

Women's Role and Position in Armenian Society Armenia, similar to the other former soviet states, is in the process of addressing a number of social issues, surfaced after the inception of the economic transition, which has been taking place in the Newly Independent States (the "NIS").

In the Shirak district, particularly in Gyumri, those processes have regional peculiarities, predetermined by the fact, that the consequences of the disastrous earthquake, which took place in 1988, have not yet been fully addressed, and they continue to generate new socio-psychological problems. The empty windows of partly destroyed buildings in Gyumri seem to symbolize wounds in the people's souls, as a consequence of difficulties, disappointments and hopelessness in their everyday life. Today, these problems require the implementation of serious research, analysis and "practical social policy". To this end, numerous efforts have been exerted by the government, as well as by social organizations and individuals. Foreign states and social institutions have also made their contributions in this process. The range of such activities continues to grow and attain new levels of performance.

Specifically, women have become one of the most vulnerable sectors. Some social and psychological researches of Armenian families carried out in the past few years show that during the most difficult economic periods, i.e. in 1992-1993, Armenian men expressed a high level of uncertainty regarding their future livelihood, while the women portrayed an unusual level of optimism and energy.

These findings, albeit with some exceptions, are also true for Gyumri, Shirak district, especially since today women are forced to reconcile their traditional role as a wife and mother, with practical demands of contribution to the financial well being of the family. It is indubitably a serious and difficult problem to solve particularly in such a comparatively small place as Gyumri, with emphasized traditions and conservatism. Resolution of this problem requires purposeful and persistent policy and new approach.

According to the final report of the "New residential strategy for the zone of earthquake" /1998, pages 91,152/, 26.2% of women participating in the poll were heads of families and 32.5% were the main providers. The objective of this survey was to ascertain the opinion of women, and their changing role in the society. By reviewing the results, it is clear that Armenian women have emerged as a distinct group, with their own set of problems, and concerns, who are addressing those problems with hope, optimism. This situation is typical for all Armenian women. However, life in Gyumri during the last 10-12 years has been excruciatingly difficult, and mere survival has been a challenge. In this situation, the revealing results of the survey and finding out the ways of resolution become even more significant.

It is interesting, that the great part of women criticizing the activities of the state entities simultaneously see the state authorities as the only entities capable of solving the problems. What is this attitude conditioned by? The optimism or hope for fulfillment of the responsibilities by authorities to the zone of earthquake?

It is clear that in order to establish a democratic state based on fair legal and social grounds, it is imperative to involve women in the political, economic, social and religious spheres of Armenia, and in effect, obliterate discrimination and inequality. According to Constitution of the Republic of Armenia, men and women share equal rights and liberties. Unfortunately, in the Armenian society these rights and liberties are somehow overlooked. Women in the Armenian society play a vital role, and the need of

correspondence of declared legal and existing socio-legal situation once again is proved by results of the survey.

The final report is comprised of 8 analytic statements, including an analysis on the numerous aspects of women's roles and positions in the Armenian society. Socio-psychological groups of women have been formed and, most importantly, a range of practical solutions for the existing problems has been revealed.

Today, in the new socio-economic conditions of unemployment and destruction of the former linkages and relationships, Armenian women are face profound alterations of their role. The features and functions typical for a traditional Armenian woman are being garbled. They do not afford to have as many children as before, and being concerned by the problems of their feeding and dressing, pay less attention to their proper education. In such conditions changes of the roles within families are inescapable. Regarding the traditional and accepted conviction, women in Armenia used to be engaged to household problems, but today they involuntarily have to seek financial means. This brings to a distortion of Armenian family's traditional model, which in its turn generates negative influence from the standpoint of birthrate decrease.

We'll try to review the results of the survey revealing that the main part of the people surveyed have a small family, i.e. 6% of families are comprised of 1 person, 11.2%-2, 13.4%-3, 24%-4, 25.8%-5, and 19.6% - 6 and more persons. As to the decline in the birthrate, it was so many times talked and written about, that any statements regarding that fact would be redundant.

With reference to the other roles of Armenian women, it's hard not to mention that among the roles of wife, mother and daughter, the role of the mother has a great preponderance /67.6% of the inquired women/. 77.2% of married women, 72.2% of divorced, 79.4% of widows, 50% of singles and 15% of unmarried are of this opinion. Thus, for the women in a parental status responsibilities of mother have a paramount importance. Responsibilities of wife and daughter are significant for 16.4% and 16% correspondingly. Role of wife has a central meaning for 18.3% of married and 22.2% of divorced women of comparatively young age /18-39/. Naturally, role of daughter is mostly important for the singles /72.6%/.

