

The role of women facilitators of bride kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan

by

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Abstract

The practice of kidnapping young women in Kyrgyzstan for forced marriage has existed for many years and has resulted in physical, psychological, and sexual violence against young women. Even though bride kidnapping has always been illegal, it has been routinely practiced throughout history. The process involves various actors at different stages, including a groom and his male friends, and his female and male relatives. The role of female relatives is significant in this process. By helping the groom, these women facilitate and contribute to the continuation of this illegal practice. Even though there is a growing body of literature on bride kidnapping, few studies have explored the roles of women facilitators of bride kidnapping. In fact, there is no study that specifically targets women facilitators, and little is known about their motives and perceptions of bride kidnapping. Knowing more about this topic is essential as bride kidnapping as it is practiced today could not continue without their involvement. As such, through a qualitative interview of women facilitators, my research is aimed at exploring the motivational factors and how these women facilitators understand their involvement in bride kidnapping and this practice in general. The study suggests six themes emerged based on the findings and provides recommendations for future research and policy.

Key words: bride kidnapping, women facilitators, ceremony of persuasion, kinship duty.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

Bride kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan is a practice that forces women into marriage against their will and, thus, violates women's rights for freedom of choice and jeopardize their liberty and security (Aisarakunova, 2010; Handrahan, 2000). Also known as bride "abduction or "capture," bride kidnapping is defined as an alternative form of marriage that implies an act of abducting a girl for marriage without her consent or consent of her parents (Ayres, 1974; Borbieva, 2012; Kleinbach, 2003). Accepted as a tradition, this cultural practice has been a point of controversy in the Kyrgyz culture, and though it has been deemed illegal since 1994 (Kleinbach, 2003; Kleinbach & Babayarova, 2013), there is still evidence that it occurs in contemporary society.

A recent story of a 19-year-old girl named Burulai, a student at a medical university in the capital of Bishkek who was kidnapped for marriage against her will, has become a symbol of the fight against bride kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan. Burulai was kidnapped by a 30-year-old Kyrgyz man named Mars for forced marriage in May 2018, even though she had a boyfriend. She refused to marry him and with the help of her parents, she returned to her home. Angered by her rejection, Mars threatened Burulai's father that he will murder his daughter. Parents of Burulai decided to hide Burulai at her sister's house living in another district instead of calling the police. When Burulai was visiting her parents for holidays, Mars kidnapped her outside her house on the corner when she was buying milk. Burulai's father heard her screaming and ran outside and called the police right away. Chased and caught by the police, the man, his male accomplices, and Burulai were brought to a district police station. Locked and left alone with Mars in one police cell, Burulai was brutally stabbed to death by her abductor, who also carved her and her boyfriend's initials on her body. Her murder caused public outcry and indignation,

raised many questions about police legitimacy, and demonstrated the failure of the public authorities to protect women's rights (Toktonazarova, 2018). Thousands of people marched in the street protests calling for more serious actions against those who kidnap young women for marriage (Oppenheim, 2019).

Bride kidnapping includes a series of complex stages that involves a young man as a primary abductor and his victim (Kleinbach, Ablezova, & Aitieva, 2005). It is important to note that a victim of bride kidnapping is referred to as a girl and not as a woman in Kyrgyz language. An interpretation of the meaning of bride kidnapping from the original language can provide a better understanding. In Kyrgyz language, a process of bride kidnapping is termed as '*kyl ala kachuu*' which literally means grab the girl and run (Werner et al., 2018). A word '*kyl*,' meaning a girl in English language, has an extended notion in Kyrgyz culture. By referring to a victim as a *kyl*, a young woman despite her age, is culturally expected to be a virgin before marriage and is therefore referred to as a girl for this manuscript.

There are other important actors involved in bride kidnapping: the abductor's male friends and relatives (including his mother) and the victim's parents (Borbieva, 2012; Handrahan, 2004; Kim & Karioris, 2020; Kleinbach, 2003; Kleinbach et al, 2005; Werner, 2009). Parents play a vital role in this process and may be a source of support and rescue for their kidnapped daughters or, alternatively, push their daughter away and force her into marriage. Unfortunately, most parents choose to approve the marriage. Some of the victims, unfortunately, find the only way out of the situation is to end their life. At least four kidnapped girls who did not want to accept the marriage and were abandoned by their parents committed suicide in cases known to the public, with one in 2006 and three of them in 2010-2012 ("Brides by Force", 2012; Kleinbach & Babaiarova, 2013). Those who have courage to escape are stigmatized by the

society for being divorced (Alymbekova, 2019) and a girl who “returns home,” meaning that the girl is believed to be stubborn and less desired as a wife and daughter-in-law (Werner, 2009, pp.322-323).

Statistical data on bride kidnapping is scarce and there is no one single source of collecting and maintaining comprehensive data on particularly bride kidnapping. According to some sources, nearly 12,000 women are kidnapped for marriage every year (Hughes, 2018). Research has found that between 13.8% and 48% percent of all current marriages in Kyrgyzstan are based on bride kidnapping (Becker, Mirkasimov, & Steiner 2017; Nedoluzhko & Agadjanian, 2015; UNFPA, 2016; UNICEF, 2018), with 92% of all kidnapped women marrying their abductor and, 60% of those marriages eventually ending in divorce (Galdini, 2014). There is some evidence that bride kidnapping may be decreasing, with UNICEF (2018) finding that 13.8% of women aged 24 and younger were forced to marriage in their most recent data. Other evidence, however, points to an increase in bride kidnapping: only 35 cases of forced marriage were registered with the law enforcement authorities in 2018 and 118 criminal cases were registered during the first six months of 2019. However, the real number is believed to be still much higher (Alymbekova, 2019).

Many bride kidnapping cases remain unknown because reports are rarely filed with the police. There are various reasons for that. The majority of families consider bride kidnapping a private issue and keep it within the family (Chung, 2016). According to Becker, Steiner, and Zhao (2017, p. 6), 66% of the respondents who were kidnapped for forced marriage did not seek for help from the law enforcement authorities explaining it as a “waste of time.” Police would accept the complaints, but often discourage victims from filing their complaints, force them to resolve the issue within involved families and withdraw their complaints (Human Rights Watch

Report, 2019). Hence, lack of comprehensive data on bride kidnapping is an ongoing issue in Kyrgyzstan that makes it difficult to keep track of the criminal cases related to it.

There is a growing body of literature that has explored bride kidnapping.

Previous research has explored the reasons why kidnapped women stay, why men kidnap women for marriage and how they felt, review of historical and ethnographical context, as well as reasons for why and how bride kidnapping is practiced and its frequency (Amsler & Kleinbach, 1999; Becker, Mirkasimov, & Steiner, 2017; Borbieva, 2012; Cooper-Cunningham, 2016; Handrahan, 2004; Kleinbach, 2003; Kleinbach et al, 2005; Kleinbach & Salimjanova, 2007; Nedoluzhko & Agadjanian, 2015; Werner, 2009). Although bride kidnapping is primarily perpetrated by men, the role of women in committing bride kidnapping is essential. Women use psychological pressure and physical force to influence the decision of the kidnapped girl to accept the marriage (Human Rights Watch Report, 2006). Trying to convince the victim to stay, some female relatives of a kidnapper (referred to here as women facilitators) often positively refer to their experience of being kidnapped for marriage too (Borbieva, 2012; Kim & Karioris, 2020). Thus, some women may have been victims of bride kidnapping themselves in the past and turn into perpetrators' accomplices later and contribute into the further continuation of this illegal practice. Therefore, it is important to highlight the role of women relatives of the man as accomplices and sometimes initiators of bride kidnapping. A few studies touch upon the importance of the participation of women facilitators of the abductor, and explain their involvement and role (Borbieva, 2012; Cooper-Cunningham, 2016; Handrahan, 2004; Kim & Karioris, 2020; Kleinbach et al, 2005; Werner, 2009).

Yet, there is no study targeting specifically women facilitators and there is still little known about their motives and how they perceive their involvement

and experience without whom this practice would not exist in its present form. As such, the purpose of my project is to explore the motivational factors and experiences of women who participate in bride kidnapping, how they perceive their involvement in bride kidnapping, and how they view bride kidnapping in general. As a result, obtained potential findings can be beneficial in terms of research and policy implications. First, the research can allow gaining new insight into this phenomenon through the lens of the women participants and contribute into existing literature and data on bride kidnapping. Next, the results can serve as a good source of knowledge for scholars interested in this field. Lastly, they can also become beneficial to policy makers and organizations focused on protection of women's rights and prevention of gender-based violence in Kyrgyzstan.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Origins and Extent of Bride Kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan

To begin with, it is important to understand what bride kidnapping is and the societal conditions where this practice existed and still remains active. Bride kidnapping is a gendered phenomenon that has been studied during three periods: pre-Soviet, Soviet, and post-Soviet (Handrahan 2004; Kleinbach & Salimjanova, 2007; Kleinbach et al, 2005). Prior to the Soviet period, Kyrgyzstan was mainly a nomadic rural highly hierarchical country, where “elderly people had authority over younger people; men had power over women; age dominated gender,” (Becker, Steiner, & Zhao, 2017, p.2) with “decentralized, patriarchal patrilocal, and patrilineal society with exogamous marriage” (Kleinbach & Babaiarova 2013, p.52). Traditional marriages were arranged or approved by parents within one tribe or between tribes with or without the consent of their children followed by expensive celebrations and exchanges of dowry (known as “sep” in Kyrgyz language) and bride price (known as “kalym” in Kyrgyz language) (Borbieva, 2012; Kleinbach & Salimjanova, 2007). Grooms were, as a rule, much older than brides. More recent estimates find that the average age of the men is 24 years old, and the average age of the women is 20 years old (Kleinbach et al, 2005). At times, a young man would inform his parents about a girl he wants to marry, then his family visited the girl’s family to make a proposal, negotiate the bride price and dowry, and come to agreement (Borbieva, 2012).

Termed as “kyz ala kachuu” in Kyrgyz Language, which means “grab a girl and run away,” bride kidnapping was known even before the Soviet Union and can be traced back to the 18-19th centuries (Kleinbach & Babaiarova, 2013; Kleinbach et al, 2005). Scholars differentiate two forms of kidnapping – consensual and non-consensual.

Consensual bride kidnapping is a somewhat a consensual elopement or staged abduction, which is performed based on mutual consent of a woman and usually if parents of a woman disapprove their marriage. It was seen “as a way for a woman to resist the patriarchal norms of arranged marriage” (Werner, 2009, p.325) when the marriage was not approved by parents for financial or social reasons due to class status incompatibilities or pre-existing arranged marriages (Kleinbach & Babaiarova 2013; Kleinbach et al, 2005). It was a way to decrease expenses for wedding and bride price unlike in an arranged marriage (Becker, Mirkasymov, & Steiner 2017; Kleinbach & Babayarova 2013). Consensual bride kidnapping occurred only with the consent of a bride; it was approved by Islamic law, but it was not welcome by Kyrgyz customs due to lack of parental consent and conflicts which resulted in tribal hostilities (Kleinbach & Salimjanova, 2007). Contemporary consensual kidnapping has been committed also to reduce the cost of marriage, avoid paying a bride dowry or decrease expenses for a wedding party (Kleinbach & Salimjanova 2007; Werner 2009). A survey conducted by Kleinbach and colleagues (2005) in one of the villages in the north-eastern region of Kyrgyzstan identified that out of all 543 female respondents, 374 (80%) were kidnapped for marriage. Thirty four percent of these kidnappings were arranged with the consent of the woman.

Non-consensual bride kidnapping, on the other hand, involves cases when brides are kidnapped against their will without their consent and consent of their parents, which is the focus of this study.

During the Soviet era, bride kidnapping was rare but remained criminalized, and penalties for men committing this crime were also severe (Handrahan, 2000; Kleinbach & Salimjanova, 2007; Werner, 2009). The Soviet government attempted to eliminate patriarchy and restructure family institutions by liberating individuals, especially women, from requirements of the family

and from the controlling economic power of husbands (Millet 2000, pp.168-169). The ideology of gender equality and secular freedom from traditions enabled women to get free education, employment, maternity leaves, free day care, and monthly benefits for children (Kleinbach et al 2005; Werner 2009).

Young men and women in the Soviet time were able to choose their marriage partners independently without parental control (Kleinbach & Babayarova 2013). Young couples would imitate bride kidnapping as a ritual, in which a bride showed a visible resistance symbolizing her virginity and purity (Becker, Steiner, & Zhao, 2017). This way, couple demonstrated their resistance to parent-arranged marriages (Kleinbach & Salimjanova, 2007). Even though, mock bride kidnapping lowered the cost for a traditional wedding and allowed the couple expresses their equality and freedom of choosing a wife or a husband, it was a step towards the rise of non-consensual bride kidnapping and its social legitimization (Becker, Steiner, & Zhao, 2017; Kleinbach et al 2005).

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, marriages by non-consensual kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan have increased, shifting from being a rare event to being a more commonly practiced phenomenon (Werner, Edling, Becker, Kim, et al 2018; Kleinbach et al, 2005). For example, 80% of female respondents reported being kidnapped (Kleinbach et al, 2005). The research findings also suggest generational differences in bride kidnapping: 64% of women aged 76 and older were kidnapped, of which 43% of kidnappings were non-consensual; 47% of all 36-56-year-old married women were kidnapped without their consent; and 63% of women aged 16-25 were kidnapped against their will. Thus, the research indicates that nearly 50% of Kyrgyz marriages were based on bride kidnapping in 1999-2001, of which 66% were nonconsensual. The researchers also explored bride kidnapping trends over time, and found that in 2004, the

number of marriages through bride kidnapping increased to 80%, with 57% of these marriages considered to be nonconsensual (Kleinbach et al, 2005). This increase of the kidnapping emerged as a result of reinforced economic hardship and crisis after the collapse of the Soviet Union; bride kidnapping was a culturally embedded solution to avoid financial expenses for marriage (Nedoluzhko & Agadjanian, 2015).

The Stages of Bride Kidnapping

Bride kidnapping consists of a few stages and involves different actors. It is usually committed by a young man (perpetrator) who either decides to marry or is told by his mother that it is time to marry in order to bring a wife her associated labor to her household (Borbieva, 2012). Bride kidnapping starts with a planning step. A young man can decide himself which girl he wants to marry, or his mother or/and female relatives help him to pick one. Depending on the circumstances, young female relatives of the kidnapper can participate in the planning and implementation of bride kidnapping (Kim & Karioris, 2020). The choice of a soon-to-be-bride is usually someone they know from the same community and is generally someone known for being a helpful with chores and hardworking daughter in her family. As such, it is believed this woman will provide a good helping hand in the household of her abductor. Once a victim is chosen, the man's family, including parents, siblings, uncles and aunts, and grandparents, and neighbors, get together at his house and bless the man and his friends for successful kidnapping before they leave his house for kidnapping ("*Brides by Force*", 2012).

