

Final Report Guidelines

TITLE VIII RESEARCH SCHOLAR PROGRAM

TITLE VIII COMBINED RESEARCH AND LANGUAGE TRAINING PROGRAM

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Responses to Domestic Violence Against Women (VAW) in Kyrgyzstan: Understanding Actions and Attitudes of Criminal Justice, Health and Social Service Professionals

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Research Abstract

Domestic violence against women (VAW) is a serious problem in Kyrgyzstan which occurs in a context of weak institutions of social protection for women (Childress, 2018; Childress, Gioia, & Campbell, 2018; Childress & Hanusa, 2018; Childress, Panchanadeswaran, & Joshi, 2018; Childress, Aparicio, & Messing, 2019; Joshi & Childress, 2017) and an emerging social work community of practice (Childress & Ubaidillaeva, 2015). This study represents one of the first research efforts to examine how Kyrgyzstan's institutions are working to address domestic violence. The objective is to dig deeper from the findings of prior reports that the Kyrgyz criminal justice system has been unresponsive and ineffective (Human Rights Watch, 2006; 2015) and to examine the reasons for these institutional performance issues qualitatively from the perspectives of the responders. This study uses criminal justice and public health responders' own experiences and words to shed light on the way they carry out and understand their roles and approaches. The study deploys in-depth qualitative interviewing with a sample of informants and uses textual analysis of interview transcripts to generate insights for policy debate and broader research about how to improve responsiveness and effectiveness in cases of domestic violence.

Research Goals

The goals of this exploratory study were as follows:

1. to explore the role of criminal justice, health care and social workers in responding to VAW in Kyrgyzstan;
2. to examine the current state of the implementation of international and national policies concerning VAW in Kyrgyzstan; and
3. to evaluate the scope of institutional support services for survivors of VAW provided through governmental and non-governmental organizations in Kyrgyzstan.

The *specific* study objectives were as follows:

1. to describe the cultural, social and legal context in Kyrgyzstan that could influence the providers' willingness and ability to respond to domestic violence;
2. to assess criminal justice, healthcare and social service professionals' knowledge, attitudes and beliefs about domestic violence and their role in responding to the problem;
3. to understand to what extent international policies (and the updated Law on Protection from Family Violence) have been translated into institutional social services framework, and what policy gaps and institutional obstacles to the development of sustainable community-based services for the victims of VAW exist; and
4. to draw implications for policy, practice and research for providing culturally sensitive care that addresses women's help-seeking mechanisms, coping strategies, and empowerment.

Research Activities

Given the sensitivity of the topic and limited prior research on gender-based violence in Kyrgyzstan, the study utilized a grounded theory qualitative research design (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The sample of informants was selected to include individuals from each of these sub-segments and others identified during initial interviewing, based on theoretical sampling technique¹. In-depth interviews and focus groups were conducted with the following groups:

- 1) social workers and psychologists from the government (e.g., Ministry of Labor and Social Protection and state administration), local non-governmental organizations (e.g., crisis centers, shelters, and child and family support centers), and academic institutions (local Universities)
- 2) judges, lawyers and legal advocates from local courts and legal aid clinics (under Ministry of Justice), and district police (under Ministry of Internal Affairs)
- 3) social pedagogues from schools and teacher training institutions (under the Ministry of Education and Science)
- 4) public health workers (doctors and nurses) from the National Center on Maternal and Child Wellbeing (under the Ministry of Health)
- 5) survivors of domestic violence.

¹ This type of sampling is based on concepts that are relevant to the evolving theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The goal of theoretical sampling is to sample events and incidents in terms of the categories and dimensions that these events represent, and not in terms of specific groups of individuals or units of time. As these observations continue, the researcher finds successive cases and examples based on the likelihood that they are able to enhance and elaborate emerging theoretical constructs (Charmaz, 2006). Patton (2002) suggests that the first participants are selected on the basis of their “information-richness,” which is the ability of the researcher to “learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research” (Patton, 2002, p. 46). It is, therefore, suggested that “the researcher choose any groups that will help generate, to the fullest extent, as many properties of the categories as possible and that will help relate categories to each other and to their properties” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p.49). The major principle is to maximize similarities within categories, and minimize differences within categories, through on-going comparison between groups (Glaser, 1978).

