FOCUS ON PROSTITUTION

SARAWAK WOMEN FOR WOMEN SOCIETY KUCHING

April 1990
Hi there!

Feeling a bit like the woman below, and looking forward to my 'holiday'.
(A holiday? - Two kids, jet lag, well-meaning relatives... you've got to be joking!)

This issue is rather rushed and limited in scope - but wanted to get something out before I left.

Hots of questions... I wish to ask questions... How about you?

Ren
Since the last newsletter there has been considerable action on this issue but sadly we do not know for certain what has happened to the girls who wrote to us.

The girls: A delegation met with Y.B. Dr. George Chan who shared the result of the internal investigation with SWWS. There were still various loose ends and a possibility the girls might still be in the country so SWWS sent Gill to Miri to meet with the police and other interested parties. Although it turned out not to be possible to meet with the girls, useful information was gathered and contact made with several people who were either willing to help make contact with the girls (by distributing our CPL literature) and/or give some assistance if the girls identified themselves. Shortly after the trip the police raided the lodgings of some of the girls and handed them over to Immigration for deportation. It is not known whether or not the letter-writer was amongst them, but at this stage no more can be done.

The issue: A very constructive idea of Y.B. Dr. George Chan was for a meeting to be convened by the Women's Bureau to bring together interested parties to discuss ways of working together to contain the problem. SWWS was requested to submit a draft proposal which was duly done. In March a dialogue session was arranged by the Women's Bureau at which it was announced that a Task Force was to be established. This initiative is welcomed by SWWS and has our full support.

SWWS's Position: The gist of this can be seen from the notes headed "General Issues". Your comments are welcome. Prostitution can be a very emotional issue. Everyone has sympathy for young innocent girls accidentally caught in the life but as the girls become older there is commonly a feeling that they know what they are into, so why be concerned.

The reasons women enter prostitution are varied and complex. Those wishing to leave may find it as difficult as a battered wife finds it to walk out on her husband. Our help could be the support they need.

Gill
The presence of large numbers of Thai prostitutes in Sarawak has been the subject of much criticism and concern. The state has enacted a new directive to curb this flow of women into the state, and the police have been working to address the issue.

The issue of Thai women in Sarawak has been dealt with through the Chief Minister's directive. The police have been tackling the problem with determination and diligence. However, the police force has been criticized for its handling of the issue.

The reputation of the police force has been at a low ebb. There is little wonder, therefore, that the reputation of the senior police officers, or the police department, should be at such a low level. The police force has been criticized for its lack of discipline and effectiveness.

However, a new Commissioner has been appointed, and the police force is now looking forward to a tightening of discipline among senior police officers. This is because they have been criticized for their lack of discipline and effectiveness.

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Miri hideout - for Thai girls?

Miri — The continuing flow of foreign girls, some of whom have been deported before, into the State for vice activities has left a big puzzle unsolved.

A syndicate is believed to be involved in bringing single foreign girls for immoral activities to Limbang via Labuan before sending them to other divisions.

This came to light on Wednesday when police here raided a residential house in Pujut and arrested 16 Thai women found without their passports and other travel documents. The women, aged 18 to 24, were believed to be involved in vice activities.

Divisional police chief, Supt Louis Chin said initial investigations had led the police to believe that the women left Bangkok, Thailand last year and entered Malaysia through Labuan in May with their travel documents.

It was believed that agents who brought them into Malaysia had kept their passports when the women entered Limbang where they remained until last weekend. The woman fled to other divisions when anti-vice operations were launched in Limbang.

"Miri, being one of the closer divisions to Limbang, was the probable choice for the syndicate to hide these women," he said.

Supt Chin said police investigations showed that two of the 16 women arrested had been deported in February when police picked them up at a raid at a barber saloon.

"We understand that the two were deported after the arrest. We now intend to find out how they had managed to re-enter the State," he added.

The State has stopped the entry of single foreign women, especially Thais, since last November, to curb prostitution. Assistant State Immigration director Haji Abdul Wahab Ibrahim, during a dialogue session with 39 women organisations last Wednesday, said only married Thai women were allowed into the State.

Haji Abdul Wahab said before the ban many Thai girls had managed to come back by changing their passports or altering their looks.

