



“Left without saying goodbye”

Lived experiences of wives of missing people due to interethnic conflicts in the South of Kyrgyzstan in 2010

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June 2017



Abstract

Title: “Left without saying goodbye”: Lived experiences of wives of missing people due to interethnic conflicts in the South of Kyrgyzstan in 2010

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Key words: ambiguous loss, grief, families of missing people, coping mechanisms, disappeared people

There are a lot of cases when people disappear against their will, while other might decide to disappear intentionally, in order to protect themselves from violence. The reason of disappearance could be wars, conflicts or any natural disasters. The families, friends who stay behind not always have an opportunity to say goodbye to those who went missing. One of the examples is interethnic conflict in the South of Kyrgyzstan, when there were people who went missing unintentionally. The families who left behind do not know any information about their loved ones either what happened to them or whether they are alive or not. This confusion about the fate of the loved ones leads to issues with identity, roles and responsibilities in the families. Moreover, for all the families it could be a very stressful situation which forces the wives to learn to cope with their ambiguity. Unfortunately, there are only few researches have been conducted in the Asian context and majority of the works are done in the western countries.

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of wives of missing people in the “peace-building” apartment buildings. The main objectives of the research was to identify the coping mechanisms of wives with their ambiguous loss and self-perception of wives about their status as “widows” or “wives of missing people”. Moreover, to contribute to the studies about the ambiguous loss.

The research was based on 5 semi-structured interviews with wives of missing people due to interethnic conflicts in the South of Kyrgyzstan in 2010, 1 focus group interview the same group and 3 additional interviews with representatives of passport agency, psychologist and clergy. The key informants were added after the focus group discussion, in order to get more information on what the wives of missing people mentioned. The findings were analyzed by using Thematic analysis.

The findings show that when the husbands went missing, the wives gained new responsibilities and seen as both “mothers and fathers” and became breadwinners of the families. Moreover, the religion and state contradict each other in recognizing a wife of a missing person. For example, it was found that religion perceives the wives of missing people as the wives who have to wait for 30 years as “waiting wives”, while the state recognizes them only as “widows”. In respect to coping mechanisms, the wives use social support as the coping mechanisms, which was very common. In addition, there were 2 more coping mechanisms that were recognized as avoidance and praying.

Acknowledgment

First, I would like to express my deep gratitude to my supervisor Professor Kathrine Skoland. Her enthusiasm, great supervision, advice and guidance, support and her constant encouragement made this research possible and at the same time pleasurable.

Also, I would like to thank the families of missing people due to inter-ethnic conflicts for their time to participate in this research, sharing their stories even it was not easy and hospitality at their houses in Osh city. Without their willingness to answer to all questions and participate in this research, this project would not be done.

I am grateful for the MFamily Program and European Commission of Education for giving me such a great opportunity to study at 3 universities, acquire Social Work discipline from different perspectives and do observational internships.

Also, I am very thankful for my MFamily 5th cohort. During these two years we became a Family. We moved from one country to another, we learnt so many things from each other, we supported each other when we cried and laughed. Even though we had ups and downs, we were all together. I will miss this wonderful group of 17 people.

I owe special thanks to my family – Dad, Mom and Sister for their support, motivation, love and patience. Thanks for always cheering me up and believing in me.

I would like also to thank my former supervisor, friends and mentors – Jana and Zack for their support and motivation through my Master's Program.

Special thanks go to Amos, Isaac and Zhyldyz for your support, patience, reading and commenting on the research.

I would like to thank all my friends from all over the world for sending me positive vibes and supporting during my thesis writing.

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Abbreviations

ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
KG	Kyrgyzstan
NSD	Norwegian Center for Research Data
NYC	New York city
US	United States of America

Definition of the terms

Disappeared person is referred to a person who is physically absent. The person can disappear forced and voluntarily (Kiepal et al., 2012). In this research, the missing people experienced forced disappearance which includes abduction and violent crime.

Families of missing people is referred to the families whose loved ones went missing due to inter-ethnic conflict who do not know anything about what happened to their loved ones.

Ambiguity is referred to “events or situations that remain unclear, facts about the status of a family member remains unclear” (Boss, 2006)

Ambiguous Loss is referred to “a unique suffering of living in uncertainty” which does not have any closure (Boss, 2006). Ambiguous loss was developed as a phenomenon and theory by Paulina Boss in early 1970s, when she worked with the families of missing pilots in Vietnam War. Boss (2006) differentiated 2 types of ambiguous loss as when a person is physically absent but psychologically present and the second type describes when the person is physically present but psychologically absent.

- **Physical absence with psychological presence** – it is the case when the people go missing and the families do not have any proof if a person is alive or dead. This type of loss is applied in the cases of wars, conflicts and natural disasters. The missing person might be physically be gone but the family will keep him or her psychologically (Boss, 2006).
- **Physical presence with psychological absence** – this type of loss is referred to the cases when the person is not in the family cognitively. This type of loss it applied to the cases when the person has dementia, AIDS, depression, autism or Alzheimer disorder (Boss, 2006).

Coping is referred as “as an individual’s attempts to use cognitive and behavioral strategies to manage and regulate pressures, demands and emotions in response to stress” (Undheim & Sund, 2016)

Stigma is defined by using the Merriam-webster dictionary as “a mark of shame and discredit”

1 Chapter 1: Introduction

This research focused on lived experiences of wives of missing people due to inter-ethnic conflicts in Osh city, the South of Kyrgyzstan in 2010. Moreover, the researcher will identify the coping mechanisms with ambiguous loss of wives of missing people while living in the “peace-building” apartments. Furthermore, the study will explore the perception of wives about their status as “widows” or “wives of missing people”. The Ambiguous Loss theory will be applied which was developed by Paulina Boss. Boss (1999;2008) theorized Ambiguous Loss as “uncertainty or a lack of information about whereabouts or status of a loved one as absent or present, as dead or alive, is traumatizing for most individuals, couples, families”. The Ambiguous Loss theory has 6 models as a guideline for practitioners to work with families. The models were applied in research in different settings and countries. One of the researches were conducted in the non-western context as previous researches were focused on western culture. Robins (2010) applied the Ambiguous Loss theory in his ethnographic research in order to understand how the ambiguity can influence on the lives of families in Nepal who had missing people due to Maoist regime and compared with the Ambiguous Loss theory. When the families experience at the same time both ambiguity and loss, the families’ coping mechanisms and grieving processes could be disturbed (Boss, 2006).

Due to time limits, the study explored the coping mechanisms and self-perception of wives of missing people due to inter-ethnic conflicts in Kyrgyzstan. The 3 models of the theory out of 6 of Ambiguous Loss were applied in the context of Kyrgyzstan. In order to give a clear picture of what had happened in Kyrgyzstan in 2010 and why people disappeared, I will begin with background of the study. This will be followed by the statement of the problem, the significance and purpose of the study along with the research questions. The conclusion of this chapter will provide information about the structure of the remained parts of the thesis.

1.1 The case of Kyrgyzstan

There are a lot of people around the world are missing due to conflicts, wars, natural disasters. The International Committee of the Red Cross is one of the humanitarian organizations that works on the cases of missing people (ICRC, 2017). There are huge numbers of people who are considered to be missing and the ICRC reported cases of missing people in Lebanon, Nepal, Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine, Tajikistan, Georgia, Afghanistan, Uganda and the list of countries can go on (ICRC, 2017). For example, Nepal was suffering from Maoist regime in 1996 which led to more than 100 000 people missing (Robins, 2010). Or another case is from Tajikistan, due to Civil War in 1992-1997 more than 140 000 were considered as missing.

Kyrgyzstan is an independent country located in Central Asia. Back in the history, Kyrgyzstan was among 15 countries as a part of Soviet Union. During Soviet time, Kyrgyzstan was one of the diverse countries where people of different ethnicities lived in peace. Data census for the period between 1989 and 1999 showed that more than 90 ethnicities were living in Kyrgyzstan (National Statistical Committee 1999; cited in Cai Wilkinson, 2015). This research will focus on Osh city which is the second largest city. Osh was considered to be “an important regional trade center” in the South of Kyrgyzstan on the borders with Uzbekistan on Fergana Valley (Khamidov, Megoran & Heathershaw, 2017). Fergana Valley is shared by 3 countries: Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan (Ismailbekova, 2013).

Nowadays, according to National Statistical Committee in Kyrgyzstan, one of the largest ethnic groups is Uzbeks among ethnic representatives (NSC, 2018). However, during Soviet time, the common language was Russian, and ethnicity was considered as the cultural phenomenon (Hirsch, 2005 cited in Ismailbekova, 2013). In addition, before Soviet time, people were not

differentiating themselves as Uzbeks or Kyrgyz in Fergana Valley, people were more divided into tribes, town or mahalla (neighborhoods) but not by nationality or ethnicity (Hirsch, 2005; Tishkov 1997; cited in Ismailbekova, 2013). Moreover, two ethnic groups had been living in peace for a long time in Fergana Valley (Ismailbekova, 2013). Most of the neighborhoods of Osh city were ethnically mixed and intermarriages were happening (Human Rights Watch, 2011).

When the Soviet Union was collapsed, Uzbeks led trading and Kyrgyz were involved in administration of the city (Khamidov, Megoran & Heathershaw, 2017). Megoran (2013) mentioned that Kyrgyzstan was considered as a common home for all ethnic groups. Both ethnicities had “bonds in culture, kinship and religion” (Megoran, 2013). According to Megoran (2013), all people regardless of their ethnicity and status were eligible for support and protection. The first tensions between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz started in 1990s during political and economic instability (Liu, 2012; Tishkov, 1995; cited in Ismailbekova, 2013) In June 2010, the South of Kyrgyzstan, Osh city faced another wave of inter-ethnic conflict between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks. The interethnic conflict in 2010 was perceived as the repetition of the conflict between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in 1990 (Tishkov, 1995 cited in Ismailbekova, 2013).

This interethnic conflict was considered to be the most “bloodiest episode in the contemporary national history of Kyrgyzstan” (Isakova, 2013). According to Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission (2011), there were more than 400 people killed, 2000 buildings were burn, destroyed. Moreover, around 111000 people had fled to Uzbekistan (Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission 2011, cited in Megoran, 2013). In 2015, ICRC in KG presented that there are still 19 people are missing due to conflict in 2010. However, other news gives different numbers, in 2018 on Remembrance Day, the Kyrgyzstani news reported about 129 people to be missing due to inter-ethnic events (Azattyk news, 2018). Most of the families found their loved ones through DNA test and identified them. There are cases of missing people in both Kyrgyz and Uzbek communities (Azattyk news, 2018). Right after the conflict the government focused on distribution of financial support to families. Isakova (2013) mentioned that the government gave financial support to the victims of June events based on what kind of damages the families had, if the family lost a family member, they were getting 1 million KGS (Isakova, 2013) (approximately USD 15 000). Moreover, the State Commission built new apartments for the families who lost their close relatives. The State Commission was distributed the apartments to people if the families lost someone during the interethnic conflicts in 2010. The main goal of the Commission was to put all people who suffered and lost a family member due to 2010 inter-ethnic conflict in the same building together (Isakova, 2013). Those apartments were called “peace enterprising” and most of Uzbek families left those places and rented it out to other people (Isakova, 2013).

1.2 Statement of the problem

In 1970s Paulina Boss did her research about the families of the US soldiers who disappeared during Vietnam War and in actions in Laos (Boss, 2006). The researches indicated that people who face ambiguous loss can have difficulties in coping and grieving (Boss, 2006). Moreover, the previous researchers pointed that the families who left behind could experience confusion, depression and other somatic disorders (Robins, 2010). In addition, the research in Nepal found that it is difficult for the neighbors as well as they do not know how to react or what to do when there are missing neighbors (Robins, 2010). Furthermore, another challenge for the families is absence of the special rituals for people who went missing in any culture. It was concluded after the work with families with diverse backgrounds who had missing people after 9/11 attack (Boss et al., 2003). However, in some cultures, the church allowed the families to conduct small rituals and funerals after 9/11 attack in NY for the missing people.

In Kyrgyzstan, wives of missing people live in the same “peace-building” apartment buildings. They live with other families who lost their relatives or have missing as well due to interethnic conflicts in 2010. Having a missing could also influence on coping strategies and the self – perception of the wives. Living at the same building could be seen both advantages and disadvantages. Boss (2006) described the cases of 9/11 attack, Oklahoma City bombing and South Asian tsunami where the community helped to families to heal. However, more researches are needed in order to identify how community and values help to people to overcome it (Boss, 2006).

Unfortunately, there is no research about missing people and their families in Kyrgyzstan. During our history classes at school, we used to learn a lot about World War II and the consequences were a lot of cases of missing people due to the war as well. Or there were writers such as Chingiz Aitmatov who also described in his books about the families who lost their loved ones in the war. Some of their bodies were brought back home and buried in Kyrgyzstan and some others were missing but registered as dead.

In 2010 when there were so many cases of missing people, Kyrgyzstan did not know how to handle it. Moreover, there was no any research in Kyrgyzstan about the ambiguous loss and its impact on families and coping mechanisms of families. It would be interesting to research how people cope in Kyrgyzstan and compare it with other countries and analyze the self-perception of women about their status as “widows” or “wives of missing people”.

1.3 Purpose

The purpose of the study is to explore the lived experiences of the wives of missing people in the “peace-building” apartment buildings. The first objective of the study is to identify the coping mechanisms with ambiguous loss of the wives of missing people in the “peace-building” apartment buildings. Secondly, the research is focusing on self-perception of the wives’ status as “widows” or “wives of missing people”. Finally, the overall aim is to make contribution to the studies about ambiguous loss and to make the recommendations, implications for the future researchers and practitioners.

