

SEX SLAVES

The Prostitution, Cybersex & Forced Marriage
of North Korean Women & Girls in China

≡ Korea Future
≡ Initiative



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Recommended citation: Yoon Hee-soon, 'Sex Slaves: The Prostitution, Cybersex & Forced Marriage of North Korean Women & Girls in China'. London: Korea Future Initiative (2019).

Published by: Korea Future Initiative, London, United Kingdom. www.koreafuture.org

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#UsTooNK

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In March 2018, the Korea Future Initiative documented widespread gender-based sexual violence in North Korea. Maintaining its focus on under-investigated and under-reported issues, this report moves to China and the tens of thousands of North Korean women and girls trafficked and sold into the sex trade.

The report uncovers and documents: First, a set of factors that leave North Korean women and girls uniquely vulnerable to sex trafficking and the sex trade. Second, a demand for sex slaves in China that is fuelling the exploitation and abuse of North Korean women and girls. Third, a set of pathways that push victims into organised prostitution, cybersex, and forced marriages. Fourth, a complex and inter-connected network of criminality that accrues an estimated \$105,000,000 United States Dollars annually from the sale of female North Korean bodies.

The findings in this report stem from careful long-term engagement with victims living in China and exiled survivors in South Korea. Collaboration between victims, survivors, researchers, Chinese citizens, and rescuers allowed for critical on-the-ground investigations and yielded significant discoveries. This report marks the first time that the majority of interviewees felt able to discuss their experiences of sexual violence and sex trafficking – for which the author is truly grateful.

The objective of this report is to provide a brief description of the systematic rape, sex trafficking, sexual slavery, sexual abuse, prostitution, cybersex trafficking, forced marriage, and forced pregnancy

of North Korean women and girls in China. Pushed from their homeland by a patriarchal regime that survives through the imposition of tyranny, poverty, and oppression, North Korean women and girls are passed through the hands of traffickers, brokers, and criminal organisations before being pulled into China's sex trade, where they are exploited and used by men until their bodies are depleted.

At a time when significant global capital is invested in China and, more recently, political capital expended on North Korea, it is a damning indictment that North Korean women and girls are left languishing in the sex trade. Condemnation is insufficient. Only tangible acts can dismantle China's sex trade, confront a North Korean regime that abhors women, and rescue sex slaves scattered across brothels, remote townships, and cybersex dens in mainland China. That Korea Future Initiative – a small nongovernmental organisation that receives no funding or support from governments, human rights institutions, or grant-giving bodies – was able to uncover abuses largely overlooked by the international community should act as an incentive to all.

With knowledge of great wrongs comes responsibilities. The question remains of who will champion North Korean human rights?

1. The exploitation of female North Korean bodies generates annual profits of at least \$105,000,000 United States Dollars for the Chinese underworld. Victims are prostituted for as little as ¥30 Chinese Yuan (\$4 United States Dollars), sold as wives for just ¥1000 Chinese Yuan (\$146 United States Dollars), and trafficked into cybersex dens for exploitation by a global online audience.
2. Commonly aged between 12-29 and overwhelmingly female, victims are coerced, sold, or abducted in China or trafficked directly from North Korea. Many are sold more than once and are forced into at least one form of sexual slavery within a year of leaving their homeland.
3. Prostitution has overtaken forced marriage as the primary pathway into the sex trade for North Korean women and girls. Enslaved in brothels that litter satellite-towns and townships close to large urban areas in northeast China, victims are mostly aged between 15-25 and are habitually subjected to penetrative vaginal and anal rape, forced masturbation, and groping.
4. Cybersex trafficking is a small, rudimentary, but expanding component in the trade for female North Koreans. Girls aged as young as 9 are forced to perform graphic sex acts and are sexually assaulted in front of webcams which are live-streamed to a paying global audience, many of whom are believed to be South Korean men.
5. Forced marriages remain an enduring component of the Chinese sex trade. Persistent in rural areas and townships, North Korean women continue to be bought, raped, exploited, and enslaved by Chinese husbands. The same fate has befallen a smaller, but significant, number of North Korean women who have been trafficked to South Korea and sold to single men.
6. Prospects for North Korean women and girls trapped in China's multi-million-dollar sex trade are bleak. Many victims have perished in China, while small rescue organisations and Christian missionaries struggle to perform work that the Government of South Korea and the international community will not undertake – namely the extension of physical protections to North Korean refugees in Chinese territory. Urgent and immediate action, which will run contrary to the prevailing politics of inter-Korean dialogue, is needed to save the lives of countless female North Korean refugees in China.

² 上海, 里弄的站街女, Lei Han.
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I am a North Korean survivor of human trafficking and forced marriage. My experiences bear witness to the failures of States, nongovernmental organisations, and human rights activists. Sadly, I am not alone. The sex trafficking of North Korean women and girls in China is more prevalent, more complex, and far closer at hand than many readers of this report may appreciate.

Three male generations of the Kim dynasty have ruled my homeland for seventy years. Like all North Korean women, I had no rights under their rule — no right to freedom, liberty, or the pursuit of happiness. My family was ripped apart and our relationships severed. I was forced to endure starvation and was driven from my homeland by desperation and fear. Trafficked into China, I was deceived by a broker and sold into marriage for ¥5000 Chinese Yuan (\$720 United States Dollars). I spent six years as a slave. I gave birth to a son. I was arrested by Chinese police. And I was repatriated to North Korea. For the ‘crime’ of being trafficked and sold, the Government of North Korea incarcerated me in a camp where I was forced to endure acts that will haunt me for the rest of my life.

This all happened because I am a North Korean woman.

After I escaped from North Korea a second time and, thankfully, found freedom in the United Kingdom, I have looked on as male statesmen, male ‘experts’, male-dominated conferences, and male journalists have attempted to explain my homeland. Most have failed to understand that the story of North Korea is also the story of female subjugation — of structural, sexual, and physical violence. North Korean women and girls are grist for the mill. We are expendable. We must experience horrors until we are forced into subjugation, death, or escape. Our bodies are fodder for the men and the ideology that rule our lives.

In such an uncaring world, what can be done for my countrywomen? Peace can never be brought to countries or people governed by men who despise women — that much is clear to all who open their eyes. Making a difference in the fight against human trafficking is, therefore, daunting, but not impossible. It is obvious that we must target China’s sex trade and trafficking rings for removal and actively rescue and protect victims. And we must also confront the main problem — the Government of North Korea — at its source.

I will not give up, and it is my hope that the voices of my countrywomen that fill this report will speak for all the voiceless North Korean women and girls, and that the world will finally listen.

Park Jihyun

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Escaping myriad human rights violations in their homeland, including extermination, enslavement, and prolonged starvation, up to 200,000 North Koreans have fled into mainland China.⁴ Most are female and exist precariously as undocumented refugees who lack basic legal protections and are denied a means to travel to third-countries. Uniquely vulnerable to abuse and exploitation, they become trapped between the Government of China – who seek their arrest and repatriation – the Government of North Korea – who torture, interrogate, incarcerate, and even execute repatriated citizens – and the illicit Chinese sex trade.⁵

An estimated 60% of female North Korean refugees in China are trafficked into the sex trade.⁶ Of that number, close to 50% are forced into prostitution, over 30% sold into forced marriage, and 15% pressed into cybersex.⁷ First detected in villages and towns in North Hamgyong Province in the

mid-1980s, the sex trafficking of North Koreans remained small-scale, opportunistic, and localised until two events a decade later connected supply with demand and transformed the crime into what is today a multi-million-dollar illicit industry.⁸

Firstly, the supply of potential sex slaves in China swelled as tens of thousands of North Koreans crossed the border between 1994–1999 to escape famine in their homeland.⁹ Largely overlooked by the international community, at least 7000–10,000 North Korean men, women, and children are estimated to have become victims of human trafficking in China by the turn-of-the-century.¹⁰ Men and boys were forced to labour on construction sites and farms under threats of violence and repatriation, while women and girls were sold into domestic labour, manual labour, and an evolving sex trade.

⁴ Estimates on the number of North Koreans in China vary between 50,000–200,000 and include North Korean nationals and their children, many of whom are born in China but do not receive Chinese citizenship. See: United Nations Human Rights Council, Report of the detailed findings of the commission of inquiry on human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (2014), 111.

⁵ In breach of its obligations under the United Nations Refugee Convention and aspects of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, China does not allow the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees unimpeded access to aid, screen, or determine the status of North Koreans on its territory.

⁶ The sex trade refers to the trafficking of victims into any act for the purpose of sexual exploitation. This figure covers the period 2015–2018 and reflects the opinions of rescuers who have been based in China. Unless otherwise stated or cited, all figures in this report are based on interviews with survivors and victims and discussions with rescuers.

⁷ North Korean victims are not alone in China's sex trade. See: The Guardian, 'Weddings from hell: the Cambodian brides trafficked to China', www.theguardian.com/global-development/2016/feb/01/weddings-from-hell-cambodian-brides-trafficked-china, 1 February 2016; J Vu, 'Thousands of Vietnamese women and children sold as "sex slaves"', www.asianews.it/news-en/Thousands-of-Vietnamese-women-and-children-sold-as-sex-slaves--17850.html, 3 November 2010; Radio Free Asia, 'Chinese Marriage Proposals Become Prostitution Nightmares for Some Lao Girls', www.rfa.org/english/news/laos/chinese-marriage-proposals-02132017122352.html, 13 February 2017; Voice of America, 'Myanmar Woman, Trafficked to China to Marry, Hopes to Save Others From Same Fate', www.voanews.com/a/myanmar-woman-trafficked-to-china-to-marry-hopes-to-save-others-from-same-fate/3998522.html, 23 August 2017.