Next, the perpetrator and usually three to four of his male friends coordinate how the actual kidnapping will take place, including who is going to drive a car and how to track the victims, sometimes consuming some alcohol before the kidnapping (*Bride kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan*, 2012; Handrahan, 2004). A victim can be abducted on the street, en route to school

or work, or even from her own house in daylight or at night. Once the men locate their victim, they drive close to her, and the accomplices grab the girl and force her into a back seat of the car, where she is kept by man's accomplices. On the way to kidnapper's house, the frightened girl tries to call for help, cry, resist, and fight back while in the car (*"Bride kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan"*, 2012; Kleinbach et al., 2005). The abductor's male accomplices have also been found to be violent during the kidnapping, with threats of rape if she refuses to obey and declines the marriage (Werner, 2009). After the girl is taken to the abductor's house, she is put in a specially designated room surrounded by his female relatives.

Women's Roles in Bride Kidnapping

Even though a man kidnapper and his male accomplices are the ones who abduct the victim, women play a crucial role in planning and implementing bride kidnapping. These female relatives are referred to as *kelin* (daughter-in-law), According to Turaeva (2017), *kelin* is a social category with status which a young bride receives after marriage in her husband's family. The status of *kelin* is based on social hierarchy which implies obedience and service of brides to their mother-in-law, or younger brides to older brides. In this type of relationship, older *kelins* or a mother-in-law acts as an instructor or supervisor, and young *kelins* as obedient "students" (Turaeva, 2017u, p.143). Among *kelin*, some are called "zhenes" in Kyrgyz language, meaning wives of older male relatives (Kim, 2020, p.711) whose social status is dependent upon their age or marriage to an older male relative. Zhenes have a role in different stages of the bride kidnapping process. A mother of a young man may encourage her son to kidnap a woman for marriage, take part in the ceremony of placing the scarf on bride's head, and even select a future wife for his son (Cooper-Cunningham, 2016). Of the mothers who participated in Kleinbach's study (2005), 23% wanted the kidnapping to happen.

To convince the girl to stay in the marriage and put on a bridal scarf, which symbolizes her consent to marry the man (Handrahan, 2004; Kleinbach et al., 2005), women accomplices use various approaches. Zhenes may treat the girl kindly in the beginning, welcoming her with sweet words and attempt to cheer the bride up by saying how lucky and happy she is that she came to this family (Werner, 2009) and praise the groom and his family (Open Line Report, 2010). They often refer to their own experience by saying “this is how we married, too” (Kim & Karioris, 2020, p.10), which generalizes women’s destiny in marriage, reminds them that it is a local tradition, and normalizes this practice building connection between the victim and female relatives of the abductor. Proverbs and folk wisdoms pointing at women’s fate to accept her marriage as a given are often used by female relatives during their attempts to convince her to stay, which they hope will ultimately lead to the oldest woman in the man’s family or his mother putting a marriage scarf on the victim’s head.

If the girl resists the marriage, the women facilitators will warn her about negative consequences that the girl might have if she refuses. They often mention that it is bad luck if the girl leaves and how she would damage family’s reputation as she would disgrace and dishonor them if she rejects the groom and returns home. Young women in this position often express disagreement with the marriage by actively fighting back, taking off the marriage scarf, screaming, and sometimes throwing things at those who try to approach her (Kim, 2020; Werner, 2009); as such, the coercion process is at times aggressive and entails the use of psychological and physical abuse (Borbieva 2012; Werner 2009; Amsler & Kleinbach 1999). Elder women facilitators remind the kidnapped girl of the shame and threaten with a curse that will result in sicknesses and misfortunes for her and her family if she decides to leave (Borbieva, 2012; Open Line Report, 2010; Werner, 2009). Sometimes, the oldest woman falls at

bride's feet or lays down at the doorstep to block her way and warns the girl about her curse if she steps over her head. This might not seem as a credible threat to western cultures; yet, in Kyrgyz culture, a curse especially from elder people and a fear of public shaming are taken seriously (Open Line Report, 2010) and ingrained as cultural values and social punishment (Sataeva, 2017). The entire process to get the victim to "consent" to the marriage might take hours and even days. Moreover, the victim is often forced to write a letter to her parents stating that it was her will to come to that house, which in turn serves as an evidence of her agreement. However, the letter is a way for a victim to express her resistance (Werner, 2009). For example, one of the victims repeatedly wrote that she did not want to stay in this family; in response, the women facilitators of the kidnapper kept bringing her new paper sheets and eventually forced the victim into writing her acceptance of the groom (Werner, 2009).

Meanwhile, a wedding feast is being prepared by the kidnapper's family at his house, and a group of old male relatives start preparing for a ceremony called "achuu basar" (Kim & Karioris, 2020, p.6). This ceremony includes a visit of a group of men relatives of the kidnapped to the victim's parents to offer apologies, deliver gifts, and ask for the parents' blessing. Once being informed of the impending marriage; the victim's parents may voice their disapproval and grant their daughter permission to return home. Most of parents, however, encourage their daughters to accept the marriage (Kim & Karioris, 2020).

Victims of bride kidnapping can be exposed to physical, psychological, and sexual abuse. Rape is often used as a tool to dominate and control women (Handrahan, 2004) and force the kidnapped girl to stay with her perpetrator and prevent her from leaving her abductor (Kim & Karioris, 2020; Kleinbach et al 2005). Approximately 22% of kidnapped brides are forced to engage in sexual intercourse before they are considered married (Amsler & Kleinbach

1999). Women facilitators stress the importance of the bride being a virgin before marriage as a required component as it is central to the notion of chastity, demonstrating the innocence and purity of an abducted girl. Kim (2020) states that “celebrating virginity of the brides is part of a wedding ceremony” (p.712). Women facilitators also play a significant role in marriage consummation and bridal virginity testing. According to Kim (2020), female relatives would sit next to the bedroom door, half-opened or closed, and allowed to come into a room after the consummation to help the bride if needed and check the bedsheets for blood stains to indicate the prior virginity of the bride. The news on the bride’s virginity is also announced to her parents along with their gratitude for proper upbringing. If the virginity of the bride is not proved, the reputation of the bride is ruined, and she can be sent back to her parents with shame and disgrace (Kim, 2020). This way, kidnapped women are prevented from returning home because they are no longer seen pure even if they never had marriage consummation with her abductor (Kim & Karioris, 2020; Werner et al, 2018).

Thus, the participation of zhenes in bride kidnapping plays a dramatic role and influences kidnapped young girls’ decision. Abused psychologically, physically, and sexually kidnapped women may decide to get married to for varied cultural and emotional reasons as they try to spare their families the shame associated with resisting these traditions (Werner, 2009). Despite their important role in this process, little is known about the motivations of zhenes. Looking at this question from perspective of theoretical frameworks suggest in the following chapter will allow gaining some understanding of this issue.

Legality and Punishment

The punishment for non-consensual bride kidnapping was always considered an illegal practice. Penalties have changed over the time. For example, prior to the 20th century a

kidnapper would be stoned to death (Kleinbach et al., 2005). In early 1900s, the punishment was regulated depending on few conditions – a marital status of a kidnapped woman (married or single) and a socio-economic status and class of a family of a kidnapped girl. Thus, if the kidnapped woman was married with high status, the fine a kidnapper paid for committing an act of kidnapping would be high compared to a fine for kidnapping a single woman with low socio-economic status (Kleinbach & Slaimjanova, 2007). In the Soviet era, legal punishment for all types of crimes that were against the freedom and equality of a women, to include all forms of marriage, which were against the will and without a consent of a bride and required payment of bride price and dowry, marrying underage, polygamy, and bigamy – all were regulated by the criminal codes of the Soviet Union Republics (Kleinbach & Salimjanova, 2007).

This dangerous practice has remained illegal in Kyrgyzstan at the time the country gained its independence in 1991. It violated the article 155 of the criminal code of Kyrgyzstan and provided for a punishment in the form of a fine (100 to 200 minimal wages per month) or imprisonment for up to 5 years. In 2013, punishment for this crime was increased from 5 years to 7-10 years of imprisonment and payment of fine (HRW Report 2019; Criminal Code of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2017). In addition, Kyrgyzstan ratified few international conventions and protocols, to include the United Nations Charter, the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on human rights which included bride kidnapping as a violence against women.

Despite criminalization of the practice and strengthening the laws, bride kidnapping remains widespread and is commonly practiced due the failure of the government to prevent the crime and prosecute the perpetrators (HRW Kyrgyzstan, 2019). It remains one of the serious

forms of the violation of women's rights and jeopardizes their liberty, security, and safety in present days (Aisarakunova, 2010; Handrahan, 2000), and it is important to understand more about why this practice persists despite the history of criminalization.

Chapter 3 - Theoretical Framework

The objective of this research is to explore why women are engaged in bride kidnapping, how they perceive and understand their role and experience in bride kidnapping and bride kidnapping in general. As such, the theoretical frameworks that guided my research are feminist theory, social learning theory, and neutralization theory.

Feminist Explanation of Bride Kidnapping

Scholars have explained bride kidnapping from the perspective of the concept of patriarchy within feminist theory. The concept of patriarchy is crucial in the study of gender relations as it considered women as subordinate in a male-dominated family, namely a large household and society in general (Walby, 1989). Feminists argue that women's oppression was ignored as a legitimate topic (Agger 2013) and they have been seen as minority group within the dominant society (Beechey 1979). According to Beechey (1979), family is considered a patriarchal unit, the goal of which is to socialize children into certain roles and statuses and keeping a woman as a subordination.

In attempt to conceptualize patriarchy, various definitions have been used, but none of the literature gives a definite term (Beechey 1979; Walby 1989). Walby (1989) argues that determining a specific term enables exploring the right definition. In this regard, the contribution of radical feminism into development of the meaning of this term is essential. This approach states that patriarchy is the cause of women's oppression, which exists on the level of family and culture. Women are treated as an object for men in the family as well as in public. Feminist perspectives hold that society degrades women physically and culturally, making them an object of sexual desire and economic and emotional needs (Agger 2013).

Unlike liberal feminism, radical feminism argues that it is necessary to radically change the family so that women will no longer be objectified and do not need to identify themselves in relation to men. Liberal feminism does not see the family as a “source of women’s oppression” and allows considering a family consisting of heterosexual partners and children (Agger 2013). Instead, liberal feminists focus on the unfair division of labor, meaning that “women do more than share” (Agger 2013, pp.100-104, pp.107-109). Thus, patriarchy is defined as a “system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women” and suggests two forms of patriarchy, private and public (Walby, 1989, p.214).

Private patriarchy can be related to the topic of this research as it is based on household production as a main space of women’s oppression; meanwhile, public patriarchy is about oppression in public sites (Walby 1989). Within this system, violence that is used to control women can even be justified as legitimate not only by men, but by the state refusal to interfere, and jointly with an ongoing sense of insecurity make women be exploited in the household and suppressed (Sultana, 2011).

Amsler and Kleinbach (1999) assert that bride kidnapping is one of many preserved patriarchal practices, within which women have limited political, economic, and human rights in modern days. Further study of bride kidnapping by Kleinbach et al (2005) questions the patriarchal nature of bride kidnapping and argue that marriage in patriarchal tradition implies approval by patriarchs of two families which is characteristic to arranged marriage, but unlike in bride kidnapping which occurs without the consent of parents.

In accordance with a feminist perspective, Handrahan (2004, p. 223) asserts that bride kidnapping symbolizes men’s ethnic dominance over women and serves as a tool to demonstrate their “adherence to Kyrgyz culture,” ethnic identity particularly, and prove man’s masculinity in

the post-Soviet economic crisis. Being a Kyrgyz man is determined by how men treated women, men's toughness and fearlessness (Handrahan 2000). Women are perceived as a collective ethnic property and those women who reject the marriage by kidnapping are considered as to be dishonoring the tradition and rejecting Kyrgyz ethnicity. Through submission to male dominance, women prove their loyalty to the ethnicity.

Although men gain "socially constructed masculinity" through bride kidnapping, Kim and Karioris (2020, p.16) claim that Kyrgyz men, however, also have a limited agency and are subject to social pressure, especially when a man is single at an older age, and as a result is seen as deviant. As identified, without female compliance in kidnapping, accomplishing ethnic identity for Kyrgyz men would impossible (Handrahan, 2004).

In addition, patriarchal society is organized based on two principles: males dominate females and older males dominate younger males (Millet 2000). Yet, when it comes to a marriage, the research by Kim and Karioris (2020) evidenced how minimal can be the role of a young Kyrgyz man in making decision whether he wants to marry or not and whom to marry. Gathered around the table, all family members, particularly his mother and older women, encourage the young man to kidnap a bride and recommend potential candidates (Borbieva, 2012). Marriage is treated as a means of obtaining a bride for the household and not for the sake of the man being married; a new bride is seen as a new labor force in the household (Borbieva, 2012; Kim & Karioris, 2020).

Another important notion that can be related to bride kidnapping is the association of patriarchy with force, which relies on violence and particularly on sexual violence (Millet, 2000). According to Werner (2009), certain patterns of violence, such as female genital mutilation or honor killing, are identified as culturally determined practices. Bride kidnapping as another form

of gender-based violence is used to maintain power over women through the discourse of shame (Werner 2009). Public shaming and public opinion are crucial in the Kyrgyz culture; it is a basic morality that is deeply ingrained in collective consciousness (Sataeva, 2017). In regard to bride kidnapping, women are bullied into public shaming and guilt if they refuse to stay with their abductor as she questions social normative power. Rejection of a groom and return to her home do not only ruin her family's reputation, but also can be stigmatized as being no longer virgin because she is assumed to be sexually violated by abductor. Werner (2009) claims that it becomes a big challenge for a woman because the patriarchal society attach great importance to virginity, which enable men control women's mobility and sexuality; and, thus, move toward greater patriarchy in Kyrgyzstan, causing confrontation between culture and human rights. Hence, patriarchal society monger fear of being stigmatized and rejected through patriarchal control mechanisms (Cooper-Cunningham, 2016).

Married older women also gain their power and status in the household by encouraging their sons to kidnap a young woman for marriage and with arrival of an abducted bride in their families. By forcing a young woman to stay, these older women make their contribution in the reproduction of patriarchal institutions (Werner 2009). Described as a "queen bee," an older, senior woman plays a leading role in the household, which is manifested in the form of the young women's oppression (Becker, Steiner, & Zhao 2017, p.5).

Given that, Borbieva (2012) argues that bride kidnapping is not solely associated with patriarchy and claims the importance of bride kidnapping from a different perspective. Her analysis offers to consider kidnapping not as "domination of victims by perpetrators, but as the actions of subject in a cultural context that continually forms them" (p.152), meaning that

subjects act in particular way in accordance with dominant discourses. In case of bride kidnapping, it was a discourse of traditionalism, marriage, and love.

Werner (2009) refers to the idea of patriarchal bargain, a term coined by Kandiyoti (1988), which means that older women in their attempt to gain more power within the patrilocally extended households under authority of male members collude with patriarchal oppression of younger women in their household. Hence, when a young bride arrives in such an extended household, she becomes subordinate not only to men, but senior women, particularly their mother-in-law (Kandiyoti, 1988). When colluding with the patriarchal oppression of younger women in the household, elder women gain limited benefits and status in patriarchal society (Kandiyoti, 1988). By forcing a kidnapped girl to stay, senior women reinforce reproduction of patriarchy and strengthen male dominance (Werner 2009).

