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REDUCING NON-CONSENSUAL BRIDE KIDNAPPING IN KYRGYZSTAN

Russell Kleinbach

Corresponding Author: Philadelphia University, USA. Email: kleinbachr@philau.edu

Gazbubu Babaiarova

Kyz Korgon Institute, Kyrgyzstan. Email: babayarovag@gmail.com

Abstract

Bride kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan is the act of abducting a woman to marry her and includes actions, ranging from consensual eloping to forceful kidnapping and rape. This paper reviews the current context and research on bride kidnapping and describes a program that shows promise in preventing bride kidnapping. This program was tested in two studies, one in small villages (2008-2009), and one in Karakol City (2011-2012). These studies provide evidence that the program can help reduce the rate of bride kidnapping from approximately 1/2 to approximately 1/4 of marriages. Analysis of the practice and the economic, political and cultural changes in Kyrgyzstan in the last century shows how this program can be effective by shifting the focus from law and punishment to a discourse framed by tradition, family, honor and shame, and using the assumption from Gandhi's Satyagraha that truth is force.

Keywords: Kyrgyzstan, Bride Kidnapping, Ala Kachuu, Marriage, Satyagraha

1. Background (Historic, Economic and Cultural Context of Bride Kidnapping)

“Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living.” (Marx, 1963, p.15)

Bride kidnapping (*kız ala kachuu*) in Kyrgyzstan (a former Soviet Republic) is the act of abducting a woman to marry her and includes a variety of actions, ranging from consensual eloping to forceful kidnapping and rape. Previous research has described the practice in general (Amsler and Kleinbach, 1999; Open Society Institute, 2010), measured the frequency (Kleinbach, 2003), identified it as an affirmation of Kyrgyz male ethnic identity (Handrahan, 2004), documented its increase over the last half century (Kleinbach *et al.* 2005), shown that it was uncommon prior to the Soviet period and thus not an “old tradition” (Kleinbach and Salimjanova, 2007) and discussed it as part of the discourse on gender and social change (Borboieva, 2012). Non-consensual bride kidnapping is popularly accepted as a traditional practice even though it violates the fundamental human rights (UN General Assembly 1948; 1993) of approximately 1/3 of Kyrgyz women (Kleinbach, 2003). It is a violation of Kyrgyz civil law According to Articles 154 and 155 of the Criminal Code of the Kyrgyz Republic, (criminal liability for "kidnapping a woman to marry against her will" in the form of deprivation of liberty is a term of five to seven years. For forcing a girl into marriage who has not attained the age of 17,

the "groom" could go to prison for a term of 7 to 10 years). It is also a violation of Islamic law and Kyrgyz traditional law of adat (Kleinbach and Salimjanova, 2007).

Kidnapping is common and can be deadly. Recently in Karakol City there were at least 4 suicides by girls within weeks/months of being kidnapped (3 in 2010-2012 and 1 in 2006). In two other cases where girls died, one in Balykchy and one in Naryn, the girls (according to their parents) may have been killed and not committed suicide. In 2010, there was a case where a girl was rescued from the kidnapping family only to return and marry the kidnapper after her family was threatened with physical harm. Sometimes the shame/violence is directed inward as the recent case where a young man committed suicide after kidnapping three girls, all of whom refused to stay. Usually it is the girl who dies as in this case:

In August 2007 in one of the villages of Bazar-Korgon district of Jalalabat oblast, a 17 year old girl, bride kidnapping victim committed suicide. When she was kidnapped and taken to the boy's home she got out of the kidnapper's place saying that she was not a virgin. Afterwards everyone in the village spread the rumors about her not being a virgin. At her home she did not have peace. Her grandmother (her mom had passed away) cursed and yelled at her day and night saying bad things. Her relatives said that she shamed her whole family and now nobody else would marry her and she needed to go back to the kidnapper. After having these hardships and pressure by her own family the kidnapping victim went to the barn of their neighbor and hung herself with the note in her pocket: "tell my dad I am still a virgin; I hope I am leaving for a peaceful place now." Villagers blamed her saying that she was truly not a virgin or psychologically ill, otherwise she wouldn't commit a suicide. [Account given to one of the authors]

International agencies such as Human Rights Watch (2006), the Committee on the Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (UN General Assembly 1981), and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) have linked non-consensual bride kidnapping with domestic violence and human trafficking, and have urged NGOs and Kyrgyz law enforcement officials to address the problem.

