

Developing “emotional muscles”

Men working with men to stem domestic violence



Neil Blacklock is a pioneer in men's advocacy against domestic violence in the United Kingdom. He initiated an intervention project in 1989, focusing on behavioural change among men who use violence towards intimate partners. He has also led “Dad's Space”, a website for fathers separated from their children. Mr. Blacklock is now the Development Director of “Respect”, a non-profit organization which sets standards for the delivery of domestic violence services for men. To find out more about Mr. Blacklock's groundbreaking work, Michael Unland, Media Officer at the OSCE Office in Tajikistan, sat down with him after the experts' seminar organized by the OSCE's Gender Section in Dushanbe in October 2008.

Michael Unland: Why are men largely absent from discussions on gender equality?

Neil Blacklock: Public debates about gender equality are often seen as focusing only on improving the situation of women. This is not surprising, since domestic violence, rape and commercial sexual exploitation are gender-based crimes whose victims are overwhelmingly women and girls. And since men largely hold the upper hand in society, they don't feel they have anything to gain from a change in the status quo.

But men, too, stand to benefit from any gains. Take a look at men's health and other indicators of happiness. We men allow ourselves to be confined in versions of masculinity that limit our range of expression, damage our personal relationships and stand in the way of our personal

happiness. Men are the main perpetrators of violence towards women and children, and they are also the main perpetrators of violence towards other men. So addressing the connection between masculinity and violence offers benefits for men as well.

What was the reaction among women's organizations when you started to work with men to counter domestic violence?

There was a mixture of support and very understandable scepticism. But the fact that the vast majority of victims are women doesn't mean that domestic violence should be seen as a “women's issue”, since it is men's behaviour that is *the* problem. Without holding men accountable for their violence, without working to change unhealthy male attitudes, and without increasing men's participation in tackling the problem, we will never get anywhere.

And what was the reaction among men?

It is definitely positive for men to hear another man addressing violence against women constructively and energetically. There is a need to create a community where men are prepared to speak up and be heard, and to act in support of women and children who are being abused. That happens when men reach out to other men and take a stand against unacceptable behaviour and make them realize that there are better ways to live one's life.

Respect runs a counselling programme for perpetrators and a national “Men's Advice Line” that receives about 7,000 calls annually from men seeking support and information regarding violence in relationships.

What is the general profile of these men?

They come from all sectors of society. They often feel powerless and trapped, which is ironic, considering that they are controlling, damaging and trapping those closest to them. Our goal is to help them understand and acknowledge the extent, frequency and seriousness of the violence they are inflicting and its negative impact on their partners and children and on themselves. We also try and instil in them a sense of responsibility for their actions: using violence is a choice. We help them to reassess their expectations of what they are entitled to from their partner and to think about how to handle the natural ebb and flow of a relationship with respect.

Men need to learn how to be strong in a different way by developing “emotional muscles”. By this I mean developing skills and internal resources that they can tap into so that they

are able to step up to their responsibilities as partners and fathers instead of running away from problems and resorting to abuse in order to silence others. It also means developing an ability to communicate and to acquire a sense of empathy and fair play. These are basic human qualities, not exclusively male or female.

How long are the counselling programmes and what is your success rate?

Respect's national service standard sets a minimum of 60 hours. However, many organizations offer longer programmes because lifelong patterns of behaviour cannot be changed overnight. There are no quick fixes. Several evaluations and actual evidence point to the fact that the majority of men attending programmes go on to end their use of violence. Success is also about helping women and children establish lives free from abuse. We pay close attention to the safety of victims by providing them with services and by keeping them informed about the risk the partner or father might pose. Without these features, it would not be safe to run programmes for abusers.

You use words such as identity, happiness, emotions — words that aren't used too often in campaigns against domestic violence.

We should use them more! We should also foster a dialogue about the responsibilities of being a partner or father and create the spaces where this dialogue can take place. An outstanding showcase is the White Ribbon Campaign, which was launched in Canada in 1991. Because it captured a universal sentiment through a symbol, the movement caught on quickly, with



55 countries adapting and developing the campaign in different ways. It mobilized thousands and thousands of men to break their silence — after all, most men are appalled by domestic violence — and to show their solidarity with women. In many parts of the world, you'll see men wearing white ribbons on 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

What lessons did you draw from the experts' meeting here in Dushanbe? Can a programme like Respect be replicated in Central Asian countries, which have only just begun to address the growing phenomenon of domestic violence in their societies?