⁸ In the mid-1980s, some female North Korean traders crossed into China to purchase goods for North Korea's nascent blackmarkets and were coerced into forced marriages and prostitution, sometimes in illicit sex shops that sold pay-per-view pornographic videotapes.

Secondly, as the supply of North Koreans in China increased, so too did demand. In rural townships and villages, out-migrations of marriageable Chinese women had created a buyer's market for foreign brides. While in urban towns and cities, higher wages led to a greater demand for prostitutes among Chinese male migrants.¹¹ Demand for brides and prostitutes were met in China's southern provinces by trafficked victims from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.¹² In north-eastern provinces, men turned to North Korean refugees.

Bought, sold, and exploited until their bodies are depleted, many North Korean victims of China's sex trade never escape the consequences of the sexual violence they endure. Numerous testimonies spoke of victims of prostitution who have perished in China from sexually transmitted diseases and physical abuse. This report has been fortunate to engage with some of the lucky few who have escaped and, unhappily, others who remain. It is now the hope of the author and Korea Future Initiative that this work marks not just the start of greater learning, but of greater action.

Connecting supply with demand have been a tapestry of ethnic Korean and ethnic Chinese brokers, human traffickers, and criminal organisations. It can be conservatively estimated that their collective sexual exploitation of female North Korean refugees in China generates annual profits of at least \$105,000,000 United States Dollars (USD).¹³

⁹ North Korea's famine is estimated to have killed between 450,000–2,000,000 citizens. See: United Nations Human Rights Council, Report of the detailed findings of the commission of inquiry on human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (2014), 39.

¹⁰ Estimate provided by a rescuer of North Koreans.

¹¹ See: G Tianming, A Ivolga, and V Erokhin, 'Sustainable Rural Development in Northern China: Caught in a Vice between Poverty, Urban Attractions, and Migration', *Sustainability* 10 (2018):1-20; J Tucker, G Henderson, T Wang, Y Huang, W Parish, S Pan, X Chen, M Cohen, 'Surplus men, sex work, and the spread of HIV in China', *AIDS* 19 (2005):539-547; X Jin, L Liu, Y Li, M Feldman, S Li, "'Bare Branches" and the Marriage Market in Rural China: Preliminary Evidence from a Village-Level Survey', *Chinese Sociological Review* 46 (2013):83-104.

¹² See: Q Jiang and J Sánchez-Barricarte, 'Trafficking in Women in China', *Asian Women* 27 (2011):83-111; Y Liu, J Stillwell, J Shen, and K Daras, 'Interprovincial Migration, Regional Development and State Policy in China, 1985–2010', *Applied Spatial Analysis and Policy* 7 (2014):47-70.

¹³ According to the International Labour Office, every female forced into sexual exploitation in the Asia-Pacific region earns \$12,000 USD profit for traffickers each year. Taking a low estimate of 50,000 North Korean refugees currently living in China – a figure that was cited in the 2014 United Nations Commission of Inquiry – and assuming that 70% of North Korean refugees in China are female and that just 25% have been trafficked into any form of sexual exploitation, these victims would earn a minimum of \$105,000,000 USD for traffickers and criminal organisations in one-year. See: International Labour Office, *Profits and Poverty: The Economics of Forced Labour* (2014), 27.



¹⁴上海,里弄的站街女, Lei Han.
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This report comprises the most significant work published to date by Korea Future Initiative. Research and interviews over a period of two years connected the experiences of over forty-five survivors and victims of sexual violence into clear patterns of sex trafficking and exploitation. In the process of telling their stories, constancies and new details of China's sex trade were exposed to reveal a complex and interconnected illicit industry that accrues vast profits from trafficked women and girls. Unless otherwise stated, all figures in this paper stem from the aforesaid interviews and discussions with rescuers and Chinese citizens.

The courageousness of survivors, victims, the families and friends of victims, rescuers and their organisations, and researchers during the lifecycle of this report cannot be overstated.¹⁵ Engaging with victims in China, and to some extent with survivors in South Korea, was a fraught process riddled with ethical, security, and political difficulties.¹⁶ Unconventional methods of outreach and research were required, not least to ensure the safety of interviewees and researchers.¹⁷

Throughout this report, and abiding by the wishes of many survivors, the terms prostitute and prostitution, rather than sex worker and sex work, are consciously employed. Such terminology moves beyond descriptive functions to contest the normalisation of male-dominated standards that govern the commodification of the female body.¹⁸ In this context, understandings of prostitution and forced marriage as transactional sex, survival sex, or sex as work are rejected.¹⁹ Victim is used to describe a person forced into sexual slavery²⁰ and survivor to describe a person who has escaped sexual slavery. In accordance with the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Minors, and aligned to the territories in which most documented crimes are committed, this report defines girls as aged under 18.²¹

¹⁵ A misguided, yet sadly common perception of Chinese nationals, in particular ethnic Koreans, portrays them as an uncaring population who exploit or overlook North Korean refugees en masse. At a time where the international community, in particular the Government of South Korea, has taken a step back from documenting and protecting North Korean human rights, it is noteworthy that a small band of ethnic Korean and Chinese researchers became integral to the findings of this report.

¹⁶ See: The People's Republic of China, Exit and Entry Administration Law of the People's Republic of China (2013); The People's Republic of China, Mutual Cooperation Protocol for the Work of Maintaining National Security and Social Order in the Border Areas (1986); United Nations Human Rights Council, Report of the detailed findings of the commission of inquiry on human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (2014).

¹⁷ See: Article 45, The People's Republic of China, Exit and Entry Administration Law of the People's Republic of China (2013).

¹⁸ Based on survivor testimonies and discussions, this report adopts the view that a distinction between forced and voluntary prostitution cannot exist. The prostitution of North Korean women and girls is a coercive and gendered practice grounded in patriarchal social structures and is reliant on physical force and other harmful contexts, such as poverty, absent legal aid, and hunger – all of which specifically disadvantage women and girls.

¹⁹ Survival and transactional sex are said to involve the exchange of sex for services, such as food or shelter. See: B Ozler, 'What do people mean when they talk about "transactional sex"?', www.blogs.worldbank.org/impacetevaluations/what-do-people-mean-when-they-talk-about-transactional-sex, 23 February 2012.

²⁰ In this report, the term 'sexual slavery' refers to all practices that place women and girls in actual or imminent danger of sexual violence.

When describing North Koreans in China, this report avoids use of the term defector. The term carries a negative connotation of a person who has abandoned or deserted their country and does not accurately describe the experiences of North Koreans who have been forced into exile by their government's imposition of poverty, hardship, and human rights violations. The terms exile and escapee are used where appropriate.

Human trafficking and exploitation are defined in accordance with the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organised Crime:²²

'[T]he recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.'

To define sexual violence, this report uses the World Health Organisation's (WHO) description:²³

'Any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the survivor, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work.'

Where appropriate, interviews conducted for this report conformed to the WHO Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Interviewing Trafficked Women and WHO best practices in researching violence against women.²⁴ Pseudonyms are used to protect the identities and safety of all victims, families of victims, and survivors in China and elsewhere.

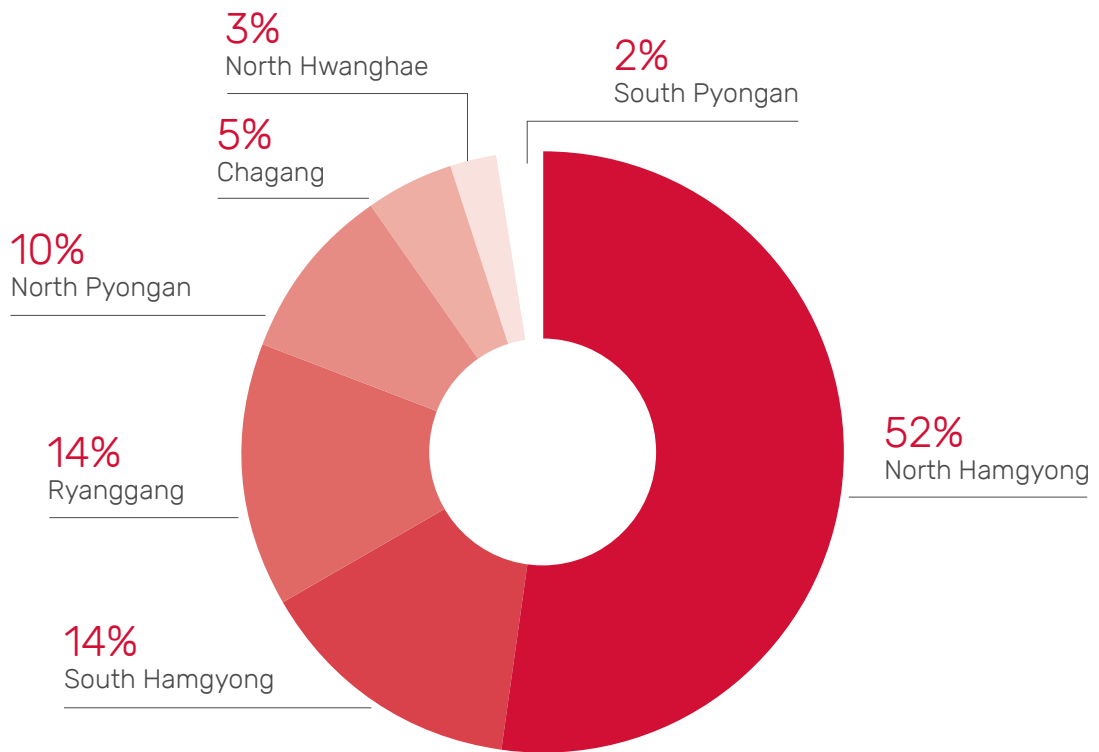
²¹ This is used in place of Article 295 of the North Korean Criminal Law, which defines a child as being under the age of 15.

