

## **Sex Trafficking of Foreign Women to US Military Base Camp Towns in South Korea: Victim's Experiences of Health, Gendered Violence and Sexual Abuse**

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## **Introduction**

There is a growing literature on the role of the United States (US) Military in creating and sustaining a military-oriented sex industry in nations where they have an ongoing presence (see, for example, Pollock Sturdevant & Stolfus 1993, Enloe 1989 and 2000). The Philippines, the Balkans, Japan and, more recently, South Korea, have become areas of particular controversy in recent years because of the presence of a US military or United Nations Peacekeepers - oriented local prostitution sector. The global media, in particular, has revealed the irony that the globe's "defenders of democracy" are the same individuals and institutions that compromise the human rights of thousands of vulnerable women and girls in various regions throughout the world by creating the demand for prostitution that fuels their trafficking. The US military, for example, is often purported to be the defender of global democracy and human rights and yet personnel representing this same institution are simultaneously responsible for purchasing the sexual labor of trafficked women and girls.

In South Korea this media assault on the US military's role in sex trafficking has been particularly scathing in recent years in line with the growing presence of trafficked women from Russia and the Philippines in particular in these areas. In March 2002 Fox Television broadcast an undercover investigative report documenting participation of US military forces stationed in Korea in the commercial sex industry. In the report, American Courtesy Patrol Officers (CPs) willingly shared their experiences and pitched advice on the operation of the sex industry in camp town areas (the report was filmed exclusively in one camp town area, Tongducheon) with reporter, Tom Merriman. It was clear from the report that US soldiers were not only aware of the existence of sex trafficking in camp towns, but that many actively participated in it or perpetuated it by protecting those personnel directly involved. Women in the camp town bars from Russia, Commonwealth Independent States (CIS) countries and the Philippines were filmed stating that their passports had been taken away from them by their managers or club owners and that they could not move about freely or return to their home countries if they wished.

Following this report, a spate of similarly revealing international print media articles carried exposes of the links between sex trafficking and the US military, with Tongducheon and another camp town, Songtan, acting as the sites for the stories. The American publication, *Air Force Times* (August 2002), carried an article that featured the story of Lana, from the Kyrgyz Republic, who was placed in a club in Songtan where she was forced to engage in prostitution for American servicemen. She lived in a three-bedroom apartment with nine other women from the club with a video camera mounted on the entrance so that they owner could monitor the women's movements. Lana stated that they were only

allowed out for 30 minutes a day. The article also refers to the camp town area outside Camp Hovey in Tongducheon, conferring the following description:

“About a mile southeast of Tongducheon just outside the US Army’s Camp Hovey in the northern reaches of South Korea, six stern, broad-shouldered military police wearing black armbands over their camouflaged shirtsleeves stood on the corner outside Olympus Club and at least a dozen others walked the streets nearby. Inside the dimly lit club, loud, slow rock music pounded the ears. The clubs 18 or so women, dressed in black bikini tops and miniskirts slit up the sides, were scattered throughout the club; standing at the padded bar on the right, ordering drinks or checking the new arrivals; seductively slow dancing with off-duty troops on the dance floor; talking or making out with troops in the padded, high-backed booths; or lap-dancing, grinding suggestively as they straddled seated troops...”.

This image, like the Fox Television story, was broadcast to an international, primarily American audience. Similar stories soon emerged with Tongducheon as the main spatial referent (Time Magazine, August 2002). The local press soon followed suit, so that the Korean public began to re-make camp town as places the actual and symbolic location of the transnational crime of sex trafficking and national shame of massive human rights abuses (for example, Korea Times, October 2002). In May 2002 US Congressman Christopher H. Smith sent a letter, signed by himself and 12 other members of Congress, to Donald H. Rumsfeld, Secretary of Defense, requesting the Pentagon to undertake an immediate investigation into, “the veracity of a recent news report indicating that US Army troops are patronizing and guarding houses of prostitution where women are forced to prostitute themselves...”. This letter was an immediate response to the airing of the Fox Television report.

In this paper I aim to present a more nuanced and detailed interpretation of the trafficking of foreign women and girls to US military base areas in Korea and elsewhere than that currently being produced and circulated, largely by the Korean and international media. The US military presence in Korea is certainly responsible for fostering an exploitative prostitution sector, often involving trafficked women and girls, with this sector grossly violating the human rights of the victims. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some US military personnel based in Korea are perpetrators of global sex trafficking – both through their purchase of trafficked women’s sexual labour and through their protection of those engaged in supplying/ selling trafficked women’s sexual labour. However by only focusing on this fact we miss the opportunity to look in more depth at exactly how women’s rights are abused, how others within the camp towns (particularly Korean club owners and managers and customers of other nationalities) also contribute to the abuse of these women’s rights, and how the

women attempt to resist their subjugation and abuse. In-depth study of this system in Korea has revealed the complexities in both the demand for trafficked women in Korea and the complex patterns of abuse and violence experienced by the women which are certainly caused by, but also extend beyond US military personnel. The remainder of this paper focuses on the violence and abuse experienced by foreign women trafficked to and prostituted in US military camp towns in Korea. Experiences of violence and abuse constitute a lens through which to identify the precise nature of the system of exploitation that operates in these camp towns.

### **Research Methodology**

This research operates from the recognition that, "The reality [of trafficked women] is complex, messy and resists easy explanations and solutions" (Doezema 2000: 45). I chose to address this "messy reality" through the use of an anthropological approach, which employs a qualitative methodology that includes narrative and semi-structured interviews and ethnography (see for example, Halfacre and Boyle 1994, Miles and Crush 1993) supplemented by a standard questionnaire which provided baseline information about all participants. As Pickup (2000: 49, emphasis added) points out, an anthropological approach to trafficked women allows us to "understand the way women's life choices are determined *by their specific context*". An understanding of trafficked women's contexts in both their home and destination countries would be extremely difficult to attain from a position of social and geographical remoteness to the participants or casual and limited interaction and observation, and even more difficult when the topics of discussion include highly personal and emotive issues of sex, rape, violence and abuse, forced confinement and financial exploitation.

Methodologically an anthropological approach to the research has enabled the use of a combination of processes to establish participant's stories of place, movement, identity, experiences and daily life. A few more recent studies of female migrant workers in Asia have also begun to explore topics beyond traditional "structural" concerns of numbers and patterns to the ways these trends are informed by the migrant's life history and are framed within the migrants' own narratives (for example, Yeoh and Huang 2000, Tyner 2002, Asis 2002). The adoption of these alternative methods for this research on trafficked women in Korea are also a response to Kelly's (2002: 8) call for trafficking researchers to, "... think seriously about these issues [of approach and methodology], experimenting with methods and approaches explicitly designed to counteract barriers to disclosure and discovery".

