How Can Studies of Bride Abduction in Central Asia Inform Conversations about Sexual Assault on U.S. Campuses?

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The problem of sexual assault significantly impacts the climate of U.S. campuses. The recent Association of American Universities (AAU) survey on Sexual Assault and Sexual Misconduct reaffirms previous findings that approximately one in four undergraduate women are likely to experience some form of non-consensual sexual assault before graduation. In April 2001, the federal government urged college administrators to take action by sending them the “Dear Colleague” letter, emphasizing that acts of sexual violence fall within the scope of Title IX regulations prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex at educational institutions that rely on federal funding.

The purpose of this poster is to demonstrate that studies of bride abduction have something to add to the ongoing conversations about sexual assault on U.S. campuses. This poster examines the striking parallels between the two practices, including the psychological impacts of these practices and the persistence of myths that help reinforce rape culture and kidnap culture respectively. However, there is one key difference – institutional efforts to address sexual assault appear to be on the rise in the U.S., while national efforts to address gender inequities are declining throughout post-Soviet Central Asia. While the efficacy of such efforts are debated in the U.S. context, the Central Asian context suggests that gender inequities and violence against women have increased in the absence of institutions that protect women’s rights.

The implications of this study are simple and straightforward - institutional efforts to address sexual assault, such as bystander intervention programs, are likely to pay off.