1.4 Significance of the study

Most of the time, people go missing unexpectedly that families were not ready and did not have any chance to say goodbye (Parkes & Prigerson, 2010; Parkes & Weiss, 1983 cited in Kajtazi-Testa & Hewe, 2018). When the families experience unexpectedness and the physical loss of a person with absent body, it is a trauma for the families (Kajtazi-test & Hewe, 2018). Moreover, when the families have ambiguity about their loss, “the cognition of families is blocked” (Boss, 2006).

In addition, there could be other consequences of leaving alone the families with their ambiguous loss that can influence on the relationship of the family members (Boss, 2006). For example, Hollander (2016) discussed that the fathers of missing children in North Uganda were blamed by wives for not being able to protect their children who went missing. Boss (2006) also mentioned that the family members start blaming themselves. That is why, is it very important for the families of missing people to be heard, supported by the family, neighbors, community, so they will be able to cope and learn to live with their ambiguity (Boss, 2006). In addition, there is a crucial need of professionals, researchers and researches on the issues of ambiguous loss and families, in order to help those families and communities to be resilient.

The significance of the research is essential, as it might contribute to the studies about ambiguous loss from Central Asian context, as it was recommended by the previous researchers. For example, Robins (2010) and Boss (2006; 2008) mentioned the importance of future researches in different cultural context which would contribute to the studies about ambiguous loss. Moreover, Boss mentioned that Ambiguous loss theory also needs additional qualitative researches in order to see how applicable it is in other parts of the world (Boss, 2008). According to Robins and literature review, most of the studies have been done in western context (2010).

In addition, the families of missing people have never been studied in Kyrgyzstan. Based on the results of the research about the lived experiences of wives of missing people with focus on coping mechanisms and self-perception, the practitioners in Kyrgyzstan could be able to understand the impact of the ambiguous loss on the lives of families. Moreover, the research will give the picture of confusion about identities and the attitude of the society about the wives of missing people. This research about the wives of missing people and their ambiguous loss might be a new area to continue to research in Kyrgyzstan. Moreover, there could be interest of researchers in Kyrgyzstan to look at ambiguous loss of families who have psychologically absent but physically presents family members.

As Kyrgyzstan is mountains country, there have been cases when people were missing because of landslides or floods. Also, as there are more and more people are migrating to Russia and Kazakhstan for labor, there are cases of missing people as well, but those families are not eligible for anything and they are not recognized as the families of missing people. I believe that both psychologists and social workers might be interested in the topic about ambiguous loss psychologically and physically and the attitude of the community could be changed as well through the community works.

1.5 Research questions

The following research questions are addressed in order to explore the lived experiences of wives of missing people in the “peace-building” apartment buildings:

1. How does Ambiguous Loss influence on self-perception of wives of missing people about their status as “widows” or “wives of missing people”?
2. What are the coping mechanisms with ambiguous loss of wives of missing people in the “peace-building” apartment buildings?

1.6 Dissertation structure

This research is divided into 7 chapters. The first chapter includes the brief history about Kyrgyzstan, background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, significance of the study, definition of the terms and research questions. The second chapter focused on literature review on ambiguous loss, coping mechanisms of families with two types of ambiguous loss which presented the significance of the research, work experiences of practitioners in the western countries. The third chapter presented the Ambiguous Loss theory and the models. The fourth chapter described the design of the study, paradigm, sampling procedures and selecting participants, instrumentation, data collection procedures, data analysis, data management, ethical considerations, delimitations, limitations. The fifth chapter presented the emerged themes, discussed the findings of the research and analyzed. The sixth chapter discussed the findings by applying the theory. The seventh chapter included conclusion of the research, the recommendations and implications for the future studies. In the appendices, the interview guides and example of informed consent were included.

2 Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 Introduction

According to ICRC (2015) in Kyrgyzstan, there are 19 families whose loved ones went missing due to interethnic conflicts in the South of Kyrgyzstan in 2010. Due to time limits, the research focused on the group of wives of missing people who live in the “peace-building” apartment buildings in Osh city and did not include other family members. Specifically, the research focused on how the wives of missing people cope with their ambiguous loss and the self-perception of wives.

As “ambiguous loss” was introduced by Paulina Boss in 1970s, there are still need for further researches in order to contribute to the studies about ambiguous loss, especially in different cultural settings (Boss, 1999,2006,2008). So, this research also aims to contribute to the studies about ambiguous loss studies from Central Asian context.

This review chapter will focus on previous researches in order to give a background of ambiguous loss and an understanding about what have been done already in other countries. This chapter will describe the ambiguous loss and types, how ambiguity influenced on the lives of families, identity challenges of families who left behind, how people cope with ambiguous loss, describes the role of community and the family, or if any rituals have been done by the families of missing people in other countries and what the closure means for the families.

“There, but not there” Boss (2006)

When we hear about the people who went missing, the first thoughts that come to our mind: abducted or kidnapped. People seemed as they were there, but at the same time not there. People go missing because of different circumstances in different parts of the world. It could be because of natural disasters, wars, conflicts, migration or displacement or attacks and accidents (Boss, 2006). If we list the countries where people went missing, it could be endless. For example, while exploring the website of Humanitarian Organization such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, which works with the families of missing people and on the cases of missing people itself worldwide. The online map of the ICRC show that, they have been working in Nepal, Kyrgyzstan, Georgia, Lebanon, North Uganda, Ukraine, Afghanistan, Mexico, Kosovo, Cyprus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Tajikistan and many more countries.

When people disappear, they might be differentiated as intentional and unintentional. Unintentional cases of disappearance could happen as forced abduction or kidnapping during wars and conflicts (Kiepal et al., 2012). Moreover, the people could be buried in massive graves later. The intentional disappearance could be organized by the missing person itself in case of In both cases of intentional and unintentional disappearance, the family members who left behind might experience ambiguous loss which is considered to be the most stressful loss (ICRC, 2017). In addition, ambiguous loss might include cases of divorce, miscarriage, chronic illness or mental illness as well (Boss, 1999; Knauer, 2002; Rycroft & Perlesz, 2001 cited in Betz &Thorngren, 2006).

When people have loss and grief, it could be associated with death (Martin et al., 2000). There are 2 types of loss: the first is ambiguous loss (Boss, 2006); the second is clear physical loss when the person is not there anymore (Martin et al., 2000). This research focused on ambiguous

loss which was developed by Paulina Boss in the beginning of 1970s based on her practice and research about the families of pilots who went missing during the war in Vietnam (1999; 2006). During her practices, Boss differentiated 2 types of ambiguous loss. The first type is the person physically gone but psychologically presents, while another type is a person physically presents but psychologically is absent (Boss, 2006).

2.2 Confusion

Very often the families are confused with the next steps, when the person is physically absent as they do not know whether they need to “keep the door open” or not (Boss, 2006). Moreover, when the families have psychologically absent person, they also experience confusion, whether they are still exist or not (Dupuis, 2002). When a loved one is missing, the families live with “uncertainty” about the fate of the disappeared person (Boss, 2006). Families always try to find answers to the questions “What had happened or where are their loved ones?”, regardless it is physical or psychological disappearance (Boss, 2006). Boss (2006) explained that one of the reasons that the people look for answers is to be able to “detach” from the person who is ambiguously lost.

Boss (2006) mentioned that, despite the culture and religion, when people lose their loved ones, people experience the same trauma and resilience, when they lose their family members. In addition, people might feel hopelessness (Boss, 2006). Moreover, during the work experience with diverse population with different cultural and ethnic background after 9/11, Boss and her colleagues identified that ambiguous loss can distress anyone (Boss et al, 2003; Boss, 2006; cited in Robins, 2010, pg.255).

2.3 Closure, recovery and impatience

Some of the researchers mentioned that the families of missing people might face the challenges when it comes to religious rituals and ceremonies (Boss, 2006). Challenges could be cognitive, emotional, behavioral or physical (Boss, 1999; Weiner, 1999 cited in Betz & Thornberg, 2006). For example, emotionally challenged families might experience anger or apathy, while cognitively challenged people might go through forgetfulness (Weiner, 1999 cited in Betz & Thornberg, 2006). Moreover, physically challenged families might face headaches or fatigue and behaviorally, people might cry or vice versa be talkative (Weiner, 1999 cited in Betz & Thornberg, 2006). Boss (2006) believed that the families do not have closure because the body was not buried as a proof of death and the families always think about their missing person. In addition, when there is no proof of death, there could be challenges with coping mechanisms and grieving processes as they might be “frozen” during this period (Boss, 2006).

Unfortunately, when people face ambiguous loss, it is difficult to recover and continue their life. However, the families can learn how to live and balance their life with ambiguous loss (Boss, 2006). Some people might interpret their ambiguous loss experience as God’s punishment or another way of showing the love to them (Boss, 2006).

Some other challenges of the families are the expectations of others “to move on with their lives after a loss” (Betz & Thornberg, 2006). However, for the families of the missing person, it is difficult to continue their lives as they do not know how to “deal effectively” with the situation (Boss, 1999 cited in Betz & Thorngren, 2006). Another challenge is created by the professionals’ “impatience” toward the families, even though it is the time when the families have to be listened carefully (Boss, 2004). Not only the families of missing people face challenges, but also the professionals who work with the families of missing people. The

professionals might think that it is their failure, when the families cannot find the closure (Boss, 2004).

2.4 Lack of rituals

Every culture has own rituals dedicated to a person who passed away as a way of proof of death and saying goodbyes. Boss and her colleagues from Minnesota University and New York City after 9/11 attack, they described the spiritual and religious challenges of the families of missing people. The absent body of a person created difficulties with grieving processes (Kajtazi-Testa & Hewer, 2018). Moreover, the families who had missing family members were not able to conduct any rituals (Betz & Thorngren, 2006; Boss 2002; cited in Kajtazi-Testa & Hewer, 2018 pg 335). The researcher mentioned that if there were some rituals, it could help the families to go through the grieving processes, otherwise it was blocked (pg.335). Unfortunately, there is no specific ritual or mourning ceremony when the person goes missing physically, so the researchers pointed that across cultures it can influence psychologically and emotionally to the well-being of left behinds (Blaauw & Lahteenmaki, 2002 cited in Robins 2010, pg 254).

Luster et al, (2009) discussed the case of children who lost their parents, where the children found comfort through the funerals and memorial services. For example, in NYC after 9/11 attack, some families did not have a body of a person, so the church allowed to bury things that could represent their loved ones (Boss et al., 2003). Sadly, the researches show that the families of missing people experience grieving process twice: first, when the person went missing and the second time, when there is no proof of death (Edkins, 2011; cited in Kajtazi-Testa & Hewer, 2018). Consequently, the families might feel insecure about their future life with ambiguous loss (Betz & Thornberg, 2006). Regrettably, many people do not understand the “unclear loss or uncertainty” (Rycroft & Perlesz, 2001 cited in Betz & Thornberg, 2006), especially when it is not “acknowledged socially” which could lead to refusal of the families to grieve (Werner-Lin & Moro, 2004 cited in Betz & Thornberg, 2006). The grieving processes for women whose husband is ambiguously lost differs from the ones who clearly lost their husbands (Blaauw & Lähteenmäki, 1997 cited in Heeke, 2015). When the people face the ambiguous loss, the grief influences on spirituality of the families. Especially, when the families start looking for meaning in their loss; their spiritual behavior, feelings and beliefs could be changed (Martin et al., 2000 pg. 19).

2.5 Security and fellowship

There are some of the researches that focused on ambiguous loss but the target group and type of ambiguous loss were different. For example, for the last several years, there have been a lot of cases, when people look for asylum and security in different places. When the boys from Sudan had to flee their country because of the Civil War without their parents, friends and relatives, they had to live in the refugee camps in Ethiopia, Kenya or be displaced in the United States (Luster et al., 2009). The boys had ambiguous loss about their loved ones whether they were alive or not back in their home countries and about immigration process in the future (Luster et al., 2009). The research explored their lived experiences in the refugee camps where they created their “alternative family”. The boys described their activities with so called alternative families, where they live, play and go to school together (Luster, 2009).

Additionally, there was another research conducted in Argentina about mothers whose children went missing due to state regime (Edkins, 2011). The mothers were spending a lot of time in offices of different institutions, where they met people with the same issue as missing children (Edkins, 2011). Edkins (2011) mentioned that the mothers thought they were alone facing this tragedy before. However, the mothers started to connect each other with other mothers as well

and meet every Thursday near the Plaza de Mayo. It was a place, where they could share and talk about their missing children and support each other (Edkins, 2011). The mothers of missing people in Argentina were not able to conduct any funerals and the loss was not recognized by the community (pg.159). Moreover, it was the time, when everybody was afraid of the government and its regime (pg.159). The families were left alone to deal with their ambiguous loss (Edkins, 2011).

2.6 Coping mechanisms

Most of the literature mentioned that majority of the missing people are the males due to conflicts and wars. At the end of the 20th century, Kosovo faced massive abduction of men and young boys. A lot of families lost and physically missed their sons, husbands, brothers and uncles. In 2012, Kajtazi-Testa and Hwer conducted a research about the mothers of missing people. In their research, it was found that the mothers feel distress even though some of the remains were found (pg. 333). However, the families felt that it was ambiguous as they did not know who killed their husbands, sons or brothers or fathers. According to the research about ambiguous loss in Kosovo, the researcher mentioned that the graves helped mothers “to reconnect with their sons” and calm themselves (pg.341).

