

that Latvia is no longer a homogenous culture: In 1997, only 55% of the population was made up of Latvians, the remainder composed of other ethnic minorities. Thus, even if a “return to the past” was possible or appropriate economically (which it is not), it presents even further problems in Latvia’s modern socio-cultural context: if the Latvian women of the “*dainas*” are held up as an ideal, as keepers of culture and tradition, this simultaneously serves to dislocate “other” women (of different ethnic backgrounds) who are not part of this tradition. In a way, then, these traditional gender roles are not only inappropriate, locking women (and men) *into* roles that may not choose, but they also serve as a way to lock other ethnicities *out* of the process of nation building — which is negative for both social integration and human development<sup>4</sup>.

If we look at attitudes towards men and

women today, then, it seems disingenuous to accept at face value that people would simply prefer the “gender inequality” of traditional times. It should be noted here that many young people do not express a yearning for the past: when interviewed, many young men and women have stated a desire to share domestic and breadwinning responsibilities with their present or future partners. Therefore, it is crucial that we ask: who benefits from the adherence to traditional gender roles, and more importantly, who is losing out? The following sections of this publication will seek to illustrate and explain how and why the losers are many. In conclusion, challenging stereotypes and gender roles evidently become one vital step for turning losers into winners — for creating a nation of people that can reap maximum and equal benefit from the processes of sustainable human development.

## **PART II: Human Development From a Gender Perspective: Economics, Education, Health, Violence**

When the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) released the first global Human Development Report in 1990, it asserted that human well-being was dependent not only on monetary figures, as traditionally construed, but also on other indicators that reflect quality of life. Thus in order to compare the level of human development in different countries, UNDP developed a Human Development Index, which could measure a country’s development situation more holistically, using indicators that reflect three basic aspects of sustainable human development: economics, education and health.

Gender is a crucial aspect of all three of these indicators. Part II of this report therefore examines how gender matters in each of these areas:

How does gender impact various aspects of these issues? How does a lack of attention to gender issues exacerbate problems? How can more attention to gender contribute to solutions? Furthermore, Part II looks to steps already taken in Latvia to integrate gender concerns into economics, education and health, while also pointing to gaps in policy and necessary actions.

The final sections of Part II also look at violence and prostitution as cross-cutting issues that crucially affect and are influenced by human development processes. Although these are relatively new subjects of public debate in Latvia, current efforts and possible steps for future actions are discussed in relation to these two important aspects of gender and human development.

### **2.1 Gender and Economics: Money, Time and other Resources in the Formal Labour Market and Within the Home**

Latvia’s transition to a market economy has brought about changes in both macroeconomic and microeconomic structures. These have included changes in the labour market — what people do, how and how much they are remunerated — as well as changes in the economics of individual households — income levels and division of work. Because sustainable economic growth, the eradication of poverty and a labour force that can adapt to

change are all crucial for sustainable human development in Latvia, maximum efforts should be made to ensure that policies and activities in these areas have a maximum impact, and benefit a maximum number of people. It is therefore crucial that these issues be analyzed from a gender perspective — not only to ensure equitable distribution of and access to resources, but also to promote full participation of both men and women in activities that foster sus-

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<sup>4</sup> The author is grateful to Irina Novikova’s article “Fashioning Our Minds: Mass Media Representations of Minority Women in Latvia” (1998) for highlighting some of these connections.

tainable development in Latvia.

While a traditional approach to economics has often focused on financial resources, it is important to recognize “economics” as consisting of other resources and aspects that are not usually associated with monetary value. In this sense, “work” consists not only of remunerated work, but of unpaid work as well (such as domestic work and

child-rearing). Similarly, availability of resources, or the lack thereof, can pertain not only to money, but to other goods and services, time, and unquantifiable resources such as health, social interaction or education. Thus, while the following three sections will look at various aspects of economics from a traditional perspective, they also address these other aspects as equally important.

### 2.1.1 Poverty

Poverty has been recognized as one of the greatest barriers to sustainable human development, particularly when defined in a comprehensive manner to mean not only a lack of material resources, but also a lack of opportunities and a lack of access (to education, to information, to health care, to social contact). Gender is also a critical dimension of poverty: because poverty impacts men and women differently, one gender or the other can be put at an increased risk for poverty or may bear the consequences of poverty as an increased burden. In other words, both causes and effects of poverty are gendered, and need to be analyzed as such. Strategies for addressing poverty must therefore also anticipate and address the ways they will impact both genders differently.

Until very recently in Latvia, poverty had not been a focal subject of policy debate. While the issue was being sidestepped by the Government, however, poverty-related problems in Latvia grew increasingly acute. Realizing the growing imperative for action, the Government requested UNDP assistance in carrying out an in-depth needs assessment and analysis of poverty in Latvia which would provide the basis of a strategy for alleviating poverty to be developed in 1999 by a working group appointed by the Cabinet of Ministers and led by the Ministry of Welfare. In the context of this project, various analyses of poverty are planned, and as of spring 1999, three poverty reports (each focussing on specific issues) have already been pro-

duced. These have incidentally highlighted various important gendered aspects of the problem.

For example, in the Report, **Who is Poor in Latvia and Where?**<sup>5</sup>, the “poverty risk” was calculated for various socio-economic categories of the population. When looking at differences in gender, the report notes that an initial glance at poverty indicators suggests no significant differences in poverty risk between women and men. However, a more in-depth analysis reveals that single women living by themselves in Latvia have the lowest risk for poverty, while men who live on their own are subject to a significantly higher risk: 15.4% of single women are poor, in comparison to 23.6% of single men. However, this situation inverts itself as the household grows larger: the more children per household, the more the risk for poverty increases for female-headed households. While the risk for poverty for male-headed households with additional children also grows larger, this increase is neither as steep nor does it reach the same level (see Figure 1). These are very significant observations that need to be analysed in more detail by policy analysts. At the moment, though, several points can nonetheless be extracted from these data: First, given that women can either be at the greatest risk or at the smallest risk for poverty, depending on their family situation, it is evident that there is nothing *inherent* in one’s gender (such as ability, fiscal management skills, will to work, etc) that creates poverty risk. Rather, social roles and social functions and the context within

**Figure 1**

#### Percentage of the Population Living in Poverty

(Household income >38 Lats per month per household member.)

Of those who:	Men	Women
Live Alone	23.6%	15.4%
Head a household with:		
no children	28.37%	28.8%
1 child	42.89%	46.3%
2 children	47.62%	61.09%
3 children	68.75%	75.21%
4+ children	79.97%	91.45%

<sup>5</sup>F. Gassmann, UNDP, 1998.

which both genders live out their daily existences seem to be far more significant in determining one's risk for poverty. The fact that women without children are less poor than women with children, while the opposite holds true for men, suggests that because of unequal distribution of childcare responsibilities in the home, women are unable to contribute equally to productive work if they have many children. It follows then, that if men were more active in the domestic sphere, families would be at less of a risk for poverty (see 2.1.3 for more analysis on this point). Furthermore, the fact that female-headed households with children are poorer than male-headed households with children reminds us that many female-headed households with children are those with absent fathers who often fail to contribute resources required for childrearing (money and time). Male-headed households with children, on the other hand, are more likely to be those with two parents that share productive labour and domestic work responsibilities (whether equally or not). Again, the need for stronger participation of fathers in family life is highlighted.

Quantitative measures of poverty (i.e. household or individual income levels), although often revealing when disaggregated according to gender, do not tell the whole story: poverty also pertains to other aspects of an individual's existence, such as opportunities and access, as mentioned above, as well as issues such as self-esteem and feelings of worthlessness, dependence, cultural or spiritual deprivation and social isolation — all of which often elude quantitative measures. That is why, as some experts have noted, documenting the experience of poverty and how it is gendered, particularly from the perspective of those who suffer most from it, is one important step towards the development of adequate policies to address these problems. Latvia has already taken a very significant step in this respect: In 1998, the Philosophy and Sociology Institute of the Academy of Sciences in Latvia was commissioned under the above-mentioned UNDP technical assistance project to undertake a qualitative analysis of poverty in Latvia. While substantiating the quantitative gender disparities mentioned above, this analysis goes further to underline some of the gender dimensions that a household budget survey can miss. For example, the qualitative analysis highlights how women and men employ different survival strategies to contend with their poverty: many respondents noted that men had more of a tendency to slip into deep depression, alcoholism and other self-destructive behaviour, sometimes culminating in suicide, while women (most often noting their responsibilities towards their children) were more active in seeking out any way at all to make ends meet, in spite of their own feelings of depression and social isolation. Again, it is evident how more involvement by men in the domestic sphere would not only provide support and assistance to women and other family members in such

crises, but would also increase men's feelings of self-worth and responsibility at a time when they are isolated from the formal employment sphere which has traditionally served as the source of their self-esteem.