This paper is concerned specifically with the experiences of gendered violence, abuse and physical and sexual health of Filipinas and Russian women trafficked

as “entertainers” to the US military camp town clubs and brothels in Korea (for a more general discussion of the various other aspects of this system see Yea 2005). The discussion and conclusions are based on research with 76 Filipinas, 3 Russians and 1 woman from Kyrgyzstan: 80 participants in total. All participants completed a detailed 15 page questionnaire which focused on a range of issues including women’s personal information, processes of recruitment and migration to Korea, women’s financial and work situation once in Korea, experiences of abuse and violence in their work, and their health and welfare. I chose to use a questionnaire because I wished to record basic bio data from participants and also because some women wished to provide information about their situation in a way that involved responding to simple questions rather than describing or discussing their lives in detail directly.

The potential for re-traumatisation of participants as they discussed traumatic and painful experiences in Korea was much reduced by providing women with the option of a detailed questionnaire. For example, many of the women in this research experienced severe and sustained violence and psychological abuse during their trafficking experiences. The questionnaire enabled women to simply tick boxes in response to questions about whether they had experienced violence and abuse, enabling them to identify the existence and frequency of such incidents, as well as the perpetrator(s), without having to recall the intimate details of these experiences. All but 8 of the participants completed the questionnaire while I was present. This was important for several reasons: in case women became distraught whilst completing the questionnaire; in case they required clarification about particular questions; and in case – as happened many times – women decided upon completing the questionnaire that they would like to provide further information in an in-depth interview.

25 of the women (all Filipinas) also agreed to participate in one or more in-depth, narrative or semi-structured interviews in which various subjects, including customers, boyfriends, abuse and violence, life before migration and in Korea, and women’s futures plans were discussed in greater detail. Some of the participants who continued to reside in Korea after running away from the club where they were deployed were interviewed more than once, and additional informal discussions in person or over the telephone were often held regularly (every week or second week). This minimised the likelihood of the research presenting a “snapshot” of participant’s experiences in Korea and their broader lives. Other participants, including those who were still working in the clubs and those who had run away from the clubs and returned within a few days to the Philippines or Russia, were normally interviewed only once.

The most extensive relationships with participants over a longer period of time were formed with 8 participants in two of the main research sites (Tongducheon

and Songtan, see 2.2 below). This enabled a greater degree of trust and rapport between us to develop so that these participants were generally willing to disclose much more intimate aspects of their experiences. These women - Jenny, Grace, Elle, Rosie, Cheryl, Rhea, Marie and Eve - figure prominently in the discussion in this paper.

Only 5 of the participants were still working in the clubs where they had been trafficked at the time of their participation in the research, while the remainder had run away from their workplace (either recently, that is within a month of participating, or within the previous year before participating) or were detained by the police or Immigration. The problems of interviewing trafficked women who are still in trafficking situations or what are labelled “unconducive contexts” at the time of their participation have been documented elsewhere (see Kelly 2002). They include:

- fear of reprisal for women from owners or managers if they are found to be talking about their situations to strangers;
- potential danger posed to researchers who enter venues where they can be seen by traffickers, particularly for female researchers who often appear as an anomaly in brothels and male-oriented clubs and bars;
- potential dangers of approaching women who see more immediate benefits in relating information about the research to owners and managers than in participating in the research, particularly if owners provide benefits such as money to women who act as “informants”.

4 of the 5 women who were still in trafficking situations at the time they were interviewed worked together in one club in Songtan and were interviewed in the apartment where they lived<sup>1</sup>. The fifth woman was met at the local Catholic Church in Tongducheon, where her club owner had given her permission to go once a week in order to play guitar at mass. I was able to meet and eventually interview this woman in this context. Women who had already left trafficking situations were met either in shelters, in private residences where they were hiding/ living or in factories where they were working after running away from the clubs where they had been deployed. Some women were met through a basic snowballing technique in which they were introduced to me by other women who were already participating in the research.

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<sup>1</sup> These women lived together in a two bedroom, third floor apartment with 5 other Filipinas, which was immediately above an identical second floor apartment where 10 Russian women working in another club lived. The downstairs door which lead to both apartments was monitored by a hidden close circuit television camera, placed there by the owner of the clubs where the women were deployed so he could monitor their movements during non-working hours. The only reason I was able to make contact with and interview these women was because, shot from the camera at the door I looked exactly like one of the Russian women living in the downstairs apartment. I was able to visit the 4 Filipina participants and interview each of them several times in their apartment during 2003.

The paper also draws on information gained from interviews and other materials (such as written statements of complaint) with other Filipinas and Russian women conducted as part of other studies and/ or official investigations and complaints against club and bar owners. It also draws on one woman's diary, several copies of "employment contracts" for migrant "entertainers" in Korea (the visa type upon which they enter Korea), and email information sent to me by various participants and customers/ US military personnel stationed in Korea. The fieldwork for the research in this report was carried out over a period of 18 months from June 2002 to November 2003.

### **Sex Trafficking of Foreign Women to South Korea**

Filipino women (Filipinas) and Russian and CAR (Central Asian Republics) women have been trafficked to South Korea under the visa category of "entertainer" (E-6 visa) since 1995. Their presence in Korea's multifarious sex and entertainment industry has become particularly widespread since 1999. The migration of Filipinas to Korea as entertainers is part of a longer term trend in Filipino overseas labor migration that is driven by a combination of the economic situation in the Philippines, governmental policy which both encourages and actively facilitates labor migration for the remittances it earns the Philippines economy, and the personal circumstances of individual women and men which drive them to seek better employment opportunities overseas. Russia and CIS countries have had a much shorter history of transnational labor migration of unskilled workers, arising in the political context of perestroika in the mid 1980s and the political and economic changes wrought on these countries as a result. In both countries grinding poverty coupled with rising consumer aspirations, widespread unemployment, growing corruption, alarming increases in drug and alcohol dependency and the increasing porousness of national borders has provided fertile ground for traffickers operating to move women as using the visa category of "entertainer" to Korea and elsewhere.

In Korea, United States military base camp towns constitute one of two major destinations for foreign women trafficked for sexual servitude. Until 1995 in Korea this industry relied exclusively on the sexual labour of Korean women<sup>2</sup>. The camp towns have become a powerful symbol of anti-Americanism, including on-going colonisation of the Korean peninsula by hegemonic foreign forces (the United States) as well as the actual physical location of crimes by GIs against Korean people. Korea's modern history is littered with incidents of violent episodes involving American GIs as perpetrators of various crimes

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<sup>2</sup> As KCWU (1999) note, in 1997 there was a large protest in "America Town", the US Military camp town outside Kunsan, North Cholla province. This protest involved Korean camp town hostesses and prostitutes rallying against the increasing numbers of foreign women working in the clubs who were taking over their customers.

against Korean people (almost always Koreans living in the camp towns or surrounding areas). These include various incidents of violent sexually-based offences against camp town prostitutes, the most infamous of which was the brutal murder of sex worker Yoon Kum-Yi in October 1992 by US serviceman Kenneth Markle, stationed at Camp Casey, Tongducheon. Over the past few years there have also been several highly publicised cases in which Korean prostitutes have been murdered or abused by US servicemen. In May 1993, a fifty-year old woman who operated a bar in Tongducheon was found unconscious after being beaten and kicked in the head and face by a US Corporal who was apparently trying to rape her. On January 30, 1999, also in Tongducheon, a Korean woman's body was found strangled in her rented room in Bosan-dong. Also in 1999 an American sailor was also suspected of killing his Korean wife and their adopted son in their home in outside Yongsan in Seoul. Petty Officer 1<sup>st</sup> Class James W. Fuhman was investigated and later arrested on suspicion of killing the two, dumping their bodies a mile from their home in Hannam Village and then setting fire to them.

