

the age of consent (17), she may have consented to having sex with all the men. Authorities are reconsidering whether to file an appeal.

In another case, a Chief Justice in Suva was criticised by women's groups for saying that, because of a teenager's previous sexual experience, her rape at knifepoint would have no adverse effect on the victim. In yet another case, in Nadi, a magistrate passed a lenient sentence against a rapist because the woman he raped was drunk and asleep when he attacked her.

GERMANY

Supply Cannot Meet Demand For Women In Reunified Germany

by Roby Alampay
Source: Today, June 12, 1995

"Did you buy your wife?"

Elnora Held, a Filipina in Berlin and the wife in question, couldn't believe what she was hearing. It wasn't so much the query as how it was asked. She and her husband, a German, were at a dinner party when Mr. Held's friend approached. He asked "so coolly, matter-of-factly" with "no malice at all." Small talk and nothing more. I knew that many Germans had this attitude toward Filipino and Asian women, but when it was asked right in front of me, I was dumbfounded."

A new study released by Ban Ying (Thai for "House of Women"), a nongovernment organization, documents the plight of Filipino, Thai and former Eastern bloc immigrants, lured, brought or bought from their native lands as mail-order brides, or hired to work Berlin's cobblestone streets as prostitutes.

Sigrund Katins, Elnora's co-staffer in Ban Ying, discusses their paper *The Trade in Women in Berlin* --- a first attempt to document the problem.

The market in women has existed for years, in cities all over Germany, all over Europe and the Western world, Katins begins.

Thais and Filipinas, singled out -- in that order -- from all other Third World women have been among the primary "goods." Poverty at home or at least just the promise of a better life abroad had lured them to Germany. Invariably, many ended up as wives to divorced or middle-aged German bachelors, or as prostitutes. Either way, many risked -- and found -- trouble.

"Everybody knows that many Filipinas here are being abused, kept prisoner by their own husbands," Elnora says. Ban Ying receives around five walk-in

Filipinas and Thais a month in an undisclosed center for abused women in Berlin. "They found out about our center by word of mouth, usually. Filipina friends or even friends of their husbands tell them about us or us about them," Elnora says. "Now we're coming out with posters -- in Thai and Filipino -- to try to reach more women who may need our help."

Ban Ying offers counselling and legal services. The most important task now for the organization is to document a phenomenon that in many ways is still not acknowledged by the German legal system. Ban Ying laments the lack of hard data on the plight of women in Berlin. In mid-1994, it only knew that 3,799 Thai and 621 Filipino women were registered -- as tourists -- with the police in Berlin. Authorities would only acknowledge that "the actual number (of trafficked women) must be much higher" because "the estimated number of unknown cases is very high."

Beyond defining the market, though, Ban Ying notes with alarm an apparent expansion of this network of exploitation -- a rise that ironically corresponded with Berlin's own rebirth and liberation.

"After 1990, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the markets for everything expanded," Katins said. Former East Germans, deprived of political and economic choices for an entire generation, wanted a taste of all the forbidden fruits the West had to offer, and provided room for expansion.

"I shudder when we speak in these terms," Elnora says. In this harsh reality, after all, the same forces affecting car sales are the same factors at play in the exploitation of women. "But I know that it's unavoidable, discussing 'the market.' It's the only way to understand the problem."

HONG KONG

Source: Hong Kong Standard Vol. II, nos. 3 & 4, July - Dec 1994.

Nepalese Domestic Trapped In Sex Racket In Hong Kong

Up to 50 women from Nepal are being forced to provide cheap sex to their countrymen and Indians in Hong Kong. A spokeswoman for the Joint Action Network for Nepal (Jann), Sujita Shakya, told the Hong Kong Standard that a number of the 600 Nepalese women recruited by Hong Kong-based recruitment agencies as domestic helpers and sales girls allegedly ended up working as prostitutes in the territory.

The trafficking of Nepalese women started about four years ago because of

the growing demand for cheap sex in the territory.

Today, Hong Kong is the second biggest market for Nepalese victims of sex trafficking. The bulk of Nepalese victims - estimated at 100,000 are in India.

Mainland Women Tricked Into Working As Domestic

Rural mainland Chinese women are being forced to work as domestic helpers in Hong Kong in spite of their having applied for non-domestic jobs. Chinese maids, who are often aged over 50, do not usually complain about their illegal work because they receive a higher salary than foreign domestic helpers. Because they can communicate better with their employers, their salaries are comparatively high, ranging from \$5,000 to \$8,000 a month.

Jump In Number Of Indonesian Domestic Helpers In Hong Kong

Indonesian domestic helpers already outnumber Thais, but Filipinas are still the favorite amahs. According to the Immigration Department, the total number of Indonesian maids reached 9,000 at the end of August. Indonesians form the second biggest group of foreign maids after Filipinos, who account for 115,000 of the 130,000 foreign domestic helpers in Hong Kong. Thais, formerly the second biggest group of foreign domestic helpers, have remained at 7,000. At the end of 1993, the number of Indonesians was 6,000, while there were still about 7,000 Thai maids. In 1993, the number of Filipina maids was 105,000 out of the 120,000 foreign maids registered. The director of the Asian Migrant Centre attributed the rise in the number of Indonesian maids to aggressive promotion by recruitment agencies. "Agencies have been promoting Indonesian maids as cheap and hard working," she said. Many Indonesian maids were paid only (HK) \$1,500 a month, while the minimum wage up to September was \$3,500. A higher minimum wage of \$3,750 took effect at the start of this month.