի մարքսիստական ուսումնասիրման առաջին փորձը», [http://lraber.asj-oa.am/4186/1/1981-10\(33\).pdf](http://lraber.asj-oa.am/4186/1/1981-10(33).pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Ռ. Նահապետյան R. Nahapetyan

boy. If the pregnant woman's navel was protruded (juttet out), then it was believed to be a boy, if it went deeper inside the body, then it was believed to be a girl<sup>5</sup>.

When a boy was born, elderly women surrounded his bed and would apply all their "magical" knowledge to keep away the mother and newborn baby from "evil", "evil eyes" and "devils". If the newborn was a boy, they were happy and congratulated the family members, while if it was a girl, they wished patience to the elderly members of the family. When a boy was born, the mother would not hide her face from people who would surround her, and people would congratulate the father or the headmen of the family, by saying the following: "Let it be seven sons, not just one". In wealthy families, big celebrities were organized to honor the newborn boy, while the daughters-in-law who would bear girls, often were cursed with the following words: "let your womb dry out", you gave birth yet to another girl", because it was considered that "a girl, whether she is good or bad, is an outside wall (belongs to others, not you)". The daughter-in-law who gave birth to baby girls one after another would appear in a more humiliating situation. In such a case, the family members would make the following wishes to her: "Let it be a blind fly, let it be stuck to the wall, but there needs to be a man at home", or "it's better to have one blind son than seven healthy daughters"<sup>6</sup> The son was always perceived as the "inner wall of the house, while the daughter was the "outer wall". Interpretation of the expressions in Armenian. Translator's Note: These expressions come to prove that there has been worship of boys/sons in the traditional Armenian families. Here, the disadvantages of having a baby girl and the advantages of having a baby boy are pointed out: The girl's honor is a serious issue. From childhood till the point when she gets married, the family is much concerned about making sure that her honor and morality are kept on a high level. So, in general, having a baby girl meant having issues, like the "tail of the mouse" (or the tail in general) causes inconveniences for the mouse, while having a baby boy brought a pure joy, since the boy "is the king, the prince, the heir of the family", "he is the golden groom", "he should be served the best dishes" and "he should be given new clothes".<sup>7</sup>

The girls were prepared to become daughters-in-law, according to certain behavioral rules that included being diligent, "the daughter-in-law should not

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<sup>5</sup> Եր. Լալայան, «Մուշ Տարոն», ԱՀ.գ. XXXI, Թիֆլիս, 1916, էջ 176-177 Yer. Lalayan, Mush Taron, XXXI, Tiflis, 1916, pages 176-177

<sup>6</sup> R. Nahapetyan "The traditional habits and rituals of Armenians from Aghdznik on a child's birth and care"; Yerevan, YSU Publishing House, 2011 Ռ. Նահապետյան «Աղձնիքահայերի մանկան ծննդի և խնամքի ավանդական սովորույթները և ծեսերը», Երևան, ԵՊՀ հրատարակչություն, 2011

<sup>7</sup> R. Grigoryan. "Armenian folklore lullabies and children's songs", Yerevan, 1970, page 12 Ռ. Գրիգորյան. «Հայ ժողովրդական օրորոցային և մանկական երգեր», Երևան, 1970, էջ 12:



be idle”, not going out without letting mom or the housewife know, always being ready to do the assigned tasks, following the habits of keeping silent and avoidance. The more the girl was skillful at housework, and the more she knew and learned before entering the new family, as a daughter-in-law, the more she would be accepted there. The daughter-in-law herself would handover the traditions that she would learn from her mom and other women to her successor. Thus, in her paternal home she was brought up in a way that would ensure maintenance of patriarchal family’s traditional norms. The examples of the daughters-in-law of her own family had already prompted her to some extent, as to what she was expected to do and what her responsibilities would be when she became a daughter-in-law herself. She never complained about the traditions that had already gained legal force and were deeply rooted in everyday life and psychology of people. And since girls got married in an early age, in the age of 9-14 it was very easy for them to get used to the lifestyle of the new family where they appeared. “The girl is a coil that has been wound onto the spindle in her paternal house. In the house of her father-in-law this coil is being unwound and then wound once again, the daughter-in-law should be able to endure the process, regardless of the number of times that they will rewind the coil. The girl’s father and mother are put behind the door of the mother-in-law’s house, so even if they are criticized or disgraced, you should endure it. Now, the girl’s father-in-law and mother-in-law are her father and mother”. Apparently, the early age marriages fully complied with the requirements of the patriarchal family, by which they not only addressed the need of having additional working hands, but also ensured having an obedient and submissive daughter-in-law.<sup>8</sup>

Starting from the initial stage of marriage rituals (ritual of “seeing” the girl), the behavior of the young girl changed dramatically. It was already forbidden for her to play with her peers, to often appear in public. The engaged girl would spend most of the day with women and would be surrounded with girls and daughters-in-law of her rank. During the whole ritual of engagement she would go out to meet people only at the demand or wish of the elderly and even in that case she would present herself very gently and silently, making all efforts to appear decent, meek and humble to her future husband and his relatives. It was considered to be an intolerable behavior for the daughter-in-law to sit among the elderly, to stay among men and elderly women, to look at their faces, to feed the child in the presence of others and without the order of her mother-in-law, etc. In the first year of marriage, the newly wed daughter-in-law’s activity within the household was very limited. The newly wed daughter-in-law did not have the right to prepare dinner, bake bread, knead dough, to “hold the ladle” in her hands [to have the right to distribute dinner

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<sup>8</sup> R. Nahapetyan, “The Woman in an Armenian traditional family” Ռ. Նահապետյան, «Կինը հայոց ավանդական ընտանիքում»

among family members], to enter the cellar without the mother-in-law's permission or to give something to the neighbor. This was the right of the elder daughter-in-law. She did not participate in the field works, either.<sup>9</sup>

In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the control over the daughter-in-law among the Armenian families of Aghdznig was expressed also by the control over the clothes that she would wear. For example, there were limitations on the clothing and external ornaments/decorations of a woman from Sasoun, connected with age differences and transfer from one social group or status to another. The restrictions, regarding the external ornaments, were mostly applied towards the newly wed daughter-in-law, to some extent also to the elderly women. For all age groups, it was characteristic to wear clothes that had long sleeves, a closed chest part and reached the heels. It was not appropriate for women to show bare arms and legs. The clothes of a widowed woman were also distinguished with their dark colors and absence of any ornament<sup>10</sup>

According to the narrator Khachatur Khaplanyan, from the village of Irind, women of Khuti Dashtadem and neighboring Armenian villages were obliged to close their mouths with the headscarf, even in the presence of men of their age, while brides/daughters-in-law wore veils on their faces before having their first child. It was shameful for a young woman to appear in front of men, especially in front of the father-in-law or the godfather with an open face. If the father-in-law was at home, the daughter-in-law should hide her hands under the apron. If people said, “this is a woman whose “face was opened””, it would be the same as saying that she is “immoral”. Often when the daughter-in-law was “ugly” or pockmarked, people learned about it only after she bore a child and removed the veil from her face.<sup>11</sup>

It was considered to be shameful and disgraceful to see the daughter-in-law with loose hair, uncovered feet and heels. The ceremony of opening the face of the daughter-in-law face had a special term “seeing the face”. It was totally forbidden for young girls and women to cut their hair, to use make-up for eyes: they could only put henna on their hands, since this was the only method of body care that was allowable and acceptable. Young daughters-in-law did not have the right to comb their hair in the presence of elderly people. In a situation whereas the **mother-in-law** entered the room, while the daughter-in-law was combing her hair, the latter should immediately cover her head. In the basis of the habit of hiding hair lies the thinking that a woman with loose hair or uncovered head can become a reason for unhappiness.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> R. Nahapetyan, the Woman/wife in an Armenian traditional family Ռ. Նահապետյան, «Կինը հայոց ավանդական ընտանիքում

<sup>10</sup> R. Nahapetyan, “Ethnographic field materials”, Copy-book 11, pages 9-10 Ռ. Նահապետյան «Դաշտային ազգագրական նյութեր», տետր 11, էջ 9-10

<sup>11</sup> Same place

<sup>12</sup> H. Tumanyan, “The Cursed Daughter-in-Law”, Works in 10 volumes, Volume 3, Yerevan,

The rules of avoidances of the daughter-in-law from the parents and relatives of her husband were even stricter. When sitting, she had to cover her face with the kerchief, she shouldn't sit with her back towards the people. When elderly people, especially her father-in-law, would enter the room, the daughter-in-law should quickly stand up, bow her head, hide her hands under the apron or quickly go away: she did not go to the floor of house where her father-in-law was present, wouldn't look at his face and would answer his questions only with head movements.<sup>13</sup>

The newly wed daughter-in-law would spend most part of the day in her corner, she was obliged to keep silent all the time. She talked to her husband secretly, when no third person was present. The habit of keeping silent with (not speaking to) different members of the family, had different time constraints. The avoidance was weaker between the daughter-in-law and the elder brothers-in-law and even weaker with the mother-in-law, due to shared housework.... In this case also, the elimination of bans was done, at the suggestion of the mother-in-law. The daughter-in-law would not talk to her brothers-in-law, until she would have 2-3 children, with sisters-in-law- before completion of the first year of marriage, with mother-in-law- in most cases, before having her first child. And even in this case, she was talking, with her head bowed and in a quiet manner. The daughter-in-law did not have the right to talk to the godfather or his family, and what is more, it was considered to be a sin, to appear in front of them. The newly wed daughters-in-law also had the duty of keeping silent with neighborhood men, especially with elderly, as a sign of respect, until they would have 2-3 children. In the phase of keeping absolute silence, the daughter-in-law communicated with the family members, through gestures (sign language) or through teenage children. When the daughter-in-law, keeping silence, wanted to communicate something, she would address to her child, at the presence of the given person, or turning her face to the wall, would communicate what she wanted in an audible manner. The suggestion for speaking was made to her by the head of the house who would either promise her a gift or say: "Everything in this house is yours, so you can speak".<sup>14</sup>

For young women people would usually say: "the woman is a piece of clothe" [Translator's Note: meaning that you can transform and change her the way you want, since she is defendless in many ways] "The woman should be reserved, she should not walk holding the arm of a foreign man or a neighbor", "The husband is the king of his wife", "The man is the head, the woman is the

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1990, pages 107-10, Հ. Թումանյան, «Անիծած հարսը», Երկեր 10 հատորով, հ.3, Երևան, 1990, էջ 107-10

<sup>13</sup> R. Nahapetyan, "Ethnographic field materials", Copy-book 11, pages 11-12 Ռ. Նահապետյան, «Դաշտային ազգագրական նյութեր», տետր 11, էջ 11-12

<sup>14</sup> R. Nahapetyan, "Ethnographic field materials", Copy-book 1, page 14, 84, copy-book 9, page 41 Ռ. Նահապետյան, «Դաշտային ազգագրական նյութեր», տետր 1, էջ 14, 84, տետր 9, էջ. 41

foot”, etc... The wife was obliged to be faithful to her husband, should obey his parents and relatives, and to carry out all her duties without any complaint<sup>15</sup>.

A childless (infertile) woman was not much honored in a family and society. She was treated, as a fruitless tree, or a “dry ankle”. Since she had to do hard work, like a man, the family also showed pity and compassion towards such a woman. On the other hand, the more male children the woman had, the more she would receive power and authority in the family and society<sup>16</sup>. “I am a mother of ten men,” she would often repeat.<sup>17</sup> The headscarf of the woman with many children was considered sacred and the honor of the given family. It often helped reconcile the two conflicting parties. You can come across stories about daughter-in-law and mother-in-law relationships also in the Armenian literature.

Mother Hripsime was carrying the burden of 65 years on her shoulders [was 65 years old]. She was very suspicious of Astghik. Every time she visited the tutor’s house, she always saw that Astghik was busy with a book, but she knew for sure, she had realized it already that it was not psalms that Astghik was carried away with.... Astghik pretended that she is plunged into the books, in a prayer book, but there was a devil there instead, a devil. Mother Hripsime did not like someone who would “read and write”, and she preferred Sima, Ruben Agha’s [Mr. Ruben’s] daughter, to Astghik, even her name sounded more pleasant to her, when pronouncing Astghik’s name her face would become distorted. Even earlier, a week ago, when she visited Ruben Agha’s [Mr. Ruben’s] house, she saw Sima who had neatly starched her brothers’ shirts. She was a real housewife, a housewife.<sup>18</sup>”

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*“Oh, you!!! Get it now!!! [beats]...”*

*Uttering these words, first, she violently hit with her hands on her daughter-in-law’s head, then in extreme fierce, and her teeth shut tightly, she started to pinch her daughter-in-law’s face, hands, ribs, and wherever she could reach with her sharp nails, and with every pinch, she even twisted and stretched Anan’s skin, caught between her nails.*

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<sup>15</sup> Same place, copybook 3, page 47, copy book 4, page 37, 107, copy book 9, page 33, 41  
Նույն տեղում, տետր 3, էջ 47, տետր 4, էջ 37, 107, տետր 9, էջ 33, 41

<sup>16</sup> R. Nahapetyan “The traditional habits and rituals of Armenians from Aghdznik on a child’s birth and care”, Yerevan, YSU Publishing House, 2011, page 99 Ռ. Նահապետյան «Աղձնիքահայերի մանկան ծննդի և խնամքի ավանդական սովորույթները և ծեսերը», Երևան, ԵՊՀ հրատարակչություն, 2011, էջ 99

<sup>17</sup> Raffi, The Armenian Woman, a collection of works, Volume 11, Yerevan, pages 99-159  
Րաֆֆի, Հայ կինը, Երկերի ժողովածու, Հատոր 11, Երևան, էջ 99-159

<sup>18</sup> T. Kamsarakan, “Tutor’s daughter” S. Կամսարական, «Վարժապետին աղջիկը»: Works, Soviet Writer Publishing House, 1984, pages 28-265 Երկեր, Սովետական գրող հրատարակչություն, 1984 էջ 28-265

“...Ooh..”, groaned Anan from pain, and firmly hugging her child, bowed over her.

“You dared to drink tea without me!!! Yes? Well, here you get it (beats), you left only eight out of the 10 pieces of sugar...so, now, I will tear you into eight pieces...(beats), you perhaps think that it is very cheap, right? You spoil it, so may you lose your eyesight and may you rot (beats again).”

And her sharp nails pierced Anan’s skinny body like a knife.

“Ow, ow”, bitterly cried Anan, writhing of pains, and her hands automatically squeezed her child tighter and tighter, and she bent over the child lower and lower. And the child was crying loudly in her lap.

The fury of crazy-Horomsim was getting worse. As if the sharp nails of her two hands were powerless to express her entire anger. Her rage got worse, especially since Anan nearly made no sound; so she thought that the daughter-in-law does not feel any pain, while in order to feel some sort of relief she wanted Anan to cry out loud, to call for help, so she tried to hit and pinch delicate parts of Anan’s body, with the intention of making her daughter-in-law cry out loud, expressing the pain she felt. But no, Anan persistently wouldn’t make any sound, and, bowing in front of her, would only express some restrained groans of pain that crazy-Horomsim could hardly hear amidst her own fierce yelping and the child’s cry.

Seeing that hitting and pinching do not help, the crazy-Horomsim pulled off the white headscarf from the daughter-in-law’s head, caught the end of one of the two braids of her thin hair and with all strength of her hand pulled it down abruptly.

“Aaaaah!”, screamed Anan sharply, closing her eyes from severe pain, and fell down on her back. Her weakened hands were not able to hold the child, anymore. The child slipped from her lap, fell on the ground and started to cry even louder.

The sharp scream of her daughter-in-law brought some sort of relief to crazy-Horomsim’s heart: she left the daughter-in-law’s hair, took the child, and pouring out continued curses, she tiredly sat on the coach and started to swing the child, so that it stops crying. Her small, evil eyes were still glinting with the madman’s fury, her narrow forehead was covered with sweat, she was panting, as if she had run a long way.