²² United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime and The Protocols Thereto (Vienna: 2004).

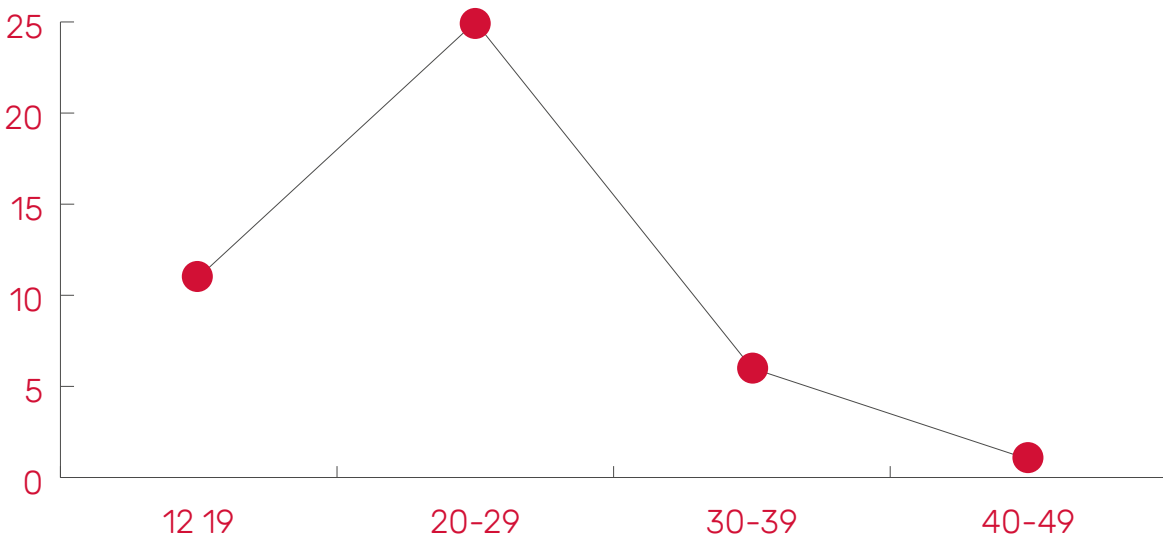
²³ World Health Organization, Violence against women – Intimate partner and sexual violence against women (Geneva: 2011).

²⁴ C Zimmerman and C Watts, WHO ethical and safety recommendations for interviewing trafficked women (Geneva: 2003); M Ellsberg and L Heise, Researching Violence Against Women: A Practical Guide for Researchers and Activists (Washington DC: 2005).

Birthplace of interviewees



Age when sold into China's sex trade



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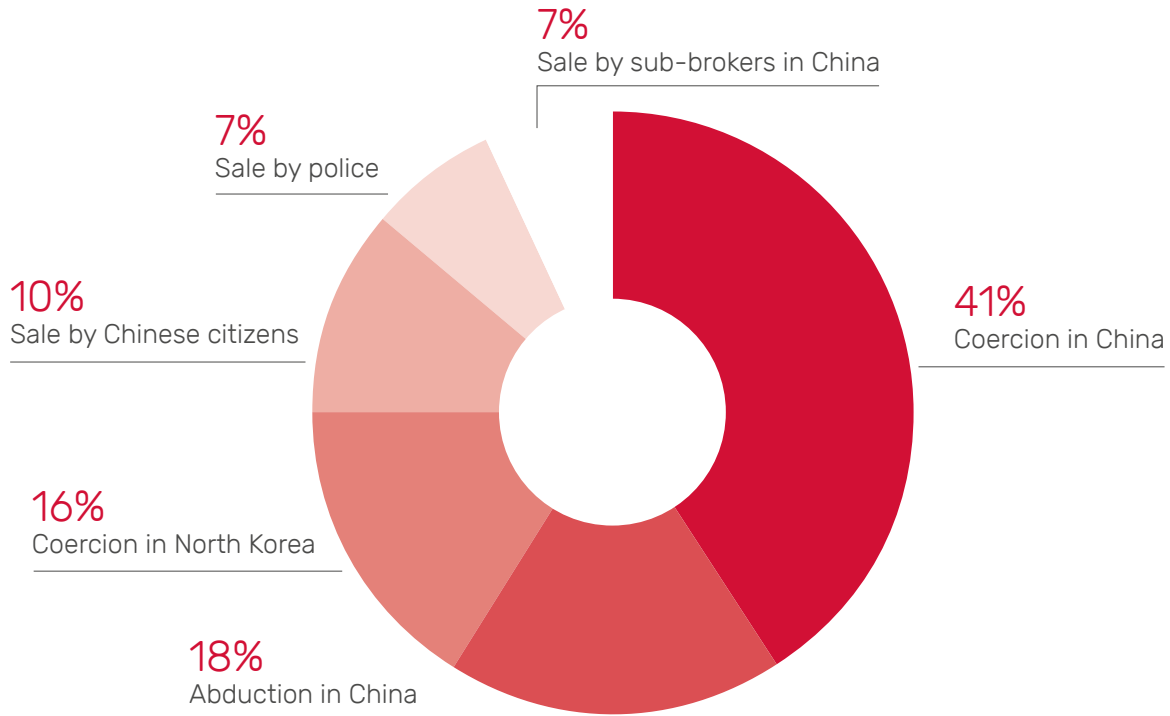


PATHWAYS INTO CHINA'S SEX TRADE

All North Koreans must cross into China to escape their homeland.²⁸ Traversing the Yalu or Tumen rivers, escapees swim or cross on-foot at narrow gullies in summer and edge across the frozen rivers in winter, avoiding thin-ice that has proved fatal for many. Under the 1951 Refugee Convention, to which China is a party, almost every North Korean outside of their homeland is entitled to protection and non-refoulement.²⁹ However, Beijing's policy of non-enforcement places North Koreans in immediate danger and pushes them to fend for themselves by scrambling into mountains and scrubland to survive.

Driven by hunger and desperation, many tentatively make their way toward settlements in China's 2,000,000-strong ethnic Korean communities. Some join relatives or look for employment in factories, farms, or restaurants. Others find occasional work as maids in hotels or the homes of ethnic Korean or South Korean families. Homeless girls, known as kotjebi, scavenge for food and money, while others venture further afield into China. Evading the gaze of authorities, all exist and subsist in the shadows of Chinese society – which is where the sex trade awaits.

Pathways into China's sex trade



²⁸ The Korean Demilitarised Zone at the 38th Parallel divides North and South Korea and prevents all but a handful of escapes across this border. North Korea also shares a small border with Russia, but few escapes occur.

²⁹ North Koreans in China are refugees owing to their inability to return to North Korea without being persecuted and their inability to claim the protection or citizenship of the Government of South Korea while in China. Details of escapes are not included for reasons of safety.

³⁰ Based solely upon interviews.

COERCION, ABDUCTION, AND SALE IN CHINA

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Eighty-four percent of North Korean women and girls trafficked into the sex trade are victims of coercion, abduction, or sale inside China.³² Moving across northeast China in small groups as they search for work and sanctuary, female North Koreans are conspicuous by their clothing, which can be peculiar to current Chinese fashions, their physical appearance, which can exhibit visible malnourishment, and their inability to speak or understand Mandarin.

Operating in rural and urban areas, many human traffickers exclusively prey on North Korean women and girls. Approaching victims in the Korean language with offers of food, clothing, support, or the chance of onward journeys to South Korea, one victim explained how she was approached by multiple and competing traffickers in a period of just four days after crossing into China. Driven by desperation and fear of arrest, and unable to differentiate between friend and foe, many unwittingly accept the dishonest offers of human traffickers.

In cases where coercion fails, human traffickers can resort to abduction. A practice that was once confined to border-towns and rural areas, 18% of interviewees had experienced either abductions or attempted abductions in China. In the majority of cases, contact between the abductor and

victims had typically occurred before a kidnapping, suggesting the practice is used as a last resort if coercion fails. Crude means of abduction are common and many testimonies involved captors using force or the means of surprise. Recent testimonies situated abductions and attempted abductions in cities, towns, places of employment, and public transport.

Direct sales by Chinese nationals, police officers in China's Ministry of Public Security, and sub-brokers account for 1/4 of the human trafficking of North Korean women and girls.³³

Sales by Chinese nationals – namely, relatives of escapees, employers, opportunistic citizens, and persons masquerading as missionaries or rescuers – have been commonplace since the mid-1990s. Typically sold by individuals who live in economically disadvantaged communities,³⁴ victims can be groomed or targeted, although many sales are believed to be opportunistic.³⁵ Known to be prevalent in border regions with ethnic Korean communities in Liaoning and Heilongjiang provinces, the sale of a single young North Korean woman for ¥7500–¥11,600 Chinese Yuan (\$1095–\$1694 USD) is considerable when compared to a minimum monthly wage of just ¥1000 Chinese Yuan (\$147 USD).³⁶

³² Almost 50% become victims of the sex trade within twelve months of their entry into China and 25% in under one month.

³³ The designation 'sub-brokers' refers to brokers, sometimes called secondary brokers, who operate under the employment of a primary private broker. Private brokers and sub-brokers are paid to lead North Korean refugees to safety in foreign countries.