Such incidents have been used by numerous social movement groups in Korea as an argument for the withdrawal of US troops from the peninsula, which they see as contributing to the inability of North and South Korea to successfully re-unify. As a consequence of the two incidents in 1993, in October of that year twenty civic and religious groups inaugurated a movement for eradication of crimes by US troops in Korea. The movement found that US soldiers commit an average of around 2,200 crimes in Korea each year, and that many of these crimes are sexually-based offences against women. Further, the movement highlighted the fact that less than one per cent of crimes committed by US soldiers in Korea are tried in Korean courts<sup>3</sup>. Since the movement was established the general public in Korea have become more attuned to these negative consequences of the US military presence in Korea. As incidents continue to occur since the formation of the movement they are now subject to popular protests and intense media coverage. The issue of prostitution in camp towns is invoked by these groups in broader feminist-nationalist and anti-imperialistic discourses of anti-Americanism in South Korea.

The increasing use of foreign women as camp town club hostesses and prostitutes can be explained by the far greater profit margins for club owners<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Under the provisions of the ROK-US SOFA (Status of Forces Agreement) which governs the provisions of the United States Military in Korea virtually all crimes committed by American military personnel in Korea are tried in an American military court and defendants placed in US military, rather than Korean custody.

<sup>4</sup> The rise in the use of foreign women in the US camp town areas is also, I believe, linked to a prolonged history of anti-Americanism in Korea. In May 1995, just prior to the arrival of the first foreign women into the camp towns, a fight broke out at a Seoul subway station between a group

The greater profitability of foreign women is intimately linked to their “foreignness”, which produces a situation of heightened vulnerability for the women, and thus the possibility of greater exploitation. Most of the foreign women in the clubs do not, for example, have unlimited freedom of movement and, virtually without exception their salaries, passports and alien registration cards (Korean identify papers issues to all foreigners residing in Korea) are withheld so that they do not run away. Recruitment agencies in Korea, Russia and the Philippines also make large sums of money from the deployment of foreign women to US military clubs in Korea, a sector that would not exist if Korean women continued to constitute the mainstay of the camp town’s sexual labour<sup>5</sup>.

Filipinas and Russian women are both heavily present in US military camp town clubs and although many of the GI customers seem to prefer Filipinas (because of their supposed exotic physical features, submissiveness, innocence and generally good levels of English), Russian women are also deployed there. While GI customers tend to prefer Filipinas, brothel and club owners and women’s promotion agents or “managers” prefer to have Russian women in their businesses since they are viewed as less likely to “make trouble” by complaining or attempting to run away, particularly since their levels of English are normally much lower than those of the Filipinas. Owners also believe, mistakenly in my view, that Russian women will more readily accept the prostitution work and other sexual labor they are expected to perform once in Korea because of their “desperate poverty and lower morals than Filipinas” (informal discussion with club owner, Tongducheon, October 13, 2002).

Apart from the US military camp towns, the other major destination for trafficked women in Korea is Korean prostitution districts, particularly karaoke and hostess clubs (see Cheng 2000 for an overview of the various manifestations of Korea’s sex industry). Here there are no Filipinas or GIs, only Russian, CAR and Korean women servicing Korean men. Due to constraints of funding and time this report only examines sex trafficking to US military camp towns in Korea. There has, to date, been virtually no research with Russian and CAR

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of US GIs and Korean men. The incident was the subject of intense media attention and public debate for several months afterwards, and was followed by other, similar incidents. Until the arrival of foreign women onto the camp town scene, a strong and repeated thread running through the discourse of anti-Americanism was the violation of Korean women by US military personnel. Thus, the entry of foreign women has acted to diffuse this particular tension in US-Korea relations somewhat.

<sup>5</sup> One Filipina participant in this research, for example, explained that, even though she was of legal age when recruited in the Philippines, she was still forced to purchase a false passport through the recruitment agency in Manila. The cost of this passport was US\$300, a charge which was added to the woman’s migration “debt” and acted to maintain her in a situation of debt bondage for much of the time she was deployed in Korea.

women in Korean prostitution districts. Further, whilst this chapter discusses the circumstances of both trafficked Filipinas and Russian women in US military camp towns it should be noted that almost all the participants in my research were Filipinas. This is because Filipinas generally speak good English, while Russian women do not. This severely limited my interactions with Russian participants. Second, the main non-governmental organization (NGO) I was working with in order to carry out my research was a Filipino Migrant Centre which assisted only Filipinas. There was no equivalent organization working to support the Russian women, thus reducing the avenues through which I could meet these women<sup>6</sup>.

Despite the dramatic increase in trafficked women in Korea, and the human rights violations their entry has produced, little systematic attention has so far been paid to violence and abuse in prostitution and in the camp town club regime where they are deployed in Korea. As Kelly (2001: 22) suggests, "At times it seems as if the 'sexual exploitation' element in trafficking and through prostitution is minimised, and even ignored". For trafficked women in US military camp town areas in Korea the issues of gendered violence, sexual abuse and health have, in line with Kelly's more general observation, not been documented or discussed at all. To date only two empirical studies (KCWU 1999 and 2002) and two background reports (Saewoomt'uh 2001, International Organisation for Migration 2002) have appeared on the issue in Korea<sup>7</sup>.

## **Health of Trafficked Women in US Military Camp Towns**

### *Health Checks and Medical Problems*

All the women interviewed for this study stated that they were supposed to have regular medical check-ups and these check-ups were agreed to in their contracts. The check-ups were normally supposed to be conducted every 4-12 weeks and the women's manager (promotion agency) was supposed to cover the costs of these check-ups and associated medical expenses. However, some of the participants stated that they did not receive their check-ups on the agreed regular basis, although most said that when they did have check-ups their manager would pay. Nonetheless, when managers paid for check-ups they

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<sup>6</sup> There is one shelter based in Seoul, Potdure jip (My Friend's House), which supports Russian female trafficking victims. However this shelter has, to date, only received 2 women who escaped from US military camp town clubs. The remainder have all run away from Korean prostitution districts. The two Korean Catholic Nuns who operate the shelter do not feel they are currently in a position to begin conducting outreach or direct services with Russian women in these US military camp town areas.