When the families have the missing person and experience ambiguous loss, it negatively influences on the families’ life even though, the “family is healthy and strong” (Boss et al, 2003). In order to resist the stressful events, the families develop own coping mechanisms. The researchers identified coping mechanisms of the families who have psychologically missing people, their mechanism was hope which accepted as the tool (Duggleby et al., 2009 cited in Wayland et al., 2016). The children whose parents have dementia, they coped through acceptance of the situation that “ psychologically, they are no longer exist in their lives” (Dupuis, 2002 pg.107). Moreover, there were cases when the children coped with dementia of their parents through avoidance (pg.108). Children who used avoidance as coping mechanism, they experienced more “pain and emotional distress” in comparison to those who accepted the situation (Dupuis, 2002 pg.108). The main goal of coping mechanisms of the children of parents with dementia was to continue to live and move forward (Dupuis, 2002). There was also a research Vargas about the Latina teens who were experiencing ambiguous loss when they were migrating. Vargas (2008) identified media practices as the coping mechanism of Latino teens and if the coping was successful, it might help teens to gain resilience.

There are many rituals to help the families to cope with death of a loved one through funerals and other rituals, but when it comes to ambiguous loss, there is a lack of rituals or no rituals (Boss 1999 cited in Vargas, 2008). Falicov (2001, 2002) proposed that the rituals help the families to cope and adjust to the new environment (cited in Vargas, 2008). When the immigrant families moved to a new place, they also go through ambiguous loss and created their own coping mechanisms. One of the examples of coping mechanisms was “spontaneous rituals” as the families were telling their own stories and shared information about their home countries (Vargas, 2008). Robins (2010) found out that another effective coping mechanism of families in Nepal was “political engagement” which helped them to meet other families with the identical beliefs. In the research in UK the families of missing people described their coping mechanisms with their ambiguous loss. Some families were coping through telling the stories of their missing family members to other people, while other families were afraid of how people would react to their stories about the missing (Holmes, 2008). Moreover, not everyone copes in the same way because some people might experience severe distress, while others can deal with it faster (Bonanno, 2008). In addition, for some families coping with loss could be through the contact with other family members, neighbors or friends (Luster et al, 2009). In some cases, the story telling tool was used for healing (Boss, 2004 pg 558).

2.7 Portrait of a woman and research outside of western context

Robins (2010) pointed out that most of the researches were done in western context and the literature revealed that there are some studies in African context as well. Moreover, Holmes (2008) mentioned also that even though there are a lot of people go missing, there is not much known about the families and their experience with ambiguous loss in UK. Robins (2010) was the only researcher exploring ambiguous loss of the families due to Maoist regime in Asian context in Nepal. He did an ethnographic research in Nepal and compared the results and applied the Ambiguous loss theory in order to test how applicable it was in Asian culture.

In many Asian countries the families stay together with in-laws which has both positive and negative sides. For example, one of the positive things could be the family's support to the wives of missing people or the opposite it could stress and pressure (Robins, 2010). According to Robins (2010), women in Nepal, they depend on their husbands because of their position in the family and the husbands are the breadwinners. When the nepali women have missing husbands, they might face quite many issues in the family and community. Heeke et al., (2015) mentioned that when the families have a missing person in the family who was sustaining the family financially, the family might have difficulties. During the research, Robins (2010) identified that Nepali families have 2 needs such as the truth about what happened to a missing person and economic support. Most of the missing people were the breadwinners in their families, so one of the organizations stated that if the families meet the basic needs, they will be living better even if they have missing husbands (Robins, 2010) because most of the wives of missing people were dependent on their husbands. Also, when the husbands went missing, there was another confusion such as "what is the relationship with in-laws?" in the nepali families (Robins, 2010 pg 263). During this period, the wives and other family members reconstruct their relationships, daily routines, celebrations and identities. According to Robins (2010), the reconstruction of identities of wives of missing people happens usually outside of the house when they meet other wives of missing people by supporting each other and sharing. If the nepali women lost their husbands and do not have any kids, they can leave and remarry to another person. However, the women might be stigmatized for being unfaithful in front of her husband and family (Robins, 2010). The wife of missing husband in this case would be accepted as the person who was looking for an "opportunity to elope with another man" (Robins, 2010 pg.260). In some indigenous groups of Nepal, widow have to be remarried to brothers of dead husband while in Hindu tradition, the widows can not get married again because she will be stigmatized, and it would be shameful for the family (Robins, 2010). However, there were some people who were following the Maoist ideology which allowed the women to remarry without any fear and stigma (Robins, 2010 pg 263). However, Boss (et al., 2003) noticed during the work with the families of missing people due to 9/11 attack that the in-laws in the Western context were supporting their daughters-in-law or older generation were helping younger generation with their ambiguity without any stigmatization (Boss et al., 2003).

There are some challenges that the nepali women can face in the community (Robins, 2010). For example, when the wife of a missing husband wore symbol of a marriage, she was questioned why she was wearing it when her husband was perceived as not "alive", even though he was just missing (wife of missing person, Robins, 2010). Moreover, the wives of missing people were perceived as if they were looking for new husbands (Robins, 2010). In addition to the stigma of wives of missing people, they were judged by the community for not being able to follow the traditions because the husband was perceived as dead (pg.261). Unfortunately, neighbors, people who living next to the families of missing people did not have any understanding what the families had to go through and what kind of issues they had because of missing person, but the neighbors were more busy with stigmatizing the families (Robins, 2010 pg 261).

Another example of women who have missing husband was taken from Kosovo. The women in Kosovo also go through some challenges as well. For example, the research results showed that the married women who have missing husbands in Kosovo, it could influence on the social status of women in their communities and families (Kajtazi-Testa & Hewer, 2018). Moreover, when the wives do not have any prove of death, they cannot grieve as it could be considered as disrespect (pg.335). The wives of missing people were considered as the “widows waiting to happen” (Williams & Crews, 2003 cited in Kajtazi-Testa & Hewer, 2018 pg 335).

When it comes to cultural differences in conducting the rituals, in the USA the clergy and authorities were encouraging the families to choose to conduct the funerals or to wait (Boss, 2004). While in Kosovo context, the families did not conduct any rituals, because the mothers believed that it would be a great disrespect toward their missing sons (Kajtazi-Testa & Hewer 2018 pg 341). Moreover, in Kosovo, the families keep the belongings of the missing people, for example, the mothers kept the cloths and photographs of the missing sons as the “physical representation” (Kajtazi-Testa & Hewer, 2008 pg.340). After abduction in Kosovo, the mothers of missing people accepted that their sons were dead only after having remains (Kajtazi-Testa & Hewer 2018 pg 341). For example, there were an examples when the left behind family members were “happy just to have a part of a person or at least a finger nail” (Boss, 2004 pg.561). There was another case when a family received a heart of a missing person and it was buried in a coffin (pg. 561). Boss (2004) explained it as detachment process when the family conducted the ritual and found something that proves the death of a person.

There is also another important factor which creates the difference between the Western and Asian cultures is individualism vs. collectivism. Robins mentioned that the communities in Asia are more collective, while in the West it is more individualistic (e.g Kagitcibasi, 1980 cited in Robins, 2010). During the group sessions of the families of missing people in NYC 9/11 attack, the support team was asked to organize more collective meetings because of collective background where the immigrant families prefer collectivism over individualism (Boss et al, 2003). When the families meet the people with the same experience as having a missing person in the family, Boss (2004) mentioned that it helps the families “move forward” (558 pg.) In Nepal, “disappearance is constructed socially within family and community” (Robins, 2010), while in the US, people were trying to cope and not to show their emotions (Boss et al., 2013). After the 9/11 attack many families also got support from church, families, communities (Boss, 2004). However, the families of missing people in the US with high income were more isolated because of private houses outside of the cities and they were independent from the community support. While the families who lived in the apartment buildings were getting more support and solidarity from others (Boss, 2004). Boss (2004) mentioned that in the US, the families might face the criticism from community for having long grieving process. It was explained as it is the cultural value “to get over it and move on” (pg.561). Harvey (2002) mentioned that it is the social stereotype when the families are asked “to move on with their life” and to have just some time for grieving (pg.36). For example, there was a case when the mayor of New York city was ready to give “presumed death” certificates, so the families can stop hoping and “begin grieving” (Boss, 2004 pg.259). However, it is very individual and every person decides by themselves (Harvey, 2002).

2.8 Closure or hope

While looking at the cases of families who have ambiguous loss and death of a loved one show that “death is not that painful as having a missing family member” whose destiny is unknown (Harvey, 2002). Sometimes disappearance of the family member might happen unexpectedly (pg.334). According to the researchers, in order to accept the loss, the families have to have

“transitional period” and preparation for goodbyes to the loved ones (Parkers & Prigerson, 2010; Parkes & Wess, 1983 cited in Kajtazi-Testa & Hewer, 2018). Doka and Aber, (1989) researched the families who experienced psychologically missing of a loved one, it indicated that it could influence on emotional well-being of families (Dupuis, 2002). Moreover, the families might experience helplessness and guiltiness for the psychologically missing person (cited in Dupuis, 2002). There is a difference, when the families see the body or remains and conduct rituals because it prepares them to say goodbyes (Boss, 2004). But if they do not see the body, it creates cognitive issues and the families are confused with what happened and where (Boss, 2004). It was found that families of missing people have more mental health issues in comparison to families whose relatives passed away (Quirk & Casco, 1994 cited in Heeke et al., 2015). For example, the research about the wives of missing people and widows whose husbands passed away due to war in Bosnia and Herzegovina showed that the wives with ambiguous loss had higher level of depression and grief (Heeke et al., 2015).

When Boss and her team worked with the families of missing people in 9/11 attack in NYC, they had to work with families of different ethnic groups. They have noticed that there are differences on how people grieve, accept death and ambiguity. For example, the practitioners described European Americans, African Americans and Latinos. The observation showed that European Americans tried to hide their emotions from public and continue their life, while for African Americans and Latinos, death or ambiguous loss was something “intimate and more expressive tradition” (Boss et al., 2003). As the group was diverse, for the immigrant families, religion was very important in coping with their loss. However, the rituals were not available for the families of missing people (Boss et al., 2003). Despite the absence of the rituals, the families created their own ceremonies in order to pray for the victims (Boss et al 2003). Some families felt that they could not say good bye to their loved ones as it supposed to be when the person passed away. Through burring the personal belongingness of missing people, the families of missing people said goodbye without a body as a proof of death (Boss et al., 2003). The reason why it is important to have the body as the proof is that: first, the the families want to conduct rituals and second, they want to be sure that the person is not alive. For example, during the research in Nepal, the participants mentioned that it is very important for the families to find at least remains in order to conduct the ritual of “passing the soul of the dead” through burning the remains (Robins, 2010). Ambiguous loss creates barriers for “grieving, mourning and moving forward” (Boss et al., 2003). That is why, Boss (2004) pointed that rituals without remains help the families to heal and it could be “a permission to begin grieving” without any body proof (pg.259).

In any situation, people have some hope for the best. In case of families of missing people, their hope is that the missing person would be back one day or at least the remains would be found. According to Wayland et al., (2016) hope is considered to be one of the “safety nets ” that helps the families to have positive thoughts. Boss also mentioned that hope is important and the families need it, even they have a missing family member (Boss, 2010 cited in Wayland et al., 2016). For example, if the families have spiritual support, it helps them to have hope, which drives them forward (Boss, 2010 cited in Wayland et al., 2016 pg. 57). However, in order to end the ambiguous loss, the researchers proposed that there is a need for closure (Robins, 2010). Boss argued that “closure is the myth” but through the ambiguous loss models which was proposed by Boss, it helps to families to find the meaning which helps them to continue to live even though there is no information about the missing person (Boss, 2007 cited in Orbins, 2010)

3 Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

Nowadays, there are so many cases of natural disasters such as earthquakes, tsunamis or accidents such as air plane crashes, displacement or conflicts and wars which lead to lost lives and missing people (Boss, 2006). When we hear loss, we understand it as someone passed away. However, loss is not just death or physical absence (Boss, 2006). Loss could be also “ambiguous” which “remains unclear” (Boss, 2008). According to Boss (2006) ambiguous loss can traumatize people, lead to confusion and create shock. When person is missing, the families do not know anything about the destiny of a loved one, neither any proof of a person being alive or dead (Boss, 2006). Despite of religion and culture, people have the same experience of trauma and resilience, when people lose their relatives (Boss, 2006). Moreover, people can continue learning to live with their ambiguous loss but unfortunately, they cannot fully recover (Boss, 2006). However, there are people who are able to live with missing person without any negative influence (Bonnanom, 2004 cited in Boss, 2006). From psychological viewpoint, people with ambiguous loss experience feelings of hopelessness which creates depression and the feeling of ambivalence creates anxiety (Boss, 2006). Some people understand the situation with missing person as they were punished by God or others understand it as the “challenge to show love” (Boss, 2006).

According to Paulina Boss (2006) families who do not know whether their loved ones are alive or not or what happened to them, they suffer from ambiguity about the loss (Boss, 2006). Further, she has worked on theorizing the Ambiguous Loss which helped to guide the practitioners and helped to researchers to test and apply it in different countries. Boss (2008) mentioned in her article that the practitioners reported that “theory is useful, but more research-based evidence is needed” (2008). Moreover, Boss pointed that Ambiguous Loss theory should be researched by applying different research methods both qualitative and quantitative (2008). Robins (2010) mentioned in his ethnography research that Ambiguous Loss theory is one of the few relevant theories to apply in the research about the families of missing people.