³⁴ Growth of just 2.1% in Liaoning Province, 6.3% in Heilongjiang Province, and 6.5% in Jilin Province are slower than the national rate of 6.9%, leading to mass layoffs from industries and declining incomes. See: South China Morning Post, 'Liaoning worst performer as China's northeast lags behind country's economic growth', <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/economy/article/2104789/liaoning-worst-performer-chinas-northeast-lags-behind-countrys>, 21 June 2018.

³⁵ According to one rescuer with experience of direct sales of North Koreans, Chinese citizens who sell refugees may have recently become unemployed or require a large sum of money for the schooling of their children or for hospital bills.

³⁶ M Melnicoe, 'China: Wage Increases Level Off with Economy', www.bna.com/china-wage-increases-n73014450562/, 5 May 2017.

Money also appears to serve as a motive for direct sales brokered by lowly-paid police officers in China's Ministry of Public Security. Throughout the summer months, police officers in Jilin, Liaoning, and Heilongjiang provinces may come into monthly, if not weekly, contact with escaping North Koreans through, for instance, routine checks of family hukou registration in townships or raids of brothels in urban centres.³⁷ Once North Koreans are

arrested, Chinese legislation provides that suspects should be questioned, identified, and repatriated to North Korea. In certain cases, for example in sub-bureaus near Shenyang and Yanji, police officers are known to have arrested and sold female North Koreans to human traffickers.³⁸

Ms. Kwon from Chongjin City

I cleaned and cooked food to earn money [in Longjing, China]. An ethnic Korean man allowed me to live in his apartment. I was not his wife. He was divorced. His wife had run away to South Korea to marry [another man], so I cooked for him instead of paying him rent (...) When he lost his job in a factory he tried to convince me to marry his friend. He told me that I would be safer. I refused many times (...) He became very angry and sold me.

Ms. Paek from Chagang Province

When the [Chinese] police asked for my documentation, I cried and told them I was North Korean. I begged them to allow me to travel to Thailand [where North Koreans can claim asylum]. They arrested me and took me to the [security bureau]. I was there for ten hours and no one asked me any questions. They put me in their car and drove me to the countryside (...) I was sold to a marriage broker.

Ms. Hwang from Musan County

I was 14 years old [and] my mother's cousin [in China] arranged for me to work in a garment factory in Yanbian [China] (...) I crossed the river at night [with a broker] and was driven to a house (...) I realised that everything had been a lie when I arrived (...) A 36-year-old man bought me for ¥24,000 Chinese Yuan (\$3500 USD) (...) I escaped before his mother wanted me to have a child.

³⁷ Towns (urban) and townships (rural) are designated within China's administrative divisions. See: The State Council, The People's Republic of China, 'Administrative Division', http://english.gov.cn/archive/china_abc/2014/08/27/content_281474983873401.htm, 26 August 2014.

³⁸ There is no evidence to suggest systemic links between Chinese police officers and human traffickers, but links between low-paid local police officers and criminal organisations in China are well-established. See: The Economist, 'A policeman's lot in a police state: not happy', www.economist.com/china/2016/10/13/a-policemans-lot-in-a-police-state-not-happy, 13 October 2016; P Wang, 'The rise of the Red Mafia in China: a case study of organised crime and corruption in Chongqing', *Trends in Organized Crime* 16 (2013): 49-73; China Daily, 'Top cops in NE China city protected gangsters', www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2008-07/17/content_6852949.htm, 17 July 2017.

Ms. Jeon from Sinuiju City

Three men abducted me [close to the border]. It was nearly dark and they put me in their car and drove me into the mountains (...) The oldest man raped me first. I became unconscious when the other [two men] raped me. When I woke up I was bleeding and they had tied me to a tree (...) The next day one of the men came back (...) [He] sold me to a broker.

Ms. Yoon from Kaesong City

I was working in a restaurant for weddings and store-opening parties [in China]. I met other North Koreans about my age who worked at that restaurant as dishwashers (...) I got to know one dishwasher who was trafficked. I tried to convince her that human trafficking could happen to her daughter, but I could not sway her. Everyone who worked at the restaurant was forced into marriage.

Ms. Im from Cholsan County

I was already employed on [the] farm [in Liaoning Province, China] when a man told me I could earn more money in the city. I needed money (...) so I agreed. It makes me angry today, but I was not suspicious [of the man] (...) He came the next night and drove [me] to a barbershop in a town near Anshan. I was sold [into prostitution].



Escape from China is a dangerous undertaking for every North Korean.³⁹ Each year the Government of China arrests an estimated 6000 North Korean refugees and repatriates them to fates that include interrogation, torture, starvation, incarceration, sexual violence, physical assault, and even execution.⁴⁰ To stand a chance of evading

Chinese authorities and reaching the relative safety of southeast Asia, North Koreans turn to private brokers who, with the aid of networks of sub-brokers across east and southeast Asia, are experienced in guiding escapees to freedom.⁴¹

³⁹ Only 32,000 North Koreans have reached safety in South Korea, with fewer arriving in 2017 than in any year since 2001. Between January–June 2018, just 488 North Koreans entered South Korea, 87% of whom were female. See: Ministry of Unification, 'Number of North Korean Defectors Entering South Korea', www.unikorea.go.kr/eng_unikorea/relations/statistics/defectors/, 24 August 2018.

⁴⁰ Suzanne Scholte, 'United States Congressional-Executive Commission on China Hearing', <http://www.cecc.gov/sites/chinacommission.house.gov/files/documents/hearings/2012/CECC%20Hearing%20Testimony%20-%20Suzanne%20Scholte%20-%203.5.12.pdf>, 2012.

⁴¹ A journey may cost between \$5000–\$14,000 USD per-person. Private brokers undertake this dangerous work for profit, but this is not necessarily a mercenary endeavour. Exiled North Korean brokers living in South Korea rarely possess college, university, or higher education and face social discrimination and unemployment. Utilising their knowledge and experiences of escaping North Korea and China, brokering is an important means of survival.

Once a thriving business, the brokering of escapes has been greatly hindered by a host of factors, namely: increased surveillance of citizens in North Korea since 2011, arrests of brokers and North Korean refugees by Chinese police, and dangers posed by North Korean agents active in Chinese territory. As these risks have increased, so too have the costs of escape, and many sub-brokers now require advance-payments and higher fees to offset greater risks. Unable to afford these ever-increasing costs, the number of North Koreans who have reached safety in South Korea has decreased from 2706 in 2011 to just 1127 in 2017.⁴²

To recoup lost and declining earnings, an unknown, but likely small number of unscrupulous sub-brokers have resorted to the exploitation and extortion of escapees' exiled families and the direct sale of escapees into the sex trade. Testimonies of sales by sub-brokers have been documented in three provinces and one directly-administered municipality.

Ms. Ha from Hoeryong City

Our mother [who had already escaped to South Korea] arranged for my sister and I to escape (...) We were driven to Changchun [China], then a new broker drove us to Shenyang [China]. He stopped outside an apartment and told us we would resume our journey in the night. I may sound ignorant, but I had no idea that I was being sold (...) We were forced to become prostitutes in a building behind a factory.

Ms. Ahn from Sinuiju City

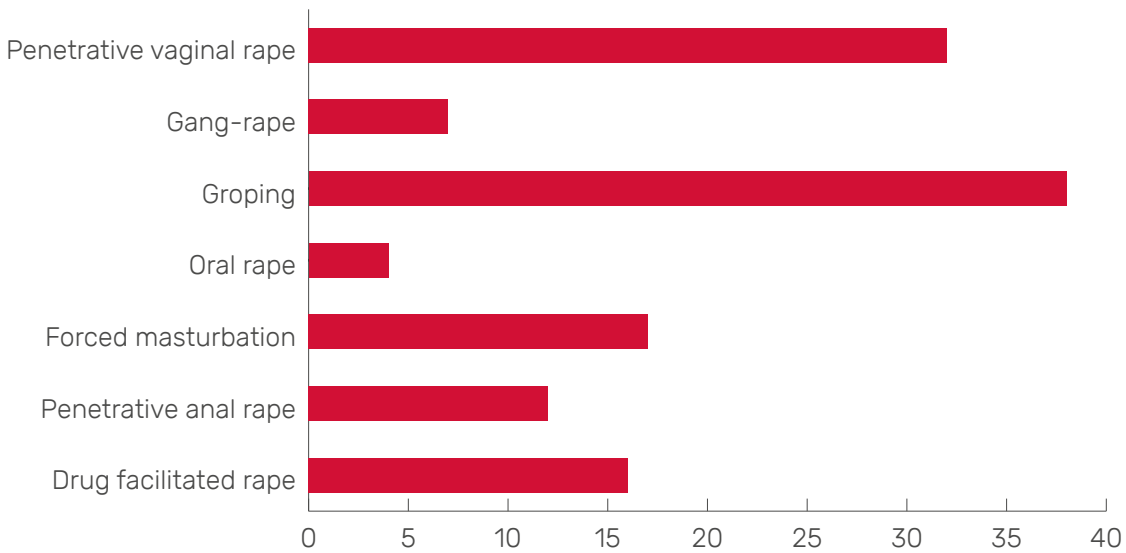
North Korean women tend not to disclose the fact that they have been victims of sexual violence. When I escaped, I was with my daughter, a 23-year-old woman, and two men (...) There are stops from China to Thailand and at every stop you meet two or three [sub-brokers] (...) During our escape, the 23-year-old woman became pregnant. After we left China, we stayed about four months in Hanawon [a resettlement centre for North Korean refugees in South Korea]. She denied that she was pregnant at first until she finally admitted that every broker had raped her. When we travelled, she slept during the day, but at night the brokers would [take her away].