For Armenian women family is the greatest value. Such an opinion has the 73.2% of women participated in the polling. They are at a great expense housewives /85.5%/ and unemployed women spending whole days with their families. The professional interests are dominant for working women /51.1%/. 24% of the inquired women proved that cordial relationships are the most important, for 20.1% it is to be self-respect. For 17.4% the feeling they are not alone and for 14.4% respect of others are more significant.

Maintaining the main function of a traditional Armenian woman, being a mother, women in Gyumri have recently faced some serious challenges. Because of financial difficulties, the number of children per family has drastically dropped. Furthermore, the level and quality of education for the children has also suffered, resulting in an increase in the number of teenage offenders and beggars.

The survey has also identified and classified separate groups of women. The most noteworthy of them is the group of women with expressed emotions in their behavior. They are frustrated, sometimes aggressive, alone and isolated. The women having given birth to a child after the disastrous earthquake, are distinguished by a segregated psychological state with an inclination to the past times: wish to see her lost one in all characteristics of new baby. Women, suffering from the complex of a forsaken and being in a continuous depressive state make an individual group. This fact was proved

by the social polling, which revealed that 38% of the inquired women in Gyumri has undergone changes in their microclimate, 16% have indefinite expectations from the forthcoming future and 42.8% suffer from a pessimistic attitude to life, instinctively seeing resolution of their problems in a lucky chance. Hence, those women become untimely aged and alienated from the society. As a rule, they are unable to gain strength for recovery.

A tangible help for women will definitely be the creation of employment for men, as the providers of the household. In the current situation, when Armenia is undergoing a difficult economic period, realizing such plans will be extremely difficult. An alternative solution would be to allow women to contribute to the family budget, by providing assistance in the implementation of low-budget income-generating projects. For centuries women in Armenia have been introducing to the World their skills in needlework. This is a viable alternative, since needlework does not require investment of fixed assets (workplace, expensive equipment and etc.) and can be a source of income.

Enhancement of women's role in the transforming society, as well as overcoming the complexes typical for post-totalitarian period (economic, social and psychological) has a direct linkage with women's creative and viable origin. Sociological surveys show that women in Armenia, particularly in Gyumri, though facing numerous difficulties of socio-psychological character, have found strength to be optimistic about the future. But parallel to this they need sympathy, assistance and direction. It is noteworthy, that a great part of women, participated in the poll, expressed willingness to learn a new skill. They need to have practical involvement in the social and economic spheres, as well as gain equal footing in the society.

There are also few issues worth of our attention and relating the sexual maturation, proper and timely enlightenment of the young generation.

All the issues pointed out in this project require not big, but tangible state, public and foreign investment and support. Perhaps the unsolved problems are one of the main reasons of emigration dominating in today's Armenia and having devastating results. The fact that 42.8% feel a lack of confidence about the future already causes an anxiety.

The situation is complicated, but not discouraging and there is a possibility to smooth the social tension. In the reports of the experts carried out researches, as well as in the speeches of the round tables' participants were notable remarks and suggestions, accomplishment of which will rather smooth the social tension.

They are as follows:

- Initiate TV programs able to boost up women's social activity and enlighten their main concerns.
- Publish and spread different consultative handbooks.
- Open consultative and supportive centers.
- Create a service "telephone of confidence", considering women's traditional approaches and present depressive circumstances.
- Taking into account women's readiness to be engaged in the process of project implementation and discussion of the final report, open amateur and discussion clubs that will be conducive for involvement into public organizations' activities.
- Contribute to the process of attaining modern professions, taking into account suggestions and preferences of the inquired women (computer skills, foreign languages, accountancy and etc.).