The qualitative survey also highlighted how the existence of gender discrimination in society impeded women in their attempts to climb out of poverty. Many women noted how they had received discriminatory treatment from both private employers and the State Employment Service when looking for work: For example, women often reported being discriminated against because they were older than 35 or even 30. While it should be noted that men above 50 also experienced difficulties in finding work, women often encountered additional discrimination in regards to their gender, appearance and role as a mother. As one woman noted, she had recently been dismayed by a job advertisement looking for "a young, pretty female worker with a nice figure and long legs." Similarly, one woman reports she was turned down for a factory job only after the employer noted that she had five children at home. Similar tendencies were noted all across the country, in both urban and rural areas. This type of discrimination has various effects: first, it devalues women's potential as employees, implying that their looks or age are more important than their abilities and skills. Not only does this put them at an unfair disadvantage in advancing their own professional lives, but it also has a serious impact on the material conditions of their families — as quantitative data on poverty levels of women with children has indisputably substantiated. Discrimination against women as mothers also reinforces social roles concerning a woman's place within the home, again locking her into stereotypes, while at the same time not in any way encouraging men to participate more meaningfully in the domestic sphere. Not least, such blatant discrimination against one's gender or age is also prohibited by the Constitution of Latvia and needs to be challenged on that basis alone.

Thus it is crucial that any steps to address poverty in Latvia take these gender discrepancies into consideration. For example, the UNDP/Ministry of Welfare project that has as its goal the development of a poverty alleviation strategy must be concerned not only with unemployment and education, but also with gendered dimensions of poverty. This strategy should promote activities that address both causes and effects of poverty and the way in which these are gendered. Specific activities could include: the provision of more psychological support for men (such as fathers' support groups), promotion of activities and services that strengthen the family in times of crisis, organization of retraining activities at times when women will be able to balance them with childcare responsibilities, mentoring programmes for women, the establishment of more and better day-care services, and gender sensitivity training for the State Employment

Service and potential employers. Specifically addressing gender in such a strategy would also be an important show of political will on the part of the

Government. This alone could help change societal attitudes, while also having a ripple effect in other areas of policy-making.

## 2.1.2. Gender, Employment and The Labour Market

Rates of employment and the quality of employment are pivotal factors that impact a nation's human development. In Latvia, with the transition to a market economy, the employment sector has had to make the parallel transition from state-controlled employment to the growth of private enterprise and major restructuring of the labour market. New trends and new policies have affected different groups of the population in different ways. Men and women, too, have been impacted differently by these changes. In order to maximize the contributions that both can make, while also guaranteeing gender equality in access to resources and opportunities, it is necessary to analyze unemployment, access to employment and quality of employment from a gender perspective, so that policies and other interventions can be appropriately developed, implemented and evaluated.

Research has shown that women are placed at a disadvantage before they even enter the labour market. For example, in an analysis of small and medium enterprises (SMEs), the **Latvia Human Development Report 1998** noted that entrepreneurs are predominantly male. Furthermore, the higher level of male activity in the SME sector was anticipated to grow even more, as employers reported that in the future, they planned to hire more men than women. These findings were also reflected in interviews with women, as noted in the previous section on poverty: many women report that they are refused jobs either because they are young women (employers assume childbearing and child-rearing will negatively impact their productivity), or because they are too old — and therefore “untrainable” or “unattractive.” Such blatant discrimination needs to be seriously addressed. While the largest Latvian-language newspaper has, thanks to the efforts of NGO lobbying, banned sex and age discrimination in job advertisements, discrimination nonetheless persists. The lack of a Labour Court or efficient ombudsperson institution that could address issues of discrimination in the labour force is one aspect of the problem, but the other is a lack of awareness of these issues in general. Many women who are discriminated against are not aware of their rights or of what action they can take to protect them. While the National Human Rights Office has an important role to play here, trade unions and employer's organizations should also be addressing this problem: employees' organizations should be working to protect the rights of those who are discriminated against, while employer organizations

should initiate activities to educate their members about discrimination.

If one were to look at rates of unemployment and economic activity, however, it might appear that women are not hindered from entering the labour market at all: rates of employment and unemployment are about equal for women and men (see Figure 2). Are women, then, not discriminated against in the labour market? The answer, quite simply, is no. As pointed out by an expert from the International Labour Organization in a recent report on the labour market in Latvia<sup>6</sup>, *quality* of employment is also vital to human development: simply because people *have* jobs, this does not mean that they are personally satisfied, subject to just and equal treatment in terms of career advancement and pay, or even earn a living wage (in Latvia, a significant number of people living in poverty are, in fact, formally employed). Trends and circumstances within the labour market — and not only rates of employment — therefore also need to be addressed from a gender perspective.

It is not surprising, then, that once women have entered the labour market, there is also evidence to suggest that they are again discriminated against. For example, various studies have highlighted the fact that serious discrepancies exist between the wages that women and men earn: on average, in the private sector men earn 10 Lats more than women per month. In the **Latvia Human Development Report 1998**, the authors highlight that this is because men tend to work in sectors with higher average wages, such as construction, while women are more often employed in low-paid jobs in education and service. The **Human Development Report** thus concludes that women who work in the same jobs as men actually only earn an average of 4 Lats less (which, it should be noted, is evidence of discrimination nonetheless). While this is one reason, it is not the only one: it must be noted that men are far more likely than women to be employers — three times more likely, in fact (see Figure 3). This, and not only the sectors in which men and women work, will affect average wages.

Furthermore, the underlying causes for the 10 Lat wage discrepancy need to be examined, rather than dismissed as a simple feature of labour market demographics. For example, we need to ask, first, *why* women are employed in lower paying sectors than men, and then, *why* they are less likely to experience career advancement on a par with their male counterparts. An answer to the first question un-

<sup>6</sup>Maarten Keune, Poverty and the Labour Market in Latvia, UNDP 1998.

doubtedly concerns attitudes and gender roles. In regard to sectors of the labour market, pervasive cultural stereotypes keep women out of jobs such as construction, while also deterring men from jobs in education, medicine, and the like. This is not to say that women want to be construction workers, but are not permitted to be: it is rather pointing out that due to culture and traditions, many women would not even consider themselves suitable for such a profession. This is further reinforced by a rejection of Soviet era gender equality and the reaffirmation of traditional gender roles discussed in Part I. For similar reasons of cultural stereotyping, men rarely become nurses, or teachers. The objective here, again, should be to break down these stereotypes so that both men and women have true choices in their professional lives, and are accepted in their chosen profession, regardless of their sex. Not only would this enhance professional satisfaction for individuals, but would also increase the gender balance in all professions. Perhaps most importantly, this would also remove one of the barriers that deters women from finding work, particularly in the better paid sectors of the labour market. Similarly, unemployed men would have better chances of finding stable work if it were more socially accepted for them to work in traditionally “female” professions.

A specific example of this type of discrimination is noted in the SME sector — an area where wages and job security are often more favourable. As noted above, women are not as active as men in this area of the formal labour market. In the **Latvia Human Development Report 1998**, the authors remark that this is probably because employers are looking for “skilled, full-time workers”, and that women are at a disadvantage here. However, given the fact that women are both better educated (see Part 2.2) and more active in the labour market than men, it is difficult to understand how exactly their skills are lacking — particularly for work typically associated with SMEs (service, accounting, etc). When employers in general were surveyed about their work forces, they stated that they are looking for employees with foreign languages, computer skills, communication skills and practical abilities backed up with theoretical knowledge. Again the question, how are women lacking, exactly? It is a mistake to simply accept at face-value the fact that

women are “unskilled”, and the underlying assumptions of this statement need to be addressed. Furthermore, if it is discovered that women truly are unskilled in comparison to men, then necessary policies and initiatives must be put into place to equalize the situation. As far as the need for “full-time” employees goes, this goes back to the reluctance of employers to hire women because of assumptions made regarding childcare responsibilities. Again, more participation of men in the domestic sphere, as well as more sensitivity on the part of employers, would help to rectify this situation.