As opposed, Borbieva (2012) argues that Werner and Kandiyoti's arguments about elder women's motivation to gain power and status in the context of patriarchal society are oversimplified. She continues by claiming that senior women gain their status and authority as they age and with the birth of a son; their participation in bride kidnapping is simply a way they help and serve the interest of their family. Moreover, female authority, pride, honor, social recognition, status, and respect of the community are gained with the birth of a son, who will bring a wife to the household and consequently strengthens older woman's authority (Kim & Karioris, 2020). Limited empirical research has been conducted to date that has explored these competing claims.

Another key point to be highlighted in regard to control and power by senior women in the household is a tendency of "Kelinizatsia," (Yarmoschuk et al, 2020). This term is originated from a word "kelin" meaning daughter-in-law or younger bride in Kyrgyz language. Kelinizatsia

is a process of exploitation of labor and constant pressure by senior women of daughters-in-laws or younger brides, which in turn enhances their control and power. It is tightly linked to bride-kidnapping because bride kidnapping means a new bride in the household who is expected to help her mother-in-law and senior women in the household (HRW Report 2006; Yarmoschuk, 2020). Since the households in Kyrgyz communities are extended, the bride's task in the family is to please her husband's relatives. This includes waking up the first in the morning and going to bed the last at night, being in charge of various types of chores, taking care of her own children and the children of other relatives living in the same household, never talking back to her husband's relatives, and maintaining her daily tasks even if she is sick. According to Altyn Kapalova, an anthropologist from Kyrgyzstan, brides are labor resources and servants for the entire household. This tendency is particularly observed in rural areas (Yarmoschuk et al, 2020).

Social Learning Theory

Another theoretical framework that guided this research is social learning theory, which is aimed at explaining criminal and delinquent behavior (Akers & Jennings, 2009). The theory suggests that individuals will avoid or commit criminal/deviant behavior based on a system of rewards and punishment attached to this behavior and through imitation and modelling of observed behavior (Burgess & Akers, 1966; Brauer & Tittle, 2012).

Social learning theory was developed by Albert Bandura (1973) stating that any human behavior, including prosocial and antisocial behaviors, are learned and acquired based on the actions of others through observation, imitation, and modeling and are not innate (Anderson & Kras, 2005). According to Bandura (1973), understanding social context, performers, and cues

of that behavior can help predicting aggressive behavior and, therefore, it focuses on external stimuli in connection to response.

In explaining social learning theory, Burgess and Akers referred to the principles of imitation of Bandura's cognitive learning (Burgess & Akers, 1966) and Sutherland's differential association theories, which stated that the behavior is learned from interaction with others (Burgess & Akers, 1966). Sutherland (1934) determined four key concepts of the theory, including differential association, differential reinforcement, modeling, and definitions. Two concepts - differential association and definitions - were borrowed from Sutherland's differential association theory, according to which individuals are more likely to commit crime based on their association with criminal patterns and in response to behavioral stimuli favorable to crime. The other two concepts - differential reinforcement and modeling – were developed based on Sutherland's formulation of differential association theory (Brauer & Tittle, 2012).

The concept of differential association focuses on the interaction of an individual with other individuals in the peer-friendship groups, including family, school, neighbors, as well as groups established virtually, such as the internet, mass media, etc. These groups provide a social context, within which an individual is exposed to learning process. If an individual is engaged with a group that is inclined to criminal and deviant behavior, he/she is more likely to practice criminal/deviant behavior (Akers & Jennings, 2009; Akers, Krohn, Lanza-Kaduce, & Radosevich, 1979; Burgess & Akers, 1966). Hence, a female member of an extended Kyrgyz household or community may be differentially associated with her intimate peer group (other female relatives within the same household or community) that exposes her to norms, values, and attitudes that are supportive of bride kidnapping.

The concept of definitions element of social learning theory deals with values, orientations, and attitudes toward criminal/delinquent behavior in accordance with which the individuals assess one or another form of behavior as “good or bad, desirable or undesirable, justified or unjustified, appropriate or inappropriate, and excusable or inexcusable” (Akers & Jennings 2009, p.106-107; Akers et al, 1979 Burgess & Akers, 1966). In regard to bride kidnapping, an act of kidnapping and accompanied violence may be justified as actions serving the “best interests of all (or most) of the individuals involved” (Borbieva, 2012, p. 151).

The concept of differential reinforcement refers to rewards and punishment for certain behavior. It operates through positive and negative reinforcement and positive and negative punishment (Akers & Jennings 2009). The more certain behavior is rewarded, and the value of the reward is high, and the less that behavior is punished, and the severity of punishment is low, the more likely that an individual will adopt this particular behavior (Akers & Jennings 2009; Akers et al, 1979 Burgess & Akers, 1966). Thus, for a criminal/delinquent behavior to emerge, certain conditions such as high reinforcement and low punishment of such behavior are required. In addition, an individual will choose to be engaged in certain behavior despite the availability of choice of another behavior if a criminal/delinquent behavior is most frequently and more highly reinforced. Even if there is a law against bride kidnapping, it is most likely that individuals are involved in this act of crime because both perpetrator and accomplices of bride kidnapping gain more rewards within their community. As discussed earlier, some scholars identified that men claim their ethnic identity and male dominance by kidnapping young girls for marriage in their community; women obtain certain social status and authority within their patrilocally extended household (Handrahan, 2004; Werner, 2009).

The concept of imitation involves the direct or indirect observation of certain behavior performed by another individual (Akers & Jennings 2009; Akers et al, 1979; Burgess & Akers, 1966). Another important function of this concept is modeling after observing certain behavior; it enables learning aggressive violent behavior, which can be strengthened through repetition and symbolic reinforcement (Bandura, 1973). According to Burgess and Akers (1966), imitation is more likely to stimulate the initiation of a new behavior of an individual who was never been engaged in certain behavior in the past. Thus, observing a criminal/delinquent behavior performed by others, realizing benefits from this behavior received by others, and lack of punishment motivates an individual to engage in this behavior via imitation (Akers & Jennings 2009; Nicholson & Higgins, 2017).

Hence, a criminal/delinquent act is initiated by an individual through differential association and imitation followed by a decision to stop or continue this crime or delinquency through differential reinforcement (Pratt, Cullen, Sellers, Winfree Jr., Madensen, Daigle, Fearn, & Gau, 2010).

Neutralization Theory

The theory of neutralization also guided my research to explore how the female accomplices of bride kidnapping justify their involvement in illegal practice. The techniques of neutralization were proposed first by Sykes and Matza (1957), who suggest that prior to engaging in delinquent behavior, individuals justify their act by neutralizing the belief that a soon-to-be committed criminal/delinquent act is wrong. In presenting their theory, Sykes and Matza (1957) refer to Cohen's subcultural theory. According to Cohen's subcultural theory (Sykes & Matza, 1957), a criminal act is committed when young people unite into what is called subcultures different from outside society with their norms, morals, and values majority of which

are of delinquent nature. The outside society, in turn, perceive these unions as criminal, and these subcultures justifies their aggression towards the outside society, which enable them to neutralize their feeling of guilt (Sykes & Matza, 1957; Copes, 2003).

Neutralization theory seeks to explain how individuals violate norms and laws that they believe in. The theory asserts that most young people recognize the conventional definitions of right and wrong; yet some of them are better at neutralizing the moral restrictions (Minor, 1980 p.103). Those individuals associating themselves with delinquent peers who engage in delinquent behavior and delinquents are still attached to the conventional society and will most frequently utilize these neutralization techniques than others to justify their criminal/delinquent behavior (Froggio, Zamaro, & Lori, 2009; Sykes & Matza, 1957). Hence, by convincing themselves that being engaged in criminal/delinquent behavior is acceptable in their situation, the offenders protect their self-esteem and neutralize self-blame (Kaptein & Helvoort, 2019). According to Sykes and Matza (1957), there are five neutralization techniques which are used by delinquents when participating in delinquent behavior: denial of responsibility, denial of injury, denial of victims, appeal to higher loyalties, and condemnation of condemners.

The denial of responsibility is a technique used by an individual to define himself/herself as not responsible for his/her deviant actions (Minor, 1980; Sykes & Matza, 1957). The individual justifies that a criminal/deviant act committed by him/her as accidental and beyond their personal control that emerged as a result of inevitable poverty, broken home, drunkenness, or other circumstances (LaBeff, 1983); thus, the individual denies responsibility for a committed criminal/deviant behavior admitting himself/herself as a victim of circumstances (Copes, 2003; Froggio et al., 2009; Sykes & Matza, 1957). A second technique is the denial of injury. An individual believes that his/her behavior caused no harm or hurt nobody even if it is against the

law (Copes, 2003; Froggio et al., 2009; Sykes & Matza, 1957). The denial of victim technique is utilized by an individual to deny the existence of a victim. Even if the offender admits responsibility for his/her deviant behavior and injury or harm caused as a result of this behavior, the individual still considers his/her criminal/deviant act as not wrong because the “victim deserves the injury” (Froggio et al., 2009, p.77) or there is no real victim. A fourth technique of condemnation of the condemners implies shifting the focus of attention away from one’s criminal/deviant behavior to hypocrisy and moral failings of social control agents who condemn one’s act of violence, particularly representatives of criminal justice system and public officials (Copes, 2003; Froggio et al., 2009; Labeff, 1983; Minor, 1980; Sykes & Matza, 1957). The fifth and last technique is appeal to higher loyalties. It is used in the situation when an individual breaks the law and justifies it as a high loyalty to a small group to which he/she belongs (family, friends, etc.) and as an attempt to resolve the dilemma between demands of legal system and society and individual’s small group (Labeff, 1983; Sykes & Matza, 1957).

Approaching my research objectives from the perspective of the two techniques of neutralization theory, namely denial of responsibility and denial of victim, helped to explore settings in which female relatives are submerged in their daily life, influence of their daily life on their participation and their social role in bride kidnapping, rituals they follow while participating in bride kidnapping, how they make sense of their participation, how they interpret this event and situations emerging during bride kidnapping. Through the perspective of neutralization theory, I sought to identify how women understand and perceive their involvement in bride kidnapping and related victimization of a kidnapped woman and why female relatives are complicit with their male relative even if bride kidnapping is punished by the law.

Chapter 4 - Aim of the Study

The current study was aimed at exploring the factors motivating women to participate in bride kidnapping and focus on the instrumental role of women in facilitating such victimization. As such, the main research questions guiding this project are as follows: What motivates women to facilitate bride kidnapping? How do women facilitators perceive their involvement in bride kidnapping? How do they understand a practice of bride kidnapping? To answer these questions, this research has four main research objectives. First, it seeks to investigate women facilitators' experiences of bride kidnapping in general. Second, this study seeks to learn how they understand and perceive their involvement in bride kidnapping. Third, the study seeks to learn what shapes their motivations to engage in bride kidnapping as accomplices. The final objective is to identify whether women understand and perceive bride kidnapping victimization as an illegal practice.

Chapter 5 - Methodology

The thesis employed qualitative research design that was conducted through in-depth semi-structured interviews. This method permitted the exploration of bride kidnapping from the perspective of the participants in order to discover the meaning they give to their experiences (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This methodology involves investigating perceptions and interpretations of events by participants (Weiss, 1994), which is crucial in understanding of the current problem of the involvement of women in bride kidnapping. A qualitative study incorporates framing a research question that gives flexibility and freedom to investigate the current topic, exploring the social settings and individuals within these settings (Berg, 2004). Thus, this methodology helped me to guide from a broad topic of bride kidnapping to a specific topic of its actors, particularly female relatives of the man who kidnapped a girl for marriage. Although the question might be considered broad by quantitative researchers, it helped to set the boundaries and determine the topic area (Corbin & Strauss 2008, p.25).

This research used in-depth, semi-structured interviews. This method was chosen for several reasons. To begin with, semi-structured interviews provide for relatively structured open-ended questions that can be prepared ahead of time before the actual interview (Galletta 2013, p.45). Framing an open-ended research question allows flexibility in tailoring additional questions and opportunity to discuss the stories more in-depth (Weiss 1994, pp.3). Even though questions were asked in a systematic and consistent way, participants were given some freedom to narrate their stories. At the same time, this type of interview was helpful in guiding participants throughout their narration by asking questions that could be reordered during the interview. Flexibility in formulating questions in words recognized by the participants and clarifying questions helped obtaining and elaborating detailed descriptions of the experience

(Berg 2004, p.79, 81). Since there is not much information and data on bride kidnapping, particularly about the involvement of women in bride kidnapping, the qualitative semi-structured interview study can be helpful in the future in conducting quantitative research by “identifying variables and framing hypotheses” (Weiss 1994, p.10).

Sample Description

Since the study is concerned with female participants of bride kidnapping, my sample selection was limited to those women in Kyrgyzstan who have had experience of participation in bride kidnapping ceremony or were themselves victims of bride kidnapping and. Selection was mainly based on a snowballing method because it is the most convenient method to reach out to people who participate in this practice. With the help of this sampling strategy, I located a few women who agreed to participate in the interview and who referred to other potential participants from their community (Berg, 2004; Lindlof & Taylor 2002). In total, I interviewed ten women. Three women were recommended by the Open Line organization, and the rest of them were referred by these women. The age of the participants varied as the participants of bride kidnapping can be both young and old women (average age 59). Half of the participants were kidnapped themselves for marriage. Eight participants reside in urban areas, the rest live in rural areas of Kyrgyzstan. More information on my sample is given in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1.*Participants' Background Characteristics and Bride Kidnapping Experiences*

Pseudonym	Age	Marital Status	Children	Level of Education	Occupation	Number of Participation in Bride Kidnapping
Aigul	60	Widow	1 (boy)	Secondary	Housewife	4
Kunduz	65	Married	5(4 girls, 1 boy)	Secondary	Housewife	2
Tursun	59	Widow	4 (3 girls, 1 boy)	College	Assistant Principal	2
Aya	35	Married	3 (2 girls, 1 boy)	College	Day Care Teacher	1
Gulzat	53	Widow	3 (2 girls, 1 boy)	College	Bank Economist	1
Meerim	37	Married	5 (4 girls, 1 boy)	College, incomplete	Housewife	1
Zarina	55	Married	3 (2 girls, 1 boy)	Tech college	Seamstress, Housewife	3
Asel	70	Widow	8 (5 girls, 3 boys)	Secondary	Housewife	10 <
Aidana	53	Married	3 (2 girls, 1 boy)	College	School Principal	1
Bolsun	76	Widow	10 (5 girls, 5 boys)	Secondary	Housewife	2

Interview Process

Given that international travelling was limited due to outbreak of COVID-19 during 2020, it was not possible to conduct in-person interviews. Since all participants had access to WhatsApp, I conducted interviews through audio WhatsApp calls. At the time of the interview, I began by reading the participants a consent form and asked for verbal consent for (1) the interview to be conducted and (2) to have the interview recorded. Prior to starting interview questions, I requested permission for the interview to be recorded and explain how their confidentiality will be maintained. Upon the permission of the participants, a tape-recording was used to maintain “vividness of speech” of the respondents, which in turn allowed me to focus on interviewee’s non-verbal communication and have exact words to quote in the report (Weiss 1994). All interviews were held in Russian and Kyrgyz languages and translated into English, and detailed notes were taken during the interviews for later analysis. At the end of the interview, I concluded with reading a debriefing statement to my participants to briefly summarize the goal of my project and let them know who they can contact for legal and social support. I have also provided a list of counseling and community services that provides legal, psychological, and social support to women in Kyrgyzstan.

