misbehavior, even though Bangladesh's constitution allows no substitute for the court system. *Fatwas*, historically rulings on points of law, are being stretched to include judgments on evidence.

As a result of her work, Kamal has received numerous threats and, last year, members of a radical Islamic group threw gasoline bombs at her home.

Source: *Human Rights Tribune*, Vol. 4, No. 1, January 1997

Vietnam's Lonely Hearts

Tran Thi Quy is unmarried and looking for a man who is "honest, knowledgeable and with a firm outlook". Like hundreds of other single people in Ho Chi Minh City, she has joined "Club 30", a lonely-hearts-cum-marriage group. Twice a week, members gather in cafes to discuss problems, dance, drink and, if they are lucky, pair up.

Nothing unusual in that, perhaps. As in other countries, women are discovering opportunities outside the home and are marrying later. But Quy is over 40 and Vietnam had a war. When she reached the marrying age—around 23 in Vietnam—she could not find many men of similar age. Tens of thousands of young Vietnamese were wiped out in the fighting which ended in 1975.

According to a population survey published by the government statistical office, the war left a land short of young men. Of Vietnamese aged 35 to 44, there are twice as many women as men. In addition, most of the widows aged 50 or over lost their husbands some 20-30 years ago. The proportion of widows in Vietnam is "exceptionally high"—five times greater than widowers.

clips

The phenomenon has embedded itself into popular culture in books and films. Last week, Vietnamese television screened a tear-jerker made by the army film company about two women supporting each other 20 years after losing their men in the battle.

At the Love, Marriage and Family Affairs Consulting Center in the city, Le Minh Nga says that women had nowhere to turn to for help in the lean years after the war. With reform, things have become easier. People can afford to place advertisements in newspapers. The daring ones mingle in the singles bars that have cropped up all over town.

Most of Nga's clients are war widows who have been handicapped in the search for a husband by having to support themselves, working in factories or teaching. With an influx of foreign investment to Vietnam and higher incomes, many have more time and fewer preoccupations. "Women are coming out and daring to talk about their lives," she says. "In the past, they wouldn't open their hearts."

Source: *The Economist*, 15 March 1997

Sweatshop Barbie

"Appalling" describes the condition of workers at the Bangkok factory producing Barbie dolls. An article in the January-February 1997 issue of *The Humanitarist* reports on the findings of Anton Foek, who visited the Dynamics factory just outside of Bangkok where Barbies, stuffed Lion Kings and other Disney toys are made by 4,500 workers (mostly female).

Foek was greeted by women and children in a rally, carrying banners that said, "We are not slave labor!" Most of the workers came from northeastern Thailand, where the poverty is abject and extreme. If the girls aren't sold into sexual slavery at 11 or 12, they are sent to work in big city factories to provide a steady income. It's "long hours, hard work, low pay, no vacations, no sick days, no rights. No union and thus no voice."

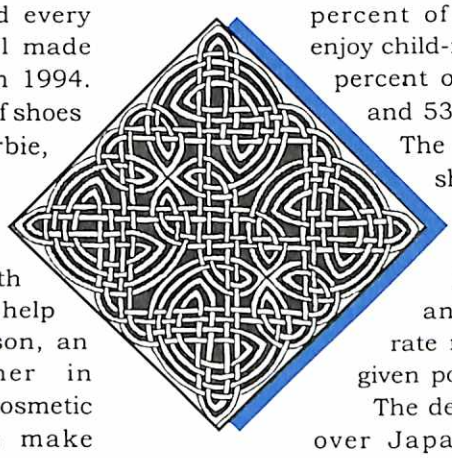
Many of the workers have respiratory infections caused by inhaling dust (75 percent). Others who work with lead and various chemicals suffer from chronic lead poisoning. If a worker wants to wear a mask, she can, but first she has to buy it; with a $4 daily wage, she simply can't afford the protection. They are in "a catch-22 situation: if they don't work, their relatives get nothing; if they do work, they get sick from all the chemicals and dust."

Dr. Orapun, who is investigating the widespread illnesses and the cases of workers' deaths in Bangkok, talked to Foek. She started investigating sweatshops in 1991 as the director of Thailand's National Institute of Occupational and Environmental Medicine. First she looked into deaths from Seagate Technology, a computer hard-disk giant, with some 21,000 workers. Thai officials told her to stop but she refused to be intimidated. Shortly removed from her post, Dr. Orapun continued her investigation. By examining blood samples of workers, she has found high levels of lead poisoning. Other diseases are caused by inhalation of dust and solvents.

