

*Гац Д., здобувач ступеня вищої освіти
Національної академії внутрішніх справ
Керівник з мови: Могилевська В.*

WILDNESS IN KYRGYZSTAN: BRIDE KIDNAPPING

Regretfully, kidnapping is a global problem which is becoming bigger and bigger every year. Abduction of women – one of the most primitive forms of marriage, marriage by capture – is now considered a serious crime throughout the world. Although the practice was outlawed in 2013, bride kidnapping continues to exist, with destructive consequences for society. As for the topic of my research, in the former Soviet republic of Kyrgyzstan thousands of young girls and women are kidnapped every year to be forced into marriage. So, what is bride kidnapping and how do we can combat this?

To begin with, bride kidnapping is often referred to as a tradition, perceived as the obvious thing to do when one is ready for marriage. If a man has his eye on a girl, he may inform his family members about the upcoming kidnapping, gather his friends together, and wait for the right time. When the girl is dragged into a car and brought to his home, his female family members will persuade the girl to stay, often using physical and mental violence, until the girl eventually agrees to marriage [1].

Much to our regret, the family's honor was violated the moment the girl was dragged onto the property of the kidnapper - social pressure often keeps the parents from taking their daughter home with them [1]. Nevertheless, most cases did not make it to court as women retracted their statements, often under pressure from female family members, fearing public shaming for disobedience or no longer being a virgin[2].

According to data by the NGO Women Support Centre, which works to eliminate violence against women, there are at least 11,800 cases of forced abduction of women and girls every year in Kyrgyzstan, with more than 2,000 of those girls reported being raped as well [3].

Because of this terrible statistics Kyrgyzstan toughened laws against bride kidnapping in 2013, making it punishable by up to 10 years in prison, according to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), which said it was a myth that the practice was ever part of the culture. To add, a UNDP spokeswoman said data was scant on the number of women abducted each year because many women did not report the crime through fear but they estimate about 14 percent of women younger than 24 are still married through some form of coercion [2].

Although the punishment on bride kidnapping was tightened in 2013, prosecution is still rare. A wide range of factors may explain the low prosecution rate, ranging from social pressure not to press charges to a lack of confidence in the authorities. In some cases, the kidnapper is a blood relative or a member of the “extended family,” further complicating the situation [1]. Only one out of 700 cases is pursued by the justice sector and

only one in 1,500 cases of abduction results in a judicial sentence in Kyrgyzstan [3].

Despite legislative measures, widespread cultural acceptance of the practice persists. Physical and mental violence is common during kidnappings and these experiences haunt the victims for years. Not to mention, a number of suicides have even been reported after kidnappings [1].

Answering the question of how can we combat this type of crime, education is one of the ways to stop this cruel practice. As an example, young boys, who joke that they will kidnap a girl themselves one day, are the ones who should be educated and hear the stories of young girls who have experienced kidnapping, see their tears, and feel how deeply they have been wounded by what people in Kyrgyzstan call a “tradition”—even though it is not. It is just a practice of violating the rights of women that began from one day to the next and can hopefully be stopped in the same way soon [1].

Even though Kyrgyzstan had ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international treaties which prevent violence and discrimination against women and girls, years of advocacy and mobilization are needed for the legal reform [3].

Summing up, there are some speeches which, to my mind, deserve public attention. Ainuru Altybaeva, a Member of Parliament in the Kyrgyz Republic who initiated amendments to Article 155 of the Penal Code, which increase penalties for “kidnapping a woman to marry her against her will”, says: “According to Article 36 of the Constitution, no marriage shall be registered without benevolent and mutual consent of the parties to the marriage.” Kamilla, a volunteer in the Women Support Centre who assists others who faced challenges similar to that of her sister says: “Speak out, tell your stories, don’t be afraid – this is how you become the agent of change! You will break the chains, if you start fighting.”

Список використаних джерел

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