The research included only those participants who are willing to participate voluntarily. Confidentiality of participants was maintained pseudonyms were assigned to ensure the protection of the participants, to include their own names, any names mentioned in their stories and names of places (Berg, 2004). In addition, the video on WhatsApp was disabled during the interview and no video recording was used. All data collected during the interview was stored in a password-protected computer and a locked filing cabinet with access to data available to me and my major professor. Upon the completion of the research, all the files and notes were

destroyed. A research proposal was approved by the Kansas State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure the research follows the requirements regarding the protection of human subjects before the interviews commence (Berg 2004).

A list of questions was created to help facilitate the interview process. Questions were created based on an outline of categories relevant to the research which was helpful in visualizing the general format of the interview (Berg 2004) and structured in the following way: main, follow-up, and probes. Participants were asked a series of open-ended questions in a such order to replicate their lived experience (see Appendix A). Probing questions were utilized throughout the interview to clarify and understand the details of their personal stories and their perceptions of this experience. The interviews lasted for approximately an hour.

Challenges during the Interviews

Since all interviews were conducted via WhatsApp audio calls, I anticipated that internet disconnection may occur or participants themselves might withdraw from participation due to various reasons, including being frustrated or interrupted by other individuals at home or work (Berg 2004). Therefore, I provided my own telephone number, including WhatsApp, for the participants to contact if there were any concerns related to the interview (Berg 2004). There were a few participants who experienced internet disconnection and we rescheduled our interviews for another day.

Data Analysis

To analyze collected data, I used the thematic analysis method (Yin, 2016). This method is selected for a few reasons. First, it is widely used as this method of data analysis allows addressing a wide range of research questions and topics. Second, thematic analysis of interviews allows flexibility and interpretation during the analysis of the data. Data analysis

included the following steps: compiling (transcribing), disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding (Yin, 2016).

The analysis commenced with transcribing the interviews from digital recording device to Microsoft Word. Right after each interview, all notes were reviewed for accuracy and completeness of data (Burke & Miller, 2001). While transcribing recordings, the content was studied, and key concepts and phrases were identified and highlighted in accordance with the research questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). I used open coding to identify any fragments of the transcribed text that contained meaningful ideas. This kind of coding was chosen because it is “unrestricted” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p.219) and allows researchers to “open up the inquiry” (Strauss, 1987, p.29). In other words, a variety of meanings of sentences, phrases, and words were equally considered. Thus, following the first stage of open coding, patterns reflecting ideas were located, labeled, and documented and these meaningful proportions of text were marked into categories and described in a single self-explanatory term (Galletta 2013; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). This was followed by a repeated revision of codes. As revision of patterns was conducted, they were put together to generate themes and subthemes in accordance with my three research questions (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018).

Chapter 6 - Reflexivity Statement

Reflexivity is a strategy applied in qualitative research dealing with researchers' subjectivity, particularly how researchers relate to people and events in certain field (Primeau, 2003). It is achieved through the ability to broaden the understanding of how researchers' position impacts the research process and improves the quality of research. To determine my position in relation to this project, first I identify myself as am a mother of a nine-year-old girl. Coming myself from a traditional culture with patriarchal beliefs and customs, I wish my daughter to live in a society that values girls and respect their individuality, encourage them to step outside their box and pursue education and career and make their own choice of what is good for them. I wish my daughter to live happily in a society free of prejudice about women and free of constraints limiting their potential and ambitions. Most of all, I wish my daughter to be safe in a society without fear that your daughter can be kidnapped for forced marriage and exposed to physical, psychological, and even sexual violence that accompany the process of bride kidnapping.

Second, as a beginning researcher, I am interested in exploring and understanding how and why such practices as bride kidnapping still exist in a modern secular country like Kyrgyzstan, what motivates women to be engaged in bride kidnapping, and understand this phenomenon from the perspective of women themselves.

Third, I position myself as a girl who witnessed bride kidnapping as a child. Since my childhood, I was emerged in a traditional society with its own set patriarchal beliefs and customs, I perceived bride kidnapping as a norm. Along with other children I would sit right next to a young woman kidnapped for marriage surrounded by older women, who were my uncles' wives,

grandmothers, and even my mother. I sometimes would hear how my parents talk about how my father's cousins were kidnapped for marriage.

I was raised in a neighborhood, where everybody is a member of a big family household and remember how my parents and older adults would watch over us, girls, when we were children teaching us traditional values and warning about consequences for inappropriate behavior. Particularly older women felt free to comment out our actions by saying that girls must be obedient, modest, quiet, and maintain their chastity. Otherwise, we will bring shame to family if we act inappropriately, which meant we could not laugh loud, play, or behave like boys, stay late playing outdoor games, etc. A discourse of shame via powerful phrase “Uyat bolot” (translated from Kyrgyz language into English as ‘It will be a shame’) was instilled in me and many girls like me growing up in such a traditional family. In turn, I never questioned a wisdom of my parents and other older adults and accept whatever they would tell me as a given while growing up and submerged in this environment.

Fourth, I identify myself as an educated woman. At high school, my family moved to a big city. That was a turning point that changed my perception of me as a girl and understanding of women's role limited not only to marriage. Studying at college and being involved in various social projects aimed at motivating young people for education and self-development, I realized that women are restricted from many opportunities to grow up as independent self-loving individuals. As little girls we were told what is good for us, that violent behavior in a family is a proof of man's love to a woman and being kidnapped for marriage is a sign that you are honored to be a wife. Travelling across the world, pursuing further education overseas, and being outside the community with traditional values and norms approving kidnapping young women for forced marriage against their will and without their consent, I was able to step outside my box and look

at bride kidnapping from a different perspective. I could not accept it as a given or destiny because many young girls are kidnapped against their will and are never asked if they want to marry and who they want to marry.

Coming from the Kyrgyz society, growing up in a village, being aware of biases and values, and witnessing bride kidnapping myself may help me build the connection with my respondents, who are from villages themselves and had experience of participation in bride kidnapping. This association helped me get access to my respondents and build the rapport with them. As a result, I gained significant insight into their experience. Pursuing education and experience of socializing outside my community and my country enable me to look at this phenomenon through the lens of an outsider as well and approach it critically.

Chapter 7 - Results

My research project was guided by three main research questions – to explore motivational factors that influence women facilitators to be involved in the illegal practice of bride kidnapping for the purpose of forcing girls into marriage; how they understand and perceive their involvement in it; and their view of bride kidnapping as a social phenomenon. I interviewed ten women residing in urban and rural areas of Kyrgyzstan who participated at least in one ceremony of bride abduction. More information on my sample can be found in the Table 1. Half of these women were previously kidnapped themselves for forced marriage and stayed with their kidnappers ($n = 5$). A thematic analysis was used to analyze my data and identify themes observed across all interviews. This analysis resulted in the emergence of seven themes related to my research questions. Hence, my first research question regarding facilitator motivation revealed two themes: kinship duty and maintenance of family network. The second question, which focused on perceptions of this practice, detected three themes: women as mediators, women as performers, and women as protectors. Cultural and legal views of bride kidnapping emerged in my discussions on social views of bride kidnapping.

Prior to discussing the identified themes, I am going to describe the process of bride kidnapping and a few concepts and terminology pertinent to bride kidnapping that were revealed throughout my interviews with the women. Understanding the process of bride kidnapping from the perspectives of these women allows better insight into how exactly these women position themselves in regard to this practice.

Bride Kidnapping Terminology & Ceremony

This section begins with key terms and symbols to provide a clear understanding of the process of bride kidnapping as explained by my research participants and relevant concepts

which will be explained in detail later. All of my respondents referred to themselves and other women involved in the process as *kelin* (Eng.: daughter-in-law). The term *kelin* means a daughter-in-law or young bride in the English language and is “a complex phenomenon” (Zhussipbek & Nagayeva, 2020, p.2). After marriage, a woman becomes a member of her husband’s family and is assigned a status of *kelin* within that kinship system. According to Turaeva (2017, p.140), a *kelin* “has a very low if not the lowest status, not only in family and kinship networks but also in her neighborhood.” Within a kinship network, a status of a *kelin* is relative depending on age hierarchy related to the husband’s age. If a *kelin* is married to an older male relative, she is referred to as *zhene* in Kyrgyz language by younger family members. She has a more dominating power over younger *kelins* and is expected to be treated by them with respect. *Kelin* has a limited social agency in regard to her personal autonomy within her kinship system where she belongs to. As Turaeva argues (2017), *kelin*’s status is upgraded to a full social status when she marries her own children off and becomes a mother-in-law herself. *Kelins* are responsible for all household chores; serving parents-in-law, other relatives, and children living in that household at that time; and treating her husband’s family members, both young and old, with respect (Turaeva, 2017). This research found that *kelins* are instrumental in the bride kidnapping process as they facilitate the ceremony of convincing a kidnapped girl.

Kyzdy oturguzuu – a women-led ceremony of convincing a girl to accept her marriage

Bride kidnapping is a form of marriage by abduction practiced in Kyrgyzstan. There are two types of bride kidnapping, consensual and non-consensual. The current research is particularly interested in non-consensual bride kidnapping as it forces women into marriage against their will, thus, violates their rights for freedom (Alymbekova, 2019; Handrahan, 2000). The process of non-consensual bride kidnapping starts with preparation or expression of

intention by a man who wants to marry. Then, with the help of his male friends, the man abducts a girl he likes and drive her to his house. After they bring her to the “groom’s” house, his female relatives help them to take the kidnapped girl inside the house, where they try to force the girl into marriage (Borbieva, 2012; Handrahan, 2004; Kim & Karioris, 2020; Kleinbach, 2003; Kleinbach et al, 2005; Werner, 2009).

All interview respondents specified that they participated in ‘kyz oturguzuu’/ ‘кызды отургузуу,’ not the actual bride abduction. The idea of kyz oturguzuu implies a set of different acts and attempts aimed at persuading a kidnapped girl to marry her kidnapper after she has been kidnapped, including using various tricks, including psychological coercion and physical force. Providing for a formal set of acts which are established by rituals “framed by the visual and performing arts” (Marriam-Webster, n.d.), the ceremony commences from the moment a kidnapped girl is brought by her kidnapper and his friends to his house and ends when the girl gives her consent to marry her perpetrator. The entire ceremony may last from couple hours to almost eight hours, as based on experience of the participants in this project.

Even though the participants explained that kidnapping is typically committed by men, there are exceptional cases when women also have to take part in abduction stage. Two out of ten participants residing in the capital city of Bishkek, said that besides being involved in the ceremony of coercion, they also participated in the actual kidnapping of the girls. According to one of my participants, Aigul, her cousin from a village came to her family asking for help to choose a girl for marriage. As an option, Aigul’s sister suggested her colleague’s roommate, whom she was friends with. The girl was recommended as a humble and nice young woman and a good fit for a potential groom. After a decision was made, the kidnapper and his cousins, including Aigul as a driver and her sister visited the colleague in her dormitory, where they met

the chosen bride. By the time they arrived at the dormitory, the roommate of the potential victim already knew about their plan and tried to help them to take her roommate out. Under the pretense of inviting those two women for a birthday dinner, the abductor and his helpers offered to join them. Being deceived, the girl decided to go with them and found out about their original plan during “birthday” dinner after she was brought to the kidnapper’s house. That kidnapping was the first experience out of four for Aigul, who explains that “basically, women do not go to abduct the girl. They do not participate in the actual kidnapping. I did it because I had a car, that is why I was asked to come with them [men] and drive them”.

Aigul’s participation was twofold: she provided the function of transportation and by being a woman, gave the victim some comfort and sense of security that she would be joining the group and would not be harmed. The victim did not even suspect of any danger. Worried of what was going to happen when the victim finds out about their plan, Aigul locked herself in the bathroom after they delivered the bride to her cousin’s house full of relatives and had her seated at the dining table with other “guests.” Aigul confessed that she was scared and did not want to see the rest of the scene once the victim realizes what was going on. Before she locked herself in the bathroom, she remembered that the unsuspecting victim was surrounded at the table by other women from both sides purposefully. These women were ready to hold the girl in case if she wanted to escape when she announced that she was in fact kidnapped for marriage. A similar scenario of victim deception occurred when a victim was brought to her kidnapper’s house was described by another participant, Gulzat, who was also involved in bride kidnapping directly because she had a car and was asked by her brother-in-law to drive the bride to his house. Besides her helping as a driver, she and her other relatives were also asked to help to choose a

bride for him. Thus, the participant was not only involved in kidnapping, but acted as a matchmaker for her male relative.

Unlike the actual bride kidnapping, the ceremony of convincing a kidnapped girl to accept the marriage implies the involvement of kidnapper's close female relatives and neighbors only and is considered to be a women's job, in which no men relatives are involved except for the kidnapper himself if needed. The stage of the ceremony of persuasion starts when a kidnapped girl is delivered to her kidnapper's house. As soon as the kidnapper's female relatives are aware of the bride's arrival, often merely by hearing the sound of the approaching car, they come outside to get the girl out of the vehicle and take her inside the house.

If the girl refuses to get out of the car, male friends of the kidnapper help to pull her out and drag or carry her inside the house into a room prepared by female relatives for a bride. According to Kyrgyz marriage culture, a bride stays in a room behind a curtain hung in that room and separating a room into the bride's side and entrance. This curtain is called 'koshogo' (In Kyrgyz, көшөгө) and a space behind koshogo symbolizes a bride's space or women's space in which no male relatives are allowed during the ceremony except for her groom when invited to convince her during the ceremony and his friends to carry the bride inside the room. The groom is allowed in that space if he needs to talk to the bride to convince her. Once the ceremony is complete, his female relatives make a bed on one side of koshogo in that room for just the married couple. The koshogo hangs there for a few days while the wedding celebration occurs and then it is removed. During the ceremony, the groom and his friends may stay on the other side of the curtain or usually wait outside with other relatives.

Locked in her room, the bride is exposed to psychological pressure from women. She is threatened by shame and disgrace that she can bring to her parents and family if she does not

accept her marriage. Women facilitators in their efforts to coerce the girl rely on cultural marriage norms and beliefs which are strongly engrained in everyday life of the collective society. For example, all women in this study mentioned that one of the techniques they used in the ceremony was proverbs and beliefs related to marriage such as ‘a thrown rock stays where it lands’ which means a girl as a rock should accept her destiny and stay where she is brought for marriage. Another belief used by women facilitators to psychologically manipulate kidnapped girls is ‘once a doorstep is crossed, there is no way back.’ It is a common phrase which creates an invisible deterrence in kidnapped girls’ mind and make them believe that it is a bad luck for them if they refuse the marriage. The majority of the participants used this phrase while trying to convince the kidnapped girls. According to Asel, who participated in over ten ceremonies of persuasion in her village, when she talked to kidnapped brides, she always mentioned this cliché.