- Organize repair of cottages of single women, widows, families having few children and lack of means and other social groups living in destroyed cottages. Organize a preparatory work to the winter season: “warm winter” project.
- Leave behind humanitarian programs and commence development programs.
- Prepare a complex project concentrated on resolution of the women’s problems and assist the implementation of the project on a local level (health, education and other spheres).
- Pay a primary attention to women’s mental and psychological rehabilitation.
- Elaborate programs guaranteeing safe pregnancy and providing with corresponding knowledge.
- Work out projects focused on qualitative improvement of unemployed workers possessing definite professions.
- Create a new market for gifted women in Armenia, organize exhibition and sale of their works, thus giving them an opportunity of working at home.
- Create an initiative and supportive group supervising the activities of the corresponding entities somehow involved in the course of actions.
- Survey schoolchildren’s opinions and interests and supply with appropriate knowledge assisting their sexual maturation.
- Enhancement of women’s role will be invaluable in the current socio-economic situation, in the process of democracy building, if we are able to give birth to functional and useful projects regenerating their feminine origin. It is undeniable that women with characteristic prudence, feminine charm, natural sense of beauty, genetic ability to give birth may become encouraging and supporting strength, social and economic support for men.

Results of the Polling Carried Out in Shirak District in the Framework of the Project "Women's Role and Position in the Armenian Society"

Table 1 – Status in Family by age (Question 6)

	Age					Total Quantity
	18-28	29-39	40-50	51-61	over 61	
1. Wife	20	25	16	11	10	82
	18.50%	23.40%	14.30%	12.10%	12.20%	16.40%
2. Mother	39	76	87	72	64	338
	36.10%	71%	77%	79.10%	78%	67.60%
3. Daughter	49	6	9	8	8	80
	45.40%	5.60%	8%	8.80%	9.80%	16%
Total	108	107	112	91	82	500
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 2 – Interests by age (Question 8)

	Age					Total Quantity
	18-28	29-39	40-50	51-61	over 61	
1. professional interests	40	20	18	15	11	104
	37%	18.70%	16.10%	16.50%	13.40%	20.80%
2. family	56	83	85	73	68	365
	51.80%	77.60%	75.80%	80.20%	82.90%	73%
3. culture	7	3	4	3	3	20
	6.50%	2.80%	3.60%	3.30%	3.70%	4%
4. sexual life	2	0	1	0	0	3
	1.90%		0.90%			0.60%
5. hobby	1	1	1	0	0	3
	0.90%	0.90%	0.90%			0.60%
6. other	2	0	3	0	0	5
	1.90%		2.70%			1%
TOTAL	108	107	112	91	82	500
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 3 –Preferred TV programs by age (Question 9) /by percent/

	Age				
	18-28	29-39	40-50	51-61	over 61
1. news	14.1	27.3	31	39	42.4
	6.1	5.6	8.4	9.4	11.6
3. movies	14.5	13.9	8	12.1	9.1
	18.4	21.3	23.4	24.7	29.1
5. music programs	30.7	13	12.4	7.2	1.2
	3.5	5	4	2.2	1.8
7. entertainment programs	4.4	4.6	4.4	4.4	2.4
	7	7.9	6.2	0.5	0.6
9. other	0.4	0	1.3	0	1.8
	0.9	1.4	0.9	0.5	0
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 4 – Time devoted to the program, by age (Question 12)

	Age					Total
	18-28	29-39	40-50	51-61	over 61	Quantity
1. 0	4	2	11	18	26	61
	3.70%	1.90%	9.80%	19.80%	31.70%	12.20%
2. 1-10 minutes	11	19	24	29	32	115
	10.20%	17.80%	21.40%	31.80%	39%	23%
3. 11-15 minutes	10	11	9	8	5	43
	9.30%	10.20%	8.10%	8.80%	6.10%	8.60%
4. 16-30 minutes	28	19	24	9	6	86
	25.90%	17.80%	21.40%	9.90%	7.30%	17.20%
5. 31-60 minutes	28	12	10	5	2	57
	25.90%	11.20%	8.90%	5.50%	2.50%	11.40%
6. over an hour	15	2	1	3	0	21
	13.90%	1.90%	0.90%	3.30%		4.20%
7. indefinite	12	42	33	19	11	117
	11.10%	39.20%	29.50%	20.90%	13.40%	23.40%
TOTAL	108	107	112	91	82	500
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 5 – Answers to the question “Do you attend a cosmetologist?”, by ages (Question 13)

	Age					Total
	18-28	29-39	40-50	51-61	over 61	Quantity
1. yes	25	17	12	6	0	60
	23.10%	15.90%	10.70%	6.60%		12%
2. no	83	90	100	85	82	440
	76.90%	84.10%	89.30%	93.40%	100%	88%
TOTAL	108	107	112	91	82	500
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 6 – The frequency of attending a cosmetologist (Question 14)