An answer to the second question (why are women less likely to experience career advancement?) is also connected to gender roles and stereotypes. Simply put, society values the work of men more. Reasons for this are less likely to do with the objective abilities and skills of men and women, and more likely to do with presumptions about gender roles. Just as men are more readily hired for the reasons highlighted above, they are also more readily promoted. Similarly, women are far more likely to be engaged in unpaid labour as family members or relatives (see Figure 3). This underlines the value that is attached in Latvian society to the work that men and women do, regardless of what the nature of that work is: if men perform a job, it is valued more, thus higher remuneration and other rewards, such as promotion, are forthcoming. If Latvia is to maximize its opportunities for sustained economic growth, these attitudes must be addressed, challenged and changed.

Several steps have been taken to help redress some of these inequalities. The Ministry of Economy, for example, has recently developed a micro-credit programme for women entrepreneurs. Other such programmes are being implemented around the country at the regional and local levels, supported by various non-governmental organizations and local organizations. The UNDP has also organized a training programme for women in small- and medium-sized enterprise. Unfortunately it is difficult at this stage to evaluate the impact of these programmes, as they are all relatively new.

Some attempts have also been made in the past to accommodate women who are mothers but also have remunerated employment outside the home. For example, Article 172 of the Labour Code of Latvia stipulates that women with children un-

### Men and Women in and out of the Labour Force

November, 1997 (total inhabitants, thsds)

	Total	Men	Women
Economically Active	1186.1	615.2	571.0
Employed	1014.9	527.1 (85.7%)	487.1 (85.3%)
Unemployed	171.2	88.0 (14.3%)	83.2 (14.6%)

**Figure 2**

**Figure 3****Women and Men in the Labour Force According to Status and Their Primary Job** (thsd)

	Men			Women		
	1995	1996	1997	1995	1996	1997
Employees	429,0	418,7	420,8	399,9	400,1	401,2
Employers	26,5	20,1	25,7	11,2	7,8	8,3
Self-employed	37,2	45,6	53,2	20,3	30,2	43,9
Unpaid labour (family, relatives)	21,1	19,1	25,7	25,5	22,4	33,9

der the age of three should be awarded full wages while working only 30 hours per week, instead of 40. While attention to this issue within legislation is commendable, several comments are nonetheless called for: in the first place, many working mothers are unaware that such a provision even exists in Latvian legislation, which speaks to the need for more information dissemination on the part of the State. Secondly, however, it should be noted that without a corresponding culture within the labour market that supports the demands of parenthood, women will be blocked from exercising their rights in the first place: if women place such demands on their employers, they run the substantiated risk of losing their jobs, just as women of child bearing age are often not given jobs in the first place. Furthermore, because of the current lack of an efficient complaints mechanism for addressing such conflicts within the workplace, if women are unjustifiably dismissed, or if employers refuse to comply with these legislative requirements, women have little course of redress. This is a good example of how legal rights are meaningless in a practical context fraught with obstacles to the enjoyment of this equality.

Finally, however, the most elementary

problem with this article of the Labour Code is its focus on mothers at the exclusion of fathers. While law-makers should be commended for their attention to the importance of parenthood, this article again fixes the woman as the prime care-giver while simultaneously alienating men from their potential role as fathers. This not only directly impacts children in the family (in terms of the gender roles and stereotypes that they will inherit and most likely continue to espouse) but also has widespread consequences for women and men, and society as a whole: women, due to their family responsibilities, are impeded from participating more actively in the public sphere, are relegated to lower-paid jobs and have more narrow networks of information and contact, while men, pushed outside of the family, often experience depression and other health problems, particularly if they lose their jobs. As a result, neither the public nor the private sphere can reap the benefits of gender-balanced decision-making and participation. Thus, continued policy and legislative review is necessary with the view to enhancing the quality of women's employment, while simultaneously allowing for strengthened families with more equal division of responsibilities.

### 2.1.3. Home Economics:

#### The Gendered Division of Household Work and Family Responsibilities.

Many experts on both gender and human development have noted that the gendered division of labour plays a key role in the perpetuation of gender inequality. This applies not only to the way the formal labour sector is structured according to gender, but also to the gendered division of labour within the private sphere — the home and the family. If the average employed inhabitant of Latvia spends around 8 hours at his or her workplace, it is logical that another 16 hours will be spent away from it — either engaging in social or civic activities, or, more commonly, within the home. As we all know, households are not run on their own — indeed, many people devote their entire day to domestic work, with still plenty left to do at the end of the day. While cleaning, cooking, shopping and household manage-

ment are a handful on their own, childrearing and child care multiply the amount of work to be done by several times. In short, it cannot be said that housework is not, indeed, "work."

Furthermore, unpaid labour within the home is a vital aspect of a nation's economics. In 1995, the UNDP global **Human Development Report** estimated that the non-monetized, invisible contributions of women to the economy, if added up, would total around \$11 trillion. It is in fact this invisible contribution that makes the formal sector of the economy possible, as we all need a home in which to live, clean clothes to go to work in, meals to eat. Children, who make up the future labour force, need to be fed, bathed, clothed, and prepared for school as well. Quite simply, without this con-

### Time Usage Among Employed Men and Women

(Total Time Fund: 168 hrs.)

Activity	Men	Women
Physiological needs	72:06	69:50
Salaried job	51:20	46:45
Studies	1:02	1:05
Domestic work	15:44	28:03
Free time	27:05	21:48
Undistributed time	0:43	0:35

**Figure 4**

tribution, the nation would collapse.

Recent research<sup>7</sup> showed that 73% of women in Latvia are primarily responsible for all of the domestic work in the household. However, given the pressures of the current economic situation, most women — or at least the same amount of women as men — are also employed outside of the home. This means that many women are in fact employed in two full-time jobs. It is no surprise then, that when a similar study asked respondents to keep a diary of the way they spend their time, it was revealed that employed women spend almost twice as many hours on domestic work as do employed men, while these same women spend only slightly fewer hours at their remunerated job. As a result, employed men have more time for both physiological needs (eating, sleeping, bathroom time) and leisure time — over an hour extra a day, in fact.<sup>8</sup> In households with children, differences in contributions are even starker: whereas single women spend about 10 hours more per week on domestic work than do single men, women spend an average of 20 hours more than men on domestic chores if these respondents are part of a couple with children. The emerging picture is very clear: women are making a much larger, yet unrecognized, contribution to the economy than that of their male counterparts.

This situation has a variety of consequences. From the woman's perspective, her opportunities within the formal labour market are restricted while she is forced to juggle all of her responsibilities. As a result, her health — both physical and mental — may suffer, and her opportunities for both personal and professional development are narrowed. As far as the family goes, however, all members suffer — not least of all, children, who in effect are left with only one full-time care-giver. In order to rectify this situation, it is absolutely crucial that fathers and male partners become more active in the domestic sphere.

The most effective and sustainable way to affect this change is through dialogue and shifts in attitudes — within the family and within society as a whole. Legislation and policy, however, do have a

role to play here as well. As gender activists in Latvia have been pointing out since 1995, current social benefits policies that grant child care allowances solely to mothers legitimate current gender roles concerning parenthood: On the one hand this approach to policy reduces opportunities for women outside of the home (she and only she must look after young children) while on the other hand, men are further isolated from active fatherhood. Changes to these policies must be made so that parents are able to choose appropriate arrangements based on their individual circumstances. Similarly, laws pertaining to employment and the formal labour market (see, for example, Part 2.1.2 on Article 172 of the Labour Code) should not be solely focused on finding ways to allow women to juggle their career and their household — they should also be encouraging fathers to share this burden.

