

Still No Freedom: From North Korea to China

Dr Hyun-Joo Lim (hlim@bournemouth.ac.uk)
 Department of Social Sciences and Social Work



BU Centre for Seldom Heard Voices



More than 80 percent of North Korean defectors are women: Why?

- Patriarchal structure – men are more systematically controlled and monitored because of their public role as employees while women exploit their housewife status.
- The North Korean state employs men in higher numbers, and a prolonged absence from the workplace is likely to raise a red flag.
- Women participate in North Korea's unofficial economy at higher rates as 'housewives' and the country's grey markets have continued to proliferate as the state looks the other way.
- A demand for North Korean brides among unmarried Chinese men, and a broader demand for North Korean women in the Chinese sex industry.

North Korean Diaspora

UK	680 recognised NK refugees; estimated over 1,000 NK defectors (Park 2015)
China	At least 50,000-200,000 (Huffington Post 2017)
South Korea	29,000 by the end of 2015 (Home Office 2016)



- NK settlement in the UK began in 2004.
- The UK Govt has accepted largest no. of NK refugees, excluding South Korea.
- Since 2008, NK refugee numbers have declined due to toughening of the screening of asylum applications.

Human Rights Abuse Faced by NK Women in China

Trafficking – false promise of the guarantee of jobs, then sold to Chinese or Korean-Chinese men who are single.

- Violations of human rights. Some examples:
 - A young woman was sold to the youngest of a family with four sons and all of them and their father regularly raped her, but his mother took pity so helped her to escape.
 - One woman was sold when she was in her early 20s to a Chinese man in his 50s but he had a younger brother who was also single, so they took turns to rape her and if she resisted, they would tie her up. They locked her up and she got pregnant but didn't know who the father was. She escaped to South Korea but couldn't bring her son with her.
 - My participant was sold to a gambler in the countryside. She was locked up so couldn't run away, forced to work in the field and house like a slave, then impregnated. She was repatriated to North Korea, during which time the family lied to her son that she abandoned him. After five years separation, she found her son and managed to escape to the UK.
- No official recognition for children born out of these forced relationships. Also, those who are left behind are denied their basic rights, e.g. education and health.

Human Rights Abuse Faced by Women within NK

Rigid patriarchal structure - deeply embedded in every institution of society:

Family

Domestic violence common; verbal abuse but no redress for such situations:

In North Korea the idea that men are superior to women is so prevalent that women are always beaten by their husbands. Even if we don't have anything to eat, we have to serve alcohol to our husbands. I was also beaten by my husband for 25 years. We have to put up with it. (Ms A)

When the famine began in the 1990s, it was the women who took the responsibility for family survival, going out and selling products and exchanging goods.

Military

Sexual violence, harassment and rape common. Senior men use the threat of blocking young women from joining the party, which is a vital pathway to a secure and successful future.

Neglect of women's hygiene issues

No sanitary towels for women and hygiene for women remain serious issues – women in the army are given wound dressings but ordinary women just use cuttings of male vests or socks etc.



Human Rights Abuse Faced by Repatriated NK Women in NK Prisons

- Inhumane conditions: very crowded (no space to stretch their legs), substandard food, regular beatings and torture, hard labour.
- Pregnant women who are caught are forced to miscarry – made to stand against the wall and be kicked. Those past the 3-4 months period deliver in the cell helped by older women but forced to leave babies face down or some cover the baby's face with a carrier bag to die. Then, the guards display the corpse on the toilet floor against the walls so people can see it to teach them not to go back to China by betraying their own country and not to bring foreign blood to NK.



Concluding remarks

- North Korean women are subject to systematic human rights abuse within and outside North Korea.
- This demands much more concerted global efforts to tackle these grave issues.