The interviews were conducted in two regions of Kyrgyzstan:

- 1) *Chui oblast*: the capital city of Bishkek, and
- 2) *Issyk-Kul oblast*: the cities of Cholpon-Ata and Karakol, and villages of Kyzyl-Suu (Jeti-Oguz raion) and Bokonbaevo (Ton raion).

The following non-governmental organizations were involved in the study:

Name of the Non-governmental Organization	Specialist or client
Public Association “Crisis Center Sezim”	1 Center Director 3 Psychologists, 1 Legal Advocate, 1 Program Coordinator
Crisis Center “Chance”	1 Director
Public Association “Men Against Violence”	1 Director
Center for Support of Children Suffered from Violence & Abuse under the Dpt of Social Development of the Mayor’s Office of the city of Bishkek and state administration of city of Karakol	<u>Bishkek Office:</u> 1 Center Director 1 Psychologist 1 Legal Advocate <u>Karakol Branch:</u> 1 Center director 1 Social Worker 1 Psychologist 1 Legal Advocate 1 Survivor whose husband received counseling and batterer intervention treatment
SOS Children’s Village	<u>Bishkek Office:</u> 4 Social Workers 2 Psychologists 2 Survivors 8 Survivors (focus group) 12 Women (focus group on economic empowerment) <u>Cholpon-Ata Branch:</u> 1 Head of Branch

	4 social workers (focus group) 3 survivors
Public Association “Sotsium”	1 Director
Public Foundation “HIV/AIDS East-West”	1 Director
Soros Foundation “Kyrgyzstan”	1 Head of Public Health Programs
Public Foundation “Open Line”	1 Director
Public Foundation “Voice of Freedom”	1 Psychologist 1 Social Worker
ICAP in the Kyrgyz Republic	1 National Coordinator
CDC/DDPHSIS/CGH/DGHT	1 Sr. Public Health Advisor
Crisis Center in Karakol	1 Director 1 Social Worker/Psychologist
Public Foundation Center for Civic Initiatives “Leader” in Karakol	1 Director 1 Social Worker 1 Psychologist 1 Coordinator of Social Entrepreneurship program
Ombudsman of Issyk-Kul oblast, Karakol	1 Ombudsman
Public Association “Ulukman Daryger”	1 Director
Center for Support & Rehabilitation of Women “Khimaya”	1 Director 1 Social Worker 1 Psychologist 1 Outreach worker 3 Survivors
Public Association “Shoola-Kol”	1 Director 2 Social Workers 1 Manager of the Happy Fatherhood Program 1 Speech Therapist for the Early Intervention Program

The following government bodies and academic institutions were involved in the study:

Name of the state body or academic institution	Specialist
Ministry of Health (National Center for Maternity & Child Wellbeing)	1 Director 1 Psychologist & 5 Nurses (Focus Group)
Ministry of Social Development	2 Specialists
Departments of Social Development under Mayor's Office & local state administration	<p>Bishkek: <i>Focus groups with:</i> 1 Head of the Dpt and 4 District social workers</p> <p>Karakol: 1 Head of the Dpt 4 Social Workers (focus group) 1 Foster mom</p> <p>Kyzyl-Suu: 1 Head of the Dpt 8 Social Workers (Focus group) 1 Foster mom 1 Survivor</p> <p>Bokonbaevo 1 Deputy Head of Local Administration (Head of Committee on Children's Affairs) 1 Head of Dpt of Social Development and 10 social workers (focus group) 1 Foster mom</p>
Ministry of Internal Affairs District policemen Juvenile Inspectors Prosecutor's office	<p>Bishkek: <i>Focus groups with:</i> District policemen (7)</p> <p>Karakol: 1 Head of Dpt of Issyk-Kul Oblast Internal Affairs 1 Deputy Head of Security 1 Juvenile Inspector 1 Police officer</p> <p>Kyzyl-Suu:</p>

