



Georgia - Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 8 June 2009

Bride-kidnapping in Georgia.

In a paragraph headed “Bride-kidnapping” an *Amnesty International* report states:

“The practice of bride-kidnapping continues to be reported. In cases of bride-kidnapping women are often raped and expected to marry the man so as to avoid stigmatization and being ‘dishonoured’. According to information received by Amnesty International, the victims of bride-kidnapping rarely report bride-kidnapping to the police fearing public opinion, and the perpetrators are rarely brought to justice.” (Amnesty International (25 September 2006) *Georgia: Thousands suffering in silence: Violence against women in the family*)

In a section titled “Violence in the family” (paragraph titled “Bride Kidnap”) a *World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)* report states:

“Bride kidnap is a widespread form of marriage in Georgia, mostly in the regions. In most cases this is free but in a case of kidnap it happens against the wish of the woman. It can sometimes be followed by rape, which remains unpunished as any form of marital rape. There is no specific article under the subheading of bride kidnap but such acts practically fall under article 143 of the Criminal Code on illegal deprivation of liberty. Unfortunately the new law did not respond to the need to explicitly forbid or include aggravating circumstances that characterise the practice of marital rape, incest and bride kidnap in Georgian legislation.” (World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) (August 2006) *Violence against Women in Georgia*, p.15)

In a section titled “Child Marriage and Kidnapping” a *UNICEF* report states:

“The occurrence of kidnapping for the purpose of marriage is still a significant protection concern at collective centers. There appear to be two major types of ‘kidnapping’ - girls are either kidnapped against their will or youth plan to elope in order to marry each other against their parents’ will. The second case may be classified as a ‘kidnapping’ in order to release the girl or the family from responsibility. The first case is clearly a violation of girls’ rights. Although this practice is illegal and not condoned by many parts of Georgian society, especially in Tbilisi, it is still occurring in some communities due to strong cultural beliefs and traditions. The psychological trauma of being ‘kidnapped’ for marriage can be very significant for girls depending on the reaction of her family. If the girl returns to the family after having been forced to spend the night out of the home, the girl and her family may be stigmatized by the community, as spending the night out of the house is automatically equated with having had sexual relation regardless of the reality of the situation. Thus, pressure for the girl to stay with

the guy who abducted her may come from her parents, siblings, or the greater community who wish to avoid shame and conflict. In other families, the girl's wishes may be considered and she will be allowed to return home if she does not want to stay with the man." (UNICEF (October 2006) *Rapid Assessment on the Protection and Livelihoods situation of Internally Displaced Children and Youth Living in Collective Centers in the Republic of Georgia*, p.28)

A report from the *Institute for War & Peace Reporting* states:

"Local women's groups say bride theft is a backward, deeply ingrained form of male violence, and they are starting to try to highlight the issue and help protect women from being 'stolen'. Activists in Samtskhe-Javakheti say it is difficult to give any hard statistics on how widespread the custom is, but they believe hundreds of women in this region are forced to marry against their will every year. Women say that very few take their complaints to the police because, once they have been kidnapped, great social stigma attaches to the suspicion of lost virginity." (Institute for War & Peace Reporting (15 June 2006) *Bride Theft Rampant in Southern Georgia* Kokhodze, Gulo and Uchidze, Tamuna)

This report also states:

"Some locals estimate half of all marriages involve the bride being kidnapped. In many cases, the abduction is in fact not real, but part of a pre-arranged courtship tradition. There are also cases where a young couple stage the kidnapping so as to avoid getting parental permission for the marriage. But many of the abductions are all too real, and anything but voluntary. 'In any village, nine out of every ten women will have been abducted,' said a resident of Akhalkalaki, Ofelia Petrosian. 'I have a daughter in eighth grade, and I'm afraid to dress her well, as she will then look pretty and could be abducted.'" (ibid)

In a section titled "Trafficking" (paragraph titled "Russian Peacekeepers Sell the Right of Choice of Georgian Women in the Conflict Zone") a report published by the Georgian NGO *Human Rights Information and Documentation Center* states:

"Young men kidnap women from Zugdidi and Tsalendjikha and cross the border with the help of Russian peacekeepers and hide within the de-facto Republic of Abkhazia with their new wives. Peacekeepers take 300 to 500 Rubles for this 'service', which is equivalent to about 30 to 50 GEL. On the 17th of December 2005, a group of unknown persons kidnapped 22 year-old Nana G. from Zugdidi. They put a bag over her head, bound her, and put her into a car. The kidnapers, together with the victim, reached the block post of Russian soldiers (the 203 Saberio Post). It was this place where the victim was able to run away. Nana G. begged Russian peacekeepers for help, but she only received a 'warm' smile from them. Then she managed to call home. Her family members involved the Gali Police Department in this case. They only found a trace of Nana on the second day. The kidnapers only freed her after Nana's family threatened to sue against them in court. According to the victim, the 'groom' and his relatives tried to persuade her to marry Dato K. for two days. They used everything from psychological pressure to threats. The deputy of Tsalendjikha Police Department Gulordava says that such cases occur quite often: 'It is a pity that we cannot

operate on Abkhaz controlled territory. Our department can do nothing in such cases.' It is worth mentioning that the criminals involved in such cases are often not taken before justice. Moreover, none of these facts were discussed during the traditional Tchuburkhindji meeting, where the Georgian, Abkhazian and Russian sides and representatives of the United Nations participate. Meanwhile, the statistics are becoming more threatening and the number of kidnapped girls taken to Abkhazia reaches 10 to 12 a month. An investigation process has only started on three of the cases." (Human Rights Information and Documentation Center (HRIDC) (January 2006) *Next Stop – Belarus ?* p.74)

References

Amnesty International (25 September 2006) *Georgia: Thousands suffering in silence: Violence against women in the family*
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This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

Sources Consulted

Electronic Immigration Network
European Country of Origin Information Network
Freedom House
Google
Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada
LexisNexis
Refugee Documentation Centre Query Database
UK Home Office
UNHCR Refworld
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