3.1 The Ambiguous Loss Theory

The Ambiguous Loss theory was applied for the research about the wives of missing people due to interethnic conflicts in 2010. Through the years of work with families of patients with dementia, wives of missing pilots who were in war in Vietnam, and other families who faced terrorism or natural disasters based on those experiences, Boss theorized Ambiguous Loss as “is uncertainty or a lack of information about whereabouts or status of a loved one as absent or present, as dead or alive, is traumatizing for most individuals, couples, families” (Boss, 1999; 2008). As it was mentioned, Boss differentiated 2 types of ambiguous loss: first, the person is absent physically, but present psychologically and the second type is, when the person is psychologically absent, but physically is present. If the person passed away, the family gets proof and conducts all the rituals, while in ambiguous loss when the person is physically gone, but psychologically is present, the families do not have anything as a proof (Boss 1999; 2006).

Boss (2008) pointed that when there is ambiguity and loss, it negatively effects on coping and grieving processes of the families. In addition, the families have confusion with roles and statuses (Boss, 2006). There are external factors that influence on the processes of coping with ambiguity such as “culture, history, development, economics, constitutional heredity” (Boss, 2006). In order to work with the families who experienced ambiguous loss, Boss (2006) developed 6 therapeutic guidelines that were applied in research in other countries and in practice as well. Due to time limits, my study explored and applied 3 guidelines of the ambiguous loss models out of 6 in the context of the wives of missing people in Kyrgyzstan.

3.2 Models of ambiguous theory

3.2.1 Finding meaning

When the families of missing people try to find “logic, coherence, rational reasoning about what has happened”, it is called meaning (Boss, 2006). Boss explained that, if there is no meaning, the families would not know what kind of problem is there (2006). Then, if there is no knowledge, the families might have difficulties in cognition, which might influence on coping and decision making and create difficulties to move forward (Frankl, 1963, Boss, 2006). Also, the families might feel empty (Boss, 2006). So, the meaning is considered to play a very important role in families’ resilience, health, survival (Boss, 2006). There might be question on how to find the meaning. According to Boss (2006), families find meaning though the cultural beliefs and religious beliefs.

3.2.2 Reconstructing identity

When the families face ambiguous loss, they experience trauma which leads to confusion about who they are and what they have to do (Boss, 2006). Moreover, when the families do not have proof as a body, people question themselves about their identity. For example, the wives of missing people might think about, who she is now a wife or a widow (Boss, 2006). Not only the reconstruction of identities happens, but also reconstruction of roles, boundaries and rituals in the families (Boss, 2006).

3.2.3 Revising attachment

Revising attachment is another process which is important for the families who have ambiguous loss in order to gain resilience (Boss, 2006). Boss (2006) explained that “it is a gradual process of learning “to live with the prospect of recovering the lost person while simultaneously recognizing that the loss might become permanent”. In this process, the families go through “despair to protest” which means that the families are “moving out of the immobilizing trauma” and towards resilience (Boss, 2006). When the families experience trauma, despair is a common reaction of the families to ambiguous loss, so when their voices would be heard and protesting would happen, it is a good sign which means the families are continuing to live (Boss, 2006).

4 Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter illustrates the methods used for this research and how it was conducted in Kyrgyzstan. The main goal of the research was to explore the lived experiences in the “peace-building” apartment buildings. The first objectives of the research was to explore the self-perception of women and coping mechanisms of wives of missing people due to inter-ethnic conflict in 2010 in the South of Kyrgyzstan. The research addressed the following questions:

1. How does Ambiguous Loss influence on self-perception of wives of missing people about their status as “widows” or “wives of missing people”?
2. What are the coping mechanisms with ambiguous loss of wives of missing people in the “peace-building” apartment buildings?

This chapter will describe research design, research paradigm, sampling and selection of participants, the instruments that were used, data collection, data analysis, the ethical considerations, induction and abduction

4.2 Research design

In order to explore the lived experiences of the wives of missing people, the qualitative research method was applied. Qualitative approach gave more opportunities to participants of the research to reflect on their lived experiences with ambiguous loss with the help of semi-structured interviews. Bryman (2012) mentioned that different “settings could be helpful in identifying the significance of the context and the ways in which it influence behavior and the ways of thinking”, so the focus group was another setting where the wives of missing people were invited to discuss collectively about their experiences and the strengths that helped them to cope with ambiguity in the “peace-building” apartments. The qualitative research can help to describe and deeply explore the issues of wives of missing people. Previous research on the topic of ambiguous loss also suggests to collect data by applying qualitative method which helps to explore well ambiguous loss in different cultures (Boss, 2008).

Both qualitative and quantitative research have advantages and limitations. One of the advantages of qualitative research was that the researcher was close to participants in more or less in natural settings (Bryman, 2012). Moreover, the participants were given flexibility in choosing a place and time. Moreover, the participants to feel free in interviews to add anything, they thought it was important or significant. Through the natural settings the researcher was able to collect “rich and deep information” from the participants (Bryman, 2012). Moreover, the questions were semi-structured where the researcher did not limit the participants reflection (Bryman, 2012). Also, through the unstructured or structured interviews, the new themes and topics emerged for analysis and for the future researches. The qualitative study was chosen also because it helped to understand the phenomena ambiguous loss in Central Asian context because this area was not well researched yet (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). The qualitative research could be very detailed and descriptive which helps to look at the participants’ behavior and get the full picture of the situation or the issue that has been researched (Bryman, 2012).

However, there are some limitations as well, where qualitative research could have the issues with subjectivity. Bryman (2012) pointed that the findings could be based on understanding of the researcher, what is important and significant. Moreover, the qualitative research is difficult

to be replicated because of its unstructured instruments, no standard procedure that the researcher could follow in replication in the future (Bryman, 2012). In addition, the qualitative research could have limitation when the interpretation or selection of participants might not be clear for other researchers which leads to transparency issues (Bryman, 2012).

4.3 Paradigm

4.3.1 Interpretivism

According to Blaikie (2019) interpretivism “is regarded as the product of its inhabitants, it is a world that is interpreted by the meanings of participants produce and reproduce as a necessary part of their everyday activities together”. The interpretivist paradigm is essentially considered for this study because the study relies on interpretations of research participants. The interpretations constitute the meaningful subjective reality as fundamental knowledge to be critically and objectively analyzed in this study. Considering that, the interpretivist paradigm is employed to inductively produce a verifiable knowledge underpinned in constructed themes which corresponding to meaningful, and contextual actions and feelings of the study participants (Blaikie, 2019).

4.4 Induction and Abduction

For this study about the wives of missing people, I applied an inductive and abductive research approaches. The general approach of the study was inductive which requires the researcher to collect specific number of interviews in order to learn something new about the group or the group’s issues in order to make a general conclusion Brinkmann (2013). Moreover, according to Brinkmann (2013), before the researcher starts collecting data, he or she would not bring specific tests or ideas about the results. During the data collection in the field, the participants mentioned some information that had to be clarified or supported or contradicted as it was not clear. The abduction approach was applied which is used when researcher is uncertain in order to get “understanding or explanation of something that happens or some effect” (Brinkmann, 2013).

4.5 Sampling

The researcher used 2 type of sampling methods: purposive and convenience. The convenience sampling was described by Bryman as sample available by chance to the researcher (2012). In this study, it is adopted because clergy, psychologist and a specialist of passport agency who were considered as secondary target participants. The secondary target participants were available by chance for interviews. The purpose of including the secondary target group was to have their perspective on the issues of the wives, and explore supportive and contradictory statements.

On the other hand, purposive sampling was applied to the main target group of participants who were wives of missing people. The wives of missing people were doing random jobs as labor migrants. The age range is between 45-55 years old. All the wives of missing people are Kyrgyz. Hence, purposive sampling was used in this research because of the limited number of participants who could contribute to the research. (Bryman, 2012). It also gives the flexibility to include all the participants who meet the required characteristics of the research participants. However, a limitation of using the purposive sampling in this study is the possibility of biasness due to including only women with missing husbands due to interethnic conflict in the South of

Kyrgyzstan in 2010. Thus, according to the International Committee of the Red Cross (2015) due to interethnic conflict in 2010 in the south of Kyrgyzstan there were 19 families who have missing family members.

4.6 Instrumentation

4.6.1 Semi-structured Interview

The first instrument in this research was semi-structured interview. The semi-structured interviews were applied to 5 wives of missing people as the primary participants, and 3 interviews with secondary target group of participants (clergy, psychologist, officers from passport agency). The semi-structured interview was selected because of its flexibility and the opportunity to add additional questions during the interview. The semi-structured interviews gave more freedom to participants to reflect on their experience, issues and other circumstances, they face. The interview questions were divided into sections in order to learn how the ambiguous loss influenced on the lives of the wives of missing people, and the way they coped with their ambiguity during those years. In relation to that, the conducted interviews lasted between 45 min – 2 hours. Moreover, the participants of the secondary target participants were interviewed as well by using semi-structured instrument, but different questions. The interview guide was developed based on the reflections of the wives of missing people during focus group. The interview time was between 30 min – 45 min.

4.6.2 Focus Group

The second instrument in my study was focus group discussion with five wives of missing people. Bryman (2012) described focus group method as “an interview with several people on a specific topic or issue” in order to collect “rich and detailed” information (Carey & Asbury, 2012). The focus group discussion took place in Osh city, South of Kyrgyzstan in order to collect detailed information from wives of missing people with the experience who made collective sense of a phenomenon through the construction of their meaning (Bryman, 2012). I facilitated the focus group without any co-facilitators as it was not convenient for the participants to have a stranger during discussion. Bryman (2012) pointed that usually the participants of the focus group should not have known each other beforehand and the participants have to have common issue or experience. Nowadays, more and more focus groups are done with people who have known each other even before (Carey & Asbury, 2012). In focus group, the participants were the contributors of information whose voices had be heard, respected and valued (Carey & Asbury, 2012; Bryman, 2012). In addition, Marshall and Roosman (1999) mentioned that some participants needed to listen what others say, so they could form their own understanding of the issue or experience.

Before starting the focus group interview, I built the trust and rapport with participants and explained the ethical principles such as confidentiality and anonymity. The focus group included general guideline with several questions to be discussed in an informal setting (Krueger & Casey, 2009; Morgan, 2010; Stewart, Shadasani & Rook, 2009 cited in Carey & Asbury, 2012). The advantages of focus group were that participants were relaxed and the natural atmosphere (Morgan, 1997, cited at Marshall &Roosman, 1999). Moreover, the researcher could observe the participants and see the differences in answers between individual face-to-face interviews and focus group (Marshall & Roosman, 1999). Also, during focus group the participants were more open to talk about stigma and attitude of in-laws. However, there are disadvantages of focus group as well where the researcher has less control over the group, or sometimes it might be difficult to gather people or they might not to show up, huge amount of data create difficulties in analyzing and it could be time consuming (Bryman, 2012).

Another limitation that I faced after focus group was not being able to understand some parts of the audio records where several participants talked at the same time.

4.7 Data collection

The data was collected through 5 semi-structured interviews and 1 focus group with the wives and 3 short semi-structured interviews with clergy, psychologist and a representative of the passport state agency. However, during focus group the wives mentioned some information that I wanted to have supportive information from clergy, emergency psychologist and the specialist from the passport state agency. Consequently, the research had multiple sources to get information for the analysis. As the research was using qualitative method, it helped the researcher to hear the voices of participants about their coping mechanism with ambiguity and how the participants perceived themselves “widows or wives of missing people”. Before starting the data collection, the researcher had applied to the Ethics Committee for an approval in Norway. Moreover, the informed consents, interview guides for the semi-structured interview and focus group were developed and sent to the Ethics Committee. The researcher had contacted with one of the wives of missing people who was a leader of the group. The leader of the group of wives provided the researcher with other contact details of other wives of missing people. The researcher knew the research participants from the previous workplace. Later, when the Ethics Committee approved the research, the participants were contacted through WhatsApp and explained the research details. Moreover, through the communication on WhatsApp, the preliminary dates for the interviews were chosen. All the research participants were glad to contribute to the research and welcomed me very well. One of the participants mentioned when I called her: “Nazgul, you have chosen a very good topic. Thanks for thinking about us and writing about our experiences. We will try to help as much as we can. Just come and we can help you to organize everything and meet other wives as well”.

4.7.1 Semi structured interviews with the wives of missing people

The semi-structured interviews were individual and face-to-face in Kyrgyz and Russian languages. Most of the participants invited the researcher to their apartments for the interview. In Kyrgyzstan when you enter the house, every host will treat you with some food or tea with sweets and you cannot deny it and it was a time of establishing rapport. Otherwise, it would be disrespectful toward the host. So, I brought some sweets from Norway with me for the tea as well. Before every interview, the participants were fully explained the goals of the research and the importance of conducting it. Moreover, I went together with the participants through the informed consent, all the rights of participants and ethical principals were discussed in great details. Moreover, before signing the informed consent, the participants were given preliminary questions, so they can decide what they feel and if they want to answer to those types of questions. After the permission for the audio recording was received, the informed consents were signed. The first semi-structured interview was conducted at the workplace of the participant and the other four interviews were done at the apartments. Some of the interviews at the apartments took a lot of time. If the initial length of the interviews were 60-90 minutes, some of the interviews were almost 4-6 hours together with tea times.

