

# Gender Norms in Flux

Bride Kidnapping and Women's Civic  
Participation in the Kyrgyz Republic



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# Executive Summary

## Motivation and Focus of the Study

This exploratory small-scale, qualitative study examines the current state of gender norms in the Kyrgyz Republic by focusing on two concrete sets of observable behaviors: bride kidnapping and women's low civic participation. These capture different aspects of life, but both are deeply shaped by the relative status of women in society, how people perceive women's roles, and what roles men hold in society. Each is a reflection of women's agency in both their private and public lives. Each has also been impacted by legal changes including a reservation system in national politics and a criminal ban on bride kidnapping. While the study focuses on bride kidnapping and women's local civic participation, the analysis is enriched by a set of questions designed to better understand how people perceive girls and women in education, the labor market, and in the home.

## Research Methodology

The study involved developing a social norms-oriented survey instrument to obtain a more detailed understanding of individual and community behaviors. A total of 180 in-depth individual interviews were conducted (equal number of men and women, stratified by age group). Two sets of focus group discussions were held with community participants and key informants (including community leaders, government officials, teachers, healthcare workers, etc.) in seven communities in three geographic regions—Chui, Osh, and Naryn—covering a mix of urban and rural locations. Individual interviews revealed individuals' perceptions and experiences regarding the areas of study, and captured sensitive and salient aspects of women's status in society that participants may not have felt comfortable discussing in the presence of other people. Focus group discussions with community participants provided insights into social norms and mental models that shape behaviors and beliefs related to marriage, bride kidnapping, women's participation in local affairs, and women's overall status in society. Focus group discussions with key informants helped identify stressors and forces that are producing perceived changes in

gender norms, and reveal features of local community factors that affect how gender norms manifest themselves in concrete behaviors.

## Social Norms Framework

The study employed a social norms framework, developed by Bicchieri (2006), which offers a nuanced understanding of the forces that sustain harmful practices, and helps identify opportunities for intervention. Social norms are rules of behavior that people follow because they believe others in their community also follow them, and because they believe those other people *think* they should follow them. In studying gender-oriented norms it is important to consider specific social norms as well as mental models about gender. Mental models provide generalizations and archetypes to help people evaluate what to do in new situations. Social norms can be held in place by, and help to reinforce, mental models. How people envision a “good wife” or a “good husband” will shape what sorts of behaviors are expected of people, and what their reactions are when those expectations are met or violated.

## Findings

- 1. Gender norms in flux.** The study reveals that political and legal changes, increased access to the Internet, negative economic conditions, and significant out migration have thrown a number of gender norms and gender-related social practices into flux. Since more traditional norms have lost some sources of support, there may be opportunities to help encourage more egalitarian gender norms.
- 2. Quasi-equality for women.** Several female participants from both rural and urban locations said that women should have a robust set of rights and that women can achieve anything they set their mind to. At the same time, however, consistently across gender, age group, and location, respondents said men were “one step higher” than women. This quasi-equality relegates women to second-tier status, and affects their exercise of agency in their private life,



as explored through the lens of marriage, and their public life, as explored through the lens of civic participation.

**3. Strong gendered conceptions of appropriate roles for women and men.** The study revealed fairly consistent perceptions of ideals of a “good wife” and “good husband” across respondents’ gender, age group, and location. Ideals of the good wife include one who sticks close to the home, takes care of the family and all household chores, respects and obeys her husband and in-laws, and who is patient, compliant, and obedient to the husband and his family. Ideals of the good husband mostly stress their role as head of the household and economic provider, being a caring and considerate father and husband, and performing male responsibilities around the household. In urban areas, a greater share of respondents said a good wife also contributes to the family income and is able to combine work and household chores. A greater share of respondents in urban areas mentioned that a good husband helped his wife with household chores. These mental models related to gender help shape the options available to both men and women.

**4. Women’s economic opportunities are shaped by their lesser status.** A significant share of respondents said it was easier for women than men to find a job because women are more willing to take any job, whereas men are more “picky.” While this willingness creates more opportunities for lower-paid and lower-status work for women, there was also evidence suggesting that higher-end jobs, such as managerial positions, tend to be reserved for men. Men’s concerns over their social standing can prevent them from taking jobs at certain pay rates, or jobs that are perceived as too feminine. Since women are perceived as “one step below” men, they do not have such social restrictions that can inhibit their job choices.

**5. Bride kidnapping is broadly unacceptable, but there remains support for a potential kidnapper.** The large majority of survey participants believed that the way people get married has changed, and that the reduction in bride kidnappings is the primary source of positive change. Bride kidnapping is also perceived as broadly unacceptable, but for those who might perpetrate a kidnapping, boys and their families, the results are much more mixed. There remain significant expectations of social support for a potential kidnapper. When presented with a vignette of a young man kidnapping a girl for marriage without her prior consent, roughly

half of the respondents predicted that he would have the support of his family and friends.

**6. Evidence that legal changes have some authority.** When participants were asked what factors brought about changes in marriage practices in their communities, a plurality responded that the criminal law banning kidnapping was a significant factor. Some described the law as changing the bargaining position of women’s families. That is, they could threaten to ruin a kidnapper’s family unless agreements could be made. While using the law to leverage a significant dowry does not directly protect women from kidnapping, it does deter the practice. An important implication of the discussion of the law is that people treated it as a given that the law had authority, and that it would be enforced if the police were involved. While the law may not be the only causal factor, it has sufficient power to motivate different behaviors. This was true in both rural and urban communities. This appears to be an instance in which a legal change can help shift a community’s normative expectations. Because the law introduces a sanction against kidnapping, even if cases are not brought to court, people are aware that kidnapping is a behavior that is justifiably punished.

**7. Conditional attitudes about consent for marriage.** While all study participants said that marriage should be based on mutual consent, opinions differed on what should be done after a young woman has been kidnapped. Much weaker support was found for the importance of consent once that value has already been violated. This is likely because other values quickly come into play once a young woman has been kidnapped such as familial honor, embarrassment, and women’s virginity. There is broad agreement that if a woman escapes, the kidnapper and his family would be humiliated. However, many participants also expressed that the woman and her family would also face significant embarrassment due to speculation about whether she lost her virginity while kidnapped. Because of this, conditional consent may be given because the value of consent may be overridden by more socially valued considerations of honor and embarrassment.

**8. Social norms restrict women’s civic participation.** The interviews revealed that patriarchal and religious norms prescribe a separate and unequal role for women in the community, and that civic and political activity fall outside the domain of women. It was often mentioned that religious communities and sharia law hamper women’s participation in the public domain, and that women are confined to

the private domain by taking care of the family and households.

**9. An important barrier to women's civic participation is their husband's prohibition.** Reasons that husbands object include that the women should focus on the family and that "family comes first," and the shame and gossip that would bring to the family of women who participate. Women were also perceived as less decisive and having fewer leadership qualities than men, and there was a common perception that it would be easier for men to solve public policy issues with other men than with women. These responses again demonstrate how mental models help shape and reinforce social norms against women's exercise of agency in civic life. Quasi-equality dictates that women can seek out public office only if their husbands are sufficiently prosperous and respected on their own. A wife outshining her husband would be humiliating for him and shameful for her. This is both because there is the perception that civic life is a men's realm, and because of the perception that women should be less powerful than men within the household. These features of mental models provide reasons for normative expectations against women's civic participation; it is considered inappropriate for women to be involved, and takes time away from a woman's obligations to the household.

**10. Civic participation is strongly gendered.** Women generally participate in areas of community life that are tied to women's traditional roles. So, while women are more able to exercise their agency in urban environments, they are largely restricted to the domains that people deem to be appropriately feminine. These include parents' meetings and committees at school, training provided by international and local organizations for self-employment (bakery, sewing, needlework) or on healthcare and crop farming (in rural areas), and events tied to religious activities. Participants in rural areas mentioned women's participation in public works, clean-up campaigns, and drinking water committees. A few respondents mentioned women's participation in *Aiyl Okmotu* (municipalities), Women's Council, Youth Council, Court of Elders, and Local Councils.

**11. Material constraints are key in explaining behaviors and norms.** While in the Kyrgyz Republic it is mandatory for young girls and boys to complete 9th grade, the main reason for not continuing to upper secondary school is parents' lack of financial resources. The study revealed that this economic constraint can have gendered consequences. There is a common belief that the biological family does

not benefit from educating a daughter, since the girl becomes a member of her husband's family when she marries, and they will reap the benefits. Further, parents often marry their daughters early to relieve their burden on the household, and to receive cattle and cash dowries from the groom's family. Therefore, families under economic pressure may opt to support a boy in school over a girl, simply because he represents a better long-term investment. The study also revealed that out-migration is affecting gender norms in multiple and conflicting ways. Out-migration of their parents is contributing to teenage girls dropping out of school as their grandparents or other family members are not able to exert control over them. Out-migration may also encourage early marriages of girls to relieve parents of their responsibilities and ensure the protection of the girls' virtue. Respondents also mentioned that migration is exposing the Kyrgyz population to Western values and social norms. In addition, women left behind are assuming male responsibilities, such as departed men's farm work, handling finances, and making purchases that usually would fall under men's purview, on top of single-handedly caring for their children. The interviews also revealed that left-behind husbands are taking on child care duties that have traditionally been ascribed to women, while at the same time being under considerable pressure to live up to locally accepted masculine ideals.

## Policy Implications

The study suggests several policy areas that are worth investigating as a means of eliminating nonconsensual bride kidnapping and increasing women's civic participation, listed in the following table. In the case of bride kidnapping, there are a variety of points of intervention that are worth further study. After all, in order to sustain this practice a young man has to decide that this is a good idea, get social support from friends and family, and then kidnap the woman, who has to be kept from escaping, or if she does, her family must turn her away. Finally, there has to be some expectation that the marriage will not end quickly in divorce. In the case of fostering women's civic participation, the focus should be on getting women out of the household context and into the public sphere, while working on changing the mental models that define women's roles within the household.



### Eliminating bride kidnapping

- Edutainment interventions using a positive deviance approach to model positive behaviors and change mental models on gender norms.
- Targeting young men as a prevention strategy by exposing them to new norms through structured conversations and a peer group. These types of programs could be directly incorporated into school curricula.
- Working with community leaders to promote the idea that kidnapping is not the girl's fault and that there is no shame in leaving, could help remove barriers to escaping. Communities might consider a two-part pledge: that they do not support kidnapping, but that they do support girls who escape their kidnappers.
- Promoting a messaging campaign that changes the perception of bride kidnappers from manly and toward 'pathetic' may help remove some social support for the behavior among potential perpetrators.
- Reducing wedding expenses through joint wedding ceremonies/ parties paired with incentives that address status competition, for example: mandating that prime locations for parties could only be used for joint parties, rather than individual celebrations, community pledges to hold more frugal celebrations, and introducing a spending cap.
- Phone apps to report bride kidnapping incidents that would allow women to report them without having to speak on the phone or find someone to help in person. This can simplify the process of initiating a report, and help bring the legal authorities in before a marriage is initiated.
- Easing requirements and fast-tracking the process to obtain a divorce might serve as a deterrent to bride kidnapping. At present, there is a mandatory waiting period for divorce, which can be a significant deterrent for women who might seek a divorce after having been abducted or abused.

### Increasing women's civic participation

- Establishing quotas for women's representation at the local government level and for local self-governing authorities. Likewise, for public administration, rather than defining a fixed percentage of women across all public jobs, adjustments could be made to ensure that women hold positions of decision-making authority. At present, women tend to hold lower-level positions with little authority. A local reservation system may provide a training ground for women to hold office at the national level. This might be paired with a temporary fund that helps women campaign for office, as they may not have equal access to resources.
- Community outreach and sensitization campaigns to reduce husbands' resistance to women's civic engagement. It is important to obtain the commitment of community and organization leaders to involve and increase women's participation in community decision making. Training programs should target community and religious leaders to expose them to the complexities of gender discrimination and the necessity of (and mechanisms for) fostering women's civic engagement.
- Collaboration with media outlets to promote the presence of spokeswomen and break gender stereotypes. Fostering women's presence in the media, including the number of female journalists, would increase media coverage of women's issues and build the capacity of media to report on current events with a gender-sensitive lens.
- Increasing employment opportunities for women not only helps families in significant financial need, but can help raise the status of women in ways that likely promote their participation in local politics.

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# Introduction

The Kyrgyz Republic has undergone a significant social transformation since independence. It has suffered a large economic shock as it has transitioned out of the post-Soviet economy. This has led to significant job losses, and high levels of economic out-migration that have fueled a very high rate of remittances, upon which the economy depends. It has experienced several constitutional changes, two revolutions, and interethnic violence. This background of significant social and political unrest, paired with economic deprivation, has created the conditions for a variety of social changes. While there have been notable formal efforts to secure gender equality through legal changes, these changes have coincided with a rising level of troubling social practices, such as bride kidnapping.

The Kyrgyz Republic is ranked 90 out of 188 countries by the United Nations 2016 Gender Inequality Index (GII),<sup>1</sup> which benchmarks country-level gender-based inequalities in three dimensions—reproductive health, empowerment, and economic activity.<sup>2</sup> The country's overall score is 0.394, putting it above Morocco, Tajikistan, and India and slightly below Argentina, Moldova, South Africa, and Uzbekistan. This ranking is higher than those of countries with similar levels of GDP per capita due to the Kyrgyz Republic's relatively high level of educational attainment and gender parity.

Gender norms have been undergoing significant changes in the Kyrgyz Republic, which has helped to undergird changes in a number of social practices. This report

focuses on bride kidnapping and women's civic participation as key windows into how gender norms manifest themselves in society. Both practices are extremely important in their own spheres, and together they help define the contours of women's autonomy and relative status. Both have been impacted by legal changes—a reservation system in national politics, and a criminal ban on bride kidnapping—but legal changes are insufficient to change broad patterns of behavior. Social norms are often resistant to such change because they are interdependent behaviors.

Behavior change cannot be accomplished by changing minds one at a time, but instead by broader shifts in individuals' expectations of each other. Just as a single person cannot successfully choose to change which side of the road he drives on, an individual cannot decide to stop adhering to a social norm without facing significant social consequences. Because of this interdependence, understanding (or changing) social norms requires looking beyond aggregate individual preferences to investigate communities' systems of mutually reinforced social beliefs and expectations. This equilibrium of expectations prevents individuals from unilaterally changing their behavior. For this reason, this study adopts Bicchieri's (2006) toolkit for exploring social norms.

This study explores the micro-level beliefs and supporting environments that have contributed to changes in gender roles. While it focuses on bride kidnapping and women's local civic participation, the analysis is enriched by the results of a social norms-oriented survey aimed at better understanding how individuals and communities perceive girls and women in education, the labor market, and in the home. The results of the survey, developed for this project, are combined with previous findings to offer a more complete picture of what helps sustain unequal gender norms.

<sup>1</sup> See: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/gender-inequality-index-gii>

<sup>2</sup> Reproductive health is measured by maternal mortality and adolescent birth rates; empowerment is measured by the share of parliamentary seats held by women and attainment in secondary and higher education by each gender; and economic activity is measured by the labor market participation rates for women and men.





Credit: Aigul Eshtaeva/World Bank



# Literature Review and the Broader Context

The literature on postindependence gender relations in Central Asia has emphasized a revival of pre-Soviet traditions and norms, especially those rooted in Islam, and a concomitant re-traditionalization of many aspects of societal life (Akiner 1977; Phillips and James 2001; Tazmini 2001; Louw 2013; Commercio 2014). Scholars have argued that this traditionalism has made gender relations a fundamental element of identity (Güneş-Ayata and Ergun 2009). In this context, the literature review focuses on the broader context of deteriorating economic conditions, migration, rising religiosity, political instability, the rise of the practice of bride kidnapping, and the changing character of women's participation in public affairs.

## Broader Context

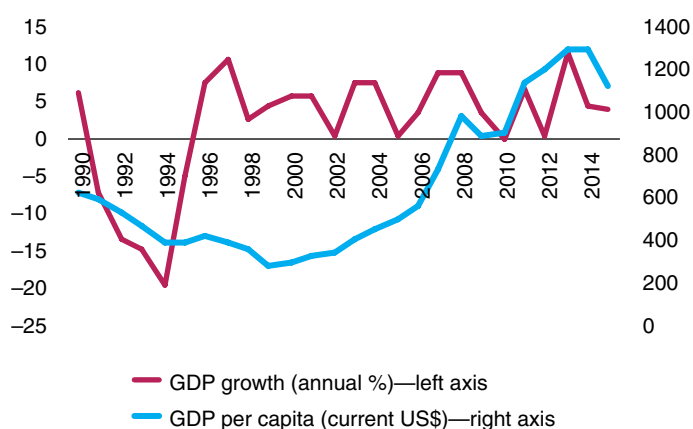
After the Kyrgyz Republic declared its independence following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, a period of rapid reform followed, which had long-lasting social and economic implications. The Kyrgyz Republic was one of the first countries in the region to introduce macroeconomic reforms to open up its economy to foreign trade, privatize state assets and industries, and overhaul its financial sector and monetary policy framework (Anderson 1999). These reforms, combined with the end of subsidies from Moscow and the sudden loss of the intra-USSR export market, precipitated deep economic

recession (Figure 1), massive increases in unemployment and poverty, and the erosion of social welfare provision and services that had been enjoyed under Soviet rule, particularly healthcare and childcare (Bauer et al. 1997; Kuehnast 1997; Anderson 1999; Heyat 2004).

These developments had a particularly strong impact on women due to their earlier professional predominance in teaching, healthcare, and local administration, as well as in research roles in the state armaments industry that collapsed after 1991, and their reliance on state-provided childcare (Bauer et al. 1997; Heyat 2004; Corcoran-Nantes 2005; Asian Development Bank 2005; Ikramova and McConnell 1999). Women's labor force participation decreased from 58 percent in 1990 to 50 percent in 2017 (Figure 2). The impact of education on employment is greatest among women; employment rates for men differ little by education level (Figure 3).

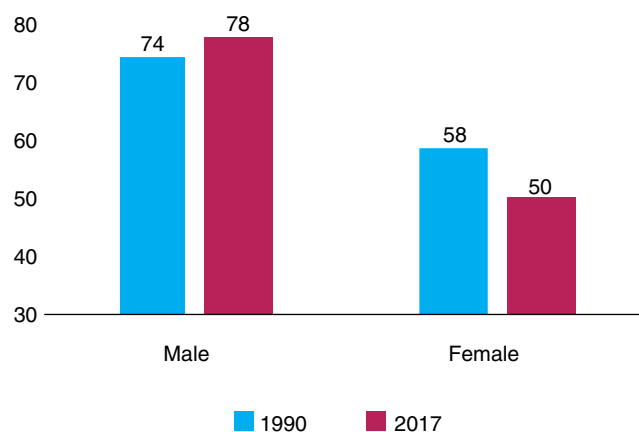
The economic transition also impacted men who lost their jobs and economic status, which affected their role as family providers and protectors. A qualitative study in rural areas in the Kyrgyz Republic found that unemployed men reported feelings of humiliation as their spouses began to engage in shuttle trading (i.e., the import and export of small quantities of goods for sale across regional borders) other income-generating activities. Respondents of

Figure 1. GDP growth and GDP per capita, 1990–2014



Source: World Development Indicators, World Bank

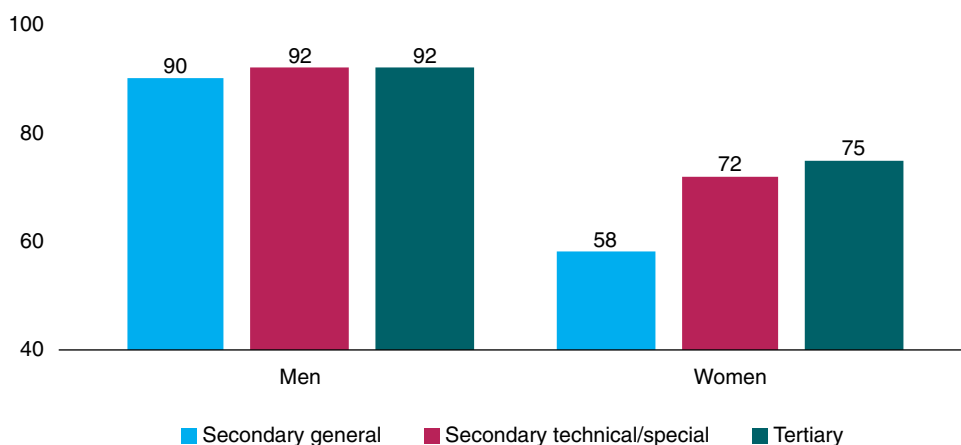
Figure 2. Labor force participation (% of female/male population aged 15+) (modeled ILO estimate)



Source: World Development Indicators, World Bank



Figure 3. Employment rate by education level (percent), 2013



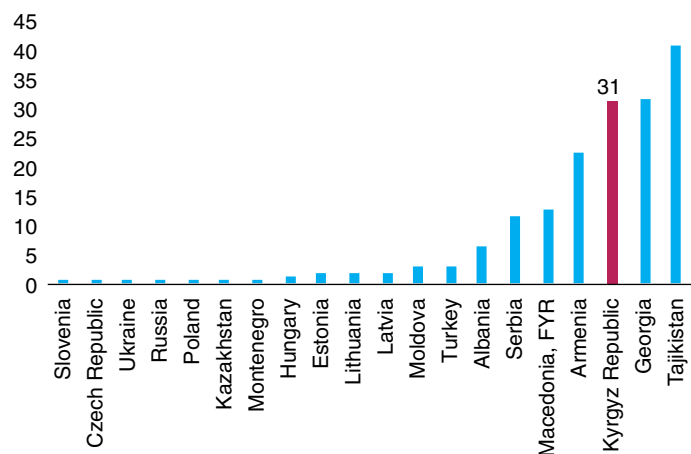
Source: Ajwad et al. 2014.

the study reported an increase in alcohol abuse and suicides among young men (Narayan et al. 2000).

