

Modern-Day Comfort Women: The U.S. Military, Transnational Crime, and the Trafficking of Women

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Introduction

The U.S. military bases in Republic of Korea (commonly known as South Korea) form an international hub for trafficking of women for prostitution and related forms of sexual exploitation. The trafficking of women is a lucrative moneymaker for transnational organized crime networks, ranking third, behind drugs and arms, in criminal earnings. The traffickers recruit and transport women to meet the demand largely created by U.S. military personnel and civilian men in South Korea and the United States. In some cases, the U.S. servicemen themselves are traffickers working with Asian organized crime networks.

This paper will examine three types of trafficking that are connected to US military bases in South Korea: Domestic trafficking of Korean women to clubs around the military bases in South Korea, transnational trafficking of women to clubs around military bases in South Korea, and the transnational trafficking of women from South Korea to massage parlors in the United States. Although, the three types of trafficking will be discussed separately, in reality, they sometimes overlap. For example, in one case a Korean woman was the victim of multiple acts of trafficking: She was abducted at age 14 from her village in South Korea, and was repeatedly raped and exploited by soldiers of the South Korean army. An American soldier brought her to the U.S. through a sham marriage, where she was then trafficked within the U.S. on a massage parlor circuit (Gallagher, 1995).

Methods

Terms and Definitions

For the purpose of this paper, the definition of “trafficking” is based on the U.S. Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000.

“Sex trafficking means the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act.” A commercial sex act is defined as “any sex act on account of which anything of value is given to or received by any person.”

For criminal charges to be brought against perpetrators, their activities must meet the criteria of “severe form of trafficking in persons,” which is “sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age.” Coercion is defined as:

“(A) threats of serious harm to or physical restraint against any person; (B) any scheme, plan, or pattern intended to cause a person to believe that failure to perform an act would result in serious harm to or physical restraint against any person; or (C) the abuse or threatened abuse of the legal process.”

“Transnational trafficking” is used to mean sex trafficking of women that involves the crossing of an international border. “Domestic trafficking” is used to mean sex trafficking within the borders of a country in recognition that the tactics used by procurers and pimps are the same when women are recruited and transported within the same country. Often, as in the case of massage parlors, the women are used on regional and national circuits, which should be recognized as a form of domestic trafficking.

In discussing the sites of prostitution in the U.S., the term “massage parlor” is used, although the establishments are also known by other euphemisms such as “spas,” modeling studios,” and “hostess bars.”

Sources of Data

Prior to the initiation of this research, no studies on the trafficking of women to Korea had been conducted or completed.¹ Similarly, there were no research studies on the trafficking of women from Korea, or trafficking of Korean women that involved U.S. servicemen. There have been several studies on the use of Korean women for prostitution by U.S. servicemen, but the focus was not on trafficking. Korean and other Asian nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have documented the transnational and domestic trafficking of women associated with U.S. military personnel, but they were not research reports. Because of the lack of previous research, the paper relied on NGO reports and media stories from the U.S., South Korea, and the Philippines.

For this research report, the authors conducted 36 interviews using open-ended questions with social service providers, activist organizations, law enforcement officials, reporters, and a researcher in the U.S. and South Korea. The interviews included 19 law enforcement officials, 10 social service providers and/or activist organizations, 6 reporters, and 1 researcher. All interviews were conducted by telephone in August, September, and October 2002.

U.S. Military in Republic of Korea and Violence Against Women

The United States has had troops in South Korea for almost six decades, starting in 1945 following World War II.² Today, there are 100 U.S. military bases throughout South Korea with 37,000 troops.

From the 1950s to 1970s, the United States Forces in Korea (USFK) and the Republic of Korea cooperatively agreed to set up “rest and relaxation” centers for U.S. troops. The purpose was to provide entertainment and improve the morale of the troops. The *kijichon* (military camp towns) around the U.S. military bases that resulted from this policy are closed to South Korea citizens and allow only U.S. troops and those who provide services to enter. Although prostitution is officially

¹ While the research for this paper was underway, the International Organization for Migration released its report “Women Trafficked for U.S. Military Bases – IOM Report,” September 3, 2002.

² For a detailed account of U.S. and Korean relations and their tacit accommodation of U.S. servicemen with women for sex, see Katherine H. S. Moon. *Sex Among Allies: Military Prostitution in the U.S.-Korea Relations*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.

illegal in South Korea, the sex industry around the U.S. military bases thrives with an estimated 20,000 women in the *kijichon* (Kim, 1997). Most of the clubs or bars in the *kijichon* have rooms upstairs for prostitution (Moon, 1997; McMichael, 2002a).

The abuse and exploitation of Korean women for “rest and relaxation” by soldiers preceded the arrival of U.S. troops. The Japanese army used Korean women for sexual slavery during World War II (Howard, 1995; Hicks, 1995). At the time, the women were euphemistically referred to as “comfort women,” and although that term is no longer used, a number of Asian women’s nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) characterize the ongoing trafficking and sexual exploitation of Korean and Philippine women by U.S. military troops as a continuation of the same practice. In fact, several sources say that some of the original “comfort women” used by the Japanese army were in turn used by U.S. troops following the defeat of Japan (Kim, 1997). The experiences of the women are similar; except now, the U.S. troops refer to them by other euphemistic and derogatory terms, such as “guest relations officer,” “bar girls,” “hostesses,” “entertainers,” and “juicy girls” (Kim, 1997; Donato, 2002; Demick, 2002).

During the almost six decades that U.S. troops have been stationed in South Korea they have committed many crimes in the Korean communities (Ahn, n.d.). One group gathered crime reports and found that from 1945 to 1999, servicemen committed over 10,000 crimes (National Campaign for the Eradication of Crimes by U.S. Troops in South Korea, 1999). In 1992, the brutal rape and murder of Yoon Keum Yi, a prostitute, by a U.S. serviceman, generated public outrage about crimes committed by U.S. troops (Kim, 1997; Kirk, Cornell & Okazawa-Rey, 2000). More recent crimes include the stabbing murder of Si-Sun Li near a U.S. military base in 1998 and the beating death of a 31 year old bar waitress by two American soldiers in 2000. In both cases, the men said they got angry because the women refused to have sex with them (Associated Press, 1998; Associated Press, 2000).

The Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), a security treaty, between the U.S. and Republic of Korea makes it difficult for Koreans to take legal action against U.S. troops, even when they have committed crimes (Moon, 1997). Created during the Cold War era, the U.S. was able to “negotiate separate and often unequal security treaties with each of its Asian allies,” providing few favorable provisions for countries like the Republic of Korea (Cornwell and Wells, 1999). While the Republic of Korea has some legal jurisdiction over crimes committed by U.S. troops, a clause in SOFA’s article 22 states that South Korea must give “sympathetic consideration” for any request made by the U.S. to waive its rights unless the case is considered of “particular importance” (Moon, 1997; “Activists intensify SOFA,” 2002). According to the National Campaign for the Eradication of Crime by U.S. Troops in Korea, the U.S. military is responsible for disciplining their troops, but frequently, when crimes are committed, the men are just moved to another post (Kirk & Okazawa-Rey; n.d.). In 1999, only 3.6 percent of all crimes committed by U.S. servicemen were brought to trial by the South Korean government (Young Koreans United, 2000).

In the climate of tolerance for crimes committed by U.S. troops, prostitution and trafficking for prostitution are among the most tolerated.

Domestic Trafficking of Korean Women for U.S. Military Personnel

According to one estimate, over one million Korean women have been used in prostitution by U.S. troops since the end of World War II (Moon, 1997). One man, formerly stationed at the Osan Air Base described the contemporary *kijichon* locale and prostitution in the following way:

Outside the front gate of our air base is a town called song-tan. There is a strip of bars along this street...about 25 bars. Men go to these bars to see the 'juicy girls.' ...when a man see a girl that he likes, he calls her over, or sometimes one of the old ladies that work at the bar just bring a girl to the man. He then buys her a 'juicy' (a small glass of juice or alcohol) for about \$10. sometimes they just talk, or sometimes he gropes her, but many times the talk negotiate a 'barfine' ... money paid to the owner of the bar so that the girl can go out for the evening 'bar hopping,' or to a hotel to have sex" (Anonymous, email, May 2001).

Korean girls and women become vulnerable to recruiters after they have been abandoned by families or run away from home because of abuse. They usually have limited job skills and few options for work. They are domestically trafficked from various regions of South Korea for *kijichon* prostitution outside U.S. bases. Korean women are recruited into prostitution by employment agencies that play a central role in domestic trafficking (Yu, n.d.). Young women who run away from home are often searched for by employment agencies. When the girl or woman is found, the cost to trace her is charged to her as a debt that she then has to repay (Yu, n.d.). Also, Korean women enter prostitution as a way to pay off credit card debt without knowing the conditions and violence they will face. According to one agency, "We hear many cases of those who started out making quick money to pay off credit card debts but ended up in situations they didn't know existed" (Go, IOM-Seoul, personal communication, September, 2002).

Once Korean women are in prostitution, they quickly accumulate more debt. Pimps manipulate the women into incurring debts, so that they will not be able to leave. Women are charged for rent, food, furniture, clothes, and medical expenses; so often, the longer the woman is in prostitution, the larger is her debt. One former bar woman said her debt accrued for 25 years while she was being used in the *kijichon*. Over this period of time, she had to pay for 25 abortions because she said she could not "bring another life in to this world if he/she has a life like mine" (Kirk, 1995). According to the representative of United Voice for the Eradication of Prostitution in Korea (Hansori):

"Every day a woman has to pay her pimp the money from three customers. If she fails to pay, it is added to her debt. A woman is sold from one place to another every one to two months, and the agency fee that the employer pays the employment agency is added to her debt. [One woman] started with no debts, but at the end of eight years in prostitution, her debt increased to over 20 million won (over US\$20,000) (Yu, n.d.)."

The pervasive tactic for recruiting and coercing Korean women into prostitution is through the creation and manipulation of debts. These debts are then used to control the women and keep them in prostitution, often for years.

Transnational Trafficking of Women to South Korea

In the last decade, the economic conditions have improved for South Korea, offering women more opportunities than in the past. Consequently, foreign women are increasingly replacing the Korean women in prostitution around the U.S. bases.

Women from the Philippines, the Russian Federation, Bolivia, Peru, Mongolia, China, Bangladesh, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan have been trafficked into South Korea (Jhoty, 2001; McMichael, 2002a; Lhagvasuren, 2001). According to the International Organization for Migration in Seoul, 5,000 women have been trafficked into South Korea, mostly Russians and Filipinas, who are replacing the Koreans (Capdevila, 2002a; Go, IOM-Seoul, personal communication, September 2002). For

example, in one *kijichon* area with 40 clubs, of the 301 women in prostitution, 107 were Korean, 149 were Philippine, and 45 were Russian (Union of Women's Social Organizations, n.d.).

For decades, Filipina women have been used in prostitution by U.S. troops around the large military bases in the Philippines, but those bases closed in the 1990s. The closing of the U.S. military bases, as well as the Asian economic crisis led to high unemployment, especially among women in the Philippines where only 46.8 percent of women are employed compared to 85.7 percent of men (Enriquez, n.d.). The Philippine government supports and facilitates the overseas employment of Filipinos because it helps solve their unemployment problem, and the workers abroad send home money to support families, helping to alleviate poverty (Enriquez, n.d.). Because the Philippines is a source of unskilled workers for South Korea, there are a number of agencies and schemes that recruit and facilitate the travel and work of Filipinos in South Korea (Enriquez, n.d.). Traffickers work within this system. Recruiters who work for foreign employers travel around the countryside offering poor young women opportunities for work abroad, often giving parents advance payments on their daughters' wages (Cruz, 2002). As thousands of Filipinas go abroad expecting to find work, many are now in circumstances of sexual exploitation by US troops in South Korea similar to those they were in when the U.S. military bases were in the Philippines.