On top of verbal attacks and manipulation, women often use physical force to keep the kidnapped girl in the room if she decides to leave. This includes blocking her way, forcing her to remain seated and keeping her hands down while trying to place a white wedding head dressing on her head. The latter is called a ritual of ‘*kelinge joluk saluu*/келинге жолук салуу’ (which means putting a wedding head dressing on a bride). Women stay with the bride in her room until she agrees to put the scarf on her. If the bride finally accepts the marriage, she agrees to keep it on her head. Otherwise, she keeps resisting and taking it off every time women put it on her. Agreement to keep it on symbolizes bride’s submission on the one hand, but also demonstrated another symbolic meaning of it. As Tursun explained:

We [women facilitators] talk about who is going put the scarf on the bride. Usually it is her future mother-in-law, but if she has no husband, then we decide among wives of other older brothers (Kyrg.: *avysyndar*) who have husband and who have kids. Widows

and those who do not have children cannot do that. There is a meaning behind it. A scarf is put by a married respected woman with many children, so that a new bride can also have a lot of children and live happily with her husband.

According to Tursun and others who describe this process, this honor is assigned to a woman holding a highest social status based on age hierarchy, marital status, availability of children, and known for being respected among kidnapper's relatives. It has a symbolic connotation meaning that the bride will inherit all these good qualities that the assigned woman is known for. This gives the significant importance to socially constructed norms which women maintain within their family network. In this case, social hierarchy among women strongly influences women's understanding of their position in the kinship structure.

If the bride submits and stays with her kidnapper, all the rest of relatives start celebrating and having a festive dinner in another room. Meanwhile the bride stays in her room and little and young single girls of that family are put next to the bride to keep her a company while she is sitting behind *koshogo*:

Little girls or not married girls will sit next to the kidnapped bride. It symbolizes a wish that this bride will have a lot of children, but at the same time, bride can be entertained by children and build connection with her younger sisters-in-law (Tursun).

Another respondent, Zarina, explained that little and young girls, namely non-married, are told to stay with a bride after she was forced to marry or married with her consent, so she does not feel lonely and talk to her young sisters-in-law. She remembered as a little girl the day when her brother kidnapped a girl and brought her to their house:

As she [bride] agreed to stay, my sisters and I stayed with her behind *koshogo*. She gave us kisses and asked different questions

... and I remember I was not even scared; I was happy because I thought we finally have a sister-in-law [zhene] now.

This evidenced that not only older women are involved in this ceremony as facilitators, but little and young girls witness this practice and are involved after the ceremony of coercion is over. This is a process which little girls learn about from their young age, which impact their perception of gender roles, the relationship inside the circle of relatives, and women's function to marry and be submissive, humble, and respectful towards other family members.

Achuu basar – a men-led ceremony of paying a visit to the kidnapped girl's family

After the kidnapped bride finally gives her consent to marry her abductor, a group of male relatives are sent to pay a visit to the bride's family. The ceremony is called *achuu basar* (in Kyrgyz: ачыу басар) meaning "anger suppression" (Leo, 2013). The purpose of the visit for a group is to apologize for their son's act, deliver gifts and a letter written by the kidnapped girl that she accepted the marriage, get to know bride's parents and request their approval. "Other men and bride's father-in-law also go for *achuu basar*. It means a visit to the girl's family is to apologize and announce that their daughter was kidnapped for marriage and to ask for parents' approval", explained Tursun.

According to an example in a Kyrgyz language dictionary, a group would consist of 5-6 men who are capable of consuming alcohol (Akmataliyev 2019, p.153). Therefore, *achuu basar* was deemed to be men's job. Even though the majority of interviewees stated that men are the ones who do *achuu basar*, one of the respondents (Aigul) claimed that nowadays, women can also be a part of *achuu basar* group. As Aigul's discussed, women and men go together, bring gifts, apologize, praise the bride's family, and highlight good qualities of the kidnapper, including the wealth of his family.

An analysis of the concepts and terminology used by women facilitators demonstrates where women facilitators position themselves in the entire process of bride kidnapping. During interviewing, the majority of the women facilitators asserted that they were involved in the ceremony of persuasion, but not bride kidnapping directly. Rituals like putting a wedding scarf on a bride, social status of women in families, and gender-based space restriction also give evidence of how women facilitators perceive female and male roles, including older and younger generations. The following sections include a reflection on themes that emerged from my qualitative data related to my research questions.

Factors Motivating Women to Facilitate the Ceremony of Persuasion

My first research question on women's motivations to facilitate bride kidnapping allowed me to explore and understand what drives women to help her male family member and facilitate the ceremony of persuasion of a bride to agree to marry her kidnapper. As a result, two themes emerged related to factors impacting women's decision to be part of this illegal practice: family/kinship duty and maintaining family network. Corresponding examples from the collected data were provided to reflect on the ideas behind them.

Theme 1: Family/kinship duty

All the respondents explained that they participate in the ceremony of persuasion of a young bride due to a kinship duty (in Kyrgyz: *tuugandyk mildet*). One of the respondents, Aidana, asserts that "being a part of a family one cannot ignore or say 'No' to relatives who need help". As a rule, when a family has a good event happening in their life, they share this happy news (in Kyrgyz: *suyunchu*) with all relatives and close neighbors in a village. Relatives and neighbors in turn visit a family to congratulate and celebrate with them. *Suyunchu* means any good news which is shared among relatives and neighbors, including a birth of a child in a family

or welcoming a new bride. Sometimes a bride's virginity is deemed to be happy news which older women of that family share with bride's mother after the first wedding night and express their appreciation for the good upbringing of their daughter. What is interesting is that when relatives receive *suyunchu* about a wedding celebration, they do not question whether it is a bride kidnapping or consensual marriage. Kunduz, who had an experience of facilitation of two ceremonies of persuasion, explained during the interview how she was invited for a ceremony of persuasion of a kidnapped bride: "They [relatives] say *suyunchuu*, "Today our son is bringing a new bride/daughter-in-law [*kelin*]. Once they say that, we start gathering. We feel like it is our duty to be there for them".

According to her, being a part of a family is to provide support without asking questions. The respondent revealed during the interview that in both ceremonies, she was scared when her brother-in-law kidnapped a girl to her house and even if she was against kidnapping girls for forced marriage, she still had to obey her mother-in-law and follow her instructions without hesitation.

All participants shared the same view that it is a kinship duty, and they cannot go against their families. According to Bugazov (2013, p.42), a model of social organization in Kyrgyzstan was based on "patriarchal family with its clear hierarchy and mutual responsibility of each family member and the family as a whole" and one of the elements of Kyrgyz society was collectivism. Hence, being in a collective culture, members of a kinship group in Kyrgyz society feel obligated to contribute in accordance with their roles within established social hierarchy. As Gulzat explained: "... it is a collective group thing, you are part of it and you stick together and that is why we have to do what the group requires." In her understanding, as a member of this group, she is obliged to be there for them no matter what happens. She associated her

involvement in the ceremony of persuasion as her obligation in front of her family. Aidana stated that kinship and family obligation play a big role in making a decision. She also clarified that no other people or strangers will be interested in attending the ceremony, but because it is their close relatives, women gather to show their support. Other women shared the same opinion that only close relatives and neighbors are invited and involved in the ceremony of persuasion.

The participants shared that it is also a kinship duty to notify close family members and neighbors about an upcoming wedding. Once close relatives and neighbors are notified, they start gathering at the groom's house. Although refusing to attend is not welcome among relatives, women can still avoid attending the wedding and participating in the ceremony of persuasion of the girl. According to Aya, if a woman does not participate, she will be left outside the kinship circle because all members will be there when it is needed to make their family happy. Yet, the participants agreed that by coming up with an excuse, which is perceived by relatives as normal, women can still avoid attending the ceremony. However, the majority respondents did not recall when women refused to come. As Gulzat notes: "Instead of telling the truth that you are against kidnapping, it is better to find another excuse."

Thus, women cannot say they are against bride kidnapping outright if they think bride kidnapping is wrong because they do not want to offend their relatives. Aigul revealed that even if she is against bride kidnapping, she cannot go against the tradition. Aidana explained that those women, who come to the ceremony of persuasion, but stay away from bride's room, are also perceived as envious and careless. The evidence provided by the respondents demonstrate how women are closely associated with a traditional kinship system and prioritize collective needs over their personal views. Thus, their motives of participation in bride kidnapping lies in understanding of their participation as simply a duty or obligation in front of their relatives.

Theme 2: Maintaining family network

Another important theme generated from the data discusses women's motivation as a way to maintain extended family networks in which people are interdependent on each other within this collective society. More specifically, members depend on each other and by providing support when one relative needs, others ensure support for themselves in the future when they are in need. Aigul said that all kinship members are expected to help each other in bad and good times: "...Who is going to help you next day if you do not support your family? If you help and support, when you need them, they will be there for you."

All participants shared similar view on interdependency within their family network. In particular, women perceive their participation in the ceremony as a support for a male relative (kidnapper) to get married, build a family, and have children. According to Aigul, "...within the family circle, relatives will support each other because they want their family member to build a family, have children ... We help our relatives, they help us".

This comment is found to provide evidence that even though bride kidnapping is illegal, with which Aigul agrees now, her motivation lied in her desire to help her relative get married and build a family. Zarina also clarified that women do not want to fail or disappoint the groom and his parents:

We do not want to fail him. We don't want him to be broken, especially his mother is afraid that if the girl does not stay, her son will be upset, and it will negatively affect him ... For us, the most important is what the man feels and thinks. They say that the girl will come to love her husband after childbirth... Women do it because they care about their sons.

According to this comment, female relatives prioritize the needs of their male relative and his parents over the feelings of a kidnapped girl. In her response, Zarina continued that women

participate because relatives help each other. Thus, the value of maintaining family network because family members rely on each other's support prevailed and greatly influenced women's decision to facilitate the ceremony of persuasion.

Aya believes that even though women have a right to refuse to participate, family members will not like it and when that women will need a support and help in the future, she will be judged negatively. The same respondent revealed that she was motivated to help her husband's cousin because with arrival of a new bride she will have a helper around the house and divide chores between two daughters-in-law. In addition, Aya specified that with more labor force, she could manage get a job:

I am a middle kelin (daughter-in-law) and live with my husband's parents in one house. Older brothers and their families live separately. I stayed home for 6 years since I married my husband and now since she [a new bride] was coming to be a part of our family, I hoped I can get a job and start working. I hoped she would help me with chores as well.

This statement seems to be consistent with a notion of kelinism, which implies a "secondary status of women in Kyrgyzstan" (Akisheva, 2021, para 3). According to Akisheva (2021, para 2), being a kelin in an extended household and living with parents-in-law nowadays, women are subordinated to their family, particularly older women and mothers-in-law and are required to "perform certain duties such as cleaning the house, cooking, looking after children, upholding the household's honor, and never contradicting the family." She further argues that kelinism is equated by feminist movement of Central Asian countries to a form of slavery exploiting daughters-in-law as a labor force. Therefore, a new bride is seen as an additional labor that will relieve other women's burden in a family. This factor becomes motivational for women relatives to participate in a ceremony of coercion that will bring a new bride as a family helper if

she agrees to forced marriage. Following my findings on why women participate in bride kidnapping, I will discuss how women facilitators perceive their facilitation of bride kidnapping in the following section.

Women's Understanding of their Experience as Facilitators of the Ceremony of Persuasion

My second research question focused on women's perceptions of their participation as facilitators of bride kidnapping. Women talked about their roles and reflected on how they see themselves during this process of forcing a bride to accept her marriage against her will. The following themes, including women as mediators and women as performers were generated.

Theme 1: Women as mediators

All participants discussed how they act as mediators between a kidnapped girl, her parents, and a kidnapper. To mediate the process, these women use all skills and various tactics to achieve the goal, including emotional and logical manipulation, fear or uncertainty management, and information manipulation. Women facilitators who are known to be skillful at persuading others and know how to sweet-talk are encouraged by other women to step up and speak to a girl: "We praised him saying he is educated, calm, he will listen to you and do what you want to do. He is well mannered and well-behaved" (Gulzat).

This is an example of how women mediate the relationship between a kidnapped bride and a groom by praising good qualities of a man. Besides, women facilitators use other strategies associated with positive emotion management by trying to comfort and brainwash the girl by praising her, her future husband and his family's good reputation and wealth and listing all benefits she will get if she marries their relative.

Asel who was herself kidnapped for marriage proudly shared that in her village she was always asked to help to convince the girl to stay. According to her, she was involved in almost all ceremonies of persuasion in her village. She remembers one of those evenings when her neighbors came and got her to help them with a bride who was constantly refusing to obey:

They came to my house and ask for my help. They were rushing me. They said, “she is not staying at all, can you come and help?” My husband heard them too and laughed. ...They always tell me that I know how to persuade people and asked me, so I would help them.

At least for Asel, her personal negotiating skills made her well known and highly valued within her family and community. That is why she was always welcome and invited to the ceremonies.

Another woman facilitator, Tursun, used an individual approach of having in-person conversation alone without other women and having the girl talk to a “groom” to get familiar with him, “I said, “Decide yourself, we don’t want to force you, talk to him (groom) in person.” We left them alone for half an hour. When we came back, the boy[groom] said she agrees now”.

Managing uncertainty and fear of the girl kidnapped by a man whom she did not know or barely knew helped to manipulate the girl’s decision in favor of the groom. Letting a girl to speak to her kidnapper and spend some time with him in private to learn if not everything, but at least have a first impression about him helped Tursun in her efforts to convince the girl to marry the man.

If flattering does not bring effect, women start threatening the victim with curses and blaming her for ruined reputation of her family if she does not stay with her kidnapper. One of the respondents, Aidana, mentioned that during one of the ceremonies, they had to shift from flattering to scolding after a girl started pushing and kicking old women around her:

We said, “You seem like you a nice girl, you will live happily if you stay. God will bless you; you will get used to it, it is no big deal, it is alright”. Then, some women started telling their stories how they were kidnapped. ... We thought if we keep forcing her to put the scarf on, she will stay. But she started kicking us. We got angry. Then I said, “you yourself behaved in a provocative way. Why did not you say no when they (a kidnapper and his friends) came to meet you the first time? You could have said that you had a boyfriend, but you went out to a restaurant with them the second time they came to see you.” We used proverbs such as “кунаажын көзүн сузбөсө, бука кайдан ээрчисин” meaning – no bull will go for a cow unless she ogles, and we blamed her for provocative behavior. When she was resisting to keep her scarf on, we started squeezing her hands and pulling her down. We also held her face down trying to restrain her.

This conversation illustrates how women mediate the communication process between different parties as well as between the victim and women themselves using various approaches. Women as mediators tend to pin responsibility to a victim by accusing her of the behavior that provoked man’s certain reaction. Following the same pattern, another respondent Aya also recollected how she accused a kidnapped girl by saying that she should have anticipated the consequences if she agreed to go out with a man. Another approach was used by Asel, who always maintained assertive communication with kidnapped brides:

She [bride] cried for a while. I said, “My dear, you better stop. Stubbornness is not appropriate for a girl. Alright, that is enough. ... What’s done is done! ... It is over for you. According to our Kyrgyz custom, once you crossed the doorstep, you do not leave. Think about your parents’ honor.