	<p>1 Juvenile Inspector</p> <p>Bokonbaevo: 1 Prosecutor</p>
<p>Ministry of Justice: (ГТЮП -гарантированная государством юридическая помощь – State-guaranteed legal aid clinics)</p> <p>Courts (Supreme, City & Oblast courts)</p> <p>Public Association “Kyrgyz Association of Women Judges”</p>	<p>Bishkek: 5 Judges 2 Lawyers from the Association of Women Judges</p> <p>Karakol (legal aid clinic): 1 Head of Issyk-Kul region Central Committee 2 Legal Advocates 1 Chief judge</p> <p>Bokonbaevo (legal aid clinic): 1 Legal Advocate</p>
<p>Ministry of Education:</p> <p>Kyrgyz Academy of Education (teacher training institute)</p> <p>Local Departments of Education</p>	<p>Bishkek: 3 social pedagogues</p> <p>Karakol: 1 social pedagogue 2 Survivors</p> <p>Kyzyl-Suu: 1 Head of Local Dpt of Education</p>
<p>Academic Institutions</p> <p>Kyrgyz State National University (Bishkek)</p> <p>AUCA</p> <p>Issyk-Kul State University (Karakol)</p>	<p>Bishkek: <i>Focus group with:</i> 1 Chair of Sociology & Social Work Dpt and 4 faculty members at KSNU</p> <p>1 Associate Professor from AUCA</p> <p>Karakol: 1 Chair of Social Work Dpt and 1 faculty member</p>

Semi-structured interview² guides (in Russian and Kyrgyz) were used to interview the participants. All interviews were audio-recorded, and are in the process of being transcribed verbatim, and translated into English³. Transcripts are being analyzed using Nvivo 12 qualitative computer software⁴. Permission to conduct this study was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the Ministry of Health of the Kyrgyz Republic and Institutional Review Board of the University of Texas at Arlington. The study protocol adhered to the WHO guidelines (World Health Organization, 2001) for conducting research on domestic violence. No names or identifying information were recorded, and pseudonyms are used to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of the study participants.

Main Research Findings

Several key themes emerged as priority concerns in the discussions by the healthcare, social work, and law enforcement professionals about domestic violence in Kyrgyzstan and their responses to domestic violence situations. The first theme centers on the ineffectuality of the public health response to domestic violence in Kyrgyzstan. Healthcare providers, for example, emphasized the lack of a standardized protocol for screening and response to domestic violence. They expressed frustration and asserted that they did not work with any partner organizations or

² In grounded theory, due to its theory-driven nature, both the structure and the questions of the interviews will vary according to the stage of theory development (Wimpenny & Gass, 2000). For all interviews, the beginning arrangements will be the same. The interviews will start with broad, open-ended questions to give the informants the opportunity to become more comfortable with the researcher. In the initial stage, the structure of the interviews will be much looser to allow the participants to respond in a free manner. Later in the data collection and analysis process, interviews will take on a less open and more structured form, in order to probe and further advance the themes and concepts that emerged during initial interviews. However, throughout the entire interview process, the researcher will always encourage the informants to introduce whatever information *they* consider relevant and will concentrate on gaining as much insight as possible into the informants' constructions of reality, on what they know, feel, and think.

³ Professional translators/transcribers are hired as Research Assistants for the duration of the project.

⁴ Graduate Research Assistant in the Doctoral Program at the University of Texas-Arlington is assisting with data analysis and writing.

specialized agencies on these issues, because they did not know where to refer their clients to seek help. They mentioned the stigma and shame of seeking help as a barrier and noted the cultural expectation that women were supposed to endure violence once they get married and accept it as their fate. Indicative statements by health care providers include the following:

“The woman will never disclose abuse even if inside she is all rotten from violence. Many women don’t understand they live in violence as they hear: “Endure, what will people say? God forbid, you will end up in the streets with your four kids?!”

“Nobody goes to a psychologist in a village of 40 houses, where they all know each other. Nobody knows how the psychologist can help... and dare you say you are going to seek help from police, the husband will shoot you right then!..., And if you engage social workers, they will terminate your parental rights for sure...”

“There is no feedback loop in the system to address domestic violence: no shelters, no transitional housing. We don’t have a purposeful system of collaboration, referral and response...”

“The biggest gap in the domestic violence response is the lack of psychological and mental health services. We only have one crisis center where the municipal government pays for utilities in the capital city, but in the regions – it’s a bottomless gloom.”

