

The Nature and Causes of Bride Abduction Cases in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

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ABSTRACT The paper reports on an investigation carried out to ascertain the nature and causes of bride abduction cases in KwaZulu – Natal in South Africa. The study utilized a qualitative survey design. Focus group discussions were used to collect the data on a purposefully selected sample of thirty research participants from three purposefully selected research sites. The sample consisted of eighteen (18) women and (12) twelve men comprising of abductors, witnesses of abductions, abducted women, local chiefs, headmen, head-girls and station commanders in the local police stations. Content analysis, through emerging themes, was used in analysing the data. The study revealed that bride abduction (contemporary and negative *ukuthwala*) is an abuse of the custom of *ukuthwala* (traditional bridal abduction) which is perceived by many people to have disappeared during social transformation. However, it is still prevalent in some deep rural areas of KwaZulu – Natal. Bride abduction grossly violates women's fundamental rights. Whereas traditional bridal abduction (*ukuthwala*) (to carry away with intent to marry), is a custom to many African tribes and is a global practice. The study also revealed that the nature and causes of bride abduction cases vary depending on the context where it is taking place. Furthermore, the nature and causes of bride abduction differ from that of traditional bridal abduction (*ukuthwala*) as a custom. The study therefore, concludes that before any hasty judgements are made about any cultural practice we need to separate what is culture from the abuse of culture. Recommendations were made that Law and Government should deal with the abuse of (*ukuthwala*). If the South African Government is serious about making lives of women, children, youth and the disabled better, the issue of the abuse of *ukuthwala* (bride abductions) should be made a priority.