Today, poverty is high, social services are in decline, and the economy depends heavily on remittances from labor migrants. The average monthly salary is 13,649 soms (roughly US\$190), and almost one-third of the country's six million citizens live below the poverty line (Figure 4). The official unemployment rate, masked by seasonal (often agricultural) jobs and migration to Russia, is 8 percent, but the actual rate is thought to be much higher (International Crisis Group 2016). Poverty and the loss of employment have led an increasing number of people, primarily men, to migrate especially to Russia to diversify their sources of income (Figure 5). Officially, 458,660 work

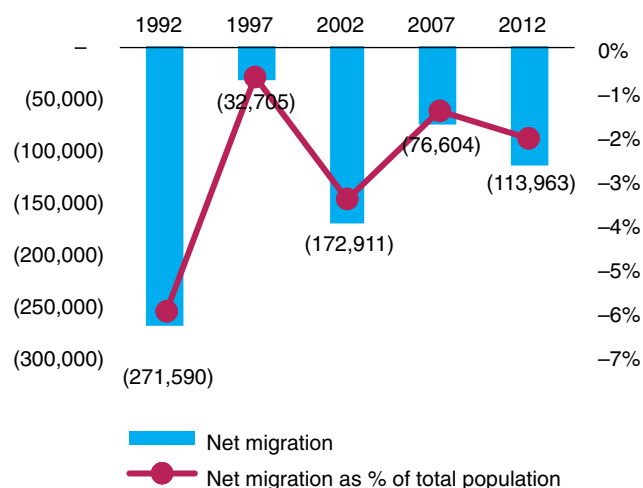
in Russia<sup>3</sup>—some 39 percent of migrants are female—but experts suggest the true number is closer to one million (International Crisis Group 2016). The economic life-line provided by migration is vital. In 2014, remittances comprised 30 percent of the country's GDP (World Bank 2016). This has led to a number of negative social consequences. Families have been burdened as children are left behind, often in the care of one parent or their grandparents (International Crisis Group 2016). Migration has also increased women's burden of work within the household, especially in rural communities. Women are generally fulfilling their traditional role as carers for family

Figure 4. Regional poverty rates, 2015 (poverty line of \$2.5/day in 2005 ppp terms)



Source: World Bank ECAPOV database

Figure 5. Net migration in the Kyrgyz Republic, 1992–2012



Source: World Development Indicators, World Bank

3 Federal Migration Service, Russia, "Factsheet, foreign nationals in Russia by gender (by nationality)," 5 April 2016 [in Russian]. Some 39 percent of migrants are female. Crisis Group interview, Osh, March 2016. Cited in International Crisis Group (2016).

members and the household, while also taking on roles usually performed by men, such as tending livestock and carrying out physically heavy agricultural work. Children in migrant families also work alongside the adults. One study indicates that the children of migrants who stay behind spend more time in agricultural work and animal husbandry (and have less free time) than children in non-migrant families (Nasritdinov and Schenkkan 2012).

After almost seven decades of official atheism, during which the Soviet ideological and political system pushed the Islamic faith out of social and political life, there has been a religious revival in the Kyrgyz Republic over the past 25 years. Its roots stretch back to the days after the fall of the USSR, when a number of former communist leaders (including Kyrgyzstan's first president, Askar Akayev, and its subsequent leaders) gravitated to Muslim theology and Islamic discourse as a pragmatic way of staying in power. Kyrgyzstan's religious revival attracted international attention. Missionaries from Muslim countries became involved in local religious activities, and a great deal of religious Islamic literature was published and imported. Clergy and internationally known theologians began to educate local communities on religious matters, tailoring their messages to the historical traditions and mentality of the local people. Most mosques are in southern Kyrgyzstan, where religious traditions run deeper. As of 2013 there were approximately 2,200 mosques open in the Kyrgyz Republic, including 601 in the Osh region (49 in the city of Osh alone), 450 in the Jalal-Abad region, and 247 in the Batken region (Foreign Policy Council 2013). The number of young people studying in religious schools is growing. The increasing influence of religious

views leads to changing attitudes toward many issues in society, including gender and family roles. Table 1 shows that compared to other regions of the country, both men and women in the city and region of Osh and in the Jalal-Abad and Naryn regions more often believe that religious values are more important than secular ones. The table also shows that men in all regions agree with almost all the statements in Table 1 more often than women.

The Kyrgyz Republic experienced significant political and social instability during its second decade of independence. In April 2005, after nearly 15 years in power, its first president was forcibly removed from office following his disputed re-election. In April 2010, his successor was overthrown following widespread public demonstrations against corruption, nepotism, and the misuse of public assets. A resulting power vacuum in the south of the country—a mosaic of diverse ethnicities, languages, and traditions—aggravated long-standing economic and social tensions that, in June 2010, exploded into three days of violence and clashes between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in southern Kyrgyzstan, primarily in the cities of Osh and Jalal-Abad. The clashes killed nearly 420 people, mostly Uzbeks, and displaced another 80,000 and resulted in the extensive destruction of public infrastructure and private property.<sup>4</sup> An interim administration headed by a coalition of opposition leaders drafted a new constitution that shifted the balance of executive power from the presidency to the prime minister, who is chosen by and responsible to the legislature. Parliamentary elections under the

<sup>4</sup> Wikipedia 2010 South Kyrgyzstan ethnic clashes [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2010\\_South\\_Kyrgyzstan\\_ethnic\\_clashes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2010_South_Kyrgyzstan_ethnic_clashes)

**Table 1.** Proportion of women and men who agree with the proposed stereotypical statements characterizing their adherence to religion, by type of settlement and region

	Education for children in madrassas is more useful than studying at school (%)		Laws of Islam from God are more important than the state legislation (%)		It is better to follow the advice of mullahs and sharia than to appeal to judicial and law enforcement authorities (%)		A true Muslim woman won't forbid her husband from taking other wives (%)	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Batken	11.2	5.6	31.4	32.2	23.9	19.3	24.7	13.3
Jalal-Abad	10.4	8.6	56.6	53.4	34.6	29	41.2	37.9
Issyk-Kul	13.5	7.5	16.5	12.7	7.5	6.9	26.5	15.6
Naryn	22.8	18.2	29.6	30.6	19.4	19.4	28.8	29.3
Osh	12.6	11.7	40.9	33.8	20.6	25.5	39.8	33.4
Talas	11.3	7.2	24.7	18.9	5.2	2.4	13.3	10.7
Chui	8.8	8.7	17.9	18.2	7	4.5	12.4	11.6
Bishkek city	12.8	7.9	5.2	6.6	14.1	7.8	21.1	13.2
Osh city	30.5	30.1	32.6	36.5	19.5	19.1	37.6	32.7

Source: UNFPA 2016. *Gender in the Perception of Society: National Survey Results*, Bishkek.



Credit: Abd Halim Hadi

new constitution were held in October 2010, and a four-party coalition committed to macroeconomic stability and continued market-oriented reforms took office in December 2010. A presidential election took place in October 2011 and the new president was sworn in on December 1, 2011. Although the government collapsed in August 2012, it was promptly replaced by a new three-party coalition, which has continued the policies initiated by its predecessor. While the Kyrgyz Republic has made significant strides, it is important to note the country's still fragile economic, political, and social environment.

## Bride Kidnapping

Bride kidnapping (*ala kachuu*) is the act of abducting a woman to marry; there is a normative succession of events that characterizes this practice (Becker, Mirkasimov, and Steiner 2017; Amsler and Kleinbach 1999; Werner 2009). The first event is the abduction, which involves a young man and his male friends taking a young woman (typically by force or deception) into a car, and she is then taken to his parent's house or the home of a close relative. She might get kidnapped from home or another location such as a school or a workplace. The event itself is usually a surprise because she is not aware of how or when she is going to get kidnapped, if at all. Frequently, the girls are raped immediately after the kidnapping, making it impossible for them to refuse marriage since their loss of virginity would disgrace their family and render them

unfit for another marriage (Amsler and Kleinbach 1999). The second event occurs when a member of the groom's household presents the girl with a marriage scarf (*joo-luk*). This is the first opportunity for the girl to publicly acknowledge her willingness to marry the groom. Often she is physically and psychologically coerced to submit and marry her kidnapper. Placing the marriage scarf over her hair indicates that she accepts the marriage. In the third event, the girl is asked to write a letter of consent to the marriage to her family. Similar to the marriage scarf, the writing of the letter theoretically gives the girl an opportunity to decline the marriage. However, there is extreme social pressure to stay, and most girls make this choice even if it goes against their true wishes. The girl realizes that she and her family will be the subject of malicious gossip if she became a "girl who returns," who would thus be a less desirable marriage partner (Amsler and Kleinbach 1999; Werner 2009; Stross 1974). The letter is the precursor of the fourth event, when the groom's relatives send an official apology; they traditionally bring their daughter's letter of "consent," sheep, and many other gifts. Such offers of bridal "gifts" are usually considered the *kalym* (bride price). Some parents remain angry and reluctant, but most parents accept the bride price. It is shameful to have a daughter return, because she is not a virgin anymore. After this, a *moldo* (an Islamic clergyman) is invited to conduct a *nikah* (Islamic marriage ceremony) despite knowledge of the bride kidnapping and the girl's disagreement (Stakeeva, Kartanbaeva and Djanaeva 2011).

Some scholars have contested the common perception that nonconsensual bride kidnapping came from a long-standing Kyrgyz tradition (Kleinbach and Salimjanova 2007).<sup>5</sup> Most Kyrgyz originally lived as nomadic herds-men grouped together in clans. Parents and extended family members typically arranged the marriages, yet some courting took place and the wishes of the potential bride and groom were often taken into consideration. The groom's family paid a bride price and the marriage was sanctified in a betrothal ceremony (*nikka*), which was presided over by a mullah. Men traditionally married young, and girls were expected to remain virgins until they were married. In this context, some accounts suggest that bride kidnapping was practiced as a form of elopement to escape the opposition of a young couple's families to the marriage (Karimova and Kasybekov 2003). Nonconsensual bride kidnapping, however, was extremely rare as it caused serious conflicts between families or clans, and forced marriage is forbidden in Islam (Kleinbach and Salimjanova 2007). Toursunof and Abdyl daeva (2003) theorize that nonconsensual bride kidnapping may have occurred when Kyrgyz males kidnapped marriageable young women from neighboring tribes in order to wipe out enemies and augment their own clans.

In the Soviet era, family gatherings from weddings to funerals were required to conform to Soviet ideology, which forbade traditional practices such as arranged marriages and the payment of a bride price. Sons and daughters were to be entitled to equal treatment and had the right to choose their partner of their own free will. These restrictions significantly challenged Kyrgyz traditions, which highly value family ties and the transfer of goods and social relationships, as well as the accompanying festivities that are celebrated at great expense (Fenzel 2009). With arranged marriages banned under Soviet rule, many young Kyrgyz exercised their right to free choice of a partner. Scholars who studied the status of women in Central Asia during Soviet times provide accounts of nonconsensual bride kidnapping, but referred to it as a "residual patriarchal and feudal practice" (Halle 1938; Massel 1974).

The increased prevalence of nonconsensual bride kidnapping in the post-Soviet era has been explained as the reinterpretation of a tradition from a rare consensual elopement to a primarily nonconsensual arranged marriage in the context of the re-emergence of patriarchal practices and values by a portion of the population (Holzchen 2010;

Kleinbach and Salimjanova 2007; Werner 2009; Handrahan 2004). Bride kidnapping has thus become understood as a Kyrgyz tradition. Kyrgyz women are expected to submit to this practice if they are "real Kyrgyz women" and want to take part in building their nation. Other revived practices include *kalym* (bride price, money, property or livestock) and *jenesin aluu* (in which a widow must marry the next of kin in her dead husband's family). Legalizing polygamy has been debated in Parliament on the basis that it is a Muslim tradition that the Russians prohibited.

The literature also highlights that the post-Soviet era has been marked by a "celebration of masculinity." Kirmse (2016) notes that various conservative gender ideologies—capitalism, local nationalism, and Islamism—encourage boys to be tough. A local *jigit* (boy, lad) is supposed to display "laddish" behavior. By adopting certain cultural practices, from "national" sports such as *kurosh* (wrestling) to forced bride kidnapping, young Kyrgyz can affirm their identities as both "Kyrgyz" and as "men" (Kirmse 2016). Handrahan (2004) depicts kidnapping for marriage as a "method for Kyrgyz men to mark their ethnic coming of age—hunting, capturing and physically forcing Kyrgyz women to marry them." On the emergence of the practice of veiling, McBrien (2009) demonstrates the complex reasoning and navigation between different normative systems involved in decisions to wear the hijab and other religious garments, considered by many as symbols of female subjugation and alien to the Kyrgyz way of practicing Islam.

Other scholars attribute the return to traditionalism and patriarchy to the decline in social safety net systems, lack of economic opportunity, and increased income inequality brought about by the transition to the market economy and political dissatisfaction (International Crisis Group 2009; Akiner 1997: 284; Blackburn 2011). The fall of the Soviet Union created difficulties for almost all citizens of post-Soviet Central Asia, but the economic problems that developed disproportionately affected women (Blackburn 2011). After the collapse, women were the first to lose employment, and the social programs that had assisted them, such as childcare facilities and universal child allowances, could no longer be funded.

Successive governments of post-independence Kyrgyzstan have passed laws to criminalize the practice of bride kidnapping and toughening penalties. In 1994, it was made illegal in the Criminal Code (Articles 154 and 155). In January 2013, President Almazbek Atambaev signed a new law that increased the maximum prison sentence for bride kidnapping to 7 years, and 10 years if the bride is a minor. These legal changes came in the wake of a

5 Kleinbach and Salimjanova (2007) came to this conclusion after extensive interviews with librarians, heads of university history and ethnology departments, museum directors, and *Manaschis* (tellers of the *Manas* epic).



mobilization of grassroots and civil society organizations that picked up momentum in 2012 and coalesced into Campaign 155, a national campaign to eradicate the practice of bride kidnapping in the Kyrgyz Republic. In November 2016, President Atambaev signed a new law to protect adolescent girls from early and forced marriages. The law stipulates a penalty of up to five years in prison for the participation of individuals in the organization of a marriage, or for those who perform the religious rites between intending spouses under 18 years of age, and is applicable to members of the clergy and to the parents of the bride and groom.

Nationwide representative data on the prevalence of bride kidnapping were rare until recently.<sup>6</sup> UNFPA commissioned a nationwide survey in 2016 of nearly 5,000 households, and found that one-fifth of marriages in Kyrgyzstan originated in the abduction of a bride (with or without her consent). Marriages through the abduction of women without their consent, to a greater or lesser extent, are observed all over the country: from 2 percent in Bishkek to 21 percent in the Naryn region (Figure 6) (UNFPA 2016). According to the study, most abducted women are from the poorest households and have only primary education or no education.

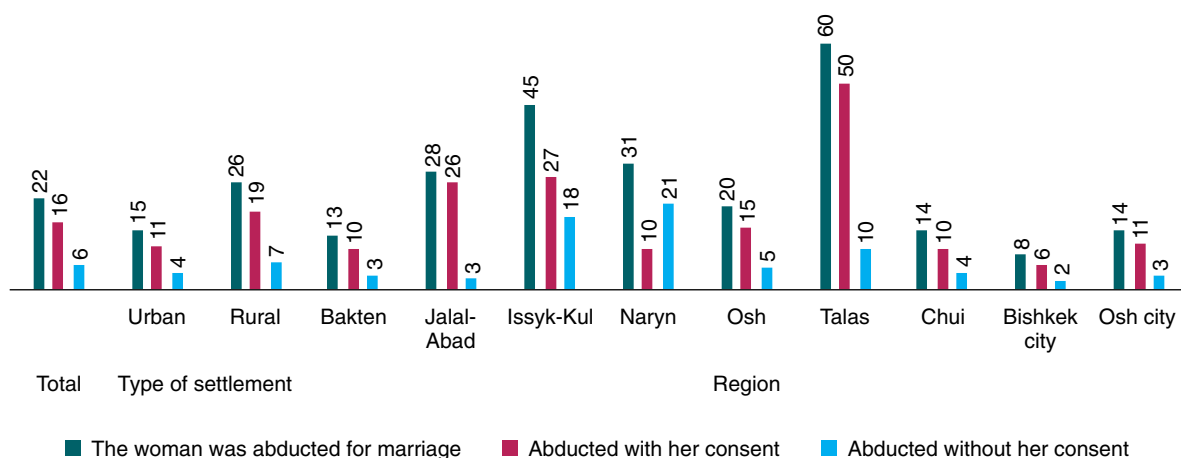
It is difficult to define a bride's consent in the case of bride kidnapping. The practice can be considered consensual when it involves the groom abducting his girlfriend, who

has consented to the abduction, but without her parent's agreement. This was experienced mostly in the context of arranged marriages. Consent can also occur when the parents of both sides agree to the wedding, but the young man kidnaps his future wife to keep the wedding costs down (Karataev and Eraliev 2000). Even if the girl wants to marry the boy, she is expected to feign some reluctance and resistance to the marriage, and thus most girls do not want to appear too eager to put on the marriage scarf. Older women may gossip about young brides who are 'laughing or smiling' on the day they are kidnapped (Werner 2009). Consent becomes murkier when the bride agrees to the marriage as a result of pressure from the female relatives of the kidnapper, and often pressure from her own family to accept the proposal for the sake of the family's reputation. After the woman agrees, it is unlikely that she will report the kidnapping, as that would require her to press charges against her husband and in-laws, with whom she often, by this point, lives. Unfortunately, both types of consent look the same. It can be hard to tell if a girl who is crying for her mother and clawing at the faces of her abductors is merely acting out her part for her boyfriend and his family's sake, or is on her way to being married against her will.

Bride kidnapping is a complex social and cultural phenomenon, with varying motives and levels of consent. One of the most cited reasons for continuing the practice is the high bride cost (dowry) and cost of marriage. The bride price is elevated when she is a virgin and the bride's productivity in the home or on the farm is high (Anderson 2007). If she is kidnapped, her "purity" value immediately falls and she is more likely to stay with the kidnapper because her market value is lower.

6 Prior attempts to estimate the incidence of bride kidnapping in post-independence Kyrgyz Republic were not based on nationwide representative samples: Amsler and Kleinbach 1999; Kleinbach 2003; Kleinbach et al. 2005; Nedoluzhko and Agadjanian 2015; Za Reformy i Rezul'tat 2015.

Figure 6. Proportion of women aged 15 and above married by abduction, by area



Source: UNFPA 2016. *Gender in the Perception of Society: National Survey Results*, Bishkek.

Note: The survey question was framed as follows: "How did you get married? A) The bride has been kidnapped upon her prior consent. B) Bride was kidnapped without her consent. C) The bride was not kidnapped." The survey relied on self-reported answers and thus there are methodological issues with regards to defining the bride's consent. The percent of nonconsensual bride kidnapping is therefore likely to be underestimated.



Credit: Altynai Osmoeva

The groom's family enjoys a better negotiating position, as the dowry becomes "usually around a third lower" after the kidnapping (Wilson Center 2011). Wedding gifts and wedding-related expenses, a big financial burden for poor households, can be reduced if the bride is kidnapped. The practice is also perceived to speed up the process and simplify the complex and burdensome wedding customs. Borbieva (2012) noted that women and men in Kyrgyzstan were expected to marry young and without long courtships for a number of reasons: the lack of social acceptance of premarital sexual activity, the expectation for women to have many children, but most importantly, the function of marriage as a transition to full adult status. Families of women with relatively poor prospects on the marriage market might thus be particularly inclined to give in to kidnapping. Furthermore, higher "search costs" also influence the probability of marrying through kidnapping, particularly in rural areas with scattered settlements (Becker, Mirkasimov, and Steiner 2017). Handrahan (2004) suggests that a more potent motivation may be the way Kyrgyz males define their masculinity and as a rite of passage to manhood. Another explanation for the high prevalence of bride kidnapping is that it is seen as an act of ethnic definition. A woman who rejects kidnapping is seen to be rejecting not only a Kyrgyz tradition but also her Kyrgyz ethnicity. Rejection, in turn, might create conflict within the community since it implies the

denunciation of a common practice, especially where kidnapping is very prevalent (Handrahan 2004). The lack of law enforcement also contributes to its continued prevalence, and in part is caused by the pluralistic legal system in the Kyrgyz Republic where many villages are *de facto* ruled by councils of elders and aqsaqal courts following customary law, separately from the state legal system (Beyer 2006; Handrahan 2004). Aqsaqal courts—tasked with adjudicating family law, property, and torts—often fail to take bride kidnapping seriously. In many cases, aqsaqal members are invited to the kidnapped bride's wedding and encourage her family to accept the marriage (Human Rights Watch 2006).