Foek also visited women who used to work at the factories and are now in Bangkok's hospitals. Twenty-year-old Sunanta, former Dynamics employee, said, "When we get sick, they throw us out." Most have no health insurance. Sunanta added that at least four

of her factory friends have died. Her head is almost bald and she breathes with great difficulty. After working at Dynamics for only a year, she started to develop problems: irregularities with her period, then headaches, memory loss, and now hair loss. Foek says she feels depressed and embarrassed, shy and ashamed of being sick. Most of these women make no eye contact; they are tired and weak.

Sunanta is interested in starting a movement because she believes that if she doesn't help the other workers, her life will have had no meaning. It is unclear if she will survive. Foek tells of her astonishment when he mentions that there are "two Barbies sold somewhere in the world every second, and that Mattel made more than $3.2 billion in 1994. More than a billion pairs of shoes have been made for Barbie, many in Bangkok."



Foek, a freelance writer based in New York City, closes the article with these words: "I cannot help thinking of Cindy Jackson, an American photographer in London who has had 19 cosmetic surgery operations to make herself look like Barbie—at a cost of $165,000. I wonder what would Jackson say if she could see these sick and dying women and know how brutally they have been exploited in order to make dolls for First World children. Pramitwa, Sunanta, and Metha [the workers interviewed] have never heard of Cindy Jackson, but my guess is they are glad not to be in her shoes. For them, it would be unbearable to live a life looking like a Barbie."

Source: Vera M. Britto of <fiatlux@umich.edu>, 4 April 1997

No, Thanks

by Sachiko Sakamaki

When she gave birth to her daughter two years ago, Noriko Ochiai gave up her job crafting jewelry. She suffered not only a big drop in income, but also had to cope with a sense of isolation and confinement, and an utter lack of time for herself.

"It doesn't matter what kind of job you had before or what kind of person you are," says Ochiai. "Once a woman has a child her life is totally changed."

More and more Japanese women seem to be reaching the same conclusion, that having children is no fun at all.

According to a 1994 Japanese government survey, only 22.6 percent of Japanese mothers enjoy child-rearing—against 71.6 percent of American mothers and 53.7 percent of Korean. The result in Japan is a sharply declining birth rate: At 1.42 per woman, it's the lowest in the world and far below the 2.1 rate needed to maintain a given population.

The decline is casting a pall over Japan's future. As the number of children decreases, many fear the labor force will shrink and the economy will contract. In the long term, that could mean a decline in living standards. Noriyuki Takayama, a professor of economics at Hitotsubashi University, thinks the national birth rate will fall to 1.1—the current rate in Tokyo—simply because child-rearing has become too costly and unrewarding.

"Japan's population will be halved in 100 years at the current low birth rate," he wrote in the monthly magazine of the Keidanren, the country's main business lobby. "If children are gone, Japan will perish."

Without doubt, Japan is the most modernized Asian nation. But some traditions die hard. "Women's employment opportunities have increased and women are better educated," says Mikiko Tanaka, who has covered two decades in her magazine, *Wife*. "But basic things haven't changed in the past 20 years."

Among the most basic is the placing of the entire responsibility for child-rearing on the mother. "The mother is blamed for everything," complains Fumie Taihei, mother of a two-year-old son in Kawasaki near Tokyo. When a child gets sick or doesn't start talking by a certain age, or fails to get into a good school, it's seen to be the mother's fault. Even though Taihei's salesman husband says he is willing to help her, he leaves home at 7:30 a.m. and comes home at 8 or 9 p.m. "Hardly any time is left for us to sit down and talk about our son," says Taihei, let alone to spend time with the boy.

Some Japanese fathers never learn how to change diapers, and many refuse to look after their children for even a few hours while their wives get a haircut or go shopping. "I bring home money," says a successful Tokyo banker, whose wife stays home to look after their newborn son. "So why do I have to change my baby's dirty diapers?"

Babysitters in Japan are professionals who make more than a mother might earn working part-time in a supermarket. So the mother ends up staying with her child all the time. "A woman has to change her priority from herself to her child," says Ochiai, the fulltime mother. "But men keep on living for their work."

Even working mothers feel distanced from their peers, though. Tomoko Asami went back