Construction of Girls' Educational Projects in Kyrgyzstan from the Intergenerational Perspective

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Abstract

The present paper considers the main constraints and opportunities in the construction of girls' educational projects in Kyrgyzstan in relation to their subjective well-being from the intergenerational perspective.

Today children have got new educational opportunities brought by various social transformations; at the same time, they come across new challenges which are often related to social inequality and economic problems on the local level. Especially female educational trajectories seem to experience noticeable effects of these transformations.

The author uses the theoretical concept of social capital to observe the role of the family in the construction of girls' educational projects. In addition to this, the applied intergenerational approach allows to observe the changes and continuities in parent-child relations.

The findings show that in Kyrgyzstan “being well-educated” continues to be an essential element, the foundation of girls' educational projects, similar to how it was for girls' mothers in the same age. In the context of a strong hierarchical family structure and low level of state opportunities, today girls tend to rely only on family social and cultural capital for the realisation of educational projects. However, families' actions are often aimed at the future prosperity, neglecting children's interests at the present time. Besides, girls face gender-specific limitations related to the perception of women's roles in the society. The frames within which girls can take decisions regarding educational trajectories are strongly defined by their families. This often leads to the feeling of uncertainty among girls and ambivalence between global promises and the “actual” local opportunity structures.

Keywords Educational projects · Subjective well-being · Social capital · Hierarchical family structure · Intergenerational approach · Gender

1 Introduction

Childhood is the period when people start thinking about critically important choices for their future life (Schoon, 2001). Bühler-Niederberger and König (2011) talk about childhood as “a laboratory in which elements of fantasy, play but also a bland realism concerning social structure and one’s own social position within it are mixed in order to draft possible future selves” (p. 191). The shaping of a self-project may become a limitation for a child, as well as a resource that may lead to the realization of the child’s aspirations into the future profession (Bühler-Niederberger and König, 2011).

Previous empirical research in various countries has proved that belonging to a social class or a certain group of the population significantly influences the formation of children’s educational and career aspirations. Children, whose parents have less resources and opportunities, tend to shape lower ambitions and are less sure about possibilities of upward mobility than children from higher class families (Zipin et al., 2015; Salikutluk, 2016). Besides, children seem to be aware of the class structure and generate their expectations taking this into account (Bühler-Niederberger and König, 2011).

Despite the growing interest to the field, there is still a lack of studies, which consider children’s aspirations in relation to their present well-being. There is a need to explore the interrelation of children’s own preferences and opportunity structures of the given context, and to investigate how children construct their future projects in this particular context (Andresen and Ben-Arieh, 2016). For this purpose, researchers suggest to consider the concept of subjective well-being as “perceptions, evaluations and aspirations of people on their lives” (Dinisman & Ben-Arieh, 2016, p. 556).

The studies, which pay attention to the construction of children’s educational projects, are conducted mostly in Western societies. As for the research on post-Soviet countries, this topic has not received due attention; especially there is such a gap in childhood and youth studies in Central Asia and Kyrgyzstan (Szafranec et al., 2018; Bhat, 2018).

Kyrgyzstan is a small Central Asian country with the population of 6,4 million people; 33,8% of them are children under 15 (Torino Process Report NRF, 2020). In the latest decades, in addition to different transformations caused by the collapse of the Soviet Union, the transition from socialism to the market economy, Kyrgyzstan also experienced a devastating blow of the interethnic conflict in 2010, and two social upheavals in 2005 and 2010. Empirical studies document that all these events affected social and political attitudes in the society, and this led to a high level of uncertainty and instability in all spheres of people’s lives (UNDP, 2013; Kroeger and Anderson, 2014; Orozbekov, 2014; Brück and Esenaliev, 2013; Reiter, 2010). Rare research on children’s life worlds in this region show that adolescents of the 2000s have got new opportunities brought by globalization; at the same time, they come across new challenges which are often related to social inequality and economic difficulties on the local level and affect their subjective well-being (Bühler-Niederberger, 2020, Schwitek, 2017; Kuehnast and Dudwick, 2004).

All the transformations, which happened in Kyrgyzstan in the latest decades, have especially affected female life courses. One of the reasons for this is the increasing role of religion. The growing influence of Islam is vividly manifested at the state and

family levels. In the latest years Kyrgyzstan has observed a rapid growth in the number of religious educational institutions, which today reached the following numbers: 102 madrasahs and 9 religious higher educational institutions (Borombaeva, 2019; Doolotkeldieva, 2020). The views related to the role of women in the society have changed towards more traditional (Joldoshalieva and Shamатов, 2008; Olimova and Tolipov, 2011), especially in rural areas of the country, where girls' future is considered through the lens of "marriageability" (Schröder, 2020, p. 162). In addition, the number of bride kidnapping cases is rising all over the country (Steiner and Becker, 2019; UNFPA, 2016). One-fifth of all marriages in Kyrgyzstan are marriages where a bride is kidnapped and abducted to get married (UNFPA, 2016). All these factors may lead to the disturbance in construction and realisation of girls' educational projects.