	Age					Total
	18-28	29-39	40-50	51-61	over 61	Quantity
1. always	1	1	0	1	0	3
	0.90%	0.90%		1.10%		0.60%
2. often	9	8	1	3	0	21
	8.30%	7.50%	0.90%	3.30%		4.20%
3. rarely	15	8	11	2	0	36
	13.90%	7.50%	9.80%	2.20%		7.20%
4. not attending	83	90	100	85	82	440
	76.90%	84.10%	89.30%	93.40%	100%	88%
TOTAL	108	107	112	91	82	500
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 7- Reasons of not attending a cosmetologist, by age (Question 1)

	Age					Total Quantity
	18-28	29-39	40-50	51-61	over 61	
1. time	5	10	12	15	4	46
	4.60%	9.40%	10.70%	16.50%	4.90%	9.20%
2. finance	24	44	40	16	25	149
	22.20%	41.10%	35.70%	17.60%	30.50%	29.80%
3. need	45	17	36	31	12	141
	41.70%	15.90%	32.10%	34%	14.70%	28.20%
4. age	2	1	1	12	32	48
	1.90%	0.90%	0.90%	13.20%	39%	9.60%
5. desire	1	3	4	8	2	18
	0.90%	2.80%	3.60%	8.80%	2.40%	3.60%
6. confidence	0	1	2	1	2	6
		0.90%	1.80%	1.10%	2.40%	1.20%
7. time and finance	3	7	5	2	0	17
	2.80%	6.60%	4.50%	2.20%		3.40%
8. professional	3	1	0	0	0	4
	2.80%	0.90%				0.80%
9. cannot answer	0	1	0	0	3	4
		0.90%			3.70%	0.80%
10. other	0	5	0	0	2	7
		4.70%			2.40%	1.40%
11. attending	25	17	12	6	0	60
	23.10%	15.90%	10.70%	6.60%		12%
TOTAL	108	107	112	91	82	500
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 8 – Answers to the question “Do you attend a hairdresser, expert beautician”, by age (Question 16)

	Age					Total Quantity
	18-28	29-39	40-50	51-61	over 61	
1. yes	80	65	58	38	12	253
	74.10%	60.70%	51.80%	41.80%	14.60%	50.60%
2. no	28	42	54	53	70	247
	25.90%	39.30%	48.20%	58.20%	85.40%	49.40%
TOTAL	108	107	112	91	82	500
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 9 – Frequency of attending a hairdresser and expert beautician, by age (Question 17)

	Age					Total
	18-28	29-39	40-50	51-61	over 61	Quantity
1. always	10	12	8	5	1	36
	9.30%	11.20%	7.10%	5.50%	1.20%	7.20%
2. often	41	28	22	18	3	112
	37.90%	26.20%	19.70%	19.80%	3.70%	22.40%
3. rarely	29	25	28	15	8	105
	26.90%	23.30%	25%	16.50%	9.70%	21%
4. not attending	28	42	54	53	70	247
	25.90%	39.30%	48.20%	58.20%	85.40%	49.40%
TOTAL	108	107	112	91	82	500
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 10 – Reasons of not attending a hairdresser and expert beautician, by age (Question 18)

	Age					Total
	18-28	29-39	40-50	51-61	over 61	Quantity
1. time	1	1	3	2	7	14
	0.90%	0.90%	2.70%	2.20%	8.50%	2.80%
2. finance	16	30	36	20	14	116
	14.80%	28%	32.10%	21.90%	17.10%	23.20%
3. need	6	3	7	6	17	39
	5.50%	2.80%	6.30%	6.60%	20.70%	7.80%
4. age	0	0	0	9	24	33
				9.90%	29.30%	6.60%
5. desire	1	2	2	3	5	13
	0.90%	1.90%	1.80%	3.30%	6.10%	2.60%
6. time and finance	0	2	0	1	0	3
		1.90%		1.10%		0.60%
7. self-service	2	4	6	11	3	26
	1.90%	%	5.30%	12.10%	3.70%	5.20%
8. cannot answer	2	0	0	1	0	3
	1.90%			1.10%		0.60%
9. other	0	0	0	0	0	0
10. attending	80	65	58	38	12	253
	74.10%	60.70%	51.80%	41.80%	14.60%	50.60%
TOTAL	108	107	112	91	82	500
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%