Approaching young girls in an authoritative manner was used by Asel to convince young girls to marry their kidnappers. Thus, while manipulating with emotions, fear and information, women mediate the relationship and interaction between victims, their perpetrators, and other involved parties.

When a kidnapped girl's parents or relatives arrive, women also try to talk to them and influence their decision if they are set against that marriage. One of the interview participants, Zarina, recalled how she gave a tour around the house to demonstrate that their daughter is going to live in abundance. Meerim remembers how she had to deal with parents of a kidnapped girl, who came to take her back when they found out that she was kidnapped:

Bride's mother and aunt first talked to me. It was a quite nice conversation. I told them, "Alright, that is true, you need to talk to your daughter and make decision" ... So, I left the girl and her aunt in the room alone. While they were talking to her, I stayed outside with her uncle and talked to him about what happened and young man's intentions...In half an hour, they came outside and said the girl wants to stay... I offered them tea... They left.

These are examples of how women mediate not only bride and groom relationship, but also deal with a kidnapped bride's family. It is interesting to observe that the presence of women make bride kidnapping a normalized practice in the eyes of some parents. Moreover, at times women facilitators have to handle situations when bride's family members do not want to give their agreement for their daughter to stay there and act aggressively:

She [bride's mother] was yelling at us and pushed all of us away to see her daughter. The men who came with her were yelling at everybody, "Where are you keeping her?" ... We said, "Nikah [a religious marriage ceremony] has been done, it is not right to take her back now!" We tried to calm them down. (Zarina)

Even though women try to mediate between parents and their groom and his family, there are times when marriage does not happen. Zarina concluded that one of the ceremonies she helped to facilitate did not end successfully, and the women facilitators' efforts did not bring any positive results. The girl was taken back to her family.

Other respondents also mentioned that women have more skills in mediating and approaching a kidnapped girl compared to men. On top of that, Aya believes that the women's presence also prevents girls from abusive behavior of man:

Men can be brutal and violent...Men do not know how to talk to women. They do not have patience and whatever the girl tells them, men can perceive it wrongly. ... Women's participation is good as mediators. ...Kidnaping would not exist if no women would participate. Because women know how to talk to women.
(Aya)

Her statement shows that women consider that their mediation more effective and less violent. By referring to men's lack of patience and brutality, women, on the one hand, confirm a gender bias in regard to stereotypical perception of a woman as gentle and patient and a man as brutal and impatient. On the other hand, they attempt to rationalize their involvement as deterrence from men's violence; meanwhile, they do not consider physical force and psychological abuse used by women themselves as violent as the men's behaviors. In continuing on the importance of women's involvement, Bolsun explained:

It is not easy to persuade the girl. Some girls do not listen, they kick, punch, push – all this disappoint us, and it is a shame. It is nice when girls listen, it makes us happy. ... If women do not participate, they [kidnapped girls] will not stay. Women's participation is necessary because it is women who tame girls. There would not be kidnapping without women. Women are like

mediators; they stand between the groom and bride and mediate the process.

Bolsun's revelation is another example of the importance of mediating skills of women who have to appease the scared and frustrated girl to calm down at the same time nicely convince her to marry her perpetrator.

Thus, it seems to be evident that women play an instrumental role and their involvement becomes crucial in mediating potential conflicts and addressing any issues during the ceremony of persuasion. The next theme will consider women as performers of the ceremony of persuasion of kidnapped girls and will attempt to reveal what their role is as performers.

Theme 2: Women as performers

In describing my theme of women as performers, I refer to Goffman's dramaturgical analysis of symbolic interactionism discussed in his "Presentation of self in everyday life" (1959). Based on his idea that people interact in social settings and make efforts to create certain impressions in front of other people, I suggest that people who are involved in bride kidnapping play certain social roles and demonstrate certain behavior depending on their role. Among all actors, women facilitators occupy a particular place in bride kidnapping. According to the respondents, it is women who perform the ceremony. This is due to traditionally assigned gender roles and gender-based space division established in their society. Thus, certain responsibilities around the house are considered female as well as certain places in the house are believed to be women's place (Turaeva, 2017). This type of gender-based responsibility and space division is due to a woman's role limited to "obedient wife, homemaker, daughter-in-law or caring mother" ("Challenging gender norms as a mother and activist in Kyrgyzstan", n.d.). The same concept is applied in the ceremony of bride kidnapping. Since bride's room is believed to be her space, only women are allowed in that room. Therefore, the ceremony of persuasion

itself is considered to be women's space as well with no men allowed. Several of my respondents confirmed that men stay away during the ceremony. According to one of them, Aya, men come as guests and are not involved in women's job. Exception is a groom, who is allowed to be present in the room to talk to the bride, and his male friends, who help to drag the bride into her room. Another of the respondents, Aidana, explained:

Men cannot enter the room. They are not involved during the process of persuasion. If men persuade, it will be a big shame and people will gossip that the girl was persuaded by men. This will not be perceived by people in a right way.

Just like other traditional gender-based norms, which imply that women's place is in the kitchen, require brides (kelin) in Kyrgyz traditional families to cook, keep the house clean, be respectful and serve her parents-in-law and other family members, the ceremony of persuasion of a kidnapped bride is deemed to be specifically women's traditional role.

As such, women as performers of this ceremony are required to make sure the setting of the stage is completed prior to bride's arrival. This includes preparation of the room, hanging the koshogo in the bride's room, preparing wedding head dressing and bride's clothes, cooking for wedding celebration, making a bed for a bride and groom after a celebration is over. Women as performers make sure that the setting looks in accordance with the custom of marriage culture.

During the ceremony, women are required to make sure all rituals and customs are followed and performed. For example, women try to engage elder women to go first to talk to the bride with intention that a scared girl will obey elder women. In their efforts to persuade, some women perform in a certain way. They relate their marriage experience and by sharing their own stories of kidnapping for marriage they can influence a kidnapped girl's decision. As part of this performance, women try to actively involve those women of a higher social status, particularly a

schoolteacher (Tursun), who is highly respected in their communities, her words may sound convincing to young girls. Hence, one of the interview participants (working as a principal director) revealed that she had to overcome a long-term depression after she left her kidnapper, who abducted her when she was 18 years old and raped her to force her to stay with him. Later on, she was asked to participate in two ceremonies. In her tactics to persuade kidnapped girls to accept forced marriage, as a performer of the ceremony she relied on her unfortunate experience and social status as a teacher:

... Teachers have certain authority, dignity, and good reputation, so I was imposed this responsibility to talk to her. I also grew up in that village and I went through all this myself, plus my education help me to know how to talk to these girls. I always told them my story, gossips about me and how I had to live like an outcast after I left my kidnapper. I said that they would be in depression and it will affect their image.

By engaging in this performance, Tursun creates an image of a supportive mentor and shows her compassion for a kidnapped girl. This impression not only influenced a decision of the kidnapped girl to accept her marriage, but also was able to convince the bride's parents to finally approve that marriage.

In addition to exploring motivational factors of women's involvement in bride kidnapping, my findings also revealed themes on women's understanding of bride kidnapping as a social phenomenon. The next section will discuss these themes in detail.

Women Facilitator's Views of Bride Kidnapping

Further analysis of the data was based on my third research question aimed at learning how women view bride kidnapping in general. Understanding of the view of bride kidnapping from women facilitators' perspective is important in further addressing this issue

comprehensively. Two generated themes are women's cultural views of bride kidnapping as a tradition and corresponding gender and marriage norms as well as their legal views of bride kidnapping as a crime and dominance of kinship duty over law.

Theme 1: Cultural views

According to my respondents, the majority of kidnapping emerged during the Soviet era and is engrained in people's minds as a part of the Kyrgyz culture. Opinions of bride kidnapping as a cultural tradition were split into those who still perceive bride kidnapping as a tradition and those who never considered it as a traditional cultural heritage.

Subtheme 1: Bride kidnapping is a tradition. Several of my participants support a commonly perceived perspective of public that bride kidnapping is a tradition. One of the respondents, Asel shares with regret:

Bride kidnapping is our tradition. it became rare because life is different now. Life is difficult now. Nowadays, young people date for many years, marry and divorce. There are so many divorces. When girls were kidnapped in the past, they did not know their husbands. First month would be difficult, but they would get used to each other. In the past, young people would marry and stay in marriage. In the past, young people would care about their families' honor. Girls would think about reputation and honor. Nowadays, girls have no shame, they don't care... Young generation have no manners. They leave. Their upbringing is bad. It was very good in the past, younger brides would respect older people.

This comment seems to show that marriage through bride kidnapping is given a cultural significance and perceived as a tradition. Culture is closely associated with the value of honor, respect, and submissiveness of kidnapped girls engrained in traditional marriage and gender

norms. To maintain these social norms, kidnapped young girls are held responsible for their family's honor and reputation. In support of this social behavior embedded in traditional culture, Zarina discusses recent changes in how younger generation treat a traditional culture of bride kidnapping:

In the past, girls used to be well-mannered, submissive, and obedient. They would think about their parents and family, other people, they were afraid of what other people would talk about them. That is why majority of kidnapped girls stayed with their kidnapper.

Traditional culture of bride kidnapping requires submissiveness of a kidnapped girl. A kidnapped young woman is held responsible for ensuring a good image and reputation for themselves and her family. On the contrary, their disobedience during the ceremony of persuasion is understood as disrespect older people and her family and bad upbringing. Bolsun also argues that nowadays young girls do not obey:

You call it democracy? Girls are independent and do not listen, they do whatever they want to do. But I always teach my daughters if you are married and crossed the doorstep of that family, you stay there. No matter what difficulties you face, you will win at the end.

This is another statement demonstrating how gender norms are constraining women's freedom of making decision dictated by traditional cultural value. Behavior of those young girls who do not obey these norms and dare to make independent from gender stereotypes decisions is seen as inappropriate and unacceptable by some women facilitators.

A cultural perspective of bride kidnapping as a tradition is tightly linked to gender norms and behavior that girls are obliged to follow and demonstrate. Hence, according to Werner (2009), even if marriage is consensual, girls are expected to show reluctance and resistance to the

marriage because showing her happiness will result in gossips among older women about her bad manners and, thus, impact her reputation. My respondents also discussed that a young woman is not allowed to walk into her groom's house on her own will without tears and resistance. Aigul added that "Girls have to cry even if they want to stay. There is a belief that girls come crying to a new family, a place where they will be happy".

Part of cultural tradition of the ceremony of persuasion is having little girls or young non-married girls to sit beside the bride and keep her a company. Some participants, such as Zarina, shared their memories of childhood:

We were little, I was nine years old. When the bride was brought and tried to run away, I thought that was the way it should be... About five or six young men chased her. There was no way for her to run away. After she agreed to stay, we stayed with her, she gave us kisses and asked different questions when we were in the room, and I remember it made me even happier.

By keeping little girls in the bride's room during wedding celebration, women facilitators contribute into reproduction of traditional gender and marriage norms as children perceive bride kidnapping and following ceremony of persuasion as a norm since their childhood. Another respondent, Aidana, told how children would replicate their observation in the form of a game:

I remember we would play bride kidnapping when we were kids. We would assign boys as kidnapper, one girl as kidnapped girl and the rest would catch her and carry her to a special place and imitate what we would witness in real kidnapping.

Imitating bride kidnapping in a play form illustrates how social norms and socialization practices established in their community are deep-rooted in children's mind and behavior.

Subtheme 2: Bride kidnapping is not a tradition. The interview respondents opposing to the view of bride kidnapping as a tradition describe it as a modern-day tendency and consider

it more as an act of violence than a Kyrgyz tradition, in which women are involved only for the sake of helping their relatives due to kinship obligation. For example, Tursun explained her view of bride kidnapping the following way:

It was not a tradition at all in Kyrgyzstan. In the past, it was arranged marriage. Kidnapping occurred only when rich girls were kidnapped by their poor boyfriends with their consent and against the will of their parents. During Soviet time, arranged marriages were prohibited. However, in villages, people could not afford paying for expensive European style weddings. By kidnapping, families could avoid such weddings and negotiate expenses. That is why under pretense of kidnapping, people came up with this custom. Even if the girl was brought to groom's house with her consent it was called bride kidnapping. Girls would pretend crying just because they could not show they excitement and have to be humble.

This cultural view of bride kidnapping reveals that bride kidnapping was never a tradition embedded in the Kyrgyz culture. As Tursun explained, young girls were kidnapped for marriage with their consent only due to various reasons, including disapproval of parents, different social status of young people in love with each other, and a way to decrease financial expenses. This is consistent with the study findings of Ibrayeva (2006), who argues that marriage in patriarchal society implies an exchange of values. There are certain requirements that a man is required to meet to maintain the balance of values, including a bride price, expensive wedding and gifts for the bride's family. Those men, who cannot ensure the balance of exchange of values, kidnap girls with or without their consent for marriage. Since bride kidnapping damages a reputation of the kidnapped girl because she is believed to be no longer a virgin after being kidnapped and

spending a night at her kidnapper's house (Kim & Karioris, 2020), it becomes a way for a man to avoid the balanced exchange of values (Ibrayeva, 2006).

As Tursun explained even if the practice was named bride kidnapping in the past, its content and form were different. With time, even if the content, which implied the intention to marry and build a family, remained the same, the form has changed from consensual to non-consensual and became a way for men to prove their masculinity and ethnic identity (Handarahan, 2004; Kim & Karioris, 2020).

My respondents have different cultural perspectives of bride kidnapping as a tradition; however, they all share the views that this illegal practice is tightly associated with gender norms. The next section will discuss legal views of bride kidnapping.

Theme 2: Legal views

Bride kidnapping is recognized as an illegal practice in Kyrgyzstan and is punishable by law (Kim & Karioris, 2020). During the interviews, I asked my participants whether or not they consider bride kidnapping a crime. Even though my participants detached themselves from being involved in direct bride kidnapping, a ceremony of persuasion of a kidnapped girl for forced marriage still remains a part of bride kidnapping practice. At the end of my interview, I also asked them whether or not they will again facilitate the ceremony if they are asked to do so. By singling out my theme on legal views, I attempted to examine women facilitators' perception of bride kidnapping as a criminalized act and find out if the law serves as a deterrent from their participation nowadays.