"We appreciate cooperation with the Kyrgyz authorities in human trafficking. Kyrgyzstan has joined a number of agreements in this dimension. At the earliest possible time, particular attention is to be paid not only to the supplier-states, but also countries in which slave-trade is widely spread. We are going to fight not only sex enslavement, but also kidnapping of women, as a way of marriage proposal, and child panhandling. We believe it is crucial to develop relationships with the non-profit sector and law enforcement bodies to raise chances for effective outcomes," the OSCE message reads. (Muller, 2007)

Lilly Salimjanova, as part of a Forum of Women's NGOs of Kyrgyzstan (2008), using data from the 2008 part of this study, testified in Geneva at the fall, 2008 meeting of the Committee on the Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women. The recommendations of the Committee on the Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women forty-second session (November, 2008) on Kyrgyzstan, included the following:

21. The Committee remains seriously concerned at the continuing existence of bride abduction despite its prohibition in the law and notes that this matter was, also highlighted in its previous concluding observations. It is also concerned that this practice results in forced marriages, in contradiction to article 16 of the Convention. . .
22. The Committee recommends immediate action by the State party to ensure the full respect of the laws penalizing bride abduction, forced marriage, and polygamy. In particular, the Committee urges the State party to take appropriate measures in order to have all cases involving these phenomena recorded, investigated, and prosecuted, even in the absence of a formal complaint. The Committee also recommends that the State party

take urgent and effective measures, including the training of the judiciary and law enforcement officials and constant and large public awareness-raising campaigns, to eliminate these practices. The role of the media must be of crucial importance in this respect. The State party is also invited to conduct research on the causes for the existence and reinforcement of these phenomena, in order to better understand what would be the most adequate measures for their eradication. [Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2008]

In 2011 the Kyrgyz ombudsman's website announced a month-long campaign against kidnapping women to force them into marriage.

The campaign, part of a month-long human rights promotion, is timed to end on Human Rights Day, December 10. "Bridal kidnapping is one of the worst violations of human rights, an infringement of a girl's honour and dignity," Ombudsman Tursunbek Akun wrote. "(My office's) purpose is to dispel the myth that bridal kidnapping is a national custom." Law enforcement agencies, NGOs, the ombudsman's office and the Education Ministry will co-operate to fight the problem, he said, adding that Kyrgyz men kidnap 15,000 to 16,000 brides yearly. Kidnapping is a crime under Kyrgyz law. [Osmonaliyev, 2011; see also Washington Times, 2011]

In January 2013, the president of Kyrgyzstan approved legislation toughening the penalty for bride-kidnapping. Sentences for forcing women into marriage against their will could now range up to 10 years (UN Women, 2013).

Prior to the Soviet era, Kyrgyzstan was primarily a nomadic, pastoral economy with a decentralized, patriarchal, patrilocal and patrilineal society with exogamous marriage. By tradition and consistent with Islamic law, marriages were arranged between families for young men and girls (often at a very young age) but with their consent, at least formally. Husbands were usually considerably older than their brides. Dowry and bride-price were exchanged and marriages often involved expensive celebrations and exchange of gifts to extended members of the families. There was little chance for young men and girls to become romantically interested before marriages were arranged because of the youthful age and protective isolation of girls. In this context girls were relatively powerless and bride kidnapping (stealing) was rare and severely punished, i.e., girls were labor/property to be exchanged between parents or men (Kleinbach and Salimjanova, 2007).

According to one Kyrgyz folkloric tradition a boy and girl in love might elope, i.e., he would take the girl (property which was not his) and run away, "kyz ala kachuu." According to Manaschi Talantaaly Bakchiev:

If to speak about the history of ala-kachuu, it has a beautiful legend. In Boom [Boh-om] gorge on the way to the Issyk-Kul Lake there is a place called 'Kiz-Kuioo' (Girl-Husband). The story goes back to the 17th or 18th century. According to it, the parents of a young couple were against their marriage, but the young people loved each other so much that they threw themselves down into the gorge in protest and died. Here we come to the idea of ala-kachuu that is: a man kidnaps a woman because they love each other and they want to get married, but their parents are against their marriage. So, the story serves as a proof to the thesis that originally the idea of ala-kachuu involved the concept of consent. [Bakchiev, 2004; for a version of this story with a happy ending, see UNFPA, 2009]

Prior to the Soviet era, ala-kachuu was extremely rare and usually resulted in punishment, possibly death and/or serious conflicts between families/clans. There were prescribed punishments for theft of women as well as other forms of property (Kleinbach and Salimjanova, 2007).