And Anan, with her eyes closed, was lying on her back on the ground and was whimpering in a monotonous and barely audible voice<sup>19</sup>

...The old woman hadn’t finished speaking, when a gigantic man entered the room like a crazy buffalo. He was so big, that when he entered, it seemed that with his body he had filled the whole space of

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<sup>19</sup> Same place:

*that little hut. It was Anan's husband: the wagoner Yagor, a rude and coarse man, like his wagon, and huge and muscular, like his horse.*

*“Oh, please, dear Yagor, do not beat... oh, my dear, please don't, my body aches”, begged Anan, stretching her head and holding her skinny shoulders with both hands.*

*“You say, I shouldn't beat!!! Shouldn't I?”, fiercely thundered Yagor, looking at her, with his viciously glittering eyes. “Then, what should I do? Should I kiss your eyes? While the old woman slept, you decided to escape secretly, and you left the house without attendance. Well, you escaped, right? I couldn't care less, if you escaped—I will not be much upset, if you leave, but where did you take my child? Do you want me to squeeze you like a worm under my feet right away? Is this what you want? Don't you know me? ... Damn you....!!!”*

*And a massive fist, as if made from iron, heavily and slowly moved horizontally and came to hit the woman on her flank (side).*

*Anan didn't even scream, but instead, all of a sudden, she opened her mouth, inhaled some air, with a strange pant, like a fish, taken out of water, then swayed and slowly fell down [powerless], like a piece of cloth.*

*“Oh, how cruel one can be! [you don't have a heart!]” What did you do?”, screamed Heghnar...in terror and ran for help.*

*For a second, Yagor looked through his thick eyebrows at the staring eyes of his wife who had rolled down on the ground in front of his feet, then without stopping to pour out swearwords, he approached the child, who continued to nibble the water-melon peel, took the child and went out without haste.*

*The old woman/mother bowed over Anan and froze in horror.*

*Anan was lying on the ground, with her abdomen bulged out in a strange way, her widely opened eyes were looking at the ceiling with a dull glimmer of a glass, blood was coming out of her open mouth, as if her panting froze out there.*

*During the preliminary inquiry, the wagoner Yagor, who was accused of murdering his wife, in response to the court investigator, said:*

*“I just hit once with a fist... well, I haven't done anything else<sup>20</sup>”*

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<sup>20</sup> Nar-Dos Our district, Novels, Նար-Ռոս, «Մեր թաղը» նովելաշար, “What happened afterwards when two lumps of sugar disappeared from the sugar bowl” Թե ինչ եղավ հետո, երբ շաքարամանից երկու կտոր շաքար պակասեց», Yerevan, Երևան, 1889-90, pages 4-5

## 2. PRESENTATION OF THE SOCIAL SURVEY RESULTS

*“If mother-in-law welcomes the daughter-in-law in a good manner, then she will gain a daughter, if not, then she will also lose her son ... Then, why should I lose my sons, if I can gain daughters.”* (a quote from an interview)

Within the study called, “The Role of Mothers-in-law And Prenatal Sex-selection”, an attempt has been made to reflect on different phases of women’s (mothers-in-law’s) lives and on different spheres of life within those phases: childhood, life in fraternal house, education, profession, work, career, free time, marital life, participation in son’s/sons’ family life. In general terms, reflections were also made upon self-perception of mothers-in-law, their values, as well as their viewpoints, regarding gender.

### 2.1. CHILDHOOD AND PARENTAL FAMILY

Within the study, the childhood period in the parental family has been reviewed, to clarify any gender discrimination and attitudes towards mothers-in-law/women during their lifetime.

The women with higher education emphasize that when they grew up, they could distinguish some differences in the attitudes shown toward girls and boys, but that these differences have not been very obvious and apparent. Very often this has not been expressed through words, and in their opinion this continues to date. Though these women emphasize that the attitude towards them has been different, nonetheless, they mostly **are not able or subconsciously are not willing to emphasize things that clearly point out those distinctions**. *“No, I cannot say that the attitudes towards us were the same..... How should I formulate it, so that it sounds right?... I have not been neglected, I have been provided with everything I needed, I have never been in any material need, but, as a girl, I have not been pampered much. It is, perhaps, due to the traditional attitudes that we have, it is common for people from Gyumri, the man’s word is the most important thing at home”*. (woman with higher education)

*“It was the same with the boys, well, the boys were born later, they were much younger, and then, according to the mentality of those times, the boys were pampered more. The two boys were born after four girls. Well, they were much more pampered, as compared to the girls, but they were not disobedient, either. In those days, the thinking was that the girl should do this chore and then the next one. The boys were freer in that*

sense. Also, perhaps, since they were much younger than us, the parents were less demanding towards them. (a woman with higher education)

*“Yes, I have felt... Even during quarrels with my brother, it was always emphasized that I am older and that I should give way, i.e. they would not listen to what has happened, they would just say that I am a girl and that was it”.* (woman with higher education)

*“My brother studied better than me and everyone always told me, including my parents, that I do not study like him. Even at school or somewhere else, whenever someone learned who my brother was, he/she would be surprised. They would always say: “How come? Are you V’s sister? But he studies very well”. And I was saying: “Well, this is the way I study. I cannot study better”. Largely, I cannot say that I been treated differently, but the boys, in general terms, were allowed to do what they wanted, while it was not quite the case for girls. But generally, this has been the only difference that I have felt”.* (a woman with secondary education).

Women with post secondary vocational education also bring evidence that in paternal house discrimination was observed towards children and that attitudes were also different toward boys and girls.

*“I was the only girl, and had three brothers, my mom has always loved her sons, not daughter. My parents were very strict, I did not have any rights, I had only ten minutes to come back home: I had to manage walking from the factory to our house in ten minutes-it was calculated that it took only 10 minutes to pass that distance.”* (a woman with post-secondary vocational education)

*“But my brothers were free, they had all the rights, simply my mom loved her sisters more, they were in the first place for her, and only after them she loved me, as her daughter”.* (a woman with post-secondary vocational education)

*“The only difference was that, well, the boys (all of them) received higher education, while we didn’t. We all were good students at school”* (a woman with post-secondary vocational education).

It is noteworthy that even women who grew up in relatively egalitarian (where both parents relatively equally participated in upbringing) families attest about the widespread stereotypes, with regard to the child’s discriminatory sex-selection. *“Both of them have been equally engaged in our upbringing, and we have been impressed with many things from them both. We are three sisters, I am the third child, and my dad anticipated that I would be a boy.... My mom always told that she was afraid... what if I also would be a girl....? [she laughs].*



*Well, we laugh now, but it's been like that. I was born and then my dad realized that this was his destiny, because my mom already wasn't young when I was born.*" (a woman with higher education)

At the same time, even if the women hadn't experienced any differences in treatment, based on gender, they still make some presumptions that such things could have existed. *"I am very happy, because I do not have a brother and have not felt it. But my younger sister was younger for 10 years, and I suppose, that my father, as well as my mother wanted to have a baby boy, because they already had two daughters. Well, it is natural. But the third child again was a girl".* (a woman with higher education)

When talking about people who have had the biggest influence on their lives, women who are already in the status of mothers-in-law, mostly mention men (in most cases father, but in certain cases also husband's father, i.e. fathers-in-law). In case of father's absence due to a variety of reasons, mothers have become a more influential character; in a certain case, the nanny took up that role, since during childhood these have been people with whom they have spent more time. Regardless of education, women also mentioned their grandmother's influence on their lives, and in most of the cases, they meant their grandmother on father's side. *"I would mention different people for different things. For example, I would mention my grandma, as an intelligent woman, my dad, as the breadwinner of his family and a person, for whom family was sacred."* (a woman with post-secondary vocational education)

Even in cases, when women mention that both parents have equally influenced their lives and decisions that they have made, it is still possible to identify certain gender-based characteristics/elements in the approaches. *"Both parents, my mom, as well as my dad. Mom was engaged in things that refer to girls, and dad got engaged a bit later, when making decisions about further education, or related issues".* (a woman with higher education)

*«My mom was the role model of a woman for me, while my dad was more engaged in our development and education".* (a woman with a higher education)

Grandma also is one of the most influential persons, as a character who has both impact and power over other members of the family, in rare cases aunt and uncle (on mother's side) are also among such people. The phenomenon of the aunt and uncle (mother's side) being influential, is mostly connected to the occupation and social status of the latter. *"I already said that my aunt worked in the ministry, and my grandpa was a war veteran, and I remember how impatient I was for May 9<sup>th</sup> to come, we would go to the parade with my grandpa". And in the jubilee years, he would visit Leningrad, he was an honored citizen of Leningrad, but he always took my brother with him.* (a woman with higher education)

It is interesting to note that besides the authorities of their parents' extended

families, women mention teachers of this or that subject who have been of great importance to them and who in their opinion have been able to present themselves as respectable personalities. *“Then, my teacher of the elementary school, she was an eminent teacher and was very knowledgeable. That woman was like an ideal for us, our family loved her a lot”*. (a woman with higher education)

To the question as to who was the person with whom they had the closest relationships, women mentioned that as girls and women, in their opinion, it is natural that the closest person for them was mother, and due to the fact that they were girls, she was also the caregiver and the person who raised them up. The cases, however, whereas the mothers-in-law have been closer to their fathers more, as compared to any other member of the family, are not exceptions, either.

### 2.1.1. Manifestations of punishment and its gender-based characteristics

According to the women, participating in the interviews, the manifestations of punishment have mainly been in the form of restrictions. *“Perhaps, I was punished. But since I have been the youngest, I only remember what’s been good.... I was not beaten... My mom was strict... I remember, I was in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. It was May 1<sup>st</sup> and at that time, it was a holiday. It was the first time that I wanted to wear wedge heel shoes (tankette), but my Mom said “But you still do not have the right to wear such”. It was in the 10<sup>th</sup> form when I wore my first high-heel shoes. Well, such things happened. I started to use make-up for eyes in the 10<sup>th</sup> form, but my brother wouldn’t allow me to use it, so I did my make-up in the entrance of our building and then went to the institute”* (woman with higher education)

While during interviews cases were encountered, whereas women mentioned about their close relationships with their fathers in childhood, however, most of them mentioned that their fathers have been particularly strict. *“My dad was quite a strict person, my mom wasn’t. We were like friends with my mom, while I got closer to my dad only after entering the institute. We got much closer after it, though he became even stricter to me in that period. Very often, he wouldn’t allow me to participate in evening gatherings that were organized [for/by students]. Well, he had a different view on this. But in the afternoons, I have been very active, even extremely active. Well, I was an organizer at school.... I don’t know.... this is the way it was”*. (a woman with higher education)

*“Yes, as a girl, I have witnessed a few restrictions on my dad’s part. And when I got married, there were significant differences in the families. In their family, both my husband and my mother-in-law were strict. (My mother-in-law was an extremely strict woman). And even when I worked, if I was late for 10 minutes, that would already become an issue for me.”* (a woman with higher education).

Women with secondary vocational education also told about manifestations of punishment, at the same time presenting their relationships with fathers and once again the latter’s strictness. *“A girl does not have the right...that has been*

*my dad's standpoint... The girl does not have the right to go somewhere, that is it... I did not have the right to go somewhere. For example, now when my daughter wants to go somewhere with friends or to meet her peers, she is free, I allow her, but I basically didn't have the right. Well, I got married in 1974, and perhaps these traditions were common to this period. Well, I cannot judge my parents or say why they acted like that."*

*"I remember, there were things that we couldn't do without letting my dad know. For example, we couldn't go out after 6, and we couldn't come back home after 6. It happened for a few times to me, when I hadn't managed to come back home before six, so next time I was not allowed to go to this place anymore. Yes, my mom and dad were very strict towards us. My dad worked a lot, and was not constantly at home, but we always felt his strictness even at a distance.... "*

*"I remember in Baku, the movie "Gikor" was shown in the theaters, and all Armenians went there to watch. I said: "Father, please let me go, the whole class will be there. The ticket cost only 10 kopeks at that time, but he said: "I will kill you..." I wasn't allowed to go to the theatre on my own.... Well, maybe he lived in Azerbaijan and that is why he was so strict. I was an Armenian child... I was deprived of participating in many things..."*

The display of protective behavior towards another member of the family and, hence, non-compliance with the expected gender roles, could become a reason for punishment: *"Everyone in the yard would call me S's brother, I was called "my brother's brother". Once my father punished me very severely. My brother was older than me. Once he went to a school and had a fight there, so I took a stick and went there to allegedly protect him.... I remember that this was the cause of their severe anger on me".* (a woman with higher education)

Compliance with the family rules that existed from the very beginning and that to some extent were even imposed to the family members, is viewed as a norm that has its interesting reflection, particularly in the context of punishment. Very often, one can come across the opinion that, since their childhood, women knew what would make their parents angry and what they would be punished for by them, so they chose not to even talk about it. For example, going out late in the evening, going somewhere without permission, etc. were some of the forbidden things.

*"They neither punished, nor encouraged me.... Well! They didn't punish me, because I was obedient, they didn't encourage me, because this was the way to be".* (a woman with higher education)

*"Let me tell you that I have been quite an obedient child, I never let someone reprimand me, even in my childhood. My mom told me that*

*she delegated my brothers' care to me and I treated them like a mother. And I have never done such a thing that would have deserved punishment: the mere glance of my father was enough for us, as children, to know how we should behave ourselves.*" (a woman with higher education)

*"I will perhaps not remember the details now, but all of us were so well-organized and smart children, that hardly could someone punish us for anything."* (a woman with secondary vocational education)

*"I have been the youngest, so they would call me "the last piece of the dough" [the last one among the children], bunny, kitty, deer, etc. and it already meant that they loved me a lot. I have been a careless child, never cleaned the house, I just accompanied my dad and mom, whenever they went. They loved me, as the youngest and the most pampered one. But I have been quite obedient, I knew my limits. If, for example, we had a school gathering, my dad would tell me when I should be back home and I always followed his order"*. (a woman with secondary vocational education)

Within the scope of punishment and restrictions, apart from certain achievements (educational, work-related, other successes) it is also important to act in accordance with traditional gender roles and respective expectations of that roles. *"I had many talents, I was very skillful. Do not consider that I am self-important...! I could sew, I actively participated in the kitchen affairs, I studied well. Starting from the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, my mom trusted the preparation of New Year's pastries to me. Now, for example, frankly speaking, even if my daughter studies in an institute, I would not trust the preparation of New Year pastries to her"*. (a woman with a higher education)

When talking about punishment, some of the woman with secondary vocational education mentioned that the boys were punished more often, than girls. *"I don't remember any punishment, as such, I remember that boys were punished more often, because they would go and disappear in the village, all mothers of the village started looking for them."*

*"I was never punished, but my brothers were always punished for not studying well and for having low scores at school."*

When getting acquainted with the life stories of women, participating in the study, the memories of their parents, having direct connection to them, have also been withdrawn. Based on these memories, specific judgements can be made about restrictions that the women encountered when making decisions, affecting their own body and reproductive life. *"My mom first thought that it is due to a menstrual pause, but then she learned that she is pregnant. The doctor had called my father and said: "Hamayak Margarovich, your wife has come to make an abortion..." My dad told her to wait, took a car, went there and said: "Forget about abortion, you should have the child!"*. (a woman with higher education)

Besides, they spoke about certain aspects of relationships between their parents (particularly about the relationships between their mothers and latter's mothers-in-law) that have been accessible to them. *"My mom always said "...my mom (mother's mother-in-law) said this, my mom said that ..."; while my grandmother would tell good things about mom. Once she told that in those years of hardship, when someone gave just a piece of lavash to my mom (she was a healthcare provider and served three villages), my mom always brought it home and told her mother-in-law: "divide between all of us"". The way of manifesting appreciation towards a woman's type who works ("earns the living"), but does not make decisions on her own, is also noteworthy. "My granda always said: "That "godless" girl never cut a piece of lavash for her to eat (a woman with higher education)"".*

## 2.2. EDUCATION AND PROFESSION



One of the goals of the research was finding out the extent to which the educational level of the interviewed women's parents had impacted the interviewed women, themselves, in terms of getting higher education. Despite the limitations on obtaining precise correlations, it can be stated with confidence that parents of all participant women with higher education also had higher education.

During early periods of life, i.e. childhood and youth age of women participating in the study, education, in their opinion, was valued higher [than now] and, what is more, it was also compulsory. It is well-proved by the fact that reading books was highly encouraged. *"We were much encouraged to read books; a book was discussed each weekend, and you had to read that book, so that you could participate in the discussion."* (a woman with higher education).

*"Also, the issue of studying was very strictly set in our family; when my father's friends visited us, to spend time and have some rest, I had to go to the toilet and do my lessons there, in order to be prepared for the next school day"* (a woman with higher education).

At the same time, reading books and studying were widely encouraged also in families of women with secondary vocational education. *"I remember very well that reading books was encouraged at our home, we [the children] always competed with each other, to see who would read more books during the holiday periods... We were reading with enthusiasm, since later, there was a chance that we would be taken to the cinema as a reward; it was a rather good prize at that time, because there were not many (modern) facilities at that time, as it is now."* (a woman with secondary vocational education).