We were 90 participants representing 20 countries brought together by the OSCE to discuss a universal problem. We learned a great deal from each other's experiences and approaches. Many of the changes that took place in the UK were, in fact, based on lessons we learned from other countries. Our work in Respect, for example, was influenced by the experience in New Zealand and the United States.

But we also acknowledged that we shouldn't assume that methods and campaigns in the West could be transported in exactly the same way to, say, Central Asia. We need to understand the interplay of class and culture with gender and identity in order to enable countries to recreate successful approaches from elsewhere in ways that they think will work best for them.

The experts' meeting demonstrated how the OSCE provides support and encouragement by connecting grass-roots organizations with participating States. This role is vital to sowing the seeds of change.

www.respect.uk.net
www.whiteribbon.ca

Vienna, 8 June.

Todd Minerson, Executive Director of the White Ribbon Campaign, addressed a symposium on combating violence against women in the OSCE region, which was organized by the Senior Adviser on Gender Issues, Jamila Seftaoui, and her team. The campaign, founded by a group of men in Canada 1991, has grown into the world's largest movement dedicated to helping men fight gender-based violence.

Young voices against violence

Children as agents of change

BY SCOTT CAMERON

I was 14 years old when arguments between my parents, who had been divorced for three years after my father left home, became increasingly frequent because of financial tensions. One day in September 2001, I witnessed my mother being abused by my father. From then on, my mother and I lived in dread that it would happen again. In October, we were forced out of our home and had to pack our bags and put our belongings into storage.

Unlike most people in Scotland in this situation, my mother and I did not take refuge in a shelter. Instead, we stayed with relatives close to our old house, so that we could continue looking after my pet dog and so that I could remain in the same school.

This semblance of normalcy had a price. For nine months, I slept on the floor in a cramped room with three other people, while my mother somehow found some sleeping space that she could call her own in the living room. It was a difficult and anxious time for both of us. I recall being confronted daily with the social stigma and humiliation associated with homelessness.

In the meantime, my mother had come into contact with Scottish Women's Aid. With a country-wide network of 39 local aid groups, the organization is the leading campaigner and lobbyist for effective responses to domestic abuse focusing on tackling its root cause: gender inequality.

The staff offered to provide me with a new, experimental counselling service. I was amazed at the help I received. A case worker was

assigned especially to me, and I could speak to her for as long as I needed to about anything that was troubling me. We didn't have to dwell on the horrors of domestic abuse or the trauma of being uprooted from our familiar surroundings, yet the sessions enabled me to come to terms with both of these issues.

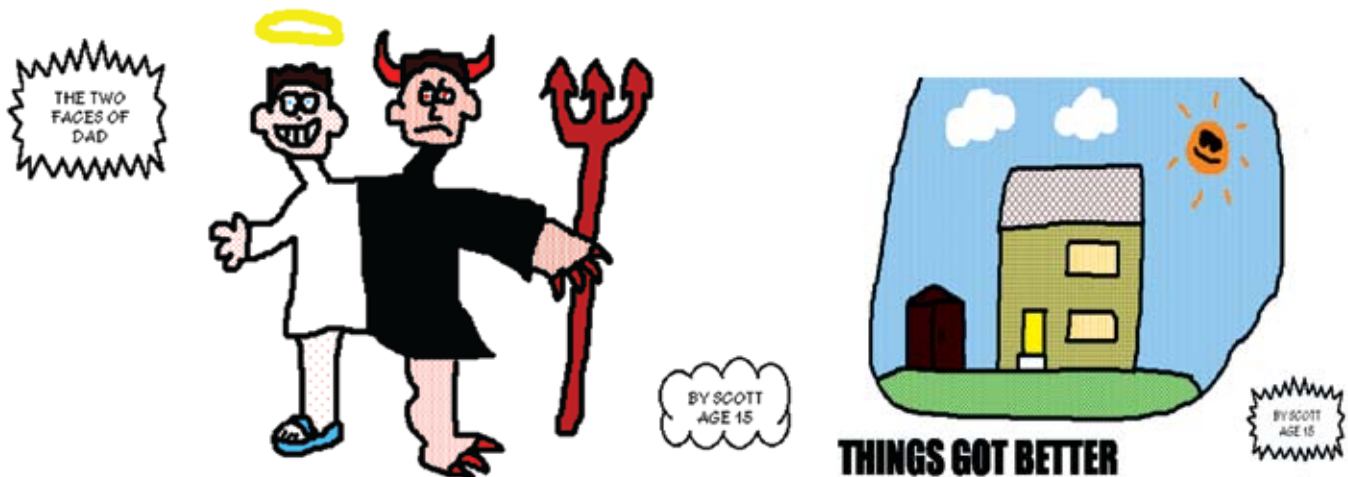
Months after my mother and I moved into a new house, in July 2002, I continued to receive help from Scottish Women's Aid. Later in the year, I found that I could even bring myself to re-establish contact with my father. I attributed this to the counselling that I received.