Ms. Seo from Yonsa County

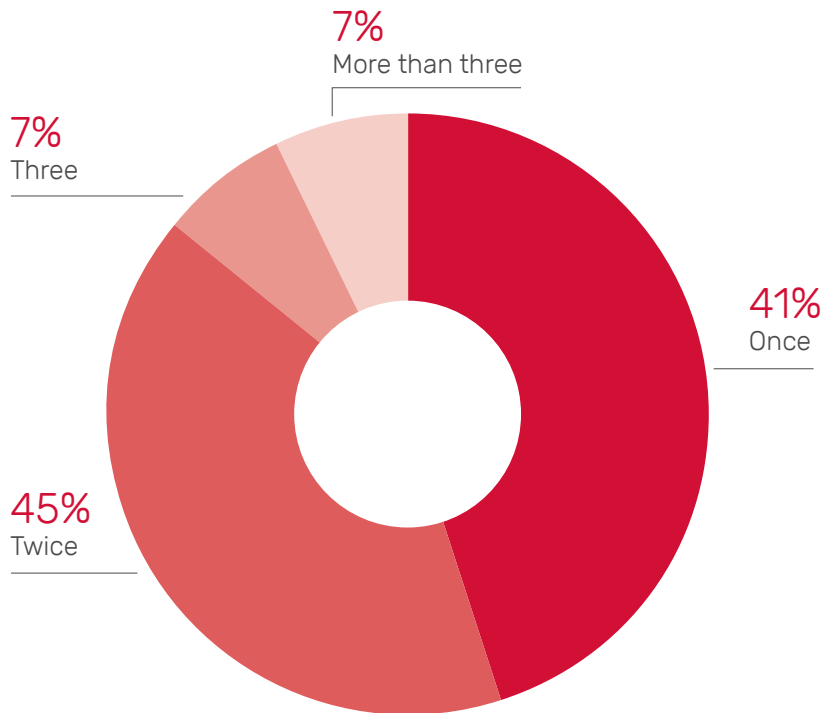
I met a woman whose sister was sold [by sub-brokers] (...) Her family [in South Korea] had sold many possessions, such as a car and televisions, to raise money to pay the brokers, but [the brokers] kept demanding more [money]. When the family said they had no more money, the brokers threatened to sell the sister to a brothel in Chengdu (...) The family never heard from the brokers again.

⁴² Ministry of Unification, 'Number of North Korean Defectors Entering South Korea', www.unikorea.go.kr/eng_unikorea/relations/statistics/defectors/, 24 August 2018.

Experiences of sexual violence connected to human trafficking and the sex trade⁴³



Amount of times sold within the sex trade⁴⁴



⁴³ Based solely upon interviews.

⁴⁴ Based solely upon interviews.



⁴⁵ Shanghai, Lei Han.
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Available at: <https://bit.ly/2D5uM7q>



⁴⁶ 上海,里弄的站街女, Lei Han.
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HUMAN TRAFFICKING FROM NORTH KOREA

28

Driven by demand for young North Korean women and girls, a growing number of Chinese brokers have established trafficking networks that stretch into North Korean territory.⁴⁷ Created to identify and target high-value young women and girls at-source and avoid risky operations to coerce, abduct, or buy victims once they cross into China, specialist brokers are able to sell victims directly from North Korea in a matter of days or weeks.

These China-based brokers do not cross borders. Instead, they employ trusted sub-brokers or relatives in North Korea to fulfil orders from Chinese pimps, madams, and other buyers. Travelling to markets, remote villages, and transport hubs in the northern provinces of North Korea, sub-brokers search for girls and women under the ages of 25-27 who appear destitute and 'suitable' for the sex trade in China. Approached with false offers of employment, either in a neighbouring province or in China, victims are trafficked to the border by

service-cars and trains, before being taken into China on-foot. Passed to new brokers, victims are transported directly to safe-houses, brothels, or to further buyers.⁴⁸ Physical and sexual violence is commonplace during these journeys, in particular drug rape, penetrative rape, and groping.

Victims who are not sold immediately are confined to safe-houses where they can be locked in rooms and subjected to rape and gang-rape – a process referred to by one survivor as 'training'. Supplementary violence designed to induce compliance is delivered in the forms of starvation, physical beatings, and verbal threats of repatriation. Testimonies have placed the direct trafficking of victims, many of whom are sold to secondary brokers, pimps, and madams, to specific satellite-towns in Jilin and Heilongjiang provinces. Few women are thought to be sold as wives through this form of trafficking.

Ms. Song from [hometown redacted]

There is a house where women are taken before they are sold. When I arrived there were many [North Korean] women, but also girls (...) One girl had her vagina and anus ripped apart. A woman told me there was nothing left: no skin, just a large hole. I was so shocked when I watched the girl crawl around the room and try to stand and lean on the wall. I could see where she had leaked fluids and there was blood on the floor. She was crying.

⁴⁷ Demand is driven by a voracious appetite for prostitution in China, a high-turnover of prostitutes owing to arrest, death, and even abduction by rival criminal organisations, and the low-price of North Korean women and girls.

⁴⁸ Testimonies indicated that sub-brokers can coerce women with the use of photographs of modern workplaces and comparatively luxurious apartments where North Korean workers are said to live – all of which are used to deceive victims. According to one survivor now living in South Korea, the photographs may simply have been found online: "I have thought about this [issue] and the factory I was shown was probably not even in China...I was ignorant and just assumed the man had been to the factory." For an explanation of human trafficking inside North Korea, see: J Burt, *Us Too: Sexual Violence Against North Korean Women and Girls* (London: 2018).

Ms. Lee from [hometown redacted]

I came [to China] three years ago to work in a clothes factory. My father is ill and I needed money to help my family pay for his medical care [in North Korea] (...) After five months the factory official sold me into marriage (...) I have a son now, so I cannot escape and leave him. I do not know what will happen to [my son] if I escape.

Ms. Chang from Musan County

A broker offered me work in China at a restaurant. My husband told me to work for a year and then send for him and our daughter with the money (...) I was lied to by the broker. I was kept in a house in a village [in China] for five days. Then I was sold [as a prostitute] to a bathhouse.

Ms. Kwon from Kimchaek City

There is a detention centre in Tumen [China] (...) Many [North Koreans] who are arrested end up there (...) I will not forget two (...) sisters aged 12 and 14. The oldest had blood stains on her trousers. I could see other women looking at that. I was told [the sisters] were both raped by a man in China who had pretended to help them. [The Chinese police] had not even given [the elder sister] new clothes.

Ms. Choi from Hoeryong City

Officials in Hoeryong City [North Korea] sold women to the traffickers. Someone [in South Korea] told me the women must have been taken from the concentration camp, but I do not think that is true. It would not have been allowed.

Ms. Ko from [hometown redacted]

We were told [the men] would take us to [a] factory (...) [The men] stopped [the van] and asked us for money. We had no money so they asked whether we had family in South Korea. No one said anything and [the men] became very angry. There was an argument and [the men] started to drag us out of the van. I was trying to stop the first man when the second man punched me in the back of my head twice. He took me into the forest and raped me (...) I was motionless and I closed my eyes and cried.

49 上海,里弄的站街女, Lei Han.
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Available at: <https://bit.ly/2MCAH3r>



The trafficking of North Korean women and girls into mainland China's sex trade is, demonstrably, neither unstructured nor opportunistic in nature. It is a highly lucrative illicit industry that is defined by transnational networks and layers of organisation that involve brokers, human traffickers, public officials, and the clients who pay to buy, rape, and sexually assault women and girls. At its very core, it is an industry with just one purpose: the trade in female bodies for profit.

Central to the prostitution of women and girls are criminal organisations. Re-emerging in China after the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, criminal organisations grew by capitalising upon the country's economic reforms, especially the decentralisation of decision-making to cities, towns, and villages. Exploiting local environments and populations with the support of corrupt local public officials – known as the 'Red Mafia' – criminal organisations gradually became involved in a range of localised illicit activities, from drug smuggling and protection racketeering to human trafficking and prostitution.⁵⁰

Today, over 30,000,000 members of criminal organisations operate in mainland China. From small groups of less than twenty to large organisations of over 200, they are most heavily concentrated in southern provinces and regions where ethnic minorities are subject to social and economic discrimination.⁵¹ Reliant upon the guanxi system and local political and public officials, criminal organisations rarely operate on a nationwide scale and are confined to regions, cities, towns, and townships.⁵² In the case of criminal organisations within China's ethnic Korean minority, the limited geographic and political boundaries incentivised the exploitation of resources at-hand: namely, female North Korean refugees and the transformation of trafficking from a predatory to a market-based crime.⁵³

⁵⁰ Guanxi refers to the interpersonal networks that have come to involve reciprocal favours between criminal organisations and public officials in China. See: S H Lo, *The Politics of Controlling Organized Crime in Greater China*, (Oxford: Routledge: 2016); P Wang, *The Chinese Mafia: Organized Crime, Corruption, and Extra-Legal Protection*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2017); R Han, 'Discussion on Relationship between Guanxi and

Corruption in China', *British Journal of Economics, Management & Trade* 14 (2011):1-9.

⁵¹ See: S H Lo, *The Politics of Controlling Organized Crime in Greater China*, (Oxford: Routledge: 2016); Stratfor Worldview, 'Organised Crime in China', www.worldview.stratfor.com/report/organized-crime-china, 19 August 2008.

⁵² See: S H Lo, *The Politics of Controlling Organized Crime in Greater China*, (Oxford: Routledge: 2016); Stratfor Worldview, 'Organised Crime in China', www.worldview.stratfor.com/report/organized-crime-china, 19 August 2008.