The educational sphere has also experienced crucial changes over the last three decades. The transition to free market economy led to the commercialization of educational offers in the country (Brunner and Tillett, 2007). Alongside with newfound educational opportunities, numerous problems are identified in the educational system by the researchers (Abdoubactova, 2020; Steiner-Khamsi & Teleshaliev, 2020). In the latest decades the state educational policy in Kyrgyzstan has experienced modifications based on democratic principles and the transition to a free market economy (Brunner and Tillett, 2007). However, the educational system encounters such challenges as lack of resources for education, teacher shortage, low quality of education, lack of public schools and their poor facilities and never-ending changes in school curricula (Shamatov, 2013). Even though access to general secondary education continues to be high in Kyrgyzstan, its quality is rather low (UNDP, 2013). There is a visible gap between the level of education in rural and urban areas (Tilekeyev et al., 2019). The offers and resources of the state educational system at the present time are quite limited and do not meet people's expectations. Since 1991, during independence period, young people have been deprived of the state support in contrast to their parents and grandparents, who were provided with state social help and protected by welfare policies in their pre-school, school and university years (Kuehnast, 2000; Jones Luong, 2004). In search of higher quality of education, some parents do their best to put their children to private schools (Abdoubactova, 2020). But due to high prices in private educational institutions, this opportunity is not affordable for the majority of the population in the country. The number of higher educational institutions has rapidly increased from nine universities in 1990 to 52 in 2018 (Platonova, 2018). However, as a result of commercialization in the educational sphere, the majority of places in higher educational institutions are fee-based—the share of students who pay for their studies in universities increased from 7,6% in 1993–1994 to 88% in 2005 (Brunner and Tillet, 2007). The overwhelming number of university graduates mismatches the labour market requirements and offers in the country (Tilekeyev et al., 2019; Galeazzi, 2016). The level of unemployment in Kyrgyzstan is high, and 40% of the unemployed are young people of 20–29 years old (National Statistical Committee, 2015). As a result, these local conditions lead to the migration of youth to neighboring countries, where it is easier to find jobs (Brück and Esenaliev, 2013).

In the given paper I make an attempt to answer the following research questions:
What does education mean for today's girls and their mothers?

How does the construction of post-secondary educational projects effect girls' subjective well-being?

What are the main constraints and the main sources of support for girls (from mothers' and their daughters' generations) in the construction of their educational projects?

2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Family Social Capital—Opportunity or Constraint

Family's socio-economic status and parents' educational attainments are considered to be the main determinants of children's educational expectations and outcomes (Behtoui, 2017). However, some researchers argue that social capital can be instrumental in relation to children's academic performance, intellectual development, and realization of educational expectations. They ascertain that in some cases social capital might be even more decisive than family's financial status and parental educational degrees and see it as one of the most essential resources for individual's upward mobility (Coleman, 1988; Roth, 2017; Wells et al., 2011; Shier, Gouthro and Goias, 2018).

In studying adolescents' educational projecting in relation to family resources and family interaction, I apply the concept of social capital suggested by Coleman (1988). He considers social capital to be a crucial resource for an individual: "Just as physical capital and human capital facilitate productive activity, social capital does as well" (Coleman, 1988, p. 101). One of the main impacts of the social capital is the "creation of human capital in the next generation" (Coleman, 1988, p. 109). Through the relations between parents and their children, the latter receive access to the human capital of their parents (or other adult members of the family) upon condition that parents are physically present in the family and show attention towards their children (*ibid.*). As the social capital is an aspect of the social structure, changes in social structures may influence the forms and manifestations of interpersonal relations (Sandefur and Laumann, 1998). According to Coleman (1990), one of the factors which may destruct or devalue social capital is the lack of dependence from each other. For example, a high level of income or state welfare support make people more financially independent, when they do not need help from each other. Coleman made his conclusions on the basis of observations in the societies with political and cultural background which differs from that of Kyrgyzstan.

In the Kyrgyz society, which is considered to be collectivist, a child's agency is restricted by a strong hierarchical structure (age, gender) within the family (Bühler-Niederberger and Schwitek, 2014). Parents expect a full compliance from their children (*ibid.*). And sometimes this might become a strong constraint for children in their attempts to realize certain aspirations. Besides, Kyrgyzstan has experienced structural changes which can be described as opposite to those which are discussed by Coleman. Since independence in 1991 people lost any state financial support and social protection which they used to rely on before and became more dependent on informal networks and family ties (Kuehnast and Dudwick, 2004). Financial insta-

bility and lack of welfare state might lead to the strengthening of ties within family-kinship networks and development of new norms and obligations between parents and children, which in their turn could affect children's well-being and construction of their projects. In the given paper the comparative case analysis of mothers and their daughters shows certain changes as well as continuities in the construction of girl's educational aspirations.

3 Sample and Research Methods

The following discussion is based on the analysis of cases from two generations in Kyrgyzstan: female children who were born in the period from 2002 to 2006, and at the time of data gathering were on their doorstep to postsecondary education; and their mothers who were born in the period of 1970–1984. Both generations were/are experiencing the effects of changing structural context during the period of educational projecting.