<sup>7</sup> KCWU (Korea Church Women United) completed another empirical study in 2002 which updates the 1999 report and provides a more comprehensive description of the situations of the Filipinas in these camp towns. No comparable study is being undertaken to document the situations of the Russian women who are equally as numerous in the camp town areas.

would normally add the cost of the check-up to the woman's migration debt (and hence exacerbate her situation of debt bondage) or as part of the agency fee she paid him from her salary. Julie and Emily (both 26 years, Filipinas) deployed in a club in Tongducheon for just over a year, for example, were never given a medical check-up. Leanne (23 years), in a different club in Tongducheon, however, received her agreed to check-up every three months of her sojourn.

Whilst the women's regular check-ups are sometimes paid on their behalf, albeit with an expectation of repayment attached, if a woman gets sick she must invariably pay her own medical expenses. Jenny (26 years, Filipina), for example, stated that, the club where she was deployed in Tongducheon would have check-ups every two months, and the manager paid these. However, she said,

*If a girl gets sick, she has to pay her own medical expenses and the cost depends on the kind of sickness she has. When we signed the contracts they said everything would be free. But we have to pay for a lot of things.*

Rae (18 years, Filipina) also stated that she had to cover her own costs if she sought medical treatment and that she did not receive days off to recuperate or recover from illnesses or injuries. If she wanted a day off because of illness or injury, she had to pay a "penalty" which was normally the cost of bar fining herself (around USD 200 - 300) for the day. She recalled one experience when she became injured at work:

*One day I fell down from the VIP room when I was coming out from having sex with the GI because I was so drunk. My leg was swollen, so I went to the doctor and had to pay for that from my own money (KRW 30, 000 for injections and more for medicine). I didn't have any days off after this accident. Only I could sit down in the club and didn't have to dance for three days. But I still had to entertain customers.*

Ally (28 years, Filipina) recalled a similar accident she had in her club in Tongducheon in which she sustained a broken ankle:

*One time two Bangladeshi customers were fighting over me and they were both pulling me in different directions. I fell over and I broke my ankle. After I got it bandaged I wanted to rest but mana-san said "No time off unless you pay. Just wear sandals with no heel". It was so stupid because, you know, if a customer buy me a drink he has to carry me to the chair and then if another customer buy me a drink he has to carry me to the other chair or the bar, like that.*

Three Filipina participants who were all working in Club M in Toka-ri during 2002-2003 (Cheryl, 24 years, Rosie 35 years and Jane 20 years) took part in a focus

group discussion on one occasion and related the story of the youngest one's medical situation whilst in Club M. They recounted the day when Jane got appendicitis and was extremely ill and began foaming at the mouth. The other two women told mama-san (in this case the Korean female club owner), but mama-san's only response was that Jane was "just acting". The other girls could not sleep that night because they were afraid Jane's appendix was going to burst and she was going to die in the club. When the mama-san finally took Jane to the hospital 2 days later, she had to have her appendix taken out immediately. After the operation the mama-san took Jane straight back to the club and forced her to continue working the same day, including going to the VIP room with customers for penetrative sex. Rosie was mad and told Jane and mama-san that Jane would burst her stitches if she had sex on the same day as the operation but Jane recounted that she had no choice but to go to the VIP room because she did not have enough money to pay her day off (to bar fine herself) after the operation (USD 200 which was the cost of the penalty to have a day off) and because the operation cost USD 2000, which the mama-san lent to her. Jane had to pay all of the operation money back to the mama-san and 4 month's salary was deducted from her as a result.

#### *Sexually Transmitted Infections and Condom Use*

None of the Filipinas or Russian women who participated in this study had contracted sexually transmitted infections (STIs) whilst in Korea. There are two reasons for the absence of women with experiences of STIs whilst in Korea: first, there is a generally well-enforced condom use policy for GI customers in the clubs where sexual services are provided, and; second, women who do contract STIs (normally as a result of unprotected sex with Korean or migrant worker customers) are normally sent by their manager back to their home country immediately rather than being treated in Korea. This meant that they normally did not receive any treatment at all, since most women returned to their home country without any savings, with treatment for STIs being cost prohibitive. Further participants in this study reported that if they were unlucky enough to be sent home because of an STI they would be too ashamed to seek medical treatment because then it would become known that they had been "prostitutes in Korea".

Talking about sexual health, rape and experiences of prostitution sex whilst in the clubs was often very difficult for participants in this study. Participants who did disclose intimate details of sexual health in the clubs generally stated that they would be given condoms before they went into any private room in the club with a customer. Women on bar fines were, however, outside this regime of control of condom use and some recounted that on bar fines customers, particularly Korean and migrant worker customers, were much more reluctant to use condoms. 3 Filipinas and one Russian woman in this study stated that they

encountered physical violence from Korean customers when they refused to either have penetrative sex altogether or without a condom. Therefore, despite the rigid enforcement of condom-use in the clubs, outside the clubs and particularly with non-GI customers unprotected sex was quite common for the women and, consequently, exposure to STIs was far greater in this context.

One participant, Jenny (26 years, Filipina) recounted the involvement of the USFK (United States Forces Korea) in the monitoring of clubs for STIs. According to Jenny, who was in a Tongducheon club for 12 months:

*One day the CPs [Courtesy Patrol] were checking the clubs for girls with STDs. They wanted to make them have check-ups. They checked three clubs. In the Club U the mamasan said to five of the girls, "You go upstairs and don't work tonight, and if the CPs come again tomorrow, you have to pay your time off". Because those five girls had some kind of STD, like thrush I think. They had to pay for their own treatment quickly so they could go back to work again, coz none of those girls could afford to keep bar fining herself until she got better.*

This approach by the USFK has an historical equivalent in Korea, introduced in the 1970s, in the form of a sexual health registration card system (see Moon 1998).