4.7.2 Focus group

After completing all the individual interviews with wives of missing people, I have ordered food and invited all 5 wives for the focus group which took place in one of the restaurants with a private room for the group. During day time all the wives of missing people were busy, they

asked to meet for dinner. Unfortunately, I could not find another office or room after 5 pm in Osh city, so the restaurant was the only option. The wives accepted the invitation without any problem and were happy to be together for dinner. One of the participants could not join the focus group because she had to travel to another city for the brother's funerals, but the wives invited another woman who found her husband a year later. I did not know that there would be another participant joining the focus group who was the wife of a missing person as well but the body was exhumated in 2011. I was told that the wives could not leave one woman as she was part of this group and they were always together. Before starting the focus group, the participants were fully explained the research objectives, motivation to conduct it and the outcomes. Moreover, I received a permission for audio recording the focus group. Every participant of the focus group was guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity. Moreover, at the beginning of the focus group, the researcher and participants created a small rule such as "all the heard information would be left in that room and when someone was talking to respect and not to interrupt". The participants were open and informative about their experience living in the "peace-building" apartment buildings, coping mechanisms with ambiguity, self-perception, external perception and other themes emerged as well such as stigmatization, new religious rituals, and relationship in the families. Moreover, the participants discussed new information that were not mentioned during the individual semi-structured interviews. The focus group continued for 1 hour 45 minutes. The focus group was in Kyrgyz language with the mix of Russian language.

4.7.3 Semi-structured interviews with secondary participants

Initially, this part of the research was not planned because the research was focusing only on wives and their lived experiences. However, during the focus group discussion the wives mentioned about how the state and religion recognized the wives of missing people after 2010 interethnic conflicts. The government and Muslim Spiritual Authority were contradicting each other. Therefore, the researcher was interested in conducting a short interviews with the clergy of the South Muslim Spiritual Authority and the specialist from the passport agency. The interview date and time was set up through the phone because the office moved out of city to nearby village. As an interviewer I had to wear a scarf on my head and bring an accompanier, the taxi driver who was a male. According to the Muslim Spiritual Authority, the woman's hair has to be covered and not allowed to enter the spiritual area alone. Before starting the interview, the clergy was explained the purpose of the research and other details. The clergy was afraid that I was a journalist, it was good that I had a letter from my supervisor which stated that I am a Master student at the University of Stavanger. Moreover, the clergy was informed about the confidentiality and anonymity of the interview. The interview continued for about 40 minutes in the presence of the taxi driver. Later, I went to meet the specialist from the passport agency in Osh city (South of Kyrgyzstan), who explained their perspective on the status of wives of missing people. In addition, the psychologist who worked with wives of missing people in 2010 for a very short time was interviewed as well. The psychologist works at the Department of Psychology at Osh State University and she was interviewed at her workplace for 40 minutes. The psychologist was asked questions related to "peace-building" apartment buildings and purposes of putting both ethnic groups at the same buildings.

4.8 Data analysis

Thematic analysis is one of the methods that is mostly used in qualitative research, where the researcher is more involved in interpretation process (Bryman, 2012). The thematic analysis

was applied in this research in order to explore and to describe the lived experiences of wives of missing people with the focus on coping mechanisms and self-perception of wives. The amount of collected data was large and rich, which covered a lot of topics, but it created also difficulties for the researchers to find “analytic paths” (Bryman, 2012). Before identifying codes and creating themes, the data was transcribed from audio records in the language that was used by the participants. The next stage was translation of transcribed data from Kyrgyz and Russian languages into English. In order to have a clear picture and not to lose the meaning of the collected data, all the interviews were translated and the emotional expressions such as laughing, and tears were included as well. As the interviews and focus group were multi-lingual, the researcher tried to translate and give exact meaning and those expressions without direct translation, they were explained. All the information was included in the analysis, so nothing would be lost. Thematic analysis consists of six phases in order to have themes and analysis (Bryman, 2012). First, the researcher was familiarized with all data and commented on what the participants said. The next stage was creating the general codes. Very often the coding is criticized by the scholars that the meaning could be lost (Bryman, 2012). Even though the hand coding process was “laborious and time consuming process” as it was mentioned by Creswell and Creswell (2018), I did manual coding. The excel program was very helpful in grouping the codes and themes. The following stages included creating the themes based on codes and defining the themes. Thematic analysis gives freedom to researchers to create new topics for analysis based on new information from research participants and make slightly changes in the research. The thematic analysis was applied to analyze all the data from individual interviews of primary and secondary group participants and focus group interview.

4.9 Managing Data

4.9.1 Audio Recording

All the interviews and including focus group were audio recorded with the permission of participants. The purpose of audio records was to have accurate data and not to miss important information from the participants. Moreover, it helped to listen to audio records several times and analyze what participants said (Bryman, 2012). Also, audio recording was a great help to the researcher during interviews to concentrate on what people said, to follow the answers, to observe how participants were behaving and were feeling (Bryman, 2012). All the participants of the research knew that they were audio recorded and signed the informed consent. The Ethical Committee was informed about using audio recording. All the records are kept in my computer in a safe locked file. All audio records will be deleted when the project will be done.

4.9.2 Translation

All research questions and informed consent were in 3 languages: English, Russian and Kyrgyz, so the participants could choose the language of interview. All the collected data from interviews and focus group were translated into English as close as possible. When there was a misunderstanding or confusion, the participants were contacted to clarify.

4.10 Ethical considerations

As the main goal of the research was to explore the lived experiences with the focus on self-perception and coping mechanisms of wives of missing people due to interethnic conflicts in the South of Kyrgyzstan. As the research was qualitative, it required participation of the target population of the research in the focus group and semi-structured interviews. In every research that involves people, there is also a need “to develop trust with participants, promote integrity of the research and guard against misconduct and impropriety that might reflect on their organizations or institutions” (Israel & Hay, 2006 cited at Creswell & Creswell, 2018 pg.88). In addition, Bryman (2012) mentioned that the committees and the ethical guidelines were

created to protect research's target group, collected data, researchers and reputation of the institutions. A very important step before conducting a research was applying to Ethics Committee at NSD (Norwegian Center for Research Data) for an approval. Even though, the research was conducted in Kyrgyzstan, it was mandatory to apply for ethical approval because the study involved direct participation of the target group and I would defend my research at the University of Stavanger. The research was conducted after the approval and permission of program coordinators, Ethical Committee, and the university. This section describes ethical considerations that were applied in my research.

4.11 Ethical Principles

4.11.1 Privacy

Another ethical principal was about the privacy of the research participants which have to be respected together with anonymity and confidentiality (Bryman, 2012). During data collection, there was no any videos or pictures taken except for audio recording with the permission of the participants. The audio recordings will be deleted after the research finishes. Bryman (2012) pointed that if there are some questions related to private life of the participants, income or religious belief, it could be considered as invasion into privacy of a participant. This research was not interested in this type of questions and they were not included. However, in interview guide, there was one question about the religious rituals that were dedicated for missing people. The participants were contacted beforehand and asked to choose a place where they would feel comfortable to have interview. Most of the participants invited the researcher to their houses as it was convenient for them. It might be considered as the invasion to the private area of the participants. Most of time, in rural areas of Kyrgyzstan, people prefer to have people over at their place for any talks. From the cultural perspective, it would be disrespectful, if the invitation was rejected. As BSA statement stated that all personal information should be kept confidential and the anonymity should be respected (Bryman, 2012). I did not take or save any notes of personal information of participants, all the names were codified and given ID numbers.

4.11.2 Deception

Deception is also one of the ethical principles that occurs “when the researchers represent their work as something other than what it is” (Bryman, 2012). Deception might occur mostly in the experimental research when the researchers want to have “natural responds” from the participants (Bryman, 2012). For example, Milgram's experiment where participants did not know fully about the experiment. In case of my research, all the primary and secondary participants were explained the research objectives, the reason of doing this research and in what purposes the data would be used. Moreover, the participants of the research were being told preliminary questions, provided informed consents and interview guides, so the participants could also read and trust the researcher.

4.11.3 Informed Consent

Informed consent is considered to be one of the important ethical principles of the research, where participants have to be given full information about the research and explained well, so the participants can decide whether they want to participate or not by signing the consent (Bryman, 2012). The informed consent was assessed by the Ethics Committee before handing it to the research participants. The informed consent was translated into Russian and Kyrgyz languages, so the participants knew what they were signing. The informed consent contained the information about the responsible people, objectives of the research, how the information

would be processed and the steps after the closure of the project. Moreover, the participants were explained all their rights they have before, during and after the participation in the research. Moreover, the participants were clarified that participation was voluntary and there was no right or wrong answers. The participants signed the informed consents and their names were not included. When I was travelling to Kyrgyzstan for data collection, I asked my supervisor to sign me a letter which stated that I was, a student, working on my Master's thesis at the University of Stavanger, so the participants or other officials would not doubt what I was doing and asking questions. The letter from a supervisor was very helpful because some secondary participants of the research such as clergy and government representative wanted to see the proof.

4.11.4 Harm

Before starting a research, all the researchers try to decrease the level of any risk that the participants might face during or after the interviews, but sometimes it is impossible “to identify in all circumstances whether the harm is likely to be” (Bryman, 2012). Bryman listed several types of potential harm that could be experienced during research by the research participants: “physical harm, harm to participants’ development, loss of self-esteem or stress” (2012). The ethics codes and guidelines require researchers to keep all personal information confidential and well protected (Bryman, 2012). Israel and Hay (2004) considered confidentiality as another separate ethical principal, which should not be neglected because of the future attitude toward the researchers and institutions: “who would like to talk to them |researchers| in the future?” (cited in Bryman, 2012).

It has been nine years as the wives of missing people live with this ambiguity without any information about their loved ones. Before going to the field, I was predicting that one of the possible harms could be the stress because of reminding about missing person and bringing to the past. The questions were self-made and general. During interviews all the questions were paraphrased. At the end of the interviews, the researcher was focusing on the positive questions or conversation out of research topic. The researcher was trying to make sure that the participants would not be left with stress or bad mood after the interviews. In order to prevent another harm of collected data, all the audio records are kept confidential at the locked file in my laptop. The participants’ names are codified and given ID numbers because pseudonyms do not guarantee that the person would not be identified (Bryman, 2012). Moreover, because of confidentiality and protection, all the interviews were transcribed and translated by the researcher herself.

4.11.5 Obtain necessary permission

In Norway it is mandatory to apply for the Ethics Committee to get an approval for conducting a research, if people, personal information or recordings would be involved. The Ethics Committee has its own application that had to be filled out with all the details about the research. Moreover, the informed consent and interview guides had to be uploaded and were changed several times due to NSD's requirements. Bryman (2012) mentioned that Ethics committees and ethics guidelines assess the practices and how ethically acceptable and unacceptable. To get an approval from the Ethics Committee, it took 2 months in total. The Ethics Committee tries to protect the participants, data and the researchers as well, so the researchers do not harm their reputation (Bryman, 2012).

4.12 Delimitations

The research was focused only on wives' self-perception as "widow" or "wives of missing people" and their coping mechanisms. A sister and a mother of two missing people were interviewed as well but due to different ethnic background and relationship status, the participants' interviews were excluded from the research. In the beginning, I was thinking to have mixed participants on their relationship to the missing person. The children and other family members of families of missing people were not interviewed due to limited time for writing a thesis.

4.13 Limitations

4.13.1 Location

The target population of the research live in Kyrgyzstan, the researcher had to travel for 2 weeks to collect data with permission of Program Coordinators. There is no regret of choosing this topic because I was very interested and passionate about the topic, but long and cancelled flights and lost luggage, so there were some difficulties.

4.13.2 NSD (Norwegian Center for Research Data)

One of the challenges that I faced during this research; it was applying to Ethics Committee to get an approval to conduct this research. The NSD review took 2 months and constant changes in questionnaires and consent were happening at the same time. As the main goal of the research was to explore the lived experiences of wives of missing people due to interethnic conflicts in the South of Kyrgyzstan, the topic was sensitive. There was a risk that the research topic could be declined by NSD because of sensitivity.

4.13.3 Translation and transcription process

Another limitation was the process of translation and transcription after the data collection. Kyrgyzstan is considered to be diverse and multi-lingual (Kyrgyz, Russian and Uzbek) country. The participants were allowed to choose a language for an interview. First all the interviews were transcribed in order to see the whole interview and the meanings. The process of translation and transcription was time consuming.

5 Chapter 5: Findings and Analysis

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussion and the analysis shows the lived experiences of wives of missing people. Ambiguous loss is considered as one of the stressors in the life of families, when they lose someone psychologically or physically (Boss, 2006). Boss (et al., 2003) pointed that when the families have ambiguous loss, it can influence on grieving and coping processes and on continuing of their lives. In order to identify the coping mechanism of wives of missing people and self-perception of wives as “widows” or “wives of missing people”, the focus group interview and individual semi-structured interviews were conducted in Osh city, the South of Kyrgyzstan. This chapter presents the result of the collected data and the analysis for the two stated research questions:

3. How does Ambiguous Loss influence on self-perception of wives of missing people about their status as “widows” or “wives of missing people”?
4. What are the coping mechanisms with ambiguous loss of wives of missing people in the “peace-building” apartment buildings?

This chapter will present some quotes of the participants from the focus group interview and individual semi-structured interviews. All the names have been codified because of confidentiality. Below there are 2 tables are presenting basic information about the participants. Table #1 describes the marital status of the wives according to the passports and the decision which was made by the court, the next column represents the level of education and employment status which could indicate what kind of issues the families could face when they left behind, and the last one indicates whether the husbands have been found or not. All the women live at the same “peace-building” apartment buildings that were given after 2010 for the families who lost their loved ones. There is participant # 6 W6K, who is still part of the group of wives of missing people even though the remains of her husband have been found a year later after the events. The table #2 represents additional participants of the research. As it was described in the methodology, the abduction strategy was used, and additional participants were included in the study in order to get more information after the focus group interview.