Women with higher education mostly stress that they wished to study other professions during early stages of their lives; however, in the course of

time, influenced by opinions of various “authoritative” persons, as well as in order not to miss an opportunity of “studying easier”, they changed their opinions (choosing basically liberal arts/humanities/, for example, professions of a pedagogue or linguist). *“I did not intend to change it, but I remember that I have always studied well and I was good also at chemistry, physics, biology, and, at heart, I desired to become a doctor; however, becoming a doctor is a very long and complicated process, so, I changed my mind”.*

The discrepancy between the acquired education and the desired/dream profession of women, has also its gender bases. **Regret about unrealized goals and dreams** can be noticed in speech of many women, from the viewpoint of education and attaining success in life. When they managed to continue their education at an institution of higher education, they strove for changing their profession, while, in the absence of such an opportunity, they wished to at least acquire any education that was possible. *“Initially, I wanted to become a lawyer; however, the year that I applied (submitted my documents), the applications of women were not accepted at the Law Department. Why? Because, after graduation, girls were assigned to work in regions, however, they refused to go. Consequently, that year and for two more years, following it, applications of girls were not accepted there, so I was forced to apply to the Department of Linguistics”.* (a woman with higher education)

*“I am satisfied with the education, but the education did not serve its purpose, as a foreign language profession... I would like, as a specialist of a foreign language, to be abroad, to visit foreign countries, to see the world, and to work abroad”.* (a woman with higher education)

*I finished Russian school, I studied very well, but I didn't get a chance to receive higher education, since my children were born one after the other. Otherwise, my aspiration was high, I wanted to study very much, but it did not work out.* (a woman with secondary education)

*“My family did not let me receive education... Immediately after I finished the school, [my future husband's family] came to ask for my hand in marriage... They were from my grandpa's village and had also moved from there and lived here. They had been traditionally rich and were involved in gold jewelry craft, and my family agreed... We married in several months... I have only finished school”.* (a woman with secondary education)

As reasons for professional “failures”, **timidity and having complexes** are also indicated, which were due to lack of contacts, in the period of growing up in rural communities. *“Our department was a new one, it was opened a few years ago, it was called bibliography, no foreign language was taught there, so I just applied. Then I received the grade 5 (“excellent”; the highest grade) for history; the head of the [examination] commission was the dean of the Department of History, so when he saw that I answered numerous questions from all sides [several*

examiners], he said: “With your logic and memory, you should study at the Department of History... Come to see me, ... your application... we will change your department...” But, since I was raised in a village, where I have had little contact with people, I could not get rid of my complexes, in order to go and see that dean and say: “I am the person who you had told to...”. And, before I could come to my senses, that man passed away after several months... and so, I stayed at that department. I don’t know what was right: to switch to the Department of History or to stay at that department...” (a woman with higher education)

Depending on mother’s and father’s position in relation to education, women were rather encouraged by their families to study non-liberal arts /non-humanities/. “I graduated from the Polytechnic Institute. At that time, only those three-four universities [higher education institutions] existed, so I applied to the Polytechnic institute just because I was good at algebra and loved it at school. But what an algebra it was! Starting the second year, physics was fully taught there, and I understood where I had appeared and that I had gone to a wrong place. At that time, I blamed my folks, saying: “In other instances, they impose their opinion on me, so why didn’t they force me to apply to the Pedagogical Institute? ...” They directed my elder sister to apply to the Institute after Brusov. I was saying that they should have taken me to the Russian Department of Pedagogical Institute, as I was good at Russian, as well. But what could I do at that point, could I start from the very beginning and apply again? So, I had to graduate, but I am not satisfied, since if at that time plants were built, and the profession of an engineer was demanded and popular, now no one needs it, and it is especially unfit to a woman” (a woman with higher education)

Reasons for choosing non-liberal-art professions (non-humanities) have sometimes been also ridiculous by nature. “Let me tell you this story as well: at that time, we were about to choose where we wanted to apply to; one of our acquaintances visited us at home and told us, that (s)he studied at the Polytechnic Institute, and that there were only 3 or 5 girls in their class, and the boys had presented them golden jewelry on March 8. I should be sincere and tell you that this occasion played a significant role in making my decision to enter the Polytechnic Institute. So, my interest was mostly grounded by being among many boys, studying, and receiving golden jewelry as present”. (a woman with higher education)

There are contradictions in the words of women, participating in the in-depth interviews, with regard to making their own independent decisions when choosing a profession. “No, I have already noted that it was my choice. To tell the truth, I have just recalled that when I was a child, I wanted to become a lawyer, but my father didn’t like it very much, as it was somehow boyish, I don’t know what; however, later I decided on my own that I should become a pedagogue; my mother is a class-master (class teacher), and I am already a teacher of mathematics”. (a woman with higher education)

The study on the opportunities for acquiring education shows that very often these women were basically forbidden to acquire education, due to a series of reasons:

gender stereotypes (being a girl and impossibility to later use the educational capital, and thus “meaningless” expenses associated with it), family circumstances (loss of a dear person during the given period of time, with whom several goals were associated), the location of the educational institution (if they lived in a region, the problem of living alone in Yerevan), as well as educational directions offered in that period of time and thus, the [limited] opportunities for finding a “convenient” job later.

*“Well, then I went and entered, and I brought the documents; my grandma had a power in our family, she was the one who made decisions in our house. I said her: “Grandma Haikanush, I entered a technical school, talk to my dad, please...” She hit her hand on the table and said that L [the respondent] should go to school. I attended the school one year, attended it the second year, and then I felt that my mother couldn’t cope with the situation, so, I switched to extramural studies (correspondence courses) and started working at shop, to help my mother. Thus, it was that way. If it weren’t for my grandmother, my father would probably not allow me to study; besides, there was a time control over me: I had to go at a certain time and return home respectively at a certain time”.* (a woman with secondary vocational education)

*“It wasn’t like it is today – 1000 specialties; it was only 4 or 5 of them; so, I chose the profession of a cook, which, I knew, would certainly be useful to me later, even if I didn’t work...”.* (a woman with secondary vocational education)

*“My father worked at a post office, as a department head; his accountant advised me..., well, he rather told my father: “Let her apply to the accounting department, we will bring her to our office, to work as an accountant...”.* I didn’t like it, I didn’t choose that profession on my own, it was on my father’s advice. I liked pedagogy very much, I liked children, I would work at school, or at kindergarten, with great pleasure. Of course, it didn’t work out that way”.

(a woman with secondary vocational education)

In response to a question on being satisfied with the education, constraints on opportunities of completing education are indicated, which basically arise from gender issues and stereotypes. *“After finishing the school, I entered a musical college, but didn’t graduate from it, as in that period I got married, and my father-in-law didn’t allow me to attend classes anymore; he said: “A married woman shouldn’t be a singer, ... our singers are not moral...”.* Thus, A. (my husband) didn’t allow me to go and complete it”.

(a woman with secondary vocational education)

*“Let us put the issue of being satisfied aside; I didn’t like it, and for the reason of not liking it, I didn’t continue. After finishing the school, I studied, and one of our doctors said: “I pity you, I don’t want you to*



*work as a nurse, let me arrange it, for you to enter the “zero” course [preparatory level, before the first year of studies] of the Medical Institute...”; and as I didn’t like it [the profession] [I didn’t go], and, besides, I said to myself that when I get married, I wouldn’t work... If I knew that after marriage I would still work, I would work for 30 years, I would go and continue my education to become a doctor”.* (a woman with secondary vocational education)

Interviews also have to some extent revealed that pressure was placed on the [women having] desire to continue studies, which was expressed in form of justifications, derived from the existing gender stereotypes, regarding life and mission of a woman. *“I am satisfied with the education; but then you are not satisfied when you see that you cannot find a job. Afterwards, I acquired the second profession: journalist; I graduated with red diploma (with excellence), and I would like to say that I already had a child at that time. I wanted to defend my dissertation, but my scientific advisor didn’t allow. Initially s(he) encouraged me much, then, when s(he) learned that I had got married and was pregnant, s(he) said: “You have done everything, have reached the end...”.* Now I don’t regret that I haven’t defended the thesis”. (a woman with higher education)

### 2.3. WORK AND CAREER



Even in case of having higher education, women noted that they always tried to get “permission” of their husbands, especially for going/returning to work: *“I don’t know what to tell you about being appreciated by my husband... After long negotiations, I started to work, then he was very jealous; after birth of my children I hardly persuaded him again, and returned again [to work] ... As to the [new] house when I told [him] that I can apply for it, he didn’t allow me, and he said: “[You think] I am very satisfied with the fact that you work, and now, if you are given a house, you will have to work all your life...”* So, I applied for the house secretly, and received it secretly... *Afterwards, I handed him the key [to the house] and told him to go and see our house... Otherwise, he didn’t like such things...”* (a woman with higher education)

Women with secondary vocational education also indicate constraints, faced by them with regard to work, after acquiring education, and these were basically expressed by prohibitions on behalf of their husbands. However, in some instances it was possible to avoid or overcome these constraints. *“Initially, my husband couldn’t get used to it, as he was accustomed to coming home for the lunch break and seeing me at home, serving him, gathering after lunch and cleaning; then, afterwards, little by little, by quarreling and reconciling, by persuading... now he can’t even imagine me without work...”* (a woman with secondary vocational education)

*“I wanted very much [to work], just, in order not to argue with my husband, so to say, not to go against him and his wish [I haven’t worked]. I took into consideration his will, his opinion, and I haven’t worked and became a housewife. I am a housewife until today and my husband tells me until now: “No work. You will stay at home, there is a lot of work and problems for you at our home, you will hardly manage”.”* (a woman with secondary vocational education)

In terms of being appreciated for work-related activities, particularly in the context of remuneration/reward, women generally saw it through [positive] attitudes of people during the process of work and after it. *“When I indicated earlier [about being an] honored [teacher], it is not me saying it, this was said about me by my students, this was said about me by their parents... Until now [people have been visiting me] on New Year, this year they [the students] visited me, they have graduated so long time ago, that I could hardly remember...”* (a woman with higher education)

When telling about appreciation by close relatives, especially by family members, relations of the woman and her mother-in-law are also touched upon. *“My husband was very-very [appreciative], and my father-in-law also was very-very [appreciative], but my mother-in-law was a bit different [had a bit different attitude] ... how to say it, how to explain it to you..., she always tried to find faults in everything. To say it differently, she was a worker, without any education, she had a bit different view on things. She was wondering how I could manage to get it all done ... My husband, whenever needed, helped me to organize events and other things, he was always ready to help by all means”* (a woman with higher education)

The analysis of the in-depth interviews’ results clearly show that the woman’s work was appreciated by the family members, in terms of providing material help/ support to the family. *“Of course, it was appreciated. How is it possible not to appreciate it in these days, if an additional sum of 20,000 drams [AMD] a month is of great help? Children grow, thank God, my son has a good job, my husband works, but I still feel good, I try to somehow help my grandchildren, [I do it] for my daughter. Besides, I don’t do hard work, I can’t say that I suffer much at work...”* (a woman with secondary vocational education)

*“Yes, it was appreciated, of course. After marriage “A” (the husband) was against my work with shifts; it was thanks to my mother-in-law that I worked. Only that; otherwise, it [my work] was appreciated, and I earned a good salary, and I had some side income, you know, there were such things [opportunities]... Let me tell you this story, my mother-in-law fell sick, and after she had a surgery, naturally, she was placed in the intensive care unit, and she saw everything there [in that unit], she was sick in bed, and she told me: “When I come home from the hospital, you won’t work there anymore; so, you have worked in*

*such a place. Why haven't I known? ..."* However, unfortunately she died". (a woman with secondary vocational education)

*"Yes, of course. How could one not appreciate it [the work], if I was able to afford expenses for my children's education, clothing and food, thanks to that work? Though, now, my daughters-in-law and grandchildren don't appreciate it and say: "Does it matter to us that you went to sea [spent your holidays at a seashore] every year? If you didn't go for two years, you could afford for buying a house, so that now we wouldn't be living with 10 persons in one house".* (a woman with secondary vocational education)

In cases when women indicate that their work has been appreciated, the highest position they have occupied, they consider it to be the "ceiling". *"I have always been in leading positions, I have always been a senior employee, this task is 1 multiplied by 1 [very simple] to me"* (a woman with higher education)

In some cases, women indicate that their husbands didn't appreciate their work, but, in their opinion, they were proud inside. *"I know only that my husband felt good, when I was praised, and much better, than I".* (a woman with higher education)

Women participating in the study indicate that they feel appreciated when they are able to do a favor for "someone", thus playing their main role in the given period of time, as they see it. A family member—a close person, mainly appears in the role of that "someone". *"My main role now is the role of a grandma, but my main goal is to do good, I always respond to the evil with kindness. My main role is being grandma: when I do something good for my grandchildren or give a present to them, they say: "...Grandma I want this, grandma I want that..." and I am able to create something, buy or give a present to them, do what they want, and they call and tell me to cook and bring some cake, and my main role is being a grandma and I play that role very well."* (a woman with secondary vocational education)

Some of them even haven't thought that their family members would not appreciate their work. *"I think, yes, and I have never thought that it could be the other way round, or that it is possible for any of my family members not to appreciate [my work]"*. (a woman with higher education)

Women with higher education emphasize that at workplace gender-based discrimination against them, is in essence justified, since such is the unchangeable "established order", based on which traditional cultural stereotypes related to significance of women are reinforced. *"It has always existed and will always exist. Well, first of all, a woman is created for family, and even if an opportunity arises, it is clear, that the woman would need to sacrifice something"*. (a woman with higher education)

In the opinion of women with basically secondary and secondary vocational education, the possibility of career advancement is excluded, because they

don't have higher education. *“Well, you know, when one doesn't have higher education, what advancement can one expect?”* (a woman with secondary education)

Besides, when speaking about career advancement, views about gender division of labor are revealed: *“Well, I worked in a place, where a woman had to be employed. Could a man come and work in the kindergarten, do that sanitary work, or change the children's diapers? [accompanied by laughter]”* (a woman with secondary vocational education)

In case of the father's absence, women, in their opinion, were freer and able to earn relatively higher income. They considered themselves as independent persons, who earn a living on their own. *“Knowing that I don't have a father I had to do everything not to be dependent on anyone. So, I collected money, dressed very well, lived very well, fashionably”*. (a woman with higher education)

In relation to both education and career, these women had self-doubting attitude towards their own capabilities and opportunities for having success and career advancement. *“Several days after I applied, the director of that library called, and I went. Initially (s)he offered the department head's position, but I was afraid, I said: no; (s)he appointed me, as a librarian (I was afraid to immediately accept a higher position). I went to receive the order for a librarian, but (s)he had already appointed me as the department head by his (her) order. (S) he always said during meetings that I was the only person there in many terms. I worked much to develop my capabilities, not to disappoint him (her), it wasn't easy. [Imagine that] Elder women worked there, and someone came to occupy [immediately] a position of a department head”*. (a woman with secondary education)

## 2.4. SELF-PERCEPTION, SUCCESS, HAPPINESS



One of the survey goals was to find out what the self-perception and values of the interviewed women were. Thus, an attempt has been made to find out how they see **their role in life**.

Their main roles, as mentioned by the interviewed women, were the roles of a parent, a mother (especially, a mother of the family), a mother-in-law, a grandmother, as well as of someone who serves the family needs.

*“I currently have three roles, the role of a mother, a mother-in-law, and a grandmother, I am not young anymore. I am 65”*. (a woman with secondary vocational education)

*“My main role in life is to keep up my family's name, help family members with what I can, within the limits of my abilities”*. (a woman with secondary vocational education)

*“My main role is to be a good mother for my children and a good grandmother for my grandchildren...”* (a woman with secondary vocational education)

*“My main role in life is to be a good wife, next to my husband, to be loved, respected by him, as well as by my sons and grandchildren.”* (a woman with higher education)

*“To take good care of my grandchildren, because I have already helped my sons to achieve something in life and have provided them with houses and cars, now I need to also put aside something for my grandchildren.”* (a woman with secondary education)

Besides the above-mentioned roles, women also see their role in sowing the seeds of more global values. *“My only role is to sow the seeds of kindness within the society”.* (a woman with higher education)

*“I guess, regardless of everything, my role is helping people, because being in many spheres of life, I understood that I like helping people, if they need it.”* (a woman with higher education)

Happiness and success are terms that are perceived relatively: in fact, no clarity is manifested towards them. It is noteworthy that happiness and success are not discussed from the point of view of personal life, but rather are related, either to a child, or parents, or another member of the family/families. On the other hand, the happiness of a mother-in-law or a wife is connected to the relationships in the children’s families and the events taking place there. *“In my opinion, no one considers herself absolutely happy, because there are always little issues that occur with everyone... I am happy with my sons, but for example, there are some issues in their families that do not allow me to feel completely happy.”* (a woman with higher education)

*“The same is with successes, something good happens, and you think you are successful, then something else happens, and you think, you are a loser. That is why you cannot say for sure, whether you are successful or not.”* (a woman with higher education)

Both happiness and success are directly linked to gender roles and compliance with the expectations, connected to those roles. *“Yes, I am a good wife, a good mother, a good grandmother: I am a happy woman.”* (a woman with secondary education)

When discussing happiness and success, in case if women mention that they haven’t been successful in life, in their opinion, it is natural that they cannot be happy, either. This thought is common among the majority of participating women. *“How can an unsuccessful person be happy? ...”* (a woman with secondary vocational education)

Many of the women with secondary vocational education sincerely emphasize the fact that they are not successful, but this is compensated by the successes of close relatives, i.e. other members of the family (children, grandchildren, husband). *“Yes, if I talk about me personally, I perhaps cannot*

say that I am successful, but my children have found their place in life, my grandchildren live a good life, so how can I say that I am not successful?”