The presence of Filipinas around the U.S. bases in South Korea was noted as early as 1987, but in recent years, the numbers have been increasing (Enriquez, n.d.). In 1994, there were approximately 250 Filipinas in prostitution around the U.S. military bases in South Korea. By 1997, the number increased to 1,365, and by 2002, the number rose to 3,000 (Donato, 2002). Traffickers target particular communities for recruiting women for prostitution abroad, such as those displaced in Central Luzon due to the eruption of the Mt. Pinatubo volcano and closure of the U.S. bases (Enriquez, n.d.). The women are mostly young, with high school or less education, coming from the rural areas and from poor families (Enriquez, n.d.). Many Filipinas are recruited by agencies that require the women to pay placement fees to secure good jobs for them (Donato, 2002). Instead of the jobs promised, the women are met at the airport and taken to bars or clubs around U.S. military bases (Donato, 2002).

In other cases, many Filipina women arrive in South Korea on E-6 entertainer visas and or false documents (Go, IOM-Seoul, personal communication, September, 2002). They are recruited as Overseas Performing Artists (OPA), for which they are required to prove they have entertainer skills before they are granted authorized entry into other countries to work in the entertainment industry ("Filipino Women Hired," 2002). There are indications that the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), which supervises the training and testing centers that determine if the women sent abroad are qualified as performing artists, is involved in bribery and deception with the issuance of E-6 visas (Cruz, 2002). Recruiters either bribe the authorities at the testing centers or send in skilled doubles to perform in order to get the needed certification for the woman to be able to go abroad on an entertainer visa (Cruz, 2002). When the woman arrives at the destination abroad, she is in the country legally as an entertainer with heavy debts owed to her employer, but with no true artistic skills. She is then forced into prostitution.

According to the Korean Immigration Bureau of the Ministry of Justice, the number of people entering South Korea on E-6 entertainment visas has climbed steadily: 2,150 in 1998, 4,486 in 1999, and 7,044 in 2000 (Jhoty, 2001). According to one report, the Korea Special Tourism Association, an association made up of 189 club owners near the *kijichon* areas, was the chief contractor for holders of the E-6 visas (Capdevila, 2002b). The Association began lobbying the government to bring in

foreign women to work in the nightclubs in 1996. The president of the Association claimed that their organization plays an important role in preventing GI harassment of Korean women and in strengthening U.S.-South Korea relations: "If it hadn't been for us, there would be sexual violations, maybe rapes. We are contributing to United States and Korean relations in our own way, and nobody appreciates it" (Demick, 2002). This claim is the same one used by the Japanese during World War II: Providing "comfort women" to the Japanese troops would prevent them from raping or harassing the local women.

Many women overstay the E-6 visas or work illegally on 90-day visitor's visas, known as C-3 visas (Jhoty, 2001). According to a spokesperson at the Ministry for Gender Equality, more women are trafficked through C-3 visas than E-6 visas. For example, in 2001, 1,500 Filipina and 3,518 Russian women entered on E-6 visas, while 6,675 Filipinas and 11,633 Russian entered on C-3 visas (Sung, 2001). A Ministry spokesperson said it is difficult to locate the holders of the C-3 visas after the visas expire because they are issued without strict passport inspection (Sung, 2001). If the women escape from the traffickers or pimps, they are considered illegal immigrants, sent to immigrant detention centers, and deported (Jhoty, 2001).

The collapse of the Soviet Union has created conditions in which tens of thousands of women from former Soviet countries are going abroad looking for work (Hughes, Forthcoming). Many of the Russian women held professional jobs at home before going to South Korea with false passports (Capdevila, 2002b). Between January 2000 and March 2001, approximately 6,000 Russian women entered Korea through Busan port and Gimpo airport (Jhoty, 2001). In 2000, 3,064 Russians entered South Korea on E-6 visas, 2,927 of them women (Jhoty, 2001). Less is known about the Russian or Russian-speaking women who are used in prostitution around the bases. The lack of information is due to fewer NGOs collecting information and documenting the women's experiences. Russian officials have repeatedly refused to comment on the situation (Jhoty). According to an IOM-Seoul representative, there are more Russian women in prostitution in South Korea than Philippine women, but there are more Filipinas in *kijichon* prostitution because they speak English, which is in demand around the U.S. bases (Go, IOM-Seoul, personal communication, September, 2002).

Organized crime groups have taken advantage of the economic difficulties faced by women. In January 2000, a network involving Russian organized crime and Koreans was broken up in Seoul. The Russian group supplied the women and received \$1000 per month for each woman they supplied. The Koreans operated a job placement agency, through which they had trafficked over 50 Russian women into South Korea during the previous year ("10 arrested," 2000).

There is evidence that although the Philippines and countries of the former Soviet Union are geographically, linguistically, and culturally distant, the same traffickers are at work in the recruitment and enslavement of women. Several years ago, Kim Kyong-Su was investigated by the Yong-San District police for "importing 1,093 foreign women, from the Philippines and Russia, to work as entertainers near the U.S. military camp." He was suspected of being paid recruiting fees by 234 club-bar owners to provide women for their use. He and two accomplices were charged with illegal recruitment and forging documents (Enriquez, n.d.).

After women arrive in South Korea, some are forced into prostitution right away; others are worn down by pressure and inability to pay their debts unless they engage in prostitution. In the beginning, the women are only required to sit with men and push drinks, but they make no money. They soon discover that the only way to make money and pay their debts is through prostitution (McMichael, 2002a).