⁵³ On the governance of minorities in China, see: G Tuttle, 'China's Race Problem', *Foreign Affairs* May/June (2015):39-46; C Larson, 'China's Minority Problem – And Ours', <https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/09/30/chinas-minority-problem-and-ours/>, 30 September 2009; Stratfor Worldview, 'Organised Crime in China', www.worldview.stratfor.com/report/organized-crime-china, 19 August 2008.

Prostitution is criminalised under Chinese law, yet remains a significant and visible component of daily life.⁵⁴ Over 10,000,000 prostitutes operate in China, while brothels – some of which explicitly advertise young North Korean prostitutes – are unmistakable in cities, urban towns, and rural townships across northeast China. Visited by more than 10% of Chinese men aged 20-24 and 17% of Chinese men aged 18-61,⁵⁵ prostitution is estimated to contribute 6% of China's gross-domestic-product.⁵⁶

Termed 'xiaojie', North Korean victims are forced to work in brothels that masquerade as entertainment or service venues, namely: bathhouses, saunas, karaoke bars, cafes, massage parlours, beauty parlours, barbershops, hair salons, small hotels, and restaurants.⁵⁷ Victims enslaved in entertainment venues, such as karaoke bars, are typically aged between 15-25. Confined inside or close to a venue, they remain in the service of a pimp or madam, rather than a venue's owner, and may engage 2-4 men every night. Victims are subjected to penetrative vaginal rape, groping, forced masturbation, and gang-rape. In service venues, such as barbershops, victims are typically aged between 17-39. Confined on or off-site, victims may engage 1-9 men every day and suffer penetrative vaginal rape, oral rape, and forced masturbation.⁵⁸

The designation of entertainment and service venues not only suggests a brothel's respective costs for clients, but also the levels of risk assumed by prostitutes.⁵⁹ Over 80% of women and girls forced to work in entertainment venues claimed to have been provided with condoms and believed they had been at low risk of acquiring HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections. Less than 50% of victims engaged in service venues regularly used condoms. In both entertainment and service venues, over 67% of survivors had experienced some form of physical violence.

Brothels identified by survivors and researchers as exploiting North Korean women and girls were mainly located in satellite-towns and townships surrounding larger cities in northeast China. Between 25-75 minutes' travel from a city or a larger urban area, brothels existed in districts with large floating populations of male migrants and in rural townships populated by male agricultural labourers and farmers. Though the population of any one town or township in northeast China may vary between 5000 and in excess of 60,000 citizens, it should be seen as indicative that a total of sixteen brothels that enslave North Korean prostitutes were identified in just one district of a town close to a sub-provincial city in Jilin province.

⁵⁴ See: J Kaufman, 'HIV, Sex Work, and Civil Society in China', *The Journal of Infectious Diseases* 204 (2011): S1218-S1222; United States Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report*, June 2017 (Washington DC: 2017), 134.

⁵⁵ S Liao, J Schensul, and I Wolffers, 'Sex-related health risks and implications for interventions with hospitality women in Hainan, China', *AIDS Education and Prevention* 15 (2003):109-121; P Suiming, 'The Realistic Response to China's Prostitution Problem', www.sixthtone.com/news/1001266/the-realistic-response-to-chinas-prostitution-problem, 30 November 2017.

⁵⁶ L Zhang, 'How China's market economy has fuelled a prostitution boom', www.scmp.com/comment/insight-opinion/article/2127627/how-chinas-market-economy-has-fuelled-prostitution-boom, 12 January 2018.

⁵⁷ 'Xiaojie' is a Mandarin Chinese expression signifying a prostitute. The term is also used in ethnic Korean communities.

⁵⁸ Earnings are typically retained by a pimp, madam, or venue manager. Few survivors were provided regular payment, although some were able to use smartphones, both for business and personal use.

⁵⁹ Y Huang, G Henderson, P Suiming, M Cohen, S Myron, 'HIV/AIDS Risk Among Brothel-Based Female Sex Workers in China: Assessing the Terms, Content, and Knowledge of Sex Work', *Sexually Transmitted Diseases* 31 (2004):695-700.

Where organised prostitution exists, it is principally dominated by pimps or madams, who may be associated with criminal organisations and who are responsible for the recruitment of prostitutes, their 'marketing', and the collection of fees paid by clients.⁶⁰ Provision of food, shelter, cigarettes, and occasionally drugs are intended to keep victims in a state of dependency. Enforcers and corrupt police officers attempt to ensure that prostitutes do not escape. In Shanghai, survivors explained how North Korean prostitutes are branded with tattoos, such as lions and butterflies, to signify ownership and dissuade abductions from rivals.

Although the prostitution of North Korean women and girls is predominantly controlled by ethnic Korean pimps, madams, and criminal organisations, it is a diversifying and evolving illicit industry.⁶¹ An ethnic Korean criminal organisation in Shenyang has 'rented' North Korean victims to a prostitution-ringing in Panjin that is run by ethnic Chinese men. One survivor was taken from a brothel in Shenyang and passed to men in Panjin who drove her to accommodation used by migrant workers. Forced to have sex with multiple workers every day for one week, she was exchanged for another North Korean victim on the outskirts of the city before being returned to Shenyang.

⁶⁰ In some hotels and restaurants, prostitution can be controlled by the venue's manager.

⁶¹ Valued for its ability to generate large profits in a market driven by strong male demand, prostitution in China has been subject to lax policing, despite sporadic crackdowns. For example: Z Caixiong, 'Guangdong plans special force to tackle online prostitution', http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-12/04/content_22624828.htm, 4 December 2015; BBC, 'China executes female gangland prostitution ringleader', <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-16077743>, 7 December 2011; The Global Slavery Index, 'China', <https://www.globalslaveryindex.org/2018/findings/country-studies/china/>; P Suiming, 'The Realistic Response to China's Prostitution Problem', www.sixthtone.com/news/1001266/the-realistic-response-to-chinas-prostitution-problem, 30 November 2017.

⁶² Shanghai, China, Lei Han.
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Available at: <https://bit.ly/2ywmd0M>



Ms. Woon from [hometown redacted]

There are four [North Korean] women working here (...) I have been in China for nine months. It is my second time. The first time I could not find work and returned [to North Korea] (...) I am fortunate because I just cook and I am good at that. The other women do lots of jobs and are also made to have sex with men who come to the restaurant (...) It is terrible for them.

Ms. Choi from Hyesan City

Our madam came into the room and told us when a client had arrived. We were sometimes told to reapply our makeup or to look happier (...) The prettiest woman would have to welcome the [client] to the bathhouse and, in turn, we would introduce ourselves by our fake names and state our prices (...) The [clients] could tell we were North Korean by our accents and some would even ask me about my life in North Korea.

Ms. Pyon from Chongjin City

I was sold [to a brothel] with six other North Korean women at a hotel. We were not given much food and were treated badly (...) After eight months, half of us were sold again. The broker did bad things to me. When I arrived [at the new brothel] I had bruises on my body. [The broker] was beaten then stabbed in the legs by some members of the gang.

Ms. Kim from [hometown redacted]

There are many South Koreans [in Dalian] (...) We put advertising cards under their doors [in hotels] (...) The cards are in the Korean-language and advertise what we offer (...) We are mostly taken to bars [by the pimp]. South Korean companies want [North Korean prostitutes] for their businessmen (...) Prostitution was my first experience of meeting a South Korean person.

Ms. Oh from Musan County

I entered China (...) and was sold to a woman who ran a massage parlour in Yanji City less than three weeks later (...) [The madam's] husband raped me in the vagina and anus. He had sex with every [prostitute].

Ms. Shin from Anju City

[North Korean] women who [are prostituted] in Shenyang, Yanji, Zhuhai, and Dalian [have sex] with more South Koreans than ethnic Korean or ethnic Chinese men (...) Although the South Korean men can already be married and have children, they lie to North Korean women that they are single. A South Korean man even promised a friend that he would take care of her as a wife in South Korea. She believed him and found him when she escaped to South Korea, but he was already married with three children. There are a few North Korean women I know that experienced this.

⁶³ 上海,里弄的站街女, Lei Han.
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Available at: <https://bit.ly/2P3tQ4t>



Aided by the spread of the internet in the early-2000s and the more recent proliferation of connected devices, particularly smartphones, online pornography has grown into an industry worth an estimated \$97,000,000,000 USD.⁶⁴ Attracting daily global audiences of over 40,000,000 men, women, and children, the industry has given rise to cybersex – namely, the performance of sex acts in front of a webcam for paying audiences. Growing into a core component of the pornographic industry, cybersex is projected to generate an estimated \$10,000,000,000 USD in profit by 2020.⁶⁵

In their search for a share of this market,⁶⁶ human traffickers have turned to cybersex and the forced online sexual exploitation of North Korean girls and young women.⁶⁷ At its core, cybersex trafficking refers to the recruitment and transportation of

victims and their live-streamed rape, sexual abuse, and sexual exploitation by traffickers, some of whom operate under the instructions of a paying online audience.^{68 69}

Acts that trafficked North Korean victims are compelled to undertake exist on a spectrum that include: sexually explicit conversations; stripping; nudity; masturbation; masturbation with objects; sexual intercourse with men, women, or children; vaginal, anal, and oral rape; gang-rape; urination, defecation, and other degrading acts; and physical violence. Dehumanised on-camera and forced to conceal bruises with makeup, hair loss with wigs, and fatigue with drug abuse, victims face coercion, starvation, intimidation, and brutalisation off-camera.⁷⁰

⁶⁴ One popular pornographic website received 87,800,000,000 views in 2017 alone. Combined, pornographic websites receive more visitors every month than Amazon and Netflix combined. See: Medium, 'How Big is the Porn Industry?', https://medium.com/@Strange_bt_True/how-big-is-the-porn-industry-fbc1ac78091b, 19 February 2017.