*“Successful—well, it depends on what you mean by being successful—as a mother, I am lucky to have such sons, I am surrounded with good people, but frankly, I cannot say that I lead a life of a successful person ....”*

**Financial safety** is not of a less significance in the context of happiness and success. *“Of course, I am successful, I have a nice family, a nice husband, a nice environment, very nice children.... But financially... Well, I have never made this comparison, but I sometimes say: Why not? I also would love to live in a gorgeous house, in a luxury... Why should I sit down and ruin my eyesight, for the sake of bringing in some additional 5000 drams for the family....? Why can't I go for a vacation? In the past, when I was still in paternal house, I have travelled a lot ...”* In terms of my children, I can say that they are loved by the surrounding people, I can go out with them with my head up. In this aspect, I can consider myself to be successful.” (woman with higher education)

The survey also revealed that success and happiness are directly linked also to the physical presence of other members of the family, i.e. women mainly mentioned that when they do not have a husband (in most cases when the husbands have passed away) and children live on their own, the women do not feel themselves much happy. *“For example, if I did not live on my own, I would say that I am both happy and successful... First, one of my sons left to live on his own, I gradually started adjusting to the idea that this is the rule of life, then my elder son decided to live in the bigger house, and I came here, to live on my own, and I am living here already for 10 years on my own [my husband passed away]”* (a woman with higher education).

Being successful also is connected to the dreams that did not come true. *“To travel, to make a tour around the world, to see the world....; instead, I got married: child, home...., I did not have any chance to travel. I had entered “Bryusov” (a university of foreign languages, after V. Bryusov), with the hope that I'll use the foreign language I study, during travels, because I knew I would certainly need it”*. (a woman with a higher education)

Women, participating in the interviews, mainly mentioned that the most important thing in life is the health, happiness and stability of the loved ones. This is directly connected to children and members of the family. *“My children... In any case, I connect everything to my family. The most important things to me are my family, my children, afterwards comes Armenia, as a country, but first of all I am focused on my children and close relatives”*. (a woman with higher education)

Love, respect, and faithfulness are not of less importance, especially for women with higher education.

*“At the moment, the most important thing to me is the happiness of my children, because I do not have any expectation from life anymore;*

*it's been ten years, since my husband passed away. I haven't started a second life for me. Until now, I am living with my mother-in-law. Besides the happiness of my children, there is nothing I anticipate."*

*"The most important thing is happiness, mentioned by You, and this is something that people perceive and interpret differently. It is very important to have mutual understanding in interpersonal relationships and within the family."*

*"To live each day of your life, as if it is the last day of your life..."*

*"The most important thing is life, taken as a whole".*

When assessing life, according to a 0-10 score scale, women with higher education, having grandchildren of both sexes, mark the range between 5-9, ensuring that they cannot mark 10, since it does not correspond to a series of standard: dreams, disappointments, financial insecurity in early years of life and at the present time, as well as loneliness.

When assessing with the scale, the main standard, against which the assessment is made, is the financial well-being and the opportunity to purchase this or that thing. The women with secondary education have marked the same range. Women with post-secondary vocational education also evaluate their life mainly in the range of 6-9. Only one of the interviewed women marked in the following way: *"I evaluate 9, but if my son gets married, I will even mark 10, but it's a serious problem, he doesn't like anyone. I cannot complain of my husband, either: he doesn't smoke, he doesn't drink, he is faithful and does not run after other women."*

In some cases, the interviewed women consider their marriage as one of the successes they had in life, since otherwise their life would have been different. Some details from their lives, obtained with difficulty, are also interesting, and often reveal that women have, to some extent, given up the idea of going after their personal wishes and realizing them. *"I would be have been the luckiest person in the world, I would have travelled, would have seen the world and that would be it...then, I would have just one child and I would be quite satisfied..."* (a woman with higher education who has 2 sons and a daughter)

In some cases, marriage (and, hence, the amount of time that the woman allocates to housework) is also considered to be an obviously wrong decision. Marriage, in this case, also causes restrictions on the way of reaching goals and realizing dreams. *"Yeah, it is quite possible. There would be a lot for me to create, because the daily routine puts you in certain limits. I do not know, if I should tell this to you, but I also saw many dreams... And it was very late to understood that perhaps I shouldn't have got married, I would be a much more creative man. I was seeing those images and, I think, I acted against them."* (a woman with higher education)

Again, as we talk about marriage, it is very characteristic that the majority of the interviewed women viewed it as a reality that could not be avoided. *"I*

always thought, how good it was that I got married and stayed here and did not go back to the village... Because in that case my life would have been quite different ... But not getting married, especially in a village family, would hardly be possible for me... Because even as a student, when I was meeting A., my aunt (I lived in their house) asked very often: "When are you going to get married? Will you first graduate and then get married...? ...and so on, and so forth". (a woman with higher education).

"Not getting married was excluded for us, given the way we were raised. My Dad always said: "I didn't have a son, so I should have three nice sons-in-law, instead." I mean, it was kind of set in our minds that our dad should have three sons-in-law [and we couldn't avoid that circumstance]... (a woman with higher education)

"I have thought about it and I have regretted to have got married... Because one should marry to a man who is appropriate to her, to some extent. I was brought up in Tiflis, I got married to a boy of a very ordinary family, living in Yerevan. He had four sisters, and these four sisters will bother me during my whole life. It is only because of my children that I do not regret." (a woman with secondary vocational education)

"Yes, I have thought about it and know that it could have been different. There were many men who made offers to me. For example, even on the same day, before my husband came, there was another guy who had come to see me. His name was Igor, he was a tall guy. I haven't thought that I should not have got married, but if I married Igor, maybe I would go to Russia, and my life would be quite different, I wouldn't see these difficulties, I wouldn't experience those moments... For example, Igor's mother was a very happy woman, and cannot be compared to my mother-in-law... But I was also thinking: "Who knows, maybe they would have some other, and more serious imperfections"" (a woman with secondary vocational education)

In some cases, women sincerely note that maybe in another life they wouldn't get married. "If at that time, I had today's mentality, I wouldn't get married... You will ask, why? Because, I was an active girl, I would organize my life in a perfect way. I would somehow win my daily bread, but not like this, not through this kind of suffering. I have suffered a lot, quite a lot, I'd rather not tell you how much, if I tell the details...better not...let no one go through what I have gone through, I do not wish the same, even to my enemies; let no daughter-in-law endure what I have endured..."

Now, what do I want to say... I will advise our youth to find out all the details about their future husband's family, first, and only afterwards, to make their choice. Don't hurry, you will manage everything, but please enjoy your life, as youth. I do not say that you should waste your time, but enjoy being young. Because you cannot bring the time back, no one can stay forever young, but live your lives first....



*Now, whenever I see a wedding ritual, I get upset and start crying, unwillingly. I feel pity towards them [the brides], they will go and appear under someone's pressure. I pity them a lot. She will not know what to do, she is young, she wants to live her own life, but she goes and starts serving someone else—and the talk is not about one or two persons: she is going to serve three, four, five members in the family. So, the deal is to go and serve them all!!! I have served, I do not want anyone else to serve like me. Do you think I didn't have my self-esteem, why would one think so? Noone reprimanded me then, but I never spoke out, either. I just acknowledged that I am the daughter-in-law, and so I should keep silent, I shouldn't reply.”* (a woman with secondary vocational education, with three sons)

On the other hand, when thinking about another way of life, women have the opinion that life should be the way it is now. The notions about another life are rather vague and unclear. *“I have thought about it and have not imagined my life without my children.... I always come to a point where my mind denies to continue thinking on the issue and I never arrive at my final thought on it... For example, I cannot imagine what I could do, where I would be, how would my life be...perhaps this is not what we can decide...”* (a woman with higher education)

*“No, when we sometimes recall our past, my husband says: “... Where did you come from? How did you find me?“, and I tell him: “You forget who found whom”, I was a 14-year-old child then, I could only think of playing at that time, when they came to see me [to ask me to marry their son]. “Well, it sounds to be too early, right? Perhaps, it is early for nowadays, while at that time especially in a village, it was very common to get married in that age”* (a woman with secondary education)

Women note that they have always waited to grow up and become a mother, even when the option of another way of life didn't exist. However, in their speech, they simultaneously deny the widespread idea that the main role of a woman is to become a mother. *“Now, after living for quite a while, I think so, but at that time I did not. Because when you don't know what marriage is and what having a child entails, you cannot tell, if you want it or not. We always hear that the most important things in life are the mother, the child and the family. But I know many people, both women and men, who do not have a family, but feel happier and live better than anyone else.”* (a woman with higher education)

In case of women with higher education, it is characteristic that they have fatalistic type of standpoints about their lives. *“No, I think that was the way to be, especially since I didn't love my husband, I think it was my destiny...”*

*“I believe in fate and I believe that whatever is destined from above, will happen to us, regardless of our will.”* They think about changing their lives in general terms, but at this moment they do not have such an intention, it doesn't even pass through their minds.

This type of notions, with regard to having another way of life, are present also among the women with secondary vocational education. *“Both good and bad... Because you cannot say for sure, you do not know what God has prepared for us; He decides what will happen and how it should be.... Who am I to foresee what would have happened?”*

*“If... I do not know in what condition I would be, I have thought about it, but, it could be better and it could be worse for me, I am not the one to decide... it is something that God decides.”*

*“If I didn’t marry... I am happy that now people are free to decide, but it is also due to the current conditions that this freedom was perceived differently by many, and I think, it is due to this freedom, that people do not get married. In our times, for example, my husband’s family came and asked that I marry their son, and my family agreed. Of course, I had my first love: he was a very good guy and was suitable to me, while my husband was both sick and a drunkard; I have always thought that if I married my first love, it would be very good, I have no doubt. I do not want to think about not having children. I do not know how I would have lived, but I am tolerant “:*

As such, pressure on the process of decision-making has been manifested on behalf of all the generations of the family/families. As noted by the interviewees, in childhood, the pressure is more commonly seen on behalf of the father, mother, brother, while after marriage it is manifested on behalf of the husband and his parents, then, after having children, it is manifested on behalf of the latter, too. *“I have never been alone... I have never decided anything on my own: first, I made my decisions with my parents, then with my husband... And now, I cannot ignore the opinion of my children.”* (a woman with higher education)

The views about pressure, put on them in the process of making decisions, are very different. Regardless of the level of education, women have been subjected to pressure, however this has not been perceived as a pressure, but rather a natural thing. *“No, I cannot call it pressure, but I do not make decisions on my own, either. I discuss everything with my family members. When I go somewhere, I tell them that I will be late, I warn them when I have to stay longer at workplace on certain days. If I know that it is something that my husband would not like me to do, I tell him that it is just “necessary”, and that is why I need to do it, but I cannot tell that it is a pressure.”* (a woman with higher education)

The majority of women with secondary vocational education are also confident that they make decisions independently. *“I make decisions independently, regarding my life, but of course I consult with my son, first.”*

Speaking about decision-making, women mainly mention that they do not feel any pressure on them or on the decisions they make. *“For our family, I find it unnecessary to talk about such things, because we respect each other and listen*

to each other. For example, last year, my husband and I had our vacation on a seashore. My neighbor saw and said. “What have you lost at the seashore? Let the youth go, instead...” Such an idea was expressed.... And then I think, if I am already over 50, does it mean that it is the end, should I think that my life ended already? (a woman with secondary vocational education)

But when talking about their free time, they prove that in reality it is quite the opposite picture. “I have some free time, only in the end of the day, when I sit in front of the TV for a little bit. I do not know what internet or facebook are, I am away from such things, I do not understand and do not want to know, either... My husband says (teasingly): “This is the only thing that you lack in life”. Yes, I know that he will not allow me, so perhaps this is because I do not even want to know what it is.... (a woman with secondary vocational education)

Simultaneously, not all women are unaware of the pressure, manifested towards them. In some cases, they even point it out: “I have felt it very often ... not just from case to case... First, I did not have the right to go out, because of the grandmother, now I cannot go out, because of my daughter-in-law. Whenever I go, I always think of going back home early, so that they do not argue.” (a woman with higher education)

*“If I decided not to get married, it would be a big tragedy for my parents, because their way of thinking is that, if you are a girl, then you should get married, and my dad said it directly. When I was saying “no, I don’t want for this or that reason” ...he would say: “Who gets in your way? ...They live in the city... They are such and such people...” But then I found out, that they stood in my way...”* (a woman with higher education)

## 2.5. FREE/LEISURE TIME



Spending free time has a series of manifestations, usually limited to activities, carried out within the territory of the house. Among such activities are **doing household chores, watching TV or using internet, visiting close and far relatives, sewing, weaving**. In rare cases, this also includes visiting different places with friends and close relatives, or going to a church.

*“During my leisure time, I clean up the study room, because children will come the next day, too, then I watch TV a lot, I do not use internet, but watch TV a lot, I follow all the news. This is it, in general... On Saturdays and Sundays children visit me, or we go to someone’s house to spend time together”* (a woman with higher education)

Women with higher education have similar views on expectations from spending leisure time, but in reality, they spend it differently, if we do not consider the part that concerns the housework. “My leisure time, yes, I plan it myself, but then.... All days are like each other, anyway, when you are at home,

all day long. Whenever I started cleaning the house, my daughter-in-law would call me and knowing what I am doing, she would start teasing me, saying: “Mom, the walls already wore out”.

“Well, I do not work now, I am mainly at home, with the child: the internet comes to save free people like me, I use it for hours, I read for hours, read the news, read medical news, etc. It is good now, once there was a shortfall of knowledge, now you open the internet and learn many things ...”

The realization of the creative mind potential, in case of having leisure time, is restricted mainly to house and kitchen work. “In the kitchen...I love kitchen very much; if I am free, I am usually in the kitchen, I should create something, invent or make something” (a woman with higher education)

“I mostly spend my time with children, but even at home, whatever I can, whatever passes my mind, I do. Mostly at home...” (a woman with secondary vocational education)

«Yes, I plan. Here, my husband has nothing to do with it, he has his own work, I have mine. I do the housework, I spend time with this son of mine who is not married.” (a woman with secondary vocational education)

Sometimes, when speaking to a woman with secondary vocational education, it becomes clear that they sacrifice spending their leisure time, in accordance with their view of it, not to “disturb” their children and other family members. “I would like to go out somewhere, to visit places, but now, even going to an ordinary place requires financial means, and I do not deprive my children of something for my own pleasure.”