#### *Pregnancies, Abortions and Miscarriages*

Unwanted pregnancies were also a major problem amongst women in the clubs that provided full penetrative sex. Even with high levels of condom use some women would not use the condoms when going with a favored or regular customer or boyfriend. In fact, of the 10 participants in this study who admitted to having abortions, 3 revealed that they were pregnant to their GI boyfriends and aborted because of the negative repercussions they would face while working in the club if pregnant or because of supposed problems with the fetus. One other participant, Jenny (26 years, Filipina) lost her baby through miscarriage resulting from abuse she experienced in the club where she worked, rather than through abortion. She recounted the circumstances surrounding her miscarriage whilst working in Club U in Tongducheon:

*I got pregnant to my GI boyfriend while I was still working in the club. This should have been our second baby, coz I already got one baby back in the Philippines. I had a miscarriage because there was a fight between me and the mamasan in the club. Some of the girls were holding me down and the mamasan was hitting me and scratching my face. I got a fever and felt sick and needed to go to the hospital after that. Some of the other girls tried to help me and they were punished by mamasan. She forced those girls who helped me to stand up during work time unless with a customer. The daughter of mamasan wasn't there when I got beat up. When the*

*daughter came back I begged her to let me go to hospital and said I would pay all my own costs. After two days they allowed me to go. I had a lot of blood and I knew I had lost the baby by that time. I had the miscarriage two months before I ran away. David was away in the field when this incident happened.*

Other participants became pregnant to customers who refused to use condoms or deliberately broke or pricked condoms. Where women became pregnant to their boyfriends or favored customers the customer normally bore responsibility for the cost of the abortion. Rhea (26 years, Filipina) became pregnant to her GI boyfriend when she was in Songtan in 2003. She explained,

*Last June I had an abortion because I got pregnant to my boyfriend here. I was one month already and he asked me what I'm going to do about it. I said I have to have an abortion because I don't have enough money. He gave me USD 350 to pay for the abortion. We still have a relationship after that, but then his tour in Korea finished at the end of June and he went back to the United States. I told my Mum about the abortion and she was mad. She asked, "Why did you abort your baby?" I said that I didn't want to go back to the Philippines with no money. I feel guilty and sad about it and sometime I have a regret about doing the abortion. I want to tell my Mum before I go to the hospital but I tell her after. I went straight back to work the next day. I got two brothers and two sisters and my Mum and Dad. I'm the only one to work abroad. I'm the only one who is single and can earn money for my family. I try to send USD 100 home every month. If I have the baby I can't do this any more.*

In cases where women became pregnant through prostitution in the clubs they normally paid the cost of their own abortion (usually in these cases the manager or club owner would lend the woman the money or pay for the abortion and the abortion cost would then continue to be deducted from her salary until it was completely repaid). Some women who became pregnant through work opted to take powerful, and quite unsafe abortion-inducing drugs, such as overdoses of strong painkillers that would abort the fetus straight away, instead of paying for the high cost of an abortion at the hospital or medical clinic. One participant, Cheryl, who had had an abortion when she was already six months pregnant, stated:

*I don't use the girl's toilet at Club M anymore because a lot of the girls lose their babies in those toilets. They take a lot of aspirin or other medicine and then they abort the baby. The baby comes out in the toilet. There are a lot of the baby's souls in that toilet. That's why it's haunted.*

Because nearly all the Filipina and Russian participants were highly religious, abortions proved particularly emotionally distressing for many women. No participant in this study received any counseling prior to or after the abortion

and every woman stated that she had to return to work the day after the abortion (one women stated that she had to return to work the same day as having the abortion). Many of the Filipina and Russian participants who ran away from their club to marry or live in a de facto relationship with a GI boyfriend became pregnant after running away, in large part in the hope of securing a long term future with their boyfriend.

There was also one quite uncommon case of a Filipina (Selbi, 21 years) who was pregnant to her Filipino partner prior to leaving the Philippines for work as an entertainer in Korea. When she was recruited by a promotion agency in Santa Cruz, Manila, the agency said to Selbi that she could have an abortion in Korea if she wanted to, and that it would cost her about W100, 000, or she could keep her baby if she wanted. Selbi wanted to keep her baby and never had a plan to have an abortion. She was told by her promotion agency that she would be a waitress in Korea, so it was okay if she decided to continue her pregnancy. However, when she arrived in Korea the papasan (Korean male club owner) in the club where she was deployed insisted that she have an abortion. She explained,

*I went to the clinic to have an ultrasound and check up on 20 April, the day after I arrived in Korea. I had to pay KRW 70, 000. Then I was told by the papasan that I would have an abortion the next day (21 April). I said, "I don't like abortion". He said, "Okay, if you don't like, you go back to the Philippines". That was when I decided to run away from the club. If I have an abortion I have to pay. It costs KRW 870, 000 in total. That money would come from my salary – like KRW 100, 000 every month until it is paid. That means out of KRW 450, 000 salary each month, KRW 100, 000 goes for the abortion and USD 100 also goes to my manager for his agency fee. What do I have left? So I ran away three days after arriving in Korea. Also, there was another girl in our club who was also pregnant – she was 5 months. I don't know what happened to that girl because I run away, but I overheard the owner saying to our manager that they had a plan to send her back to the Philippines before it was too late.*

### **Alcohol and Substance Abuse amongst Trafficked Women in the Camp towns**

Alcoholism and drug abuse amongst the women are highly prevalent. Only two participants in this research said that they did not either drink or take drugs on a regular basis. One of these two women, Cheryl (24 years, Filipina) said, **The other girls did that way, because if they are normal, how could they do the work they do?** The reasons the women drink are related to the sexual services they perform, loneliness, shame and depression. Women would drink and take drugs to forget, albeit temporarily, their life in Korea. This strategy for coping is one that has been described more generally by Barry (1995) in her discussion of the patterns that emerge amongst women exposed to sexual exploitation who

wish to distance and disengage themselves from the prostitution acts they must perform. Rae (18 years) stated, for example,

*I got drunk every single day. And almost every day I smoke a marijuana stick. I do this because I don't want to see who I am in Korea. I just want to forget what I do here. So if I wake up the next day I only feel my headache [from hangover]. Even if I am drunk I remember everything I do last night, but I only feel my headache.*

Rae stated that the women were only supposed to drink cola or pineapple juice when customers bought them drinks, and that they would be fined if they were found to be drunk at work. However, women often ask their customers to buy them alcoholic drinks, like tequila, when the manasan was not looking. Often they would give the GIs money to buy them alcohol because they could not go out of the club unaccompanied. Rae, for example, stated that, **We would quickly go to the door and get out GI friends to go to the grocery store and buy us some alcohol. Then I would quickly put it in my bag to hide it.**

Other women recounted similar stories:

*Sometimes I get drunk because if I don't drink, I'm feeling shy. I don't want to move my body (when dancing on stage). Sometimes my manager gives me alcohol because she knows I'm shy. Maybe one or two glasses of tequila is enough. If I'm not drunk I don't want to talk to GIs. I'm fucking shy. If I drink, I'm cool. I can do it (talk to and sit with GIs) (Rachel, 28 years, Filipina).*

*You know I can't work in the club if I'm not drunk. I'm shy to talk the guy – I'm scared. When a GI buys a drink I don't like the juice. It's too sweet. So I ask the GIs buy me tequila. Mamasan is mad, but I don't care. I used to go down to the shop next to the club and buy a bottle of soju (Korean rice wine) for W1000 and drink the whole bottle just to make me forget about my work and life. (What about the terrible taste?) It's okay. After two shots I'm drunk so I don't think about the taste after that (Angel, 25 year, Filipina).*