On a positive note, social dialogue about these issues has noticeably increased over the past few years. Leading this effort are both NGOs and academics — while a considerable amount of research on these issues has been published over the last two years (see Bibliography), this has been supported by a number of conferences and seminars that attempt to bring this research to a wider audience. For example, in November 1998 the Women Studies and Information Centre, in cooperation with the Council of Europe, held a seminar on "The Role of Fathers in the Family." The activities of several NGOs are also worth mentioning, most notably the efforts of the Union of Latvian Associations of Large Families, which has been working for several years to strengthen the role of the family in society, including increased participation of fathers. This organization has also actively lobbied the Government to implement more family-friendly policies, unfortunately, however, with limited success. Partnerships between state and local government institutions and community-based and non-governmental organizations need to be strengthened in the future in order to combine social dialogue and public policy for change.

<sup>7</sup> B. Zepa et. al. "Latvian Women in the Labour Market: Attitudes and Behaviours". 1998.

<sup>8</sup> Ieva Marga Markausa, "The Distribution of Domestic Work in Latvian Families," 1998.

## 2.2 Gender and Education

The level and quality of a nation's education is a meaningful indicator of human development: the more literate and educated a nation is, the more its population can contribute to its ongoing development, while also enjoying their rights and responsibilities as residents of that nation. In terms of gender, education should be examined from the perspective of access and structural equality — that

is, whether or not men and women have equal opportunities within the education system — but should also be looked at in terms of substance: Do schools and the materials they teach promote or hinder gender equality? Do educational programmes reinforce or challenge stereotypes and out-of-date gender roles? In this context, education can also be seen as an *opportunity* for addressing inequality.

### 2.2.1 Structural Equality in the Education System

In comparison to many other countries, the population of Latvia is very well-educated with a literacy rate of 99% in 1996. Furthermore, the percentage of inhabitants aged 7-23 years old that are enrolled in some type of educational facility has increased from 68.2% in 1993 to 74% in 1997. It also can be said that women and men in Latvia have relatively equal opportunities when it comes to formal education: In 1997, 50.5% of students enrolled in comprehensive schools were female — a percentage that has remained relatively unchanged since 1990. Additionally, there are currently no formal or societal barriers in Latvia that would place girls at a disadvantage to boys in terms of access to basic education, as it is a culturally accepted norm in Latvia that girls should receive the same amount of education as boys.

In terms of professional education, it is worth noting that in the 1996/97 school year, only 41.7% of students enrolled at vocational schools were women. However, since a secondary professional education can also be completed at specialized secondary schools, where 52.1% of those enrolled were women, one could conclude that professional education opportunities, and the enjoyment thereof, are equal for both men and women.

Moving on to higher education, however,

discrepancies between the sexes grow. The ratio of female to male university graduates in 1997 was 1.4 to 1. In other words, if anything, men seem to be worse off than women when it comes to earning a university degree. But this discrepancy needs to further analyzed. For example, how does this difference impact opportunities for men and women? In terms of higher education as a means of preparing for a career, we see that men do not seem to be discriminated against at all: Given that women are disadvantaged both in the labour market (see above) and in terms of political representation at the national level (see below), their better education does not seem to put them at any advantage. It is absolutely crucial that this major inconsistency be examined more closely: If women are more educated than men, why do they make less money and hold less prestigious jobs? The answer undoubtedly brings us back to issues of hidden discrimination, stereotypes and gender roles in the sphere of employment, both in the public and private sector, that were discussed above.

Another issue to consider, however, is the type of education men and women are receiving. Just because more women are active in higher education, this does not necessarily mean that they are better equipped for a higher *quality* of employment.<sup>9</sup> For

**Figure 5**

#### **Percentage of Women Enrolled in Various Fields of Vocational and Specialized Secondary Education**

(as of September 1997)<sup>10</sup>

<b>Field of Study</b>	<b>% of Women, Specialized Secondary Education</b>	<b>% of Women, Vocational Schools</b>
Institutions		
General Education	38	38
Humanities	79	75
Social Science	88	74
Engineering and Technology	25	15
Agriculture	35	46
Health and Health Sciences	—	95
Services	74	82

<sup>9</sup> The quality of employment refers to such aspects as working conditions, working hours and remuneration.

<sup>10</sup> Educational Institutions in Latvia. CSB. Riga, 1998.

**Figure 6****Enrolment in Selected Institutions of Higher Education by Sex**(as of September 1996)<sup>11</sup>

School	Enrolment		% of women of total enrolment
	Women	Men	
University of Latvia	10882	5539	66.3
Riga Technical University	3054	5014	37.9
Latvian University of Agriculture	2938	2994	49.5
Riga Aviation University	1363	1892	41.9
Latvian Academy of Medicine	1531	615	71.3
Riga College of Pedagogics and Education	2462	143	94.5
Police Academy of Latvia	667	1364	32.8
Pedagogical Sports Academy of Latvia	526	593	47
National Academy of Defence	74	635	10.4
Latvian Academy of Arts	422	216	66.1
Latvian Academy of Culture	446	105	80.9
Jazeps Vitols Academy of Music	253	156	61.9
Riga College of Economics	72	126	36.4

example, at the beginning of the 1996/97 school year, women made up 80.9% of the students enrolled at the Latvian Academy of Culture, 71.3% of the students at the Latvian Academy of Medicine and 94.5% of the students at the Riga Higher Education Institution for Pedagogy and Education — all sectors in which professionals traditionally receive low wages and are afforded low social status in Latvia. Conversely, women made up only 36.4% of the students enrolled at the Riga College of Economics. A similar picture is reflected in enrolment at vocational and specialized secondary schools, where gender balance does not exist in any subject area: all areas of study (with the exception of agriculture) are either predominantly male or predominantly female — and some overwhelmingly so (see Figure 5).

Unfortunately, there are no statistics that could provide information on whether these percentages reflect the fact that pre-existing cultural stereotypes are keeping women and men out of certain fields of study, or whether these are free and informed choices on the part of the students. In ei-

ther case, all professions and educational disciplines would benefit from a more equal gender balance: if both men and women were equally represented in the medical profession, then gendered aspects of medicine would be more likely to be addressed. Conversely, if more women studied economics, more females would be more likely to be employers and in management positions in the private sector.

Despite the need for more comprehensive analyses of the links between education and opportunities and how this impacts both genders differently, several recommendations can already be made. For example, teachers, education counsellors and career counsellors should be encouraged to promote the participation of young men and women in “non-traditional” fields of study for their gender. Furthermore, the education system — and particularly vocational education and higher education — needs to be reformed so that it better meets the demands of the changing labour market. In the context of such a reform, mechanisms should be established that would guarantee both young men and young women equal opportunities to access to the labour market.

### 2.2.2 Promoting Gender Equality Within Education Programmes

The education system has a potentially important role to play in finding ways to address and eliminate gender inequality in society. As one educator has noted, “The world is created by our interpretations of it. We create our views not on the basis of what is true, but on the basis of what we see and hear around us”<sup>12</sup>. For children especially, then, what they are exposed to in the school environment can significantly impact their views and behaviour.

If gender equality were to be reflected and promoted in teaching materials and classroom interactions, then a significant step would be taken towards addressing gender roles and stereotypes outside of the classroom.

Guidelines issued by the Content and Examinations Centre of the Ministry of Education in 1997 regarding teaching in the social sciences state that elementary school students should gain an un-

<sup>11</sup> Latvian Women and Men: A Statistical Portrait. CSB, Riga, 1997.

<sup>12</sup> Aija Tuna, “Gender Equality in Latvian Schools”. Much of the information in Section 2.3.2 is based on Ms. Tuna’s reflections in the cited article.

### **Thinking Gender: The Gender Studies Centre of the University of Latvia**

When asked recently by a Finnish colleague whether it was not maybe “too early” to discuss gender and feminist theory in Latvia, the director of the Gender Studies Centre at the University of Latvia answered that the academic discussion of these issues in Latvia was long overdue. For this reason, through the enthusiasm and hard work of three women, the Gender Studies Centre was established in 1998. Primarily financed by grants from the Central European University, the Centre offers courses to students (and non-students in the community) in various disciplines of gender studies and organizes events to promote the debate. Most recently, these have included a conference on Gender and Multiculturalism in Jurmala in June 1998 and an International Nordic-Baltic Conference on Gender Studies in Riga, in October 1998. The Centre has also published several books in cooperation with international partners.