**Some women mention that they would like to change their life, but in any case, they would want to do the same things, just in a larger scale.** “I would want to, why not? But you know, now we live in a time, when you count everything, you cannot allow yourself, to, say, take your grandchildren to an entertainment center every Sunday. You pay a lot for such pleasures, you should cut it off from somewhere else. The finances are not enough, perhaps, to do what you really want to do” (a woman with higher education)

## 2.6. POSITIONS ABOUT GENDER ROLES



In fact, the study showed that higher education does not generally serve as a criterion, for being supportive of gender equality, very often in their speech the women themselves continue to deepen the stereotypes and the extremely stereotypical behavior that is anticipated to emerge in this case. “There is no necessity, to overcome it intentionally, because it happens by itself: when people

go out [to other countries], and see it there, they come back and immediately want to do it the same way, or they see things like this on TV and perhaps start thinking about it. But you do not do it on purpose, you do not tell men that we need to be equal, of course they will say no to it... Will a lion want to stop being the king of the animals? Of course, not... And the last thing that I want to say is: would we want to see a hare, instead of the lion?" (a woman with higher education)

"This is a very disputable topic, but I think, it is not necessary for a man and a woman to be equal... Because, even if they are equal, and even if the woman outshines the man, the latter is still the head of the house (so to say) and it has been this way for ages. I have raised two sons and do not imagine that all of a sudden, a daughter-in-law can come and say that she is the one to rule in the house and that is it. No, nothing like that can happen in our house. Now that I do not work for a few years, I feel good, and always think that the woman is mostly needed at home, I feel good, because my children come and see me at home. They also said that it is very unusual finding me at home, but that it is good..." (a woman with higher education)

"For example, the other day, we were at my son's apartment, he has got a daughter and a son.... And I tell him: "Do not make your son lose power (feel pitiful) for no reason..." Sometimes, I hear that he doesn't allow him to go out and play with his peers, so that he studies, instead... I tell him: "My dear son, you should not isolate your son, the children of the district will make fun of him, will tease him saying: "don't your family members allow you to come and play?" Well, and we don't think about the girl that way". (a woman with vocational education)

In general terms, almost no tendency is noticed towards changes in perception of gender: women more often rely on the existing traditions and stereotypes. "In our family, there are certain questions and things that yes, are allowed, but there are also those that are not allowed... But, perhaps, this is normal. It is normal, not to interfere in everything, you should allow the man to do whatever is to be done by them, right from the beginning. For example, my mother-in-law has worked for years and has raised her three children almost on her own, with no help of others... But, I have never worked, and I don't know, what is the question here? Is it due to the family type, is it due to the husband's character, or are there some other issues? For example, I will never interfere, and will never tell my husband, where he should or shouldn't go, who should he go with.... He has never told me: "Don't tell me what to do", but I know that I should not ask. (a woman with higher education)

"In my parental family, we were so unanimous, we did not know what it means: "the woman should say this, the man should say that.... Then, I got married. In their house it was matriarchy, all the decisions

were made by my mother-in-law. My father-in-law was such a quiet and modest man, maybe it was due to his character, but also due to being from Van. Their family had fled from Van and perhaps that had left its trace on his character. Only then, I realized what it was like. Currently, in our family my husband also acts like that, he wants to be the decision-maker. However, with regard to the house issues, he never makes decisions alone; he always asks me or the children. With regard to our daughter-in-law, we do not tell her where to go or where not to go; my sons sometimes are “stricter” towards my daughter, I cannot say that they deprive her of everything, as we hear from many other people, but they do want to make sure that they will not be embarrassed wherever they go. (a woman with higher education)

Among women with higher or post-secondary vocational education, there were some who shared the opinion that there should be gender equality. “Of course, they should have equal rights. If we talk about a human being, it shouldn’t matter whether it is a woman or a man.... It should be considered that all family- or child-related issues are on the woman’s shoulders. I surely think that a woman is a better leader, than a man. The woman is much more robust, than the man; the woman can also successfully lead politics, because in the family we apply some political tricks, too....” [laughs]: (a woman with higher education)

“Let us bring an example of a family situation, let us see what the level of the family is. Let me take our family. I am equal to my husband, we discuss things together: before making decisions, each of us expresses his/her opinion and then we decide. I have never noticed the man’s superiority, I have always felt that we are equal”. (a woman with higher education)

“If I cannot claim it for the entire public, nonetheless, gender equality exists in my family, because I have my say, my daughter has hers, my son has his, and my daughter-in-law is not deprived of anything, either. All of us have our opinions, and there is no one without an opinion.” (a woman with secondary vocational education)

“I am interested in politics, I follow it and I follow the women in politics, but since I see that all is fake and rotten, and since there are a few “Hermine Naghdalyans” in it, everything seems to be a lie. I would like us to have parliament members, similar to Zaruhi Postanjyan and Anahit Bakhshyan”. (a woman with secondary vocational education).

The rights should be equal, also in the opinion of women with secondary vocational education, however it is interesting to study the characteristics of the “equality” that they have in mind. “I think that the rights, of course, should be the same [for a woman and a man], but they should not become a basis for many bad things. Today’s youth interpret equality differently and in a bad way.

*For example, I do not like seeing a boy in the street who is not much different from a woman and I do not like to see a woman who is not much different from a boy. This is the worst way that equality is interpreted by the new generations.”*

*«In our family, I have always been the inner wall and my husband has been the outer wall. I have served as an example of a mother; my husband has been the example of a father. ...Yes, I never wanted to work and I never did.... I have brought up my children.... I raised my son as a guy, and I raised my daughter as a girl”.*

*“The girl should be well-mannered, I do not say that the boy should not be polite, but a girl should be brought up in a different way, certain “codes” should be put in a girl.... Once we had an issue with a girl who had been given a lot of freedom, and now that girl does not know her measures.... And, now, I similarly follow our grandchildren, I always ensure that the girl is extremely modest, because when she grows up, no matter what, she will not be that modest anymore...”*

As a result of in-depth interviews, it also became clear that some women are sure that there is inequality in the society. *“A lot of inequality... The most critical inequality is within families where our woman never finds her place, the leaders are men, in most of the cases, and never want to give in their place, but, nowadays, as compared to the past, there is some change in this aspect.”* (a woman with higher education)

*“And there are many examples of inequalities in the public. Let us take the examples of our staffs of different periods in time: one of our teachers wanted to join our staff to attend a graduation party, and her husband would not allow her. We went to a theater with the whole staff, her husband would forbid her. There were a few women who, as we all knew, would not join us, since their husbands wouldn’t allow them”.* (a woman with higher education)

*“For example, so many things happen, we witness them through the TV show ”Semi-open windows”. If one watches it, how can (s)he say that there is equality? I wouldn’t say that equality exists. For example, sometimes when I see that the husband is strict and beats his wife, I say. “Oh, I should have been there, I should have shown him what it is to beat a woman....”. I think: “You consider yourself to be a human being and you do not consider her to be one. How come? You think, your mom gave birth to you, and what about her? Wasn’t it a mother who gave birth to her?” There should be equality.”* (a woman with secondary vocational education)

*«Let me tell you that it is one of the most urgent present-day topics. From the very beginning the role of a man has always been very important, even during Soviet years, it has been very distinctly seen that*

*the man is the family head, the family leader, the basis of everything. An attempt was constantly made not to show the role of a woman. The woman has always been lower than a man. She has always been considered to be lower than a man, both in terms of having her say and making decisions. Let me tell you that I make every attempt to show that the man is not superior in any matter. I even tell my husband, that the man is not higher in any terms, not even in terms of intelligence. .... Something has changed, but we still cannot say that there is equality. Women's role has risen gradually, but not significantly, so let us hope that years later, we will have the equality that we have dreamed of or strived for.”* (a woman with higher education)

*“I can state that I have even felt some sort of jealousy on behalf of my husband. For example, if my son asked him for help with algebra and asked me for help with geometry during school years, he would say: “Why don't you ask me for help with geometry?” My son would respond: “Well, my mom is quicker in it”. Or say, if I solved a mathematical problem, he would also solve it, but in a way that was out of the standards, to prove that his way of thinking was different, that men think differently”.* (a woman with higher education)

*“Oh, this was right to the point... Yes. My husband tells me: “Yes, of course... You are the man of the house, right?” In my opinion, surely, they should have this equality. I hate, for example, when after the wedding, the relatives go to the bride's house and say. “Good for you, good for you, our congratulations to you”. What is it...? Well, firstly, I am in favor of pureness and innocence: it is the most important thing for me in everything and especially in moral issues. But I do not like the difference that people put between male and female. Has someone ever asked the guy what places had he attended [before marriage]? Why should it be that way...? I find it very offensive..., I have done it myself, but I find it to be a terrible mistake... It is not allowed... Secondly, in my opinion, women and men should be 100% equal. During elections, no one tells you: “You are a woman, you should not elect...” Why should it be different in other matters”.* (a woman with secondary education)

During the interviews women also talked about the worldwide trends of gender equality, and yet, in their minds, they did not overcome the consciousness of everlasting male power over them, however modern their notions would be.... *“Now, I will tell You something, there is such a tendency all over the world when a man becomes a woman and, on the contrary, a woman becomes a man. Now I do not understand. It is a paradox. In many cases, men sit at home and women earn the living and solve all the issues. And still, they say that they are smart, that they will tell us what to do, they will lead and decide certain family issues. It is some kind of a paradox to me.”* (a woman with higher education)



*“It depends on what is meant by equal opportunities.... It shouldn’t be to an extent, whereas the man loses his role in the family, but the woman also needs to be independent and able to create and do something... For example, after my husband passed away, it was so difficult for me.... I did not know where to start from, even if I wanted, it was so difficult.... I think the woman should be independent.”* (a woman with higher education)

Women also discussed the manifestations of inequality, migration and its positive impact on women, in terms of leading an independent life. *“In terms of being independent, nowadays, we have many examples, since in every apartment building, there is at least one family with the husband living abroad.... This already presumes that the woman of that house is independent and takes care of upbringing children, does the purchases for the house and manages the finances... It is good, but on the other hand, many families are falling apart, because of husbands living abroad.... The man goes out and sees “how ideal everything is there”, so he does not want to come back home to his wife...”* (a woman with higher education)

When talking about causes of inequality, interesting notions are observed about the impact of western cultures and values, transferred from generation to generation. *“The first reason for inequality, in my opinion, is the way we perceive equality.... That is to say, that, for example, we always hear that people do it this way in Europe, or they do it that way in the US, and we call it equality, but our national characteristics do not allow us to have that kind of equality... This is the explanation.... We hear that in the US the child can apply to the police and complain from his/her parents. Can you imagine such an Armenian family where the child complains to the police from her/his parents? Of course, you cannot imagine, the same refers to the inequalities between men and women.”* (a woman with higher education)

*“Inequality is everywhere, it is not that easy to overcome it, it does not disappear that quickly. You encounter unequal situation everywhere.... And that complicates life a lot, because there are some extreme cases of inequality. It cannot be overcome by one person, if you and I fight individually, we will not be able to change anything; all the efforts need to be mobilized to overcome that inequality. On one hand, people cannot get rid of traditions that have transferred from generation to generation, on the other hand, the new approaches come from Europe non-stop. And men, who are afraid that their wives or children will be influenced by these new approaches and mentality, are involuntarily becoming even stricter towards them.”* (a woman with secondary vocational education)

*“The primary reason, in my view, are the traditions and habits that have passed to us through our genes and memory. In my opinion, our blood, as well as our mind have memories which should not be erased or forgotten. Or, another thing is that when we attend kindergarten, we always hear that girls are weak and the boys do not cry, because they are not girls, so we learn that girls are weak and apply that thinking in our lives .... “* (a woman with higher education)

The argument that men do not want to turn over their roles and power is among the reasons of inequality. *“They should be equal, but they aren’t and they will never be [equal]... You should have no doubt that they will not be... Men always think that they should be superior in this or that way... They should be equal...why shouldn’t there be equality? But we see that even if there is some progress, the result is all the same. In the past, there were even fewer workplaces for women, now there are some more...”* (a woman with higher education)

*“The reasons of gender inequality mostly lie behind the way the men are raised, because our traditions are rather strong. There are many moral norms, according to which it is rather improper for an Armenian man, if the woman is considered equal to him. Since childhood, we educate our boys telling them that a girl should not be older, should not be more intelligent or more eminent than them.”* (a woman with higher education)

*“The traditional ways of upbringing and pressures against men, by certain elderly people in the families, the demands of elderly of how a “real” man or a father should be, are among the reasons. To reach a certain level of equality in the families, it is important to live as separate families, I think this is the way out, the newly formed family should live on its own.”* (a woman with higher education)

As a reason of inequality, women with secondary education mention standpoints of both women and men. *“One of the reasons is the change of the era: in fact due to it, we have equality, while the reason for inequality is perhaps the fact that people do not get used to it, and men do not get accustomed to the fact that women are also capable, or that they also should do what they can. Well, I think it is a rather deep, but also a very subtle and complicated issue. Let them reach it, but not through immoral methods...”* (a woman with secondary education)

*“Both women and men are responsible for inequality, there are men who do not give freedom to their wives, and there are women who interpret freedom in a wrong way... The rest follow it and say to themselves that it is better not to give any freedom to women, than to be ridiculed by people.”* (a woman with secondary education)

The arguments about gender inequality are sometimes supported by the quotes from the Bible on women’s and men’s equality. In general terms, a tendency is observed to justify the gender inequalities. *“Well, this topic is being discussed very often currently, but I don’t know, maybe I am wrong, or I think in a wrong way, but we, when we read the Bible, see it very clearly that God created the woman from the man’s rib....Now, as you see, the woman is the helpmate (spouse) of the man, she should always be beside the man and not ahead of the man or above the man....”* (a woman with secondary vocational education)

*“In our family... So, my husband is a very calm man, he is very kind and tolerant.... I can always tell him we should do it this way or that way, but I do not show it; no one ever knows that the decision was*

mine, or when Abo speaks, I never interfere, and never interrupt.... No.... But he always considers my opinion, he does not do anything on his own, if it refers to children or our home". (a woman with secondary vocational education)

"Well, let them be.... But no, there should be some difference, in any case. This is how I view it: I am both for and against equality, but let them [men] be a bit different... If the man is weak, if he doesn't pursue what he wants to do, if he is subject to someone.... He will not be able to have his voice in the family, here the woman will be the decision-maker. The man goes to work and the woman is the one to decide, whether she wants to clean the house, or do her chores (or perhaps she decides that it is better not to do anything). Now, the man comes home from work, the dinner is not ready, the house is not clean.... And he comes with his friend.... Is this acceptable? There is a mess on the table; it is afternoon, but beds are not covered yet. And here the woman leads. Is it right? Of course not. It means that he is weak, he has not set his rules there. And here, neither of his parents (either his dad or mom) had a voice. And this is called "women's leadership"" (a woman with secondary vocational education)

«I think there should be some difference, I do not say that this difference should be big, but to some extent there needs to be some difference. At least there should be some formal difference, so that people get the impression that you do everything the way your husband says, as if he is the leader..”(a woman with secondary vocational education)

"In my opinion, it is of course very good, to have equal opportunities, however, on the other hand, the woman stops being a woman, now you look at women they look like men, as if they want to be like men...I know what it is like, I have felt in on my skin, when you have to take care of everything yourself, it is not easy, and I don't understand why women want to take care of all the issues themselves, I am surprised." (a woman with secondary vocational education)

"It is not inequality, it is the mentality of our nation, it has been like that for thousand years. Now, everybody tries to raise their children in that [the new] way. They learn whatever they see. Nothing can be done in this sense. Once I said: "Syuzi, I will take care of the child, you go and work", my granddaughter, my Sonul, says: "Mothers do not work". Since her birth, this child has seen that her dad is the one who works, that her grandmother and her uncle's wife don't work." (a woman with secondary education)

Among the participants of the interviews, there were women who thought that equality is not necessary, however, they expressed some ideas about it:

*“No, in my opinion, it is not necessary to be equal, at least the man’s voice should be primarily heard. I do not say that the woman should be voiceless, but she should be the one who gives in, she should formulate her advice in a way, that she reaches what she wants. But she should not do it in a way, as if proving that she is equal to the man and that she should reach her goal; she should do it in another, [in a subtle] way. They should not be equal, but the woman should have a voice, especially if she speaks clever things. Or the man should be so clever, that he is able to understand that “this person is saying the right thing, should we follow what she says or not?””* (a woman with higher education)

As a result of the survey it became clear that even when women and girls are of value (deserve respect) they have a notion of being under some sort of power which is normally accepted. *“No, of course they are not equal. That inequality also comes from women. I tell you, if you are not able to have a firm position and protect yourself, no one will protect you. It all depends on the level of intelligence of the family and the people you are dealing with. If you, sorry, but I concretely mean you, deal with a person who is lower than you, then if you get married to this person, there is nothing you can receive from that person, while he, being an ignorant man, will think that with his ignorance, he is higher than you and will start putting pressure on you. Isn’t it clear? I do not blame.... There are sadistic men, there are many strange people, but I cannot blame only them, because we, ourselves, do not know our value as women.* (a woman with higher education)

*“Then we have that Armenian mentality, especially in the villages...”*  
*“Oh, she is already 25...she is still at home (not married). It doesn’t matter who she will marry to...but she should...Shouldn’t she have a child?”* But my daughter is 40, and I do not think that she has lost all her chances to get married, or to have a child.... *If she marries a stupid person whom she still needs to educate, it is better not to get married and not to have children, at all, rather than to have a child from this stupid person and suffer for the rest of her life... I think that our Armenian mentality needs to change here, in our head. If it is empty, you cannot do anything with it. In this case, your daughter will be beaten and/or raped, she will be given the ladle to prepare dinner and will be told that she does not do anything right. Well, I am talking about people who have low level of intelligence .... I think it is more common in villages. I currently don’t know such families in the city, for example I do not know such cases among people who surround me... I haven’t seen such cases when mothers-in-law or daughters-in-law get involved in personal matters of other family members.... There are mothers-in-law (both husband’s moms and wife’s moms) among my friends, but they never get involved in their children’s lives.... Moreover, their sons-in-law will not allow them to get involved in their personal life, showing them their*

place, so that they understand that they cannot interfere. Perhaps, she might have some influence on her son-in-law, but only through her daughter, the same refers to mothers-in-law who may have some influence on their daughters-in-law through their sons”. (a woman with higher education)

The expressions of pressure and violence within a family: “For example, when I wanted to go somewhere else, he wouldn’t allow me. **Why?** ”He wouldn’t permit saying that we will go there together...He wouldn’t allow me to go to a restaurant with our staff. There have been many similar opportunities. After graduation of the insititute we were invited to a restaurant, many of our girls were married at that time and they went there on their own, but he didn’t allow me. Since husbands and wives were not invited, he didn’t let me go on my own. (a woman with higher education)

When discussing gender-related standpoints, the interviewees didn’t forget to mention their neighbors, as well. In this case, the neighbor is a person who tries to “maintain” or “protect” the “honor” of the family, regularly reminding about the traditional gender roles.