Bride kidnapping has a myriad of negative impacts on women, children, and families. These marriages often leave women and girls isolated and vulnerable to domestic violence, and prevent them from seeking help. Qualitative studies find that women are often raped while being kidnapped and before they were considered married (Amsler and Kleinbach 1999; Human Rights Watch 2006). Further, girls are typically wed in religious ceremonies, and their marriages remain unregistered because bride kidnapping is illegal. Often the man does not register the marriage because initially he is not sure whether (or how long) she will stay (UNFPA 2014; Stakeeva, Kartanbaeva and Djanaeva 2011). Under national law, women in



unregistered marriages are not entitled to marital property or other rights afforded a registered spouse, like alimony and child support, making it all the more difficult to escape abusive relationships. Further, the psychological stress involved in forced marriages also affects children. Becker, Mirkasimov, and Steiner (2017) find that children born to kidnapped mothers have a substantially lower birth weight than those born to mothers who were not kidnapped.

Bride kidnapping is often associated with underage marriages, as many victims are 17 or 18 years old, or younger. The links between the two, however, have not been empirically established due to the lack of reliable data, as the marriages are not registered with the state. The 2003 Family Code of the Kyrgyz Republic establishes that the minimum marriage age is 18 for both men and women. According to the National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic and UNICEF (2014), 0.4 percent of women aged 15–49 were married before the age of 15, and 12.7 percent aged 20–49 years old were married before the age of 18. Nearly one in seven women aged 15–19 (13.9 percent) are currently officially or informally married. The growing number of early marriages is suggested by the increasing number of children born to minors. According to official data, there has been a steady growth in births among women aged 15–17, from 4.4 children per 1,000 women of this age group in 2006 to 7.4 in 2014. In addition, the birth rate is increasing among women aged 18–19—from 62.7 children per 1,000 women of this age in 2008 to 92.7 in 2014 (National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic 2016).

## Political and Civic Participation

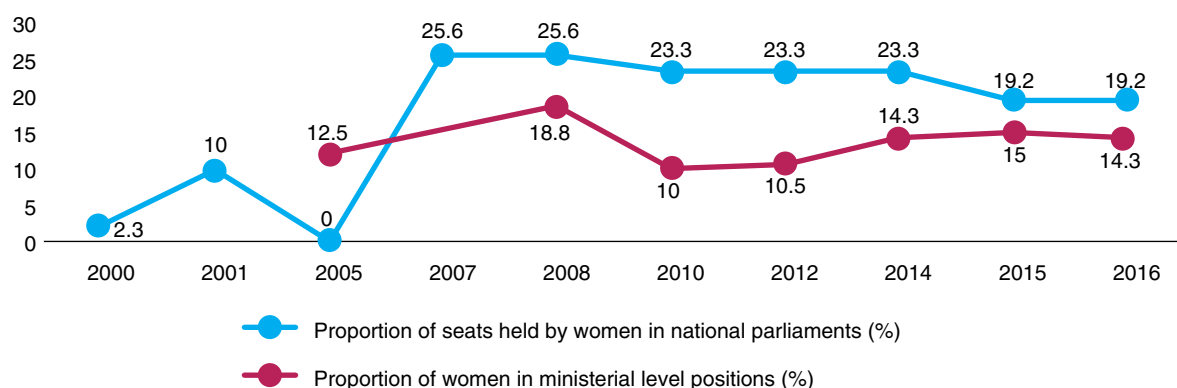
From a historical perspective, the literature emphasizes the changing experiences and attitudes toward women's participation in the public sphere in Kyrgyzstan. During the Soviet era, women were encouraged (or in many cases, coerced) to abandon the veil and other markers of their Islamic and cultural identity and become 'new Soviet

women' (Massell 1974; Warshofsky 1978; Northrop 2004; Ashwin and Bowers 1997; Corcoran-Nantes 2005; Kuehnast 1997, 1998). The period was also marked by the successful introduction of universal mass education and the provision of a sophisticated and comprehensive (in principle) system of social welfare—from free or heavily subsidized healthcare, childcare, housing, and public utilities to generous maternity and sickness benefits and pensions—partly funded by subsidies from Moscow (Hoare 2009). This helped to ensure that, despite being the second-poorest republic within the USSR, standards of living (in urban areas at least) were equivalent to those in other Soviet regions (Bauer et al. 1997; Kuehnast 1997; Heyat 2004). As was the case throughout the Soviet Union, women and girls were entitled to equal access to education as men and boys, and women entered the paid workforce in large numbers. In addition, quotas ensured the representation of women at the senior management level in workplaces, and in regional and local governments (Hoare 2009). However, women remained consistently excluded from higher levels of power and, mirroring patterns throughout the USSR's Asian republics, Slavic women were more likely than Kyrgyz women to hold positions of power and authority (Corcoran-Nantes 2005; Anderson 1999).

Post-independence, the literature describes the diminishing participation of women in decision making at both the national and local levels. By 2005, the Kyrgyz Parliament was solely composed of men. The adoption of a 30 percent parliamentary quota made it possible to change the situation, albeit slightly. By 2015, 19.2 percent of seats in the national parliament were held by women (Figure 7). The same picture was reflected at the local level with some regional variation. The share of women deputies in rural government councils was 10 percent as of December 2016, and around one-fifth of rural government councils have no women deputies (Figure 8). In urban areas, women's representation in city/town *kenesh* is on average 21 percent, with some regional variation (Figure 8).

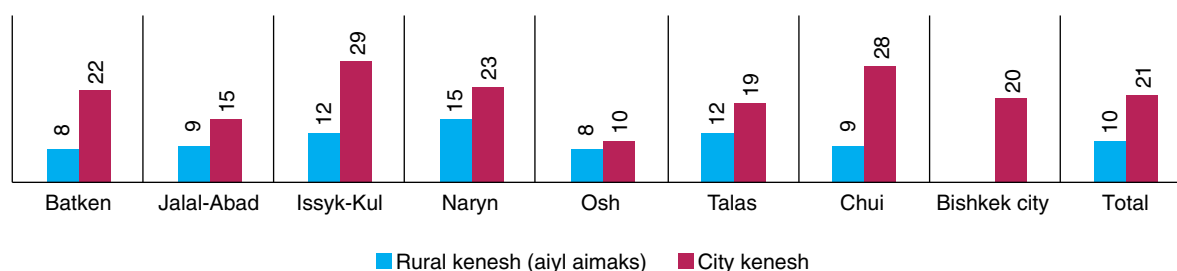
The literature highlights that patriarchal norms prevent women from participating in politics. Central Asian

Figure 7. Proportion of seats held by women in national parliament and women in ministerial-level positions, 2000–2016



Source: World Development Indicators, World Bank

Figure 8. Proportion of women deputies (%), December 2016 elections



Source: Kyrgyz Republic Central Elections Committee. See: [http://www.awli.kg/images/mk/sta\\_mk2012\\_2016.pdf](http://www.awli.kg/images/mk/sta_mk2012_2016.pdf)

women are expected to be submissive and reticent and confine themselves to the domestic domain (Constantine 2007; Handrahan 2002; Werner 2009; Borbieva 2012; Commercio 2014). UNFPA's nationwide survey found that the key obstacle to women's political participation is the lack of support from their spouse and family (50 percent of both women and men respondents) (UNFPA 2016). The proportion of those who reported that the most important reason was a lack of support from their spouse and family was 1.5 times higher in rural than in urban areas (57 and 38 percent, respectively).

While women's participation in formal political institutions has declined, the literature describes greater female involvement in civil society and religious organizations (Hoare 2009; Blackburn 2011; Commercio 2014; Borbieva 2012; International Crisis Group 2009). Commercio (2014) argues that in the context of economic uncertainty, women have joined religious organizations as a coping strategy because they benefit economically. Similarly, Borbieva (2012) notes that informal Islamic groups provide moral guidance and spiritual fulfillment for women impacted by economic insecurity.





Credit: Nick van Praag/World Bank



# Conceptual Framework

## Social Norms Framework

The framework of analysis is based on Cristina Bicchieri's (2006, 2014, 2016) account of social norms. She defines social norms as behavioral rules in a given population in a particular cultural context. An individual within this context prefers to follow these rules if and only if two kinds of expectations are met: *empirical expectations* (she expects that a sufficient subset of the population will also comply with the rules) and *normative expectations* (she expects that a sufficient subset of the population believes that she should follow the rules). Failure to comply with these rules may result in sanctions from other members of the community, while compliance may bring positive rewards. Bicchieri defines a *descriptive norm* in the same way, except that there are no normative expectations and no concerns about sanctions.

According to Bicchieri's account, social norms are not merely behaviors that most people in a group engage in. Instead, identifying a collective behavior is only the first step in identifying a social norm. Social norms can be distinguished from other collective behaviors by relying on differences in expectations and the motivation of the individuals engaged in the behaviors in question. The biggest differentiator between categories of behaviors is whether or not those behaviors are *independent* or *interdependent*. That is, does Alice's behavior depend on Bob and Carol's behavior, or is Alice free to do as she pleases? Social norms are an important class of interdependent behaviors: our actions depend both on what individuals *believe* other people to be doing and *what they think others expect of them*. This interdependence can make social norms remarkably resistant to change, as behaviors are not merely based on individual preferences, but are mutually reinforced by a web of social expectations.

Bicchieri's social norms framework allows a more precise description of norms, which is crucial for designing effective policy interventions. Since the definition allows for measurement, it is used here to detect the presence or absence of a social norm, and help determine the necessary components of interventions to eliminate harmful

social practices and sustainably promote healthier social practices. This framework has been used in a number of policy areas in the development context, such as the case of foot binding in China (Mackie 1996; UNICEF 2010). Mackie's analysis showed the importance of moving beyond a focus on individual behaviors to considering the interdependence of decision-making processes. It highlights that when a social convention or social norm is in place, decision making is an interdependent process in which a choice made by one family is affected by (and affects) the choices made by other families; it is the result of reciprocal expectations. The theory offers an explanation of the reasons daughters and their families continue to choose foot binding and female genital mutilation (FGM), and why it is so difficult for individual girls or families to abandon FGM on their own. The social norms framework has also been usefully deployed in the areas of child protection, sanitation, and domestic violence reduction. To illustrate how this framework operates, the components of choices are described in more detail below.

## Building Blocks of Choices

In the Bicchieri model, conscious and unconscious choices rely on a set of beliefs, expectations, and constraints. Normative and empirical *beliefs* provide one's personal basis for making choices, while normative and empirical *expectations* provide the social basis for choice making. Lastly, material constraints provide an account of objective constraints, such as budget constraints or institutional constraints. Better understanding these building blocks allows behaviors to be categorized, which can inform the structure of important behavioral regularities, and the available policy options to confront or reinforce them.

- *Personal normative beliefs*: Individual values that emanate from religious and moral convictions—what they think *should* or *should not* happen, e.g., “I think girls should go to school,” “I believe domestic violence is wrong.”
- *Personal empirical beliefs*: Beliefs about the world, e.g., “It rains a lot in the Spring” or “I get sick because witches cast spells.”



- *Empirical expectations*: What individuals think others are doing in a particular context, e.g., “no one in my village uses a toilet” or “in my village girls are married by age 19.”
- *Normative expectations*: What people think other people want them to do, e.g., “a good husband earns money for the family” or “my parents-in-law expect me to have a baby soon.”
- *Material constraints*: Economic and institutional challenges such as budget constraints, lack of infrastructure, and lack of state capacity, e.g., “The school is 10 miles from where I live, and there is no bus,” “There are no employment opportunities here.”

## Independent and Interdependent Choices

The survey constructed for this study was designed to help determine whether the practices under consideration are independent or interdependent. Independent choices are socially unconditional: individuals choose regardless of what anyone else does. These individuals rely on personal normative and/or empirical beliefs, as constrained by material constraints. Interdependent choices are socially conditional: an individual's choice depends on what they think everyone else chooses; this perception is in turn influenced by their empirical expectations and possibly also their normative expectations.

To see why interdependence of behavior matters, consider two different cases. The first is a farmer who learns (either on his own or by talking to others in his community) that a particular kind of fertilizer greatly enhances the productivity of his crops. This farmer has new empirical beliefs that will likely encourage him to buy some of that fertilizer (provided it is in his budget). This farmer does not have to care about whether other farmers are also using this fertilizer: regardless of what anyone else does, it is still a good idea for him to use it. In this case, his behavior is *independent* of what others do. However, not all choices are like this. In the second case, the same farmer may think that driving on the left-hand side of the road is more fun than driving on the right. But if everyone else drives on the right, then if he has any interest in avoiding a crash, he too will drive on the right. In this case, the behavior is *interdependent*—indeed, this is an example of what Bicchieri would call a convention, a kind of descriptive norm. Likewise, that same farmer may be

personally against a dowry system, but also love his children and want them to marry well. If others in his community engage in the dowry system, he will likely be forced to participate also. Here, his personal beliefs are overwhelmed by his social expectations. Marriage practices are fundamentally *interdependent*. Indeed, these are typically social norms—people see that everyone engages in the practice, and they believe others expect them to engage in the practice as well. So even those who do not personally approve of a practice will engage in it because of their empirical and normative expectations.

## Mental Models, Schemas, and Scripts

Gender-oriented norms should consider specific social norms as well as “mental models” about gender. A mental model, as the name suggests, is the framework individuals use to help make sense of the world. Mental models provide generalizations and archetypes that help evaluate what to do in novel situations. As Muldoon (2017) has argued, social norms can be held in place by, and help reinforce, mental models. This is precisely what makes behaviors related to gender so resistant to change. The sets of behaviors, attitudes, and schemas that people use to understand the world around them are often interlinked. How people envision a “good wife” or a “good husband” shapes the types of expected behaviors, as well as individuals' reactions when those expectations are met or violated.

Two core types of mental models are schemas and scripts. Schemas are mental models about things in the world, which provide archetypes for understanding that represent the essential features of the object or person in question. Schemas therefore provide a basic model of a woman or man, a mother or husband, or a teacher or child. For each, they provide a set of beliefs, a set of values, and emotional resonances. For instance, it is common to think of mothers as loving nurturers who devote much of their time to raising their children; this schema creates a set of behavioral expectations for mothers that can sustain a variety of social norms, such as mothers staying at home to raise their children, mothers preparing meals for their family, and so on. Scripts provide a structure to common interactions. These help coordinate behavioral expectations and provide grounding for different emotional responses to expected or unexpected behaviors.

For instance, consider the set of scripts involved for a husband coming home from work. Does he make dinner? Is his wife already home, or is she also coming home from work? Does the husband play with his kids, or go relax after a long day? All of these questions are answered by a common script of expected behaviors.

Scripts and schemas both represent parts of the broader apparatus that can support existing norms, and hinder the adoption of new norms. Mental models provide a sense of what is “natural” and reduce individuals’ perceptions that their social behaviors are contingent on others’ actions.

## Social Norms as Constraints and Enablers

The Bicchieri norms framework helps identify where individual preferences are constrained or enabled by broader mental and social structures. Shared mental models and social norms shape social practices, and can thus dramatically limit individuals’ abilities to behave in new ways. Likewise, they enable behaviors that are broadly consistent with existing practice. Utilizing a norms framework helps identify new ways of productively engaging with these constraints.





# IV Research Methodology

This study uses qualitative research methodologies to provide rich textual descriptions of the complex relationships between gender, social roles, and important social behaviors. The use of open-ended questions and probing gives participants the opportunity to respond in their own words, rather than forcing them to choose from among fixed responses, as quantitative methods do. In addition, open-ended questions can evoke responses that are meaningful and culturally salient to the participant, unanticipated by the researcher, and rich and explanatory in nature. Qualitative analysis attempts to identify trends and statements that are similar across different research participants.

The qualitative research focused on two aspects of gender norms. First, it analyzed women's voice and community participation at the local level to gain insights into barriers and mechanisms to facilitate women's participation in citizen engagement efforts, including holding positions on local councils. Second, it explored attitudes toward (and the risks of) gender violence as they relate to the reappearance of practices such as bride kidnapping or early marriage, and how these behaviors are related to other normative constructs of masculinity, honor, tradition, and national identity. This section summarizes the study methodology, sampling method, and fieldwork.

## Research Questions

This study examines the informal enablers and impediments to women who wish to participate in local civic life, and to women and girls who wish to consent to their marriages. These are important components of women's exercise of agency. While these two sets of behaviors operate in different spheres of life, they both hinge on whether women are able to make their own decisions, believe in their own capacity to handle a wide range of tasks or situations, and take action. The Bicchieri framework facilitates the examination of the broader support structure of these observable behaviors and practices, and how these social supports for behavior evolved in response to exogenous factors.

Your ability to take action, be effective, influence your own life, and assume responsibility for your behavior are important elements in what you bring to a relationship. This sense of agency is essential for you to feel in control of your life: to believe in your capacity to influence your own thoughts and behavior, and have faith in your ability.

The survey was designed to explore these support structures. The questions focused on the degree to which girls had fair access to schooling, compared to boys, and whether women had fair access to the labor market, or whether their participation was limited to gendered roles. These are questions that are interesting in their own right, but combined, they provide a broader understanding of the relative status of women in the different surveyed communities. Less access to education, and a limited role for women in the workforce, indicate a substantial social commitment to gender inequality. Likewise, gender parity in schooling and a more open labor market suggest a greater background commitment to gender equality. Since both bride kidnapping and low female participation in civic life reflect a lower social standing for women, these questions provided a baseline for gender parity that informs the rest of the survey.

The survey was geared to examine the study's two main interests—women's civic participation and bride kidnapping. For each, the questions were designed to test for the presence or absence of social norms related to the behaviors of interest. Questions examining women's participation in local civic life addressed two main elements: women's willingness to participate, and the community's willingness to support women's participation. This part of the survey entailed a series of questions aimed at determining whether there were women participating (empirical expectations), whether they should (normative beliefs), and what were the impediments to women's efforts to participate (normative expectations). To obtain a richer perspective on these issues, the survey also included probing questions asking for causal explanations. Finally, short vignettes presented concrete examples of women or men considering running for local

office to explore people's beliefs about what would happen next.

Pairing questions with vignettes enabled participants to engage with the subject both by asking about their real communities as they are, and by using imagined stories about fictional people in their communities. The more abstract questions allow people to express their view of what is typical in their communities, whereas the vignettes offer participants an opportunity to think through the individual behaviors that help create that broader picture.

Questions on marriage practice were similarly designed. Vignettes were designed to carefully explore normative expectations regarding both bride kidnapping and its rejection, and non-vignette questions were used to investigate personal normative beliefs and empirical expectations.

Since mental models can support social norms, the survey also explores mental models relevant to work and marriage—what constitutes a “good husband” or a “good wife.” These questions explore the roles that husbands and wives are expected to fill in a marriage, and by extension, what kinds of qualities men and women ought to have more broadly.

Lastly, to gauge whether the country's recent social and political changes were reflected in gender norms, the survey asked participants to judge whether gender norms have changed, whether those changes have been positive or negative, and what might have caused the changes.

## Research Instruments

A guiding principle of this research was to learn from individuals' perceptions, experiences, and interpretations of their situation. Thus, the study relied on qualitative data collection to capture individual perceptions of social norms, beliefs, behaviors, opinions, intra-household community-level dynamics, and contextual factors.

The following instruments were used in this study (see Table 2):

- In-depth interviews to uncover individuals' perceptions and experiences regarding marriage practices—bride kidnapping in particular—and women's participation in local affairs, in order to capture overall sensitive and salient aspects of women's status in society that individuals may not feel comfortable discussing in the presence of other people. In each community, between 24 and 36 in-depth

interviews were conducted in the three different age groups: 15–25, 26–39, and 40–60. Annex 2 shows the participants' profiles.

- Focus group discussions with community participants that allowed insights into general group norms on marriage, or ‘collective’ views, beliefs, and discourses related to marriage, bride kidnapping, women's participation in local affairs, and women's overall status in society. The use of both tools helped to cross-check information.
- Focus group discussions with key informants (i.e., community leaders, government officials, elected officials, lawyers, judges, important local employers, business or financial leaders, teachers, healthcare workers) sought to understand the stressors/forces that are leading to changes (or at least perceived changes) in gender norms, and seek information about the local context to understand the community factors that affect gender norms.

## Community and Participant Selection

The communities were selected in order to be geographically inclusive and, to the extent possible, provide an urban/rural dimension. The study conducted research in seven communities in three geographic regions: Chui, Osh, and Naryn, covering a mix of urban and rural locations (Figure 9, Table 2). The individual interviews ( $n = 180$ ) were stratified by age group and included equal numbers of women and men (see Table 2).

The study used the snowball sampling method instead of random route sampling,<sup>7</sup> as the participant recruitment strategy was not working as well as anticipated because people were not opening their doors and were refusing to be interviewed. Snowball sampling is a nonprobability sampling technique in which existing study subjects recruit future subjects from among their acquaintances. Thus the sample group is said to grow like a rolling snowball. This technique allows surveyors to include people in the survey who may have more to say and can help uncover common practices and views from within a social network. While snowball sampling lacks the statistical representativeness associated with random route sampling, it is arguably a better approach to exploring social norms, as it allows researchers to look at subcommunities in more detail. Since social norms rely on sets of mutual

<sup>7</sup> In random route sampling, interviewers are assigned a starting location and provided instructions on the random walking rules—e.g., which direction to start, on which side of the street to walk, and which crossroads to take. Households are selected by interviewers following the instructions.

