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[**Bride Kidnapping – A Controversial Tradition in Kyrgyzstan**](http://www.odditycentral.com/news/bride-kidnapping-a-controversial-tradition-in-kyrgyzstan.html)

By Sumitra on December 15th, 2011 Category: [News](http://www.odditycentral.com/category/news), [Travel](http://www.odditycentral.com/category/travel)

Many women dream of being carried away on a white horse, by their knight-in-shining-armor. But what if the so-called knight turned out to be an abductor, forcing a woman to elope with him?

That is exactly the case with **bride kidnappings** that take place in Kyrgzstan, Central Asia. Parodied in the 2006 film Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan, the practice is a harsh reality of the region, more prevalent in Kyrgzstan than Kazakhstan. In the film, Pamela Anderson was kidnapped by the main character for marriage. In real life unfortunately, the stories are never funny. Although precise statistics are unavailable, it is commonly believed that more than half of Kyrgyz wives are married in this manner. It is even seen as a matter of pride, a means for a man to prove his manhood. Often, the families of the groom participate in the abduction, they help in planning the ‘capture’ of their son’s would-be wife. A white scarf is placed, often forcibly, on the woman’s head, signalling her acceptance. Once kidnapped, the bride’s family urge her to accept her situation and her new husband, for fear that she would never find another suitable mate again.

There are several theories pertaining to the reasons for this barbaric practice. In fact, what seems barbaric to the rest of the world, is perceived as a common way of bride-hunting. The practice of bride kidnapping is said to date back to pre-Islamic times, prior to the 12th century. The region was then filled with marauding tribes that stole horses and women from rival tribes whenever supplies ran low. This was common practice back then, and the custom seems to have carried on through the ages. Another reason given for the practice of bride snatching by Kyrgyz men is that it is easier and cheaper than the ritual of courtship. The standard bride price can be as high as $800 and sometimes, even a cow.

Over the years, the stories of several Kyrgyz women have been reported by the media, highlighting their plight. In some cases, the ending is a happy one. After initial resentment, the women learn to be happy with their new family and husband. In fact, one of the Kyrgyz sayings on marriage, goes, “Every good marriage begins in tears”. But this is not always the case. Sometimes, the abducted women are raped by their captors. Russell Kleinbach, a sociology professor at American University in the capital city Bishkek, talks about the sister of one of his students. Four days after the girl was kidnapped, her body was found lying in a river. The family responsible for her abduction was never charged with murder. Kleinbach says that most people don’t even know that the practice is illegal. It is in fact, very much illegal, and has been so for several years.

A typical kidnapping could happen anywhere, on the streets, at the girl’s university, workplace, or even her home. She is whisked away by a group of men, the groom among them, in a car. Her protests are unheard, and rarely taken seriously, as it is considered the norm for women to scream and resist. Out of sheer desperation, in the middle of being kidnapped, one woman told her captors that she “wasn’t a girl anymore” (implying that she was no longer a virgin). Ainur Tairova was in her 20s at the time. Her lie worked, the captors took her back home. However, life did not get any better for her. Men showed little interest in her, she was mocked at her workplace, and her father was angry at her for having told such a lie. She was eventually kidnapped by another man she was actually in love with, and is now married happily.

It’s no surprise that Kyrgyzstan is a desperately poor country, with the average annual income at $870. It seems highly unlikely that a solution would be found soon for the pressing problem of bride kidnapping, though not for the lack of trying.

*Sources: [MetroWestDailyNews](http://www.metrowestdailynews.com/opinion/x1481466576/Brinkley-A-barbaric-custom-in-Kyrgyzstan%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank),*[*NY Times*](http://www.nytimes.com/2005/04/30/international/asia/30brides.html)*, [GlobalPost](http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/asia/100721/bride-kidnapping-kyrgyzstan%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)*