“I have always seen my daughters-in-law equal to my sons, my younger son has a free mindset, he lets my daughter-in-law and his children free. He doesn’t forbid to wear a short skirt or dress, or to go somewhere.... There are some neighbors who sometimes say: “your Asulik has a nice body, and she puts on mini skirts and dresses... Why do you allow her?” (a woman with secondary education)

## 2.7. The IDEAL OF A WOMAN



It is interesting to note that when talking about the ideal of a woman, the women with higher education mention concrete names and characters of women.

“I love Alla Pugachova a lot. Well, because we are almost of the same age, but as I look at her and me, I think it is not the case, I look older than she.”

“My class teacher has been the ideal of a woman to me. “

“My mother has been the ideal of a woman—modest, literate, smart and very kind, and this is what we lack nowadays—the kindness.... She would understand everyone, she would feel the situation in which this or that person appeared, we have never heard her speaking loudly”.

“Sophie Loren, her character, as a whole.”

“The example of a woman’s ideal is St. Mary; no other woman or man has ever been created faultless by God...Who am I to select an ideal...? “:

*“We had a lecturer, Ms. Gasparyan, who was the leader of our class at the university. Every day, after her class I went home thinking that she is an ideal woman. Perhaps she is not alive anymore, she was very old even then....She was well-educated, literate, she was shining in the area of her profession, I always wanted to be just like her. Even now, every time I stand in front of the class, I recall how she stood and how she spoke to our class”.*

*“The ideal of a woman...I have never thought in that direction.... but I think I have an ideal...let me think a bit....Margaret Thatcher.... in those years when she was the prime minister, perhaps no one thought whether there is equality-inequality, or that a woman couldn't hold high positions...She is, so to say, the reflection of all of this”.*

*“Sose Mayrik's character should be exemplary to us, I think... Because I have heard many stories about her courageous deeds.”*

When talking about a woman's ideal, women with secondary or post-secondary vocational education mainly mention that no one is ideal, and if they still admire someone, they think they cannot reach her...” *There are many celebrities, many stars who I like to follow through Facebook, I always follow what they have done, how they have done it, but I cannot say that anyone of them is an ideal to me.... Because, let's say, she is my ideal, what should I do? How can I reach for example, Trump's wife”?* (a woman with post-secondary vocational education)

In certain cases, women with secondary education mention more general, and to some extent, even unreachable ideals: *“St. Mary and all those women who devoted their lives to the God and church and did not live their lives with worldly sins”.* (a woman with higher education)

## 2.8. MARITAL LIFE



One of the **goals** of the study was to also find out the notions of the mothers-in-law about their marital life, about the strategies of adapting to the husband's family and about the relationship with the mother-in-law.

### 2.8.1. The process of getting acquainted with the future husband

The majority of the interviewees **got married through mediation of relatives and acquaintances**. However, the phenomenon of getting married through mediation was more widespread among the women with secondary and post-secondary vocational education, than among women with higher education.

*“We haven’t known each other, my aunt knew my husband’s parents, and they were looking for a girl [wife] for my husband. As a good girl, as a girl of a good family, my aunt recommended me. Otherwise, I didn’t want to get married at that time, I had made up my mind to work for a while, then receive a higher education... I was working at school, and my aunt said that some people would come to see me. And I acted as if, I did not know that they would come. In the beginning, my mother-in-law came. She came, well, I knew it’s her, but I pretended that I do not know...”* (a woman with post-secondary vocational education)

*“I got married in the age of 18: we had some mutual relatives who introduced us to each other.”* (a woman with post-secondary vocational education)

*“Well, at that time, it was not like now. The youth didn’t go out together, to see if they are fond of each other and, only afterwards, to introduce the families to each other. At that time, the morals were different, the guy’s family would come to see the future bride, even without knowing the bride beforehand. In our case also, some mutual acquaintances suggested that my husband’s family see me, as a nice girl and a child of a nice family.”* (a woman with secondary education)

*“I had seen my husband for several times, then they came and asked my family, if their son could marry me, then, a few months later, we got married .... Well, I wasn’t in love, nothing like that.... The maturity of the 18-year-old of that time perhaps was equal to the maturity of today’s 10-year-old .... And so, with that level of maturity, how did they decide that we could get married? However, over the years, I started to love my husband, we are devoted to each other, and have good relationships.”* (a woman with post-secondary vocational education)

*“My parents made me marry...At that time, did I understand what love was, or if I loved him....? Or that you should love, if you want to get married.... I was just going to live in someone else’s house from our village ... But now, we are spouses of 45 years, and I can surely say that he has become “half of my life” [perhaps, means, my best half], because we went through the best and the worst experiences together. And I also would advise you the following: everyone has his/her place in this life, but you should give your husband a special place in your life, because in the end, only both of you will remain, the way it was in the beginning.”* (a woman with post-secondary vocational education)

There are also quite a number of cases whereas the women had to be subjected to their parents’ decisions, putting aside their own feelings. *“I got*

*married in the age of 18... My husband's aunt was our neighbor in Tiflis, and I was still a child, when she was telling me that she will marry me with her Norik, she didn't have children, so she loved her sisters' children like hers. And so, one summer they came to our house in Tiflis, with the whole family... There was another guy whom I loved, we were friends, my father didn't know about him, but my mother knew. My mom said: "well, you should already forget him, that is it". And I forgot... Now I think that I am perhaps paying for it, with the hardships in my life".* (a woman with post-secondary vocational education)

*"I got married in the age of 23, no, my parents had decided that I should already get married, because my younger sister was about to get engaged soon. It was due to a taboo, according to which I had to get married first, since I was the elder sister.... For example, my uncle would say: "You should not give such a chance to a girl, you should make the choice instead of her and give her to a person that you want her to marry to."* (a woman with higher education)

*"I got married and only afterwards, when already in their house, I turned 17. I had just finished school, and my mom was already sick, doctors said that her life is short, that is why she wanted to see me settled and that is also why I married Samvel and didn't wait for my love to come. But afterwards when that guy returned from the army, and my mom was still alive, she told me: "If I knew that I wouldn't die, I wouldn't make you marry, I would allow you to wait until he came back from the army." But, perhaps, everyone has a certain destiny, perhaps that was the way it should be..."* (a woman with secondary education)

It is interesting to note that very often, before one could get acquainted with her husband, other members of the husband's family first got acquainted with the future bride. *"My father-in-law had told my aunt to ask me to visit her place, with the purpose of showing me some jewelry, so that he could also come and see me there. Then, even before my father-in-law would come to see me, my brother-in-law had already seen me. He was right at the entrance of the school, he was waiting there to see me. Then, it was my father-in-law's turn. Everybody came, except for my husband. Then, I went to my aunt's house, my father-in-law came, he looked very happy and said: "... What a nice girl she is"; he was telling similar things. So, everybody told my husband that I am a nice girl and I am a suitable match to him and that he should come and see me. Then, my husband came to school, with his acquaintance, to see me. Finally, he also liked me, and they came to ask permission from my parents, if we could get married. That was it".* (a woman with post-secondary vocational education)

**There were relatively more cases of marriages without anyone's interference or at [personal] will, among women with higher education, nonetheless even in these cases, the girl's parents had a significant influence on the**



final decision. *“Yes, we got acquainted with my husband still during student years, he was my choice. But the final decision of marrying him was not mine. Once we had argued with him, and there was no cell phone at that time, so we didn’t speak all the time. And all of a sudden, he came to our house with his parents, to ask for permission from my parents to marry me. And I said that I do not want to get married at the moment, and my dad was respectful towards elderly people and he said:” If you did not want to marry, this guy wouldn’t bring his father and mother to our house. And then these people have already come to our house, I will not tell them “no”. And so, we got married in a few months”.* (a woman with higher education)

### 2.8.2. Expectations from marital life and relationships with husbands

The majority of mothers-in-law participating in the survey did not have any exact **expectations** and didn’t even imagine what a marital life would look like.

*«Well, what can I say about feelings, I don’t know... And what about expectations? You know, at that time it was not like now, you didn’t plan or didn’t know where you are going, or what are you going to do... And when a person does not have any expectations, it is difficult to say what has gone wrong and what has gone right. “* (a woman with post-secondary vocational education)

*“What expectations did I have? I grew up in a neat apartment, then I came to Zeytun, it was a private house where 100 people lived-a total of 10 families. My father-in-law brought all his sisters and brothers to his yard and built houses for them there; he gave a room to each of them, and I went to be a daughter-in-law among all these people. You can imagine what it was like...”* (a woman with secondary education)

According to the survey results the majority of women **assess their marital life** average or below the average. As the survey showed, the women’s life changed dramatically, after the deaths of their husbands: before then the husbands were almost alone in earning the living and addressing the financial needs of the families, but after they passed away, the burden of keeping the family completely fell on the wives’ shoulders. *“He was too young when he died, after that our lives turned upside down... Because he was taking care of everything, he was a much respected and loved person, we didn’t know where and how to start... And all of a sudden all the responsibility of taking care of the family fell on me”.* (a woman with higher education)

Almost all of the interviewed women **compared their marital life to the one they had in their parental house**, considering that they have grown up in a more progressive family, in a more loving and favorable atmosphere, where

they had their own corner and enjoyed the parents' love, while after getting married they appeared in worse conditions, in general terms.

*«...my mother-in-law didn't like jokes, humor, she didn't like to smile, it was hard to make her laugh.... We weren't allowed to host everyone we wanted. And in my paternal house, it was not like that. I wasn't used to it, it was very hard to host people in that manner... It was challenging to me. (a woman with post-secondary vocational education)*

**The interviewed assessed their relationships with their husbands as average**, regardless of the fact of marrying them at will or through mediation. The majority of women is convinced that the peace in the family depends on the wife, and the more the wife adapts to her husband and her husband's family, the fewer are the conflicts and tensions in the families. It is noteworthy that adaptation often means to also be subjected to various types of pressure and even physical violence, not only by the husband, but also by the entire family.

*“We had good relationships with each other.... You didn't have the right to speak. If he said something, I accepted it, but whenever I said that something needs to be this way, he never listened to me...he is the man...what can I say? How can I disagree with him? .... But then he felt that he was wrong, but I never mentioned it to him, so that he doesn't feel badly.... Do you know what I am talking about? It is such a wrong thing. ...It is a big mistake when the wife directly tells her husband everything that she thinks is right .... Do you think it is a good thing? It doesn't bring any benefit.... No, it is a bad feature of character in women, not allowing the husband to say something or to decide something”.* (a woman with higher education)

*“...And you can imagine what I experienced in that house will all the strictness, severity, poverty, neediness and wickedness. Besides, my husband was a drunkard, and I had two kids. And I have always thought of divorce, because my relationships with my husband have always been bad, the same with my mother-in-law and others surrounding her, because they treated me like a small child, I didn't have higher education, so that was a reason for them to tease me, I don't know what they were doing. And yes, I had such a nice family myself [parental family], while in this house....”* (a woman with secondary education)

### 2.8.3. Relationships with mothers-in-law

The majority of the respondents had lived with mothers-in-law and, when recalling their life, many of them mainly consider it to have been a great mistake on their part.

*“Yes, of course, my husband was the youngest son, and there is such an [unwritten] law that the youngest stays to live in the paternal house. And my mother-in-law always said that “this house’s daughter-in-law is G”. My father-in-law didn’t remember my name, he was just very old, so he said that he will call me Anna, because it was easier to remember.... The relationships were good, until my brother-in-law also got married, and an issue of dividing the house between the brothers arose. My brother-in-law’s wife was a very determined woman; she meant what she said, so one morning we woke up to find out that we were left with just one bedroom and a living room. Then, my sons put much effort to build the rest; currently, we have additional rooms and live like human beings here. And I understood that I also should have been demanding, so that I also owned a house...”* (a woman with post-secondary vocational education)

*“...however good the relationships are, it is all the same, a mother-in-law continues to be a mother-in-law, she will never become a mother”.* (a woman with higher education)

Often the mothers-in-law expressed their content or discontent through non-verbal behavior and it was again the responsibility of the daughters-in-law to understand that behavior.

*“...And then, she was not hospitable.... In her house, we had to look at her face and try to understand from her glance, if she allowed us to prepare coffee [for the given guest], or not “.* (a woman with post-secondry vocational education)

The interviewed women also told about the **interference of their mothers-in-law in their personal lives and about obvious pressures and ill-treatment that they showed towards them.**

*“As I look at my daughter-in-law nowadays, I recall my own days in my husband’s house... I didn’t have the right to drop the piece of cloth and the broom from my hand—I tell you it was literally like that.... Every week they emptied the furniture drawers, because I had to wash all the kitchenware and put them back.... When I recall it now, you cannot imagine how I feel... What for? I didn’t have the right to omit it once, if I didn’t do it for one day, she would mumble constantly: “The whole house is in dust, it is dirty everywhere”. I also like cleanness, but as I read some psychological topics now, I can surely say that it had become some kind of an obsession for her ....* (a woman with higher education)

*“Everyone had the wish to “torture” me.... When it was cold in the house, my mother-in-law would put a big tub in corridor, would take a bath there, and then would tell me that I should pour out the water in*

*the toilet gradually, with pails. When I asked her why I should do it, she answered that because I am the youngest in the family. And I always did it with disgust.”* (a woman with secondary education)

*“For example, if I wanted to say to my husband “I also want to come...”, oh, well, I didn’t have the right to say so, my mother-in-law was the one to decide, it was her opinion that was considered to decide, if I should or should not go...”* (a woman with post-secondary vocational education)

*“No, they haven’t interfered much, only in the choice of the children’s names. My mother-in-law decided that we should name my elder son after my father-in-law... Then, she suggested a name for my daughter. But we decided not to accept it [not to call my daughter by the grandma’s name], and my mother-in-law always said: “I put the names of the whole family members, but they do not want to call my granddaughter by my name.”* (a woman with higher education)

*“When A. was alive (father-in-law), how could the daughter-in-law say something at home? Who was she to say something...? In fact, both daughters-in-law were speechless. He interfered in all issues...”* (a woman with post-secondary vocational education)

*“She didn’t just interfere, in fact, she managed our family herself. One of my brothers-in-law didn’t get married, he also lived with us in the past, so my mother-in-law made me take care of him too: to wash his clothes, to iron and clean for him...”* (a woman with post-secondary vocational education)

*“My mom was already very sick, she was in bed, my sister was having a complicated pregnancy, and the Baba Yaga [my mother-in-law] didn’t allow me to go and take care of my mom. And my poor mom would wait for someone who would bring her a cup of water...”* (a woman with post-secondary vocational education)

*“She interfered in all possible issues, sometimes my father-in-law said: “He is already 40 years old...” At that time, she would tell my husband what to do and how to do it, where to go and where not to go... Whenever we had a party or celebration at home, she would tell us who we should invite, whenever we went somewhere, she would tell us what present to take, if we should take the children with us or not...”* (a woman with higher education)

A few differences were observed also among the perceptions of mothers-in-law, relocated to Yerevan, from rural and urban communities, with regard to pressure and even physical violence used against them. For example, according to one of the mothers-in-law who had lived and grown up in a rural area, if her

mother-in-law taught or explained something to her, even in a rude manner, it would leave a bigger impact on her, as compared to a mild feedback that was simply given to her.