“A large number of women don’t ever go to doctors even if they are beaten, raped, or psychologically abused their whole lives. They lie that they fell over or stumbled over something.. They tend to stay with the abuser because of their financial situation/dependency. They only go to the doctors if they want to throw the husband in jail...”



Another major theme discussed by social workers is the lack of funding or political will for providing social and mental health services for victims and perpetrators. They discussed the low status of social work as a profession and the need to raise the salaries and prestige of their work. They discussed the multiple roles that the social workers play when dealing with situations of abuse, and how important it is to educate future social workers about intervening in family violence both at the advocacy and clinical levels. This is how one social worker explains it:

“We, social workers are the lowest paid among all professions – that is the root of the problem. We are considered ‘technical workers’, which is equal to cleaners and clerks. Our interns change their major once they learn what their role involves: a psychologist, a lawyer, a firefighter, an emergency responder, a nurse, and... Mother Teresa at the end. We need to increase our salary and heighten our status and prestige.”



Law enforcement professionals and judges emphasized the importance of community-coordinated response to ensure adequate provision of safety planning services and resources. The police expressed frustration about the low status and lack of authority the police have in responding to these cases. They noted the lack of mechanisms to enforce the recently adopted 2017 Law on Social and Legal Protection from Domestic Violence. Police informants described three continual issues in handling domestic violence situations: 1) difficulties finding a safe space for women seeking help; 2) a lack of funding to transport or accompany the victim to a

safe space, and 3) a lack of trauma-informed/restorative justice programs to deal with the abusers to help them change. But even more importantly, they emphasized the predominant role of cultural factors preventing them from carrying out adequate enforcement of laws, including the frequency of women rescinding initial criminal complaints due to the influence or interference of in-laws. The following indicative quotes capture these themes:

“The new law says, ‘take her to the safe place.’ Where am I supposed to take her? To the Mayor’s Office? My house? Or is she supposed to follow the policemen around like an idiot all day long? We take her back to the in-laws!”

“And then it says, ‘impose a fine with community works on the abuser.’ Who is supposed to take the abuser and monitor his public works? The system is not working. For the system to work, it’s not just the police, but the whole system (social workers, aksakal courts, youth and women’s council, city services) has to work together to respond.”

“We work with the worst of the society, and nobody gives us credit for this... It used to be that the police could arrest the abuser for 5 days. The new law requires that we collect all the material and take the couple to court. In court, you have to wait for hours and days before the decision is made... The fine is a slap in the wrist and the abuser keeps going back to the house and beating her up even worse... And who is the scapegoat again?”

“A lot of times women recant... their in-laws come and talk with her parents: ‘Oh, they have children, they need to keep the family together. We have our ancient traditions we need to keep for our youth. Who needs all these laws? Only Europeans do’.”



Social work researchers in academic settings emphasized the importance of addressing larger structural problems, such as poverty, corruption, and migration in reducing societal violence. They focused more attention on the connection between these social problems and interpersonal violence and emphasized the need for mainstreaming violence education into university curricula. They also emphasized the importance of developing prevention programs which would foster women’s solidarity to change their mentality for abusive dynamic and to break the oppressive cycle of abuse. They discussed potentially promising approaches in reaching their University youth. The following indicative quotes from social work researchers illustrate these themes:

“We need to educate the masses about violence, particularly, our youth. This is a closed topic. We have to engage police, social workers, local administration, schools, Universities, and NGOs.”

“There is a huge divide between the rich and the poor. People are left on their own, and they leave for Russia to survive. Migration, domestic violence, and social orphanage are increasing. Aksakal courts are degrading. Corruption, violence, alcoholism, and class and ethnic resentment are becoming widespread. As a backlash against all of that, the appeal of radical Islam is also being strongly felt by many young men.”

“The root of the problem is not men, it’s the women themselves. We need to develop women’s solidarity. Often times it’s the mother-in-law or sisters-in-law who induce violence. Bride-kidnapping happens with the help of women – the women continue that cycle because they are driven by jealousy, resentment, envy, and violence in their own lives...”