While the University provides office space and classrooms, all activities of the Centre are financed from individual project funds (from organizations such as the Nordic Women’s Information Centre, the Soros Foundation and the Nordic Council of Ministers). Although on the one hand the lack of university funding carries with it a welcome freedom in terms of hiring lecturers and setting a curriculum, it also leaves the centre in a precarious balance: what happens when project funds run out?

As with any new initiative, the Centre will have to prove that its existence makes a vital contribution both to the University and to society more generally. One way it is trying to do this is by attracting a diverse audience to classes and activities. Male students have attended every class to date, and the emerging flip side of “women’s studies” — masculinities — is also being taken seriously. In the spring of 1999, a guest lecturer and international expert on male studies gave a series of lectures on this topic.

Another main objective is involving gender activists from NGOs and the wider community in both courses and conferences hosted by the Centre. As the Centre’s director points out, these activists can often teach academia a lot more than academia can teach them. In this way, a necessary intersection of theory and practice emerges: the study of gender relations informs the way activities are implemented, and reality of gender relations in society continues to remind academics that theories require practical application. The director of the Centre also feels that more information about gender issues needs to be published, more straightforward texts need to be translated into Latvian, and, most importantly, this information needs to be made accessible to everyone in society — not just to academics in dusty library reading rooms. Through this intersection, the Gender Studies Centre can make an important contribution to the way in which gender relations are understood.

Understanding of the following: “what men and women, as well as boys and girls, have in common and what is different between them; stereotypes and reality, distribution of jobs and obligations; links between gender and profession; historical traditions and the present day.” The guidelines also state that classroom activities should reflect “cooperation, mutual assistance; ensuring and demanding equal opportunities.” Similar guidelines are also currently being developed at the secondary school level.

These guidelines are a very significant and important step forward — not only will they (hopefully) influence what is being taught in classrooms, but they also illustrate political will on the part of the Government to take gender equality seriously. However, the guidelines will be meaningless without a concerted effort to implement them, including the monitoring and evaluation of this process. At the moment, there is still plenty of anecdotal evidence to suggest that the reality in classrooms still reflects gender bias and stereotype: for example, one researcher has noted that when housework

is discussed in classrooms, children are still encouraged by teachers to assist “mommy” at home. Similarly, many teaching materials are based on Latvian folklore traditions which depict traditional gender roles as discussed in Part I. Teachers enforce these roles not only with the children they teach, but with parents as well: on parents’ days and at other events, teachers often speak only to mothers, sometimes grandmothers, and rarely fathers, about a child’s development. This not only sends the message that women (exclusively) should be responsible for child rearing, but may also contribute to fathers’ sense of alienation and dislocation in modern society.

Comments from teachers themselves substantiate these attitudes. Recent research showed that many teachers believed gender issues were either an artificially created problem, or one that did not apply to the classroom. Only through training teachers to be more sensitive to these issues — and to genuinely espouse their underlying principles — will real change come about. This will undoubtedly take time, as well as more significant investments

from schools and the Government.

While the way in which subjects are presented and classrooms are conducted can help to break down traditional gender roles and stereotypes, the types of subjects that schools offer can also contribute to a greater understanding of gender issues. As alluded to in the new Ministry of Education guidelines discussed above, schoolchildren and students should also be learning about the substance of gender relations and inequality: in the home, in the workplace and elsewhere. However, there is little evidence that this is being done. While during the old Soviet regime, family issues were a mandatory part of the education curriculum, this is no longer the case (whether or not this former subject espoused gender equality is not exactly the point: if it still existed it could at least be used as a framework and forum for the discussion of gender issues today). Despite concerted on-going efforts by educators, non-governmental activists and some state institutions (notably, the State Health Promotion Centre), health education (including sex education) is still not a mandatory part of the school curriculum at all levels. Were this so, another important forum for discussing gender relations in terms of sexual relationships would be opened up. While the current primary school curriculum contains a section on civic society, gender is not discussed as an aspect of this — although this presents one potential avenue for integrating gender

issues. As it stands, there exist very few opportunities and even fewer examples of where and how to discuss gender from within the curricula of primary and secondary schools.

University-level education, however, offers more promise. Not only do university curricula offer more room for the discussion of diverse issues and topics, but instructors at this level are also more specialized. There are two ways to potentially bring gender into university classes — either by integrating issues of gender into existing subjects such as political science, sociology, philosophy, law, and others; or, by offering specific classes on gender studies (see Box 1). Studying gender in university can have a variety of effects: first, students themselves become more exposed to these issues; second, gender issues begin to be more reflected in academic publications; and third, the “trickle-down” effects of academic publications and discussions, as well as direct involvement with the communities in which academic institutions find themselves, increases an understanding about gender in society more generally. Together, these effects can contribute to the formation of a society that is more aware of how gender disparities negatively impact its development, and can thus take measures to address this. In summary then, more efforts to increase the way in which gender issues are reflected in school curricula would be beneficial.

## 2.3 Gender and Health

Health is obviously a crucial aspect of human development — the healthier a nation’s inhabitants are, the more they are able to contribute to human development processes. Indications of a nation’s health can be found in the average life span of its citizens, as well as in the incidence of other diseases and illnesses. While these indicators mark long-term progress (or deterioration), more short or medium term indications can be uncovered by looking at issues of access and information (Are there enough doctors and hospitals to treat patients? Can people afford to visit a doctor? Are people informed about preventive measures and risks?), and by ex-

amining proxy indicators such as attitudes and behaviour (Do people value their health? Do people use the information available to them, taking precautions in risk situations, or by using preventive methods in general? Are people generally positive and happy?).

In terms of a gender approach then, it is important not only to analyze differences between men and women in terms of mortality and prevalence of illness and disease, but also in terms of access to quality medical and counselling services and up-to-date, reliable information. Any discrepancies noted should then provide the basis for tailoring strategies and policies so that the benefit to both genders is maximized.

Unfortunately, as in many other areas, there is a lack of comprehensive and reliable information about all aspects of health and health care in Latvia, and particularly of data that is gender-disaggregated. However, available research and statistics point to some areas needing further attention.

In the first place, it is no secret that the average male **life span** in Latvia has reached a critical low, and lags more than ten years behind the female average. It is not surprising, then, that indicators for the second and third highest causes of **mortality** in Latvia — cancer and unnatural causes — are more prevalent in men than in women (see Figure

**Life Expectancy at Birth, Male and Female**

Year	Male	Female
1990	64.21	74.58
1992	63.25	74.83
1994	60.72	72.87
1996	63.94	75.62
1998	64.10	75.50

**Figure 7**

## Box 2

### Unemployment, Depression and Suicide: A Man's World?

Antonina, aged 52, has a secondary education and works as a cleaner in a soap factory in Riga. Her husband, Grigorijs is a mechanic, but unemployed. They have a 23 year old daughter, a 14 year old son and a 4 year old granddaughter. Antonina is the only breadwinner in the family. During the interview, she spoke of how for an entire year Grigorijs had been unsuccessfully looking for work and of how he has been deeply traumatised by the negative outcome. Over the last little while he has come home drunk after looking for work, which has caused arguments in the family.

Not long after this conversation, the interviewer went to visit Antonina again to find that a week after the initial interview, Antonina had discovered Grigorijs in the kitchen after he had hung himself.

(excerpt from A Qualitative Analysis of Poverty, UNDP/Philosophy and Sociology Institute of Latvia, 1998.)

8). It should also be noted that while the biggest killer in Latvia — cardiovascular disease — is fatal to more women in total than men, the vast majority of these deaths occur in women over the age of 75 — when, unfortunately, the average man has already died from other causes. Furthermore, mortality indicators from cardio-vascular disease for men from the ages of 45-70 outweigh mortality rates of women in the same age categories by 3 to 4 times. Thus while cardiovascular disease may not kill as many men in actual numbers, the intensity of death from cardio-vascular disease for men is 1.8 times higher than for women.