*“Perhaps, there have been such cases, but my attitude to them has been positive. I considered it, as part of an upbringing process. She could educate me, the way she educated her child. In the very beginning, I had the habit of taking out things from the soup with my fingers; once my mother-in-law saw it and hit on my hand, so that I do not do it anymore. My mom always told me not to do so, but it had no impact on me, yet the beating helped...”* (a woman with post-secondary vocational education)

Even after years, the women, telling their lives, would recall some details that had offended them a lot and had impacted their future relationships with their mothers-in-law.

*“I was pregnant, my mother-in-law brought the pineapple juice, opened it and drank it with the grandchildren and did not offer it to me.”* (a woman with secondary education)

In general, the **pressures** have been more obvious, **with regard to the issue of having children** and these pressures have been demonstrated both directly, demanding to have a certain number of children, and indirectly, for example, through promises of presents or donation of an apartment for the fourth child.

*“Well, let me tell you this... You can describe a person with the steps he/she makes, right? I didn't have children for the first five years.... I became the daughter-in-law of that house, and I had a miscarriage in the 5,5 months of pregnancy and lost my twins.... And I returned from the hospital without children, for me it was even worse than being in mourning.... I came home and saw that there is a baby carriage next to my bed.... What did that mean? .... They put her other grandchild's (her daughter's child's) baby carriage next to my bed, so that I felt pain.... I have cried bitterly during those five years when I didn't have children. If I poured my tears on them, their entire family would have drowned”.* (a woman with post-secondary vocational education)

*“I wasn't getting pregnant for a year.... And for the whole year they [my mother-in-law and sisters-in-law] tortured me. My mother-in-law was saying: “Perhaps, I will not see a grandchild, and will die before seeing one” because non of my sisters-in-law had children at that time, so I was their only hope .... My first child was a girl, and my mother-in-law made us call my daughter by her name”.* (a woman with post-secondary vocational education)

*“My mother-in-law always said: “Whoever bears the fourth child, I will buy a nice diamond for her...” but none of us ever had the fourth*

*child, and she never bought any diamond”.* (a woman with post-secondary vocational education)

*“No, she had three sons and a daughter who was born after them. She was telling us that when she was pregnant with Hasmik, she thought it will be her fourth son: she wanted to have four sons... My second child was also a boy, and she always told me: Well, you have also decided to have three boys, right? It was in the 90’s, and people were enthusiastic about having soldiers, but then they took their soldiers and ran away from the country...”.* (a woman with secondary education)

*“I remember the day when my first child was born. It was a boy, and we were in such a joy and happiness! In those times, women delivered at home.... Well, they had many children and wanted us to have many children too.... I am sure, now when I recall my past, that if we stayed to live in the village, we would also have many children, because there you didn’t think of anything, you didn’t work, there were people who would take care of your children, but here, it was not easy to even take care of the three children. My mother-in-law had three sons, followed by four girls.... I was afraid that after my third son, they would tell me that now the turn for having daughters had come, but they didn’t say so...”.* (a woman with post-secondary vocational education).

It is noteworthy that the issue of having or not having a child, has mainly been discussed between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law and never between the spouses, while if the husband got involved in the discussion of the issue, his intervention was often imposing in its nature.

*“My mother-in-law had only one child, and she always told me: ”Do what you want, but please do not stay with just one child”. She was telling me that it was wrong to just have one child. My first child was a girl and the second was a boy, but we have never discussed, if it should be a boy or a girl.... And the third one wasn’t a planned baby, I learned that I am pregnant only when the pregnancy was already in an advanced stage... I didn’t want to have children anymore, my daughter was already a pupil and my son just started walking and he was very naughty at that age, so I wasn’t ready physically to take care of the third child, but my husband told me abruptly that I should bear the child...”* (a woman with post-secondary vocational education).

*“Yes, I first had my sons, then I had some health issues, but I wanted to also have a daughter. Also, my mother-in-law was already saying: “And what about having a daughter”? It was also my wish, so though it was with some delay, but I had a daughter...”* (a woman with post-secondary vocational education)

#### 2.8.4. Pressure for having a son

If not the majority, then at least some of the interviewed mothers-in-law have experienced pressure against them for having a son: *”Why is she still bearing a child? She already has a son”* (a woman with secondary education)

Generally, **the wish to have a son** is manifested among interviewed mothers-in-law, their mothers-in-law, and currently, also among their daughters-in-law, as the interviewed mothers-in-law claim. The most widespread approach, as expressed during various interviews, can be summarized in the following way: *“Perhaps when your first child is a boy, you are already relaxed and are not worried about what the second child will be. For example, if you have three daughters first, then you will ask God for at least one boy, but it wasn’t the case with us.”*

Let us quote one more part from the interview:

*“I wanted my first baby to be a boy, by all means...*

***What was the reason for it?***

*In that case you feel more comfortable, you already have a heir, continuation of the family.... Your conscience is calm in that sense.... Then, you can have your second and your third child, and even if they turn out to be girls, you already know that you have a son. In those times, such things were considered to be important. Then, I personally, preferred a baby boy, I generally loved when the first baby was a boy, and before marriage I always said “My first child will be a boy”. That was my dream and it came true “.*

*“... M. was still to be born (the eldest grandchild of the family, my brother-in-law’s daughter), I remember A. (my husband) came to me and said:” Soon P. will be born (his father’s name was Pavlik). All of them had the same dream of having a baby boy and naming him Pavlik, because their father had passed away when he was 40.” And so, my elder brother-in-law had already two daughters, when I got married and the expectations of having a baby boy transferred to me. And when I got pregnant, my husband told me that it’s a boy.... In those times no ultrasound was available, but everyone was expecting that I will have a baby boy, and in fact, a boy was born. For example, my mother-in-law didn’t like it.... When she learned that I am pregnant with a baby girl (my second child), she had told my uncle’s wife: “Why is she having it, she has already got a boy”.... And when that woman let me know about it, I was upset and decided to go and do an abortion, but my doctor didn’t agree to do it, because it turned out that our nurse had warned the doctor about my decision and asked her not to do abortion, if I [Karine] suddenly decide to go there. She had told the doctor that I have made an impulsive decision ... and so, my daughter was born due to that nurse (a woman with post-secondary vocational education)*

*“But my daughter-in-law said:” I don’t want to do an ultrasound, because we will be upset, if we find out that it is not a boy, so it is better not to know and wait for the baby impatiently....”* (a woman with secondary education)

*“My first baby was a girl, and she was the first grandchild in the family. Then, my brother-in-law had a girl, I already could feel that my mother-in-law wanted to have a grandson. “You may have as many children, as you want, after you have a son”, she loved baby boys a lot and was very content that she had three sons and a daughter. This has been our conversations about it, but she didn’t make it a special topic for discussion....”* (a woman with higher education)

In extended and more traditional families, having a baby boy is supervised not only by the mother-in-law, but also by elder family members, particularly by the husband’s grandmothers (mothers-in-law of the mothers-in-law).

*“Even now, whenever one of my daughters-in-law, who already has a daughter, comes to our house, my old mother-in-law asks her: “Aren’t you pregnant?”, she wants them to have a baby boy. And this is why my daughter-in-law said that she will visit us only when she gets pregnant”* (a woman with secondary education)

The wish of having a son has even somehow affected the girls that were born instead of the boys. As one of the interviewees mentioned: *“My husband took after his Mom, he also loved and wanted a baby boy.... When my third daughter was to be born, he was expecting it to be a boy and he bought boy’s clothes and toys, he was telling my son: ”We’ll bring a brother for you soon...”, and so my daughter was born with a boy’s spirit.... And till now, she has a boy’s spirit in her”* (a woman with post-secondary vocational education)

*“My dad had four daughters and was kind of eager to have a son. He always said that he expected that her 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> children would be boys, but, well, it didn’t happen. Then, it was already late for them to have children, and he hoped that we will have sons. He said: “I will have seven grandsons, so that they hold my coffin together when I die”, and this has been the case”.* (a woman with higher education)

*“Well, I cannot say that they interfered on purpose, my father-in-law had four brothers and none of them had a son, he was the one to have two sons (one of them was from another woman, not from my mother-in-law) and his other son doesn’t have a son, so they were kind of relying on me, to ensure the continuation of their family, and they (especially my husband’s aunts and uncles on father’s side) reminded me constantly that just a son is not enough for the continuation of the family... They were persistent, and our third child also turned out to be*



*a boy, due to certain calculations that we were advised to make.* (a woman with higher education)

It is noteworthy that often the husband has also been against having the third or the fourth child, but also gave in to the parents' and especially mother's demand to have a boy.

*"... my husband on the opposite, was saying to me: "Do not have another son, so that they love the elder, the way they have loved me", well, he was also the first child of the family and was much loved".* (a woman with higher education)

There were, of course, women among the interviewees who were absolutely against interfering in the affairs of the sons' families, especially in terms of advising them how many children they should have or what the sex of the children should be: *"Well, but who am I, to tell them how many children they should have....? Even though they do not have plans for having a baby at the moment, but let us assume that she is pregnant right now, how can I tell her: "You should not have your third baby", they live in a separate house, they are a separate family...."* (a woman with post-secondary vocational education)

### 2.8.5. The strategy of adapting to the husband's family

During all interviews, women stated about getting adapted to the husband's family. According to the survey results, the strategies of adapting to the husband's family have not been much different from each other. According to the interviewees, the main, and in many of the cases, the only strategy, has been the adaptation to the situation, generally at the expense of their own personality, their wishes and, often, their dignity.

*"No, no, he didn't force me, I knew that I was obliged to do so. If I am the daughter-in-law, then it is my duty to do it for them, even if their aunts lived in their house. My sister-in-law lived with her husband in our house, I have gone through that hard experience. But now, if I compare, I, myself, have three daughters-in-law, and none of them would endure such a thing, none of them would stand it.... When I look back now, I understand that all of them have abused me, in the direct meaning of the word. I have been a subordinate person, do you understand? No one compelled me to do this or that thing, but I knew that I was obliged to.* (a woman with higher education)

*"... After that case, I understood that my husband could not convince his mom or come to an agreement with her, and that he would be having constant disputes with me, so in order to keep the peace of our*

house, it was better that I did what they wanted”. (a woman with post-secondary vocational education)

*“And, still, if you are in good relationships with your husband, for the sake of your children, there are things that you need to adapt to. I also got adapted to, and was satisfied with whatever had been provided to me. My mother-in-law... well... how should I call her? Perhaps she was a stern woman. She didn’t like much human contact, she didn’t want me to go out, but I got used to everything, considering that I had a good husband. And if you adapt, you are, perhaps, the one who wins in that situation. Otherwise, if you show who you are and (s)he shows who (s)he is, no family will be formed”.* (a woman with post-secondary vocational education)

*“Naturally, I was obeying to whatever they were telling me. I was telling myself: let it be what they want. It was patriarchy in their house. Oh, she always interfered and disturbed us”.* (a woman with post-secondary vocational education)

However, when looking back, the interviewees do not consider that the adaptation to the husband’s family has been a positive phenomenon. Moreover, they link their current health issues directly to the adaptation process that included “making an impression of a good daughter-in-law” and being away from unnecessary gossips.

*“Because I thought that my husband was these people’s only and long-expected son, and if he goes to live on his own, they will go mad... I kind of accused myself all the time, but, now, when I look back, all the health issues and issues that I have with my nervous system are all connected to it, now I am 50 years old, but have so many problems that my mother-in-law didn’t have in her seventies”.* (a woman with higher education)

*“And all of it was happening at the expense of my nerves, I didn’t want that woman to feel badly, I wanted to **leave an impression of a good daughter-in-law**.... I have always deprived myself of many things, so that they feel themselves good, I always thought: What if my children come home and see that my husband and I had again argued....? So, this is how it has been....”* (a woman with post-secondary vocational education)

Also, the adaptation to the husband’s family was often explained by the fact that they did not want to disturb their parental family and did not want to be “a reason for unnecessary discussions”.

*“That woman/the mother-in-law/ had four daughters, but everything was left on me /daughter-in-law/ and the explanation was that he had raised Vardan /husband/, so I had to take care of him. Plus,*

*I had a mild character, being from a traditional family of Gyumri, and if my dad learned something, he would blame me, not the elderly of the family, because he had much respect towards the elderly, in general... He always said: "...If one doesn't respect the elderly, let her/him not grow to that age..." So, I didn't want to express what I felt, because there was no hope that my family would support me, and so I kept silent". (a woman with higher education)*

In certain cases, the parental family clearly showed that they would not take back their daughter, if she returned. *"And once, when I was offended, I went to our house, and my mother said: "Even if you are offended, let him go out, the wife does not have the right to leave the house, together with children..." And to date, it still sounds in my ears, and I give the same advice to everyone else."* (a woman with higher education)

The adaptive behavior continues up until now. *"I didn't have the right, I didn't... What do I want to tell you? If you are an honorable person, if you went there, because you loved, and you have been the one to choose your way in life... Who made you go? You could have stayed .... So, if you entered that family, you have to endure.... If I go back, who will take me back, firstly? Or let us assume I went back, OK, who will provide me with what I need? It is a destiny, you have to go and endure everything.... This has been my slogan, and I have lived with it for 40 years.... Now, well, the issue is not with my mother-in-law, it is rather with my sister-in-law who is unmarried and lives with me. She is sixty-six years old, well, now, she replaces my mother-in-law, and up to the present time, I am under control and in the status of a servant. I do not have the right to say anything... well, this is the opinion of my husband".* (a woman with post-secondary vocational education)

The adaptive skill somehow is transferred from mothers-in-law to the daughters-in-law, in the form of advice and tips for life: *"Now my daughter-in-law says: "I wouldn't stand it..." and I say to her "if you do not endure it, you will not have a family"*. (a woman with higher education)

The interviewed mothers-in-law perceive the adaptation process as part of the existing socio-cultural routine and a phenomenon that is transferred from generation to generation. The adaptive position is generally also perceived as something that is inevitable and unquestionable.

*"I wouldn't say that I had any expectations, because when you enter a new family, you already do not have any expectations. On the contrary, you think of accepting these people's traditions and habits, respecting them, etc. We have been raised with this mentality, this is the way my father and my father's mother have taught us: if you go somewhere, or if it [the family] is new to you, you should take into consideration that you are the one who enters their family, and not them entering yours.... If someone comes to*

*your family, you expect that he/she adapts to your family's habits, and if you are the one to join a new family, you have to adapt to it, to get along with it, and to love it.*" (a woman with higher education)

*"Yes, we have lived with my mother-in-law. By the way, they had a separate apartment, but did not allow us to live there on our own, because my mother-in-law thought that living together was the right thing to do. And we are living together up to now.... I can't say that the relationships between us are excellent, but they aren't bad, either.... Simply, she has been a leader by nature. It can surely be stated that she has raised the three children on her own, and her desire has always been spreading her leadership over me, too. Regretfully, I have to admit that she succeeded, since I didn't have any other choice, except for getting used to it."* (a woman with higher education)

At the same time, the interviewees acknowledge that their adaptive behavior implies a certain retreat and reaffirmation of their position, as subordinates, and, as a consequence of this all, a perspective of "not being taken seriously".

*"Perhaps, there haven't been many conflicts, since I had made my choice of getting used to everything.... Now, I think that, perhaps, it would not be that way, if I had set my own rules then... They knew that, well, it was me, and that I'll adapt to it, anyway, so they didn't "take me seriously" .... I would fight with my own self, but would never go and tell them that this needed to be done this way and not that way...."* (a woman with higher education)

*"...I was often offended. And I held the offense inside me. I never expressed it, I kept it all inside me, and that has been my mistake. Now, I think that if I could go back and start living the same life again, I would behave completely differently. I would behave just the way the wife of my brother-in-law did. She manipulated my brother-in-law the way she wanted, she did it successfully, she was capable of doing it. But I wasn't like her, I obeyed to whatever they told me. This has been my mistake. I didn't struggle for making them consider my opinion, too, and so, I got a corresponding response from them".* (a woman with post-secondary vocational education)

Furthermore, as in case of many other issues, here comes yet another responsibility that again falls on the shoulders of the daughter-in-law, by which she is expected to establish good relationships with her husband's relatives. And that kind of a position is totally internalized by the daughters-in-law themselves.

*“I think, it is very important how a daughter-in-law [a girl] has been raised, “the code” that your parent has implanted in you matters a lot. There are some girls who go and start demanding things from the husband’s family, while I have been told that I should live where my husband lives. There has been no talk about living on our own and, in those times, it was a shame to live on rent. (a woman with higher education)*

To some extent, the relationships in Armenian families contradict to the ones that are typical to other cultures.