Figure 9. Map of Kyrgyz Republic and key study sites



Table 2. Individual interviews and focus groups

Community	Key informant focus group and network mapping exercise	Focus group of people in communities in different age groups	Interviews and participant observation			Total number of individual interviews
			Ages 15–25	Ages 26–39	Ages 40–60	
1. Tokmok (city), Chui Oblast	5	6	8(4 W; 4 m)	8(4 W; 4 M)	8(4 W; 4 M)	24
2. Panfilov (village), Chui Oblast	5	6	5(3 W; 2 m)	3(3 W; 0 M)	7(3 W; 4 M)	36
3. villages Kum-Aryk, Telman (village), Chui Oblast	5	6	7(3 W; 4 m)	9(3 W; 6 M)	5(3 W; 2 M)	
4. Osh (city), Osh Oblast	5	6	8(4 W; 4 m)	8(4 W; 4 M)	8(4 W; 4 M)	24
5. Otuz-Adyr (village), Osh Oblast	5	6	12(6 W; 6 M)	12(6 W; 6 M)	12(6 W; 6 M)	36
6. Naryn (city), Naryn Oblast	5	6	8(4 W; 4 M)	8(4 W; 4 M)	8(4 W; 4 M)	24
7. Ak-Jar (village), Naryn Oblast	5	6	12(6 W; 6 M)	12(6 W; 6 M)	12(6 W; 6 M)	36
Total	35	42	60	60	60	180

expectations, snowball sampling better enables the exploration of shared expectations within a community.

## Data Analysis

The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Patterns in attitudes and responses were identified and coded. Inductive and deductive codes enhanced the analytical meaning of the themes that emerged. Themes were compared between men and women in the different age groups, and among different locations and urban and rural settings. Tentative themes developed from the analytical process were compared with others to check for validity. All data were analyzed in

Russian and Kyrgyz languages, and relevant quotes were translated into English.

## Ethical Considerations

The qualitative study embedded a number of ethical protection measures. Research team members followed World Health Organization guidelines for conducting sensitive research on vulnerable populations (WHO 2001). Data collection proceeded with subjects' informed consent. Data was collected and stored with no personally identifying information. All computer files were password protected to ensure confidentiality.

## Limitations of the Study

The methodology used in the study has the following main limitations that should be accounted for when interpreting the findings:

- *Potential selection bias:* Participants selected for the interviews and focus group discussions were not randomly assigned. Furthermore, as the interviews required considerable time to conduct, the number of participants was necessarily smaller than what could be incorporated into a quantitative study.
- *Quantification of findings is not the scope of this study:* The study used qualitative methods to obtain in-depth

insights into perceived and actual gender and social norms. Qualitative analysis allows the identification of key issues, but the extent to which any of the identified issues applies to the larger population cannot be quantified.

- *Overlapping norms:* The study was designed to uncover the presence or absence of consistent social norms. It cannot differentiate between some norms that would be behaviorally consistent with each other. This would require follow-up work that investigates the full structure of those norms.





Credit: Nick van Praag/The World Bank





# V Findings

The survey respondents consistently described their society as undergoing a number of significant changes in a fairly short period of time. Changes to the relative status of men and women have had significant consequences for women's exercise of agency in their private lives as explored through the lens of marriage, and their public lives as explored through the lens of civic participation. While women's agency has increased in all areas of life, it has not achieved parity with men's agency. Indeed, it appears that at present, the sampled population's preference is for women to have significantly higher status than a decade or so ago but not necessarily on a par with men. This basic view helps shape a number of social norms that govern behaviors linked to women's ability to exercise their own agency in private and public life.

The findings are presented using an iceberg model of behavior (Figure 10). The iceberg model is a systems thinking tool that describes social support structures, patterns of behavior, mental models, and exogenous factors

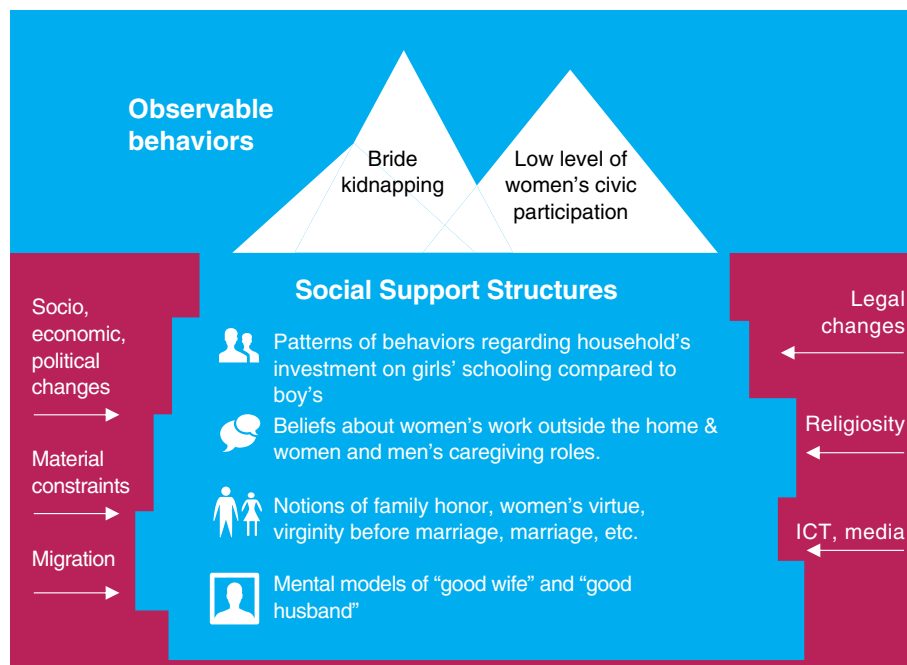
that cause the social support structures sustaining the two sets of observable expressions of women's agency discussed here (bride kidnapping and low levels of women's civic participation) to shift. Following this model, the key findings of the social support structures that lie below the surface are described, followed by the findings on respondents' perceptions of the two observable behaviors of interest (above the surface).

## Beneath the Surface: Social Support Structures

### Consistent Support for Quasi-equality for Women

The interviews reveal consistent support for what is termed here "quasi-equality" for women. Several female participants from both rural and urban areas said that women should have a robust set of rights and that women can achieve anything they set their minds to. At

Figure 10. Iceberg model of behavior



Note: Adapted from Goodman 2002.

*[. . .] a woman must respect a man, regardless if he is good or bad; he has a higher status. He is one step higher.*

—A male respondent, 41 years old, Tokmok city, Chui Oblast

*They used to say “No, she is simply a woman!” Now they listen to what women say—[. . .] gender equality.*

—A female respondent, 29 years old, Ak-Jar village, Naryn Oblast

*Men will do what women do now. And women will do what men do. I think it is good for men and women to have equal rights. At the same time, we should preserve our Kyrgyz mentality. And everyone must seek this.*

—A female respondent, 21 years old, Osh city, Osh Oblast

the same time, however, consistently across genders and location, respondents said men were “one step higher” than women. While some of this can be explained by a simple heterogeneity of views within the population—where some believe a larger gender imbalance is appropriate—a large portion of respondents believed both that women should have significant social standing and that men should have slightly higher status. According to the framework used in this study, such views do not constitute a social norm, as they are not tied to a particular set of behaviors, but rather represent one element of the mental model of “what it means to be a woman” in Kyrgyz society. This view of women as “one step below” men informs a wide variety of behaviors and shapes how people conceive which roles women ought to play in civic and family life. This mental model of quasi-equality influences a number of behaviors relevant to the study’s other findings.

## Strong Gendered Conceptions of Appropriate Roles for Women and Men

The ideals of a good wife and a good husband, as expressed by study participants, underscore the many ways in which strongly held normative values related to gender determine individual attitudes and behaviors. As such, they reflect both the actual social relations and division of labor within a household as well as the expectations about what men and women should bring to a marriage and the family. These ideals are often internalized and

strongly influence women’s behaviors and gender roles and expectations in marriage. The study revealed slight differences between women’s and men’s perceptions of the ideals of a “good wife” and “good husband.” Ideals of the good wife include one who sticks close to home, takes care of the family, and respects and obeys her husband and in-laws. Ideals of a “good husband” mostly stress their role as head of the household and economic provider, performing male responsibilities around the household, and—in some cases—refraining from bad behaviors such as drinking, gambling, or beating their wife (Table 3). In urban areas, a greater share of respondents said a good wife also contributes to the family income and is able to combine work and household chores, and that a good husband helps his wife with household chores. These mental models of the roles of women and men dramatically shape the kinds of behaviors that people consider appropriate for both themselves and others, and so can be held in place both through internalization and external reinforcement in the form of social expectations regarding particular behaviors.

The interviews also reveal husbands’ controlling behavior and restrictions on women’s mobility, as reported by men. Male participants in Osh city—an area with stronger religious and conservative beliefs, as indicated in Table 1—said that wives should obey their husbands and report to them if they go out of the house. Men reported that wives should be under the control of their husbands, but that wives should not limit their husbands. Further,

**Table 3.** Characteristics of a good wife and good husband

Ideals of a good wife	Ideals of a good husband
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To take good care of the household and family</li><li>• To respect/esteem/obey/take care of her husband and his family</li><li>• To give birth to and bring up children</li><li>• To be compliant, patient, mild, always stay in a good mood, be pretty and neat</li><li>• To combine work outside the home with household chores</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To fully provide for the family</li><li>• To be a caring husband and father and dedicate time to his family</li><li>• To be respectful of his wife and her family; avoid conflicts with his wife</li><li>• To stay away from bad habits and not to raise his hand to his wife</li><li>• To perform male duties around the house</li><li>• To help his wife with household duties (a few mentions, especially in urban areas)</li></ul>

*She should respect her husband and family, follow our traditions and obey our mentality, be a decent and conscientious daughter-in-law.*

—A male respondent, 27 years old, Ak-Jar village, Naryn Oblast

*You have to become the head of household, you must stand at the helm of the ship, you are the defender of your wife; the responsibility of providing for the family rests with you, whereas everything that concerns the issues within the family is your wife's business. Therefore, every family member should know his role.*

—A female respondent, 57 years old, Osh city, Osh Oblast

women often said that wives should put their husbands' wishes and needs first in order to have a better relationship. While the study did not focus on domestic violence, the interviews reveal that this controlling behavior may be associated with a higher likelihood of abuse. On one occasion, a man justified beating his wife to control and discipline her. Studies have shown that controlling behavior among men is significantly associated with a higher likelihood of domestic violence (Heise et al. 1999; Johnson 2001; Gage and Hutchinson 2006; Sugarman 1996). As some of the quotes below illustrate, mental models regarding the appropriate roles of men and women, and men's superiority to women, help justify these behaviors.

Discussion groups also compared current conceptions of a good wife and husband with those of the previous generation. Many recalled that women used to stay home and that they would be more respectful, submissive, and a "model to follow." Participants observed that women now work outside the home more often, dedicate less time to children's upbringing, are more disrespectful, and even "want their husband's place." Many respondents expressed that men have become lazier and less hard-working. Respondents noted that men used to take care of their wives and now they only care about themselves, and so they have become more selfish, more indecisive, and have lost their manhood. However, some female respondents reported that men have become "softer"

because they display more care toward their children and give more freedom to their wives. They are also more likely to consult their wives about household decisions. Negative qualities of today's husbands, as expressed by both men and women, include that they are unprincipled, abuse alcohol, and do not take care of their health. Labor migration of men without their families was mentioned as a negative aspect of today's husbands. These responses suggest that there has been significant progress toward greater gender equality, but this transition has not been viewed as unambiguously positive. Importantly, the mental models of what women and men are like, and how that translates into their roles as husbands and wives, have required a number of changes. As women gain in status, and men have lost some economic status, there has been a change in how people perceive the behaviors and virtues associated with different social roles. Most clearly, women's increase in self-assertion is perceived as both a positive move for equality and a loss in terms of respectfulness. This is likely an ongoing period of change for these mental models. It suggests that people recognize that these roles are malleable, but are uncertain how they will evolve going forward.

Mental models related to gender help shape the options available to both men and women. As described in more detail below, changes in these mental models have resulted in changes in labor market opportunities for

*Women have assumed many responsibilities—providing for their families, working. Women have become providers, mothers, and housewives. I think the roles have changed. Men, on the contrary, stay home with children.*

—A female respondent, 40 years old, Tokmok city, Chui Oblast

*Women used to be more respectful, which is a good thing; but were unable to stand up for their rights, which is not good. Now they are not very respectful, which is bad, but know how to stand for their rights, and this is good.*

—A male respondent, 27 years old, Naryn city, Naryn Oblast

*Men have become indecisive, losing their manly core. They say one thing, and do another.*

—A female respondent, 22 years old, Osh city, Osh Oblast

*For equality, men have to have a job so that they do not feel low and dependent on working women.*

—A female participant, 37 years old, Otuz-Adyr village, Osh Oblast



women and altered social norms regarding marriage and civic participation. While labor market participation, marriage, and civic participation may appear to represent diverse areas of life, they are all fundamental areas in which women may or may not be able to exercise their own agency. The basic quasi-equality finding is consistently replicated in behavior: while women's agency has increased, it matters less than men's. This concept is reinforced by social norms that help to police this hierarchy.

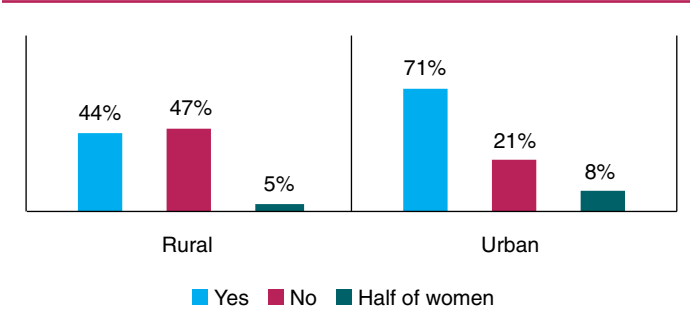
### Women's Economic Opportunities Constrained by Their Lesser Status

The choices that women and men make about work are informed as much by their definitions of masculinity and femininity and their views of care responsibilities at home, as by market opportunities. In rural areas, a greater share of respondents said that most women do not work outside the home, primarily due to their household responsibilities (looking after their children, household chores, working on family livestock and farms), prohibition by their husband, lack of education, and lack of employment opportunities. In urban areas, a greater share of respondents said that women often work outside the home (Figure 11), and the main reasons cited for women not working include a lack of jobs suitable for women, no vacant spaces in kindergartens, and the need to take care of their children. Women work in educational

institutions, healthcare facilities, banks, government institutions, catering and retail establishments, the sewing industry, as cleaners/janitors, hairdressers, seasonal work, factories, and as entrepreneurs, especially in urban areas. There was a strong consensus among respondents that women should not be engaged in work that is physically demanding and that is harmful to their health, such as mining, construction, or jobs involving the operation of equipment and vehicles. The study also revealed that there is a perception that more women are now working outside the house to supplement family income than in the past.

The study found that, counterintuitively, women's economic opportunities are enhanced by their lesser status. Asked if it was easier for men to find a job than women, a significant share of respondents said that it was easier for women because they are more willing to take any job, whereas men are more "picky." This is an interesting finding in part because it suggests that unequal roles for men and women can damage men's economic opportunities. Men's concerns about their social standing can prevent them from taking jobs at certain pay rates, or jobs that are perceived as too feminine. Since women are perceived as "one step below" men, they do not have social restrictions that can inhibit their job choices. Since the participants were mostly at or near the poverty level, these restrictions on labor opportunities can make a large difference in household income. This certainly creates more opportunities for work at the lower end for women, but there was also evidence suggesting that higher end jobs, such as managerial positions, are more often reserved for men. Other respondents said that there was a greater demand for labor associated with work that requires physical effort (construction, fieldwork, grazing), especially in rural areas, and thus more job opportunities for men. Several study participants said that women were migrating to Russia to work as nannies and send money to their families. In urban areas, some respondents said that

Figure 11. Would you say that most women in your community work outside the home?



*I believe that women should not work in managerial positions. They should be ordinary workers. They must make way for men.*  
– A female respondent, 26 years old, Otuz-Adyr village, Osh Oblast

*Intellectual labor, more logical work where she needs her femininity, her intellectual development, jobs requiring logic, thinking. Leave the manual labor for men—let them work with a shovel.*  
– A male respondent, 52 years old, Tokmok city

*We should not separate women from other people, we do not have the right to do so; of course, they should not do work requiring physical strength—I mean laying asphalt or carrying cement.*  
– A male respondent, 47 years old, Osh city, Osh Oblast

*Because women are not picky, they can work in any position, while men are, so to speak, more self-respecting.*

– A female respondent, 31 years old, Otuz-Adyr village, Osh Oblast

employers avoid hiring young women because they think they will quit after having children.

Indeed, social restrictions can help explain the significant difference in women's labor market participation between rural and urban environments. Cities provide more opportunities for work other than physical labor, and have broadly more equality-oriented mental models. Cities have a much higher rate of women in the workforce. In rural environments, there are stronger expectations for women to remain in the household, paired with fewer jobs that do not require physical effort. This provides a useful case of background mental models shaping expectations over particular behaviors—namely, whether women work outside the home, and what kinds of jobs they are eligible for.

## Material Constraints

Material constraints shape behaviors and norms. Interviews and focus group discussions revealed that a loss of economic power, underlying poverty and economic necessity, and a lack of job opportunities are forcing some parents to withdraw girls from schooling after the 9th grade and marry them off at an early age. While in the Kyrgyz Republic it is mandatory for young girls and boys to complete the 9th grade, the main reason for youth not continuing their upper secondary schooling is parents' lack of financial resources. Respondents said that some families even lack the resources to pay for school uniforms and clothes for their daughters. Not having the

prerequisites for school attendance can be embarrassing for families and illustrates the very real economic challenges experienced by many families. Girls drop out of school to work in order to contribute financially to their families. While the girls—and their communities—would eventually be made better off with higher levels of educational attainment, families need to respond to immediate needs. However, this economic constraint can have gendered consequences. There is a belief that the biological family does not benefit from educating a daughter since she becomes a member of her husband's family when she marries, and they will reap the benefits. Further, parents often marry their daughters early to relieve their burden on the household, and to receive cattle and cash dowries from the groom's family. So, families under economic pressure may opt to support a boy in school over a girl, simply because he represents a better long-term investment. Since the girl will eventually go to another family, the priority is to help make her an appealing bride.

Social and religious norms also explain girls' dropout rates as they are expected to take care of the family. Parents also withdraw girls from school after the 9th grade to protect their virtue and prevent them from engaging in premarital sex. In Osh city, some respondents said that parents do not allow girls to attend upper secondary school due to fears that she would be kidnapped for marriage.

Respondents repeatedly mentioned that out-migration is affecting gender norms in multiple and conflicting ways.

*Many girls are forced to get married after completing the 9th grade, as their families are unable to provide for them.*

–A male respondent, 17 years old, Otuz-Adyr village, Osh Oblast

*Many people are unemployed; they have no job. Out of despair, they leave their children with their parents or parents-in-law.*

–A male respondent, 50 years old, Osh city, Osh Oblast

*Some parents believe that it is sufficient if their daughter completes 5–6 grades, so that she knows how to read and write, all other things are not important . . . why spend money on her studies if she gets married anyways; let her husband take care of her education.*

–A female respondent, 33 years old, Osh city, Osh Oblast

*[They do not allow them to study after 13 years old] to keep girl's face.*

–A female respondent, 33 years old, Osh city, Osh Oblast

*Some parents are too religious; they believe that upon completion of the 9th grade girls [. . .] must stay home.*

–A female respondent, 54 years old, Otuz-Adyr village, Osh Oblast

*[factors that constrain teenage girls going to school] Some parents, mostly women, leave abroad to earn money and no one looks after their children, that is why they may go or may not go to school. [. . .] For the most part it is our fault as parents.*

—A male respondent, 41 years old, Tokmok city, Chui Oblast

*Yes, the roles of men and women have changed . . . Most of our women have migrated abroad. And men sit at home and raise children, many of them drink alcohol.*

—A female respondent, 25 years old, Osh city, Osh Oblast

*Women have to participate in all spheres of public life, because many men migrate to work.*

—A male respondent, 25 years old, Osh city, Osh Oblast

*[factors that explain changes in gender norms] Migration has increased, not only in Russia, but also in Turkey, Dubai, and other countries where women perform men's duties.*

—A male respondent, 26 years, Otuz-Adyr village, Osh Oblast

On the one hand, respondents said that out-migration to Russia is contributing to teenage girls dropping out of school, as their grandparents or other family members are not able to exert control over them. Girls also are taken to Russia to work, many as babysitters. Out-migration may also be encouraging early marriages of girls to relieve parents of their responsibilities and to protect the girls' virtue. On the other hand, respondents also mentioned that migration is exposing the Kyrgyz population to Western values and social norms. In addition, the women left behind are assuming male responsibilities, such as the departed men's farmwork, handling of finances, and making purchases that usually would fall under men's purview, on top of single-handedly caring for their children. The interviews also revealed that left-behind husbands are taking on childcare duties that have traditionally been ascribed to women, while at the same time being under considerable pressure to live up to locally accepted masculine ideals.

While out-migration has not generated a consistent direction of change, it is clear that out-migration *generates social change*. For better or worse, out-migration is a destabilizing phenomenon. Brought on by serious economic challenges, out-migration is a very reasonable individual response. Going to areas with work available allows people to provide for themselves and their families. But this large social disruption makes previous social norms and mental models untenable. Men may take on more childcare responsibilities, women may seek more work outside the home, and children may be left with less parental time to absorb previous gender roles. Out-migration has likely led to some improvements in women's status, but it has also worsened other problems. For the purposes of this report, it is notable because it represents a large shock to communities, which may undermine the social expectations that sustain social norms.