Having experienced the impact of this support on my young life, I decided to become engaged in advocacy activities concerning domestic violence. Starting in my local community of Ayrshire, I spoke at a number of different events, telling my story to government ministers and service providers. Many young people and children were encouraged to join me on these occasions and described how they coped with abuse. We also shared our insights into practical matters such as shelters and financial aid.

Soon, we realized that we could make an even more significant contribution at the national level. I took part in "Listen Louder!", a major nationwide campaign aimed at improving support services by getting people to listen to the real experts on domestic abuse: children and young people who had witnessed and gone through it first-hand. I spoke at the launching of the campaign in Edinburgh, supported by members of Scottish Women's Aid and local councils.

"Listen Louder" ran from 2002 to 2004 and was an enormous success. It culminated in the

Computer art work by Scott Cameron, created when he was 15 years old.



Government setting up a high-level national group to draw up a delivery plan for Scotland's children and young people. Covering the justice, health, education, housing and police sectors, the plan was launched in June 2008. We were also able to secure major funding for the same type of specialized support that I had received, designed especially for children and young people.

I continued to speak at both local and national events, including at a celebration in Edinburgh in 2006, honouring the accomplishments of Scottish Women's Aid in the past three decades. In October 2008, these engagements led to a global stage — the OSCE-sponsored Experts' Seminar on Innovative Approaches to Combating Violence Against Women, in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, where Heather Coady of Scottish Women's Aid and I spoke about the importance of enlisting children and young people as partners in the battle

against domestic violence. Our presentation — highlighting Scotland's unique approach to children's rights and support for them — was well received, and many participants came up to us after the event to pose follow-up questions.

I've been asked on more than one occasion why, despite my other work and study commitments, I am still actively engaged in the cause. My answer is always the same: "I don't want others to experience what I went through. And if my experience has taught me anything, it's that children and young people who have lived through domestic abuse are the best agents of change. We need to make things better for them. We need to have their voices heard."

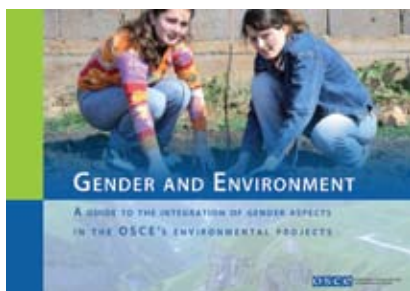
Scott Cameron, 22 years old, is in his fourth year of a master's degree programme in computer science at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow, Scotland.



Recommended gender mainstreaming tools

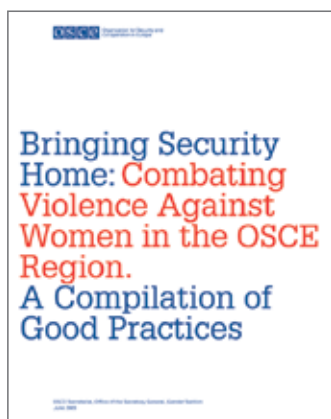
(in addition to those described on pages 11, 16 and 30)

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Gender and the Environment: A Guide to the Integration of Gender Aspects in the OSCE's Environmental Projects seeks to make OSCE managers of environmental projects more aware of the often-invisible linkages between gender and the environment. Women play a vital decision-making role in the management of natural resources, especially during and after conflict. At the same time, they are among those most vulnerable to the consequences of environmental degradation and disasters. The Guide illustrates how gender is mainstreamed into the development, implementation and evaluation of environmental programmes dealing with the management of water, energy, land, chemicals and waste, as well as with climate change and local environmental governance. *Prepared by the OSCE Gender Section*