Recent investigations found that the women “are all indentured servants, modern-day sexual slaves. ... These Filipino girls say they’re locked in the bar every night” (Merriman, 2002). Another investigative report found that every woman interviewed inside and outside the clubs, with the exception of some in Seoul, said they were trafficked (McMichael, 2002a). The journal of a 22-year-old Filipina detailed how she and other trafficking victims were locked in their rooms, had their passports and travel documents confiscated, threatened with violence, prohibited to make phone calls, and were given less than \$10 a week for food (Demick, 2002). In some housing for the women, video cameras are mounted over the doors to monitor their movement. Women are usually allotted only a short period of freedom, such as a half hour per day (McMichael, 2002a). One reporter found that the women were “[s]ometimes packed into one room with six or more women, they often survive on little more than ramyeon (noodles) and are forced to work, even when ill” (Jhoty, 2001). These detainment conditions led to five foreign women dying in a fire in a Gunsan brothel in 2000. In early 2002, a similar fire broke out in a Gunsan pub, and 12 women died because they were prevented from escaping by barred exits (Lee, 2002). According to a member of the U.S. Air Force who was stationed at Osan Air Base:

“[M]ost have a contract for one year. They supposedly get paid \$300-\$350 per month. but their wages are held by their owners for 3 to 4 months to pay for the airline ticket and other expenses. they usually work from 7 p.m. to 1 or 2 a.m. 7 days a week. they are usually confined to their quarters from 2 a.m. to noon the next day. this is to make sure the girl is not prostituting herself without the owner getting his cut. because of the long nights that these girls put in, they often turn to shabu (that is the name for the drug speed here in the orient) to keep themselves awake and looking happy” (Anonymous, email, May 2001).

In an exposé, TV reporter Merriman filmed U.S. military police patrolling and protecting the bars and brothels where U.S. servicemen use trafficked women for prostitution. The military officers acknowledge on camera that they know the women are trafficked, but that it was their job to protect the bars and brothels to ensure the safety of US servicemen (Merriman, 2002). One soldier stationed at Camp Casey remarked, “You know something is wrong when the girls are asking you to buy them bread. They can’t leave the clubs. They barely feed them” (Demick, 2002). A different report documented the good relations between the bar owners, pimps, and military police (McMichael, 2002a). U.S. soldiers said that the club-bar owners buy the women at auctions and must earn large sums of money before they are given their passports and freedom (Merriman, 2002).

When the women come to the attention of the Korean government, the most usual response is deportation. The Korean government defends their treatment of women as illegal aliens, not as victims, because they allegedly voluntarily engage in prostitution and make money (Jhoty, 2001). In 2001, in an international assessment of countries’ efforts to combat trafficking, the U.S. State Department ranked South Korea on tier 3 (the lowest rating) because South Korea did not comply with minimum standards and had made no efforts to comply. The Trafficking in Persons Report stated that Korea was a country of origin and transit for trafficked persons. Teresa Oh from the Korean NGO Saewoomtuh criticized the report because it failed to recognize that South Korea was also a destination country for trafficked women and children (Jhoty, 2001). Other Korean NGOs demanded that the “U.S. share the blame for Korea’s problem of prostitution and human trafficking,” referring to the significant role the U.S. military plays in creating the demand for trafficked women (Kim, n.d.).

Trafficking Korean Women to the United States

Asian and Asian-American organized crime networks operate transnationally within and between South Korea and the U.S. One of their activities is operating massage parlors throughout the U.S. that use Korean women for prostitution. The trafficking networks use some of the same methods migrant smugglers use to get women into the U.S., including: uninspected entry, meaning the women are smuggled in to the U.S. across the borders with Mexico or Canada without passing through immigration control points, the use of counterfeit documents, and entry on student or tourist visas. Another route that is routinely used by traffickers involves marriage to U.S. military personnel. In some cases, traffickers pay servicemen to bring Korean women into the U.S. through sham marriages. In other cases, traffickers and pimps target Korean women who are abandoned or divorced by U.S. military personnel.

Korean-American gangs that are known to be involved in prostitution are the Korean Fuk Ching, the Green Dragons, the Korean Killers and Korean Power. The gangs also engage in international drug trafficking, extortion, home invasions of Korean immigrants, and gambling (McGarvey, 2002).

Law enforcement officials describe the nationwide network of massage parlors as having a “layered business structure” (Doucette, 2002a), and “hierarchy” (Sergeant Jim Lalone, Waterford Township Police, Michigan, personal communication, August 30, 2002). One law enforcement officer described one network that was headquartered in Houston with links to Seoul:

The mamasans in the massage parlors [in the network around the country] send the money to Houston and Dallas, and they send it back to Korea. ... Someone is running these rings. They are routing the women. ... Someone is keeping track. ... There is a hierarchy” (Sergeant Jim Lalone, Waterford Township Police, Michigan, personal communication, August 30, 2002).

An indication of a well-organized network is the efficiency and quickness with which massage parlors reopen after a raid. Usually, the massage parlors reopen within days or weeks of a police raid (New York law enforcement officer, personal communication, September 2002; Michael Mendez, Vice Unit, Dallas Police Department, Texas, September 5, 2002; Doucette, 2002b). In some cases, if the climate becomes too hostile, the pimps move to another location before reopening.

U.S. Military Personnel as Traffickers

A high proportion of the Korean women used in the massage parlors in the U.S. were originally married to U.S. servicemen. According to one INS agent, “I don’t recall ever having interviewed a Korean prostitute in this country that was not in the country as a result of being married to an American serviceman” (Goldman, 2002). A social service provider in New York City stated that the majority of women from massage parlors that she sees were previously married to U.S. military servicemen (Rainbow Center, personal communication, October 17, 2002).

For women in prostitution around the military bases in South Korea, it is difficult to escape the stigmatization of society. Their only hope of getting out of prostitution and emigrating to the U.S. is to marry a US serviceman (Moon, 1997, p. 4). Even the trafficked women from the Philippines say their dream is to marry an American man who will buy their freedom (Merriman, 2002). In some cases, U.S. men pay off the women’s debt to the pimp to free them (Kim, 1997). In one case, a U.S. serviceman helped a trafficked woman escape by contacting a known anti-trafficking activist in Seoul (McMichael, 2002b).