Julie and Emily (both 26 years, Filipinas) also drank regularly. Like Rae and Rachel, they would often ask their GI customers to buy them alcoholic drinks instead of juice or cola. On other occasions their customers would insist that they drank alcohol. As Emily stated, **The customer sometimes says, "Hey, I buy you a drink. I want to see you get drunk". So I have to get drunk instead of drinking juice.** Often Julie and Emily would get drunk in their room outside of work hours, sometimes during the day. Emily said, **In the Philippines I never drank or smoked, but when I started working here I started doing like that.** I met Julie and Emily on five separate occasions while they were still working in Club B in Tongducheon. One each occasion they were either drunk (twice) or

hung over from the previous day (three times). On one occasion when we met Emily said,

*We drank so much last night. I woke up with a headache this morning. We drank one bottle of whisky when we were working and three bottles of soju [Korean rice wine] back in our room later. When I was back in the Philippines, if I had one drink I was drunk. But not here. Here I have to drink a lot, and I also started smoking cigarettes.*

Apart from problems related to substance abuse, particularly alcohol abuse, some women also suffered from pre-existing illnesses such as ulcers and heart problems, which made them particularly vulnerable in their living and working circumstances in Korea (sleep deprivation, poor diet, lack of exercise apart from strip dancing on stage, substandard living conditions such as no hot water, and regular consumption of alcohol). Other women became sick or unhealthy as a result of these same conditions. Eve (26 years, Filipina), for example, has a serious health problem, which she felt was exacerbated by her lifestyle in the club where she was deployed in Songtan. She stated,

*I have an ulcer. It's my fault because I get drunk. In the Philippines I just drink on special occasion, but here every night because especially if I have a new customer I'm shy to talk. Every night I get drunk and if we're busy we don't have time eating. The owner pays for the treatment but I pay for the medicine.*

Elma (34 years, Filipina) also said that problems relating to drinking alcohol were often made worse by the lack of food or times to eat meals for the women:

*Sometimes it's hard to drink alcohol because our stomachs are empty. The customers ask to me to make by drink strong, but it's hard. The boss never give the food for us. We only eat one time a day – at lunch time - because we don't have money. The boss she forces us to ask the customers for tips of USD 1 so that we can buy our food, but you know the club is supposed to give us food.*

Lenny (28 years, Filipina) already had a heart condition when she arrived in Korea to work in Club E in Tongducheon. The condition was exacerbated by the lifestyle and conditions she was exposed to in the club in Korea. She said:

*The shower in our living quarters above the club never had hot water the entire time we were at the club – even though in February it was like minus 20 degrees. One week in May I get sick – my heart. I'm tired and stressed and I take a shower and the water is very cold. Cold is bad for me. That day I cannot breathe properly. I feel numb. I lay down and started to cry. My boyfriend is very worried. My workmate called him but he's working so he can't be with me. I relax for 3 hours and the next day my boyfriend comes down (to the club). Five days later all my*

*customers worry about me. The customers are mad at Ajumma (Korean female club owner) because she never sent me to the doctor. GI payday I only sleep 3 hours because work is 6 pm – 2 am and Friday and Saturday even more hours, so everyone is worried. My side started to go numb. I'm lucky because some of my customers are very nice. They say, "Go to the hospital". Finally I go to the hospital but Ajumma makes me pay ₩40,000 for the check-up out of my drink commission. When she gets my hospital record she called my manager in the agency and she blamed everyone because I got a heart problem and no-one told her. My manager talked to me and asked where the pain is. She said if I'm sick in front of the customer it's big trouble. On May 26 I run away because I'm so worried about my situation and my heart and I know Ajumma and my manager don't care about that.*

## **Club Punishments**

Depending on whether the club is relatively "good" or "bad", as described by the women themselves, women are often subject to a strict system of punishments (arbitrarily imposed verbal, physical and emotional/ psychological abuse of the women) and penalties (arbitrarily imposed fines, salary deductions and other payments exacted from the women). These punishments and penalties are most commonly meted out for "breaking club rules" or failing to meet drink quotas. In addition, women are often subject to the removal of some of their "privileges", such as free time to go outside the club, holding of a cell phone or even being able to sit down at work if they break rules or do not meet drink quotas.

Not all of the clubs punish or penalize the women; although these clubs are a minority (only 2 of the 27 clubs in this study were completely penalty and punishment free for example). In some of the "good" clubs, such as Club B in Tongducheon, the women are not punished if, for example, they do not meet a weekly or monthly drink quota or are late to work. As Emily (26 years, Filipina) explained,

*The manasan started to introduce a penalty for being late to work, because, Julie, she gets drunk and she sleeps until after 8 pm, so the manasan said, "I will introduce a penalty". The penalty is ₩20,000 every 10-20 minutes we are late. We only have that penalty if we miss work time, not if we go out and come back late outside work time. I am always late so I owe manasan lots of penalty money, but I never paid it yet.*

In fact Julie and Emily never paid these fines before they returned to the Philippines when their contracts expired. In Club P too, the women were not subject to strict punishments and penalties. Instead the women in this club would receive a reward for high drink sales as Cherry (24 years, Filipina) explained,

*There aren't really any punishments for drinks. If a girl sells 250 drinks in a month she got USD 50 bonus, and if she sells 300 drinks she receives ₩100, 000. I never got this bonus. Sometimes I would sell just over 200 drinks and that's all.*

In other clubs, like Club Y and Club M in Tongducheon and Tonka-ri respectively, for example, if a woman does not meet a monthly drink quota she is punished by not being allowed to have a day off in a month. In these clubs, penalties and punishments are taken much more seriously. In Club Y, for example, Rae (18 years) stated,

*If a girl does something "really, really bad" they will be locked in a small room with the light switched off for 3 hours - half a day. I received this punishment three times in the three months that I was at the club. The first time I received this punishment was when the MPs came to the VIP room. I was in there with a GI and the MP asked me what was going on there. I replied, "This is part of my job. That is why I'm here doing this". The mamasan was so mad at me for saying it was part of my job, that she locked me in the small room for punishment. Even though the mamasan hadn't told me the correct thing to say in that situation! In the room it is dirty (the used condoms and tissues from VIP are put in there), there is no toilet and I cannot stand up. I cried when I was put in there. I just had to talk to myself and try to sleep.*

In Club M, the women were punished if they stayed outside for more than the time allowed by the club owner. Cheryl (24 years, Filipina) said this was one manifestation of "Article 15", which meant,

*If I go outside for more than 30 minutes I got "Article 15". This meant I couldn't go outside at all and I was not allowed to use the cell phone to call my family in the Philippines for 6 months.*

Article 15 is in fact a US military term that denotes any arbitrary punishment for misconduct inflicted usually by a superior officer over junior ranking personnel. It has been appropriated by some of the camp town clubs and applied by the club owners to their foreign female employees.