Soviet economic and social policies made revolutionary changes to the mode of production and to the patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal social structures and traditions,

including marriage. The Soviets collectivized productive wealth, educated both boys and girls through college or university, delayed marriage, and greatly restricted arranged marriage, dowry and bride-price. These policies directly undercut the economic base of the patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal social structures and traditions, and significantly empowered girls/young women in choosing when and with whom they would marry and where they would live.

In this context, during the Soviet period, the previously rare, romantic and consensual "kyz-ala-kachuu" emerged as an alternative to patriarchal arranged marriage. It was gradually transformed and defined as a "tradition" (Kleinbach and Salimjanova, 2007). Yanti Martina Holzchen provides a comprehensive analysis of Hobsbawm's (1983) theory of "invented tradition" as applied to the transformation of kidnapping from crime to "tradition" (Holzchen, 2010). She concludes bride kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan is not really an "invented tradition" as defined by Hobsbawm, but rather a constantly re-invented tradition. Her analysis places the practice in the context of the reemergence of patriarchal practices and values by a portion of the population and the conflicts raised by the diverse ideological currents of Soviet ideology, nationalism, globalization and traditionalism, and a situation of not uniformly defined values and morals.

Bride kidnapping thus changed from a rare consensual elopement to a primarily non-consensual arranged marriage supported by a new tradition or ideology, in this case a false explanation or paradigm developed to explain and legitimate unequal relations, and creating a false consciousness that effects behavior (Marx and Engels, 1970). This new tradition/ideology is not a conscious deception but a change in one aspect of "tradition," i.e., their larger inclusive world view (Mannheim, 1936). It can be argued that for many or most Kyrgyz people, the paradigm or worldview of "tradition" is still the fundamental paradigm of reality and informative of much social discourse and interaction. It can more easily change as oral tradition evolves more readily than does written tradition, this helps explain how the folkloric story of consensual kidnapping could have evolved in popular culture into the belief that non-consensual kidnapping is a tradition (Kleinbach and Salimjanova, 2007).

These transformations in the tradition paradigm served the latent function of countering the Soviet gender-equality policies and became an effective force in maintaining the patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal marriage practices. The inventing of non-consensual bride kidnapping as a tradition also serves the manifest function of legitimating the practice by defining it as a "Kyrgyz Tradition". In contemporary Kyrgyzstan this false conscious defense of bride kidnapping is widespread even among government officials, academics and popular media as seen in the recent popular film, "Boz Salkyn," and the statement to this effect by its creator Earnest Abdyjaparov to Vice Media Group (Vice News, 2011).

Maintaining patriarchy in marriage and family was made easier by the Soviets' failure to revolutionize, i.e., mechanize reproductive work in the home. In developing countries, it is with the mechanization of reproductive labor in the home that women are able to liberate themselves even when still primarily responsible for reproductive work in the home (Benston, 1969). This ongoing contradiction between the modern technologies and structures of production vs. the pre-modern reproduction was never resolved in Kyrgyzstan during the Soviet period, and was made worse with the collapse of communism and the reversion of much of non-urban life to a political economy and culture more reminiscent of a pre-Soviet, pre-industrial pastoral economy in need of women who will marry, maintain a pre-mechanized house and, among other tasks, milk cows.

None-the-less the Soviet gender equality transformation of productive employment, education, and urban living space to apartment blocks (much of the urban environment) provided, and significantly still provides, the material and structural foundation for moving beyond patriarchy and patrilocality. Thus contemporary Kyrgyzstan is rife with contradictions (urban vs. rural, mechanized vs. hand production, modern beliefs in gender equality, civil laws and practices vs. patriarchal beliefs, Islamic laws and Kyrgyz traditions). These contradictions provide fertile ground for both the forces struggling to reestablish pre-Soviet Kyrgyz traditional patriarchal marriage and family and for the forces struggling to maintain and complete gender equality in not only production and education also in the full sense of gender equality in marriage and family represented in Kyrgyz law, UN conventions the best of most modern cultures.