Bringing Security Home: Combating Violence Against Women in the OSCE Region. A Compilation of Good Practices is a technical reference tool describing more than 95 examples of good and innovative practices in preventing violence against women, protecting victims and prosecuting offenders. Strategies to engage men and young people in a variety of activities are also included. A chapter examines noteworthy research and evaluation initiatives aimed at shedding light on what the international community considers as one of the most pervasive human rights violations taking place on a global scale. Each of the featured practices is considered as having succeeded in applying creative solutions to a universal problem and to be making a real impact. *Prepared by the OSCE Gender Section*



Mapping female experts for politico-military projects is an online database that will disseminate consultancy opportunities for women in such areas as arms control, border management, combating terrorism, conflict prevention, military reform and policing. A roster of qualified female experts will be maintained. The tool seeks to promote the full and equal participation of women in conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation. Currently, women make up just ten per cent of civilian police working for the OSCE and are not represented at all in military affairs. *Expected launch by the OSCE Gender Section: September 2009*



The Gender and Security Sector Reform Toolkit introduces gender aspects to people working on security sector reform, a broad area aimed at transforming security policies, institutions and programmes. The package includes a user guide, 12 tools and 12 practice notes covering the following: policing, defence, justice and penal systems, border management, parliamentary oversight, national security policymaking, civil society oversight, private military and security companies, monitoring and evaluation, and gender training. A guide to international laws and standards is also included. The Toolkit is available in print, as a CD-ROM and online. *Toolkit partners: OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces and UN International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women.*



OSCE/SHERKIROV KAMOL

Tajikistan's lone domestic shelter has its hands full

Pinning hopes on legislation

BY GRAZIELLA PIGA

"I just happened to be passing by."

"I read about it in a brochure."

"I finally came to my senses and decided to seek you out."

"My neighbours told me about it."

These are the most frequent explanations given by women who turn up at the door of the Gulrukhsor Women's Shelter, often in a state of distress, bewildered children in tow. Located in Khujand, north of the Sughd region, it is Tajikistan's only shelter for female victims of domestic violence and trafficking. It also operates a hotline, which receives up to 1,700 cries for help every year.

"The creation of the shelter as an extension of an existing women's crisis centre was initially opposed by local authorities who didn't see the need for it," recalls Orzu Ganieva, who heads the shelter. "But it was obvious that we were in the right place at the right time, and we now receive backing from several State agencies."

Khujand, Tajikistan, May 2009. Each story of domestic and sexual violence is unique, says Orzu Ganieva, who heads Tajikistan's lone domestic shelter.

Since the shelter started operations in 2005, with the support of the OSCE Centre in Dushanbe, as it was then known, it has taken in 83 women and more than 100 children. The average stay is 11 days, but some have left its comfort and safety only after two months. Nearly 60 per cent of the women were victims of domestic violence; 10 per cent had suffered sexual violence.

"We care deeply about helping these desperate women develop self-confidence and find peace of mind," says Ms. Ganieva. "Our professional staff, including five social workers, offer free medical consultations, psychological and social rehabilitation and counselling. Our one-to-one assistance has enabled many of the women to get jobs, housing and access to education and financial assistance."

Each story of domestic and sexual violence is unique, but a common thread runs through all of them: the humiliation and helplessness felt by the victims, pushing many to the brink of suicide, often by self-immolation. In 2008 alone, out of nearly 1,740 women who called the hotline, 54 had attempted suicide.

Officials estimate that about 500 people in Tajikistan take their own lives every year. "That's about six out of every 100,000 people; if this were true, it actually wouldn't be so bad," says Dr. Davron Mukhamadiev, Chief Consultant in the Military Forensic Medicine Centre in Dushanbe. "However, I find it difficult to believe this figure, considering the fact that an average of 15 victims of attempted self-immolation are taken to the Burns Clinic in Dushanbe every month."