The Miri police chief said the 16 Thai women were being detained under the immigration laws and police are still investigating their illegal entry into the State. He added that the police would take appropriate actions against those involved in bringing these women into Sarawak.

"We believe that their passports are still being kept by the syndicate, the identity of which is being ascertained," he said.

Supt Chin warned members of the public against harbouring persons who entered the State illegally.
The future?

The results of your investigations... everything fine. no evidence of Down's Syndrome... no chromosome abnormalities.

It's a boy. Oh... I was expecting a girl.

And, brown eyes... probably short sighted.

He'll be a bit... perhaps with perhaps slight tendency to overweight.

He'll be more of a dreamer than a doer... altogether a nice child.

Oh my God.

That's all. I am sure you are using the techniques that are available to us.

Are you sure these are my notes?

May I phone my husband?

Please do.

Doctor...

We won't take it after all.
KUCHING — A politician's wife whose husband has been frequenting night joints in the city and neglecting the family has called on the Sarawak Police Commissioner Mohd Ghazali Yacub to wipe out the bad apples in the Police Force.

In a letter to the Sarawak Tribune last week, she also gave the names of four senior officers whom she alleged were covering up foreign girls and prostitutes working in the city's night clubs and lounges.

The politician's wife, who asked that her identity not be revealed, wrote the letter in response to the Tribune editorial on March 26 which pointed to the indiscretion and dishonest activities of some senior police officers.

The following day Encik Mohd Ghazali Yacub warned his officers to cease immediately any activities which may tarnish the good image of the Police Force.

"I must thank ST for having the guts to print that editorial for public consumption. It is a daring exposure of what has been public knowledge — a knowledge that has spelt concern and worries to all morally conscious citizens.

"I happened to be in the midst and a victim of such a situation. My husband (a former YB and now manages a big company) has been frequenting that nightclub at ....... (name of road given) and a loutish that was burnt down recently and spending heavily on his Filipino lover.

"I know of another wife who suffers just like me. Her husband came once on a fortnight from his station and spent most of his evenings and nights at those joints with another girl. Our problems are the same. You can imagine the heartache, the agony of our suffering. But our husbands, being weak, succumbed to their sweet talks and even threatened to divorce us.

"What moral obligations do they have to their families? A lot. But immorality has drained out all rationality and sensibility in them. These foreign prostitutes ... under whatever guise they work ... are only too happy to be visited by men who can afford to pay. Most of them who are looking girls in night clubs are maintaining their men by offering them sex every so often just to keep them.

"I think that the Chief Minister should also ban Filipino girls, and not only Thai girls, from entering the State. There are more Filipino prostitutes in Kuching than any other foreigners. Their job ... looking girls in night clubs. Their trade ... the same ... prostitution! Maybe in a more subtle way and no wonder only those in higher ranks of society who can cover each other ... can have access to their services.

"I think that the Police Commissioner might feel embarrassed but who are these people ...... (she gave four names) and many others ...... inspectors and above.

"I wish to appeal to the Commissioner to get to the root of the problem and to wipe out the bad apples in the Police Force. Perhaps when he took over from Yassin, he was not briefed properly on how bad the image of the Sarawak Contingent was.

Her parting line: "If there is any consolation to the Commissioner, the Immigration Department is just the same."

THE CHIEF MINISTER

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Flushback ... The Commissioner's call to his officers reported by ST on March 26.
Can you whistle and do you shout?

My father and mother both used to warn me that "a whistling woman and a crowing hen would surely come to no good end." And perhaps I should have listened to them. But even at the base I knew that though my end probably might not be good I must whistle like a woman undaunted until I reached it.

(Alice Walker)
PROSTITUTION

General Issues

* Cannot eliminate but need to keep in reasonable limits. Some may feel there is no 'reasonable prostitution' but have to be realistic.

* SWWS's major concern - women who do not want to be involved. (i) have been tricked - had no idea of what they were coming to. (ii) feel exploited - had some idea of what they may be coming to but find the conditions unacceptable.

* SWWS accepts that some women will want to be involved and may willingly accept the conditions - restricting their activities is the concern of the authorities not SWWS's BUT:-
  - They still have health needs +
  - It is not known how big a proportion of the prostitute population they are; their existence does NOT mean no action should be taken to help the other categories.

