



**YEAR IN
REVIEW
REPORT
2018**

**CENTER FOR CRITICAL GENDER
STUDIES**

**AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF
CENTRAL ASIA**

Year in Review Report 2018

Annual Report for:

‘Combatting Sexual Violence in Kyrgyzstan through Innovative Education and Information Technology (Kyrgyzstan, Central Asia)’

Funded by: *World Bank & Sexual Violence Research Initiative*

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YEAR IN REVIEW REPORT

1: Introduction

The end of the project year is a fantastic opportunity for to reflect on the year that is coming to a close, and all the many accomplishments and events that have made up the previous year. Often, the work that we are engaged in is taxing, fast paced, and stressful. This can lead to us being unable or forget to look back at everything we have accomplished.

To work against this possible trend, this piece is meant as a starting place for such a reflection. A year in review. Not just of the tangible accomplishments, outcomes, or lessons learned, but also the process itself and affective moments that define the experience. We believe that continual reflection assists in smooth working as well as leads to a more thorough, thoughtful, and participatory outcome to the project, allowing for a more substantive and sustainable end result that will continue in new directions.

This report consists of eight sections which help us understand the year in full. This starts with an overview of the project, its outcomes, and its outputs, and where, a year in, we have gotten to with these aims. Following this, there are individual sections briefly detailing each of the three main components (Research, Curriculum, Technology) of the project and what was achieved in each of them. This is followed by a section on the Center for Critical Gender Studies. While the Center is an indirect outcome of the project, it is an integral part of addressing the year's work. Closing the annual report are sections on Lessons Learned from Year 1 and looking forward to Year 2. These are preliminary outcomes on the year. Final outputs of the project will be addressed and analyzed in June 2019.

2: Project Outcomes & Outputs

When the team began this two-year World Bank & Sexual Violence Research Initiative (SVRI) project, it is fair to say that it had a lot on its plate! The project had a threefold approach and set of activities. These were, in broad terms, related to: education; technology; and research. Each of these three sets of activities contained several important components . During the first project year, the team focused more on the aspects related to technology and education.

Thus, the research component of the project took a backseat letting education and tech development components take priority.

Importantly, as we moved through the first six months, the team had to readjust some initial plans and timeline. As a first-time team, much of these adjustments were related to assessing team skillsets. While everyone has worked previously on grant projects, as a team, it took time to learn from each other and build the new relationships



Photo 1: Early Team Meeting

and trust. While not often listed as an output for grassroots projects, these crucial relationships and networks require investment and time. This is particularly true at the beginning of what is hoped to be a sustainable project. This goal was assisted by three of the team members co-teaching a course (discussed below).

3: Research

As stated above, the research component of the project took a backseat for much of the first year. That said, in the second half of the year, the team worked to plot out the timeline for the research components for the remaining year and a half of the project. As a team, we subdivided the research component of the project into small research quadrants. As a whole, the project seeks to focus on research related to culturally-endorsed sexual violence. This is an exceptionally broad topic, so, following and augmenting the original project, the research component developed. It did this as the team established the current state of the research in Kyrgyzstan and found out what information was needed to address this core element of our project.

The four subtopics for research the project will be addressing are:

1. Generating locally-grounded knowledge and understanding of culturally-approved sexual violence within the practices of bride kidnapping and child marriages through culture-sensitive and ethical research practice.
2. Exploring challenges and opportunities in the provision of victim-focused counseling services.
3. Identifying institutional spots which impede persecution of criminal offences dealing with sexual violence through guiding and accompanying one survivor of sexual violence through the existing legal system on all stages of the process.
4. Introducing and evaluating effectiveness of a mobile application for mapping and immediate response by the multidisciplinary team.

Each of these research components will be led by different team members. While the team will be involved in most of these, we have divided leadership of each component. This, beyond being a practical decision, allows for a plurality of voices to come through in the research.

These research components began in April 2018 and will continue through May 2019. This will be elaborated further in the final section of the report detailing the work to be undertaken in the Year Two.