From a human development perspective then, it would be important to bring down mortality rates for everyone, but for men in particular. Various necessary interventions include not only more accessible services, but more public information and efforts to encourage people to live healthily and take preventative health measures. For example, a 1997 WHO survey on **nutrition and diet** found that while both women and men consume insufficient amounts of fruits and vegetables, women consume much less (men consumed a daily average of 200.8 g of vegetables, while women consumed only 167.4 g). This gender discrepancy could be connected to poverty, which as noted in Part 2.1, affects women differently than it does men. When surveyed, many poor women reported that in hard financial times, they had sacrificed their own nutritional intake for the sake of their family's. Because

poor health compounds the effects of poverty (less energy and frequent illness make it more difficult to work or be socially active), it is necessary to find ways of promoting health for underprivileged portions of the population as well, and particularly for women. Again, this points to the need for holistic gender policies that acknowledge links between areas such as poverty and health. It is also possible, however, that poor nutrition in women in Latvia may be connected to eating disorders, such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia, which are also “gendered” illnesses. There has been virtually no sociological research on these illnesses in Latvia, despite the fact that they are undoubtedly prevalent.

Another aspect of healthy lifestyles that is gendered is **physical activity** and weight problems. Women tend to be more often overweight than men and are more often clinically obese as well (9.6% of men versus 18.5% of women). Furthermore, while physical activity is not sufficient within any age or sex group of the population, women engage in physical activity less often than men. Given high mortality rates in women from cardio-vascular disease, programmes should be developed to encourage women (especially older women) to live more healthily in this respect.

Alcoholism rates, however, are higher amongst the male population, and particularly amongst those living in impoverished conditions. Not only does this take a severe physical toll on the body (as substantiated in male mortality rates), but

Figure 8

### Death Rates by Main Causes of Death in 1997, Male and Female

Cause of Death	Deaths per 100,000 inhabitants	
	Males	Females
Cardiovascular disease	660.3	763.2
Cancers	268.2	227.3
Unnatural Causes	230.0	80.6

**Percentage of First-time Patients Treated in Hospitals For Alcoholism that are Female<sup>13</sup>**

Year	Percentage of Patients that are Female
1993	12.6
1994	16.7
1995	16.6
1996	22.0
1997	22.7

**Figure 9**

it can also have profound effects on another critical area of health care: **mental and psychological health**. One illustration of this can be found in male suicide rates, which are very high (28.5 per 100 000 inhabitants, in comparison to 7.4 for women). It is interesting to note, though, that when asked to rate their emotional well-being, women are far more critical than men. For example, in 1997 twice as many women as men reported to being “often” or “very often” depressed<sup>14</sup>. Gender roles and stereotypes

help explain this paradox. Men in Latvia often succumb to the stereotype that men must be strong, invincible and capable of solving their own problems, and those of the people closest to them. For example, in a survey commissioned by UNFPA and Ministry of Welfare in 1997, 51% of men who had been the victims of violence had sought no help at all — not even from friends, relatives or a doctor. When asked in what instances they would seek help from a psychologist or psychotherapist, only 0.1% said they would if they were contemplating suicide. It is also interesting to note that in all situations, women were more ready to seek professional help, except for the purpose of consultation (acquiring new information), where more men stated they would use professional services. This again highlights men’s resistance to admitting that they have any problems for which they might need help in resolving. Unfortunately, this situation therefore finds its logical resolution in high rates of male alcoholism and suicide. It is therefore crucial that means are explored for encouraging men to take responsibility for their mental health and to seek help when necessary. Both national health strategies as well as community-based and NGO activities could play an important role here.

### 2.3.2 Reproductive and Sexual Health

The area of reproductive and sexual health has often been considered by some policy makers to be a rather narrow issue, mainly of concern to women of reproductive age (usually 15-45). For this reason, parliamentarians and policy makers may assume it is not important, or certainly not a policy priority. This assumption needs to be challenged for two reasons: First, if policy makers do not pay sufficient attention to this issue because it only affects “women of reproductive age”, it should be quickly recalled that in Latvia, for example, this “narrow interest group” in fact represents around 30% of the population. To ignore reproductive health concerns for this reason thus ignores demographic logic as well. The second reason to challenge this assumption is simply because reproductive and sexual health are not only about women of reproductive age, or even women. They are equally, although in several different ways, about men. In Latvia, reproductive and sexual health are particularly significant, given the demographic and health crises that persist.

by women in Latvia as a form of birth control. Under these circumstances, incidence of abortion reached astounding numbers — in 1993 alone, 57.3 abortions were performed for every 1000 women aged 15 to 44 years of age. Furthermore, the total fertility rate (the average number of children born to a woman of reproductive age) in 1996 was 1.16 — which highlights a characteristic trend of the nineties where the number of abortions outnumber live births. Such high figures are significant for several reasons: first, abortion has a serious impact on the health of women. Many health professionals have pointed to a correlation between high abortion rates and high rates of infertility, which also then points to the connection between reproductive health and demographic indicators, i.e. low birth rates. For this reason high rates of abortion should be of concern to society more generally. Furthermore, not only do abortions take their toll on women’s bodies, but the psychological impacts are also significant: in a 1997 survey on reproductive behaviour and attitudes in Latvia, many women reported feeling depressed and anxious after having an abortion<sup>15</sup>. This stress is also augmented by the fact that most women bear this burden alone: this same survey revealed that only 36% of women consulted their partner in the case of their first (in some cases, only) abortion. These

For both of these reasons, reproductive and sexual health are indisputably gendered, and need to be approached from a gender perspective. One issue to examine is the high rate of **abortion** in Latvia. As with many other countries that were part of the former Soviet Union, abortion was often used

<sup>13</sup> Alcohol Consumption, Alcoholism, Alcohol-induced Psychosis, Drug Addiction and Smoking: Incidence and Consequences, Latvia 1997. Centre for Addictions. Riga, 1998.

<sup>14</sup> Social Processes in Latvia, p. 78. CSB, 1998.

<sup>15</sup> “On the Reproductive Health of the Population”, Baltic Data House, 1997.

mental and physical health risks for women logically impact other areas as well: a woman's relationship to her husband and family, her performance at work, her psychological comfort and self-esteem.

This is not to say that a woman's right to an abortion should be restricted — the right to choice in the case of unwanted pregnancy is a fundamental aspect of reproductive rights for women. However, the major negative impact that abortions, and particularly repeated abortions, can have highlights the need to address this problem, including looking at its causes and possible solutions. The high level of abortions in Latvia can be largely attributed to the legacy of the Soviet era which did not provide women with information or access to quality reproductive health services that would allow women to make informed decisions regarding contraception, pregnancy, and other reproductive health matters. It must also be highlighted that this situation was also largely symptomatic of a general policy that did not acknowledge any special needs or rights of women to contraceptive choice. Without any other options presented to them, women resorted to abortion as their only option.

It is particularly encouraging to see that through the hard work and conscientious efforts of non-governmental organizations in Latvia, the amount and quality of information on reproductive health issues has risen considerably, while the incidence of abortion (in absolute numbers) has been in decline over the past few years. This is an extremely positive trend, and a worthy testament to the impact that access to quality information and attention to the reproductive health needs of women can have. Similar positive trends are noted in the prevalence of **hormonal contraception** — alongside an increase in information and access to quality services, the number of women using safe and modern contraceptive methods has significantly increased.

As noted though, these changes have come about largely through the efforts of non-governmental organizations and dedicated professionals. Response from the government, on the other hand, remains inadequate. Despite a major project in

1996/97 funded by UNFPA to collect and analyze the necessary information for the development of a **national strategy** on reproductive health in Latvia, this strategy has yet to be developed (although the Ministry of Welfare has recently taken steps to initiate this process). Even more significant, however, is the Parliament's continued lack of attention to the development of a **law on reproductive health** that would regulate abortion and surgical methods of contraception (currently there are no official laws on these subjects). While many activists have spent considerable time developing and commenting on draft laws over the past three years, in the fall of 1998 the Parliament stated that it would no longer discuss any versions of such a law, deeming it unnecessary. However, abortion — and its potential effects — is *not* just a women's issue, but rather affects *all* of society in the ways described above. It is therefore highly recommended that this law be taken up again in the Saeima as soon as possible.