The possibility to compare cases from two generations seems to be very advantageous. The two cohorts live under different historical conditions, which make impact on their access to educational and job offers. According to Brannen (2006), this can happen “through the influence of economic cycles and employment rates, systems of social stratification, and welfare provided by the state” (p. 137). The study of female educational projects in two generations in a comparative perspective allows to observe the effects of structural changes, such as disappearance of welfare state, on children's educational expectations and children's place within family.

I employed a semi-structured interview with the elements of narratives as a method to collect relevant data from families in two biggest cities of Kyrgyzstan—Bishkek and Osh.

The discussion in the present paper is based on the data collected from 14 women and their daughters. Nine out of 14 mothers received higher educational degrees and five women received vocational training after secondary school. Three women out of the respondents with higher educational degrees are housewives at the time of interviewing.

For the data gathering process I prepared a specific set of topics which helped me to guide respondents through their narratives. These topics were differentiated according to specific life phases such as childhood, transition to adulthood, adulthood. The main focus of the discussion is made on school life and family life during childhood, relations with parents, aspirations and expectations, periods of making decisions regarding professional trajectories, family formation and parenting. The topics of family formation and parenting were included in the interviews with participants from mothers' generation because Kyrgyzstan is the country where postsecondary education often goes alongside with the transition to marriage and childbearing.

The semi-structured interviews conducted with children are supported by the use of an additional research tool—Vidaview Life Story Board, which was first suggested as a supportive research instrument for qualitative studies by Stewart-Tufescu in the framework of the multinational qualitative study Children's Understanding of Well-being (CUWB) (Stewart-Tufescu et al., 2019).

The given study applied the ethical protocol suggested by ERIC project which insists on parental and children's consent for participation and full confidentiality during data processing and results' presentation (Graham et al., 2013). For confidentiality purpose the respondents' names presented in the given article are changed.

4 Results

4.1 "Being Well-Educated" as a Destination

The comparative analysis of cases from mothers' and daughters' generations indicates that all of them connect their well-being in the future professional and personal life with a high level of education. "Being well-educated" gives them a feeling of security and promises prosperity in the future.

You have to finish school studies well. If you've got a good education you will have a good job, that's it. A good job is equal to enough money to buy everything you want. (Bermet, 15 years old)

My parents always told me that education opens up the world and everything is different if you are educated. In general, I say the same to my daughter. First, it offers a lot of opportunities to get a job; second, for your own self-affirmation eventually. I think this is a foundation. Even overall development is not possible without education, or the quality of life changes. Besides, you should have some kind of certainty for the future, that you will be ok." (Altynai, 46 years old).

But while the mothers' view of "being well-educated" includes both higher education and vocational training, the interpretation of good education by younger generation, daughters, primarily includes a university degree. All 14 girls in from the children's sample declared their desire and intention to continue studies at university.

When I grow up, I also must receive a diploma with honors. I must go to university, find a job. And these test scores may influence all this. That is why I am scared. That is why I do my best and try to study well. (Bermet, 15 years old)

I also want to study at university. I'd like to meet more people, to have close people behind me. (Safia, 16 years old)

Under the influence of the post-Soviet transformational processes and their crucial consequences for the economy of the country, some women from mothers' generation lost their jobs and accepted the roles of housewives. Even though in their stories these women present this change in their biographies as their readiness to sacrifice their career for the benefits of their families, and their personal choice to perform their traditional female roles of wives and mothers, still all of them in the interviews emphasize their educational degrees and achievements. In their answers to the question "What do you do in your life?" they give similar answers with the focus on their higher education degrees and former careers: "At the present time I am a housewife, but actually I am a doctor/teacher/economist, etc." So, the educational degree contin-

ues to play an important role in women's self-affirmation. And this is a message that they give to their daughters when giving advice to receive a higher education.

I want them (daughters) to be happy in family life as well as in their career. If her career is good enough, she won't be lost in the future. Nowadays, a woman has to be independent from her husband—to have a job, a career, so that she could provide for herself. (Begimai, 40 years old)

There were no girls in the children's sample who would speak about the option of becoming a housewife in the future—all of them declare a wish to have jobs and professional careers.

Considering a university degree as a mandatory destination is true not only for those girls who express specific professional aspirations, but also for those who do not manifest any interests or ideas about what they want to do after secondary school. These girls also highlight the necessity to receive a university diploma. But they are not sure or are not able to decide what they want to study at university. The educational projects of those girls who do not have certain professional preferences, are characterized by frustration and a high level of uncertainty regarding upcoming transition to postsecondary education.

I am very concerned. I am afraid, nerves, nerves. One more year is ahead, it is so stressing to understand that I have to go to university. But which one? I do not have any preferences or specific interests [...] But I have to choose something, I consider this as "I have to", but I do not know what. (Olga, 16 years old)

In these cases, when children do not present any professional preferences, we can observe a very poor level of parent-child interaction within the family.