*“My mother-in-law was 100% Russian; my father-in-law was half-Russian. And I always noticed how my mother-in-law would sit down and smoke, filling in crosswords, while my father-in-law would prepare dinner. My mother-in-law would send the poor man to the market, for several times a day. Yes, this is what I have seen, I haven’t witnessed the husband being violent toward his wife and the wife obeying him. And in this kind of a family, how can the relationships be bad? No, we had very good relationships. And, then, I consider that your assessment should not be one-sided, you cannot say, for example, “oh no, the mother-in-law is not a good woman, while the daughter-in-law is a saint”. No, it wasn’t the case with us. Our relationships were reciprocated”. (a woman with higher education)*

## 2.9. RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE MOTHER-IN-LAW AND THE DAUGHTER-IN-LAW



### 2.9.1. Violence against the daughter-in-law

Another objective of the study was to find out **the attitude of mothers-in-law towards the phenomenon of violence against the daughter-in-law** and understand to what extent the violence against the daughter-in-law is justified and legitimized.

It is interesting to note that in the opinion of some of the interviewees, it is acceptable to use violence against the daughter-in-law, however, they should not be the ones to use it. *“But who is the mother-in-law to use violence against the daughter-in-law. If her husband thinks it is necessary, let him use it, but not the mother-in-law...”* (a woman with post-secondary vocational education)

When talking about pressure and violence, the interviewees brought examples of their neighbors and relatives.

*“The daughter-in-law of that family seems to be working at school, so she needs to be there, let’s say, at around eight o’clock. We wake up in the morning, as she starts cleaning the sofa cover and the carpet by joggling (shaking) it in the entrance. First, she cleans the whole house and then goes to work. Now, I don’t know what it is. Do they control her or is it the discipline of this house?” ... “But it didn’t happen just once, we regularly hear how she juggles the carpets every morning...”* (a woman with higher education)

In some cases the control over the daughter-in-law took place also on behalf of the mother-in-law of the mother-in-law, especially if they lived together.

*“...At that time, my daughter was not married yet, there would be a quarrel with A. (daughter-in-law) every day, and every day the reason for the conflict would be different. Let me not mention the arguments that she had with the grandmother.... The grandmother acts as a mother-in-law towards her, not me. She [the grandmother] also constantly reprimands me, and says that whenever she overlooks me, I do not do it right, either.”* (a woman with post-secondary vocational education)

As the analysis of the study results show, it is generally quite an acceptable phenomenon to perceive the daughter-in-law as a servant, and as someone who takes care of everybody’s needs. Moreover, many of women thought that serving the husband’s family should be at least compensated by having a similar daughter-in-law who would serve them. *“I always said: Dear God, I have served everyone in my whole life, will I see the day when my daughter-in-law will serve me and will make a coffee for me to drink?”* (a woman with post-secondary vocational education)

The study provided us with an opportunity to reveal yet another interesting regularity: the son/the husband manifest an avoidance strategy in case of conflicts between the mother and the wife. The following quote from one of the interviews is characteristic in this sense. *“.....now our conflicts are around such things. For example, I say: “Do not open the door in front of anyone”, then I come home and find out that she has opened it, then we start a quarrel, my husband is at home and he knows that she has opened the door, but doesn’t tell me about it. Rather, he tells me: “I was in the bathroom at that time or haven’t heard anything ....”* (a woman with post-secondary vocational education)

Only in a few cases have the husbands used obvious physical violence against their wives, for not obeying their mothers. For example, according to one of the interviewees: *“...my husband was always on his mother’s side and defended her. There were cases when he would beat me, because of his mom. What can be worse than that....? I knew that my husband was such a clever and quiet man that he would never hit even his child, but that old woman could make*

him beat me. (a woman with post-secondary vocational education)

In some other cases, the control over the son's family has been manifested not by the husband's parents, but **by the husbands themselves**. For example, as mentioned by one of the interviewees: *"I will not talk about physical violence, because I haven't experienced it, but I have always experienced both psychological and mental violence. My husband was a very strict and rude man, he never hit me, but whenever he got angry, he spoke, using a very bad language both with me and children. He was very strict towards the children. At that time, we were living in Sevan, my daughter had entered the Pedagogical University and came here to live on rent on her own. My husband secretly came here every day to learn, if his daughter uses cosmetics, or if she is at home or not.... He had rented the house in the neighborhood of "Russia" theatre, so that he could monitor her closely. She had only 10 minutes to come home after the bell rang. He then phoned her, and the child had to be at home to pick up the phone.... He was a very severe and rude man."* (a woman with higher education)

*"Not me, but my husband: my son got married before becoming 20-year-old, while my daughter-in-law was only 14. We celebrated her 15<sup>th</sup> birthday already in our house. They were fond of each and fell in love with each other still at school, but the girl's mother didn't want them to get married, because she was too young and it was too early for her to get married. Then, one day, my husband went to their house, taking a weapon with him, and soon he came back, bringing my daughter-in-law with him to our house. And so, we didn't organize any wedding party, she just came to live in our house. Now they are married for already 21 years..."* (a woman with higher education)

*"I do not accept violence, but I am for moderate control over the daughters-in-law. Because, if the daughter-in-law is like the one that I have, then having control over her is even required.... My husband had a good control over the daughter-in-law..The child had long and thick hair.... Every day she combed her hair, stood in front of the mirror and admired her beauty, and one day my husband took the scissors and cut her hair and told her not to stand in front of the mirror anymore.... He didn't allow the girl to look out of the window, either.... Well, he did the same to me, too. Moreover, neither me nor her, had the right to answer the phone calls..."* (a woman with secondary education)

It is also worth mentioning that **the restrictions** set by the husbands **often have not been acknowledged as such**. Instead, the restrictions and control over them by their husbands have been perceived as normal manifestations of relationships between a man and a woman. *"The only thing I remember is that I wanted to study, and my husband didn't allow me. We had to come from Shahumyan to Yerevan for me to study, and so he didn't allow me. He was saying:*

*“Even if you study, you will not work, because I will not allow you to work” .... I got married, and we lived very well, so there wasn’t even a need for me to work.”*  
(a woman with secondary education)

## 2.9.2. Self-perception of mothers-in-law and their role in the son’s family

The vast majority of the interviewees thought that they **are incomparably better mothers-in-law** and they treat their daughters-in-law much better than they have been treated by their mothers-in-law.

*“No, I have experienced it all, I haven’t become hateful, if someone treats me in a bad manner, I respond with kindness. Moreover, I help with what I can... My grandchildren, my son, also my daughter-in-law...”* (a woman with post-secondary vocational education)

The majority of the interviewed mothers-in-law also mention that the present generation has changed a lot, and that they cannot even see themselves treating their daughters-in-law the way their mothers-in-law and the husband’s relatives have once treated them.

*“Today’s generation is not like the one we had in the past, now they have their opinions, they are the ones to say how it should be, I need to consider my daughter-in-law’s opinion, my son’s opinion, I cannot decide where my daughter-in-law should or shouldn’t go, the way my mother-in-law once did to me..... I have lived my life, I know what it is like to live together and what difficulties it implies, and I do not want that my daughter-in-law or the daughters-in-law experience it, or that my sons live in such conditions. I have felt it on my skin, so how can I do the same to them?”* (a woman with post-secondary vocational education)

However, at the same time, the more in-depth analysis of the interviews shows that the interviewed mothers-in-law mostly wish to present themselves more positively than they in reality are. For example, in the opinion of one of the mothers-in-law, she doesn’t interfere in her son’s family affairs, nonetheless, the money that her son earns is, all the same, managed by her.

*“No, my interference is limited to the fact that my son brings and gives me the money he earns, now we have some loans and have borrowed some money, that is why he gives the money to me, so that I organize everything. Besides, I also work; I am taking care of a child, so that I also add on to my son’s earning and help him. Then, he knows that none of us spares money on M., M. also knows it and doesn’t complain. She doesn’t think: “Look, he receives the money and brings it to give to her mom”, she also knows and sees that it is the requirement*



*of this moment in time and that everything will be arranged soon". He also gives some money to her, some pocket money, for her to spend on a daily basis, for taking the child to the kindergarten, or to go out, etc... " (a woman with post-secondary vocational education)*

The cases, whereas the mothers-in-law claimed that they have extremely loving relationships with daughters-in-law and will never allow themselves to interfere in the son's family affairs, were not rare, either. However, during the interview, they would make expressions, like: "who is the daughter-in-law?", "they are my daughters-in-law, but I do not have the freedom to say something to them", "I say directly whatever I do not like, if they want to get offended, let them get offended", etc.

*"No, my sons adore me and I adore them: who is the daughter-in-law for me to change my attitude towards my son?" (a woman with post-secondary vocational education)*

*"Now, one of my daughters-in-law has a son, the other has got a daughter. It is all the same to me, I have two grandchildren [perhaps also means grandchildren of both sexes], but I know that a girl needs a sister; I know how good it is to have a sister, so I tell my daughter-in-law that she should have another girl, but she already wants to get pregnant and says that she wants a boy.... However, she has some issues with breasts, so maybe she will not be able to have another child, I am not sure..." (a woman with secondary education)*

*"The latest conflict that we had was the following: It was my grandchild's birthday, they invited all of their friends, but didn't invite my sister's daughter. I was offended and said, "Why didn't you invite her? It would add the number of your guests just by one person, she wouldn't disturb you." (a woman with higher education)*

*"No, the advantage of living separately is that we are not dependent economically. But I say what I want, it is in my character, when I see something that I don't like, I tell about it, so that I feel at ease. When I go there and notice something that does not satisfy me, I voice it out. In the past, I wouldn't say, thinking that they might get offended, but now, I say. And they have got used to it now: we are not offended from each other, we discuss and then we forget about it. Even if we get offended, I forget about it, and make a phone call to her." (a woman with higher education)*

Even though the mothers-in-law claim that they do not interfere in their sons' family affairs and particularly in discussions about the number and sex of the future grandchildren, however, a section from the interview with K. is characteristic in this terms. *"But as I learned that she is pregnant, I said: "It is a girl, do not cherish any hopes in vain..." And truly, when the sonography showed that it is a girl, I was extremely upset."* (a woman with secondary vocational education)

**Often the interference of mothers-in-law starts from selection of the future daughter-in-law.**

*"I have chosen a wife for my third son. Once I visited my sister, I saw their neighbor's daughter and like her a lot. Again, it was the New Year period, I went home and sent my son to my sister's house right after me... My sister had called her, so my Norik had seen and liked the girl. Once they visited us, I wanted to keep her, not to let her go away... It didn't happen that time, but later it was the way we did it: we didn't organize any wedding party... My son worked, he was making furniture, so he earned enough to take care of a family, but didn't have any intention to marry... So, this was the reason why I, myself, have been looking for a wife for him, and then, at least one of my daughters-in-law would be in my taste, would be "on my side".* (a woman with secondary vocational education)

*"No, I was saying: "One of you should get married this year... I need a daughter-in-law... I already am not able to manage everything on my own." That was a joke, of course, but I wanted them to pity me a bit more and initiate something in that direction. So, thus, I cheated and persuaded one of my son's and made him get married."* (a woman with secondary vocational education)

The interference into the relationships of the son and the daughter-in-law sometimes happen in an indirect way, and the mothers-in-law do not perceive this kind of indirect interferences, as an intrusion into the son's family

*"If there is something I don't like, I call my daughter-in-law and tell her: "G., what is this...?". I say once or twice, and if she does not correct her mistake, I tell her: "I will tell A. (my son)", and she already becomes sober... But I, of course, do not go to A., and tell him..." You know, G. did this thing", no, if, for example, A. is sitting in the room, I go and tell G. "G. who did this thing? How many times have I warned you not to do it, or to ask me before doing it?", so she becomes more careful... She also understands very well that I want A. to hear what I am saying... She is very determined, she is able to do everything, but whatever she doesn't know, she doesn't want to learn, either. For a couple of years, I have been giving baking classes at home. At that time, she wouldn't enter the kitchen; up until now she cannot bear the work*

*with the dough, she doesn't prepare anything with dough*" (a woman with secondary education)

It is also noteworthy that even in the linguistic discourse of mothers-in-law who think that they are very good mothers-in-law for their daughters-in-law, and never allow themselves to interfere in the affairs of their daughters-in-laws, the prevailing position is that the mother-in-law has the right to find faults with, to force or impose things on their daughters-in-law.

*"She came, knocked on the door of my room and said: 'K. I am sorry, today my head aches, would you go and buy milk for Ani?'" She was [mild] like that. Instead of complaining or saying, 'she is your child, go and buy milk for her', she would talk like that.* (a woman with secondary vocational education)

During the interviews, the phenomenon of **social comparison** is distinctly manifested. The process of social comparison starts, when the assessment of opinions and abilities is not possible to perform through mere experiments in the given environment. In such conditions, people assess their opinions and abilities, by comparing them with others. In general, people can compare themselves with others for different reasons. Mostly, it is done to heighten their own self-esteem and self-efficacy.<sup>21</sup>

According to this theory, in case of the absence of objective standards (which are necessary to assess the personal characteristics), people look for other people, to be assessed through a comparison with them. First, they appear in front of the issue of a wide selection of options: personal traits/qualities, external look, even an abstract phenomenon, i.e. assessment of happiness, but it does not matter much; the important point here is that people concentrate on other person's personal traits, the way s(he) looks and her/his happiness, i.e. on our social environment.

During the interviews, the mothers-in-law periodically compared themselves with other mothers-in-law who they knew among their neighbors, relatives, friends, while those who had daughters, compared themselves with the latter's mothers-in-law. The comparison was always made in favor of themselves.

*«My elder daughter is married, the younger one is engaged. My daughter's mother-in-law, oh, what a mother-in-law she is...! Not only the mother-in-law, but also the mother-in-law's sister..., they do everything themselves, they make all the decisions. Even though my son-in-law is not that weak, as a person, to allow them to act like that, but my daughter says that the two sisters tell him what to do...*

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<sup>21</sup> Jerry Suls, Thomas Ashby Wills, Social Comparison: Contemporary theory and research//Lawrence Elbaum Associates, Inc; Hillsdale, New Jersey, 1991, P. 23

*it is not fair, anyway... She says that whenever she plans to visit someone, her mother-in-law calls her sister and says: "V. (daughter-in-law) is going to a birthday party, what should she take with her as a present?". My daughter-in-law follows these stories, and once she told me jokingly: "Now I love you even more, learning what kind of a person your daughter's mother-in-law is". (a woman with post-secondary vocational education)*

*«For example, my daughter has escaped from violence, which she experienced on behalf of her mother-in-law. That woman's son got married for two times. Their first daughter-in-law escaped from them for the same reason, then my daughter got married to him and escaped from them, too. They were living in very bad conditions. In the beginning I was assisting my daughter a lot, I provided her with everything I could, as part of her dowry, since I didn't want my child to be in need of anything. Then, every time we visited them, we would take a lot of things to them.... My grandchild was born, but since she didn't talk to her daughter-in-law, she wouldn't approach the child, even if it cried and yelled. She would do the laundry, but wouldn't wash the child's clothes. In the end, when my daughter came back, we learned from the neighbors what she had said: "Her mother and father know how much she eats, that is why they bring a lot of things, for her to eat....", then she had told them "she was not a virgin when she married my son, I have accepted her for the sake of my son". (a woman with post-secondary vocational education)*

*"For example, I am not like that, but my sister is. Whenever I say well, you're your daughter-in-law decide, she tells me "How come? Why should a daughter-in-law come and decide things in my house, let her come and see what I am doing, and adapt to the situation... Whenever she sets up her own house, I will go there and adapt to it..." And many of my neighbors are like that, we hear that the power is in the hands of the mother-in-law, and the poor daughter-in-law is not allowed to make a move by herself or initiate something on her own... Once we went to drink a coffee at a neighbor's house. Her daughter-in-law lives there for about two years already. And she calls her mother-in-law once in every two minutes and asks something and you feel that she is not able to or is not allowed to do something on her own." (a woman with post-secondary vocational education).*

The interviewed mothers-in-law considered that it is a sign of closeness and a symbolic end of conflicts between a daughter-in-law and a mother-in-law, if their daughters-in-law call them "Mom". *"In the past (I can tell you even*

*more), even a few months ago, she didn't call me "Mom", but then I achieved what I wanted .... And it wasn't very easy, she didn't use the word "mom", maybe if it weren't me, but another woman instead of me, she would directly say to her:" Well, I know, I am a stranger to you, that is why you do not call me "mom"! But, in the end, I succeeded: she started addressing me directly and calling me mom, while in the past she was talking to me, but without addressing me."* (a woman with higher education)