While positive trends regarding abortion and modern contraception have been noted over the past few years, the same can not be said about the incidence of **sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)** in Latvia. Rates of HIV infection have significantly increased over the past few years, particularly in parts of the population that have identified themselves as intravenous drug users and men who have sex with men, while incidence of syphilis in particular has reached alarming rates. One explanation for this is the poor reproductive health of men. While the majority of women reports visiting a doctor for regular check-ups, very few men report similar behaviour. This is a very significant fact in terms of gender: because reproductive health is marginalized as a woman's issue, men either do not have the same access to information and services, or are discouraged from making use of these due to prevailing societal stereotypes. While it is socially accepted and in fact expected that a woman would visit her gynaecologist regularly, there is no public encouragement for men to go for preventive check-ups. This is also related to stereotypes of "macho" and "powerful" men, who should have no reason to see a doc-

**Figure 10**

Year	<b>Abortions and Contraceptive Prevalence in Latvia</b>			
	Abortions		Contraceptive prevalence (hormonal)	
	total	per 1000 women aged 15-44	total	per 1000 women aged 15-44
1993	37 273	57.3	17 664	32.3
1994	32 535	49.8	28 150	52.3
1995	32 324	48.9	32 775	61.9
1996	29 653	46.1	45 573	86.6
1997	27 206	41.6	49 227	94.1

tor. **Condom use**, as the most effective way to protect against STDs, is another helpful indicator: The UNFPA/Ministry of Welfare survey revealed that less than one third of men had used condoms for the purpose of protecting against HIV or other STDs. Moreover, when those people who use condoms were asked why they do so, it was interesting to note that 17.5% of men stated that their female partners asked them to, while only 5% of women reported the same request from male partners. In other words, women are demanding condom use three times as often as men. This again highlights men's lack of attention to their own health, and to that of their partners. As a result, the health of both genders suffers.

Over the last few years, increasing information is being made available to men specifically in the form of pamphlets and brochures. However, it needs to be pointed out that this information is still not reaching the audiences of men for whom it is intended. More focus needs to be placed on how to disseminate such information so that men do in fact take notice of it. At the same time, other ways of encouraging men to take responsibility for their own sexual health need to be investigated. The lack of a national strategy on reproductive health which could specifically address this point does not help the situation. Furthermore, because health education has still not been made a part of the mandatory school curriculum, a vital opportunity for convincing young men of the need to pay attention to their reproductive health is lost. Policy makers need to address these issues, with special attention paid to male involvement, most urgently.

Attention also needs to be focused on challenging stereotypical gender roles and relations, and the above-mentioned UNFPA/Ministry of Welfare survey also provides valuable insight into the way in which attitudes about gender can have a negative impact on reproductive and sexual health. For example, while around half of the men surveyed either agreed or were unsure whether a woman should be a virgin upon entering marriage, more than 2/3 of women strongly disagreed with this statement. It was also interesting to note that when asked to rate their first experience of sexual intercourse, almost 3/4 of all male respondents claimed this was "fantastic and unforgettable" or "pleasant". Only 40% of women on the other hand felt this way — an additional 40% claimed it was "nothing special," while almost 15% found it unpleasant or very unpleasant (in contrast to less than 2% of men). While the first example highlights cultural **stereotypes regarding male and female sexuality**, the second example shows how these stereotypes impact people's actual experiences: it is culturally accepted for men to be libido-driven while women are meant to be chaste and passive. The way people behave in this most intimate sphere of life cannot be dissociated

from behaviour in society more generally. It is also important to remember that women are at increased vulnerability in the context of intimate relations, as law and protection institutions are hesitant to intrude upon this "private" domain in the case of partner assault, rape and other forms of violence in intimate relations. This makes ensuring gender equality within intimate relations even more crucial.

As stated in the ICPD<sup>16</sup> Programme for Action, which Latvia also signed up to in Cairo in 1994, reproductive and sexual rights include the promotion of "responsible sexuality that permits relations of equity and mutual respect between the genders." The State therefore also has an obligation to encourage this through activities such as sexual education and services for young people, a variety of community-based activities and information campaigns, and the promotion of an open discussion about gender roles and sexual abuse. It is vital that issues of sexuality, negotiation of contraception and condom use and relationships are included as part of campaigns to improve reproductive and sexual health: while "health" can be protected through various objective measures, we can not forget that these measures — for example, condom use, — are embedded in social contexts bound by cultural stereotypes and traditions regarding gender. It is no use, therefore, to teach people how condoms can protect against STDs without helping young people (and adults) to negotiate the sensitive situations that arise when putting this knowledge into practice. Specifically designed programmes and activities that address not only sexual health, but its social and gendered context, can help young people to negotiate sexual situations already early in their relationships, so that healthy and satisfying sexual relations can become an intrinsic part of healthy and happy lives for both genders.

In this respect, NGOs are again leading the way in Latvia. Youth organizations in particular have done an outstanding job of promoting discussions about sexuality amongst peer groups in schools, summer camps, telephone hotlines and other venues. Increased understanding and tolerance of homosexuality is also being promoted by the Homosexuality Information Centre, an NGO active in addressing the rights of gay people in Latvia. Another NGO project worthy of note was a joint effort undertaken by the Women's Rights Institute and Latvia's Association for Family Planning and Sexual Health during 1998, which sponsored a series of seminars for women addressing issues of sexuality.

If gender roles and sexuality should be one important consideration for reproductive health policies, interventions and activities, another important consideration is **poverty**. A qualitative examination of poverty from the perspective of poor people has shown that access to prenatal care for poor

<sup>16</sup> International Conference on Population and Development.

women is limited, particularly for women who live in rural regions. For example, in order to encourage healthy pregnancies, the state has doubled the birth allowance for those mothers who take advantage of prenatal care services. For women in rural regions, however, this often means travelling long distances by inadequate rural transport in order to reach the regional capital where they can receive such care. This journey is costly in terms of money, energy and time. Therefore those expectant mothers who could most benefit from increased birth allowances are not able to take advantage of them. Similarly, “baby-friendly” antenatal services, which have recently been

introduced in a number of hospitals offer families a wide range of options to guarantee a safe, family-oriented, pleasant birthing experience. While this is a very positive development that strengthens family ties and removes the sense of “female shame” that has surrounded childbirth in the past, a large majority of women unfortunately can not afford to take advantage of these services. This situation is another consequence of failing to address gendered dimensions of poverty in Latvia, which again points to the need to address gender issues cross-sectorally and in a holistic manner. Otherwise, important connections remain hidden from view.

## 2.4 Gender-Based Violence

Gender-based violence is violence that is committed against one gender in disproportionate amounts or which is committed against a person specifically because of reasons to do with their gender. Gender-based violence takes many forms, which include: rape, incest, domestic assault, rape in marriage, acquaintance rape, forced prostitution and trafficking, threats of violence, intimidation, harassment, structural violence within the medical or legal system, and others. While males are also the survivors of gender-based violence, it is important to recognize that in all societies, survivors are disproportionately female, while perpetrators are disproportionately male. It is crucial that incidence of violence is therefore examined from a gender perspective.

All gender-based violence poses a serious threat to sustainable human development and the development of a stable and just democratic society. From a health perspective, violence can have debilitating effects on survivors, ranging from stress and fear, to serious injury, to death. In turn, this violence can have very practical consequences in terms of economic productivity and growth: survivors miss work and are hindered from realizing their potential as productive members of society. Similarly, the distress, psychological impact and physical injury endured by survivors of violence can impede them from participating in political, civic and social life. Violence, and particularly violence within the home, is also cyclical, passed from generation to generation, which means that children learn from behaviour they observe in their parents. For all of these reasons, gender-based violence needs to be urgently addressed and combated, not least to guarantee the safety and survival of survivors and potential victims, but also for the benefit of society as whole.

From the outset it is crucial to point out that **there are no comprehensive statistics, research or data** on gender-based violence in Latvia. While some attempts have been made to collect this data, none have been comprehensive and none have yielded entirely reliable results. For example, even a brief glance at the UNFPA/MoW data in Table 2.4 suggests a substantial amount of underreporting: if

reliable data from countries around the world have highlighted that anywhere from one in four to one in two women has been the victim of some form of violence against women, then surely incidence in Latvia should emulate these findings. Small scale surveys and informal research undertaken by NGOs in Latvia have in fact yielded results more in line with global statistics, although given the lack of necessary funding, such research has been limited in terms of methodology. Not only does the absence of reliable data impede a discussion of trends and dynamics of this violence, but an approach to solutions based on comprehensive situational analyses is also impeded. For these reasons, one of the most pressing recommendations in this area is the implementation of a comprehensive and in-depth survey on these issues, to be commissioned by the Government.