## Above the Surface: Observable Expressions of Women's Agency: Bride Kidnapping and Women's Civic Participation

### Bride Kidnapping: A Declining, Broadly Unacceptable Practice

One of the most blatant ways a society can fail to respect women's agency is by denying them the right to consent to marriage and sexual encounters. The practice of nonconsensual bride kidnapping, and social norms that support it, are fundamentally at odds with any respect for women's agency. To kidnap a bride is to deny a woman the opportunity to choose her own future. While Kyrgyz kidnapping rates used to be quite high, interviews reveal a perception that bride kidnapping is on the decline: 87 percent of interviewees reported that the most common way of getting married was by mutual consent, while 8 percent reported that consensual kidnapping was the most common. Only 0.1 percent of the population reported nonconsensual kidnapping as the most common way of getting married. When presented with a vignette of a young man kidnapping a girl for marriage without her prior consent, 57 percent of respondents reported that this never happens in their community. Another 27 percent reported that kidnapping was rare. However, about 13 percent of respondents reported that this was a common behavior. Half of those who reported that this was a common behavior came from the same village: Otuz-Adyr village (Osh Oblast), though only one-third of the respondents in that village said that kidnapping was common. Similarly, 91 percent of the survey participants believed that the way people get married has changed, and 72 percent reported that this change has been positive. Respondents cited a reduction in bride kidnappings as a primary source of this positive change.

Kidnapping is also perceived as broadly unacceptable. After respondents were presented with the vignette about Ruslan kidnapping Anara without her consent, they were asked to predict the responses of various members of Ruslan and Anara's community. The study found that:

- 50 percent of participants thought that Ruslan's parents would not support his actions
- 82 percent of participants thought that Anara's parents would be upset
- 81 percent of participants thought that Anara would be upset
- 62 percent of participants thought that Anara's friends would be upset

This demonstrates a broad rejection of the practice of kidnapping. However, that does not mean that there is no support for kidnapping. Indeed, the study found:

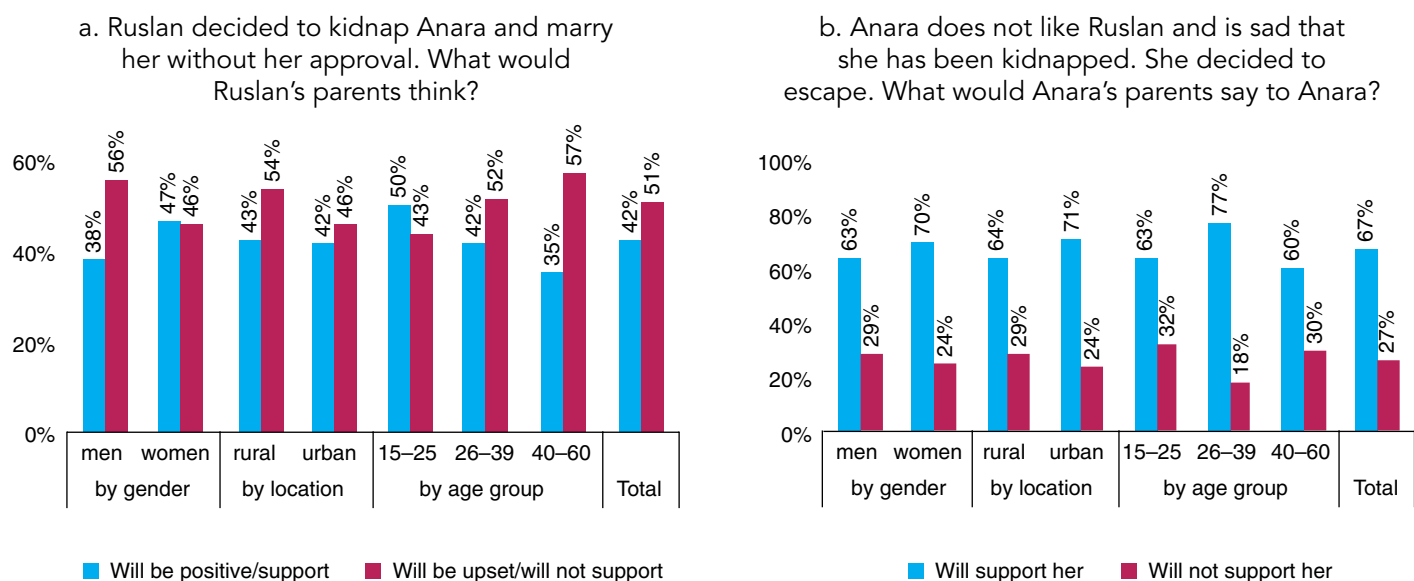
- 42 percent of participants thought that Ruslan's parents would support him
- 51 percent of participants thought that Ruslan's friends would support him
- 8 percent of participants thought that Anara's parents would be happy, with an additional 5 percent expecting that Anara's parents would negotiate with Ruslan's parents to arrive at an agreement in support of the marriage
- 17 percent of participants thought that Anara's friends would be happy for her

The interviews revealed some differences in attitudes toward bride kidnapping by gender, location, and age group of the respondent. The vignette question about whether Ruslan's parents would support their son's

kidnapping a girl for marriage without her consent shows a slightly higher share of women (47 percent) than men (38 percent) expressing that his parents would support him (Figure 12a). There were minor differences in responses between respondents in rural and urban locations. Interestingly, a greater share (50 percent) of younger respondents—aged 15–25—said that Ruslan's parents would support their son, in contrast to respondents aged 40–60 (30 percent). This may indicate that young people are mistaken about how parents would react. It is possible that the younger generation believes that the older generation is more interested in maintaining the practice of bride kidnapping than it actually is. With regards to the vignette question about Anara's parents' support for her escape (Figure 12b), a greater share of women said her parents would support her (70 percent) compared to men (63 percent), and a greater share of urban respondents (71 percent) than rural respondents (64 percent). Further, a greater share of respondents aged 26–39 (77 percent) said that Anara's parents would support their daughter in contrast to the younger age group (15–25, 63 percent) and the older age group (40–60, 60 percent). Similar to before, this may indicate that different generations misperceive each other. As this is not associated with underlying support for kidnapping, this may provide evidence that there is enough intergenerational discussion of these issues for people's expectations to match.

Applying the norms framework more systematically, there are consistently strong empirical expectations in favor of marriage by mutual consent, and virtually nonexistent empirical expectations of nonconsensual bride kidnapping. People are individually against bride kidnapping.

**Figure 12.** Responses of vignette questions on bride kidnapping by gender, location, and age group





[. . .] I am against this. If my boy kidnaps a girl and I learn she does not like him, I will be very upset! As you cannot force anyone to like you.

—A male respondent, 52 years old, Tokmok city, Chui Oblast

Educated friends would say this is not the right thing to do; street friends would say “good job, you are a real man.”

—A male respondent, 36 years old, Otuz-Adyr village, Osh Oblast

These two findings together are quite positive: most people surveyed reject bride kidnapping and think that their communities have also rejected kidnapping. However, this story is made more complex when normative expectations are considered. It appears as if there is ample evidence of a social norm against bride kidnapping among girls and their families, but for those who might perpetrate a kidnapping, boys and their families, the results are much more mixed. There remain significant expectations of social support for a potential kidnapper. And in Otuz-Adyr village (Osh Oblast), there are rather robust expectations of social support for kidnapping, even if it is a minority practice.

The survey revealed that while people generally perceive kidnapping as unacceptable, the participants believed that a kidnapper would benefit from a fair amount of social support. They predicted that Ruslan would have the support of his family and friends about half of the time. So, while kidnapping is viewed as no longer a common practice, and is counter to people's beliefs about how marriages should be initiated, there are not strong universal norms against kidnapping. The study cannot fully explain whether this is because people believe that *the sorts of men who kidnap* are likely to have families and friends who support them because they come from a subgroup that is more willing to do so, or whether there is a broad-based weak level of support for kidnapping within the population. Participants suggested that more educated, more secular people have very low levels of support for kidnapping, whereas people with less education are more inclined to kidnap and find support for kidnapping. This is worrying in part because it suggests that progress made against bride kidnapping has not been universal. Subcommunities can provide ample social support for the practice even if it has been broadly rejected by the wider population.

## Broad Acceptance of the Legitimacy of New Laws That Criminalize Bride Kidnapping

Quite frequently, legal changes do little to alter underlying behaviors. This can be true for a variety of reasons: the

state has insufficient capacity to enforce the law, agents of the state charged with enforcing the law do not agree with it and disregard it, or citizens simply continue following an established social norm rather than a legal norm, and do not report legal infractions to the police. However, when participants were asked what factors brought about changes in marriage practices in their communities, a plurality responded that the criminal law banning kidnapping was a significant factor. Other significant factors described were economic changes, bad experiences with kidnapping, democratization, access to the Internet and media, and education—but the law was widely cited as a causal factor. No one who mentioned the law suggested it was illegitimate or should be ignored. Some described the law as changing the bargaining position of women's families. That is, they could threaten to ruin a kidnapper's family unless agreements could be made. While using the law to leverage a significant dowry does not directly protect women from kidnapping, it does deter the practice. An important implication of the discussion of the law is that people treated it as a given that the law had authority, and that it would be enforced if police were involved. While the law may not be the only causal factor, it has sufficient power to motivate different behaviors. This was true in both rural and urban communities. This appears to be an instance in which a legal change can help shift a community's normative expectations. Because the law introduces a sanction against kidnapping, even if cases are not brought to court, people are aware that kidnapping is a behavior that is justifiably punished.

While not strictly a legal change, there appears to be greater use of pre-existing legal pathways—namely, divorce. Divorce rates have been on the rise, and participants have noted that divorce has lost much of its previous stigma. They point out that nonconsensual kidnappings become pointless if the woman can then initiate divorce proceedings. This is seen as humiliating for the kidnapper.

## Conditional Attitudes about Consent

One of the most striking features of the data gathered was an apparent conditional commitment to mutual consent for marriage for a subset of the population. While

*[factors that have contributed to a decline in the bride kidnapping] The law and the opportunity for a woman to escape the kidnapper. In the past, parents could make their daughter stay with the kidnapper.*

—A male respondent, 31 years old, Kum Aryk village, Chui region

*Compared to the past, in the last 2–3 years, big changes have occurred. In the old times, if a girl was kidnapped, people said that a stone should be left where it dropped, so the girls stayed with their kidnappers. Currently, when parents learn that their daughter is kidnapped, they send their daughters-in-law to learn if the daughter would stay with the kidnapper or not. If she doesn't agree to stay, they will take her away, there's nothing to be ashamed of. Here in Otuz-Adyr girls have become smarter, they don't agree anymore. It's been 2 years since the bride kidnapping law has been adopted, so the term of imprisonment is more than 5 years. And girls here are not kidnapped any more. They make a deal, with their parents' consent, give earrings to a girl and parents let her go.*

—A female respondent, 38 years old, Otuz-Adyr village, Osh Oblast

all participants said that marriage should be based on mutual consent, opinions differed about what should be done after a young woman has been kidnapped. Two-thirds of participants believed that a girl's parents would support a decision to escape a kidnapping. The remaining third thought that the parents would expect her to stay. Only 55 percent of participants thought that Anara's friends would support her decision to leave. Slightly under half of the participants thought that Ruslan's friends would not blame Anara for leaving. So, there was much weaker support for the importance of consent *once that value has already been violated*.

This is likely because other values—primarily familial honor—are at stake once a young woman has been kidnapped. There is broad agreement that if a woman escapes, the kidnapper and his family would be humiliated. However, many participants also expressed that the woman and her family would also face significant embarrassment due to speculation about whether she lost her virginity while kidnapped. She may also be blamed for the kidnapping itself. Because of this, conditional consent may be given because the value of consent may be overriden by more socially valued considerations of honor and embarrassment.

While this certainly appears to be a factor, another social consideration appears to be the woman's prior prospects for a marriage based on consent. A number of respondents noted that if the man came from a good family, or was seen as a good person, she should consider the marriage regardless of how it started. Likewise, if she is perceived to be less likely to find a husband due to age or some other factor, participants offered prudential reasons for her to remain after being kidnapped.

These two explanations share a form of social paternalism. Both ways that conditionally waive an interest in a woman's consent to marriage involve her welfare, even

if they do not take her autonomy seriously. The first set of concerns demonstrates that she would face a serious loss of status if she escaped a kidnapping, and therefore she may be better off as a married woman. The second set suggests that women without social status ought to prefer marriage regardless of how it came to be.

While the study design does not permit a full assessment of the relative strengths of these two sets of considerations, it finds evidence of both. Combined, this suggests that while consent and respect for everyone's right to choose their spouse is a value, it is not universally seen as a *right*—a value that can trump other considerations. Instead, consent is one value among many that are worthy of consideration.

Notably, this conditional commitment to mutual consent is an important example of the complex interplay among multiple norms and mental models in social institutions. It is only because there is a strong set of beliefs that unwed women should be virgins, and that their virginity reflects their family's honor, that the first set of considerations can even enter into discussion. Likewise, there is a sense that a woman who is perceived as less desirable should be grateful that anyone would want her as a wife, and that being a wife—no matter the circumstances—is better than being single. These are not descriptions of the natural state of the world, but rather a set of social values that is structured in a way that disadvantages women to such a degree that it can create social justifications for remaining in a marriage initiated by violence.

## Women's Civic Participation

### Civic Participation Is Perceived to Be More Significant in Urban Areas

Consent is central not only to entering into a marriage in one's private life, but also to authorizing the civic rules

*People are judgmental. They will discuss her virginity, marriage. Everyone knows about everything. It would be hard for her to gain her face back, to recover.*

–A male respondent, 52 years old, Tokmok city, Chui Oblast

*Men are not condemned. It's girls who are condemned.*

–A female respondent, 46 years old, Otuz-Adyr village, Osh Oblast

*If she is 30 years old and she is still single, they would be happy for her. If she is still young, they would say "We feel sorry for the girl, she is so young."*

–A female respondent, 21 years old, Osh city, Osh Oblast

*They would support Ruslan saying that he did a manly act and that it is the girl's fault.*

–A female respondent, 57 years old, Osh city, Osh Oblast

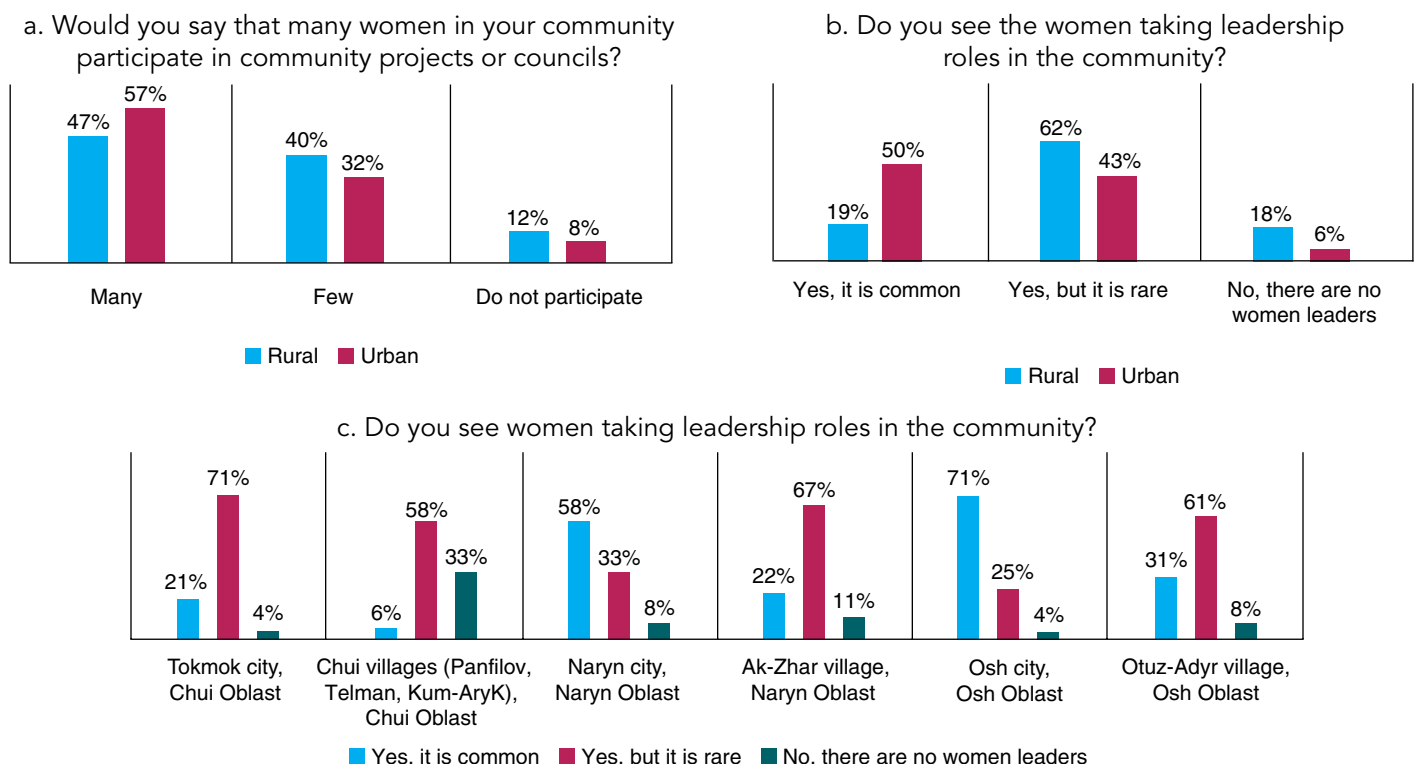
*I think they would tell her to stay to not make them feel embarrassed. Any parent would say so.*

–A female respondent, 41 years old, Ak-Jar village, Naryn Oblast

that one is subject to. Participation in local governance is the best way to offer that consent. This has two important components: first, women need to be able to see themselves in public roles and try and seek them out, and second, their communities need to recognize the contributions that women can make, and offer at least nominal support for their participation. However, while the Kyrgyz Republic has mechanisms for boosting women's participation at the national level, the survey found fewer such mechanisms at the local level, particularly in rural areas.

While attitudes about bride kidnapping did not show a significant urban/rural divide, women's civic participation is perceived to be more than twice as frequent in urban than in rural areas (Figures 13a, 13b). This finding is consistent with those for labor market participation: women are much more likely to work outside the home in urban areas. Interestingly, despite strong religious and social norms that could prevent women from engaging in civic and political activities, a large majority of respondents in Osh city said that it was common for women to take on leadership roles in their community (Figure 13c).

Figure 13. Women's civic participation and leadership



*Yes. We had elections this year, and many women got rather many votes.*

—A female respondent, 40 years old, Tokmok city, Chui Oblast

*[. . .] Women are very active in this sphere. Women participate in meetings. We even noticed that there are some women in society who participate in rallies on purpose, the so-called OBON [special women force]. It's already part of their mentality—if you go somewhere and shout loudly, you will achieve some results. For example, in most cases, it is women now who speak in the meetings, put forward conditions, and voice some negative aspects.*

—A female respondent, 57 years old, Osh city, Osh Oblast

## Social Norms Constrain Women's Civic and Political Participation

Social norms against women's civic and political activity were the most cited constraint for women's participation across locations. The interviews revealed that patriarchal and religious norms prescribe a separate and unequal role for women in the community, and that civic and political activity fall outside the domain of women. It was often mentioned that religious communities and sharia law hamper women's participation in the public domain, and that women are confined to the private domain by taking care of the family and household. Other constraints mentioned by respondents included time constraints due to household work, women's lack of self-confidence, unawareness of community events, and lack of financial resources.

The responses suggest a robust norm against women's participation. Participants pointed out that it is men who go to public gatherings, and that husbands do not let women participate, which forms an empirical expectation that women will be left out. Normative expectations include women's obligations to their household, and a sense of shame for those who attempt to participate. These combine to restrict women's participation in civic

life. However, some respondents said that women's participation in civic and political life would enrich the policy-making process and help better address various societal needs from a women's perspective, and that women would make good political actors because they are more caring and just.

As in the findings related to labor market participation, while women are perceived to be quasi-equal to men, there remain sharply gendered roles in public life. Managing the household is for women, and managing the community is more for men. These roles, in turn, structure the normative expectations for each gender. Men, to fully inhabit their roles, are to participate in civil society. Yet women who participate in local civic life are considered to be distracted from their core task—maintaining the household. Women can be easily rebuked on these grounds, as there is wide agreement that women ought to maintain the home and children.

Where more women work outside the home, this may generate greater enthusiasm for women's participation in civic life by altering the mental model that women's place is in the home. Once this connection is severed and women are taking on roles beyond the home, it is much

*They have things to do around the house, it is primarily men who participate; maybe their husbands do not allow them to participate, saying they will themselves go [to a community event].*

—A male respondent, 43 years old, Ak-Jar village, Naryn Oblast

*It is part of our mentality that all public gatherings are attended by men.*

—A female respondent, 25 years old, Ak-Jar village, Naryn Oblast

*This is our practice. It is shameful for women to participate in such matters [. . .] they feel embarrassed, or their husbands do not allow them to participate.*

—A male respondent, 38 years old, Chui rural villages, Chui Oblast

*Sometimes, women themselves are afraid to be leaders. Most often they are afraid of responsibility.*

—A male respondent, 52 years old, Tokmok city, Chui Oblast

*Since most of the population is Muslims, we have community life areas reserved for men.*

—A female respondent, 22 years old, Osh city, Osh Oblast



harder to rebuke those who participate in local civic life. It is also possible that women who work outside the home take more of an interest in public life, as they have more exposure to it. As such, labor market participation might increase individuals' motivation to participate *and* decrease social resistance to female participation. While this study was not designed to investigate this causal pathway, there is enough evidence to suggest that this would be a fruitful area for future research.