Table 1. Information about the main target group (wives of missing people)

No	Nationality	Marital status	Education	Employment status	Missing or found status of husband
W1Z	Kyrgyz	Widow	University	Employed	Missing
W2D	Kyrgyz	Widow	High school	Labor migrant	Missing
W3I	Kyrgyz	Widow	High school	Unemployed due to health	Missing
W4G	Kyrgyz	Widow	High school	Temporary	Missing

W5A	Kyrgyz	Married	High school	Temporary seasonal work	Missing
W6K	Kyrgyz	Widow	High school	Unemployed	Found remains in 2011

Table 2. Information about the secondary participants

No	Affiliation	Reason of interviewing
1	Psychologist	Was accompanying the families during 2010 conflict
2	Clergy	Spirituality and Religiosity were mentioned a lot during focus group
3	Representative of the passport agency	To find out why the wives have the status of widows when they are missing their husband

5.2 Women taking own role

According to Boss (2006), when the families face ambiguous loss, they might have loss of their identity. For example, when the husband disappears, the wives might be confused about their identity whether they are still considered to be a wife or a widow (Boss, 2006 pg.115). Boss defined identity as “knowing who one is and what roles one will play in relation to others in the family and community” (pg.116). According to researchers, when the family experiences the ambiguous loss, “identity confusion becomes a normal response to abnormal situation” (pg.116). Therefore, the findings in this section explores how the family, society, religion and state is part of the reconstruction of identity of women who have missing husbands in the South of Kyrgyzstan. The sub-themes were emerged during focus group interview with the wives. One of the participants of the research mentioned, that she was offended to be called a widow by the passport agency. When I heard this statement, other wives were asked about how they identify themselves and what was their status. In addition, in order to find out about the religious interpretation about wives of missing people, the clergy was met for an interview, who explained his perspective.

During interviews, most of the women when they were asked to describe themselves, they pointed in their marital status and the role in the family after their husbands went missing. All the women mentioned that their role in the family has been changed because now they have to take care of their children, be both mother and father and act like “a man outside and woman inside” (W1Z). Moreover, as it was shown in Table #2, most of the wives did not have higher education and the husbands were the only breadwinners before they went missing. After their husbands went missing, one of the ladies said that she was doing “menish” work (W2D). Before 2010, all the outside work such as building house or fixing or going to animal bazars, grocery shopping were men’s work. All the wives reported that they see themselves as a father and a mother now.

5.2.1 *"I am both father and mother"*

"I felt like that I became both mother and father because I have all the responsibilities on my shoulder. I go out I am a man and when I enter the house, I am a woman" – W2D

When the wives became both "fathers" and "mothers", they received additional responsibilities for their children and around the house and including to find a job in order to feed children and pay for their education. Holmes (2008) mentioned that ambiguous loss can influence on the lives of families because the missing person was responsible for finance. When the wives of missing people stay at their ambiguity where they do not know anything about their husbands and whether they are alive or not or would they be back one day. Many questions and fears about the future were disturbing the wives of missing people in Kyrgyzstan, including their identity if they are considered wives or already widows. In some cultures, when women have status of wives or widows, it could be seen visually due to traditional clothing or signs. For example, Robins (2010) described nepali women who wore special clothing for widows and the red powder on the forehead would be removed after the husband's death (pg. 256). Even though the husband would be missing, community might consider him as dead and it is difficult for the wives to accept it, because there was no any remains seen (Robins, 2010). In case of kyrgyzstani women, if she has lost someone who is very close one, then the women wear green, dark blue or black dresses and scarfs as mourning colors. However, it will not indicate whether she lost a husband or someone else. The kyrgyzstani women wear the mourning color for a year. However, the wives of missing people mentioned that they were seen by their community and children as "Husbandless" (W6K) when they went to an animal bazar where it is rare to see a woman.

"My son was offended at me and asked me what the purpose was of going to the place where only men go" - W6K

or another quote which shows:

"In such places like "animal bazaar" it is obvious that we do not have husbands" - W1Z.

Based on the interviews, not all women were upset about their marital status as being widows. During focus group interview, all of them were laughing at what they are called and how they call themselves. Only one woman mentioned that she was offended that she was called a widow, while another woman even did not think about it. The wife's offence could be also explained as "avoidance" and not accepting the new status of being a widow.

5.2.2 *"I see myself as...?"*

"When I got my passport, it was written "widow". It is very rude to hear from the government institution as widows. When I heard and saw it for the first time, I cried a lot. They could put something different. Can you imagine?! – W2D

Even though the participant W2D conducted all the funeral rituals a year later for her missing husband, she still is offended to be called a "widow". Then, it could be considered as rituals were imposed her by her in-laws or neighbors or community. Based on the statement of W2D, she was not ready to be called a widow. According to Isabaeva (2011) people in Kyrgyzstan are afraid of social criticism and social disapproval and W2D conducted everything with the thoughts of being judged. Moreover, people depend on community's opinion and they think too much about "What will others say? What will others think?". Consequently, the participant W2D could conduct the rituals because of social pressure on her. While during focus group

interview all the wives were laughing at the lady WIZ, how come she did not know her marital status in her passport, they were questioning her. Moreover, the wives were joking at her by saying that they have been meeting so many times and talking about it. According to Robins (2010), wives reconstruct their identities “outside the family, through contacts with other wives of missing people and using narrative method”.

“Of course, you are widow, check your passport” – 4 wives of missing people.

When the wives of missing people mentioned that their passports indicate that they are the widows, a specialist from the Information center of the passport agency was included as a participant as well. Based on the interview with the specialist, it indicated that people in Kyrgyzstan have 4 statuses such as: single, married, widow or divorced. There is no such status as a wife of a missing person. Moreover, the court decides which marital status the person can get based on the documents, they have. For example, in the table #1, it shows that one of the women has the status as married even though her husband is missing, while other wives are registered as widows because of her documents.

5.2.3 *“The state perceives me as....”*

“What are you talking about? This person is missing, it means he is not alive. The wife will be considered a widow and that is why it is written as widow in their passports, but usually the courts decides” – Information center for of passport agency

The specialist of the information center was so surprised how the missing person could be considered as alive because the husband was missing. However, on the other hand, it could be beneficial for the wives of missing people to have the status of widows because in this case, they were able to be considered for the benefits from the government. For example, the wives of missing people received apartments and money around 1 000 000 KGS (approximately 15 000 USD) (Isakova, 2013) or lands as it was mentioned during focus group interview. If they were registered as wives of missing people and married, in this case, they might not get anything from the government except for some financial support. While the state recognizes the wives of missing people as widows, the Religious and Spiritual Authority considers wives with ambiguous loss as “waiting wives”. The religion and the state contradict each other when it comes to the status of the wives of missing people. For example, according to religion the wives have to wait for their husbands.

5.2.4 *“What religion says about my status?”*

“The wife of a missing person should wait for a husband for 30 years, she cannot get married to another person according to shariyat, but it applies if the wife of a missing person practices religion. Yes, if the wife of a missing person is not religious and do not practice Islam, then of course she would get married” – Clergy

While in some other cultures, the wives have to get married to the brothers of their husbands when they passed away (Robins, 2010). For example, Robins (2010) described the case when in the indigenous group communities, the wives remarry to their brother-in-law (pg.256). However, in other cultures such as Hindu, it is stigmatized if the women remarry (Robins, 2010). In Kyrgyzstan, the wife of a missing person has to wait for her husband and cannot get married.

5.3 **Making meaning of their situation**

“Meaning” was one of the models of Ambiguous loss theory which was developed by Boss (1999;2003;2006). According to Boss, it is important to have the meaning because if there is “no solution to the problem, as with ambiguous loss, meaning shapes how and whether people cope or are overwhelmed by stress, as well as how and whether people grieve or refuse to grieve” (pg. 74). Moreover, meaning helps people to understand of what happened or how it happened that the person is missing (Boss, 2006 pg.74).

This theme explores how the wives of missing people were looking for the meaning. In case of wives of missing people in Kyrgyzstan, the ladies found the strength and united as associations “Wives of missing people” and “Mothers of missing people” in order to find the justice and answers of what had happened to their loved ones. When they created their associations and registered legally, they became politically active as well by requiring the government to find and imprison people who abducted their husbands.

5.3.1 *“Our strength is in unity”*

“In the beginning, when we did not know each, we thought that we were alone. But later we found out that there were so many families whose relatives were missing, some of them found their relatives later. We cried together, we went to morgue together to see if there were our loved ones and we were calling there every day. In 2010 we built a new association of families of missing people but later it was divided into smaller groups such as the Mothers of missing people and our group (wives) and there are also other organizations. We started being active and look for justice and ask the police to find our missing relatives and start the prosecution. We went to so many institutions, we wrote letters to the government I was ready to go until the end” -W1Z

When the people who share the same problem, they understand each other better and they get closer. Moreover, the families unite and try to find answers to the questions such as where are their missing relatives? What happened? Several researches indicated the importance of families being together. For example, the families of the missing people in 9/11 in NYC became like brothers and sisters because they shared the same loss and pain, and they felt to be part of the union family (Boss et al., 2003). Or another case comes from Argentina, where the Madres did not know that there were so many people who had the same loss as ambiguous; because of the regime in the country (Edkins, 2011). When the people united, they found strength to protest and fight for justice (Edkins, 2011). The families got closer so much that, they asked the team to organize them more group sessions with everyone (Boss et al., 2003). It was explained as people came from different cultures and they practice more collectivism rather than individualism (Boss et al., 2003). While in Kyrgyzstan, the wives of missing people prefer to stay together with the group of wives only. However, even though the groups of wives and mothers and brothers were united and strived for justice and to find answers for their questions about ambiguity, the wives were stigmatized by the other mothers who live at the same building and have also missing sons.

5.3.2 *“My community see me as...”*

“As we live at the same building, the mothers of other missing people always comment on our actions and gossip about us. For example, when we are going somewhere, they tell us that we are not mourning but going to party while they are sitting at home and grieving” – W3I

When the mothers compare their mourning behavior with wives’ behavior, it could be seen as the mothers’ coping mechanism with their ambiguity and mourning because they were sitting

home and the other group was having fun. Boss et al., (2003) described the case from the experience in NYC 9/11 attack, where they gathered all family members: wives, children, mothers, fathers and in-laws. The situation was described as the families were in silent and no conversation between each others (Boss et al., 2003). Boss et al., (2003) pointed that at that situation, the older generation such mothers or grandmothers made a great impact on the atmosphere in the room. Moreover, the practitioners called the older people as “co-therapists” who helped to younger generation to meet each other and share what they were feeling and exchanging contact details (Boss et al., 2003). While Nepali context showed that the wives were discriminated by the older generation. Similarly, the wives of missing people in Kyrgyzstan were “socially monitored” which includes stigma or discrimination or control by the mothers of other missing people who live at the same “peace-building” apartment buildings. However, the mothers’ group and wives are together in other meetings like Remembrance Day or when there is need to go to Mayor Hall or to meet some other politicians:

“We do all activities related to missing people with the mothers’ group” – W6K

When the associations were not there yet, everybody was on their own with their ambiguity and other challenges. When the associations were created, the families became more open and raising their voices in order to be heard. The main goal of the organizations was to find their missing ones, people who kidnapped them and get support from the government. Every 10th of June, the state has the Remembrance Day. In that day, all the families of missing people, families who lost someone due to interethnic conflicts in 2010, they gather for praying and food. Moreover, the families and the government representatives visit the monuments dedicated to victims (missing, dead) of June events. According to Boss (2006), the government that joins the gatherings could be a sign of solidarity. The wives of missing people mentioned that mostly only the families join them for the Remembrance Day near the monuments. Visiting the memorial could be another way of findings the meaning of their loss and saying goodbye. The memorial could be as the place of attachment to their missing ones.

5.3.3 *“Remembering the lost through political solidarity”*

Findings shows that, the wives of missing people come together for a Remembrance Day yearly on every 10th of June. All the families of missing people gather for the memorial which is dedicated to the missing people in the South of Kyrgyzstan.

“Every 10th of June we organize the Remembrance Day and we sacrifice the animals. The government officials come to Osh, we pray all together in the park next to the monument and put some flowers. The memorials were established by the government. Later we eat all together plov (traditional food in Kyrgyzstan). All the families of missing people, who lost their loved ones, our relatives and government representatives come there” – W3I

Robins (2010) mentions “political solidarity” means showing empathy to the families of missing people through the creation of memorials. The government officials built a monument for the families of missing people after 2010. The findings indicate that the memorial ceremony for the lost has the backing of political institutions because the date for the celebration is endorsed by the government, and during the celebration families of missing people do have the support of the stakeholder including government representatives.

5.4 **Rituals for lost husbands**

This theme explores the rituals that were adapted by the families of missing people. According to Boss (2006) there are no rituals in any culture which is dedicated to the missing people. It is

emphasized, that when there is no body or no any remains, people do not know what to do or how to conduct the rituals (Boss, 2006). When the person passed away, the family has the time to say goodbye and conduct the rituals. On the contrary, in ambiguous loss, there is no any goodbyes and transitional periods (Boss, 2006). Nevertheless, Luster (2009) pointed that the “rituals such as funerals and memorial services provide comfort” for those left behind. In the case of ambiguous loss, the families of missing people created their own rituals as it helps the families to start grieving. In similar situation, it was reported, victims of missing people were encouraged in doing such rituals and masses by the church representatives and government officials which could mean to stop hoping and moving on (Boss et al., 2003).

5.4.1 “Real funeral”

All wives of missing people conducted the rituals except for one participant who was hoping that her husband would be back one day.