4: Curriculum

One of the core features of this project was the development of a substantive and innovative curriculum for students from Kyrgyzstan related to issues of gender, gender & sexual violence, and the process to undertake research on these topics in an ethical fashion. This was a fundamental goal of the project, not simply due to a lack of education on these topics for specialists doing research, but also with the intent to create a wider group of people educated on these topics in Kyrgyz society more broadly. The goal was to begin a process of education on the small-scale level, as each student taught would go out into their community bringing the lessons they learned from the course with them. Of course, even before we began we knew that this method of changing narratives, knowledge, or perspectives was a challenge. But it also represented one of the most in-depth ways of making those changes. By focusing on young students who are about to enter the work force, to most likely get married and start a family, or to fully enter adulthood, we believe that the project will be able to have a stronger cohort impact than had we addressed our educational initiatives to a wider audience initially.



Photo 2: Participatory classroom exercise

Work on the curriculum began in December 2016 prior to the start of the World Bank & Sexual Violence Research Initiative project. In December 2016, students in Dr Karioris' 'Sociology of Gender' course contacted AUCA's then President Andrew Wachtel to ask if AUCA could establish a program in Gender Studies. President Wachtel reached out to Dr Karioris and asked whether

this would be possible. After conducting a quick assessment, Dr Karioris convinced the President that not only was it possible to begin a program in Gender Studies, but it would achieve the desired standards with minimal investment of additional resources into the program. It was decided that the university would begin offering a Minor in Gender Studies, and, depending on the success of the program, consider expanding this into a full Major. Further, starting with a Minor allowed the university to begin the program without working through the Kyrgyz Ministry of Education to establish and accredit an officially licensed Major in Gender Studies. Under Kyrgyz Ministry of Education guidelines, to offer a Major, the Major - as a discipline/field - would first have to be established in the Ministry, before an individual university could put an application forward for accreditation of that Major at their university.

Between December 2016 and February 2017, Dr Karioris evaluated the current course offerings throughout the university to assess current courses faculty had been teaching, looking particularly for courses that had been offered on a regular basis in the previous three to five-year period. This was to establish a baseline for resources - of various kinds - that the university already possessed. Working from this foundation, he then analyzed existing programs in Gender Studies internationally. Opening in September 2017, the [Minor](#) in Gender Studies (as well as a [Concentration](#) for students Majoring in Liberal Arts & Studies) at AUCA is the first academic program on Gender Studies in Central Asia.

The establishment of the Minor in Gender Studies coincided with the beginning of this project. The founding of the academic program laid the ground work for the project to undertake this component of its goal with confidence. More specifically, having a program in Gender Studies legitimized the creation and offering of the upper-division, specialized courses that the project had hoped to offer. Additionally, it offered a beginning group of possible students for the course.

Working from this, in summer 2017, Dr Elena Kim, Dr Elena Molchanova, and Dr Frank G. Karioris began working on a syllabus for the course that would be the cornerstone of the project's curricular component - 'Gender, Ethics, and the Politics of Violence'. With Dr Kim taking lead in the syllabus design, the course was developed for upper-level undergraduate students and Master's students, taking into



Photo 3: Students working on class activity

account the fact that many of the students would have had very limited exposure to the study of gender in any substantive fashion. As such, the first section of the course covered fundamental topics related to gender and sexual violence. Moving forward from this, we aimed to provide critical and nuanced readings of these topics in more depth, while working with students on methodological issues related to ethically conducting research on sensitive topics - especially sexual and gender-based violence.

In Fall 2017, the course was comprised of undergraduate and graduate students, as well as a professional from outside the university. While the class was small (6 students), the students were committed to the endeavor, coming prepared each week with intensive reading of the class materials and bringing their own experiences to bear on the issues at hand. This was due in no small part to the commitment of the trio of faculty, who each brought their unique perspective and backgrounds to bear on the course. Dr Molchanova brought detailed case

studies from her years of work as a psychologist; Dr Kim shared her extensive research experiences in Central Asia working on gender issues; and Dr Karioris brought an expansive knowledge of the scholarly literature. This first semester was also a great way of testing out which readings worked better or had a major impact, and what activities were most successful and understand why.