## Lack of Support for Participation from Husbands

The study revealed that an important barrier to women's civic and political participation is their husband's prohibition. When asked a vignette question of a hypothetical situation in which a civically motivated woman wants to run for the local council, consistently across urban and rural locations, 9 percent of respondents said the husband would likely not support his wife and another 7 percent suggested that her decision to run meant that she would have already obtained her husband's approval. Many respondents suggested that husbands who are more educated, tolerant, and are not jealous would more likely support their wives. Reasons cited for a husband to object include that women should focus on the family and that "family comes first," and the shame and gossip it would bring to the family of women who participate. Women were also perceived as less decisive and having fewer leadership qualities than men, and some participants noted that it would be easier for men to solve public policy issues with other men than with women. Interestingly, a few respondents mentioned that older and divorced women are more likely to run for office. This is

likely because divorced women do not have husbands to answer to, and older women are less likely to have young children to care for. These are then cases where the mental models of women as caregiver can no longer generate the same normative expectations against participation in civic life, as they simply do not apply.

These responses again demonstrate how mental models help shape and reinforce social norms against women's exercise of agency in civic life. Quasi-equality dictates that women can seek out public office only if their husbands are sufficiently prosperous and respected on their own. A wife outshining her husband would be humiliating for him and shameful for her. This is both because there is a perception that civic life is the realm of men, and because of the perception that women should be less powerful than men within the household. These features of mental models provide reasons for normative expectations against women's civic participation; it is considered inappropriate for women to be involved, and takes time away from household obligations.

## Civic Participation Is Strongly Gendered

Civic participation is strongly gendered; women generally participate in areas of community life that are tied to women's traditional roles. So, while women are more able to exercise their agency in urban environments, they are largely restricted to the domains that people deem to be appropriately feminine. These include parents' meetings and committees at school, training provided by international and local organizations for self-employment (bakery, sewing, needlework) on healthcare and crop farming (in rural areas), and events tied to religious activities.

*If her husband has a job, he will support her; otherwise he will be against it as he will not look good in society: he stays home, and his wife is a local council deputy.*

—A male respondent, 27 years old, Naryn city, Naryn Oblast

*If she has an understanding husband who knows she is faithful, capable, and strives for truth, if she takes good care of the house and the family, and if she achieved all she has herself, he would support her. He might also lay down a condition that she has to do all the work around the household despite running for the post.*

—A male respondent, 55 years old, Osh city, Osh Oblast

*Her husband would be against it; most husbands do not want their wives to work at a high post. There are very few understanding men. They think that if she works at such a position, she would not notice and obey them.*

—A female respondent, 29 years old, Osh city, Osh Oblast

*If her husband is a simple person, he will be disappointed. If his job position is higher than hers, he will support her.*

—Male respondent, 31 years old, Otuz-Adyr village, Osh Oblast

*I think that they will discourage her, as they themselves like to be leaders; it will not be to their liking if a wife becomes a leader.*

—A female respondent, 41 years old, Tokmok city, Chui Oblast

*It would be right if men solved the community problems, and women solved family-related issues.*

–A male respondent, 25 years old, Osh city, Osh Oblast

*They will agree with me. Women may participate in meetings at school and in clean-up campaigns, but they should not run for political posts.*

–A male respondent, 44 years old, Chui rural villages, Chui Oblast

*Yes, there are more community areas reserved for men. Women only participate in parents' meetings at school.*

– A male respondent, 17 years old, Chui rural villages, Chui Oblast

Participants in rural areas mentioned women's participation in public works, clean-up campaigns, and drinking water committees. A few respondents mentioned women's participation in *Aiyl Okmotu* (municipalities), Women's Council, Youth Council, and Court of Elders. In urban areas, respondents more frequently mentioned women's participation in Women's Councils, municipalities, and Local Councils.

The perception that women are more caring and just is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it lends credence to the idea that women have the capacity to be leaders who care about their communities. On the other hand, however, it suggests that women's real role is in the household caring for children. This is an interesting instance of how changing gender perceptions can manifest themselves

in different contexts: the perception of women as nurturers and caregivers can be seen as an asset in public life, but only if that caregiving can extend beyond the home. Where women are most likely to be found in public life, mostly urban communities, they are still doing "feminine" work.

Overall, women's agency across several areas of life remains gendered. While they have gained considerably, quasi-equality can keep women from positions of authority, and where they do have more authority, it is more likely to be in areas considered to be traditionally feminine. Spouses are more expected to deliberate, but husbands continue to have a veto over wives' choices, while wives do not have the same kind of veto over husbands' choices.



Credit: Justin Ames



# VI Policy Implications

These findings have a number of interesting implications that merit further investigation. The findings illustrate that Kyrgyz society is experiencing a considerable amount of social change in a fairly short period of time. These changes are caused by a number of factors, including the 2005 and 2010 revolutions, significant changes in political rights and other changes to the legal system, increased Internet access, negative economic conditions, and significant out-migration. This change has thrown a number of gender-related social practices into flux. As such, there may be opportunities to encourage more egalitarian gender norms, since some traditional norms have lost support.

One of the most important findings is that “quasi-equality” for women has relegated them to second-tier status, and that this has affected women’s ability to exercise their agency in core areas of their life: their private life through their ability to choose their spouse, their economic life, and their civic life. Promisingly, bride kidnappings appear to be on the decline, but women’s consent in marriage remains undervalued. Labor market participation and civic participation are both positively associated with urban environments, which would be a fruitful area for further investigation. These behaviors appear to be evolving. As such, it is worth thinking carefully about how best to help women obtain greater agency over their lives during this time of transition. This section offers some policy implications that aim to reduce bride kidnapping and increase women’s civic participation, which are summarized in Table 4.

## Policy Implications for Eliminating Bride Kidnapping

In considering a complex behavior like bride kidnapping, there are multiple potential interventions worthy of further study. After all, a young man has to decide that this is a good idea, get social support from friends and family, then kidnap the woman, who has to be prevented from escaping, or if she does, she must be turned away from her family. Finally, there has to be some expectation that the marriage will not end quickly in divorce.

This sequence of events suggests a number of possible policy approaches to eliminating nonconsensual bride kidnapping. Educational initiatives may do the most to help change the mental models that support the idea of kidnapping, and develop normative expectations against kidnapping.

**Edutainment.** There is a growing evidence base regarding the effectiveness of “edutainment” interventions using a positive deviance approach to model positive behaviors and change mental models on gender norms. Characters in television soap operas can inspire audiences to engage in new thinking about “what is possible” and change the perception of what is “normal” and socially acceptable behavior. In Brazil, access to the TV Globo network—which was dominated by soap operas with independent female characters with few, or even no children—has been linked to the country’s rapid drop in fertility (La Ferrara, Chong, and Duryea 2012). A radio program in Tanzania was linked to a significant increase in condom use and a reduction in the number of sexual partners (Vaughan et al. 2000). In the United States, a reality TV show was linked to a significant drop in teen pregnancy<sup>8</sup> (Kearney and Levine 2014). Rather than engaging in a full mini-series production, a more cost-effective model could be to incorporate messages in support of consensual marriages and against bride kidnapping within a nationally televised soap opera, similar to what was done in South Africa, where television programming was harnessed to improve financial decisions<sup>9</sup> (Berg and Zia 2013). To enhance impact, the Population Foundation of India recently adopted a multichannel behavior change communication approach—including social media and mobile applications, audience feedback, and an intensive outreach program through NGO partners—to reinforce the messages of a soap opera called ‘Main Kuch Bhi Kar Sakti Hoon’ (‘I, A Woman, Can Achieve Anything’), which include gender equality and women’s empowerment.<sup>10</sup>

8 “16 and Pregnant”: [http://www.mtv.com/shows/16\\_and\\_pregnant/](http://www.mtv.com/shows/16_and_pregnant/)

9 *candall*, a South African soap opera with financial messages, including ones related to gambling: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ys5eSxTetF4&noredirect=1>

10 <http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/theory-of-change/html/casestudies/multi-media-edutainment-initiative.html>



**Table 4.** Policy implications for eliminating bride kidnapping and increasing women's civic participation

Eliminating bride kidnapping	Increasing women's civic participation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Edutainment interventions using a positive deviance approach to model positive behaviors and change mental models on gender norms.</li> <li>• Targeting young men as a prevention strategy by exposing them to new norms through structured conversations and a peer group. These types of programs could be directly incorporated into school curricula.</li> <li>• Working with community leaders to promote the idea that kidnapping is not the girl's fault and that there is no shame in leaving, could help remove barriers to escaping. Communities might consider a two-part pledge: that they do not support kidnapping, but that they do support girls who escape their kidnappers.</li> <li>• Promoting a messaging campaign that changes the perception of bride kidnappers from manly and toward 'pathetic' may help remove some social support for the behavior among potential perpetrators.</li> <li>• Reducing wedding expenses through joint wedding ceremonies/ parties paired with incentives that address status competition, for example: mandating that prime locations for parties could only be used for joint parties, rather than individual celebrations, community pledges to hold more frugal celebrations, and introducing a spending cap.</li> <li>• Phone apps to report bride kidnapping incidents that would allow women to report them without having to speak on the phone or find someone to help in person. This can simplify the process of initiating a report, and help bring the legal authorities in before a marriage is initiated.</li> <li>• Easing requirements and fast-tracking the process to obtain a divorce might serve as a deterrent to bride kidnapping. At present, there is a mandatory waiting period for divorce, which can be a significant deterrent for women who might seek a divorce after having been abducted or abused.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishing quotas for women's representation at the local government level and for local self-governing authorities. Likewise, for public administration, rather than defining a fixed percentage of women across all public jobs, adjustments could be made to ensure that women hold positions of decision-making authority. At present, women tend to hold lower-level positions with little authority. A local reservation system may provide a training ground for women to hold office at the national level. This might be paired with a temporary fund that helps women campaign for office, as they may not have equal access to resources.</li> <li>• Community outreach and sensitization campaigns to reduce husbands' resistance to women's civic engagement. It is important to obtain the commitment of community and organization leaders to involve and increase women's participation in community decision making. Training programs should target community and religious leaders to expose them to the complexities of gender discrimination and the necessity of (and mechanisms for) fostering women's civic engagement.</li> <li>• Collaboration with media outlets to promote the presence of spokeswomen and break gender stereotypes. Fostering women's presence in the media, including the number of female journalists, would increase media coverage of women's issues and build the capacity of media to report on current events with a gender-sensitive lens.</li> <li>• Increasing employment opportunities for women not only helps families in significant financial need, but can help raise the status of women in ways that likely promote their participation in local politics.</li> </ul>

**Targeting young men as a prevention strategy.** While mass media has been shown to influence men's and women's perceptions of appropriate behavior, small groups have also been proven to change young men's preferences and behavior. In Brazil, India, and various countries in Africa, small groups have been an effective way to change young men's perceptions of the acceptability of domestic violence and their conception of manliness.<sup>11</sup> Young men participating in structured conversations in these small groups on what it means to be a man, such as the role of economic provider and men's relationship vis-à-vis women, adopted more progressive norms. The discussions exposed young men to new norms and gave them a peer group in which they could find support for practicing progressive rather than regressive behavior. They should also include a discussion among men on how men should invest in their daughters and support women's economic advancement and general empowerment.

<sup>11</sup> Organizations that work with men and boys to change harmful gender norms include: Emerge (<http://menandboys.ids.ac.uk/emerge>), Promundo (<http://promundoglobal.org/>), Sonke Gender Justice (<http://www.genderjustice.org.za/>), and MenEngage Alliance (<http://menengage.org/>).

These types of programs could be directly incorporated into school curricula.

**Shame and social standing.** The survey results reveal that multiple norms are shaping behaviors relevant to kidnapping. The shame associated with escaping a kidnapping, combined with the fear of gossip, serve as powerful motivations for girls and their families to ultimately accept a kidnapping. However, this represents a potential area of intervention. Working with community leaders to promote the idea that kidnapping is not the girl's fault, and that there is no shame in leaving, could help remove barriers to escaping. Indeed, communities might consider a two-part pledge: that they do not support kidnapping, but that they do support girls who escape their kidnappers. Pledges have been successfully used in female genital mutilation, domestic violence, and water, sanitation, and hygiene settings, and could be deployed in this context as well. As discussed earlier, it is important to make these pledges more inclusive. As part of this, communities can work to create "safe spaces" for girls who escape kidnappers. More generally, finding ways to destigmatize girls

who are kidnapped or get divorced can help support women's status.

The survey found that the Kyrgyz people broadly reject kidnapping, but some communities still support it. Only targeting those recalcitrant communities may encourage a backlash, especially given that there appear to be socioeconomic differences between groups that still support kidnapping and those that reject it. By offering a two-part pledge, anti-kidnapping messages can be communicated as part of a more universal commitment. While the first part of the pledge (against kidnapping) may only need to target a narrow segment of the population, the second part still needs much wider support.

Another possibility is to depict kidnappers as shameful or pathetic. While it would be unwise to target individual kidnappers in this way, promoting a messaging campaign that aims to lower the status of kidnapping may prove valuable. Participants reported that some boys view kidnapping as a 'manly' activity, and so changing this perception might decrease social support for the behavior among potential perpetrators.

While educational and media initiatives can help address how people perceive kidnapping, there are also material causes of bride kidnappings, both consensual and non-consensual. In particular, wedding expenses can be burdensome for many families.

**Wedding expenses.** Another common challenge reported by study participants was that traditional weddings have become too costly, as families often use weddings as an opportunity to engage in status competition. This encourages evermore lavish parties, even in economically constrained communities. Some bride kidnappings (whether or not they are consensual) occur to avoid these expenses.

In other parts of the world, joint wedding ceremonies have become a successful way to make wedding costs more affordable.<sup>12</sup> Under this scheme, communities can have individual wedding ceremonies, but share a wedding party either by all families contributing to a common wedding fund or by particular families pooling their resources. Given that there is an underlying status

competition motivating families to throw lavish weddings, such an approach would likely have to be paired with an incentive that addresses this issue. For example, mandating that prime venues could only be used for joint parties, rather than individual celebrations.

*[asking God for one wish with regards to changing gender roles] There are cases when people arrange weddings and then cannot pay off debts.*

—A female respondent, 36 years old, Osh city, Osh region

Another way of ending a costly status competition is for communities to impose spending limits on weddings by making a common pledge to hold more frugal celebrations. Families that violate this spending cap could face some (minor) social sanction. Introducing a spending cap can block status competition by removing the status gain associated with spending more than one's neighbors. A minor social sanction can serve to reduce one's status, which would be counterproductive to the purpose of spending more.

Each approach would need to be tailored to local communities, but both have benefits beyond a reduction in bride kidnapping. Both free families from unmanageable wedding-related debts and allow them to spend their money on more productive investments.

While these measures are aimed at preventing kidnapping, improvements could also be made in dealing with kidnappings after they have occurred. For example, improvements in reporting kidnappings would help make the sanctions more certain, and women's rights to divorces should be strengthened, both by making it legally easier and by further reducing the social stigma associated with divorce.

**Reporting.** Given that people generally viewed the laws against bride kidnapping as reasons not to engage in the practice, there are opportunities to increase the law's effectiveness by strengthening enforcement. Participants reported that young women are very likely to have cell phones, and so these might be used to streamline reporting of domestic violence more generally, and kidnapping in particular. Having a dedicated number to text, or a user in popular mobile apps such as WhatsApp, could allow women to report a kidnapping or a domestic violence incident without having to speak on the phone or find someone to help in person. This can simplify the process of initiating a report, and help involve the legal authorities

<sup>12</sup> This has been increasingly common for foundations and local governments in India, for example. <http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-foundation-to-conduct-mass-marriage-for-poor-2401327>, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/adityanath-govt-to-hold-mass-wedding-of-poor-muslim-girls/articleshow/58167510.cms>, <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-kerala/Two-day-mass-marriage-of-girls-from-poor-families/article15359011.ece>

before a marriage is initiated. Such a text-to-report system may help combat domestic violence more generally, especially when paired with media campaigns.

**Divorce.** One of the study's most intriguing findings is that the availability of divorce is serving as a deterrent to bride kidnapping. This is quite an interesting development, as earlier studies suggest that a decade ago divorce was rather stigmatized and thus difficult to obtain, even for victims of domestic abuse (Human Rights Watch 2006). In the survey conducted for the current study, participants spoke of divorce as a readily available option to kidnapped women, which suggests that it is much less stigmatized today. A follow-up study that focused on a woman's ability to initiate a divorce or end a relationship would be useful, as the current survey did not include questions on divorce. It is likely that more can be done to make divorce more available to victims of abuse and kidnapped women, thus furthering its deterrent effect for kidnapping. One option is to create a legal fast-track for divorces sought by victims of kidnapping or domestic abuse. At present, there is a mandatory waiting period, which can be a significant deterrent to women who might seek a divorce after having been abducted or abused.

Even without legal changes, more can be done to make divorce more salient, both for victimized women and for men and their families who might consider kidnapping. For example, a message campaign targeted at men who might consider nonconsensual bride kidnapping could emphasize the potential humiliation of kidnapping a bride only to get divorced shortly thereafter. Since the survey respondents noted that bride kidnapping was more common among men who might otherwise have a hard time finding a spouse, this sort of messaging could suggest to them that their actions would further reduce their social standing, rather than improve it. While further legal changes are desirable, the deterrent effect of the existing legal framework can be amplified by making it more salient, and working with civil society groups that can facilitate the initiation of divorce proceedings.

## Policy Implications for Increasing Women's Civic Participation

Improving women's civic participation may represent a bigger challenge than reducing bride kidnapping, as low civic participation is not a crime. While there was universal agreement among survey participants that marriages should be based on mutual consent, there was no such agreement that women should participate in politics or civic life at a rate that is on par with men. While kidnapping

can be more easily seen as harmful, low civic participation can be readily explained away: people could suppose that women are simply not interested, or are too busy taking care of children, or are unsuited to civic life. This can be a self-perpetuating cycle, as low participation rates seem to justify these reasons.

Therefore, the main areas of investigation should be ways to visibly get women out of the household context and into the public sphere, while working to change the mental models that reinforce the notion that a woman's place is at home.

**Political reservation systems.** The Kyrgyz Republic already has a national-level reservation system for both public administration and elected officials, which consists of a 30 percent quota for each gender on the ballot. Increasing this quota could help generate the necessary momentum to increase women's civic participation. Likewise, for public administration, rather than hiring a fixed percentage of women across all public jobs, it might be more effective to encourage gender parity across decision-making positions, as women currently tend to hold lower-level positions.

A reservation system might be also deployed at the local level, for both *kenesh* and other special-purpose councils. This system would likely help create opportunities for women in local communities, and encourage men to sit on councils that are perceived as "for women." This might be paired with a temporary fund that helps women campaign for office, as they likely have less access to resources than men. Reservation systems help provide examples of women in positions of authority, and a local reservation system may help to provide a training ground for women to secure national-level offices.

**Community outreach and sensitization campaigns to reduce husbands' resistance to women's civic engagement.** The study revealed a strong gender norm against female participation in the public sphere in the communities surveyed. Respondents repeatedly said that husbands prohibited women's civic and political engagement. Thus, program interventions to foster women's civic engagement at the local level in the Kyrgyz Republic should include community outreach, awareness, and sensitization campaigns directed toward men aimed to change gender norms regarding women's civic and political participation. Furthermore, it is important to obtain the commitment of community and organization leaders to involve and increase women's participation in community decision making. Training programs should expose community and religious leaders to the complexities of

gender discrimination and the necessity of (and mechanisms for) fostering women's civic engagement. Community outreach activities encompass a range of interventions and approaches, including community meetings, training or sensitization sessions with local authorities, street theater, and other cultural activities and demonstrations.

A potential strategy, drawn from participant discussions, is to demonstrate that women leaders will at the very least have a better sense of the needs of women in the community, who may be ill served by men. The challenge with this strategy is that it must avoid ghettoizing women's civic participation into gendered committees on "women's issues."

***Collaboration with media outlets to promote coverage of spokeswomen.*** The media should strive to amplify female voices as a source of information. Collaboration with media outlets would aim to break gender stereotypes

and barriers to women in participating in public life. Increasing women's presence in the media, including the number of female journalists, would increase media coverage of women's issues and build the media's capacity to report on current events with a gender-sensitive lens.

***Increase women's labor force participation.*** Urban women are far more likely to work outside the home and participate in local civic life than rural women. There is likely a connection between labor force participation and political participation, as a core barrier that participants cited is perceptions that women's role is in the home. Increasing the number of women in the public sphere weakens the salience of this home caretaker role. Increasing employment opportunities for women not only helps families in significant financial need, but can also help raise the status of women in ways that likely promote their participation in local politics.





Credit: Justin Ames

# VII Conclusion

This study examined the present state of gender norms in the Kyrgyz Republic by focusing on two concrete sets of practices: bride kidnapping and women's local civic participation. These capture different aspects of life, but both are deeply shaped by the relative status of women in society, how people perceive women's roles, and what roles men hold in society. Each is a reflection of women's agency, in both their private and public lives. This study examined these practices using a social norms framework in order to determine what sustains harmful practices and identify opportunities for intervention. However, just as importantly, the study points to areas for future work on this important topic.