In the midst of this struggle, it is important to note that while patriarchal attitudes are common in the society, and for some men kidnapping may be a positive Kyrgyz cultural male

identity marker (Handrahan, 2004) there is no cultural obligation to kidnap a bride. There is nothing unmanly or inappropriate for a young man to choose the tradition of, "take a girl by hand" (*kol menen aluu*), which means that it's a consensual marriage, the boy and girl come into an agreement that he can send his parents to her parents in order to discuss the marriage. Both sides can meet and discuss the forthcoming wedding, sometimes they can come to agreement to reduce the cost of the wedding, or abolish dowry and bride-price (*kalym*) in a way consistent with the Sharia Law requirement that families not spend beyond their means for weddings, it depends on economic situation of both sides. The point is that there is no expectation of marriage by kidnapping nor is there any social criticism for not kidnapping. This absence of a cultural expectation to kidnap makes it easier to prevent kidnapping than if there was a cultural norm that young men ought to kidnap their brides.

2. Background (Development, Nature and Testing of Anti-Kidnapping Educational Program)

This educational program builds on the political and economic changes made by the Soviet revolution in terms of the ethics and structures of gender equal education, laws, employment, day care and health care. Some of this gender equality has been undercut by the post-soviet changes. While other factors also influence women's status, in more economically equal countries there is a tendency for women's status to be higher and for there to be a higher level of trust among people (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009). And where critical cultural analysis often begins with the critique of religion (Marx and Engels, 1970, pp.39-95), in Kyrgyzstan it must begin with the critique of tradition as tradition is a more significant medium of discourse than is religion. This educational program builds on the power of "old" tradition in Kyrgyzstan to critique "invented tradition" and to reduce a particular form of abuse of young females. The program uses the power of the knowledge of tradition, religion, empirical research, the negative experience of kidnapped women, and reason to show the harmfulness of the practice of kidnapping. This method draws on the principles of Satyagraha (*satya*: truth; *agraha*: insistence) or "truth force" and passive resistance as developed by Mahatma Gandhi (1961, pp.6-7 and pp.350-352) and Martin Luther King Jr. (1958, pp.78-80) including an emphasis on the information about kidnapping and pledges by young men and women, and their families, to resist being involved in kidnapping. Key aspects of Satyagraha include, a) an objective investigation of the facts, b) doing no harm, c) acting in such a way as to promote mutual understanding and actualization of all people involved, and d) using broad based public support and action (Erikson 1969, pp.410-418). While Gandhi resisted outside support, both the American civil rights movement and the Kyrgyz anti-kidnapping programs welcome national and international support from outside local communities. As to the principle of doing no harm (including punishment), the anti-kidnapping program does not oppose punishment for kidnappers but believes that even a prison sentence (now up to 10 years) will be of little benefit to the kidnapped girl or either of the families involved and will do little to prevent kidnapping in the context of a very corrupt criminal justice system, and a traditional culture where to take a domestic dispute into a public court brings shame on all families involved.

From 2003 to 2008 anti-kidnapping activists developed anti-kidnapping educational materials and conducted more than 150 seminars on bride kidnapping for students and community members in all 7 oblasts (provinces) of Kyrgyzstan. These seminars presented the statistical data from earlier research, a documentary film of actual kidnappings by Petr Lom (2004), and answers to common false beliefs about kidnapping.