“I did not conduct the rituals because there was a hope but now, I wish I could conduct the rituals because it has been already so many years. Look all of the wives have conducted already and I am the only one who left. I cannot do it now because of my financial situation and I am spending too much for my health” - W4G

Some of the families conducted real funerals by announcing a person as dead, while other families just organized small praying hours and invited some people. In Kyrgyzstan, when the person passed away, the relatives of the dead person announces it, so everybody can come and mourn with the family. During the funerals, the kyrgyzstani people cannot bury instruments or any other belongings of the person as it was allowed in the US because, in Islam people do not use coffins, but instead the special white fabric would be used. Moreover, the families of the person who passed away would distribute all the belongings of the person to relatives and neighbors. While in some other cultures like in Kosovo, the families try to preserve and keep in their orders, so the mothers would feel attachment (Kajtazi-Testa & Hewer, 2018).

“We conducted religious rituals according to Kyrgyz traditions. We did a real funeral even though there was no body of my husband. There were no remains to Asbury, we conducted all the steps as if it was real. For example, when a person passed away and there are a lot of rituals we follow- Kyrgyz people. There are special prayers when the person died in order to give his soul freedom. In Kyrgyzstan, there is such thing as spreading or announcing that the person passed away. I was told by clergy that we can conduct rituals and it must be done” – W3D

However, during the interview the clergy mentioned that there is no such thing as conducting rituals for the missing people according to the religion.

“It is just what was created by the communities. Imagine, if the person is missing in Russia or somewhere else and what if he comes back. Look at the cases when people were considered as missing, but they appeared back” – clergy

There is no any funeral rituals in the religion in order to say goodbye to a missing person and there is only one thing that the wives of missing people can do, it is to wait for 30 years, according to clergy. Boss (2006) might argue with the clergy because conducting the rituals help the families to start grieving and coping process and people would be able to say goodbye in a different way and learn to live with their ambiguity.

5.5 Wives of missing people depending on

As the coping mechanisms play an important role, it helps people to deal with difficulties (Endler and Parker, 1990). The grieving and coping processes could be influenced by the cultural, ethnic and religious experiences (Boss et al, 2003). According to Folkman and Lazarus (1985), “coping is a complex process” which refers to “cognitive, behavioral efforts to manage” (pg.152). Coping has 2 functions which is “regulation of distressing emotions” (emotion-focused) and “doing something to change for the better the problem causing the distress (problem-focused)” (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985). This section explores the coping mechanisms of the wives of missing people with their ambiguous loss while living at the same apartment buildings with other families. Most of the studies about coping, they measure by applying special scales. Unfortunately, this research has a small data that is why the tool was not used to measure quantitatively. The interviews identified many coping mechanisms and they were classified by emotion - focused, problem - focused and avoidance mechanisms and presented below. The participants were asked to describe their days, free hours and what kind of activities they do with their families and what do they do when they want to overcome some difficult situations. For example, for some wives the religious belief helps to overcome stress while for others it was important to talk to someone and get the empathy and some of the wives were just avoiding any conversation about the missing person. While some of the wives of missing people use encouragement of each other as coping or other use the supporting strategy to each other in problem solving. This type of data also shows how far the wives are moved forward or if they stopped with their coping. However, all the individuals are different, and they choose different coping mechanisms based on their habits, knowledge, hobby and psychological state (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985).

5.5.1 “Social support”- problem-focused coping”

The common coping mechanism was the “social support” that all the women pointed as the most important one. When people use this type of coping mechanisms, for them it is very important that someone can listen and understand them. For example, the wives of missing people meet very often, where they listen to each other, support each other, show their empathy and if there are any issues, they solve it together. Moreover, some of the participants mentioned that they become like sisters who trust each other and miss each other, if they do not see each other.

“I always try to spend my time with the group of wives, If I do not see them, I miss them, so that is why we have decided to meet once every 2 weeks. They are the only one who understand me. Do you think others care about me? It is good that we live at the same place, it helps us to meet more often and see each other. I trust this group because I get the advice what to do in some situations when I do not know. Or we go somewhere just for fun and we talk about our relatives and in-laws. We talk about what should we do if we need something”

-W31

According to Boss (2006) it is very good if the families are in contact with other people who have similar issue which can influence on the resilience of the people. For example, in NYC, the families of missing people due to 9/11 attack were meeting to share and do things together (Boss et al., 2003). Moreover, for the majority families of missing people in NYC, English was not the native language, the families started gathering for learning and practicing it together. (Boss et al., 2003). In Nepal, the wives of missing people were meeting separately from other groups because of the hierarchies in the families and communities (Robins, 2010). In Kyrgyzstan, it was similar situation as in Nepal, the wives were gathering separately from other groups because of social monitoring of the elderly people who live at the same building. One

of the examples of how the wives got used, support and understand each other better was observed during interview. The wives started discussing about the lands that they were given by the government after 2010, so they can build additional houses. Two of the wives could not finish their documents, they had a leader who asked them to prepare all the documents, so she can check and help them to register in order to privatize those lands.

5.5.2 *“Praying”*

Also, there were two women who used “praying” as the coping mechanisms which helped them to overcome their anger. According to Boss et al., (2003) religion was one of the great helpers to deal with any type of loss to families after 9/11 NYC attack. Some researchers mentioned that “grief affects us spiritually as well and these reactions can include: searching for meaning in loss, changes in spiritual behavior, feelings, or beliefs” (Martin & Doka, 2000 pg. 18). This type of coping was classified as emotion-focused coping, according to Folkman & Lazarus (1985).

“Several years ago, I started to pray. It helps me to feel myself better, I can be only by myself. It helps me to cope when I am angry or have bad days. Recently, my younger daughter joined me for morning prayers, so she helps me to get up and prepare myself otherwise, I can be very sick” – W3I

5.5.3 *“Avoidance”- emotion focused coping*

In the interview guidelines, there were questions about conversations about missing people in the families and with neighbors. Three wives of missing people pointed, that they discuss with their children about their fathers and the things he would do if he was there. While two other wives do not mention their husbands near children at all, because they are afraid of hurting their children. Moreover, the whole family escapes any conversation about the missing person any time.

Only one of the wives was identified as the person who uses avoidance coping in the situations when she feels uncomfortable talking about her husband with her neighbors. Dupuis (2002) mentioned that the families who use the avoidance as coping, they can be more distress in comparison with people who accepted the situation. Moreover, people might use avoidance as coping mechanism first but later they might deal with it (Falkmun & Lazarus, 1985 pg. 150). Or the person can avoid first and after look for the “emotional support” from others (Falkmun & Lazarus, 1985 pg. 150). During interview, one of the ladies described her behavior when she meets her neighbors who want to know about her husband and if there are any news about him. Of course, to discuss such details can be difficult emotionally for the wives of missing people. On the other hand, the neighbors do not understand how difficult for the wives and children to talk about their missing husbands and fathers, it was even mentioned in nepali context by Robins, who mentioned that the neighbors might not have any idea what was going on (2010).

“I do not know what people talk in my village, I just leave that place quickly, so they do not ask about my husband” – W5A

In order not to face the conversation about the missing husband, W5A would avoid any conversation by avoiding people, she would not be distressed.

5.6 Conclusion of chapter 5

The main goal of the research was to explore the lived experiences of the wives of missing people with the focus on wives' coping mechanisms and their self-perception about their status. The chapter 5 presented the findings and analysis of the interviews of wives of missing people and clergy, psychologist and the specialist from the information center of passport agency.

The findings were analyzed by using the thematic analysis. So, the chapter 5 presented that the wives of missing people have changes in their roles, identities, responsibilities inside of the house and outside. Moreover, the analysis showed that the women who have missing husbands are recognized as widows by the state, while religion perceives them as "waiting wives" for 30 years. The wives of missing people identify themselves as "mother and father" with extra responsibilities for children and being men outside of the house and women inside of the house.

The next theme "Making meaning of their situation" shows that the wives of missing people try to find the meaning about their husbands who went missing by being in contact with other families of missing people and creating the associations. However, in this stage the wives of missing people are socially monitored by the mothers of other missing people for not mourning but having fun. Unfortunately, there are no any rituals for the people who went missing, so the wives of missing people adapted the rituals for the husbands by conducting real funerals and small praying for the soul of the missing. Also, there is another ritual which is described as the "Remembering the lost through political solidarity" because the families meet every 10th of June near the memorial which was built by the government. In order to deal with all the stressful events, the wives of missing people developed their own way of coping. All the wives reported "social support" as one of the common coping mechanisms, while some of the wives find coping through prayer and avoidance from the situation, where there would be discussion about their missing husbands.

6 Chapter 6: Discussion of findings

6.1 Introduction

The main purpose of the study was about the lived experiences of the wives of missing people due to interethnic conflicts in the South of Kyrgyzstan in 2010. The main focus was on how the wives cope with the ambiguous loss while living at the “peace-building” apartment buildings and the self-perception of the wives about themselves as “widows” or “wives of missing people”.

In the relation to the first research question How does Ambiguous Loss influence on self-perception of wives of missing people about their status as “widows” or “wives of missing people”?, the findings that “Women take own roles” implies that these women are doing more than they used to according to the wives’ experience. The wives used to have certain rules before their husbands went missing and now, they take the roles of their husbands which has formed a new identity for them. This theme “Women take own roles” is best explained by the Reconstructing Identity model by Boss. Reconstructing Identity is explained as the cases when the families face ambiguity, they might be confused about who are they and what their roles are (Boss, 2006). It is emphasized in the model that “identity confusion becomes a normal response to abnormal situation” (pg.116). Based on the responses on this research, I observe wives going through the bane of taking on the new roles in the absence of their husbands. It may be difficult and confusing status for them because of the additional responsibilities. Perhaps some wives have not settled with whether they are widows or not, yet they will have to perform their responsibilities to ensure the smooth running of the families. This confusion of identity can also be attributed to the ascribed status of the women from both the clergy and the government which seem to both contradict itself. From the perspective of the government the women are widow, whereas on the part of the clergy they are still wives. However, as this tension goes on the obligation for these women to care for their families receive scars support from either the religious or the government agencies. This situation obviously plunges the women into not waiting but to take on the new roles as mother and fathers, as breadwinners or as head of the family. Nevertheless, it was observed that, the women concur with the status of the government for them as widows because it means they could get some benefits such as financial support or flats and lands. The status also is an eligibility criterion for most women to gain benefits from other organizations as well. But the idea of accepting different status for these wives for the sake of benefit has its own psychological implications, implication for their human dignity and can be a stressful situation at the same time.

Another aspect of the findings is “Making meaning of their situation”. In view of the ambiguous loss theory an explanation to the death of husband contribute to the understanding and meaning to the ambiguous loss. For example, the boys who had missing fathers after 9/11 attack in New York did not know what had happened to their Dads and they were angry because their dad left them, so one of the workers took them and explained them what their fathers were doing when it happened, for example, the father saved the lives of people. It helped the boys to find the meaning through the explanation by other workers (Boss et al., 2003). In this study there were occasions where the women look for meaning. The wives of missing people demonstrated this in their quest for government to provide them answers. Lucidly, the formidable groups by wives of missing people exemplifies the unity toward achieving the meaning of their husband’s ambiguous loss. In pursuant of the meaning of their ambiguous loss, wives of missing people may have found a sense of relief from the monument, feel attached, and some DNA test result by non-governmental organization. An extension of finding meaning is explained by Robins to incorporate a rationality for a coping mechanism which in this study is witnessed in the

formation of their unity (2010). I guess for some wives of missing people being part of this united front helped them to look for the answers concerning their missing husbands' and how they passed away, whereas for others coming into unity with person with similar problem gave them a sense of belonging. But Robins (2010) made it clear the possibilities of stigma that may be targeted on the wives of missing people in Nepal. This is because Kyrgyzstan's socio-cultural norms that were created by the community of wives which insists on wives of missing people continuous mourning. As a result, certain activities that are more recreational for wives are judged by community as others are still mourning. It is the separation, and distinction in statuses of these women that reinforces the stigma provided they go contrary to their religious status as widows.

Furthermore, the theme 'Rituals for lost husband' explains the need for families to say goodbye to their loved ones. Luster (2009) pointed that the "rituals such as funerals and memorial services provide comfort" to the ones who are left behind. Therefore, it is the need for comfort and peace with one owns mind that necessitate the performance of the ritual, and this ritual performance is not exceptional for the wives in Kyrgyzstan. In view of Revising Attachment module, the act of performing ritual cannot be overemphasized. Thus, per the module, revising attachment establishes an explanation for wives' clamor for the state showing respect, and honor to their missing husbands by providing explanations to their absence or missing status. As a result, it is demonstrated by some of the wives of missing people that they participated in the ceremonies. However, from the Kyrgyzstani cultural perspective, the contention to perform the ritual or not has it bearings on the opinions of both the respected elderly and the clergy in the society. The latter emphasized that, in order to perform the rituals, the wives must wait for thirty years, meanwhile the elderly of the community suggested that the rituals have to be performed. Besides that, one of the wives did not perform the ritual because of the hope of their husbands return home someday. In my opinion although, there is confusion for these women in deciding whether to go by the elderly or the clergy, it is better for them to perform the ritual since it is a pathway to open a new chapter of their lives. It is also beneficial in that they can grieve and deal with the sadness in order to move on and are properly comforted by the society. Also that, other confrontational challenge is with the wives in ability to have the finance to perform the rituals since they are already low-income earners as the most of them do not have stable long-term job. Hence, it is a bit difficult situation coupled with the children they must care for.