⁶⁵ The Conversation, 'Webcamming: the sex work revolution that no one is willing to talk about', <https://theconversation.com/webcamming-the-sex-work-revolution-that-no-one-is-willing-to-talk-about-69834>, 10 January 2017.

⁶⁶ It may be indicative that the online sexual exploitation of children earns an estimated \$20,000,000,000 USD annually. See: J Eggstein & K Knapp, 'Fighting Child Pornography: A Review of Legal and Technological Developments', *Journal of Digital Forensics, Security and Law* 9 (2014):29-48; A Almendral, 'Cheap tech and widespread internet access fuel rise in cybersex trafficking', <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/tech-news/cheap-tech-widespread-internet-access-fuel-rise-cybersex-trafficking-n886886>, 30 June 2018.

⁶⁷ Research on cybersex trafficking networks remain scarce. However, the UNODC has estimated that 61% of trafficking victims in East Asia and the Pacific were trafficked for sexual exploitation in 2016, which includes exploitation for pornography production, while the ILO estimates that there are 2,500,000 victims of sexual exploitation in the Asia Pacific. See: UNODC, *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2016*, (2016), 29; International Labour Office, *Profits and Poverty: The Economics of Forced Labour* (2014), 27; Terre des Hommes, 'WCST as a phenomenon', <https://www.terredeshommes.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/FAQ-English.pdf>, 2013.

⁶⁸ As Carback notes, "Due to the literature gap on cybersex trafficking, there is no definition of this particular crime approved by consensus". See: J Carback, 'Cybersex Trafficking: Toward a More Effective Prosecutorial Response', *Criminal Law Bulletin* 54 (2018):64-183; 100.

⁶⁹ Interpol, *Towards a Global Indicator: On Unidentified Victims in Child Sexual Exploitation Material*, (2018), 14.

⁷⁰ Lasting physical and psychological traumas are cited as commonplace. Survivors had not spoken of their experiences of cybersex due to feelings of shame and lived in fear of being exposed to former clients in South Korea.

Catering to consumers of 'regular' pornography and an estimated 750,000 paedophiles from across the world who conduct daily online searches for cybersex content featuring children,⁷¹ profits accrued from cybersex trafficking are thought to be substantial. One single cybersex live-stream featuring a North Korean girl aged 9-14 can cost upwards of \$60-\$110 USD, while a live-stream featuring North Korean girls and women aged 17-24 can cost up to \$90 USD.⁷²

Less technically sophisticated than 'mainstream' cybersex websites, the platforms hosting North Korean victims can be rudimentary, deliberately inconspicuous, or simply well-known and widely-available video-chat services.⁷³ At their most basic level, cybersex traffickers exploit a single victim with a smartphone or a computer with a webcam, access to high-speed internet, and an online money transfer service. To increase profits and exploit multiple victims, traffickers have utilised hosting websites that allow for

encrypted live-streaming; instant messaging and chat-rooms; mixed-payment methods, such as cryptocurrencies or individual money transfer services that use multi-currency accounts; and social-media sites and messaging apps to advertise victims.

Home to the largest online population in the world at 772,000,000, of which more than 344,000,000 use live-streaming services,⁷⁴ the prevalence of cybersex trafficking in China is difficult to gauge.⁷⁵ It may be indicative that between January-June 2018, China's National Office Against Pornographic and Illegal Publications closed 22,000 pornographic websites and deleted over 1,075,000 online pornographic 'publications'.⁷⁶ Testimonies from victims and survivors locate cybersex trafficking in Jilin Province, Liaoning Province, Beijing, and Tianjin, but many more cybersex dens are thought to exist in southern provinces and cities close to the Laos and Vietnamese borders.⁷⁷

⁷¹ Terre des Hommes, 'WCST as a phenomenon', <https://www.terredeshommes.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/FAQ-English.pdf>, 2013.

⁷² Figures relating to the costs of these services differed enormously and were contingent on many variables, such as the age and profile of the victim or the platform used. These figures are gleaned from primary research, survivor testimonies, and the experiences of a rescuer.

⁷³ Of the twenty most visited websites worldwide in August 2018, four were legal pornographic websites that hosted cybersex content. See: Similarweb, 'Top Websites Ranking', <https://www.similarweb.com/top-websites>, 12 August 2018.

⁷⁴ China Internet Network Information Centre, 'China Statistical Report on Internet Development', <https://www.cnnic.net.cn/hlwfzyj/hlwxzbg/hlwtjbg/201701/P020170123364672657408.pdf>, January 2017.

⁷⁵ See: China Daily, 'China closes 22,000 pornographic websites this year', <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201805/24/WS5b06ad47a31001b82571c205.html>, 24 May 2018; R Tan, "'It's all about the porn': China's latest crackdown on live streaming", <https://www.vox.com/world/2017/7/7/15922928/pornography-china-live-streaming-female-anchors-porn-censorship-dissent>, 7 July 2017; M Borak, 'China's live streaming sites facing another attack on porn and illegal content', <https://technode.com/2018/08/20/china-live-streaming-pornographic-illegal/>, 20 August 2018; Z Caixiong, 'Guangdong plans special force to tackle online prostitution', http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-12/04/content_22624828.htm, 12 April 2015.

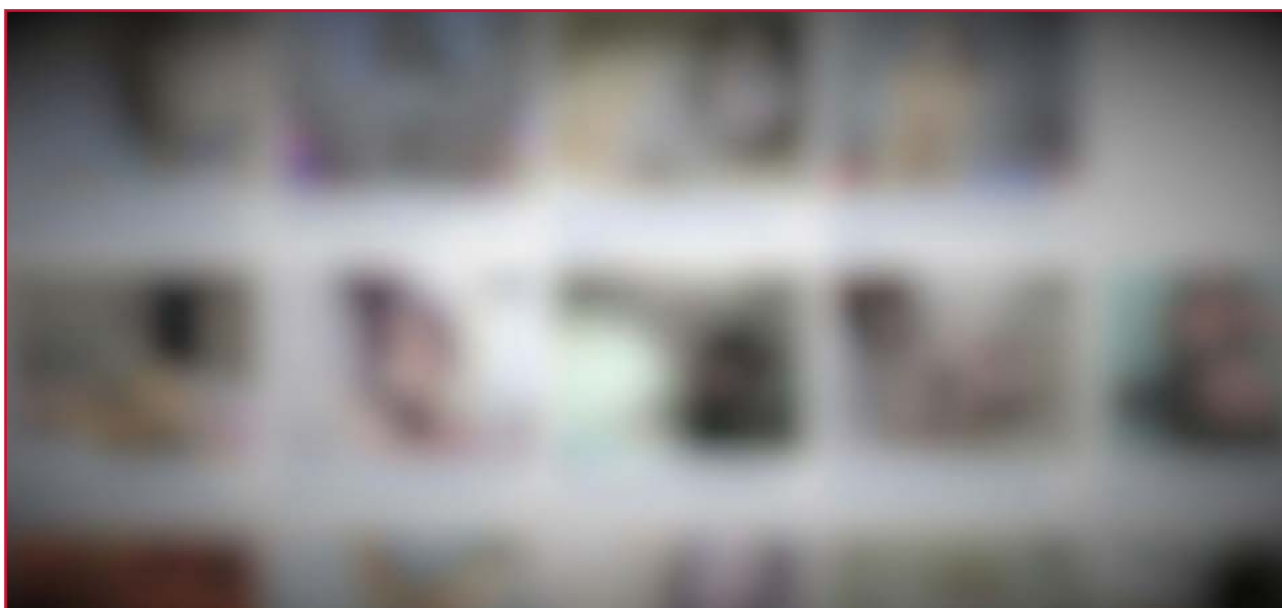
⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Victims are confined in, or near to, large cities, presumably due to the need for high-speed internet connections, and tend to live on-site with their traffickers in 'cybersex dens'. Dens can simply be apartments or rooms above a brothel or shop and can confine up to 6 women and girls.

Evidence suggests that demand for cybersex that exploits trafficked North Korean women and girls is largely driven by a Korean-speaking male market that exhibits a high-engagement with online pornography.⁷⁸ Testimonies from survivors who communicated with clients recalled the use of the Korean-language and that South Korean accents were, in hindsight, perceptible if audio-chats

were initiated.⁷⁹ In research undertaken between February–September 2018, specific South Korean websites were found to be advertising North Korean cybersex and pornography, even by way of ‘pop-under’ web-advertisements.⁸⁰

A pornography website hosting trafficked North Korean women



⁷⁸ A 2014 study of South Korean male college students found 84.5% had viewed pornography, with nearly 75% viewing pornography between 1-5 days per-week. Another national study placed consumption of pornography by South Korean children aged 14-16 at 47%. See: C Sun, E Miezán, N Lee, & J Shim, ‘Korean Men’s Pornography use: Their Interest in Extreme Pornography, and Dyadic Sexual Relationships’, *International Journal of Sexual Health* 27 (2014):16-35; Y Kim, ‘Adolescents’ health behaviors and its associations with psychological variables’, *Central European Journal of Public Health* 19 (2011):205-209.

⁷⁹ 92.7% of South Korean households have access to the internet. The use of Virtual Private Networks allows clients to bypass restrictions on pornography consumption with relative ease. See: Freedom House, ‘Freedom on the Net 2017’, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2017/south-korea>, 2017.