In the 1980s, Army statisticians reported that the decade produced 25,000 marriages between Korean women and U.S. soldiers, at a rate of about 3,500 a year (Henican, 1989). Although many of these marriages may start off with good intention, 80 percent of marriages between Korean women and U.S. servicemen end in divorce (Moon, 1997, p.35). The women may have poor job or language skills, and are often victims of domestic violence or abandoned by their American husbands (Rainbow Center, personal communication, October 17, 2002). Isolated from both Korean and American communities, they have few options but to return to prostitution (Kim, 1997; Raymond, Hughes & Gomez, 2001). Traffickers or pimps often target women who were married or recently divorced from U.S. servicemen with attractive job offers. Korean women owners or recruiters for massage parlors are familiar with cultural practices and family obligations that could be used to pressure women into earning money. For example, the madams look for Korean women who were formerly married to U.S. servicemen and are trying to survive economically on three to four part-time jobs. She tells them they can make more money working part-time in the massage parlor. According to a former law enforcement officer who worked on prostitution and massage parlor cases for ten years: "There were Korean women who were predators, recruiting other women into the business... They knew where to push the buttons" (Former New York law enforcement officer, personal communication, October 15, 2002).

In some cases, the marriages between Korean women and U.S. servicemen were never intended to be legitimate; they were a way to bring the women into the U.S. The woman may have cooperated in a sham marriage in order to get into the U.S. in the hope of finding a better life. In other cases, her new husband served as a trafficker, working with an Asian crime network in deceiving the woman. Victims often say that their "husbands" sold them to massage parlors after their arrival in the United States (Unidentified woman, *Fox On The Record*, 2002; Kim, 1997). According to a former law enforcement official in New York City, women may be coerced into the sham marriages by Korean/Korean-American gangs to repay a debt (Former New York law enforcement officer, personal communication, October 15, 2002). Korean-American gangs obtain young women for prostitution through connections to organized crime groups in South Korea, and use sham marriages to American military servicemen to get the women into the US; they are then turned over to the Korean-American gangs that run massage parlors. Some of the young women may have been abducted from villages in South Korea and forced into sham marriages (McGarvey, 2002).

After gathering information from numerous massage parlor raids around the country, law enforcement officials name "sham marriages" with "GIs" as one of the primary methods that traffickers use to get women into the U.S. (Doucette, 2002c).

In Houston, police who issued licenses to work in "sexually oriented businesses" identified two general groups of Korean women in the area massage parlors. The women in one group speak no English and need an interpreter to assist them with the application. These women have Korean family names on their passports, but the passports are not stamped as they should be if they passed through official immigration control points when leaving Korea or entering the U.S. There is another group of Korean women who can speak more English and have American last names, indicating that they have been married to an American man (Sergeant Tim Cox, Vice Division, Houston Police Department, personal communication, September 12, 2002).

According to a police officer who was involved in raids on Korean massage parlors in the Midwest, the network that operates in his area is run by a Korean organized crime network based in Seoul, and

relies on U.S. military personnel to bring Korean women into the U.S. The women are usually young and attractive: Some are as young as 18, most are in their early 20s, but a few are in their 50s:

“The men are paid by the Korean mob that is based in Seoul. They are paid \$1500 to marry the Korean woman. In San Francisco, the divorce is already arranged as soon as he gets her into the country. Then he gets another \$1500. ...Black military personnel are involved. ...Don’t know why that is, but 90 percent of the men are black. A few whites guys, and never a Hispanic man”(Sergeant Jim Lalone, Waterford Township Police, Michigan, personal communication, August 30, 2002).

According to Police Chief William Dwyer who was involved in closing Korean massage parlors in Farmington Hills, Michigan in the mid-1980s:

“We learned servicemen had married some of the defendants in the case and brought them over here for a certain amount of money -\$5,000 to \$10,000. ... It was a slavery thing. They divorced once they were here and [the women] went to work for a Korean crime cartel who had them actually living inside these places” (Martindale, 2000).

According to a representative of the Army’s Criminal Investigation Division, “soldiers are seldom punished even when sham marriages are suspected” (Henican, 1989). Other police sources indicate that this pattern continued through the 1990s (Gillerman & Goodrich, 1997). In 1993, police obtained specific information on a member of the U.S. Navy who delivered a Korean woman to a massage parlor in Oakland County, Michigan. One of the women, who had just been delivered to the brothel two weeks before the raid, was willing to talk to the police and tell them that her “husband” had taken her to the brothel, then left her there. According to the Oakland County prosecutor:

“She was his wife, officially. He was paid to bring her here. He was in town less than 24 hours. He then left for Norfolk, Virginia” (Prosecutor, Oakland County, Michigan, personal communication, August 30, 2002).

Marriage certificates to American men enable women to obtain additional pieces of identification, which makes it more difficult to detect the activity of the traffickers. According to one officer involved in the raid of a club with Korean women in Rhode Island:

“They were Korean women, with Americanized names. We checked on their legal status with INS – and they all cleared. ... they had IDs, driver’s licenses... What happens is they would marry American servicemen and then get divorced” (Raymond, Hughes & Gomez, 2001).

Transnational trafficking networks have several ways to get women into the US for use in massage parlors, one of which is to use US military personnel. According to one law enforcement officer, “The military is the key! I’ve never seen it any other way” (Sergeant Jim Lalone, Waterford Township Police, Michigan, personal communication, August 30, 2002).

Different transnational crime groups may use different methods, which probably change over time as other opportunities for supplying women arise, but at least some of them make heavy use of U.S. military personnel as couriers, making them traffickers by law.

Massage Parlor Circuits

Crime groups usually manage a string of massage parlors around the country. Sometimes Korean women who were formerly prostitutes own the individual massage parlors (Former New York law enforcement officer, personal communication, October 15, 2002). Women are rotated from place to

place, in order to supply “fresh faces” for the men (Merriman, 2002). According to one police officer, “They women are there just a short time and then move on to the next location... They move from one big city to the next” (Michael Mendez, Vice Unit, Dallas Police Department, personal communication, September 5, 2002).

In keeping with their close association with U.S. military personnel, many massage parlors with Korean women are located around military bases in the U.S. For example, there is a heavy concentration of Korean massage parlors in Waldorf, Maryland, close to the large military populations of Andrews Air Force Base, Bolling Air Force Base, Naval Research Center, and the Pentagon (Polaris Project, 2002).