Subtheme 1: Bride kidnapping is a crime. All respondents solidly agreed upon the fact that non-consensual bride kidnapping is a crime. One of the women specified that if bride kidnapping is against the will of a girl or if underage girl is kidnapped for marriage, it should be

deemed a criminal act. Yet, she shared her view on this practice from a perspective of a benefit for society in case of consensual bride kidnapping:

Of course, if the girl never met the man, and was kidnapped against her will, kidnapping is wrong and will impact her life. But if both knew each other and liked each other before, and kidnapping happens, the man will bear responsibility for building his family. It will make it easy for society. Families or couples who want to marry choose kidnapping to decrease some expenses. Otherwise, young people who want to marry, but cannot ... will have to live together hiding from relatives, but there is no marital responsibility on the man and if he decides to abandon the girl, he will not bear any further responsibility. Even if it is named (termed) bride kidnapping, the meaning behind it is different.
(Tursun)

In her opinion, complete ban of bride kidnapping, even if it is consensual, will cause other social problems. She argues that consensual bride kidnapping serves as a way out for those young couples who cannot afford an expensive wedding or other associated expenses. Fear of legal prosecution and lack of capability to pay for wedding pushes young people to live in a civil marriage in secret without notifying their parent because a civil marriage is not approved by society. Thus, relatives are not aware of this civil marriage. In case if a girl is abandoned by her civil partner, she is not protected by law and families cannot be involved to help.

One woman also defined nonconsensual kidnapping as a violation of women's right and deprivation of freedom of a kidnapped girl. All participants shared their fear of punishment for bride kidnapping nowadays. To my comment that bride kidnapping has never been legal, women argued that the law was not properly enforced in the past.

In addition, the participants shared their observations on recent pattern of nonconsensual bride kidnapping becoming rarely practiced now because public has become more cautious about the legal prosecution. On top of that, six participants pointed out that marriage through nonconsensual bride kidnapping is decreasing because a lot of young women do not obey and do not value traditional social and gender norms. According to one of the interviewees, the root of this change is in modern generation of girls who have a different mindset; they are not afraid of showing disrespect to elder people. One woman said it is hard to participate in non-consensual bride kidnapping nowadays because young girls are disobedient and make it hard for women to convince them.

While answering my question about criminality of the practice, the majority of the women referred to a recent well-known murder of a young college student committed by her perpetrator. This case stirred up public reaction and since 2018 caused escalation of numerous campaigns against gender-based violence in the capital of Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan (Margolis, 2018; *“Kyrgyzstan Women Fight to End Bride Kidnapping”*, 2019). Burulai’s perpetrator was sentenced to 20 years in prison and his friend who was helping him in kidnapping was sentenced to 7 years in prison. On top of that, a number of police officers were punished, including dismissal of 3 policemen, convicted of negligent behavior (HRW Report, 2019). This murder and following measures instilled fear among my respondents. Knowing that bride kidnapping can be now prosecuted discourage the majority of the respondents from further participation in bride kidnapping. Yet, the participants still discussed situations where kinship obligations supersede the law.

Subtheme 2: Kinship duty over law. Even though all the respondents consider bride kidnapping a crime, they specified that bride kidnapping with bride’s consent should not be

prosecuted by law. Even though all women confirmed that non-consensual bride kidnapping is illegal, and they shared their concerns about legal prosecution, six respondents said that they would still participate if they are asked to do so because it is their kinship duty and they must support their families “Even if it is against the law, relatives worry about their sons, so when they kidnap, they will try their best to convince the girl to marry. They do it because they care about their sons” (Zarina).

Thus, it is evident that kinship obligation still prevails legal responsibility. Only one woman who is willing to participate explained that she will do so only if she knows it is a consensual bride kidnapping. For the rest three participants, the law was found to be a deterring factor. They were firm in their responses against their participation in the ceremony of persuasion in the future because they have a fear of legal punishment.

The semi-structured interviews provided valuable insight into women’s personal stories and lived experiences regarding bride kidnapping facilitation in Kyrgyzstan, an understudied phenomenon. To my first research question, these women facilitators provided detailed description of what motivated them to participate in bride kidnapping. Being a member of a traditional kinship system, they believe it is their obligation to persuade the bride to accept the forced marriage. In addition, maintaining a family network and helping their relatives allow women secure help from relatives in the future. My second research question on how these women see themselves in this practice identified women as mediators and as performers of the ceremony of persuasion. Furthermore, by answering to my third question on their understanding of bride kidnapping as a social phenomenon, I was able to examine women’s cultural and legal perspectives on this issue. These findings and their connections to previous literature, theory, and future policy and research implications are discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 8 - Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion

Bride kidnapping is seen as a “product, producer, and reproducer” of gender inequality and stratification (Amsler & Kleinbach, 1999, p.195). It is a gender-based violence to maintain male power and ethnic identity (Handrahan, 2004; Werner, 2009). In the context of patriarchy, women, particularly elder women, gain their power and authority by oppressing younger women in the household (Kandiyoti, 1988). Expanding beyond the explanation of patriarchy, other research findings identified bride kidnapping as a way for women facilitators help their families (Borbieva, 2012). Yet, men can also be socially pressured and have limited agency as they bring kidnapped brides as a new labor for the household, who in turn brings desired status and honor to elder women in the household (Kim and Karioris, 2020). As such, women’s engagement in bride kidnapping is an integral part of the entire process.

Previous research has been mainly based on the perspectives of the victims of bride kidnapping, their perpetrators, and public in general and was focused on exploring the anatomy and reasons of bride kidnapping, its frequency, historical and ethnographical reviews (Amsler & Kleinbach, 1999; Becker, Mirkasimov, & Steiner, 2017; Borbieva, 2012; Cooper-Cunningham, 2016; Handrahan, 2004; Kleinbach, 2003; Kleinbach et al, 2005; Kleinbach & Salimjanova, 2007; Nedoluzhko & Agadjanian, 2015; Werner, 2009). Therefore, examining this social phenomenon through the lens of women involved in bride kidnapping is important.

This study sought to identify motivational factors of female facilitator’s involvement in bride kidnapping. In particular, I explored why women participate in bride kidnapping being an illegal practice, women’s understanding of their facilitative experience in the bride kidnapping process and their views on this practice. This research is significant as it will be specifically

focused on studying the involvement and motivations of female accomplices in bride kidnapping. Exploring bride kidnapping from the perspective of female accomplices may provide insight into why this practice has persisted despite its criminalization. Furthermore, their viewpoints may uncover new knowledge about this practice, which may be used to develop policies to disrupt its continuation.

The following themes were generated from my data in accordance with the research questions: first, women facilitators are motivated to be involved in bride kidnapping by kinship duty (theme 1, RQ#1) and the maintenance of a family network (theme 2, RQ#1); next, women facilitators perceive their involvement in bride kidnapping as mediators (theme1, RQ#2) and performers (theme 2, RQ#2); and lastly, cultural views (theme 1, RQ#3), including subtheme 1 (bride kidnapping is a tradition) and subtheme 2 (bride kidnapping is not a tradition) and legal views (theme 2, RQ#3) including subtheme 1 (bride kidnapping is a crime) and subtheme 2 (kinship duty over law) reflect women's understanding of bride kidnapping in general. These themes and their theoretical implications will be further explored in the next section.

Factors motivating women to facilitate bride kidnapping: kinship duty & family network

My first research question was built in an attempt to find out why women themselves facilitate bride kidnapping. To be more specific, I wanted to identify the factors that motivate female relatives of the kidnapper to help him in forcing a kidnapped girl into marriage. The findings of this study suggest that women are motivated to facilitate the ceremony of persuasion of girls kidnapped for forced marriage in Kyrgyzstan by such factors as their kinship obligation and maintaining a family network. Kyrgyz society has historically been built based on a patriarchal kinship system. The system was mainly patrilineal with extended families including

parents, their children, and grandchildren, all residing in one village. Family members are closely associated with father-sided relatives (Jumakunova, 2014) As a rule, one married son, his wife, and their children as well as his single siblings live with their parents in one household. Once other siblings get married, they usually move out from their parent's house.

Within a traditional kinship network, the relationship between younger kelins and older kelins, particularly their mothers-in-law is based on the structure of domination (Zhussipbek & Nagayeva, 2020). To be more specific, it is formed into a kelin being a subject of exploitation in the household, to include housekeeping and childbearing, and her mother-in-law being a supervisor. This type of relationship allows a mother-in-law to hold a dominating authority position over kelins and their son's families, which requires her kelins to be obedient and follow instructions given by mother-in-law. Holding the lowest social status in a family, kelins cannot express their points of view openly and possess a freedom of choice. Kelins do not question their mothers-in-law instructions, but on the contrary maintain obedience. Thus, kelins becomes as a subject of exploitation, marginalization, and powerlessness in the kinship system (Zhussipbek & Nagayeva, 2020). In accordance with the concept of patriarchy presented as a system of oppression of women, the latter are embedded in the patriarchal kinship system in Kyrgyzstan as a subordination under men's domination (Tugelbayeva et al, 2018).

Obliged to play particular gender roles and practices, including bride kidnapping, the women in a kinship network ensure the kinship system operation. Hence women have a function of not only raising children and maintaining a household, but also being involved in family-related social events where kelin is exploited as a labor force to cook, clean, serve, and be on duty until the end of the event. Kelins typically do not take active part in social events staying behind the scenes, in the kitchen (Turayeva, 2009). Participation in the ceremony of persuasion

of a kidnapped bride at some point gives them a space for direct involvement and attaches a special importance to kelin. However, kelins were found to be not asked whether or not they want to facilitate the process; moreover, they cannot express their discontent with this practice outright if they believe bride kidnapping is wrong. Bugazov (2013) argues that in a traditional society the notion of the collective dominates the notion of the individual; hence, such system of the collective prioritizes common level and results over one individual. In case of kelin, their personal views are muted in favor of social norms and collective benefit established in the kinship system that women perceive as an obligation to maintain. It becomes evident that older women in the household possess certain authority over younger women in the kinship system as suggested by a Kandiyoti's (1988) idea of patriarchal bargain, implying that older women colluding with the patriarchal oppression of younger women in the household gain limited benefits and status in their household. However, my research findings show that when it comes to bride kidnapping, women do not in fact gain any social authority or upgrade their status by being involved in the ceremony of persuasion. However, their high social status allows them to be assigned certain roles in that ceremony. Within this traditional family network, women's agency is limited, and, according to the current research findings, their mind is shaped in a way to perceive their involvement in social life of their family as an obligation. Thus, family duty and kinship obligation greatly impact their decision to facilitate the ceremony and motivate women to facilitate the process.

Furthermore, female facilitators were found to be motivated to participate in the ceremony of persuasion because maintaining a family network ensures receiving help and support when needed. Living in a collective society like the one that exists in Kyrgyzstan, people depend on each other's help in good or bad times. The respondents expressed their concern that

refusing to participate in the ceremony would offend relatives and result in them becoming outcasts. Thus, their willingness to help is driven by the need in help in the future within that extended kinship system (Bugazov, 2013). As Kanaiaupuni and her colleagues (2005, p.1140) argue, the social support takes place through “reciprocal exchange.” It included the exchange of material goods or services between members of the group or between groups. The scholars specify that this is a two-way exchange implying that the members can be providers and receivers. The participants of my study shared their concern that if they do not help their relatives in good or bad, including illegal practice of bride kidnapping, their family will be abandoned from getting help within that kinship system. Hence, another motivational factor for women to facilitate the ceremony of persuasion of kidnapped girls for forced marriage is maintenance of benefits available in the family network/kinship system.

Another attempt to neutralize their involvement in the ceremony is found when women stated that all couples, they helped to marry through bride kidnapping, still live together happily and have children, and moreover, express their gratitude to their female relatives for their help. By justifying their involvement through contribution into building a “happy” family, women are found to make sense of their participation and view the victims of bride kidnapping instead of being harmed, having families and living happy life. On top of that, rationalizing that a kidnapped girl ended up living happily with her family, the women facilitators seem like to attempt to neutralize their involvement in the illegal practice. This approach is consistent with the technique known as the denial of victim (Froggio et al,2009). In accordance with this technique, although the respondents admit responsibility for their deviant behavior, they do not see their behavior as wrong, but rather as an act of goodness, and do not consider the kidnapped bride as a victim, but rather as a potential wife who will be happily married to her kidnapper.

Bride kidnapping as known is a patriarchal practice that symbolizes man's ethnic dominance over women (Handrahan, 2004) and exposes women to psychological and physical abuse, and violates women's rights (Aisarakunova, 2010; Handrahan, 2000). Driven by kinship obligation and dependency on mutual help in the kinship system, women construct a social meaning of this practice and contribute into reinforcement of this kinship system. Motivated to facilitate the ceremony, they contribute into continuation of the illegal practice of bride kidnapping, and thus reproduce patriarchal values and gender inequality.

Women's perception of their facilitation of bride kidnapping: mediators & performers

In accordance with my second research question on how women perceive their facilitation in bride kidnapping, the findings suggest that women perceive themselves as mediators and performers of the ceremony. Women's participation in bride kidnapping is found to be crucial and they distinguish their role in the ceremony as significant with explicit gender-based space.

By mediating the communication and relationship between a kidnapped bride, her kidnapper and her parents, they greatly impact kidnapped girl's decision using various tactics including flattering, threatening with curses, shaming and blaming for a ruined reputation of her family and herself, using physical force to keep a head dressing on her head. Those women, who were kidnapped themselves, share their stories and try to justify marriage through bride kidnapping. The participants also rationalized their mediation based on the opinion that it is women's job to persuade the kidnapped girl. Previous research seems to be supportive of these findings; a kidnapped girl brought to her kidnapper's house is turned over to his female relatives who keep her in a room and try to convince her to marry her kidnapper (Borbieva, 2012; Kim & Karioris, 2020; Kleinbach, 2003; Kleinbach et al, 2005; Werner, 2009). Various tactics used by

women mediators confound the kidnapped girl. This approach seems to be similar to a ceremony of genital mutilation practiced in Sudan (Oldfield Hayes, 1975), which provides for only female participation. Giving gifts and use of festive noises around and focused attention to the young girl exposed to the operation to some extent are tricks used to draw attention of the girl away from the emotional and physical violence she went through.

Another pattern that emerged from my results is that women distanced themselves from bride kidnapping and identified themselves with the ceremony of persuasion of a kidnapped bride for forced marriage which is not bride kidnapping itself but follows the actual bride kidnapping. According to the participants, they mediate the ceremony convincing the girl after she is kidnapped and delivered to the groom's house and have nothing to do with directly abducting the bride. By distancing themselves from bride kidnapping itself, women most likely attempt to rationalize their involvement. The ceremony of persuasion is in fact an integral part of the practice of bride kidnapping. Women's attempt to rationalize their involvement through distancing can be explained by techniques of neutralization proposed by Sykes and Matza (1957). Hence, as per a technique of denial of responsibility, female facilitators justify their behavior and participation not by denial of their responsibility, but through detaching and distancing from this illicit practice, which has been supported by other research on topics such as domestic discipline among Christians (Deshotels et al., 2019) and cyberracism (Vysotsky & McCarthy, 2017).

As performers of the ceremony, women ensure all settings are prepared and rituals are followed in accordance with social gender norms. Roles of women are not discussed in advance. As Goffman (1959) describes expected behavior and roles in particular situation, women in bride kidnapping follow a social script that already dictates them how they behave and act. A

kidnapped bride is taken to her room and held behind *koshogo*. A white head dressing is prepared by women and placed on the bride's head by a specially assigned woman holding a higher social status among other women, including age hierarchy, marital status, and children. If a bride finally accepts the marriage, a group of men is sent to visit her parents for *achuu basar*, a festive dinner is prepared, and all family members are invited for dinner and celebration. Meanwhile, a bride stays behind *koshogo*, and little and young girls are put beside the bride to keep her occupied with her little sisters-in-law.