With a first edition completed, and strong word of mouth, the Spring 2018 section of the 'Gender, Ethics, and the Politics of Violence' course filled to the max capacity (22 students). This section, comprised of a large group of upper-level undergraduates as well as Master's students who were part of the Gender Research Team (lead by Dr Kim), provided new challenges and new opportunities. Having a larger group changed the format for the classroom, and allowed us to spread out the demand being made on students in each class - particularly related to presentations and information sharing.

We have met our goals for number of students, and are, therefore, moving the educational component into new directions.

After an exciting Spring 2018 semester, we have now wrapped up the main education components of the project. This is an amazing accomplishment within the first, and something that we had not anticipated. We have met our goals for number of students educated in the course, and are, therefore, moving the educational component into new directions. What this means is that next academic year (2018-2019), we will not be offering the 'Gender, Ethics, and Politics of Violence' course. That said, this is not the conclusion of our educational initiatives. These will be outlined in the concluding section of this report, demonstrating the sustainability of the curricular programming that the project has created and implemented.

5: Technology

One of the crucial elements of this project has always been to push technological innovative forward in thinking about ways to best address gender and sexual violence. While technology is not a quick fix solutions to the complicated social, cultural, and personal issues related to gender & sexual violence, the goal of this project is to find ways to integrate technology in

productive ways to provide individuals more information, protection, and connection with, when desired, the legal system.

At the beginning of the year, we began working with the AUCA student group Neobis. This group of current and former students works on developing computer & phone apps, as well as various other tech projects. In integrating them into this part of the project, the aim was to involve experts, but also to further the educational mandate through working with students.



Photo 4: Neobis team working on Aiymkana

One of the Neobis team members took the 'Gender, Ethics, and Politics of Violence' course in Spring 2018. The integration of our technology team with the education component of the project was important for us, as it allowed for great cohesion in the project and the outcome.

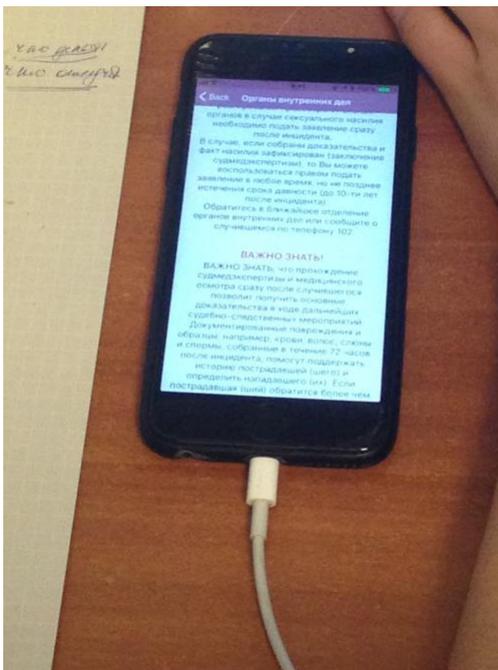


Photo 5: Early version of Aiymkana

Working with Neobis, the team began formulating initial ideas for the application that we wanted and that we thought would be able to make a valuable impact in people's lives. Most importantly, providing women with information about their legal rights - in clear and accessible language - related to harassment and sexual violence. The application - named Aiymkana - was the result of this. In the initial phases, the team had the wonderful opportunity to enter the application into a Hackathon - a marathon for technology development. Over a long weekend at the end of October, the team - led by Neobis - worked on the application during the Hackathon. At the end of the weekend, the team had a working prototype of the application to present to the

Hackathon judges. Seeing the important work that Neobis and the team had done, the judges

awarded Aiymkana first [prize](#). We could not be more excited about this result, and took it as a strong sign that we were on the right track with not only the design of the application - which Neobis has spearheaded - as well as the utility of the application.

