Combatting culturally-endorsed sexual violence in Kyrgyzstan through innovative education & technology (2017-2019)

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Initial Project Aim:

- The project goal is to strengthen local capacities in the Kyrgyz Republic to combat gender based violence through innovative university curriculum, ethical and safe research, and effective use of information technologies for awareness raising and multi-sector service provision.
Initial Project Objectives

- Development and testing sexual violence-focused university curriculum integrating innovative teaching approaches, e.g., service learning, system thinking, action-research and critical thinking.

- Building local capacity (academics, scholars, state officials, civil society organizations and university students) to respond to sexual abuse victims through pilot-testing methods of solid and ethical research, victim-focused provision of social and legal support and development/tesing of SOS mobile application.

- Making visible the problem of sexual abuse, especially silenced and socially accepted practices of child marriages and bride kidnapping, through inter-institutional cooperation, academic publications and use of social media.
First Developments

- Founding the Center for Critical Gender Studies at AUCA
- Develop curricular program in Gender Studies – the first of its kind in Central Asia
- Build connections & networks
CENTER’S LECTURE SERIES WITH LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL EXPERTS

Clockwise from top left: Juliet Jacques, Mohira Suyarkulova, Georgy Mamedov, Maryna Shevtsova, and Amir Mukambetov
Mobile Phone Application

- As part of the initial project, we undertook the development of a mobile phone application.
- The early goals for this app were to allow users to utilize an SOS button (a common component of apps around these issues).
- Further, it allowed users to pin on a map where an issue of sexual violence occurred; and then would allow others to see all the pins on a real-time map.
- Additionally, a crucial part was having common-language translations of legal documents outlining basic rights victims had.
Neobis, Hackathon, & App Development

- Entered Hackathon to work on initial development of mobile phone app
- Worked with local group – of AUCA students – Neobis, a development company
- Came in first place in the Hackathon
Working with departments throughout AUCA, the Center for Critical Gender Studies began putting together an academic Minor in Gender Studies.

The program was approved by both the Faculty Senate as well as the University Scientific Committee (Uchonyni Sovet).

As part of this, the team developed a specific course to run in tandem with the research and technology aspects of the project.

Course: ‘Gender, Ethics, and the Politics of Violence’ (Co-taught by Drs Kim, Molchanova, and Karioris)

The first student graduated with a Minor in Gender Studies in Spring 2018.
Gender, Ethics, and the Politics of Violence

- Course has run throughout the entirety of the program
- The goal is to provide in-depth knowledge and build up a cadre of individuals who had not only studied texts but had learned practical elements about how to undertake research on issues of gender and sexual violence.
- In Spring 2019 the course was run between both AUCA and the University of Pittsburgh.
- Students from both universities worked together, concluding in group reports on some of the major issues in sexual violence.
Research Components

- Our research looked not simply at sexual violence as an act in isolation, but address the wider set of actions and practices that both lead to sexual violence and which sexual violence is predicated upon.

- Virginity for sale:
  - *Our first research question to address the issue of virginity is: what is the cost of virginity in Kyrgyzstan? What are both the tangible prices and the price that women pay from psychological perspective?*

- Institutional Violence:
  - Addressing violence in the field of Obstetrics, this project sees this not simply as individual or one-on-one violence, but as part of a broader pattern of violence that is part and parcel of the institution.
Presentations of Research

Peer-reviewed Publications


Public-engagement Publications


- Manual on performing forensic and psychological expertise to minors including victims of violence. Approved by the Ministry of Health of the Kyrgyz Republic in 2019.


- Guidelines on providing psychological counseling to children victims of violence. Clinical guidelines. Approved by the Ministry of Health of the Kyrgyz Republic in 2018


Findings

■ To comprehend gender as a structure, it must be contextualized in deep and imbricated ways with histories & structures – there is no present-tense without the past.

■ Sexual & Gender-based violence must be both theoretically and empirically addressed through and with other forms of violence – including economic, ecological, symbolic, national, and structural

■ Too often, issues of “gender” are pulled apart from the world(s) that constitute them, leaving ‘gender’ still too frequently as an “add gender and stir” style topic – this is not the way forward.
Changes over time

- Our research found that to address the matters we had desired, we needed to simultaneously address the world(s) in which these concerns occurred.

- This meant challenging ourselves - and our research – to not fall into disciplinary offsetting, and instead to integrate our analysis from top-to-bottom in historically nuanced and sociologically critical fashions.

- This took us engaging with a wider readership than anticipated, and in both deepening & focusing our on-the-ground outcomes that we had originally hoped for.
Challenges

- 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.
- The difficulty of working with/through/from/outside institutional and structural modalities of process/practice (ie bureaucracy).
- Working with and building local networks, support, and ensuring the highest level of both engagement as well as communication.
THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME & CONSIDERATION

We look forward to discussing this further and answering any questions you may have.