* Prostitution is a problem affecting society at large:-
  - S.T.D. will not only affect the prostitutes but also their customers and their wives/partners. (S.T.D. = e.g. V.D., herpes)
  - Syndicate crime (gangsters etc.) are, and increasingly will be, attracted to making "easy money" & bring with them more law and order problems.
  - The more prostitution flourishes, the more likely local vulnerable girls/women will be caught in the lifestyle (e.g. through poverty; naiveté; adolescent rebellion; temptation of big money)

* It is not therefore just a problem affecting foreign women. It is also known that many girls from East Malaysia work in the West and vice versa. There are also young girls from advantaged homes in K.L. who have been attracted into the business.

* There is a danger that by blaming the women (e.g. they must have known what they are coming to) that the main points are lost. (As in Rape and Domestic Violence - the arguments focusing on the women are harmful and detract from constructively dealing with the situation).

* Whilst accepting that the "business" is likely to continue - need to restrict now before its growth increases through tourism and the likelihood of big profits.
  Already know:-
  a) Escort agencies for tourists and business men operating in Kuching
PROSTITUTION continued

b) Casual talk in the tourist trade of the need to lift restrictions so Malaysia can emulate the Thai trade.
c) Often assumed in West Malaysia that Asian women with E.P. (European) men must be prostitutes and not their wives. (Presumably because of escort agencies in Thailand.)
d) More of the recruiting operation is likely to move to the Philippines as the prevalence of AIDs amongst Thai prostitutes is publicised - nearer for links to Sabah & Sarawak - where markets are relatively undeveloped.
e) Syndicates already exist.
f) Operators feel sufficiently secure to advertise for "erotic masseurs" in the Sarawak Tribune. (March 1990)

Accept there are problems for the authorities in controlling prostitution and hope to be able to help them where possible eg.
- information booklet for women trapped
- women’s groups interviewing girls before being deported
- public awareness
- working group
- gaining information from other women’s organisations within ASEAN how they have tackled the problem. Realise that any internal problems, of applying policy within the authorities, are their concern.

SECRECY BUILDS UP MORE EXPLOITATION:

- Age of girls involved could become younger and younger - child prostitution common in Thailand and Philippines.

- The variety of prostitution offered is likely to become more daring.

- The more the operators feel they can get away with the less they will provide for the prostitutes; the more they will trick people when recruiting and the more exploitative will be the working conditions eg. recent People’s Mirror article of conditions in Japan.

AS FAR AS POSSIBLE KEEP DISCUSSION OPEN; CONSTRUCTIVE; NON-THREATENING AND FINISHING ON POSITIVE FOLLOW-UP & THE NEED TO WORK TOGETHER NOW WHILST THE PROBLEM IS MANAGEABLE (small working party to report back to Women’s Bureau / further dialogue session?). Where applicable refer to individual examples without identifying people or source.

Gill Butcher
If it were a lady, it would get its bottom pinched.
If this lady was a car she'd run you down.

FIAT

TO VOLVO, A SON.
4,397 POUNDS.

Good luck next time.
Sex Industry in Hong Kong

by Cheung Choi-wan translated by Irene Tong

Hong Kong’s sex industry seldom receives much public attention except when minors are involved, as in the case of under-aged female prostitutes or young boys found engaging in prostitution. In fact, sex businesses here are rather inconspicuous and lack the variety and diversity exhibited by other Southeast Asian countries. The society’s attitude towards female participants in the industry is one of general discrimination, while male ‘clients’ can often escape unscathed.

Apart from prostitution, the sex industry in Hong Kong also includes topless/bottomless bars which cash in on the exposed female body, nightclubs/bars which treat women’s bodies as playthings for male customers, and as services for men. At another level, pornography, sex video rentals and cinemas which specialize in sex films are all part of the sex business. Whatever medium is used, they all profit through the exploitation of women.

It can be generalized that women in the industry share similar backgrounds. Though sociological investigations into the local sex businesses are scanty, the few publications available did register a decline in the age of the women involved. Most of them were found to come from ‘broken homes,’ or from families which failed to create a sense of belonging among the female members. In other words, as in the case with ‘problem youths,’ most of the women belong to the lower-middle stratum of society, where conditions at home are conducive to encouraging progress at school, and where family conflicts and instability make them refuse the disciplines of the school and the home, turning instead to extra-familial circles for refuge and identity.