Another important theme emerged during this field work across a broad range of informants is the complex effect of de-institutionalization of children's care provision, aimed at reducing the number of children in institutions and promoting family-based alternatives, such as foster families. One of the most important implications of de-institutionalization is the accompanying focus on prevention of violence as opposed to response to crisis situations. The complex demands and systemic nature of the issue of de-institutionalization of care for affected children and family-based preventive responses have emerged as a critical and timely issue, with service providers stressing the importance of coordinated systemic response and their search for adequate resources to support this response.

While the scope and nature of the challenges and the resource scarcity described are extremely daunting, it was also encouraging for future work to hear about the ways frontline professionals are finding to provide care to children and families in Kyrgyzstan within the constraints noted above, often by leveraging the importance of preserving the values of family and community, and using the teaching of psycho-social techniques in families to foster wellbeing of children and families challenged by poverty, violence and abuse.



Policy Implications and Recommendations

Given these initial findings, it is important that the scope of this research expand to include greater consideration of issues of de-institutionalization of child services, violence prevention in families with children, and alternative interventions which leverage community and family assets. It is important to create additional, proactive entry points of contact in the upstream work of prevention, to support and complement the more reactive, downstream interventions and case management responses. Respondents expressed that there is a widely felt need to create more resiliency and support for wellbeing and harm-reduction in the face of chronic, systemic violence through community-based and broader family health initiatives, which encompasses the whole continuum of service delivery for more effective prevention and response. Among those high on the list of priorities are strategies on teaching safe and healthy relationship skills, engaging influential peers and adults, and disrupting the developmental pathways toward partner violence. Taking this focus, I am developing my new research around adapting school-based and family-centered interventions for use in Kyrgyzstan.

Co-Curricular Activity

While in the field, I met with several U.S. Embassy officials at the Embassy: Gulzat Kochorova, Educational Programs Coordinator, Public Affairs Section Cori Bickel, Cultural Attaché, and Ariel Ahart, Public Health Specialist. On July 4-5, 2019, I attended a seminar on “Standards against gender-based violence” organized by Crisis Center “Chance”. The event discussed the topic of assessments of the quality of services in cases of gender-based violence. Experts working in this field were involved. Psychologists from crisis centers discussed the provision of psychological assistance to victims of gender-based violence.

Plans for Future Research Agenda/ Presentations and Publications

I have been reviewing the CDC's compendium of evidence-based interventions on violence prevention titled "*Preventing Intimate Partner Violence Across the Lifespan: A Technical Package of Programs, Policies, and Practices*" (Niolon et al, 2017) to understand the strategies and approaches that represent different levels of the social ecology on the prevention continuum and have identified some approaches that could be useful for the Kyrgyz case. I have discussed these approaches with my Kyrgyz partners in the government and NGO sector, and we will plan to utilize the existing platforms to introduce these evidence-based approaches at the primary prevention level. We have identified a number of grants I will apply with the local agencies, e.g., <https://www.coca-colacompany.com/stories/the-coca-cola-foundation>, State Department grants for Democratic Commission (<https://kg.usembassy.gov/education-culture/democracy-commission/>), and American Councils for International Education Central Asian University Partnership Program grants (<https://unicen.americancouncils.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/NEW-UNICEN-RFP.pdf>) in order to develop my research/teaching agenda for Central Asia. I will also apply for K01 award for my pilot initiatives and then will plan to apply for R01 and research infrastructure building grants through NIH, CDC, and Fogarty mechanisms.

I have been discussing service-learning opportunities with the Center for Service Learning at University of Texas-Arlington and will plan to participate in the Faculty Fellows program to incorporate global service-learning activities as part of my State Department grants applications. Currently, I hold a Fulbright US Scholar FLEX award which would allow me to make three trips (Dec 27-Jan 27, 2020; May – Aug, 2020; May – Aug, 2021) to continue to build my research agenda and strengthen the networks on the ground.

Currently, data analysis is underway to plan for several publications focusing on systematic review of deinstitutionalization of children at risk in post-Soviet Central Asia, service providers perspectives of risk assessment and safety planning for domestic violence, and implications for policy reforms. Results and recommendations of this research will be also disseminated through conference presentations in international conferences, including but not limited to *Central Eurasian Studies Society, Society for Social Work Research, Council for Social Work Education, American Society for Criminology, International Family Violence and Child Victimization Research Conference, International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry, and American Public Health Association.*

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