⁸⁰ Convictions in China and South Korea for operating illicit cybersex websites are rare. In 2010 a South Korean man was arrested for forcing 160 North Korean and ethnic Korean women into cybersex, while in 2015 the operators of a South Korean internet broadcasting service, which had over 100,000 clients and a revenue of \$3,000,000 USD over three years, were indicted on similar charges. See: IOL, ‘Sex slaves forced to strip on webcams’, <https://www.iol.co.za/business-report/technology/sex-slaves-forced-to-strip-on-webcams-911055>, 31 May 2010; S Kim, ‘Operators of webcam site exploiting defector women indicted’, <https://www.knews.org/2015/02/operators-of-webcam-site-exploiting-defector-women-indicted/>, 24 February 2015.

Ms. Choi from Hyesan

The man (...) drove me to his apartment (...) It was shocking to see [North Korean] girls there. I do not know how old they were (...) I saw two girls who had not yet developed breasts (...) I was taken to a room that had a bed in front of a table with a computer and a webcam (...) Four men came (...) [and] gang-raped me (...) When the third man began raping me, my vagina was bleeding (...) I cannot remember any more.

Ms. Paek [hometown redacted]

I had no idea [cybersex] existed (...) I go days without eating (...) I want to forget what is happening to me.

Ms. Jang from Onsong County

We only had one room where we slept and ate. It was small. The windows were always closed so nobody could see us and it became very hot (...) If we fell asleep when we were waiting [for online clients], [the trafficker's wife] was told and she would stab us repeatedly with a sewing needle. She used a sewing needle so the marks would not show on the camera.

Ms. Han from [hometown redacted]

I have told people [in South Korea] that I was sold [into marriage] to a Chinese man and that I escaped after five years. It is not completely incorrect. I was in a forced marriage (...) [But my husband] sold me to another man who made me do sexual things in front of a computer. I did not want anyone [in South Korea] to know what I suffered.



⁸¹ 上海,里弄的站街女, Lei Han.
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Available at: <https://bit.ly/2D8T401>

Forced marriage – namely the sale of women into cohabitation with men – is illegal but commonplace in rural China. Most prevalent in low-socioeconomic regions with skewed sex-ratios and high female out-migration, wives can be bought for as little as ¥1000–¥50,000 Chinese Yuan (\$146–\$7330 USD). Considerably less expensive than a conventional marriage, which may cost up to twenty-times an annual household income,⁸² the act of buying a North Korean wife is tolerated and in many cases defended by local populations in China’s so-called ‘bachelor villages’ who perceive the crime as a legitimate function to maintain the viability of a village or township. One survivor described the role of forced marriages to that of ‘power-generators’: ‘Without North Korean women, the village [I was sold to] would have died many years before I was there’.

North Korean victims are sold to prospective husbands by marriage brokers. Often well known in their local and neighbouring villages and townships, and linked, either financially or familiarly, to local public officials, marriage brokers are commonly ethnic Korean men aged between 24–55. Some marriage brokers operate alone, but many work alongside family members, in particular their wives, who assume different roles. Bought directly from

traffickers or independently coerced or abducted, marriage brokers confine victims in safe-houses that dot the countryside and mountains of Jilin, Liaoning, and Heilongjiang provinces. Subdued through starvation, physical violence, and the use of drugs, the purpose of safe-houses is twofold: to detain victims and to act as a real or virtual marketplace for potential buyers.⁸³

Once the price of a wife has been agreed between a marriage broker and prospective husband, a victim is collected or delivered to her husband’s household. Fearful of escape, a husband’s family will confine a newly purchased wife to their home for weeks or months and rarely grant her access to mobile phones and computers or allow her to move without an escort. From the outset, North Korean wives are expected to undertake multiple unpaid duties: domestic labour in the mornings and evenings, agricultural and other forms of manual labour during the days, and sexual intercourse with their husband and, on occasion, his male relatives, at night.⁸⁴ Less than 10% of survivors recalled their husbands using any form of contraception, meaning that over half of survivors became pregnant within two years of being sold.⁸⁵

⁸² X Jin, L Liu, Y Li, M Feldman, S Li, “‘Bare Branches’ and the Marriage Market in Rural China: Preliminary Evidence from a Village-Level Survey”, *Chinese Sociological Review* 46 (2013):83-104.

⁸³ While marriage brokers once travelled from town-to-town to advertise victims, they increasingly advertise online and through social media with photographs and details of victims.

⁸⁴ Manual and agricultural labour is often imposed so that wives ‘earn back’ the fees spent on their purchase.

⁸⁵ Unlike some cases of trafficked Vietnamese brides in China, where ‘dates’ and sham-marriages can occur, no North Korean survivor interviewed for this report had experienced a wedding ceremony or legal marriage. See: T Hancock, ‘Rural Chinese Men Are Buying Vietnamese Brides For \$3,200’, <https://www.businessinsider.com/rural-chinese-men-are-buying-vietnamese-brides-for-3200-2014-8?IR=T>, 18 August 2014.

The introduction of a North Korean wife to a township or village is almost always known to the local community and, despite its illegality, rarely reported to authorities. In situations where North Korean wives are arrested, bribes can be paid to secure their release. In a village in Heilongjiang province, one husband who lacked the money for a bribe that would release his wife from arrest consented to her prostitution to public officials, after which she was released.

Although some survivors recalled their Chinese husbands as benign, North Korean wives are trafficking victims who are sold, raped, exploited, and enslaved.⁸⁶ Their Chinese husbands are enablers of human trafficking, perpetrators of sexual violence, and supporters of an illicit industry that profits from female bodies. Studies indicate that forced marriages in China inspire the perpetration of further sexual crimes, such as rape and enslavement, and encourage environments where female security is continually diminished.^{87 88}

Ms. Park from Musan

One of my nieces went to China when she was aged 24. She was sold into a forced marriage and found herself in the early stages of pregnancy only after she had escaped to South Korea (...) After giving birth, she sent the baby to an orphanage but took the baby back. She was traumatised from the experience and still suffers.

Ms. Ahn from Sinuiju

When [my friend] first escaped to China, she [was married into] a family of three men: a father and his two sons. She was forced to have sex with the men alternately. And she could not run away. I cannot even imagine what it was like.

⁸⁶ A common perception that North Korean wives sold to ethnic Korean, rather than Chinese, husbands will experience better lives based on their ability to communicate was rejected by interviewees. No correlations between a shared-language and lesser experiences of sexual and physical violence were found.

⁸⁷ J Banister, 'Shortage of girls in China today', *Journal of Population Research* 21 (2004):19-45.

⁸⁸ Spilling across borders, the sale of North Korean women as wives is not confined to China. South Korean men, notably those in the country's southern provinces, have long-purchased foreign brides, including North Korean women from specialist brokers in China. Understood to be increasingly common, victims are trafficked and smuggled from China to South Korea on commercial flights and ferries. Once in South Korea, victims are known to endure further exploitation, sexual violence, and other human rights violations at the hands of South Korean husbands. On the prevalence of legal and illegally brokered marriages in South Korea, see: *The Economist*, 'Farmed Out: South Korea's foreign brides', <https://www.economist.com/asia/2014/05/24/farmed-out>, 24 May 2014; J Scobey-Thal, 'Decoder: Asia's Bride Market', <https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/03/26/decoder-asias-bride-market-wives-south-korea-singapore-china-vietnam/>, 26 March 2015.

Ms. Kang from Hamhung

My aunt escaped [North Korea] in 2004 (...) She was sold to a disabled Chinese man so she escaped to Harbin and found work in a factory. The owner told her he would help her, but he sold her to a man in the countryside in Heilongjiang (...) Her second Chinese husband is so poor. We are saving money to bring her [to South Korea].

Ms. Byeon [hometown redacted]

I do not know how much he paid [for me] (...) I plant crops and harvest them, usually on my own (...) He drinks alcohol every day and sometimes he will leave for 2-3 days (...) Everyone here watches me so I cannot escape.

Ms. Cho from Sinpo

When I escaped in the late 1990s, most women were sold into forced marriage. Today, women are sold into prostitution. My friend's mother escaped from Heilongjiang Province and when she reached Yanji she saw North Korean girls forced into prostitution. Girls who cross these days are put in accommodation in Yanji, are fed, and then forced to have sex with men every night.

Ms. Paek from Hamhung

I met a [North Korean] woman who had been sold twice to the same man [in South Korea]. The first passport she was given was not of a good quality (...) The broker made the man pay more money for a better passport. On the second journey she arrived in South Korea (...) Because she was unable to have children her husband told her he wasted a lot of money and beat her. She lived in three countries and had three bad lives.

Ms. Jeong from Hamhung

I saw a man on [South Korean] television say that North Korean women sold into forced marriages are lucky because they escaped prostitution or arrest. I think that I was not lucky. I had to have sex and give birth to two children even though I did not want it (...) I am not lucky. That is something I would like to make clear.

³¹ Night, Lei Han.
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First, the global sex trade and the sex trafficking of women and girls must be combatted by all States. Norms relating to male dominance over women must be challenged publicly at the highest level of every State.

Second, evidence suggests that the Government of China will not revise its policies towards North Korean refugees. States, in conjunction with exiled North Koreans, should lodge complaints with the International Court of Justice and impose sanctions on China as a violator of a legally binding Convention.

Third, all States should facilitate the escape of North Koreans in Chinese territory. Embassies should accept North Korean asylum seekers as refugees.

Fourth, the Government of South Korea should reconsider its silence on North Korean human rights. Every South Korean citizen who values democracy and the universality of human rights must hold their political representatives to account.

Fifth, the Government of North Korea will not eradicate the institutions of rule that push women and girls into China. It is these structures that must be targeted for removal.

Sixth, rescue organisations should be afforded the resources to rescue far greater numbers of North Koreans in China and cater to their resettlement and rehabilitation.