Stories of how teenage girls become prostitutes are often reported in the press. Usually they were lured and coerced into the business by intimate boyfriends or other friends after being in debt, raped and beaten up. As prostitutes, they often indulge in gambling and drug abuse and can never pick themselves up again.

Most sex businesses in Hong Kong, particularly prostitution, are controlled by triads which use a whole set of methods, invariably threats and violence, to induce and force women into the occupation. Because of this, though it is claimed by many that today’s prostitutes enter the business voluntarily, the reality is that they are often compelled to do so.

Even less attention has been paid to non-Chinese women in the sex industry who come from Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Taiwan, etc. Many of them were recruited overseas by employment agencies which claim to offer them positions as domestic helpers, maids and the like in Hong Kong. Once in Hong Kong, these women were forced into prostitution triads which took advantage of their helplessness and unfamiliarity with local laws. Since it is rare to find local individuals or groups showing concern for their plight, their situation is most pathetic.

Under the laws of Hong Kong, it is a criminal offence to have sexual intercourse with girls under 16 years old. Thus, we find more restrictive measures against under-aged prostitutes. Moreover, they tend to receive wider attention from the public on moral grounds. A law under Hong Kong law, prostitution is not illegal. It is only
when it can be proved that someone is using another person as prostitute for profit-making that the law is broken. Therefore, we find numerous 'sole-proprietor' prostitutes operating under what is commonly known as "one flat, one phoenix" system. They appear to work for themselves only, but beneath the surface, it is not surprising that they are controlled by triads.

As these "one flat, one phoenix" prostitutes establish themselves within residential premises, they often attract complaints from the residents. This leads to the suggestion of drawing all sex businesses together under a red light district. Those who favour the idea are obviously people who seek a clear demarcation between "decent folks" and "indecent" ones, losing sight, however, of the fact that frequenters of such places are more often than not "decent" men in daily life. That society carries a double standard in its treatment of prostitutes as opposed to their 'clients' is evident here.

In the attempt to marginalise an institution indispensable in a male-dominated society, the oppression and exploitation that women in the sex industry face are further dismissed.

Presently, the thriving sex industries in Southeast Asia has sent men to Hong Kong, mainland China, Taiwan, Thailand, the Philippines, and so on.

The Association For The Advancement of Feminism (AAF) had, in 1986, held an internal discussion on the issue of prostitution. We believe that prostitution is a business which reflects and fortifies the exploitation by men upon women, and as such, should be phased out eventually. However, as "commoditisation of women" is unlikely to disappear in the short term, it will be inadvisable to penalise the prostitutes as that could only subject them further to triad control. Medical and health services should be made accessible to this particular group, and they should not be prevented from voicing their demands for better 'working' conditions. At the same time, we oppose the idea of setting up a red light district, since it enhances the commoditisation of the female body. As evidenced by red light districts in Southeast Asia as well as in Europe, the sex service provider there symbolise an increased consumerist pressure on the violation of women's bodies and sexuality.

Source: Women's News Digest, No. 15 Apr. 1989, AAF, Room 1202 Yum Tze Commercial Bldg. 17-23 Thomson Road Wanchai, Hong Kong
KUCHING — A lot of women have the misconception that only sexually active women are prone to getting gynaecological cancer.

"Cancer of the uterus has been detected in women who have not had any children and those suffering from diabetes and hypertension," Dr Helen Ng, the Resident Consultant Obstetrician and Gynaecologist at the Northern Medical Specialist Centre (NMSC) said all women are at risk during a talk on the importance of gynaecological cancer for government officers recently.

"We are more concerned over cancer of the cervix, ovary and the uterus as they are the common sites of cancer. Very rarely do we come across cancer of the vagina, vulva and fallopian tube."

Different risk factors exist for different cancers.

"For cancer of the cervix, the high risk groups are the sexually active and those who have a lot of sexual partners and whose have a number of female sexual contacts.

Smokers also fall into this group.

"We recommend pap smear screening tests in all women because all these early lesions of the cancer of the cervix are without symptoms," Dr Ng said.

"The cancer can only be diagnosed early by examining women regularly and if the pap smear is abnormal, then the patient will be further evaluated with a colposcope.