FAMILY CONFLICTS

In his study of female survivors of self-immolation, Dr. Mukhamadiev found that 55 per cent had attempted suicide because of family conflicts, often involving mothers-in-law. "In the old days, people with suicidal tendencies were always thought to be mentally ill, needing psychiatric care. Today; professionals still have difficulty acknowledging that suicide can be brought on by unstable social and economic circumstances," he says.

"In many households, women are treated as chattels and servants," says Orzu Ganieva. "During the height of the job exodus of thousands of men to other countries, women often found themselves raising children on their own and heavily dependent on relatives and in-laws. The global financial crisis has changed the picture slightly, but not to the advantage of women. Many of the male migrants are returning home to a worsened economic climate, with women once again bearing the brunt of domestic violence."

Tajikistan's bumpy path to stability after independence and after five years of civil war has taken a heavy toll on women and obstructed

their quest to take their place in social and economic life. Especially in the rural areas, the return to certain local customs and traditions has been eroding women's gains by placing a low premium on education for girls; putting pressure on young women to marry early, sometimes through arranged marriages; discouraging them from taking up gainful employment; and turning a blind eye to the practice of polygamy among men.

An OSCE survey carried out in 2008 on girls' education covering 24 *jamoats* (villages) showed that nearly one out of four girls and young women had not completed primary school. Some 30 per cent of female respondents aged between 18 and 25 said they had been unable to complete their basic education or continue their studies because their parents had prevented them from going to school.

The same survey also found that some 30 per cent of school-aged children were not in school. The proportion of school-aged boys in school was 65 per cent, while that for school-aged girls was 59 per cent. Yet, in discussion groups in the same *jamoats*, it was not uncommon for male and female participants to remark that an uneducated woman was more likely to become a victim of domestic violence and to accept it as a fact of life, or to resort to extreme alternatives such as suicide.

A PRIVATE MATTER

Aggravating the situation, notes Gulbahor Safarova, a human rights lawyer in Dushanbe, is the attitude, also prevalent in many other societies, that domestic violence is a private matter. "Law enforcement officers tend to take on the role of mediators and focus their energies on persuading women to 'go home and be a good wife'," she says. "Even judges sometimes pronounce that 'a good woman does not get battered.'"

When given the chance, however, women are often hesitant to file complaints against their husbands. "During a recent six-month period, out of 48 cases of domestic violence that were brought to my attention, only ten wound up in court," says Ms. Safarova. "As soon as a victim realizes that her husband might be thrown into prison, she decides it is better to put up with the abuse than to risk incurring the wrath of the perpetrator and his family, and losing her sole source of modest financial support. And since women don't enjoy the same property rights as their husbands, they risk becoming homeless as well."

The OSCE Office in Tajikistan, which runs a dynamic gender programme, takes a holistic approach to combating violence against women, focusing on the protection of victims, research and analysis, advocacy and lobbying work with

government bodies and parliament, and prevention through awareness-raising and education.

At the OSCE-sponsored experts' meeting on domestic violence that took place in Dushanbe in October 2008, government officials and NGO representatives pointed to the crucial role being played by the country-wide network of 11 OSCE-supported women's crisis centres. Since 2005, these have helped thousands of victims of domestic violence and vulnerable women through the provision of free psychological support and legal advice.

NGOs are pinning their hopes on a newly created unified database of information from these crisis centres, which is being shared with government bodies. "We hope this will help NGOs and the Government's Committee on Women and Family Affairs in their continuing efforts to lobby for an adequate legal framework that considers domestic violence as a criminal offence," says Ms. Ganieva.

A law setting out a comprehensive and coordinated approach to combating violence against women, including measures to protect victims from perpetrators, was drafted in late 2007 and was the subject of discussions at meetings between government ministers and heads of international agencies. Since then, however, the draft legislation has not been taken up again, nor has it been submitted to parliament. Its passage has been encountering a number of bottlenecks, including funding.

Nevertheless, both national and international advocates of the law have not lost hope that it will be adopted this year. If so, it will pave the way for more shelters to be opened in other parts of the country and ensure the sustainability of the network of OSCE-supported women's crisis centres. Until then, women in dire straits have only one shelter in the country to run to.

Graziella Piga is the Gender Programme Manager at the OSCE Office in Tajikistan.

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OSCE/SHOKIROV KAMOL

The Gulruksor Women's Shelter. Women show up at the door, often in a state of distress, bewildered children in tow.