One of the great challenges of promoting gender parity is that practices that are related to gender norms are invariably held in place by a complex web of beliefs, expectations, and norms. This study identified three major areas in which further work could inform future policy efforts: the apparent growing acceptance of divorce, the effects of economic out-migration, and the interplay of consent with other social values.

The study found evidence that divorce is becoming somewhat more socially acceptable. Divorce has become more common, and many divorces are instigated by kidnapped women. However, divorce still has a mandatory cooling off period by law. It is not clear whether the loss of stigma has driven the increase in divorce rates, or the other way around. More importantly, little is known about the perceived status of divorced women compared to married women or those who never married, or whether a more permissive environment for divorce would deter bride kidnapping. It may be that a general increase in the status of women drove both higher rates of divorce and lower rates of kidnapping. More clearly understanding these dynamics could help promote women's well-being.

Out-migration to Russia and other nearby countries was seen as a significant cause of social upheaval, mainly

because parents were less likely to be able to raise their children. It is too early to tell whether this social upheaval has paved the way for positive norm changes, or has only been a source of community distress. Regardless, targeted economic interventions could be helpful. If many women are leaving to work in other countries, creating economic opportunities at home that are at least partly targeted to women may reduce community stress while raising women's status in the home and the community. It would be valuable to explore small-scale experiments in this area, paired with an ongoing gender study.

While the study highlights a number of opportunities to change normative expectations and mental models, next steps include examining the role of potential influencers and how they might be able to more effectively change expectations and shift mental models. For example, working with religious leaders who conduct marriage ceremonies could be helpful, as they could refuse to sanctify marriages from kidnappings and help spread the idea that kidnapping is wrong in a variety of contexts.

It is not clear how consent compares to other values in the Kyrgyz Republic. There is strong evidence that people consider consent for marriage from both parties to be important, but it appears that people do not interpret that to mean that people have a *fundamental right* to consent. Instead, the value of consent is weighed against other values, and can be overridden by additional considerations—at least once consent has been violated. Future studies could explore whether consent is seen to be more important in other areas of life, or whether consent from men is seen as more important than consent from women in a variety of contexts.

This study paves the way for a richer understanding of gender dynamics in the Kyrgyz Republic and demonstrates how a social norms framework can aid in exploring complex social phenomena.

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# Annex 1. Guide to Individual Interviews and Focus Group Discussions

## Guide to Individual Interviews

### GREETINGS (5 MINUTES):

«Hello! My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I represent independent research agency "M-Vector Kyrgyzstan," which conducts a survey that aims to understand social roles of men and women in Kyrgyz Republic. (SHOW ID) If you agree to have a discussion, what you say to us today will help us learn more about the social roles of men and women. There are no right or wrong answers, we do not know the situation and that is why we are interested in learning from your opinions and experiences. The questions usually take about 40 minutes. All of the answers you give will be confidential and will not be shared with anyone other than members of our survey team. (SHOW SUPPORT LETTER) You don't have to be in the survey, but we hope you will agree to answer the questions since your views are important. If I ask you any question you don't want to answer, just let me know and I will go on to the next question or you can stop the interview at any time. Do you have any questions? May I begin the interview now?»

1. RESPONDENT AGREES TO BE INTERVIEWED → SIGN CONSENT FORM AND PROCEED WITH THE SURVEY

2. RESPONDENT DOES NOT AGREE TO BE INTERVIEWED → WRITE DOWN REASON OF REFUSAL AND GO TO NEXT HOUSEHOLD

### This section is filled out by interviewer after the survey

Record number	_ _ _
Cluster number	_ _ _
Household number	_ _ _
Oblast code	
Settlement code	
Date of fill out	_ _   _ _  2016
Time of interview's beginning	_ _  hours  _ _  minutes
Time of interview's end	_ _  hours  _ _  minutes
Name of the interviewer	
Name of the respondent	
Telephone number of the respondent	

### INSTRUCTIONS TO INTERVIEWER

1. In the questionnaire, sentences written in capital letters (e.g., INTERVIEWER!) are instructions to interviewer. These sentences should not be read to respondents.
2. Read questions exactly the way they are written in the questionnaire.
3. Establish 'cultural ignorance,' i.e., the interviewer is the one learning; interviewees are the people that are knowledgeable. Let the person being interviewed be the guide. The measurement of success is that 80% of the talking should be the words of the person interviewed.

4. Allow people to respond to the question in their own terms, expressing their own opinions, values, and experiences.
5. Listen and express interest in what the participant/informant is saying.
6. Do not move onto a new topic until you feel you have explored the informant's knowledge on the question at hand.
7. Probe to encourage participants to expand on their answers and give as many details as possible, but without the interviewer asking leading questions.

Probing examples:

- Silent Probe: just remain quiet and wait for informant to continue

- Echo Probe: repeat the last thing an informant said and ask them to continue
  - The Uh-huh Probe: encourage participant to continue with a narrative by making affirmative noises: "Uh-huh," "yes, I see," "right, uh-huh"
8. Avoid the use of "why?" which implies that there is right and wrong. Instead, ask them to describe more: e.g., "tell me about."
  9. We are not trying to see whether they live up to our expectations, or whether they know what we want them to know, or do what we want them to do. We want to learn from them about their lives and the situation they find themselves in. The key idea is that people are experts about their own lives, and they are experts about their communities.
  10. We want to ask questions in a way that makes people feel comfortable telling the truth. We want people to feel like they are helping us learn about their communities. So the tone of questions should be friendly and inquisitive, not judgmental and leading.

## SECTION 1: SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE (5 minutes)

### D1. Sex (MARK WITHOUT ASKING)

1. Female
2. Male

### D2. What is your age? |\_\_|\_\_| years

CHECK QUOTAS. IF THE RESPONDENT DOESN'T MEET REQUIREMENTS, APOLOGIZE AND FINISH THE INTERVIEW. GO TO THE NEXT HOUSEHOLD.

### D3. What is your nationality?

1. Kyrgyz
2. Uzbek
3. Russian
4. Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_
99. Refused to answer

### D4. What is the most advanced level of education that you've completed?

1. Primary school (4 classes)
2. Secondary incomplete education school (9 years)
3. Secondary education school (11 years)
4. Vocational education/incomplete university
5. Higher education
6. Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_
99. Refused to answer

### D5. What is your current occupation?

1. Employee of a private organization
2. Employee of a state budget-financed organization

3. Have own business
4. Farmer
5. Student
6. Housewife
7. Temporarily unemployed
8. Pensioner
9. Temporary wage employee
10. Other

### D6. Do you study? If yes, where?

1. No, I don't study anywhere
2. School (high, elementary, middle)
3. University
4. Vocational college
5. Other \_\_\_\_\_

### D7. What is your current marital status? If married, for how many years? If not, are you in a relationship (do you have boyfriend)?

1. Single, in a relationship/SKIP => D9/
2. Single, not in a relationship/SKIP => D9/
3. Married, husband/wife living at home |\_\_|\_\_| years
4. Married, husband/wife living and working in a foreign country |\_\_|\_\_| years
5. Separated/divorced
6. Widow
7. Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_
99. Refused to answer/SKIP => D9/

### D8. How was your marriage registered?

1. Registered in governmental bodies
2. Registered in accordance with religious custom—nikka
3. Concubinage without registration in governmental bodies and religious custom—nikka
4. Both—registered in governmental bodies and in accordance with religious custom—nikka
5. Other
98. Don't know
99. Refused to answer

### D9. Currently, how many people, including you, live in your household?

D9.1. Older 18 years |\_\_|\_\_| (people) 99. Refused to answer

D9.2. Younger 18 years |\_\_|\_\_| (people) 99. Refused to answer

### D10. Do you have kids? If yes, how many? |\_\_|\_\_|

99. Refused to answer

**D11. What are 3 main sources of income for this household? Who earned this income?** (SHOW CARD D11)

	1. Earned by respondent	2. Earned by respondent's spouse	3. Joint income of respondent and other household members	4. Earned by other household members
1. Raising and/or selling livestock	1	2	3	4
2. Raising and selling crops	1	2	3	4
3. Paid farm work or paid herder of livestock	1	2	3	4
4. Remittances	1	2	3	4
5. Salaried worker	1	2	3	4
6. Pension, allowance	1	2	3	4
7. Other (specify) _____	1	2	3	4
98. I don't know	1	2	3	4
99. Refused to answer	1	2	3	4

**D12. Over the last 12 months, what was the total household income? (including salary, pensions, aids, alimony, income from agriculture, from running business)**

1. Less than 10 000 KGS
2. 10 001–50 000 KGS
3. 50 001–100 000 KGS
4. 100 001–150 000 KGS
5. 150 001–200 000 KGS
6. 200 001–300 000 KGS
7. 300 001–500 000 KGS
8. More than 500 000 KGS
98. Don't know
99. Refused to answer

**D13. To what consumer group would you refer your family at the present time**

1. Sometimes we don't have enough money even for food
2. We have enough money for food, but buying clothes is a real problem for us
3. We have enough money for food and clothes, but it'd be difficult now to buy home appliances (refrigerator, washing machine, etc.)
4. We have enough money to buy home appliances, but we can't afford to buy a new car
5. We have enough money for everything, except for buying such things as a country house or a flat
6. We don't have any financial problems, if needed we can buy a country house or a flat

**PART II****YOUNG WOMEN GOING TO SCHOOL**

1. Would you say that most teenage (aged 13–18) girls in your community (village/town) go to school?
  - If the answer is no, then why not? What are factors that constrain teenage girls from going to school.
- a. Do you think they are in school as much as boys after the 9th grade?
  - If the answer is no, then why not? What are the factors, in your view, that influence teenage girls in your community/village to drop out of school?
- b. Do you think that any adolescent girl who wants to go to school can go to school? How about a specialized lyceum, college, or university?
  - If the answer is no, then why not?

**WOMEN'S WORK OUTSIDE THE HOME**

2. Would you say that most women in your community work outside the home?
  - If the answer is no, then why not? What are the reasons, in your view, that explain why women do not work outside the home?
    - a. What kinds of jobs do you see women in?
    - b. Do you think there are certain jobs that only men should do? What types of jobs should women not be engaged in?
    - c. Do you think that it is easier for a man to get a job than a woman? If so, why?
3. Would you say that many women in your community participate in community projects or councils?

EXAMPLES OF PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY LIFE CAN BE MEETINGS IN AIYL OKMOTY, PARENTS' COMMITTEE, WOMEN COUNCIL.



- If the answer is “no” then why not? → What do you think are some of the reasons women do not participate in community life? What are some of the constraints or obstacles for women to participate in community life?
- a. What areas of community life do you see women participating in?
- b. Do you see women taking leadership roles in the community?
  - Is it common or rare? If yes, then in what positions and what spheres?
- c. Do you think there are certain areas of community life more reserved for men or for women?
  - If yes, then why, and in what areas?
- d. Would you say that anyone who wants to participate in public life is able to?

### MODEL OF A GOOD WIFE AND GOOD HUSBAND

4. *Aimeerim recently got married to Nurlan. She wants to be as good a wife as she can be.*
  - a. If you were asked to give Aimeerim advice on how to be a good wife here, what would it be?
    - How does a good wife who lives here spend her day? What are her main tasks? What household work should she do?
    - Does a good wife contribute to the family income? If not, why not? If so, how does she balance work and family life?
    - Should she do everything Nurlan tells her to do?
    - When it comes to making decisions, should she be advising, discussing, and deciding jointly with her husband?
    - If you were going to describe a good wife from the time of your mother's generation, in what ways would she be different from a good wife today?
5. *Nurlan recently got married to Aimeerim. He wants to be as good a husband as he can be.*
  - a. If you were asked to give Nurlan advice on how to be a good husband, what would it be?
    - How does a good husband who lives here spend his day? What are his main tasks? What household work should he do?
    - Does a good husband have to be a good provider? If so, how does he balance his work and family life?
    - How should he treat Aimeerim?
    - Should he do tell her what to do?
    - When it comes to making decisions, should he make key family decisions jointly with his wife?

- If you were going to describe a good husband from the time of your father's generation, in what ways would he be different from a good father today?

### WOMEN'S AND MEN'S PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY AFFAIRS: Part II

6. *Cholpon has been living in your village/town. She is 30 years old. She always has been interested in helping others, and has always been very smart and capable. She decides that she will run for local kenesh, so she would be able to help more people than she could by herself.*
  - What would Cholpon's friends say to her when she told them of her plans? Would they encourage her or try to change her mind?
  - How about her parents, what would they think?
  - Her husband, what would he think of it?
  - What would you say if you were to offer her advice?
  - In your view, what are some reasons why women do not run for local kenesh or other local decision-making bodies?
7. *Taalay has been living in your village/town. He always has been interested in helping others, and has always been very smart and capable. He decides that she will run for a local kenesh, so he would be able to help more people than he could by himself.*
  - a. What would Taalay's friends say to him when he told them of his plans?
  - b. What would you say if you offered him advice?

### GENDER NORMS CHANGE OVER TIME

8. Do you think men and women's roles and responsibilities have changed over the past 20 years? (IF THE ANSWER IS “NO,” THEN PROCEED TO 8d.)
  - a. Is this change more positive for women or for men? Please explain.
  - b. What do you think are the biggest changes? (IF NO RESPONSE, ASK ABOUT working outside the home, participation in community life, and marriage/bride kidnapping.)
  - c. In your view what factors have caused these changes?
  - d. What do you think; who from people around you would agree with your point of view, and who would not?
9. Do you think men and women's roles and responsibilities should change in 10 years? (IF THE ANSWER IS “NO,” THEN PROCEED TO 9a.)
  - How should they change?
  - What could cause these changes?

- a. What do you think your neighbors would say about how much women should participate in community life?
- 10.** Do you think that women should be free to make their own choices about things like study at school/ university, work, marriage, and community participation? (MAKE SURE THAT THE RESPONDENT ANSWERS BY EVERY COMMUNITY STEP)
  - a. Or should someone limit their choices? If yes, then who and in what sphere should someone step in and limit their choices?
  - b. Right now, do you think that anyone does limit women's choices about study, work, marriage, or community participation?
- 11.** Do you think that your life is mostly up to you and your choices, or there is someone else who decides for you?
  - a. If so, then who decides?
 (for older respondents: 20 and >)
- 12.** Are adolescents growing up better than you did? If so, how?
  - a. Is it different for boys or girls than how it used to be? (IF ANSWER "YES," THEN ASK HOW? AND IN WHAT?)

## MARRIAGE

- 13.** *Anara and Ruslan are from the same neighborhood. Ruslan likes Anara, and he assumes that she likes him too. Ruslan decides to kidnap Anara and marry her, without her approval.*
  - a. What would Ruslan's parents think? Would they be happy? Upset?
  - b. How about Anara's parents? Would they be happy? Upset?
  - c. Do you think Anara would be happy that Ruslan did this? Why?
  - d. What would Ruslan's friends think? Why would they think so?
  - e. What would Anara's friends think? Why would they think so?
  - f. Would this be different from what other boys usually do?
  - g. How old do you think Anara and Ruslan are?
- 14.** *Anara does not like Ruslan, and is sad that she has been kidnapped. She decides to escape back to her parents' home.*
  - a. What would Anara's parents say to her? What would they say or do to Ruslan or his family?
  - b. What would Anara's friends think? Would they be glad? Would they gossip about Anara? Would they be upset with Ruslan?
  - c. What would Ruslan's family do?

- d. What would Ruslan's friends think? Would they gossip about Ruslan or Anara? Would they be upset with Ruslan for kidnapping her or with Anara for escaping?
- 15.** In your personal opinion, what courtship would a girl like in your village/city, and what courtship would be considered as ideal? From your point of view, how should a perfect marriage be?
  - Should the man and woman both consent to the marriage? If no, then why?
  - Should it be arranged by their parents? If yes, then why?
  - Should the man kidnap the woman for marriage? If yes, then why?
  - How old should the man be for marriage?
  - How old should the woman be for marriage?
  - Do you think other people in your community (village/town) agree with you regarding age for marriage? If no, then why?
- 16.** What is the most common way for people to get married in your community (village/town)?
  - By consent?
  - By nonconsensual kidnapping?
  - By consensual kidnapping?
  - Or by arranged marriage (from groom's and bride's sides)?
- 17.** Do you think that the way people get married has changed over the last 20 years? (IF ANSWER "NO" SKIP TO QUESTION 18.)
  - a. If it has changed, is it for the better or worse?
  - b. Why?
  - c. In your opinion what caused these changes?
- 18.** If God promised to fulfill your one wish about making changes in your community regarding men's and women's roles, responsibilities, and opportunities, what would your wish be?

## Guide to Focus Group Discussions with Women and Men

Hello! Thank you for agreeing to participate in our discussion of the social roles of men and women in Kyrgyzstan. My name is \_\_\_\_\_, I represent the M-Vector research and consulting company. You have been randomly selected for the survey.

I have a few questions for you about the documents that you filled out upon arrival at our office. Please answer "yes" or "no" to each of the questions (if participants nod or shake their heads, ask them to answer aloud for recording purposes).

- Did you fill out a questionnaire upon arrival at our office today?
- Were you provided a consent form for participation in today's discussion, which will be recorded on a tape recorder and a video camera? (If no consent was obtained, make sure the said devices are switched off)
- Have you read and signed the form?

Do you have any questions?

All information received today will be kept strictly confidential to the extent permitted by law. Your name, address, and any other personal information will not appear in any survey-related reports, newspapers, or videos. Also, please keep in mind that you can discontinue participating in the discussion at any time.

There are no right or wrong answers, but rather different points of view. Please share your opinion even if it differs from the views of other participants in the discussion. The following rules must be followed during the discussion: take turns when speaking; ask questions if you need to.

Our conversation will be recorded on a tape recorder and a video camera to make sure we have complete information.

Let's start the discussion now. But first, let's meet each other. Please take turns to introduce yourself—say your name, your age, and occupation.

## Questions

### I—General understandings of gender (35 minutes)

- 1.1. What do you think of when you think of the word "woman"? What do you think of when you think of the word "man"?
- 1.2. What do girls/women of your age in your community do in life? Do the majority or minority do it? What responsibilities do girls/women your age in your community have? What qualities?

PROBE ABOUT MEN AND BOYS

- 1.3. In your opinion, what should girls/women do in life? What qualities and responsibilities should a woman have in your opinion? What should a woman be like?
 

What characterizes a good wife? What are her responsibilities?

What characterizes a good mother? What are her responsibilities?

What should a daughter be like? What are her responsibilities?

What responsibilities should a woman not have? (Explanatory questions: What is a woman's/man's job? What is different between things men and women should do every day?)

PROBE ABOUT MEN AND BOYS

- 1.4. Is it better to be a girl or a boy, or is there no difference?
- 1.5. What do other people in your community/settlement expect from a girl/woman to be like/to do (qualities, responsibilities, roles, values)? Who are those people? (parents, children, husband, parents in law, other relatives, friends, neighbors, colleagues, etc.)

Are there any differences between the expectations of different groups of people you named? How so?

What are different people (e.g., your parents/kids/parents in law/friends/neighbors/colleagues) proud of you for?

PROBE ABOUT MEN AND BOYS

- 1.6. Do you think men's and women's roles and responsibilities have changed over the past 20 years since independence?

ONLY GROUPS "40–60 y.o." and "60 y.o.+" WILL BE ABLE TO EVALUATE THE CHANGE. ASK YOUNGER WOMEN TO SHARE THEIR *PERCEPTIONS* ABOUT THAT TIME BASED ON THEIR KNOWLEDGE OR ATTITUDE, OR WHAT THEY HAVE HEARD FROM OLDER FAMILY MEMBERS.

- Is this change more positive for (in favor of) women or men? What do you think has caused these changes?
- Do you think men's and women's roles and responsibilities should change? How should they change?
- Do you think there will be changes in the next 20 years? Positive or negative changes for men, women? What kind of changes? What do you think will be causing these changes?

### II—Women's voices and community participation (35 minutes)

- 2.1. Do you participate in your community? If so, how?
- 2.2. Who do you see participating in community life in your settlement? Who would you say makes most local community decisions? (e.g., in matters relating to irrigation water, road repair, installation of an electrical transformer; do they participate in the council of

elders, in conflict resolution, take part in public associations of potable and drinking water users, etc.?)

Mostly young? Older people? Rich? With education?

(IF GENDER ASPECT HAS NOT BEEN BROUGHT UP) Do you see girls/women your age participate in activities in your community? Do you see women of different ages participate in activities in your community? How many? Most? A few? Do many men/boys participate in community activities? What are the exact spheres they are active in?

**2.3.** What would you do if most other girls/women your age in your settlement/community \_\_\_\_\_ (would participate/would not participate in community life/activities) (REPEAT THE MAIN POINT OF THE RESPONDENT FROM 2.2. TRY TO KNOW WHAT MEN/BOYS WOULD SAY ON THIS.)

**2.4.** Who do you think should participate in activities in your community? Who do you think should make decisions regarding activities in your community? What are the qualities of these people/that person (who should participate in activities in your community and make decisions)?

IF YOU REALIZE THAT RESPONDENT DOES NOT UNDERSTAND WHAT "ACTIVITIES IN YOUR COMMUNITY" MEANS, E.G., INSTEAD, SAYING ABOUT GOING TO CAFES, WALKING IN PARKS WITH FAMILY, ETC., PLEASE ELABORATE.