One network of Korean massage parlors has a circuit around the Midwest and southeast. The string of massage parlors runs across the southern seaboard, up the eastern seaboard and across the Midwest. According to a law enforcement officer who has been involved in raiding a number of the massage parlors in Michigan:

They start the women off in Houston and Dallas. Then they take them east along the southern seaboard. Then they go onto Florida, Georgia, from there, to Ohio, Michigan. We have 3 to 4 towns they are in here: Grand Rapids, Flint, Waterford, and Saginaw. They move them around in vehicles; they never fly. The women spend one month in each place, then onto the next. They want fresh faces. (Sergeant Jim Lalone, Waterford Township Police, Michigan, personal communication, August 30, 2002).

What happens to women in the massage parlors was described as “horrible, unbelievably terrible” by an NGO representative (Frank Barnaba, Paul and Lisa Program, personal communication, September 5, 2002). Throughout the country, sources report that women live under similar conditions in most locations. The women have few possessions and live in the massage parlors, usually sleeping on the floor (Merriman, 2002). According to one law enforcement official who was involved in several raids:

“When we raided the spa, we found that the women’s sleeping quarters upstairs ... This apartment ... was not furnished at all...there were blankets and sleeping bags all over the place. Almost like a communal type living. Next to the sleeping bag, was a cosmetic bag, handbag. The women slept there, made a small space for themselves next to their sleeping bags.... I think they get moved on a lot. So this is temporary living situation. How they were living was definitely made for ease of mobility. If they closed overnight, they could just pack up and throw everything into a van and just go” (Raymond, Hughes & Gomez, 2001).

The women seldom leave the premises and are required to work all the time.

“They don’t have access to a vehicle. We’ve never seen cars parked in the vicinity to indicate that these women are independent to drive out when they please. We’ve also never observed these women ever venture outside of the premises. I believe that the managers feed, clothe them as they see fit. If they do go out, it is probably an organized outing in the company van. ... These women were not just walking out the door” (Raymond, Hughes & Gomez, 2001).

Women are required to work to pay off debts. Even daily expenses for travel and living expenses, referred to as *papkap* or “rice money,” are added to the women’s debt. In one case in Royal Oak, Michigan, the prosecutor said that in Korea the women’s family members were living under threat or she was being used to pay off a family debt (Charles Semchena, Royal Oak, Michigan Attorney’s Office, personal communication, September 4, 2002). In another case in Rhode Island, the women had to work 16 to 18 hours per day to repay their \$10,000 debt for travel to the U.S. A police officer

noted that one of the women had cigarette burns on her arm. The club owner provided housing and food for the women, but did not pay them. Any money they made came from tips, which required the women to engage in prostitution (Rockoff, 1998).

Women in the massage parlors are subjected to high rates of violence. In one case in Washington, D.C., a man killed a woman by stabbing her 23 times in the face, neck, chest, arms, and hands (U.S. Attorney's Office, July 17, 2001). A researcher who has done studies on massage parlors in connection to AIDS commented on the level of violence and coercion the women are subjected to:

"I'm aware that many of these women are abused by clients and by their employers. They are required to have sex with several men on a daily basis, and are indebted to their employers. Some are required to pay off debts. Some are under contract for their work, and must work a certain amount of time and [earn] money to meet the requirements of their contract" (Tooru Nemoto, Center for AIDS Prevention Studies, University of California-San Francisco, personal communication, October 11, 2002).

The crime networks have many ways of preventing the women from leaving. The women believe that if they can make enough money to pay their debt, they will be able to leave and look for other opportunities. This keeps them compliant. According to an officer in the Houston Vice Division, "They save their money to pay their debt. Then just about the time their debt is paid, someone breaks into the massage parlor and steals their money." The women are told they have to continue working to pay their debt (Sergeant Tim Cox, Vice Division, Houston Police Department, personal communication, September 12, 2002).

In other situations, drugs were used to control the women. A former law enforcement officer commented:

"The prevalence of crack and cocaine was a device that a lot of madams used to create some level of obligation. Girls would get addicted to the stuff. Even if there was no original debt going into the situation, debt was incurred by purchasing narcotics. It would be done informally, while they were waiting for customers. They did it because others did it" (Former New York law enforcement officer, personal communication, October 15, 2002).

A woman who provides assistance for women from massage parlors in New York City said that many of women had been physically and verbally abused and have problems with substance abuse (Rainbow Center, personal communication, October 17, 2002).

Official Corruption and Trafficking of Women

There is widespread official complicity and corruption in the trafficking of women for prostitution. Traditionally, organized crime groups strive to corrupt officials in order to conduct their activities. Transnational trafficking of women is dependent on crossing borders and obtaining the necessary travel and identity documents, so involvement of corrupt officials, who take bribes or assist in providing authentic documents, is crucial to successful operations. Because prostitution is often viewed as a "victimless crime," police and other officials are more willing to cooperate with the pimps and traffickers.

In South Korea, police are often complicit in the control of the women by returning escaping women to the bar owners (McMichael, 2002a). Teresa Oh, a social worker who assists women in prostitution reported that, "If a Russian or Filipina girl runs away, and the club owner calls the police, the police

will go get her-and she will be abused when she's brought back" (McMichael, 2002a). Senior Superintendent Kim Kang-ja, Director of the Women and Juvenile Division of the Korean National Police Agency, cites widespread corruption or tolerance of prostitution in clubs around the U.S. bases. She said that "almost all" of the South Korean police and officials responsible for enforcing prostitution laws accept bribes (McMichael, 2002a). She added that if the South Korean law banning consorting with prostitutes was tightly enforced "almost all U.S. soldiers would be arrested. Korean police should arrest them, or hand them to the American officers. But it's not actually taking place. Nobody is controlling them" (McMichael, 2002a).