I cannot say that my family (parents and younger sister) is important for me. There are many scandals, quarrels in the family. For example, I cannot imagine sitting and talking to or to sharing my concerns with my mom. So, why should I talk to her about my future? This makes no sense. (Olga, 16 years old)
I tried to discuss this with them (parents). But they also told me not to think about this a lot [...] Still we didn't discuss it a lot. (Veronica, 14 years old)

The findings of the study show that in such controversial situations mothers' generation had an alternative source of support in the form of school teachers who felt responsible to make certain suggestions regarding children's future educational and professional steps.

It happened at school. You know that lecturers and deans of different university faculties came to schools to tell about their specialty. And my school teachers decided for me, then they invited my mother to school, and she agreed. So, I became a student of the grant group in the university. (Aijana, 42 years old)

Another option which was available for mothers' generation during their secondary school years—professional orientation work of schools and the state educational system in general—also helped school children to make their decisions about their postsecondary education and career due to. There were orientation lectures delivered by universities, and professional and vocational orientation courses in secondary schools for senior grades students.

Actually, I wanted to become a doctor. Yes, you know I even attended nursing courses. In the last school year we could choose among some additional courses [...] You know it was like a professional course. In the end we received a certificate. I liked my white medical gown (smiles). There was also a cooking training course. I do not remember what else. I feel so sorry that I didn't go to medical school. (Aisalkyn, 40 years old)

At that time, professional orientation courses did not always guarantee the choice of suggested careers but functioned as a one of informational sources about possible and relevant options.

Today, in contrast to mothers' generation, children do not receive the state professional or educational orientation courses. Family seems to be the main advisor and supporter in the construction of educational and professional aspirations. The lack of such family social capital leads to frustration and uncertainties.

4.2 Extracurricular Activities in Mothers' and Daughters' Generations

Extracurricular activities make up a noticeable part of children's everyday life and seem to determine their future educational and professional trajectories to a large extent. The respondents from both generations devote a lot of time in their interviews to out-of-school courses, clubs and hobbies (sports, art, music, dancing, foreign languages, etc.).

In the latest three decades new innovative types of extracurricular activities were introduced to young people. Sports, art and music classes continue to attract children's and parents' attention; but in addition to this, modern self-development courses such as critical thinking classes, debates clubs, programming courses, etc., have become an essential part of children's lives. However, many of these activities are privately organized fee-based courses, and they are not supported by the state. Even those circles and clubs which are offered within school are commercialized, and parents have to pay if they want their children to attend them.

In mothers' generation attending extracurricular courses and circles was promoted by the state educational system. Most of these activities were free of charge. As they were offered by school or local cultural and educational state institutions, it was taken for granted that children attended them. As the interviews show, sometimes parents and family did not know for sure which extracurricular activities their children attended. Parents often saw these activities as a part of a general educational process.

Today extracurricular courses and clubs are perceived differently: most activities are fully planned and organized by parents and reflect parental expectations regarding educational and professional future of their children. Thus, children's participation in

certain extracurricular activities in most cases is strongly related to the planned fields of study or future careers.

I come home after school, change my clothes, and go directly to the English course [...] Also, mom says it will be especially important for my future [...] for example, I want to go abroad for studies. (Salima, 14 years old)

My mother wants me to become a teacher of English. I attend English classes so that I could go later to the USA, and stay there. (Aigul, 13 years old)

One of the main obstacles for children's independent choice of out-of-school activities is their financial dependence on their parents. As the most extracurricular activities today are provided on a commercial basis, children cannot choose them independently. If children select a hobby and extracurricular activities just for fun, because it is interesting for them, parents may discourage them from attending them if they consider this useless for the future. Such activities can be seen by family as waste of money and time, or even a threat—it takes time from something else what they consider to be more important for their children.

I want to play piano, but parents don't want. They don't want to buy a piano. My mom is afraid that I will become a musician [...] Mother wants me to become an English teacher. (Aigul, 13 years old)

I wanted to attend the musical school. But parents did not have financial opportunities at that time. They told me that dancing is enough. So, parents suggested that I should focus on one thing. But I also want to attend the French course. I want to learn French. I downloaded a mobile application, so I could learn it by myself. And later I will attend French classes when I get enough money. (Veronica, 16 years old)

Not all girls accept parents' refusals and give up the idea about desired hobbies. Some of them try to find some way out, for example Veronica used a free mobile application for learning French. But often children have to agree to parents' decisions.

4.3 Trend Towards Going Abroad for Studies

Families with enough resources gladly invest in extracurricular development of their children. As there is a common trend to select such activities which are considered to be an investment into successful future, foreign languages courses are very popular today. Children and their parents believe that the knowledge of foreign languages is the main tool for reaching global opportunities outside the country. During the independence period due to openness towards foreign countries, young people have got a new global offer—they can travel abroad for studies, receive education in faraway countries, unlike their parents who could do this mostly within the Soviet Union. Ten out of 14 girls declared a desire to go abroad for studies/living. These children consider this to be the solution of many problems they come across in their own country.