By "activities in your community," I mean any civic activities that take place in your community, for example, participation in the resolution of community issues, participation in community events or discussions (regarding any topics, e.g., water supply questions, community development questions—roads, education, etc.) (PROBE IF GENDER ASPECT WAS NOT BROUGHT UP OR FULLY COVERED IN THE PREVIOUS DISCUSSIONS, PLEASE ELABORATE.)

Do you think that girls/women should participate in activities in your community? (PROBE) Do you think older/younger women should participate? Or is it better for girls/women not to participate? Should men/boys participate in civic life? How exactly should they participate? What responsibilities do you think they should have? What tasks should they perform?

Who (men or women) must deal with the following:

- Allocating land for gardens
- Working with agricultural machinery
- Owning the rights to land and water
- Crop planning
- Making decisions regarding breeding, selling, or slaughtering livestock
- Controlling women's (wives') earnings or the assets that she brings to the household

- Deciding on taking a loan, its amount, and who will take it?

Explain. Does everybody think so? Are there different opinions?

**2.5.** If a girl/woman, let's say Cholpon (IF THERE IS NO CHOLPON IN THE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS (FGD), PLEASE CHOOSE ANY OTHER TYPICAL FEMALE NAME.) wanted to speak at a town meeting or would decide to run for a Local Government Authority (LGA) ("aiyl okmotu")/NGO/informal local organization, what would happen? What reaction would she receive regarding her plans and from whom? Would she receive a positive or negative reaction? From whom positive? From whom negative? (friends, parents, colleagues, neighbors, grown children, etc.— example: Maxat) (TEST ABOVE QUESTIONS AS FOR A MAN/BOY.)

**2.6.** How do you think Cholpon/the majority of girls/women in your settlement/community would do/act if \_\_\_\_\_ (people) (PEOPLE MENTIONED IN 2.5) did not encourage/expect/get upset about/get angry about/(sanctions named in 2.5)? (Example: Maxat) (TEST ABOVE QUESTIONS AS FOR A MAN/BOY.)

**2.7.** Have you noticed any changes over the past 20 years (since Independence) in the activities of girls/women in community life? What kind of changes (positive, negative)? What/who caused these changes? What about men/boys?

ONLY WOMEN FROM GROUPS "40–60" AND "60 Y.O. +" WILL BE ABLE TO EVALUATE THE CHANGE. ASK YOUNGER WOMEN TO SHARE THEIR PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THAT TIME BASED ON THEIR KNOWLEDGE OR ATTITUDE OR WHAT THEY HEARD FROM OLDER FAMILY MEMBERS.

**2.8.** Do you think that the situation with the activities of girls/women in community life should be changing? How? What/who can be causing these changes? In your opinion, which community leaders can strengthen/strengthens women's role in local governance: distribution of public resources, pasture, water supply, and sanitation management, etc. How?

Do you think that the situation with activities of girls/women in community life will change? How? What/who is going to cause these changes? (TEST ABOVE QUESTIONS AS FOR A MAN/BOY.)

### **III—Attitude to and risks associated with gender-based violence (35 minutes)**

- 3.1.** How do people usually get married in your community?
- a. By consent?
  - b. By nonconsensual kidnapping?



- c. By consensual kidnapping?
- d. Or by arranged marriage without consent of youth (from groom's and bride's sides)?
  - At what age? Is bride kidnapping widespread in your community?

Do girls/women mostly make their own choices whom to marry? All girls/women, all ages? If not, who makes the decision? (PROBE/TEST ABOVE QUESTIONS AS FOR A MAN/BOY.)

Who mainly takes charge in a romantic relationship? Girls/women or boys/men? Do women expect men to take charge in a relationship or vice versa?

- 3.2.** What would you do/have done if most other girls/women in your settlement/community \_\_\_\_\_ (could or would/could not or would not decide (have decided) whom and when to marry; be kidnapped) (REPEAT THE MAIN POINT OF THE RESPONDENT FROM 3.1. AND MORE \_\_\_\_\_ REVERSE OF THE MAIN POINT.) Would you want/do \_\_\_\_\_ (decide/have decided whom and when to marry; be/have been kidnapped (REPEAT THE MAIN POINT OF THE RESPONDENT FROM 3.1. TEST ABOVE QUESTIONS AS FOR A MAN/BOY.)

- 3.3.** In your opinion, should a girl/woman be kidnapped to get married? How? Do you think it is right? How old should someone be to get married? Is there an age when people should be married by?

In your opinion, what do you think an ideal courtship and marriage are like? (TEST ABOVE QUESTIONS AS FOR A MAN/BOY.)

- 3.4.** In your community, does a girl have to get married if she was kidnapped? Do you think, in your community/settlement, a woman has no right to leave if she was kidnapped? (TEST ABOVE QUESTIONS AS FOR A MAN/BOY: In your community, boy/man has to kidnap if he gets married?)

- 3.5.** Would you say that people expect a man to kidnap the girl he wants to marry? Who do you think expects a girl/woman to accept marriage if she was kidnapped? Who is against? (PROBE/TEST ABOVE QUESTIONS AS FOR MEN/BOYS.)

Anara and Ruslan are from the same neighborhood. Ruslan likes Anara, and thinks that she likes him too. Ruslan decides to kidnap Anara and marry her.

- What would Ruslan's parents think? Would they be happy? Upset?
- How about Anara's parents?
- Do you think Anara would be happy about Ruslan doing this?
- What would Ruslan's friends think?

- What would community (males, females) say? Would bride kidnapping be considered a feat?
- What would the clergy say?
- What about the local civil society (NGOs, informal organization—the court of elders, women's societies, etc.)
- What would local self-government authorities (aiyl okmotu) say?

- 3.6.** How do you think Anara/the majority of girls/women in your community would do/act if \_\_\_\_\_ (people) (PEOPLE MENTIONED IN 3.5) did not encourage/expect/get upset about/get angry about/sanctions named in 3.5?

- 3.7.** Have you noticed any changes over the past 20 years (since Independence) in situations with decisions to whom and whom to marry for girls/women and boys/men? What kind of changes (positive, negative)? What/who caused these changes?

ONLY WOMEN 35Y.O. AND OLDER WILL BE ABLE TO EVALUATE THE CHANGE. ASK YOUNGER WOMEN TO SHARE THEIR PERCEPTION ABOUT THAT TIME BASED ON THEIR KNOWLEDGE OR ATTITUDE OR WHAT THEY HEARD FROM OLDER FAMILY MEMBERS. TEST ABOVE QUESTIONS AS FOR MEN/BOYS.

Do you think that situations with decisions about when and whom to marry for girls/women and boys/men should be changing? How? What/who can be causing these changes? If you could institute a policy or social change to end bride kidnapping, what would it be? Why? How would it work? (PROBE)

Do you think that situations with decisions about to whom and whom to marry for girls/women and boys/men will change? How? What/who is going to cause these changes?

*FGD expected duration: 2 hours*

## Guide to Focus Group Discussion with Key Informants

### Focus Group Discussion Guide—Local self-government authorities, NGOs, associations, informal organizations

Hello! Thank you for agreeing to participate in our discussion of the social roles of men and women in Kyrgyzstan. My name is \_\_\_\_\_, I represent the M-Vector research and consulting company. You have been randomly selected for the survey.

I have a few questions for you about the documents that you filled out upon arrival at our office. Please answer “yes” or “no” to each of the questions (if participants nod or shake their heads, ask them to answer aloud for recording purposes).

- Did you fill out a questionnaire upon arrival at our office today?
- Were you provided a consent form for participation in today’s discussion which will be recorded on a tape recorder and a video camera? (If no consent was obtained, make sure the said devices are switched off)
- Have you read and signed the form?

Do you have any questions?

All information received today will be kept strictly confidential to the extent permitted by law. Your name, address, and any other personal information will not appear in any survey-related reports, newspapers, or videos. Also, please keep in mind that you can discontinue participating in the discussion at any time.

There are no right or wrong answers, but rather different points of view. Please share your opinion even if it differs from the views of other participants in the discussion. The following rules must be followed during the discussion: take turns when speaking, ask questions if you need to.

Let’s start the discussion now. But first, let’s meet each other. Please take turns to introduce yourself—say your name, your age, occupation, etc.

## Questions

### I—Women voice and community participation

(1 hour)

**1.1.** What does your organization do? Who mainly works/participates in your organizations/associations? In terms of age, gender, occupation, etc.? Mainly women, men? Older, younger? State servants or workers from private companies?

**1.2.** Who do you see participating in your settlement in community life?

DO NOT READ LIST, ONLY IF THEY WOULD NOT TELL THEMSELVES

(LGAs, NGOs, informal organizations, other civil society representatives)

Who would you say makes most local community decisions? How and what decisions do they make, and what contributions do they make?

Mostly young? Older people? Rich? Women, men? With education?

What about others? Why do you think they are not participating/working?

IF GENDER ASPECT HAS NOT BEEN BROUGHT UP

Do you see girls/women participate in activities in your community? Who are these women? Where do they participate? What do they do? Why?

NOW TALK ABOUT MEN

Do many men/boys participate in community activities? Who are they (how old are they)? Where do they participate? What do they do? Why?

**1.3.** Who do you think should participate in activities in your community?

DO NOT READ LIST, ONLY IF THEY WOULD NOT TELL THEMSELVES

(LGAs, NGOs, informal organizations, other civil society representatives, opinion makers, public leaders)

Who do you think should make decisions regarding activities in your community?

What are the qualities of these people/that person who should participate in activities in your community and make decisions?

IF GENDER ASPECT HAS NOT BEEN BROUGHT UP

Do you think that girls/women should participate in activities in your community? Where, what organizations?

DO NOT READ LIST, ONLY IF THEY WOULD NOT TELL THEMSELVES

(e.g., Council of Elders, conflict resolution, agricultural water users associations, etc.)

What responsibilities do you think they should have? What tasks should they perform?

NOW TALK ABOUT MEN

In what spheres of community life should men/boys participate? How exactly should they participate? What responsibilities should they have?

Do you think older/younger women should participate? Or is it better for girls/women not to participate?

Should men/boys participate in civic life? How exactly should they participate? What responsibilities do you think they should have? What tasks should they perform?

**1.4.** Do your organizations/associations encourage anyone to participate or participate more actively in activities of your organizations/associations or

other public, community activities? If yes, whom do you encourage? How? (ASK EACH RESPONDENT ABOUT WOMEN.)

- a. Who do your partner organizations/associations attract (women/men)?
- b. How do they try to attract (women/men)?
- c. Do other ordinary people in your settlement expect/encourage girls/women to participate in community activities? Who encourages, who discourages? How? What about men/boys?
- d. If a girl/woman wanted to become a member of your organization, what would be the reaction of members of your organization/from the people of your village/settlement?
- e. If a girl/woman wanted to speak at a town meeting, what would happen? What would the reaction be from the side of your community?
- f. If a girl/woman decided to run for a LGA ("aiyl okmotu") or wanted to participate in NGO/informal local organization, what would happen? What reaction would she receive from your community (local population)? How would members of your organization react?

What about men/boys? (ASK SAME QUESTION AS ABOUT GIRLS/WOMEN—QUESTIONS 1.4: B–C—IN CASE GROUP WOULD NOT MENTION, THEN ASK QUESTION: "Who would have a more positive reaction?")

- 1.5.** Have you noticed any changes over the past 20 years (since Independence) in community life about participation of different layers of society?

IF GENDER ASPECT WAS NOT RAISED

- a. Changes about activities of girls/women in community life?
- b. What/who caused these changes? Are these changes positive or negative? Participation of girls/women in activities of community life?
  - What about men/boys?

Do you think that changes in the participation of girls/women in the community of your settlement are necessary? What changes should occur? What/who can be causing these changes?

- What about men/boys?

Do you think that changes in the participation of girls/women in community life will happen? What way? Why? What/who is going to cause these changes?

- What about men/boys?

to marry? Is bride kidnapping widespread in your community? Is arranged marriage widespread in your community? What about marriage by consent? Do girls/women mostly make their own choices about who to marry? All girls/women, all ages? If not, who makes decisions? What about boys?

Do you see any organizations/associations/opinion leaders change regular marriage practices? Who? How? What way?

- 2.2.** What do you think of the regular practice of getting married in your community?

Do you think something should be changed in this practice, or not? If yes, what exactly, how, by whom/what?

According to your opinion what are the consequences of bride kidnapping? If positive, then in what? If negative, then in what?

- 2.3.** Would you say that people expect a man to kidnap the girl/woman he wants to marry in your community? And do you think people expect a girl/woman to accept marriage if she is kidnapped? Who are these people? Who is against (parents, friends, etc.)? What people? (parents, friends, etc.) Do different people have different opinions? What organizations/associations support/against? Do people encourage girls/women to choose who they should marry and when (age)? (TEST ABOVE QUESTIONS AS FOR A WOMAN/GIRL. TEST IN PASSIVE VOICE.)

- 2.4.** Have you noticed any changes over the past 20 years (since Independence) in decisions about when and who to marry for girls/women and boys/men? What kinds of changes (positive, negative)? What/who caused these changes?

Do you think that situations about decisions when and who to marry for girls/women and boys/men should be changing? How? What/who can be causing these changes?

If you could institute a policy or social change to end bride kidnapping, what would it be? Why? How would it work?

Do you think that situations with decisions when and who to marry for girls/women and boys/men will change? How? What/who is going to cause these changes?

*FGD expected duration: 2 hours*

## **II—Bride kidnapping** (30 minutes)

- 2.1.** What is the regular practice of getting married in your community? Who makes decisions about whom

# Annex 2. IDI Participant Profiles

	1. Tokmok city, Chui Oblast		2. Panfilov, Telman and Kum-Aryk villages, Chui Oblast		3. Osh city, Osh Oblast		4. Otuz-Adyr village, Osh Oblast		5. Naryn city, Naryn Oblast		6. Ak-Jar village, Naryn Oblast	
	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W
<b>Total number of participants</b>	12	12	18	18	12	12	18	18	12	12	18	18
<b>LEVEL OF EDUCATION</b>												
Incomplete secondary education (9 grades)	2		2	6	1	3	1	1	3			4
Complete secondary education (11 grades)	3	3	8	6	4	1	7	8	4	4	11	7
Vocational school/ an incomplete higher education	3	4	4	3					4	3	3	3
Complete higher education	4	5	4	3	7	8	10	9	1	5	4	4
<b>Marital status</b>												
Single	5	7	6	4	2	3	6	5	4	5	4	3
Married	6	3	10	14	10	7	12	13	7	4	13	14
Widow/er						2			1	1		1
Divorced	1	2								2	1	
No answer			2									
<b>Average marriage age</b>	22	24	24	22	23.8	20.3	23.3	20.1	24.7	19.5	23.1	20.5
<b>LEVEL OF INCOME</b>												
Average monthly income per family member	5,368 KGS	5,975 KGS	3,491 KGS	2,703 KGS	5,713 KGS	5,057 KGS	5,605 KGS	4,963 KGS	4,965 KGS	3,637 KGS	3,455 KGS	2,588 KGS
Average monthly income per family member, the minimum value	1,736 KGS	2,083 KGS	1,852 KGS	278	1,302	208	417	1,458	1,563 KGS	1,488 KGS	781	500
Average monthly income per family member, the maximum value	8,333 KGS	11,111 KGS	10,417 KGS	5,208	11,111	13,889	13,889	11,111	11,111 KGS	8,333 KGS	8,333	5,208
The subsistence minimum in specific Oblast according to the Kyrgyz Republic National Statistical Committee <sup>13</sup>	4,562 KGS	4,562 KGS	4,562 KGS	4,562 KGS	4,994 KGS	4,994 KGS	4,994 KGS	4,994 KGS	4,713 KGS	4,713 KGS	4,713 KGS	4,713 KGS

13 National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, *Living Wage Table*. Accessed April 24, 2017 < <http://www.stat.kg/ru/living-wage/> >



# Annex 3. Key Poverty and Gender-Disaggregated Data for the Kyrgyz Republic

Dimension/indicator	Data	Year
<b>GENERAL</b>		
GNI per capita, PPP (current international \$)	3,300	2015
Poverty headcount ratio at national poverty line (% of population)	31	2014
Poverty headcount ratio of \$1.90 a day (2011 PPP) % of population	3	2013
Rural population, female (% of total)	32	2015
Rural population, male (% of total)	32	2015
Female headed households (% of households with a female head)	27	2012
<b>HUMAN ENDOWMENTS: EDUCATION</b>		
Literacy rate, adult male (% of males aged 15 and above)	100	2009
Literacy rate, adult female (% of females aged 15 and above)	99	2009
Literacy rate, youth female (% of females aged 15–24)	100	2009
Literacy rate, youth male (% of males aged 15–24)	100	2009
School enrollment, primary, female (% net)	89	2014
School enrollment, primary, male (% net)	91	2014
School enrollment, secondary, male (% net)	80	2014
School enrollment, secondary, female (% net)	80	2014
School enrollment, tertiary, female (% gross)	53	2013
School enrollment, tertiary, male (% gross)	41	2013
Lower secondary completion rate, male (% of relevant age group)	90	2014
Lower secondary completion rate, female (% of relevant age group)	91	2014
Adolescents out of school, female (% of female lower secondary school age)	8	2014
Adolescents out of school, male (% of male lower secondary school age)	8	2014
Share of youth not in education, employment, or training, female (% of female youth population)	30	2013
Share of youth not in education, employment, or training, male (% of male youth population)	13	2013
<b>HUMAN ENDOWMENTS: HEALTH AND DEMOGRAPHICS</b>		
Adolescent fertility rate (births per 1,000 women ages 15–19)	40	2014
Maternal mortality ratio (modeled estimate, per 100,000 live births)	76	2015
Mortality rate, infant (per 1,000 live births)	19	2015
Births attended by skilled health staff (% of total)	98	2014
Contraceptive prevalence, modern methods (% of women ages 15–49)	39	2014
Unmet need for contraception (% of married women ages 15–49)	18	2014
Age at first marriage, female	22	2012
Age at first marriage, male	26	2012
Life expectancy at birth, female (years)	75	2014
Life expectancy at birth, male (years)	67	2014

Dimension/indicator	Data	Year
<b>ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES</b>		
Labor participation rate, female (% of female population ages 15+) (modeled ILO estimate)	56	2014
Labor participation rate, male (% of male population ages 15+) (modeled ILO estimate)	80	2014
Labor force participation rate for ages 15–24, female (%) (modeled ILO estimate)	37	2014
Labor force participation rate for ages 15–24, male (%) (modeled ILO estimate)	59	2014
Vulnerable employment, female (% of female employment)	38	2013
Vulnerable employment, male (% of male employment)	44	2013
Unemployment, female (% of female labor force) (modeled ILO estimate)	9	2014
Unemployment, male (% of male labor force) (modeled ILO estimate)	7	2014
Wage and salaried workers, female (% of females employed)	55	2014
Wage and salary workers, male (% of males employed)	51	2014
Self-employed, female (% of females employed)	39	2013
Self-employed, male (% of males employed)	46	2013
Borrowed from a financial institution, male (% age 15+)	14	2014
Borrowed from a financial institution, female (% age 15+)	13	2014
Borrowed to start, operate, or expand a farm or business, female (% age 15+)	5	2014
Borrowed to start, operate, or expand a farm or business, male (% age 15+)	8	2014
Contributing family workers, female (% of females employed)	21	2013
Contributing family workers, male (% of males employed)	7	2013
Married men and married women have equal ownership rights to property (1 = yes; 0 = no)	Yes	2015
Firms with female top manager (%)	29	2013
Percentage of firms with female participation in ownership (average reported by firms)	49	2013
Law mandates nondiscrimination based on gender in hiring (1 = yes; 0 = no)	No	2015
Non-pregnant and non-nursing women can do the same jobs as men (1 = yes; 0 = no)	No	2015
Law mandates paid or unpaid maternity leave (1 = yes; 0 = no)	Yes	2015
<b>VOICE AND AGENCY</b>		
Proportion of women in ministerial level positions (%)	15	2015
Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments (%)	19	2016
Women who were first married by age 18 (% of women aged 20–24)	8	2014
Nondiscrimination clause mentions gender in the constitution (1 = yes; 0 = no)	Yes	2015
Law prohibits or invalidates child or early marriage (1 = yes; 0 = no)	Yes	2015
Legislation exists on domestic violence (1 = yes; 0 = no)	Yes	2015
Legislation specifically addresses sexual harassment (1 = yes; 0 = no)	Yes	2015
Legislation explicitly criminalizes marital rape (1 = yes; 0 = no)	No	2015
Women who believe a husband is justified in beating his wife (any of five reasons) (%)	33	2014
Decision maker about a woman's own healthcare: mainly husband (% of women aged 15–49)	4	2012
Decision maker about a woman's own healthcare: mainly wife (% of women aged 15–49)	31	2012
Decision maker about a woman's own healthcare: wife and husband jointly (% of women aged 15–49)	59	2012
Decision maker about a woman's visits to her family or relatives: mainly husband (% of women aged 15–49)	5	2012
Decision maker about a woman's visits to her family or relatives: mainly wife (% of women aged 15–49)	14	2012
Decision maker about visits to her family or relatives: wife and husband jointly (% of women aged 15–49)	72	2012
Decision maker about major household purchases: mainly husband (% of women aged 15–49)	6	2012
Decision maker about major household purchases: mainly wife (% of women aged 15–49)	9	2012
Decision maker about major household purchases: wife and husband jointly (% of women aged 15–49)	75	2012