Raising the alarm on bride abduction in Kyrgyzstan

Wanted: More studies to shed light on emerging trends



Naryn, Kyrgyzstan. A young woman weeps while being forced to wear a marriage head kerchief after being abducted.

BY TURGANBUBU ORUNBAEVA

Aigul is visiting her village in Naryn province for the holidays, enjoying the short break from her studies at a prestigious college in Bishkek. Walking home from shopping one day, she is accosted by Erkin, a good-for-nothing young man from the same village. He forces her into a taxi and takes her to his family home. She is held there for more than a week, during which Erkin's female relatives relentlessly try to talk her into marrying Erkin. Aigul fends off the women's attempts to have her wear the jooluk, a white head kerchief that signifies marriage, and is determined to remain defiant to the end. Finally, Erkin's parents give up and ask Erkin and his friends to take Aigul back to Bishkek. Inside the taxi, Erkin, deeply angered that his plans have been foiled, has a violent argument with Aigul. Erkin and his friends decide to exact vengeance and all four rape Aigul, threatening to kill her if she breathes a word to anyone about the incident.

This is just one of many heartbreaking stories that my mostly female staff share with me daily at the regional hospital in Naryn province, where I have been working as a gynaecologist for the past 20 years. Bridal abduction — *ala kachuu* in the Kyrgyz language — does not always end as tragically as the story of Aigul and Erkin (whose names I have changed to protect their identities). Some women do manage to move on after breaking free and shape a life of their own choosing. Others profess to being happy and content in their new domestic setting after initially resisting their entrapment.

Just a point of clarification: There is such a

thing as “consensual” bride abduction, which is less controversial and takes place less frequently. The couple usually stages their own “kidnaping”, sometimes with the approval of both sets of parents — for example, when they cannot afford to pay for the costs of a formal marriage ceremony — and sometimes as a way of bypassing parental consent to marry.

It is the “non-consensual” bride abduction that appears to be gaining in popularity among Kyrgyz people as an instant path to marriage, setting off alarm bells among authorities, legislators, gender specialists and a wide cross section of civil society. Rising divorce rates, growing alcoholism and aimlessness among young men, and cases of suicide and prostitution among young women who find their lives suddenly shattered are just some of the devastating repercussions that the practice leaves in its wake.

Proponents of *ala kachuu* — and there are many, especially in the rural areas — justify it as a Kyrgyz tradition. However, there has never been any consensus among the population as to its legitimacy and authenticity. Some scholars believe that the coming of independence gave rise to the resurgence of a practice deemed illegal during the Soviet era. Others think that a harmless courting ritual from nomadic days has taken a brutal twist.

Whatever its ancient cultural and sociological roots, the fact is that non-consensual bridal abduction is a crime that is punishable by the imposition of a hefty financial penalty or imprisonment of up to three years, as set out in Article 155 of Kyrgyzstan's Criminal Code (1997). It also violates the spirit and the letter of every major

convention and commitment that the country has signed up to, aimed at safeguarding human rights and the dignity of women in Kyrgyzstan.

Why, then, is the practice alive and well?

SHEDDING NEW LIGHT

Bakubat (meaning “wellness”), which I founded in 2000, was probably the first NGO in Central Asia to call attention to this little-examined topic. We consulted historians, ethnologists and researchers and rummaged through published literature in libraries to shed new light on the practice, but we came up empty-handed.

This is when we decided to rely on our own resources and develop a programme to make young men aware that resorting to violence and abuse in their search for a life partner was hardly the way to go about laying the foundations for a stable and harmonious family. My interest in film-making also led to my producing several short documentaries on bride abduction which we screened at every opportunity.

In 2006, we received a much-needed boost when the OSCE Centre in Bishkek took notice of our efforts and helped us embark on a small survey in an attempt to understand why the practice was thriving. We decided to focus on Naryn province, where our NGO is based. With an estimated population of 52,000, Naryn is one of the most mountainous and most remote provinces in Kyrgyzstan.

A total of 950 married Kyrgyz women, ranging in age from 16 to 70, took part in the survey. We had chosen them randomly, dividing them almost equally between residents of urban and rural areas. Their answers to our questions confirmed our worst fears: More than 60 per cent of the women in the rural areas and more than 40 per cent of those in the urban areas had entered into marriage against their will, through *ala kachuu*. Force had been used in more than half of the abductions. Close to 60 per cent of women had been abducted against their will, most of them when they were between the ages of 16 and 22.