Aiymkana has, since then developed into a much more fleshed out platform for addressing these issues through both passive and active processes. Neobis's [website](#) states that the application will:

- Information about what constitutes violence and what kinds of violence exist. This part provides information about the relevant legislation and rights people have to live violence-free lives
- Where to turn? List of institutions on the map. Here, the users receive information about what to expect in each institution and how to act with the frontline workers
- Hazardous areas: Display of marked points on the map, to identify dangerous or unfavorable places / areas on the map of Kyrgyzstan
- SOS - SMS: Prompt notification of the circle of proxies, that the user is possibly at risk.
- Stories: the user has the opportunity to anonymously express themselves as a witness or victim of gender-based violence. Also, the user can read other people's stories

Through this innovative combination of more passive knowledge transfer and active assistance, Aiymkana gives users a one-stop shop to address the multitude of issues related to gender & sexual violence.

Throughout the first year, Neobis has been working hard - in collaboration with the team - to develop the mobile application. In this, they have added features, improved usability, and increased the information loaded into the application. While there is still a lot to work on with the application, the progress that we have made on the application in year 1 is above and beyond what we had anticipated or hoped for.



Photo 6: Neobis Captain presenting Aiymkana to the class

6: The Center for Critical Gender Studies

While the Center for Critical Gender Studies does not fall directly under the auspices of this project, it is important to discuss as it is directly linked to all the activities of the team and elevates the outcomes, ensuring the value for investment. Further, though not directly part of the project, the Center has acted as a house for the project and the team, and has provided the project some of the critical structure and infrastructure necessary for the project and team to make the swift progress that they have.



Photo 7: Lecture by Dr Steve Roberts

The Center for Critical Gender Studies was [founded](#) in July 2017, after seven months of work and development towards its establishment. Designed as both a center for research on gender issues as well as the home of academic programs offered by AUCA, the Center set its aim high. By September 2017, as noted above, the academic programs had begun in earnest, and members of the Center began

seeking more funding - in addition to this World Bank & Sexual Violence Research Initiative [grant](#).

In October, Dr Kim and Dr Karioris began working on a grant project with UNDP Poverty-Environment Initiative (PEI) in Kyrgyzstan. The organization was finishing its tenure in the country, with another UN agency transitioning in, and wanted to have a concluding report or document as an overview of the work they had done in the country. Seeking to produce something comprehensive while also useful, Dr Kim suggested a *Teaching Handbook* as the output. This idea appealed strongly to the PEI Office, as it allowed them to further share resources and knowledge with a wider audience - something which policy reports often were not able to accomplish. Dr Kim and Dr Karioris designed the [Teaching Handbook: Poverty, Environment, and Gender](#), which gave students and faculty all of the resources needed to run

a university-level course on this topic. The *Teaching Handbook* was designed to be a practical guide for faculty to deliver a graduate level course in an interdisciplinary, evidence-based and interactive manner. The handbook utilized as its primary case, PEI Kyrgyzstan's vast and important work in country, supplementing this with various other cases and readings. In such a way, the handbook will be applicable to many institutions around the globe and act as a further tool for development and education. Designed as a course handbook, the volume contained short introductions to each chapter, vignettes from case studies, a reading or case document, and an easy to adapt lesson plan for course activities.

Working with other faculty from AUCA's Psychology Department, the Center applied for a grant from *Aids Fonds* and *Bridging the Gap*. The project was titled 'The Impact of Community Empowerment on access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and services (including HIV) in line with the Sex Worker Implementation tool (SWIT) for female, male and transgender sex workers in Kyrgyzstan'. The project focused



Photo 8: Reading with Dr Suyuarkulova, Juliet Jacques, and Georgy Mamedov

on working with sex worker communities in Kyrgyzstan to access sexual and reproductive health, rights, and services, and to gain a better understanding of current issues within these community. This project will run from February 2018 to February 2019.

In June 2018, the Center and its team were proud to award the first Minor in Gender Studies to Dursun Rejepova. Dursun was heavily engaged throughout the year in almost all of the courses offered related to gender, including an Independent Study course with Dr Karioris. We are thrilled to have her as our first graduate, and are proud that the program has graduated its first student in its first year in existence.