While it is very difficult to end or prosecute a kidnapping once it happens, this program is effective in preventing kidnapping by using "truth force" of reason, evidence and experience to exploit several existing contradictions; a) the belief that kidnapping is a tradition vs. the evidence that it is not a tradition, b) the belief that kidnapping is a positive act vs. the prohibitions of civil and religious law, c) the immediate needs for country daughters-in-laws vs. the long-term developmental needs of the girls and the country, and d) the traditional requirement for excessive spending on a wedding vs. the Sharia Law requirement that families not spend beyond their means for weddings.¹ The passive resistance of young people and

¹ A young man and his observant Islamic bride in Bishkek recently had a modest wedding after using the Islamic teaching to convince the extended family that they would not have large wedding.

families who refuse to participate in kidnapping prevents conflict before it emerges. The use of the Lom documentary film also exploits the contradiction between the self-image of Kyrgyz people as modern civilized people contrasted with "barbaric" images of girls being forced to marry as shown in the film. When the Lom film of actual cases is shown to Kyrgyz rural and urban audiences, the most common response is embarrassment, and never pride. The truth force of the images and facts of the film are quite powerful

The truth force the education program is made stronger by the facts that a) there is no sense that tradition requires a boy to kidnap a bride, and b) we can use evidence from the Manas epos, existing ethnographic records, practices of Kyrgyz communities in China, Afghanistan and Tajikistan, and the testimony of respected white bearded elders (Aksakals) to demonstrate that non-consensual bride kidnapping is not an old Kyrgyz tradition but a Soviet era fashion.

Here are the key points of the brochure and message of the program:

What Are the Mistakes of Those Who Kidnap Girls?

1. Mistake: *Kidnapping a girl is a good traditional way to get a bride.*
Answer: Non-consensual kidnapping a bride violates Kyrgyz law, According to Articles 154 and 155 of the Criminal Code of the Kyrgyz Republic, criminal liability for "kidnapping a woman to marry against her will" in the form of deprivation of liberty is a term of five to seven years. For forcing girls into marriage who has not attained the age of 17, the "groom" could go to prison for a term of 7 to 10 years. Non-consensual kidnapping also violates Article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 1 of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, and Article 16 of Convention on the Elimination of Violence against Women.
2. Mistake: *"A girl becomes happy through tears" - traditionally it is believed, that marriage beginning is dramatic for a girl under any circumstances, that this way - through pain and tears - leads a girl to the happiness.*
Answer: Research of forced marriages confirms: "Violence while creating a family implants violence during the whole life. Families where a woman was kidnapped are characterized by chronic socio-psychological tension, frequent scandals, absence of respect, and more frequent divorces." Bride kidnapping is based on the low estimation of girl's rights. She is not evaluated as a person, is viewed as a good and her voice is not heard. There is no reason to expect that in the new family, a girl who was forced to enter into marriage might have a high role and status.
3. Mistake: *The girl and her relatives want her to be kidnapped:*
Answer: According to the research, "Ala kachuu in a Kyrgyz village," 96% of mothers and 98 % of girls' fathers don't want their daughters to be kidnapped without consent. 87% of the girls in a 1999 study and 90% of the girls in a 2004 study did not want to get married through kidnapping.
4. Mistake: *There are men who think: "Only a brave and real man can kidnap a girl"*
Answer: Research, shows that the reason for bride kidnapping in 29 % of cases was that the man was afraid that girl would refuse, 7 % - he was afraid that the girl's parents would refuse him, and 12 % of cases the girl has actually refused a man to marry him. Strong, confident and worthy man will not be afraid to gain a girl's love and her consent to marry without violation!
5. Mistake: *Bride kidnapping is an ancient Kyrgyz tradition*
Answer: Bride kidnapping without consent is not found in the Manas Epos or other Kyrgyz epics. Forced marriage is totally forbidden in Islam. In Sharia Law any marriage that is forced in any way is null and void. It is not allowed in Kyrgyz tradition customary law of Adat, which requires prior consent of the young woman. The book "Iz Obriadovoi Zhizni Kirgizov" studies specific cases of bride kidnapping in the past of Kyrgyz people and states that, though it occurred rarely, such actions were punished.
6. Mistake: *"Where the stone is thrown it should stay ..." (the stone is heavy where is it thrown...)*

Answer: Research reveals that: 8% of bride kidnappings girls refused the forced marriage and left groom's house afterwards. A man, who kidnapped a girl, might be never forgiven and will not experience full love in his marriage. Evil causes evil; violence cannot generate love. When a kidnapped girl does not agree to enter into marriage, it reduces man's evaluation and status; he becomes object of ridicule.