There are some organisations in Korea, they choose children for some kind of traineeship which lasts from two to seven years. So, me and my friends, we applied for this program [...] Ok, honestly, I don't want to study in Kyrgyzstan. The quality of studies is not so good here. My older brother and sister, they all chose some other countries for university studies. (Aidana, 12 years old)

Some parents support children's desire to go abroad. They consider this opportunity as an alternative in case of any structural limitations in Kyrgyzstan or believe in higher quality of education abroad and better chances to find well-paid jobs afterwards. These parents try to prepare their children for studies and life in foreign countries. Those who can afford this, send their children to private schools which offer intensive foreign language programs.

Despite this common tendency to postsecondary education in foreign countries, if we consider specifically girls, their desire to realize their educational projects abroad might conflict their parental expectations. As the data show, girls are less likely to be allowed to go abroad for studies, than boys, as for example in the case of Malika, whose mother is strongly against her aspiration to study in the USA.

If we talk about my son, I can let him go abroad. I would like him to study somewhere outside of Kyrgyzstan. But talking about my daughter, no, I can't. I don't want to let her go [...] she is a girl after all. It will be better for her (daughter) to stay close to us, and we'll give her in marriage to somebody. (Jarkyn, 33 years old)

Some parents might agree to consider the possibility of their daughters to study in foreign countries if they can rely on the support of other family members in the country of destination. Availability of social networks, particularly based on kinship, is considered as a safe context for female adolescents. If there is somebody who could provide accommodation for a girl abroad, keep an eye on her and help her, if necessary, then education abroad is planned and prepared by the family beforehand.

I will go to study in Czech Republic. My grandmother's son is there now, but he is of the same age as me—the difference is three-four years. He is studying there, and I will go there, I think. So I do not have to worry, I won't be all alone. (Elina, 15 years old)

In mothers' generation there are also respondents who were not allowed by parents to travel far away for studying. In addition to concerns related to morale and marriage of a girl, the respondents also mention unstable political and economic situation as a reason why their parents did not allow them to leave Kyrgyzstan for post-secondary studies. For example, Altynai talks about the crash of her educational plans which she was constructing with her parents for several years. She planned to continue her education in one of Moscow universities, where her mother had studied. However, when Altynai finished secondary school, her parents did not allow her to travel to Moscow because of political and economic instability at that time. Altynai regrets till today about this missed chance to study in Moscow.

I had a wild desire to go there (to Moscow). So, they (parents) just did not let me go. So, I didn't have a choice, I stayed here. But my dream was of course to continue my studies there. Even now I still feel like I did not finish something important in my life. (Altynai, 46 years old)

4.4 Orientation of Girls Towards "Female" Professions

The findings of the study confirm that in the Kyrgyz society some professions or jobs are considered to be more suitable for boys or for girls. One of the professions which have been always considered to be appropriate for women is a doctor, especially a pediatrician or a gynecologist. Participants from mother's generation when talking about their choice to become a doctor, referred to their relatives and friends' example as the main motivator. Besides, these respondents highlighted the importance of educational achievements for this career, attributing success to high academic performance, hard work and special abilities.

My mother wanted me to become a doctor. So, after the 8th grade I decided to go to medical school [...] First, I wanted to become a gynaecologist. But I failed. It was very hard to enter medical academy at that time. So I entered the nursing school then, and after graduating the nursing school with excellent marks, I tried one more time and was admitted to the sanitary and hygiene faculty of medical school. (Aziza, 43 years old)

This profession seems to be attractive for the respondents from children's generation as well. Despite the high popularity of this profession in the society, there are families who reject this option for their daughters because of a long period of studies. Such families cannot afford to pay for all study years and expect quick after-study rewards. That is why girls might choose a nursing college instead of a higher medical educational institution, and later work as a nurse which is also seen as an acceptable profession for girls in Kyrgyzstan. Another reason for rejecting time investment into medical studies is related to the prioritization of marriage over career. In such cases girls' families are interested in the fast way of receiving education and profession by their daughters and granddaughters so that they would be able to get married sooner.

I wanted to become a doctor. But then I changed my mind. My parents don't want this. To become a doctor—you should spend 11 years. This is not easy at all. (Aigul, 13 years old)

4.5 Bride Kidnapping

Bride kidnapping appears to threaten the girls' educational projects. There are respondents from mothers' generation who refer to this experience in their biographies. However, the findings of the research indicate that today bride kidnapping might play a more decisive role in girls' educational projects than in their mothers' projects.

Today bride kidnapping is perceived by different groups of the population in different ways. Even those women from mothers' generation, who were kidnapped without their agreement and later agreed to stay with the men, declare controversial opinions about this when reflecting on their own biographical experience and on their daughters' plans.

Though some women could not foresee this life event and did not plan it, bride kidnapping for them was a normative transition to family life, and they took it for granted as an inevitable event which is considered to be equal to marriage.