In the relation to the second research question "What are the coping mechanisms with ambiguous loss of wives of missing people in the "peace-building" apartment? The findings that "Wives of missing people are depending on..." indicates that the coping mechanisms play an important role in the life of every wife of the missing person. During interview, the wives described many activities that they use and do when they face difficulties or unpleasant thoughts or when they interact with people and the way how they react. Undheim and Sund (2016) mentioned that "successful adaptation to the environment requires strategies to cope with stressful situations". The strategies mean whether a person is using cognitive or behavioral strategies which can vary according to people's interest (Undheim & Sund, 2016). The common coping mechanisms among wives of missing people was "social support", when they can share their issues and news, meet and do some recreational activities and spend time together. For example, the wives of missing people were living at the same "peace-building" apartment where they were spending most of their times and it was easy to meet up any time of the day and night. According to Boss (2006) it is very good if the families are in contact who share the same issues as it can influence on the people's resilience. So, the wives of missing people were helping each other to gain resilience. In addition to social support coping mechanism, there was mentioned the praying as a mechanism which was not popular among wives of missing people. However, it was used by some wives where they could understand the

meaning of the loss, find comfort and cool down their anger as it was mentioned in the findings. Both coping mechanisms could be explained by using the model Finding meaning. This model espouses that, the wives of missing people try to find explanation about their ambiguous loss, ambiguous identity in the society and family through the support group meetings with other wives of missing people and religious prayers. Avoidance as a coping mechanism was mentioned by some wives of missing people. For example, avoidance coping mechanism could be described as denial to talk about their missing husbands with other neighbors who do not live in this peace building apartment. According to researchers, the person who is reacting by avoiding, she will need the emotional support which would be found through social support mechanisms (Folkman and Lazarus, 1985).

Now, focusing on the model revising attachment, the model suggests that moving from “despair to protest” is one way of revising attachment. In Kyrgyzstan, the families also went through this stage where they were in “despair” and moved to “protest” which is good. Boss (2006) points that, it means that the families are moving forward and looking for the answers. In relation to that, women of missing people form a united front to either accept the death of their husbands or not. By this united front they can gain the attention of government representatives for explanations and real solutions. In effect, monuments initiated by government officials is a response to the wives of missing people’s political solidarity. Thus, for most of the families who could not say goodbye to their loved ones, this could be a place where they come and grieve which could be another way of attachment. Moreover, it is essential to mention that through political solidarity the families learn to live with their ambiguity as well. The families do, as the government shows their solidarity through organizing meetings with the families of missing people.

6.2 Conclusion of chapter 6

To conclude, the modules from ambiguous theory were juxtaposed with the major themes from the finding in exploring the situation of wives of missing people. Essentially, it is established that the sudden and unexpected roles of wives of missing people currently play has informed the reconstructing of identity and meaning for their situation. Also, challenges in relation to sociocultural norms that dictates the status of wives of missing people were discussed that wives of missing people face. Thus, the status that were recognized by the government and Religious and Spiritual Authority critically remains that the wives of missing people have to contend with. Nonetheless, it is indicated by the study that wives of missing people cope with their situation through coping mechanism suggested to bring them comfort and peace of mind. Particularly, the avoidance, praying and social support have been adapted as means to ward-off the stress, pain, and anger that comes with talking about their missing husbands.

7 Conclusion and recommendations

7.1 Overall conclusion

The main purpose of the study was to explore the lived experiences of the wives of missing people. The research was conducted with an intention to answer to 2 research questions. The first question focused on the coping mechanisms of the wives of missing people with their ambiguous loss. While the second question tried to look at the self-perception of the wives of missing people as “widows” or “wives of missing people”. The ambiguous loss theory was applied in this research with 3 models that were developed by Paulina Boss: Reconstructing Identity, Revising Attachment, Finding Meaning. The findings illustrated that the problem of missing husbands, influenced identities, responsibilities and the roles of wives who left behind with children. Thus, wives of missing people become both mothers and fathers and additionally breadwinners. However, religious perspective considers the wives of missing people as the waiting wives for 30 years. In recognizing the identity of the wife of a missing person, the state and religion contradicts each other. The state indicates the wives of missing people as “widows” which could be beneficial for the wives because they can apply for the social benefits. Also, the community identifies them as “widows” who should not go to the places where only men supposed to go and to sit at home and mourn. The stories of wives of missing people indicate that there is a lot pressure from community to conduct the funerals for the missing people even though some of the wives hope, of the return of their husbands. The families with ambiguous loss particularly wives, they developed their own coping mechanisms. The common coping mechanism was social support mechanisms which helped the wives to spend time together and talk and seek the emotional support. Living at the same “peace-building” apartment buildings helped the wives to stay close to each other which greatly influenced on their coping. Other participants find praying as the coping mechanisms which helps them to cool down their anger and ask for a better life. However, there are still avoidance mechanism which is used by the families to escape any conversation about their missing husbands.

7.2 Recommendations

Base on the study, I would recommend the following:

- To explore the relationship of the family members within the family of the missing people. Because, it was mentioned by some participants that they are afraid of talking about the missing loved ones with each other in the house, which means that everyone grieves alone.
- To use the Oral history approach and mixed methods, so the researcher could spend some days with each family and have both qualitative and quantitative data.
- To explore the non-western context about the families who have the psychologically missing people, which is another type of ambiguous loss
- To explore resilience of families of both ethnic groups Uzbeks and Kyrgyz people who have missing loved ones and compare them.
- For Social Workers: To implement long-term intervention programs where the whole family will be included (family group sessions).
- For Social Workers: To monitor, focus and identify the strength of women of both ethnic groups in order to develop vocational trainings in the future.
- For the state: To have transparent statistics on people who went missing due to any circumstances
- For the state: To recognize the families of missing people, so they will be able to receive social support.

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Appendix A

Letter of Informed Consent

Title: *“Left without saying good-bye: Lived experiences of wives of missing people due to inter-ethnic conflicts in the South of Kyrgyzstan in 2010”*

Purpose of the study

My name is Nazgul Irisova and I am one of the students of Erasmus Mundus Master’s Degree program in Social Work with Families and Children (MFamily) at the University of Stavanger. One of the requirements for the final semester is to conduct research. As I am very interested about the lived experiences of wives of missing people due to inter-ethnic conflicts, I came up with the following topic. The main goal of the research is to explore your lived experiences with ambiguous loss. Moreover, the study will explore the coping mechanisms everyday life and how the society and family influence on forming the coping mechanisms. Similarly, the research will analyze your adjustment processes to a new role in the family.

Who is responsible for the project?

I am Nazgul Irisova, Master’s Degree student will be conducting this research under the supervision of Associate Professor Kathrine Skoland in coordination with the University of Stavanger, Norway.

What does participation in the project imply?

The research will be based on qualitative method where the semi-structured interviews will be used. The second part is focus group discussion with all of you (5 wives). Individual semi-structured interviews will give you more opportunities to reflect on your personal experiences, coping mechanisms and how society and family influenced on forming coping mechanisms. The focus group discussion will continue for about 1.5 hours which help you to discuss together about their lived experiences. The individual semi-structured interviews will continue approximately between 60-90 minutes. I would like to ask your permission to audio record the interview and focus group discussion in order to transcribe them in order to have accurate information and not to miss what you will be sharing. Also, I will take some field notes from during focus group discussion, but all information will be kept confidential. After analysis, the field notes will be shredded. The recruitment process was done by applying snowball sampling method as I knew one of the participants of the research who was willing to help to recruit other participants.

Processing privacy information

All the collected data will be used only for the purpose of the master’s research. All the gathered information will be confidential and anonymous; the names will not appear anywhere. All the notes will be kept in a protected notebook and all audio recorded materials will be stored in a secure laptop with a password which will be accessible only to me and my supervisor Kathrine Skoland. Any personal information or identification numbers or names will not be collected in this research. The first names will be changed and codified in order to protect the privacy of the participant.

Voluntary participation

Participation in the research is voluntary. There are no right or wrong answers; only your personal experiences and opinion. When I will finish transcribing the interviews, you may read and see if the information is accurate and what you meant. The information about the research and interview questions will be presented so you can decide to participate or not. Participants can withdraw from the research at any time and even after being interviewed, then all gathered information will be deleted. Moreover, the participants have the right to refuse to answer to any specific questions or stop the interview without any explanations. If you have questions related to research, you are always welcome to contact the student or the supervisor.

Student: Nazgul Irisova

Supervisor: Kathrine Skoland

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All the information you share, it will be analyzed based on your consent. NSD – Norwegian Centre for Research Data was notified about the research.

Your rights

As long as you can be identified in the data material, you are entitled to:

- insight into which personal information is registered about you,
- getting personal information about you,
- delete your personal information
- get a copy of your personal data (data portability)
- to send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or the Data Inspectorate about the processing of your personal data.

After the closure of the research project

I will be presenting this research around on 15th of June 2019 as my final project for Master's Degree. The results and analysis of the research will be shared among my classmates and professors; and maybe it might be used in some research articles or publications in the future. According to ethical guidelines, all the information about the participants that can identify will be deleted or destroyed after the research analysis. In order to guarantee that the research will be done according to ethical guidelines, I hereby take responsibility and promise to follow all the principles and guidelines of ethics that are described above.

Student: Nazgul Irisova (nazgul.irisova@gmail.com)

Date/Signature _____

Participant: I have received all the important information about the project and I confirm my participation

Date/ Signature _____

Appendix B

Interview guide for semi-structured interviews with wives of missing people

Title: *“Left without saying good bye: Lived experiences of wives of missing people due to inter-ethnic conflicts in the South of Kyrgyzstan in 2010”*

Dear participant!

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in my research. Our interview will continue for about 60-90 minutes. I would like to let you know that there is no right or wrong answer in this interview. Moreover, I would like to ask for your permission to audio record our interview in order to be able to transcribe accurately all the shared information. All the information will be kept confidential and anonymous; your name will not appear anywhere. When I will finish transcribing the information, all the audio records will be destroyed permanently; there will not be any copies of the record. In addition, I will use all the information only in research purpose. If you do not feel comfortable to answer the question or if you do not want to participate, you can withdraw any time from the research, even after finishing the interview, you have the right not to participate. In this case, your interview will not be included in the research and will be deleted. I would like to learn about your lived experiences, coping mechanisms through these years and how society and family influenced on forming your coping mechanisms with ambiguous loss.

Life after 2010

1. What kind of joyful events happened in your family during 2010-2019? Could you share some of them please?
2. What kind of difficulties did you face during these years? Could you share some of them please?

Coping

3. What did you do in order to overcome difficult situations?
4. When you have difficulties, do you feel giving up or try to overcome it and make new steps?
5. In what kind of activities are you involved in order making busy yourself?
6. What do you do when you have unpleasant feelings?
7. Have you done any religious/ spiritual rituals? If yes, could you describe them please?
8. Do you still do some religious/spiritual rituals? Why?
9. When you have a dream, do you try to turn it into reality?
10. When you have free time, what do you usually do? Can you describe your day?
11. You are a neighbor with the other wives of missing people. How often do you meet? What kind of activities do you do together? How do you help each other?
12. Do you try to see good things in your everyday life (people, environment, situations)?

Ambiguous Loss

13. How do you understand ambiguous loss?

14. Do you feel like that you have learnt to live with this?

Self-perception

15. How would you describe yourself (curious, optimistic, flexible, adaptable, can easily adapt to new things, good at solving issues, adaptable)?

Family

16. What is family for you? Whom do you consider to be a family member?

17. Do you talk about your husband with your children? If yes, what about do you talk? If not, why don't you talk?

18. Have you changed rules of the family?

19. Did you feel like that your role has changed in the family? What role did you gain?

20. What kind of support do you get from your family?

21. Do you share your feelings with other family members? If yes, what can you share with them? If not, why don't you share?

Society

22. What kind of difficulties did you face in your community and family when your husband disappeared?

23. What does your community say about your husband?

24. Do you share your feelings with your neighbors and family members? If yes, what about do you talk? If not, why don't you share?

25. What kind of support do you get from your neighbors?

26. What kind of activities do you do with your community?

27. What do you think about the new houses? What do you feel about them?

Resilience

28. Do you attend any community gatherings or parties? What do you feel about going to community gatherings?

State

29. What kind of support did/ do you get from the state?

30. What kind of celebrations does the state organize?

31. Did you get any support from psychologists, social workers or other organizations?

Appendix C

Guideline for focus group discussion of wives of missing people

Title: *“Left without saying goodbye: Lived experiences of wives of missing people due to inter-ethnic conflicts in the South of Kyrgyzstan in 2010”*

Dear participants!

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in my research and your time. Our focus group discussion will be for 1.5 hours. I would like to let you know that there is no right or wrong answer in this interview. Moreover, I would like to ask for your permission to audio record our focus group discussion in order to be able to transcribe accurately all the shared information. All the information will be kept confidential and anonymous; your name will not appear anywhere. When I will finish transcribing the information, all the audio records will be destroyed permanently; there will not be any copies of the record. In addition, I will use all the information only in research purpose. If you do not feel comfortable to answer the question or if you do not want to participate, you can withdraw any time from the research, even after finishing the focus group discussion, you have the right not to participate. In this case, your interview will not be included in the research and will be deleted. Please, feel free to talk and discuss any issues or things that you feel like to share as it is significant for you. Let us respect each other's opinion and give opportunity to talk to everyone. Moreover, all the shared information will be asked to stay in this group. If you have any questions before or after focus group discussion, please let me know.

Questions:

- A. Can you share please about your lived experiences after 2010? (children, relatives, judgmental society, living in the same building with other families of a different ethnic group, attitude of the group of mothers, self-perception of a woman, strong side of women, state support, religious rituals, activities of the community)
- B. Would you like to add anything or maybe you missed something?

Thank you!