7. Mistake: If a girl is kidnapped, to leave the groom's place means to disgrace (shame) the whole family. Answer: This is not correct! Only the girl herself has a right to decide her destiny, and nobody else can infringe upon her freedom. Girls, remember, that the malicious gossips (ill fame) about girls who left both «koshogo» and violator - is a lesser misfortune, than a destroyed life. Young women who did not admit kidnapping and chose your dignity and liberty, you are not alone. You have a chance to protect your rights and interests!

The task of the 2008-2009 study was a longitudinal study launched during the summer of 2008 and completed in the summer of 2009 to determine whether or not the educational efforts and materials that had been used on a small scale in villages and schools could reliably be used in a much larger national effort to reduce the practice of non-consensual bride kidnapping throughout Kyrgyzstan.

3. 2008-2009 Project Method

The research project identified and surveyed (summer, 2008), one or two small villages of 150-350 families in each of the seven oblasts (provinces) of Kyrgyzstan. The researchers then went house to house and asked for information on any marriages in the last 12 months in this house or other families in the village, so that these brides could be interviewed using the questionnaire developed in 1999 and used on additional studies in the country (Kleinbach *et al.* 2005). Members of the research team interviewed women married in the previous year and present in the village at the time of the survey, to determine the current frequency of non-consensual kidnapping.

The researchers gave each home in the village a copy of the bride kidnapping informational brochure and copies of the pledges for females to refuse to stay if kidnapped and males to not kidnap.

Usually in the afternoon of the second day of canvassing the village, the researchers presented an educational seminar, using the Petr Lom documentary film of actual kidnappings and a power point presentation of previous research on bride kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan.

One year later, in the summer of 2009, the researchers returned to these villages and again going house to house, interviewed women married in the intervening year to learn the frequency of non-consensual kidnapping following the 2008 educational effort. The 2009 survey also asked questions to document how, if at all, the kidnapping educational materials influenced behavior in the village during the intervening year.

4. 2008-2009 Project Results

The results in 2008 showed that in the 10 villages there were 143 marriages in the previous year. Eighty-one of the brides were at home. Researchers interviewed 75 (52%) of the 143 brides; five brides refused or were not allowed by in-laws to be interviewed. Thirty-eight (51% of those interviewed) were married by non-consensual kidnapping. This required that the woman answer three separate questions stating that at the time of the kidnapping, she did not love the man, she did not want to be kidnapped and she was kidnapped by deception or force. Thirteen (17 % of those interviewed) were married by consensual kidnapping. This means the woman was kidnapped and answered at least one of the three questions in the affirmative, i.e., she loved the man and/or she wanted to be kidnapped and/or she was kidnapped with her consent. Most commonly it was the case that she loved the man but did not want to be kidnapped and was kidnapped by deception. Twenty-four (32% of those interviewed) were married by traditional customs which include marriage being initiated and arranged by the families and/or couple, with consent of all parties to the marriage.

The 2009 results show that in the intervening year, in the 10 villages there were 240 reported marriages. Researchers interviewed 71(30%) of the 240 brides. Nineteen (27% of

those interviewed) were married by non-consensual kidnapping. This is a significant decrease from the 51% reported in 2008. Sixteen (22 % of those interviewed) were married by consensual kidnapping, representing an increase over the 17% reported in 2008. Thirty-five (49% of those interviewed) were married by traditional customs. This is a notable increase in traditional marriages over the 32% reported in 2008. Most significant is the overall increase in consensual marriage to 71% from 49% the year before.

The increase in consensual marriage is spread between traditional marriage and consensual kidnapping. Perhaps the increase in consensual kidnappings is a way of combining the "tradition" of an arranged marriage with the "fashion" of kidnapping. The increase in consensual kidnappings may also stem from the practice that once a girl is engaged, her family frequently restricts her movement and public contact with other men and/or protects her from kidnapping by another man, thus the public activity, to which she is accustomed, may be severely restricted for several months. It would be a big shame to her family if the engaged girl "behaved badly", i.e., if people saw her with other boys, or other families came to ask for her hand without knowing of her engagement. If she is consensually kidnapped, the couple will be "married," and her public activities restored weeks or months before the official wedding party.