"Dr Ng said the NMSC would be getting a colposcope in May which will help to examine patients with abnormal lesions more carefully and assess the extent of the lesions.

"The earlier we pick up any of the problems, the better will be the cure," she said.

Although the colposcope has been widely used overseas, the advanced facility is something very new in Sarawak.

Dr Ng said the colposcope that can magnify up to 20 times or more, is very reliable if can detect lesions of cancer of the cervix at its precancerous stage which can be easily treated.

While a pap smear screening test is only able to show the presence of a lesion, it does not show where and what type it is, unlike the colposcope.

Without the help of a colposcope, the patient will have to undergo more invasive procedures which includes surgery and hospitalisation and probably result in a increased risk of complication.

"The colposcope will contribute to a better standard of gynaecological practice," she said.

Dr Ng, who conducted a talk recently, added that many women do not know of the gynaecological screening programmes in NMSC.

"That is why every time patients come to us, we distribute pamphlets and we try to conduct talks to show them the importance of gynaecological cancer."

The NMSC will be organising a series of talks for members of the public.
I am 19 years old, a girl, and I'm still studying. Not very long ago, I met a guy in a restaurant. He is quite handsome and charming. He is friendly and I like the way he talks to me. From that day on, I always go out with him—almost everyday. But now, I feel something is wrong. I don't know what it is and I tried to find out. I found nothing and it annoyed me a lot.

I tried to resist this guy because I want to study. But he keeps coming to bring me out.

My problems are: 1. How can I resist him or tell him that I don't want to go out anymore without hurting him? I have already told him that I don't want to go out too often.

Once I shouted at him to leave me alone, but he doesn't care. I don't know what's wrong with this guy. 2. How to deal with this kind of guy? 3. How to make him leave me alone or dislike me?

My parents wanted me to marry him as they think we love each other so much. They don't know how I feel about him. I am not sure I want to marry him ever. I am only 19 and I am not ready to be a wife.

How can I tell my parents that I am not ready to marry him without hurting their feelings? I have told them but they ignored what I said.

One day I was so mad that I told my parents, "Why don't you let me marry him?" I have never talked to my parents like that. I felt sorry but there's nothing I can do.

I do need your advice. Please Chris, I am in deep, real deep trouble now.

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Parents see their daughter, going out with the same guy, all the time. They are worried for a while. I am not sure I want to marry him ever. I am only 19 and I am not ready to be a wife. How can I tell my parents that I am not ready to marry him without hurting their feelings? I have told them but they ignored what I said. One day I was so mad that I told my parents, "Why don't you let me marry him?" I have never talked to my parents like that. I felt sorry but there's nothing I can do.

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New-born baby girl abandoned in empty house

KUCHING — This sad-looking baby girl (see picture above) was found abandoned in an empty house at Jalan Astana in Petra Jaya on Wednesday.

She could not have been more than a few hours old when two young boys found her that afternoon.

The two brothers heard her crying when they were playing near the house.

When they entered the building, they found the baby cold and hungry, lying on a cold floor near a pool of blood.

The boys rushed home to inform their parents.

With blankets wrapped around her, the baby was later handed over to the Sarawak General Hospital.

It is believed that the pool of blood found on the upper floor of the house indicated where the baby was born.

Nobody has come forward to claim the baby girl. For now, at least, she is being tenderly cared for by nurses at the hospital.

But who is the cruel mother who heartlessly left her new-born to fend for herself in an empty house?
NO?

That's fantastic. Oh, I know you don't approve of me going on bridge. I don't want to take any risks.

What does Jeremy say? Surprised, but he's getting used to it.

Oh, he'll adore it and so will you.

I don't know about that.

Do you want a boy or a girl? I rather fancy twins actually.

If that doesn't happen, I can always adopt one in a couple of years. You really mean it.

Well, if I get too tired off Jeremy can always take over.

Or if my cook falls ill I'll get a nanny... except I wouldn't want them to get too fond of someone else.

Have you thought about names? Fanny and Alexander.

What are you two up to? What are you cooking up between you?

Do you mind if I tell him.

Alison's going to stop using contraceptives!
Mississippi Winter

I cradle my four-year-old daughter
in my arms
alarmed that she already smells
of Love-is-True perfume.
A present from
her grandmother
who loves her...

(Alice Walker)