Ninety per cent of abduction victims said that their fear of being ostracized by their community and sometimes by their own families, and their concern that they would have diminished chances of having a happy future if they stepped outside the “threshold” again played a crucial role in their decision to accept their situation. And even when victims refused to meekly accept their fate, they generally did not file a court case, or turn to law enforcement authorities.

Although there are no official statistics, the survey revealed that large sectors of the population are comfortable with the *ala kachuu* “tradition”, tacitly approve of it and are unable to recognize its harmful impact. In addition, a complex web of factors feed into each other,



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nurturing the practice. These include: the reckless attitude of young people towards marriage, even among the relatively well-educated; the low level of awareness among young women of their legal rights (and, similarly, the ignorance of the law among young men); and the prevailing attitude among law enforcers that domestic violence and bride abduction are best tackled within the family.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC DAMAGE

Our co-operation with the OSCE Centre in Bishkek led to a pilot project in 2008 aimed at countering domestic violence and bride abduction by promoting gender awareness. We are now reaching more young people than ever in Naryn and are strengthening the relations between public institutions and civil society.

At our seminars, we try to open the eyes of young men and women to the fact that the practice of *ala kachuu* — which literally means “to take and run away” — encapsulates every form of violence imaginable: physical violence, because almost every abduction case involves force; psychological violence, because regardless of whether or not the woman knows her abductor, the fact is that marriage is forced on women through deception or through coercion lasting from a few hours to several days; and sexual violence, because women are often raped as a way of “sealing” the union.

Equally reprehensible is the socio-economic damage being inflicted on women, their families and society as a whole. By entering into this form of marriage against their will, women are deprived of their right to play a positive and productive role in their country’s development.

In our survey, 32 per cent of abducted women had to drop out of school completely, while 27 per cent had to shift to part-time studies. The fear of being abducted also discourages

Naryn town, 26 November 2008. University students hold up signs protesting against domestic violence and bride abduction and promoting well-being through education and happy and healthy families. The author, Turgan Orunbaeva, is seated, centre.



Naryn town, 5 December 2008. On the occasion of an international campaign against domestic violence supported by the OSCE Centre in Bishkek, the NGO Bakubat conducted a series of seminars for 150 military personnel of Kyrgyzstan's Border Service, soldiers in the Naryn battalion of the Defence Ministry, medical students, and students from the Teachers' Training College and the Naryn State University.

COURTESY OF T. ORUNBAEVA

thousands of young women from returning to their villages, where their skills are badly needed, especially in schools and hospitals. They often choose to stay in towns and cities, where they end up doing unskilled labour and become vulnerable to the sex trade and to trafficking.

SHARP CONTRAST

A milestone achievement made possible by the OSCE project was our opening of a counselling and rehabilitation centre in Naryn last year. So far, we have been able to provide about 500 victims of domestic violence and bride abduction with psychological and medical assistance and legal advice.

It has been gratifying to see that all these activities have started making a difference. To take just one example, there has not been a single case of non-consensual bride kidnapping in the village of Baetov, in Ak-Talaa *rayon* in Naryn province in the past three years. We are witnessing a similar downward trend in other villages. Moreover, State and law enforcement authorities are now more ready and willing to work with us and other NGOs to combat the practice.

In October 2008, I was invited to describe the work of Bakubat at an OSCE-sponsored experts' seminar in Dushanbe focusing on innovative approaches to combating violence against women. And in March this year, with the encouragement of the OSCE Centre in Bishkek, I presented the findings of our survey on bride abduction at parliamentary hearings on "Gender Aspects of Legislation Norms on the Marriage Age".

Since the hearings, senior officials have been expressing support for our work with the OSCE,

and journalists have taken greater interest in writing about our activities. What a sharp contrast to the time when I first brought up the controversial subject in the late 1990s, only to be met with scepticism, suspicion and even hostility. State authorities, local activists, citizens, academicians and members of the international community should now seize the momentum by combining resources to wipe out one of the most abhorrent practices being committed against the women of Central Asia.

Turkan Orunbaeva is the founder and Director of the NGO Bakubat in Naryn, Kyrgyzstan. She herself was a victim of bride abduction.