In the U.S., a nationwide investigation into Asian American organized crime exposed how corrupt police officers protect and assist the operation of Korean prostitution rings. Presently, as part of a nation-wide crackdown on Asian-American organized crime involving Korean massage parlors, a Sunnyvale, California police officer stands accused of accepting gifts, cash, and sex in exchange for police information and protection for two Korean "hostess bars." In addition, he helped the owners of the club track down women who escaped before paying their debt. On one occasion, he traveled with the owner of the club to Hawaii to threaten a woman with jail or deportation if she did not pay the owner money (Stites, Cronk, & Pittman, 2002).

Several law enforcement officials who were interviewed noted suspicious patterns in the identity documents that the Korean women in the massage parlors had when a raid took place. One officer noticed that although the women had what appeared to be authentic passports, they were not stamped which would be required if the women had passed through immigration control (Sergeant Tim Cox, Vice Division, Houston Police Department, personal communication, September 12, 2002). Another official noted that most of the women had driver's licenses issued for the same place (Prosecutor, Oakland County, Michigan, personal communication, August 30, 2002). These irregularities or suspicious patterns seem to indicate that corrupt officials may be involved in assisting the traffickers or massage parlor crime groups in getting identity documents for the women.

U.S. Military and Government Response to Trafficking of Women

U.S. Military, Government, and Federal Law Enforcement Response

When confronted with evidence of U.S. troops using women for prostitution and women being trafficked for prostitution in South Korea, the Department of Defense has two standard responses. The first is to say that engaging in prostitution is a violation of US Military Code of Conduct, thereby stating that they have an official policy against it and that men who engage in prostitution are in violation of the rules. The Department of Defense's second response is to say it is prevented from taking action against in South Korean civilian criminal activity because it would violate South Korea's sovereignty (McMichael, 2002a).

According to a man formerly stationed at the Osan Air Base, South Korea:

"I also believe that the Korean government and the United States Forces Korea (USFK) knows what is going on and does very little to stop it. The USFK has the military authority to make these places "off-limits" but doesn't unless they find out that prostitution is going on in an establishment. Then they usually make that establishment "off-limits" for a while then it gets taken off their list of "off-limit establishments" and there back in business again. Prostitution is prohibited to military personnel by the military uniform code of justice but it goes on" (Anonymous, email, May 2001).

The U.S. State Department is on record saying that U.S. soldiers should not engage in prostitution. Nancy Ely-Raphel, former head of the Office to Combat Trafficking in Persons said, “There’s a zero-tolerance policy on the part of our military toward prostitution and towards frequenting brothels. So the military can do a lot about it” (McMichael, 2002c). Yet, in a report released by Saewoomtuh, a South Korean NGO providing services to military base prostitutes, eighty-four percent of male U.S. military personnel admitted to being with a prostitute (Kim, 2000).

In the spring and summer 2002, exposés on the exploitation of trafficked women around U.S. military bases in South Korea were aired by several news agencies. The reports showed that military police were aware of the activities and patrolled the bars. In response, a number of U.S. Congressmen wrote a letter to Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld requesting an investigation. Army Secretary Thomas E. White responded that military police “do not regulate, protect, or support Korean businesses or enterprises in any way” (McMichael, 2002a). Further investigation is underway, and there may be Congressional hearings on this topic in the future.

The trafficking of Korean women for prostitution in the U.S. is not a new phenomenon, and in the past has received periodic federal attention. In 1986, the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations reported on U.S. servicemen’s involvement in bringing Korean women into the U.S. for use in massage parlor prostitution circuits. They identified a pattern of Asian/Asian-American organized crime groups using sham marriages to get women into the U.S. According to Dan Rinzel, the chief Republican counsel to the subcommittee nearly all the women entered the U.S. “by visas obtained through fraudulent marriages to American GIs stationed in Korea” (Yeager, 1994).

In summer 2002, a crackdown by federal agents on Asian organized crime in the U.S. revealed both the scope of the massage parlor networks and the progress that needs to be made by U.S. authorities in effectively countering trafficking. Eighty-seven warrants were served in California, Michigan, Kentucky, Nevada, Tennessee, Connecticut, Ohio, North Carolina, Texas, Georgia, Pennsylvania, and Virginia (Associated Press, 2002a). The investigation was initiated five years before when one of the massage parlor operators tried to bribe public officials, including a judge (Associated Press, 2002b).

This series of cases was investigated from the framework of organized crime, which focused on the crimes of money laundering and bribery, not trafficking in women. Initial comments by FBI and local police that appeared in newspaper stories indicated these women were in classic trafficking conditions: the women were recruited in South Korea and provided visas by brokers; if visas could not be arranged, the women were flown into Mexico and smuggled across the border; the women were brought to the U.S. under false pretenses; the women were obligated to repay debts for travel and living expenses by engaging in prostitution; and the women lived in the massage parlors and were only allowed to leave for short periods of time (Mickle & Palmer, 2002; Associated Press, 2002a; Associated Press, 2002b). While initial investigations by the FBI did not find any evidence of trafficking, screening for trafficking may have failed due to intimidation of the victims by organized crime groups, cultural barriers in communication, and lack of follow-up by law enforcement. One FBI official involved with the case believes that trafficking was probably present, and cited lack of prioritization by the FBI as the reason why the screening may have failed and no follow-up was planned (FBI agent, Michigan, personal communication, August 10, 2002). Calls to newspaper reporters in the towns where arrests were made indicated that just days after the raids and arrests, the massage parlors were open again (Ken Palmer, reporter, *Flint Journal*, personal communication, August 7, 2002).

Local Law Enforcement Response

Although a few smaller municipalities have worked vigorously to close massage parlors because of their unpopularity in the community, in larger cities, there is little enforcement of laws concerning massage parlors or the establishments reopen within a few days of a raid (Michael Mendez, Vice Unit, Dallas Police Department, personal communication, September 5, 2002). Reasons given for lack of enforcement range from massage parlors being a lower priority than other types of prostitution or organized crime, lack of personnel and resources due to decrease in size of vice units, and legal challenges to ordinances regulating massage parlors (Sergeant Jim Lalone, Waterford Township Police, Michigan, personal communication, August 30, 2002; Keith Haight, Vice Unit, Los Angeles Police Department, personal communication, September 5, 2002; Sergeant Tim Cox, Vice Division, Houston Police Department, personal communication, September 12, 2002).