In 2008 it was common for villagers to refer to kidnapping as "tradition." In 2009 many villagers said that there is now a trend away from kidnapping and a return to the Kyrgyz "traditional" way of the marriage being initiated and arranged by the families and/or couple, with consent of all parties to the marriage. In a few instances, kidnapping was referred to as a passing "fashion." In only one interview did the bride report her marriage was arranged by the parents and non-consensual.

5. 2011-2012 Project Method

The 2008-2009 model was reproduced in 2011-2012 in Karakol City, a medium sized city with a population of approximately 60,000 people/15,000 families, 11 universities and colleges, and 9 high schools. The project team included staff and approximately 60 student volunteers from various universities and colleges. The project distributed 18,000 anti-bride kidnapping brochures (15,000 Kyrgyz language & 3,000 Russian language), 15,000 calendars (Kyrgyz language), 18,000 pledges not to kidnap (for boys) or to not stay and marry if kidnapped (for girls), 500 reprints of a published article documenting why non-consensual bride kidnapping is not an old (pre-Soviet era) tradition, 50 DVD's containing a Power-Point presentation on the previous bride-kidnapping research, the Petr Lom documentary film, and most currently available research in English, Kyrgyz and Russian languages, and questionnaires in Kyrgyz and Russian to interview women married in 2010 and 2011.

Brochures, pledges and calendars were delivered door to door by project staff or student volunteers to approximately 95% of non-Russian homes and apartments in Karakol City. Ethnic Russians do not bride-kidnap however there is evidence that Kazaks, Uighur, Dungan, Uzbek, and Kalmyk occasionally kidnap brides.

Presentation-seminars were held in 10 universities/colleges and one university dormitory for approximately 1,175 students. The students were shown the Power-Point presentation on the previous research on bride kidnapping, and viewed the Petr Lom documentary film. They were also given brochures and pledges in their language of preference (Kyrgyz or Russian). The PP and film were followed by periods of discussion and debate. Students were also asked to identify themselves or other females they knew who were married in 2010-2011 as persons to be interviewed about their marriages.

Brochures, pledges and calendars were given to 700+ faculty members of various universities and colleges, and brochures and pledges were handed out to many people on the street (mostly women) as staff were walking the streets.

Reprints of a published article documenting why non-consensual bride kidnapping is not an old (pre-Soviet era) tradition were given to nearly all teachers in the 9 high schools in the city.

Interviews of 101 women married and/or kidnapped in 2010 or 2011 prior to the project show that 55% of women were married in traditional way without kidnapping and 45% of women interviewed were non-consensually kidnapped. Other data of note include; a) 56% of kidnapped women did not previously know the men who kidnapped them, b) 33% of kidnapped women were kidnapped by men who did not know them, c) 18% of kidnapped women were forced to

have sex (raped) before the marriage ceremony, and d) there were no identifiable cases where a couple married by “consensual-kidnapping”.

6. 2011-2012 Project Results

In the summer and fall of 2012, ethnic Kyrgyz women in Karakol City region who had been married since the education program were interviewed. Of 122 interviewed, 76% had been married by consent (up from 55% prior to the project). The women married by non-consensual kidnapping were 24% (down from 45% prior to the project). Other data of note include; a) 7% of the consensual marriages were by consensual kidnapping, b) 84% of consensually married women, and 59% of consensually married men had been exposed to at least one aspect (brochure, pledge or calendar) of the educational program, and c) 76% of non-consensually married women but only 24% on non-consensually married man had been exposed to at least one aspect of the educational material. The consensually married men had more than double the exposure rate to educational materials.

Looking at data for 165 women kidnapped in the 4 years (2008, 2009, 2011, 2012) studied; a) 12% of kidnapped girls were age 17 or younger, b) the average age of kidnapped girls was 19.9 years, and c) the average age of kidnappers was 24.5 years. The fact that males who kidnap average 4.6 years older than the girls they kidnap will need to continue to influence the focus of the educational efforts on males in their early 20's as well as younger girls. From the same years, the average age of 186 women traditionally married (not kidnapped) was 21.0 years. Marrying later is another positive aspect of reducing kidnapping.

The evidence over all is strong that the program reduces non-consensual bride kidnapping and demonstrates that educational efforts must focus on the potential kidnappers (young men in their early-mid 20's) as well as younger women.