Beyond the educational components of the Center, this year has seen its expansion into a full-fledged research unit. This has been seen most notably in the Center's Lecture series that

ran Spring 2018. Our lecture series featured top-tier, international academics and writers. These included, Dr Steve Roberts from Monash University. You can read about this in the lecture review by Asel Shamybekova, an AUCA student, that was published in [Engenderings](#). We could not be prouder of Asel for publishing this piece, and wrote about it briefly in a previous [update](#). At the end of March 2018, the Center hosted a reading by Juliet Jacques and Dr Mokhira Suyuarkulova, with an introduction by Georgy Mamedov. The Center was absolutely delighted to host this event, doing so in collaboration with AUCA's Anthropology Club. A review of the reading by Daria Gavriushchenko was published on our [website](#). We also hosted Dr Maryna Shevtsova, a scholar and activist from Ukraine to discuss LGBT+ activism.



Photo 9: Lecture by Dr Maryna Shevtsova

With such fantastic individuals as part of the lecture series, we could not have been happier with the results. Each event was followed by a Question & Answer session, allowing our students to gain deeper knowledge about these topics and to think through them in relation to Kyrgyzstan.

In Summer 2018, we are honored to have Dr. Saltanat Childress from Arizona State University (ASU) as a Visiting Research Fellow. Originally from Kyrgyzstan, Dr. Childress is working on a research project over the summer, and the Center is excited to be collaborating on this with her. In addition to Dr. Childress, this year we were thrilled to host Corinna Vetter for a short research trip.

Corinna is a Master's student at the London School of Economics, University of London. She was in Bishkek doing research for her MSc thesis in Gender, Policy, and Inequalities. Her thesis and research will look at issues related to nation-building using women's bodies, focusing on Kyrgyzstan as her case study. She will be defending her thesis in September 2018.

The Center's Facebook page, the primary site of engagement, has nearly 875 people following it. Throughout the year the page's views ranged between just under 1,000 a week to upwards of 15,000 for a week. With daily posts - including news stories, call for papers, and event information - we have gathered a strong engagement with people all around the world.

7: Lessons Learned

Any first year of a project is bound to be filled with lessons learned; some smaller and some bigger. This project is no exception. Throughout the year, the team, as individuals or as a group, has worked through many issues. Reflecting on these, there are at least a couple points to share and that we will take with us as we move forward into the second year of the project.

One of the key lessons learned for the team has been the challenges of technology. While technology is extremely helpful, its design and development comes with a myriad of challenges and issues. In our initial project proposal, we had put forward a timeline for the tech component of the project that was quite overeager to implement. In designing technology, it is important to allow for the necessary time to design, build, load, test, and retest the application. Beyond this, it is important to work with people who are knowledgeable in both the technological aspects of what is being developed, but also in the content/use of the application. We were extremely lucky to work with Neobis who were both fantastic at the tech aspects and were genuinely interested in the content of what they were designing and its implications.

A second lesson from the year was to try and work through all the institutional and structural foundations - the bureaucracy - of a project in the early stages of the project. With the creation of the Center for Critical Gender Studies, the project and team were extremely fortunate to have a house to work as part of. That said, as it was a new Center, it lacked some of the infrastructure that would have been



Photo 10: Team meeting

helpful for most efficiently working through some of the project's needs. This is also true in relation to the connection between the Center and the university more broadly. In the past year, AUCA has undertaken the design and implementation of a variety of new policies, including ones that deal with grants. These new policies, and the Center's newness, caused some initial challenges in working through these matters; all of which have been resolved at this point. Addressing and working through these issues as early as possible would assist the project and team in streamlining their work in a number of ways.

One of the most important lessons that we took from this year was to engage in local or regional competitions. The Hackathon was a marvelous chance for the Neobis team and the application to get high-level support and feedback from internationally renowned business and tech people. The current application owes much of its strength to this foundation. If it is at all possible to enter such a competition, we have found that it can an innumerable bounty to the project.



Photo 11: Winning the Hackathon

Building on this, one of the key things that we as a team would continue recommend is to work with local organizations of various kinds. This is, of course, not a new lesson nor a particularly innovative one. Yet, it is one that can be a challenge. Involving outside organizations takes time, resources, and, often, patience as you work through other's schedules. The costs are

almost always worth the reward when working with local organizations. In addition, projects are able to gain greater sustainability through these partnerships.