In our culture a girl is kidnapped for marriage. I was kidnapped. I had a boyfriend at that time. We had dated with him for three years already. And then, it just happened, I was kidnapped. And I had to stay. I didn't know my husband before kidnapping. Parents agreed, it was normal. (Begimai, 40 years old)

Other women see bride kidnapping experience as an unpredicted intervening incident in their life course which roughly violated their biographic projects, destroying educational plans for the future and contradicting their perception of a transition to marriage.

Honestly it was not my decision. He kidnapped me, when I was a third-year student. I knew him, it was like we were acquainted. We were not friends [...] They (parents) were against this, of course, but following our customs, I had to stay. A boy was good, and they (parents) allowed me to stay. He strongly wanted to get married [...] I was against. I was a third-year student. And I wanted to finish my studies first, I had some plans for the future. Honestly, I was always against kidnapping [...] It was because of my mother that I stayed there. Yes, it was my mother's decision rather than father's. (Jarkyn, 33 years old)

In relation to their daughters who are on the doorstep to adult life today, some mothers show readiness to accept kidnapping, if they know the man and his family—they would approve kidnapping if the man comes from a good family. But in these mothers' narratives they often do not even consider their daughters' willingness to accept this event.

I don't know. I am thinking about this. It makes me scared [...] We will consider all pros and cons. We will discuss this with elder members of the family. If I see that he is a good boy, comes from a good family, if he is a decent boy [...] He has to convince me, that he will make my daughter happy. In this case I would agree, even if she is kidnapped. (Jarkyn, 33 years old)

Even in those cases when mothers see bride kidnapping as a formal tradition, which means the agreement and arrangements between the parents, this might not always imply the consideration of their daughters' own perception of bride kidnapping.

Those mothers, who recognize negative effects of bride kidnapping and see it as a destroying intervening event in their young years, try to prepare and warn their daughters against the possibility of *ala kachuu*.

I didn't know my husband before kidnapping. That is why I always tell them: if you are kidnapped, first of all call me. I have to know where you are, what happens to you. And under any circumstances, even if the family is good enough and wealthy, I don't know. That is why I tell them, if you get a boyfriend or something, immediately tell me and introduce him to me. Because I have to know, I am very afraid, today you have to be very careful, because girls go out and anything can happen. I am afraid. (Begimai, 40 years old)

So, the results show that the issue of bride kidnapping constitutes an integral part of mother-daughter's communication about plans for the future and causes concerns irrespective of the fact how they perceive it.

5 Discussion

5.1 Family as the Main Source of Support for Girls in Their Educational Achievements

Relationships within family are certainly very important for the individual's subjective well-being (Andresen and Ben-Arieh, 2016; Bradshaw et al., 2013). Besides, child-adult interactions can be a powerful resource for achieving high educational attainments by children (Coleman, 1988).

The empirical data have shown that in Kyrgyzstan family is one of the main or sometimes the only resource of opportunities for children in the construction of their educational projects.

Both mothers and their daughters highlight the importance of "being-well educated", and this is transmitted from parents to children across generations. This finding might be considered as an echo of the socialist ideology which was characterized by the prioritization of cultural capital over material one (Eyal et al., 1998). And in the context, which is full of risks and uncertainties, cultural capital in the form of a high level education continues to be taken by people as the value that no one could take away from them in any situation. The status of a well-educated woman with a university degree, who is able to earn her living, continues to grant the holder emancipation feelings inherited from the Soviet past. For this reason, today parents who value cultural capital in the form of higher education, do their best to realise their daughters' educational projects before their marriage. A poor level of welfare state support for women and children in the country strengthens individuals' concerns about their future and their faith in the role of education and good career. Thus, the analysis have shown that "being well-educated" gives women and their daughters a feeling of security and confidence that they will be able to earn their living in the future if necessary.

Transmitting high educational expectations from mothers to their daughters seems to be related to parents' concerns about their own old age. Bühler-Niederberger (2016) in her study on the life world of Kyrgyz preschoolers suggests that parental ambitious expectations regarding children's university education and successful careers might be caused by children's potential future contribution to the welfare and prosperity

of their immediate families. In the context of risks and uncertainties of today's reality and state social welfare conditions, parents expect their children to be the main resource of their future subsistence, maintaining life-long obligations towards elder parents (Bühler-Niederberger, 2020). The data of my study support this conclusion. The transition to postsecondary education becomes a collaborative project between parents and their children. Children are aware about parental expectations regarding a high level of education, successful careers and the necessity to make a contribution to family prosperity in the future. Sometimes this gives children a feeling of encouragement, however in other cases this leads to children's nervousness and frustration. Parents' high expectations or ambitious plans for their children, for example a university degree, might become a real burden for children. In such cases a child is afraid to let parents down if his/her achievements do not meet these expectations.