Contributing to this article were Jumagiul Esenalieva, Gender Focal Point, and Burul Usmanalieva, Media Officer, at the OSCE Centre in Bishkek.

<http://www.osce.org/bishkek>



Representation of women in national parliaments in OSCE participating States (as of 31 May 2009)

Rank	Country	Lower or single House			
		Elections	Seats	Women	% Women
1	Sweden	9/2006	349	164	47
2	Iceland	4/2009	63	27	42.9
3	Finland	3/2007	200	83	41.5
4	Netherlands	11/2006	150	62	41.3
5	Denmark	11/2007	179	68	38
6	Spain	3/2008	350	127	36.3
7	Norway	9/2005	169	61	36.1
8	Belgium	6/2007	150	53	35.3
9	Germany	9/2005	612	197	32.2
10	Belarus	9/2008	110	35	31.8
11	Andorra	4/2009	28	9	32.1
12	Switzerland	10/2007	200	57	28.5
13	Portugal	2/2005	230	65	28.3
14	former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	6/2008	120	34	28.3
15	Austria	9/2008	183	51	27.9
16	Kyrgyzstan	12/2007	90	23	25.6
17	Monaco	2/2008	24	6	25
18	Liechtenstein	2/2009	25	6	24
19	Moldova	4/2009	101	24	23.8
20	Luxembourg	6/2004	60	14	23.3
21	Canada	10/2008	308	68	22.1
22	Bulgaria	6/2005	240	52	21.7
23	Serbia	5/2008	250	54	21.6
24	Italy	4/2008	630	134	21.3
25	Croatia	11/2007	153	32	20.9
26	Estonia	3/2007	101	21	20.8
27	Poland	10/2007	460	93	20.2
28	Latvia	10/2006	100	20	20
29	United Kingdom	5/2005	646	126	19.5
30	Slovakia	6/2006	150	29	19.3
31	France	6/2007	577	105	18.2
32	Lithuania	10/2008	141	25	17.7
33	Tajikistan	2/2005	63	11	17.5
34	Uzbekistan	12/2004	120	21	17.5
35	Turkmenistan	12/2008	125	21	16.8
36	United States of America	11/2008	435	73	16.8
37	Kazakhstan	8/2007	107	17	15.9
38	Czech Republic	6/2006	200	31	15.5
39	San Marino	11/2008	60	9	15
40	Greece	9/2007	300	44	14.7
41	Cyprus	5/2006	56	8	14.3
42	Russian Federation	12/2007	450	63	14
43	Ireland	5/2007	166	22	13.3
44	Slovenia	9/2008	90	12	13.3
45	Bosnia and Herzegovina	10/2006	42	5	11.9
46	Azerbaijan	11/2005	123	14	11.4
47	Romania	11/2008	334	38	11.4
48	Hungary	4/2006	386	43	11.1
49	Turkey	7/2007	549	50	9.1
50	Malta	3/2008	69	6	8.7
51	Armenia	5/2007	131	11	8.4
52	Ukraine	9/2007	450	37	8.2
53	Albania	7/2005	140	10	7.1
54	Montenegro	3/2009	81	5	6.2
55	Georgia	5/2008	150	9	6

As of May 2009, 11 OSCE participating States had reached the minimum target of 30 per cent female members of parliament set by the UN Economic and Social Council in 1990.

A number of different factors influence the representation of women in parliament:

Social attitudes and political tradition: Certain participating States have a long-standing tradition of women participating in political life.

Quota systems: The constitutions or electoral laws of several OSCE participating States prescribe quotas for the number of women in national parliaments or for the number of women nominated by parties as electoral candidates.

Electoral arrangements: Nine out of the 11 participating States that have met the 30 per cent target have a proportional electoral system.

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union
<http://www.ipu.org/english/home.htm>



Female members of the *Riksdag* with Speaker Per Westerberg in 2007. Sweden has the world's second highest proportion of women in a national parliament (after Rwanda). Photo: Swedish *Riksdag*/Melker Dahlstrand

Within the framework of the Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality, the OSCE assists the participating States in their efforts to develop effective measures to bring about the equal participation of women in democratic processes and promote women's political participation. The Organization carries out and supports projects in this area, often in connection with election-related democratization projects.