Women facilitators' view of bride kidnapping: cultural & legal

Studying women's cultural and legal views in regard to bride kidnapping provides insights into bride kidnapping from the perspectives of female facilitators, which is important because women themselves play a central role in one of the key stages of bride kidnapping. Exploring their perspectives on bride kidnapping can enable understanding of how this problem can be addressed.

Bride kidnapping has been rationalized as a cultural tradition of Kyrgyz people. However, research findings demonstrated that Kyrgyz families historically never committed to a culture of stealing brides for forced marriage (Kleinbach & Salimjanova, 2017). Even if it took place, it was prohibited and punished by traditional customary law before and during the Soviet period. Bride kidnapping can be explained through the cultural model suggested by Beyer and Finke (2019). Following their articulation about tradition as a cultural model, cultural views of bride kidnapping are identified by its participants, namely women facilitators in our case, and have not only practical, but moral components. For example, whether with consent or without, a kidnapped girl is expected to demonstrate tears and resistance (Werner, 2009). Women facilitators treat this behavior as expected and justify it as normal. Besides expecting a certain

“acceptable behavior” from a kidnapped girl, women facilitators during the persuasion ceremony use proverbs and wisdom of elders, which are considered “central elements of what counts as tradition” (Beyer & Finke, 2019, p.316).

As a result, bride kidnapping is perceived as a form of marriage and is closely associated with expected gender behavior and norms (Werner, 2009). Not only adult women, but little girls are exposed to observing and learning the traditional social norms and cultural values established in their families by being placed in the bride’s room after the ceremony of persuasion is complete. Such exposure to domestic socialization enables sustaining cultural models of such tradition across generations (Bayer and Finke, 2019). According to them, when children are exposed to such cultural views, in our case traditionalization of bride kidnapping, these ideas can have powerful and long-term influence on them.

Moreover, observing the scenes of abusive treatment of a kidnapped bride most likely impacts their perception of gender relations and gender-based-violence. As such the findings provide support for social learning, which suggests that criminal/delinquent behavior is learned by observing, imitating, and modelling and probability of deviant behavior is based on the system of rewards or punishment (Burgess & Akers, 1966). In particular, Sutherland’s differential association theory (Sutherland, 1934) can be applied in this case.

Given its concept of imitation and reinforcement, an individual is subject to direct or indirect observation of certain behavior performed by another individual (Akers & Jennings 2009; Akers et al, 1979). If a group of individuals practice criminal and deviant behavior, an observer is more likely to practice criminal/deviant behavior. In my research, the study respondents as little girls would observe adult men’s and women’s violent behavior towards kidnapped brides and emotional reactions during the ceremony. Even though they were scared at

first, watching how the efforts of adult family members were rewarded by cheerful celebration at the end enabled them to apparently perceive marriage through kidnapping as a normal inevitable practice. One respondent even told how as children they would simulate bride kidnapping in the form of game. This shows that it is most likely a learnt behavior that was adopted and modeled in their adulthood when the women themselves became kelin. It becomes apparent that growing up, little girls are exposed to learning process in the context of social interaction during the ceremony of persuasion of kidnapped brides and are most likely to adopt and imitate this deviant behavior when they themselves become kelins.

Other concepts such as concept of definition and association can be applied in the following case. Young women after marriage becomes subordinate in her husband's family and supervised by her mother-in-law. There are certain set of responsibilities that she is held implicitly, including assisting in daily routine within the household and social family events. Thus, a young kelin of an extended Kyrgyz household or community becomes involved in such social event as a ceremony of persuasion. During the ceremony, she can be differentially associated with her intimate peer group, particularly other older female relatives within the same household or community. This way, she becomes exposed to those values and norms that are supportive of bride kidnapping and imitate the same behavior as other older women. Besides that, in accordance with the concept of definition, which implies that certain values and attitudes toward a criminal behavior can be assessed as justifiable (Akers & Jennings 2009). In case of bride kidnapping, some of the respondents seem to justify this practice as a form of marriage and a way to build a family. Thus, the values that are attached to bride kidnapping make the respondents to justify this practice as appropriate. This belief is consistent with the argument of Borbieva (2012) who states that women are involved in bride kidnapping for good intentions to

maintain productive social relationship. In fact, the cycle of deprivation and oppression of women by women is most likely to be repeated from generation to generation with a mindset embedded in women who adopt the same set of behaviors (Zhussipbek & Nagayeva, 2020). Thus, they contribute into the internalization of this type of patriarchy by women themselves.

Some of the participants' understanding of culture of bride kidnapping was not fully associated with tradition, but mainly necessity to help each other. This view of bride kidnapping as not a tradition is consistent with other research findings (Kleinbach et al., 2005). In fact, bride kidnapping was not justified as a tradition, but a way for a couple to stand against their parent's disapproval of their marriage or avoid excessive financial expenses for wedding and bride price. Traditional marriage in patriarchal families required exchange of values with maintenance of balance (Ibraeva, 2006). Bride kidnapping for a young man became a way to balance it differently, through damaging a reputation of the kidnapped girl as being considered no longer virgin after kidnapping (Ibraeva, 2006; Kim & Karioris, 2020). In addition, bride kidnapping was perceived as an act of violence against kidnapped girls (HRW Report, 2015; Werner, 2009). Furthermore, the participants pointed out at changing trends in present days which is important because they demonstrate whether or not public is still inclined to maintain bride kidnapping as a cultural norm and what causes these changes. Participants mentioned that there are less non-consensual bride kidnapping and even if it occurs, it is more difficult to persuade a kidnapped girl if she is kidnapped against her will. According to the respondents, this is partially due to changing patterns of gender norms and cultural views among younger generation in society. More young girls disregard traditional gender norms and cultural values implying obedience and submissiveness of young girls to older women (Kleinbach & Babayarova, 2013) and do not view cultural values of shaming (Sataeva, 2017) and reputation as detrimental as before.

Even though bride kidnapping is perceived as a traditional custom, the criminal law of the Kyrgyz Republic penalizes this crime of kidnapping for the purpose of marriage and coercion into marriage (Criminal Code of Kyrgyzstan, 2019, articles 175-177), women tend to believe that consensual bride kidnapping should not be punished. The women facilitators confirmed that bride kidnapping is illegal; however, they claimed that if needed they will still help their relatives to facilitate the ceremony of persuasion of a kidnapped girl due to their kinship obligation and benefits that they can get by helping their relatives. Yet, public fear of legal prosecution impact the current tendency of decreasing rates of non-consensual bride kidnapping (World Bank Report, 2017).

Conclusion

As it was studied before, bride kidnapping is a complex process consisting of different stages (ceremonies) and involving different actors at each stage. Among all actors, women are found to play an instrumental role in the bride kidnapping process as they facilitate one of the key ceremonies, a ceremony of persuasion of a kidnapped girl. Women facilitators in fact are keepers of the local culture and by participating they contribute into reproduction of bride kidnapping. Yet, they consider it a crime and expressed their fear of legal prosecution nowadays. Even though the law existed for many years, prosecution was not enforced due to negligence of police and lack of report by victims (HRW Report, 2006; Toktonazarova, 2018). The murder of Burulai in 2018 (HRW Report, 2019) caused numerous public frustration and response of local and international organization to tackle this issue appropriately. Thus, the women facilitators are themselves forced to the edge between obeying the law or adhere to local cultural norms. Being a part of a patriarchal society that requires women's submissiveness (Tugelbaeva et al, 2018), women see their role in bride kidnapping as kinship duty, which becomes a driving factor.

According to my respondents, more and more young girls are becoming less obedient and respectful toward patriarchal cultural norms making the persuasion ceremony difficult to perform for women. These changes are perhaps due to values of the younger generation in Kyrgyzstan leaning towards the western value of individualism versus traditional values that have been observed nowadays (Abdymomunova, 2008; Urumkulova, 2017). Urumkulova (2017) argues that the globalization process that Kyrgyzstan is adjusting to results in prioritizing individualistic principles and values among young people in the context of the transition of the country into market economy and under the influence of the western culture. Due to these socio-economic changes, some social norms of a conservative nature are subject to change.

In regard to the illegality of this practice and women's views on it, despite the fact that bride kidnapping is deemed a crime and the law and fear of legal prosecution serve as a deterrent factor from participation in bride kidnapping, women still prioritize their obligation in front of their family. It is women, who by using various techniques of convincing mediate the interaction and communication between all parties involved and make sure all rituals are performed accordingly under the supervision of the mother-in-law of that household or eldest women. Witnessing the practice since their childhood and being emersed in the process as kelin in adulthood, women learn this violent behavior through their role models in their families. Even if they realize that this is an illegal practice, they attempt to neutralize their involvement as not directly in abducting a bride, but in the ceremony of convincing requiring psychological and physical coercion used by women. Another justification is that the respondents are convinced that after all, those families build through bride kidnapping live happily. Thus, women remain a central part of bride kidnapping standing between demands of traditional cultural norms of collective society and changing pattern towards the value of individualism among younger

generation. What is found to be unchanged yet is that this practice is less likely to exist in its present form without women being involved in it.

Limitations

There are a couple of limitations included in my study. First, the findings of this research are not generalizable in terms of the number of respondents. This is due to a limited sample size that comprised ten women who I was able to reach out to and interview within a given time frame. Thus, the findings do not represent the opinion and views of wider female population. Second, due to COVID-19 outbreak in 2020, conducting in-person interviews became challenging. Therefore, the interviews were conducted only with those women in Kyrgyzstan who were available during the timeframe of my project and had access to internet and modern means of communication. Women without such resources available to them were not able to participate even though they expressed their wish to do so.

Strengths of the Project

There were several strengths of this project. Even though my sample size was limited to ten participants, these women had a wide diversity of experiences with bride kidnapping, including personal experiences of victimization of bride kidnapping, facilitation experiences, and a number of involvements in bride kidnapping. In addition, the majority of research on bride kidnapping was aimed at studying the logistics and frequency of this practice (Kleinbach & Babayarova, 2013; Kleinbach, 2003; Kleinbach et al, 2005), and various discourses and perspectives of victims themselves, perpetrators, or public in general, including women and men (Amsler & Kleinbach, 1998; Handrahan, 2004; Kleinbach & Salimjanova, 2007; Kim & Karioris, 2020; Nedoluzhko & Agadjanian, 2015; Open Line Report, 2010). There were a few studies explaining the reasons behind female relative's involvement in bride kidnapping

(Borbieva, 2012; UNFPA Study, 2016; Werner, 2009); yet little was known that was told by these female participants themselves. The study is unique in a way because it is focused solely on women, who participated in bride kidnapping process. Bride kidnapping is a complex social phenomenon consisting of different stages and involving multiple actors at each stage. Therefore, I believe it is crucial to examine this practice comprehensively and hear all parties engaged in the practice. Even if the stage of ceremony of persuasion of a kidnapped bride for marriage is not primary, but it was found to be a key stage that plays a pivotal role in obtaining the agreement of a kidnapped bride to marry her abductor. The ceremony is completely performed by female relatives of the abductor. Through their personal stories, lived experience, emotions, and feelings, I sought to gain a better insight into what the role and position of female relatives of the kidnapper are in this illegal practice that has been widely spread in Kyrgyzstan and sealed the fate of many young girls without asking them. The findings provide a source of first-hand information that demonstrate changing tendency in perception of traditional social and cultural norms of younger generation and growing authority of law and order in society. Conducting this project is particularly important to me as I myself come from this culture and hope that my research findings will contribute into the further development of knowledge on bride kidnapping and raising social consciousness of local society on gender-based violence.

Policy Implications

The findings of this study may have some important policy implications. My recommendations include enhancement of educating of public about legal consequences and strengthening of civil participation to ensure enforcement of the law. It is worth mentioning that the majority of population reside in rural areas. Women in rural areas have less access to sources of information, including legal knowledge. Traditional social norms and gender expectations in

rural environment is harsher towards women, therefore women's civil participation is comparatively low in rural areas than in urban areas (World Bank Report, 2017). Since fear of law and punishment for women facilitators were found to be a deterrent factor from involvement in bride kidnapping, it is essential to incorporate the efforts of local non-government organizations, law enforcement agencies, and local government to better educate more rural population on legal consequences for bride kidnapping and strengthening the enforcement of the law. This target group should include not only women, but young men who have a potential to commence kidnapping. In order to ensure the enforcement of the law, it is also important to strengthen the civil participation of public in rural communities. Therefore, the efforts should include community leaders working jointly with local government and law enforcement offices and promoting the idea that the law and order prevails kinship obligations in case of bride kidnapping. Women should be included in these collective efforts as important key participants and allowed to speak up without fear of being outcasted.

Future Research

The findings of this research can be used in further study of the phenomenon of bride kidnapping and ongoing gender-based violence in the Kyrgyz society. It will be more beneficial looking at this social phenomenon from a different angle, particularly from women's perspectives, and guiding the efforts with account of women facilitators' experience and role in understanding and effectively addressing a problem of violation of women's rights and gender-based violence in the Kyrgyz society. Since the project included women facilitators only and a sample size was small, further study of the problem of bride kidnapping from the perspectives of women facilitators on a larger scale and covering all urban and rural regions of Kyrgyzstan is needed. Future research may explore the extent to which women's engagement impacts the

outcomes of bride kidnapping and whether or not their own prior victimization experience has an influence on the continuation of this practice, as well as the views of other category of population on the involvement of women facilitators in bride kidnapping, including individuals of different genders, social status, and ethnicity. Enabling public to understand the experience of women's participation in bride kidnapping and how they feel during this process may impact general perception of population on this issue and ultimately disrupt the practice of bride kidnapping.

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Appendix A - Interview Guide

Introduction questions (including demographic)

Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and your family?

What is your marital status?

What is your level of education?

How many children do you have? How many boys and how many girls?

What is your occupation?

Do you work or are you a housewife?

Personal experience of bride kidnapping and how respondents understand bride kidnapping:

Can you tell me what bride kidnapping means in your culture?

Can you tell me about your experience of bride kidnapping?

Did you participate in planning? If yes, what is the process and to what extent women are involved in planning?

Did you stay with a kidnapped girl in a room? If yes, can you tell me more about your experience?

Can you tell me how did you feel about participating in it in general?

Can you tell me how women convince a kidnapped girl to stay with her kidnapper?

Can you tell me about bride's reaction while she stays with other women in the room?

Can you tell me how usually women are invited to participate and help in bride kidnapping?

How and when do women discuss their roles in bride kidnapping before the kidnapped girl is delivered to the groom's house? How are these roles assigned to women?

How different is bride kidnapping nowadays from what it used to be in the past? What impacts this difference/change?

What is your attitude about bride kidnapping being criminalized?

How in your opinion have people's attitudes to bride kidnapping changed since the penalty has become tougher?

Motivation to participate in bride kidnapping:

In your opinion, what motivate women to participate?

What is your opinion about women being involved in bride kidnapping?

How important is the involvement of women in bride kidnapping?

What would happen if a woman refused to participate?

Can women easily refuse to participate and what consequences they might have if they decide not to participate?