7. Reflections as to Why the Educational Program is Effective

Since the Soviet era, extended families have members living in modern cities, as well as pre-modern villages and summer herding camps where most have cell phones and electricity (access to modern world) but few if any have indoor plumbing or toilets. With the exception of electricity, cell phones and access to auto transport, the majority of the population live in a pre-industrial herding/agriculture village mode of life, getting the majority of their sustenance from home gardens and small numbers of sheep, cattle and horses. Cash money comes mostly from relatives working in urban centers or a foreign country. According to the World Bank (Ibraimov, 2013) seasonal workers remittances total the equivalent of 30 percent of Kyrgyzstan's GDP. As demanded by tradition, accumulated wealth in animals is often consumed in very expensive wedding and funeral celebrations, which also draw wealth from distant relatives and friends, and require reciprocal expenditures in the future. The hardships of rural life contrast with the ease of urban life with its indoor heat and plumbing (hot showers), prepared food and no cows to milk, wood to cut, barns to clean or manure to dry for heating in the winter.

In the rural pre-industrial, patrilocal homes a son is expected to marry and bring a young woman into the home to have the role of servant to her mother-in-law and other family members. These are frequently oppressive if not abusive relationships, often avoided by young women who wish to further their educations, get employment and live in an urban environment with related benefits. This need for rural daughter-in-laws is a primary driving force for non-consensual kidnapping of brides because most young women will not choose this role immediately upon graduating from high school.

Almost all people in the country are educated through high school, watch TV, and know the gender equality values of the Soviet era and the modern world, they know the differences between urban and rural living, and the life of a rural daughter-in-law vs. the modern life of a professional woman (married or single) living in a single family apartment. While it is certainly appropriate for a young woman to choose to be a village wife and mother, this life should be chosen freely with her consent.

As previously noted most Kyrgyz, irrespective of where they live, are held by a traditional worldview. Kyrgyz culture deeply respects what is understood to be Kyrgyz Tradition (embodied in the 500,000 line Manas epos and many other oral traditions). As noted earlier, little of the oral tradition is written and evolves easily, this helps explain how the folkloric story of

consensual kidnapping could have evolved in popular culture into the belief that non-consensual kidnapping is a tradition (Kleinbach and Salimjanova, 2007). Tradition is considered more important as a value/norm reference than either civil or religious law, even by well educated and secular people. Hence, e.g., even a woman state prosecutor in the capital Bishkek told one of the authors that she did not prosecute bride kidnapers because "bride kidnapping is a tradition." Those involved with kidnapping, know that an important tradition is to show respect for one's elders, hence for girls to refuse the demand of elderly women to put on the marriage scarf while a captive in the kidnapper's home requires the girls show real disrespect for these elders. A third relevant element of tradition is respect/fear of the power of the curse. This fear is pervasive regardless of level of education or secular orientation and is used as a primary threat against young women if they refuse to stay, once kidnapped.

The power of these beliefs (kidnapping is tradition, respect one's elders and the power of curses to destroy a girl's life) make it very difficult to end a kidnapping by having the girl return home, or prosecute a kidnapping once it happens. At the same time, the educational program, is effective in convincing many people to not kidnap brides by using the truth force of reason, evidence and recorded experiences of kidnapped girls to demonstrate that a) non-consensual bride kidnapping is an invented fashion not a true tradition, b) non-consensual bride kidnapping is a human rights violation of a girl, c) modern civilized people do not kidnap girls for marriage, and d) spending beyond a family's means for a wedding is not a good of resources for a new couple and not sustainable development extended families and their children.

Bride kidnapping is functional for patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal rural households to get obedient young daughters-in-law to serve in difficult conditions. The present program does not address the material inequality between the modern urban modes of production and reproduction and the rural pastoral mode of production and reproduction, but it appears to significantly and effectively change the social discourse in which decisions are made as to when and how people marry.

8. Conclusion

These longitudinal studies in 10 villages and Karakol City provide evidence that the distribution of truthful educational materials to village homes, educational seminars in village schools, and passive resistance by young people and families can contribute to the reduction of non-consensual bride kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan. Such a program reduces the negative effect the practice has on the lives of young women and their families. It also has the effect of contributing positively to the overall sustainable development of the country of Kyrgyzstan.

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