Law enforcement personnel in the United States are generally unaware that Korean women in massage parlors are potential victims of trafficking. The women are usually treated as criminals, as in Flushing, New York, where the women were arrested or in Providence, Rhode Island, where one victim with cigarette burns was arrested and deported. Many police recognize the slavery-like conditions under which the women work, but are unaware of the concept of trafficking in persons as a human rights violation and the legal status of a trafficking victim. Women's possession of U.S. drivers' licenses or other documents makes victimization harder to recognize. Prosecution of the victims further victimizes the women, and shields the traffickers from being held accountable under US anti-trafficking law.

Conclusion

The U.S. military bases in South Korea form a hub for the transnational trafficking of women from the Asia-Pacific and Eurasia to South Korea and the United States. Over the past six decades, U.S. troops have used an estimated million Korean women in prostitution. During the 1990s, increasing numbers of women from the Asia-Pacific and Eurasia, particularly the Philippines and Russia, were trafficked into bars and brothels around the military bases in South Korea. From South Korea, women are trafficked, frequently by U.S. servicemen, to the United States where they are used in prostitution on massage parlor circuits. Asian, Russian, and Korean-American organized crime groups cooperate with each other to run the trafficking networks. The number of different groups or gangs that are involved, how they are interlinked, or cooperate is unknown. They exist to make money by supplying women to meet the demand for prostitution by U.S. military personnel in South Korea and men in the United States.

A significant number of Korean women in massage parlors in the U.S. are former wives of U.S. servicemen. Some of the marriages are legitimate, but after being abandoned or divorced, Korean women are vulnerable to being recruited for the massage parlor circuit. In other cases, the marriage was a sham arranged by organized crime networks as a method to get Korean women into the U.S.

The widespread tolerance of prostitution in bars around the U.S. bases in South Korea and the massage parlors around the U.S. has fueled the demand for women, resulting in increased trafficking of women. In South Korea, if there are too many negative incidents relating to prostitution in the bars, they are listed as off-limits to the troops for a certain period of time; later the ban is lifted. In the U.S., a few smaller communities have permanently closed massage parlors, but in most large cities, there is little investigation or effective enforcement of laws. Most of the massage parlors reopen within days of police raids.

In both South Korea and the United States, some members of the military, police, and social service agencies recognize the abusive, exploitive, and often slavery-like conditions under which the women live. Yet, the women are still usually treated as criminals, instead of victims. In South Korea, the foreign women are deported. In the U.S., with a few exceptions, most police raids on massage parlors focus on arresting the women.

The findings of this research indicate that much more education is needed for military personnel, federal and local law enforcement personnel, and social service providers on the trafficking of women for prostitution. In the interviews that were done for this paper, few of those interviewed in the U.S. were aware of the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act that was passed by Congress in 2000, or the implications of the new abolitionist definitions of sex trafficking. Changes in U.S. local law enforcement practices are needed because priorities for enforcement of laws against massage parlors are set at the local level. A nation-wide paradigm shift is needed in how prostitution in massage parlors is viewed and handled. Police officers need to recognize that the women are most likely victims of transnational and domestic trafficking. They should be offered services instead of being arrested as criminals.

Much more research is needed on the transnational and domestic trafficking of women to South Korea and from South Korea to the U.S. From the interviews conducted and media stories and NGOs reports reviewed, there appear to be a variety of methods that traffickers and pimps use. In this paper, these different methods have been described, with a focus on the involvement of U.S. servicemen, but much more in-depth research is needed to fully characterize and quantify the different modes of operation. It is not known if different organized crime networks use methods specific to their groups, or if different methods reflect changes in modes of operation over time. It is not known if different methods of trafficking are unique to certain geographical regions.

More service providers are needed to assist the women used in the bars in South Korea and the massage parlors in the U.S. While the Philippine Embassy has created strong outreach efforts and local NGOs in South Korea are increasingly providing services to women involved in military prostitution, there are fewer such provisions for Russian women who are involved in sex trafficking. In the U.S., the infrastructure and trained personnel for coordinated outreach to trafficking victims within massage parlors currently do not exist. Additionally, the lack of a strong social support system within the Korean American community (due to the stigma associated with prostitution) and within the greater community (due to language barriers) adds to the ease of targeting trafficking victims.

On a more positive note, a new awareness is growing. In the Republic of Korea, a coalition of women's organizations (Korea Women's Associations United – KWAU) has recently created a committee working to draft a bill to strengthen anti-trafficking initiatives to be presented before the National Assembly (KWAU, 2002; Cho, Y.S., personal communication, 2003). Furthermore, increasingly strained political relationships between the U.S. and Republic of Korea suggest an opportunity for constructive changes in the SOFA. The acquittal of U.S. servicemen who allegedly ran over two school girls with their tank led to massive public outrage against crimes committed by the U.S. military. Combined with recent nuclear threats from North Korea, the U.S. government agreed to set up a task force to revise the current SOFA conditions, including ways to strengthen South Korea's right to investigate crimes committed by U.S. soldiers (Korea Now staff, 2002).

Also, in the U.S., the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act is providing new tools and definitions to fight the trafficking of women. The annual Trafficking in Persons report with its ranking of countries' compliance to minimum standards for combating trafficking is putting countries

on notice that they are failing in their response to fight the trafficking of women. In 2001, South Korea was ranked on tier 3, the lowest. As a result, the government began to take steps to bring itself into compliance, resulting in its rank being raised to tier 2 in 2002. More media stories and research are exposing the traffickers and the harm to victims. Media exposés in South Korea have generated investigations by the U.S. Congress. The combination of these pressures is creating an increase in arrests of traffickers in South Korea (“Prosecution combats brothels,” 2002). In the U.S., federal prosecutors have increased the number of cases of trafficking they are pursuing, although, to date, none have involved Korean massage parlors.

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