In Club P in Tongducheon the Korean mamasan (bar manager) was, according to Elle (28 years) particularly ruthless in her delivery of punishments to the women. Elle stated, for example, that:

*If you are one minute late to work you have to raise your arms to customers for 30 minutes on the stage. So that means if you are two minutes late you have to stand like that for on hour. It's so humiliating.*

Other punishments in this club were more arbitrarily distributed. Elle recounted another occasion when one of her workmates was kicked outside the club in winter (wearing only her thin costume) for 4 hours. This punishment was inflicted because a customer paid her workmate's bar fine and the women thought she would not have to return to work that night after the bar fine. However, upon her return from the bar fine she was told to go back to work and, when she pleaded that she had earned the required commission for that night, was kicked outside to stand in the snow in her thin costume.

### **Violence, Rape and Abuse**

Every woman who participated in this research could recount some personal experiences of physical, sexual or verbal abuse whilst working in a US military camp town club in Korea, with some women experiencing all of these. 71 participants experienced repeated verbal abuse from one of their Korean bosses, which usually meant being yelled at by the club owner or Korean staff working in the club or, in some cases, their Korean promotion manager. Other participants were also regularly subject to verbal abuse by their customers, including 20 by Korean customers, 18 by migrant worker customers and 23 by GI customers. Many participants stated that they were also physically or sexually abused on a regular basis whilst working in the club. For participants who admitted that they experienced physical, sexual and emotional or psychological abuse on a regular basis, the person primarily responsible for inflicting this abuse was most commonly a Korean, primarily the owner or other employee at the club and secondly Korean customers (see Table 1, below). Although GIs were less commonly cited by participants as their primary abusers GI customers were still identified by many women as responsible for inflicting some of the abuse they experiences. Rae (18 years), for example, stated that, **Often the GI would beat me before having sex with me.**

**Table 1 - Number of participants who experiences of verbal, physical, sexual and emotional abuse in the clubs**

| <b>Abuser<br/>Type of Abuse</b> | <b>Korean Club<br/>Owners,<br/>Employees and<br/>Managers</b> | <b>Korean<br/>Customers</b> | <b>Migrant<br/>Worker<br/>Customers</b> | <b>GI Customers</b> |
|---------------------------------|---|-----------------------------|---|---------------------|
| <b>Verbal</b>                   | 80  | 20                          | 18                                      | 23                  |
| <b>Physical</b>                 | 35  | 20                          | 16                                      | 21                  |
| <b>Sexual</b>                   | 10  | 21                          | 16                                      | 21                  |
| <b>Emotional/</b>               | 28  | 2                           | 2                                       | 8                   |

|               |  |  |  |  |
|---------------|--|--|--|--|
| Psychological |  |  |  |  |
|---------------|--|--|--|--|

*Sexual Abuse, Rape and Violence by Customers and Owners*

For those who had experienced sexual abuse, such as forced intercourse or forced provision of other sexual services, the majority stated that in most cases the abuser was a Korean or South Asian customer (see Table 7, above). Often their experiences would be accompanied by violence (physical abuse) against the women if they refused intercourse or refused to perform certain sexual acts. Honey (21 years, Filipina) focused almost entirely on her experiences with customers in Club L in Tongducheon during one of her in-depth interviews. She experienced physical abuse and harassment from some customers and when she tried to complain to the Korean bar manager it fell on deaf ears. I first interviewed Honey the day after she ran away from the club and she still had deep bruises covering her legs from where one of her customers pinched and punched her. She explained,

*My greatest stress in the club concerned the customers. Last Saturday night (20 April, the week before she ran away) I said I want to go upstairs because I'm already drunk and threw up, but mama wouldn't give me the key to the room because it is still work time. But I'm running upstairs to the toilet and then I went to the kitchen and slept because they wouldn't give me the key to the room". My Bangladeshi customer cashed four cheques to pay drinks that night... He react [to buying expensive drinks] but he cannot speak English so just say, "Okay". He always want to take me out (on a bar fine). Last Saturday Mini (Korean female bar manager) say, "Okay, you take her out but mama said, "No, oppso [cannot], because Honey too much drunk". When we're sitting there and he buys drinks he always pinch and punch me, like playing, but it hurts so much.*

Despite the fact that the vast majority of the women's customers (including those to whom sexual services are rendered) are US GIs, only 21 participants stated that GIs sexually or physically abused them on a regular basis, although there were certainly individual incidents of violent and sexually abusive GI customers. Some women described singular bad incidents with GI customers, but tended to that these GI were the exception rather than the rule. Cheryl (24 years), for example, recounted one incident in which,

*A black GI had bought my time and I was fighting him because I did not want to have sex. He bit me on the shoulder and I was bleeding and the bite started to swell up and become infected. I always tried to resist the GIs, but I'm scared because, like this particular GI, they are so much bigger and stronger than me and if they hit me they could just easily knock me out.*

Women stated that South Asian, particularly Bangladeshi customers always wanted sex and would always try to fondle and grope the women, even when they had not paid for sex, while again most women stated that Korean men were often violent and physically abusive during or preceding sex.

Some participants were also raped or sexually harassed by the Korean owner of the club where they worked or, less commonly, by their manager. In October 2003, eight Filipinas working at Club S in Tongducheon ran away together to a shelter. One of these eight women was raped by the club owner, whilst he also attempted to rape two others. One of the victims of attempted rape (Marie, 20 years, Filipina) described the incident this way (note all dates and names are falsified):

*On March 2 at around 2 a.m. the daughter of Mr. Lee called me to go to Mr. Lee's room on the second floor and "Give a massage to Daddy". So I go there to .... his room and then I massage his body. While I'm massaging... he touch(es) my body and I remove his hands and so he stops and I continue to massage. Then Mr. Lee pulls me down on top of his body and his fingers he put into my vagina. It's easy coz I'm still wearing my costume. I kick his arms and I try to go out and he says, "You don't go. You stay there because you don't finish my massage". Mr. Lee asked me to put the magnet on his hand and feet and I did that. Then I go out to the third floor and he follows me. I go to my room and then to the kitchen and he just keeps following me! After that he said, "Don't you tell your friends what happened to you". I'm still a virgin. I'm so scared he's going to come after me again.*

Of the eight Filipinas who ran away from Club S, the three that experienced rape or attempted rape were regarded as the shyest and quietest of the group, and therefore the ones with the lowest drink sales. As is commonly the case, such women are often inducted into prostitution and other forms of sexual labor through rape and violence. Marie herself suffered from the constant harassment of the Korean mamasan for regularly being the employee with the lowest weekly drinks (juice) sales.