Despite the lack of reliable data, several factors relating to gender-based violence in Latvia should nonetheless be commented on. First of all, as the underreporting in both official statistics and other surveys suggests, there is an **insufficient understanding** in society of what exactly violence is and thus a failure to always recognize it and name it. At the same time there is also an unwillingness to discuss violence by both victims and society as a whole. This shroud of silence impedes both more meaningful dialogue in society that could raise awareness of the causes and effects of violence, while also impeding concrete action against perpetrators and in support of victims. In Latvia, this silence is further complicated by practical matters: for example, due to a lack of shelters or alternative housing arrangements for victims of domestic violence, these individuals are often forced to remain living with their abuser. While counselling and crisis centres are helpful, it is vital that a network of shelters also be developed. The lack of understanding of gender-based violence in society also leads to victim-blaming and revictimization. For example, a recent study of women in prisons for charges of murder showed that many had murdered their partners after withstanding physical and sexual violence for many years.

**Figure 11****Victims of Violence in Latvia**<sup>17</sup>

Percentage of Respondents Who Say They Have Been the Victim of:	Men	Women
Physical violence	24.1%	9.4%
Psychological violence	15.2%	18.7%
Sexual violence	0.4%	6.6%

The failure of the legal system and police force to protect women from violence can thus lead to an escalation of consequences for all parties involved. Currently, Latvian legislation does not recognize domestic violence as a special crime under the Criminal Code, and it is thus treated (in the rare cases where charges are laid at all) as common assault. The on-going psychological abuse suffered by many women is not recognized within the legal system.

Despite this troubling scenario, there have been several positive developments over the last few years to address the problem of gender-based violence. These include efforts by non-governmental organizations to provide sensitivity training to law enforcement officers on issues of domestic violence, and the establishment of some counselling services for survivors. For example, the Crisis Centre “Skalbes” has recently received funding from the Riga City Council (amongst other donors) to provide services to women survivors of violence in the Riga area (Skalbes provides crisis intervention for survivors of other types of trauma as well). In the district of Liepaja, the municipal government has do-

nated the premises of an old school house, that has been transformed by a local women’s NGO into a half-way house for women who have left their homes because of conflict and violence. Gender-based violence is also a topic that is integrated into peer education schemes of youth health groups around the country.

Despite these efforts, there are still many activities that need to be undertaken in order to comprehensively address issues of gender-based violence. These include both additional research and legislative reform, as suggested above, as well as the provision of more accessible and quality services for survivors. In order to coordinate these efforts and avoid ad-hoc approaches to such a complex problem, it is strongly recommended that the results of a comprehensive survey be used by the Government to develop a comprehensive strategy for addressing gender-based violence in Latvia in the context a National Plan of Action of Gender Equality. Furthermore, as an expression of its political will to combat violence, the Government should adopt a statement of commitment to non-violence.

## 2.5 Prostitution and Trafficking in Women

Prostitution and trafficking in women are issues that are increasingly attracting attention in Latvian society. It is difficult, however, to say if these activities themselves are increasing, and to what extent, as there are no reliable data on the extent of these phenomena. However, while prostitution has always existed, it can certainly be said that commercial sex work activities have become far more visible — and thus more readily available — over the last eight years.

Due to the massive economic changes brought about by the transition to a market-oriented economy, it is also a reasonable assumption that many women have turned to prostitution since the regaining of Latvia’s independence (a) out of economic desperation to make ends meet; and (b) because of the growing client demand from expanding tourist and foreign business industries. The growth in organized crime is also undoubtedly a factor in the growth of prostitution and trafficking.

It is important to bear in mind that attitudes towards prostitutes are often connected to gender stereotypes that need to be addressed before effective interventions can be developed or implemented. These stereotypes include notions of “sexually loose women” with overactive libidos that in effect “lure” men away from their wives and families. Not only does this stereotype ignore the fact that *clients* of prostitutes are those who perpetuate commercial sex work, but it also ignores the socio-economic desperation that provides the motivation for many prostitutes. Furthermore, this simple stereotype also ignores the fact that men are also engaged willingly and unwillingly in commercial sex work (although in Latvia, at least, clients are virtually always men).

When discussing prostitution and other forms of commercial sex work, however, it is also important to recognize that not all women or men involved have been forced into their current situa-

<sup>17</sup> Reproductive Health of the Population of Latvia. UNFPA/Ministry of Welfare, 1997.

### Male Prostitution: An Invisible Problem

In November 1998, the Cabinet of Ministers accepted new regulations on prostitution. Although these regulations stipulate simply that a “prostitute” is an “individual who engages in prostitution”, the grammar throughout the text in every instance refers to prostitutes as female<sup>18</sup>. While this is merely the language of the text — not its substance — language is powerful. Although these regulations are meant to be applied to male prostitutes as well, they are a prime illustration of the way the sexual exploitation of men in Latvia is made invisible.

Latvia’s Association for Safe Sex recently carried out two different surveys in Latvia: one on the attitudes, knowledge and behaviour of men who have sex with men, and another on commercial sex workers. The intersection of these two surveys revealed that men are indeed involved in commercial sex work, providing sexual services to other men for either money or in-kind payments. Of those surveyed, 77% of men who have sex with men under the age of 18 stated that they had either paid for sex or received payment for sex at least once. Of all the men surveyed, 15% stated that such incidents had occurred more than once. While there is a serious lack of research on this subject, many men who have received payment for sex have admitted to coercion and other forms of violence connected to these transactions. Young men are especially vulnerable — many come from rural areas to the city, and, without a place to stay, spend the night at hang-outs where sex is demanded in lieu of rent.

Because of the invisibility of male prostitution, those involved are especially at risk for violence and abuse. Attitudes towards prostitution that stereotype prostitutes as “sexually loose”, coupled with prevailing homophobic attitudes in society, often doubly deny these men from protection under the law in the case of abuse. It is important that current debates on prostitution in Latvia do not ignore the way in which these phenomena turn some men into invisible victims.

tion against their will: some commercial sex workers have made a choice, based on their circumstances and other considerations, to earn a living in this manner. It is important therefore not to judge or condemn the choices these individuals make, but rather to ensure that they are granted the same basic rights as others in society: access to health care, information and a safe environment. To this end, there are several organizations currently working with prostitutes in Latvia. One of these is Latvia’s Association for Safe Sex, which has opened a 24-hour consultation service for prostitutes, and offers both psychological and medical services. This organization has conducted surveys amongst the sex worker population and is also involved in providing information and medical advice to men who have sex with men. Another organization is Latvia’s Centre for Gender Problems, which has also conducted various surveys of prostitutes and implemented street work projects to disseminate information on health and other matters. The State Health Promotion Centre is also actively addressing the issue.

Perhaps the most significant step the State has taken in addressing this problem was the adoption of the Cabinet of Ministers’ Regulations on Prostitution in November, 1998. While this is a positive move in terms of addressing the problem rather than simply criminalizing it and then brushing it under the carpet, various grass-roots experts who work

with prostitutes have expressed concern over the content of these new regulations, the main criticisms being that these do not at all address the issue of client responsibility. For example, if more attention were paid to clients who use the services of underage prostitutes by making an effort to apprehend them and charge them with statutory rape, perhaps clients would be more discriminate of the types of services they purchase. Again, it is important to recognize prostitution as a client-provider relationship.

Another rising problem across Eastern Europe, including Latvia, is **trafficking in women**, whereby women are lured, often under false pretences, into the sex industry. Young girls are tricked by false advertisements regarding work or study abroad, and are often left with no means of escape if their passports, for example, are confiscated by those running the trafficking rings. Unfortunately, the largest problem in addressing this issue in Latvia is a total lack of information. It is therefore necessary that the Government develop some sort of action plan, starting with data collection and including concrete preventive interventions, with an aim to halting this form of sexual exploitation. At the NGO level, however, some steps are already being taken. In May 1999, for example, the Latvian Council of Youth Health Centres hosted a seminar for peer counsellors on how to equip young women with the tools to be able to spot potential trouble situations.

<sup>18</sup> According to Latvian grammar, every noun must have a gender. With most professions or occupations, a noun can take either a masculine or feminine ending, depending on the concrete person referred to. In ambiguous cases, most often the ending is left in the masculine.