On the other hand, a low level of parent-child communication and the lack of any plans or discussions in the family regarding children's educational or professional choices, which was observed in some cases during the study, can also lead to a high level of uncertainty for children. Emphasizing that information is necessary for taking actions, Coleman (1988) refers to this form of social capital as "the potential for information that inheres in social relations" (p.104). The results show that the role of school in planning the transition to postsecondary education and decision making regarding professional choices has decreased compared to the period of mothers' childhood; and there is lack of state informational portals related to professional orientation. In mothers' generation the state was the main provider of educational information and support through professional orientation system and through teachers who used to evaluate children's abilities and give advice. Today children refer exclusively to opinions, knowledge and experience of their parents or other family members. In spite of new global opportunities and internet resources, the family and family networks in Kyrgyzstan often fulfils the function of the main resource for children regarding education and careers. This can be considered as an outcome of transformations in authority relations between family and school. And this might be the reason why children who are excluded from a trustworthy, reliable and sometimes the only available resource for them—family social capital—feel a high level of uncertainty and frustration regarding their transition to postsecondary education and job.

5.2 Family as a Constraint—Geographical and Content-Wise Restrictions for Girls' Educational Projects

In the situation when there is mutual understanding and agreement between parents and children regarding educational and professional projects, family's social capital is an advantage for children. But at the same time family's activities and capital may become a crucial obstacle for some children in the realisation of their aspirations and may negatively affect their present subjective well-being. In case of discrepancies between family and children's plans, high level of social capital within the family seems to become a serious limitation. In such cases social capital performs a different function—as a source of social control (Portes, 1998). This might become a real constraint for girls on their paths to the realization of educational aspirations. If girls construct their educational projects relying on external sources of information which

carry a global message about unlimited opportunities irrespective of gender, they often cannot realize them because they contradict the values of the local context and expectations of the family.

The conditions of the current labour market in Kyrgyzstan lead to the growth of unemployment and external labour migration of youth to other countries (Brück and Esenaliev, 2013; Orozbekov, 2014). There are girls and mothers in the present sample who do not see appropriate educational and career opportunities in Kyrgyzstan and often speak about better education and employment abroad. However, when speaking about their daughters, not all parents support their aspirations to continue postsecondary education abroad despite the girls' aspirations. Parental unwillingness to let their daughters leave Kyrgyzstan might be caused by traditional norms and strengthened by the prioritization of traditional women's roles and normative expectations for girls nowadays—to get married and to take care of children. And education abroad might become an obstacle on the way to family formation. According to Schröder (2020), there is a view in Kyrgyzstan that without appropriate family supervision in a foreign environment, the image of a girl, her innocence and moral purity will be damaged, and this might affect her future chances to get married and form a family. This issue is so topical in Kyrgyzstan that women's ability to travel abroad was discussed even on the state level. In 2013 and in 2018 the Kyrgyz parliament discussed the proposal to prohibit women till the age of 23 and 26 respectively to travel abroad without parental consent. The supporters of a ban expressed their concerns about physical safety of young women abroad and destructive effects of such travel on their moral behavior and declared the necessity to have “a piece of legislation that will protect the national, social and moral security of the Kyrgyz nation” (Kasymova, 2013). The law about the ban has not been enacted, but the topic of young women travel abroad, and how it affects morality of Kyrgyz women continues to be under discussion.

Another constraint for girls' education and career is related to gender-oriented approaches to the choice of professions. In Kyrgyzstan girls' educational and career ambitions are presented on quite equal footing with boys (Chicherina, 2021). All girls who participated in the study declared a wish to study at university and to work according to the acquired profession in the future. And this is not surprising, as women of Central Asia inherited from the Soviet past the expectation of equality at work, full access to education and employment (Jones Luong, 2004). But despite girls' ambitious expectations, not all professions in the Kyrgyz society are considered to be appropriate for women. As the results of the present study showed parents or grandparents often impose gender-oriented normative patterns of professional choices, differentiating between jobs for girls and jobs for boys. And girls tend to accept the suggestions that certain professions are not appropriate for the woman's roles in the society. This finding goes in line with the results of recent studies conducted in Kyrgyzstan which show the growing gendered trends in professional distribution. At present women are mostly involved in educational, health care spheres and in the growing sector of beauty salon services—hairdressing, makeup, etc. (Tilekeyev et al., 2019).

Today one of popular career aspirations among girls and their parents which requires an academic degree is a profession of a doctor. In the local context which is characterized by an overwhelming number of medical educational institutions and

medical students, this finding of the study might be considered as paradoxical. Almost every year new medical schools are established in the country. Without adequate state financing, educational institutions are interested in admitting more students who pay tuition fees (Galeazzi, 2016). And in the end of studies, the number of newly trained doctors is significantly exceeding the demand of the labour market (*ibid.*). Despite this situation, adolescents and their parents believe that the profession of the doctor is a good choice and can guarantee secure income to them in the future.

Such a high level of interest in medical professions was noticed by researchers in some other countries where labour market is not characterised by stability (Cuzzocrea, 2015). Cuzzocrea (2015) names several reasons why becoming a doctor seems to be so attractive among young people in these societies. According to her, this profession gives a feeling of security through a reliable career path which does not depend on labour market changes. In addition to this, for women becoming a doctor implies additional value, such as successful self-construction "...within very gendered family and national contexts" (Cuzzocrea, 2015, p. 196).