This year, we learned just how complicated events can be to run - including the Center's Lecture Series and meetings with partners and the team. This was seen most especially in the Center for Critical Gender Studies' lecture series. Working to coordinate schedules,

timelines, rooms, people, and getting individuals to attend can be more than a challenge. This is true regardless of the type of event being run. These events, though, provide a public venue and outlet for feedback on pieces of the project that are not necessarily ready for publication, but are ready for discussion. Use these spaces to make connections, networks, and get feedback.

As a team, one of the things that we learned throughout the year is to utilize team member's strengths in full. Any team has members that are stronger public speakers, and members that are better writers, and members that are good negotiators. Use each member as wisely and strategically as possible. This will not only improve the project, but will make each team member feel they are contributing to the overall success of the project with ease, while enjoying the demanding process.

One of the most important - and certainly most public - outputs from this first year has been the short Update publications that the team has authored. Over the course of 10 months, we have published 14 such updates. While each update has been short and pithy, they provided the team the opportunity to reflect on the work being accomplished, as well as the successes and



Photo 12: Presentation by Kyrgyz Indigo

overall direction the project was headed in. This reflective work was key towards the process of consolidating the goals for the Year Two. Further, and importantly, these reflections allow the public an insight into the project, especially as it continues to develop and move forward.

8: Looking forward to Year Two

While Year 1 has provided us with tangible successes - described above - and the project team has learned a nearly endless amount of knowledge, we, as a team, are even more

excited for the second year of this project. First and foremost, because we now have much of the groundwork laid, we have built a strong team & connections, and the second year will provide more substantive outputs. Beyond this, in Year 2, we will be looking to the future and thinking about the ways that this project will develop in the longer term.



Photo 13: AUCA

The most important activities that we plan on working on in the second year of our project is taking some of the initial research that we have done and turning these into more substantive subprojects. As listed above, we have four research components that we will be working through in the coming year. These range from deepening and developing research on specific gendered practices that are linked to sexual violence; most especially bride kidnapping and child marriage. Through these cases, the research will seek to gain a better understanding of the cultural uses of sexual violence, the social implications of this violence, and the mechanisms that victims are using to address and redress these issues.

This will tie into research topic number two, to look at victims and counseling services. While these are distinct subprojects for research, they are non-discreet and will be integrated together after the initial research for each has been finalized. Research subproject number three seeks to explore these same issues, but from an institutional standpoint - including the police and emergency personnel. Finally, the fourth research element will collect data on the Aiymkana application, its uses, and data input into the application.

As this fourth research component moves forward, our second goal is to continue developing Aiymkana throughout year two. The goal of this will be to solidify the application, advertise it so that it gains a larger user base, and to increase utility - including looking into increasing the number of languages the application will be in. This work will be paired with a small-scale marketing of the application.

The third project goal for year two is to begin training events related to gender violence and sexual violence with community and state actors; importantly, police and firefighters. These individuals are often the first responders to these issues, and raising awareness amongst this group could have a large impact on the ways that they are managed and handled. Further, in these trainings, we will work to integrate emergency personnel into Aiymkana in positive ways.

While our main educational course has been completed, team members will be busy integrating aspects of the 'Gender, Ethics, and Politics of Violence' course into other classes that they will be teaching in Fall 2018. This allows students to continue to be brought into these conversations, and to build up a sustainable focus on these topics. Additionally, the Minor in Gender Studies program is looking to expand its student body as it moves into its second year.

Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan
July 1, 2018

TEAM MEMBERS



Dr. Elena Kim - PhD, Chair, Assistant Professor of Psychology at American University of Central Asia.

Dr. Elena Molchanova - MD, Associate Professor of Psychology at American University of Central Asia.

Aigerim Bakubatova - Office Assistant, Psychology at American University of Central Asia.

Dr. Frank G. Karioris - Assistant Professor of Sociology and Director of the Center for Critical Gender Studies at the American University of Central Asia.

Mirgul Kuhns - Independent international security and development practitioner based in Washington, DC.

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