High social status of doctors in the society and the desire to help family members are among the main reasons why girls want to become a doctor in Kyrgyzstan. At the present time, when the quality of health care is quite low and not free of charge, it seems to be beneficial for a family to have their own well-educated doctor who can cure the whole family if necessary. A special value of this profession might be also strengthened by personal experience of adolescents' grandparents and parents when admission and studies at medical school were associated with a high level of knowledge and advanced achievements. Besides, a diploma of a medical school can promise high financial rewards in the future on condition of the employment in the private health care sector. Adolescents and their parents are sure that doctors can start their own business, work in private clinics, pharmacies, rehabilitation centres or some other private institutions related to medicine. Thus, the perspective of getting such a noble profession promises benefits in the future and gives the feeling of satisfaction at present for the right and highly valued choice.

5.3 Bride Kidnapping as an Intervening Event

Another finding from the analysis of the mothers' and girls' interviews is the perspective of being kidnapped for marriage.

Different studies on bride kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan focus their attention on *alal kachuu* as the violation of women's human rights and consider its negative social and psychological effects (UNFPA, 2016). There is a discourse on bride kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan as an event which may threaten only girls with a low level of education, coming from poor families in the rural context. But the findings of the present study do not confirm this assumption. Women from mothers' generation who talked about their bride kidnapping experience in the given sample have university degrees and come from families of middle or high socio-economic status.

According to the empirical data, the semantics of bride kidnapping varies in different social groups or sometimes even within one group. Often individuals when referring to bride kidnapping, speak about the so-called "tradition", an intermediate link between a decision to get married and the actual wedding. For them bride kid-

napping is a ritual before the wedding ceremony, and a kidnapper is a potential broom whom the girl dated before. However, in other situations bride kidnapping can be a real abduction of a girl by a man whom she does not know or does not consider to be a husband in her biographical project or does not want to marry. Even when it is done as a traditional performance before the arranged and planned marriage, for a girl it might imply no choice but marriage without her personal agreement. In this case a young woman is denied the right to make decisions regarding such important life course transition as marriage, and this might destroy educational projects of female individuals.

The findings indicate the presence of thoughts and concerns about bride kidnapping among parents of girls when they talk about plans for their children's future. Girls' perspective regarding this question depends on their family background, parental experience and expectations, and many other structural factors outside the family. Irrespective of their own attitude to this question, when constructing their biographic projects, girls in Kyrgyzstan have to keep in mind a hypothetical option of being kidnapped for marriage. This is an essential topic which is discussed by parents and children alongside with educational aspirations. And the decision about staying with or leaving a hypothetical husband is taken by elder family members and not a girl herself. This brings additional risks and uncertainties for female individuals in their transition to adulthood, which can be managed and resolved only through negotiations within the family. And this is what makes the context for girls' educational projects formation very different from that in some other countries.

6 Conclusions

In Kyrgyzstan "being well-educated" continues to be a desired destination in girls' educational projects similar to how it was for their mothers during their adolescence. But in contrast to their mothers, at the present time girls are deprived of state welfare support during secondary and higher education. Taking into account the commercialization of most educational opportunities in the country over the last decades, children have to rely on their parents' support. Risky local context strengthens the dependence of children on their families. Thus, family capital is often considered to be the main and sometimes the only source of opportunities for the construction and realisation of educational aspirations.

At present parents in Kyrgyzstan more actively participate in planning their children's future education and professions than in mothers' generation. Projecting the transition to postsecondary education is often seen as a collaborative project between a child and his/her family.

On the one hand, we see the supportive role that family social capital plays for girls' postsecondary educational plans. On the other hand, social capital may become a constraint for children on their way to a desired educational project. The family efforts are often aimed at the future prosperity of children and at the same time neglecting their interests and preferences at the present time. They are denied for the sake of the successful future of girls according to families' expectations. In the context of a strong hierarchical family structure and low level of state opportunities, chil-

dren often have no other alternatives, but to accept parental suggestions and advice. The frames within which girls can take decisions regarding educational trajectories are defined by family. Those girls, who are deprived of favourite hobbies and have to follow trajectories imposed by parents, feel disempowered and unable to realize their own aspirations. The discrepancy between families' expectations and children's own educational projects may lead to a high level of uncertainty for them.

The findings of the study show that new opportunities brought by social transformations and globalization, alongside with risks related to no welfare state and existing inequality, push children to perceive their lives as lives characterized by insecurities. Children tend to rely only on family resources—social and cultural capital. Offered opportunities outside the family are perceived as unclear and often shifted to foreign countries. And in their paths to these opportunities girls face gender-specific limitations related to the perception of women's roles in the society, when modernization encounters restrictions imposed by strong hierarchical family structure. In this contradictory context girls tend to declare educational aspirations, which are based more on families' expectations, rather than girls' personal interests or preferences.

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Declarations

Conflict of Interest The author has no conflicts of interest to declare.

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