#### *Psychological, Physical and Verbal Abuse from Korean Owners and Managers*

Of the Korean bosses who inflicted verbal, physical and emotional or psychological abuse on the women, the vast majority were female club owners and managers (the mamasans or ajummas in the clubs). Lenny (28 years, Filipina) had particularly bad experiences with the ajumma in the club where she was deployed. She explained that the ajumma was always changing the club rules, implementing arbitrary punishments on the women and verbally and physically abusing them:

*You know it's because of the ajumma that we decided to run away, coz ajumma had a very bad attitude. We always tried to follow the rules and work hard, but ajumma kept changing the rules. I like to explain if it is not my fault, but ajumma, she doesn't like me to explain. She's just mad and we have a fight. She keeps saying, "I'm the owner, you must respect". If she wants to yell, you are not supposed to say anything. But I yell, because I have no fault. So when the club closes she comes over to me and tells me the drink rule again: "If a GI does not give you a drink in 5 minutes you must stand up". Then ajumma never likes me anymore. In the morning (the next day) after she say that I don't want to eat and she yells at me. She wants me to apologize, but I never apologize. She calls my manager, Mr. Kim. We have a big meeting on the Monday (drink commission day) and she yells at me: "Your time is over. I'm the owner here and you (do not) accept me". Mr. Kim explains to me, "You must follow the rules and not fight". Ajumma says, "I want to send you home. Your time is over". I'm shocked because I'm a good worker. She shouts at me in front of all the other girls, "I don't want to see you no more".*

*I want to work, so I beg again and I cry. Ajumma says, "I'll give you time and you are a fighter woman. I want all the girls to follow what I say". She gives me another chance, but no drinks and trouble again. Starting the end of May if I get some fault she never communicate anymore. She's just waiting till I get a big mistake and she'll send me back.*

Jenny (26 years, Filipina) also experienced the most repeated abuse from the mamasan (club owner) in Club U where she was deployed. She recounted the following story which, along with physical abuse resulted in a miscarriage, influenced her decision to run away from the club as soon as she could. She said:

*I was with my boyfriend "David" one day in the club. He had bought me a drink, so I was sitting with him. I was very hungry, so he bought me something to eat. I was just finishing to eat and was walking to the toilet. The mansan threw ice at me and it hit my back. Manasan yelled at me, "Why did you stay with him so long? You spent too much time with him for the drink". I went into the toilet and started crying. My manager came in and I started yelling at her. I said, "I was hungry and I was only eating". I went back out to the Club and I was so mad. I sat at the bar and I refused to work. I just sat at the bar.*

Other women sited experiences of having things thrown at them or being hit or slapped by one of their Korean bosses. These women's experiences are common to many of the participants in the research:

*Opa (Korean male club owner, literally father) always yelled "Ship pal" [Fuck] at us. Sometimes he throws the ashtray and the bottle opener and it hits one of us. If he find out you stay with a customer without a drink he bangs his hand hard on the*

*table right where you are. But it's not easy to get a customer to buy us a drink so we need to talk them first like that. (Ally, 28 years, Filipina).*

*In September 2003 I had a bad experience. The husband of our Korean bar manager broke a bottle of beer on the bar and got some of the glass and came towards me. He grabbed me and pulled my hair back and scarred by forehead. You can still see the scar. Then he tried to strangle my throat but I got free and ran. He yelled at me when I was running away, "You're useless". Then he said in Korean, "Chogum [small number of] juice". (Lynn, 22 years, Filipina).*

*Papa (Korean male club owner) hits me on the back of the head all the time. For him he's joking but for me it hurts. I tell him but he said I'm just complaining. (Sandy 22 years, Filipina).*

## **Conclusion**

The USFK has, and continues to be, involved in the sex trafficking and prostitution of foreign women in Korea primarily as: buyers of women's sexual services; regulators of women's sexual health in order to protect soldiers sexual health, and; protectors of buyers (customers) of women's sexual services and of establishments selling sex, primarily through corruption and extortion. Some individual members of the USFK units responsible for monitoring Korean bars and clubs for prostitution and employment of trafficked women and to place those in violation off-limits, routinely extort Korean bar and club owners. In exchange for not reporting offending businesses, women who work in those establishments are required by their owners to provide free sexual services to the MPs<sup>8</sup>. Some US military personnel in Korea act to perpetuate derogatory sexist and racist stereotypes of foreign women trafficking to camp town clubs, largely through the production, circulation and consumption of stereotypes through various media, such as web sites depicting secretly filmed footage of GIs engaged in intercourse with trafficked women<sup>9</sup>. Some US military personnel in

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<sup>8</sup> A Department of Defense (DoD) civilian employee who has been based in Korea for many years and is intimately familiar with the bar club scene recently filed an anonymous complaint with the USFK Inspector General under protection of the whistleblower reprisal Act. It outlines his allegations of gross negligence on the part of US military enforcement authorities, alludes to the extortion of bar club owners by MPs and the coerced prostitution by bar club managers of sex trafficked women (information received from David Goodman, personal communication, September 2004).

<sup>9</sup> In a recent article on sex trafficking and the US Military in Korea, Vinson (2004), discovered 3 different Yahoo-based list serves in which US military personnel talk about the camp towns near their bases. Vinson states, "Complaints surface occasionally about new rules in place – such as bans on lap-dnacing and bar-fines. However, numerous recent postings confirm that sex for money is still readily available. One soldier

Korea physically, psychologically and sexually abuse foreign women in camp town areas. In many cases these are “boyfriends” and customers of the women.

Nonetheless, despite the predominance of the US military in the sex trafficking system in the camp towns in Korea, all traffickers involved in the recruitment, transportation and deployment of women to camp towns are nationals of Korea, the Philippines, Russia or other CAR countries. These traffickers develop bilateral networks between the source country and Korea through which women are brought into Korea, normally involving a “promotion agency” in the woman’s home country and an equivalent agency in Korea. Many of the agencies and clubs are run by Korean-Filipino and Korean-Russian couples, often involving other family members in both the source countries and Korea in the trafficking process. The “mamasans”, or Korean female club owners and/ or manager are almost exclusively former prostitutes and hostesses in camp town clubs, with some of them possibly having been victims of internal trafficking themselves.

For most women, the majority of their experiences of violence and abuse occur at the hands of Korean and to a lesser extent, migrant worker customers, not at the hands of GI customers. This is not to imply that women do not experience violence and abuse at the hands of GI customers. The repercussions for a GI accused of abusing a woman are much more serious than those for Koreans or migrant workers. For most women, the majority of their experiences of verbal and psychological abuse, and some experiences of physical violence, occur at the hands of Korean “mamasans” and, to a more limited extent the Korean “papasans” in the clubs where they are deployed.

In addition, the club owners and managers of the women are supposed to ensure their basic health needs are met, primarily through the provision of free, regular medical check-ups whilst in Korea. Some women do not receive regular or any check-ups and other women receive check-ups but must bear the cost of these, which is usually added to women’s debts at inflated prices. Women have to pay their own medical expenses and, if they become sick, pay a monetary penalty for taking time off work to recover. Because women can often not afford to pay their time off they usually have to return to their duties in the club before recovering. STDs are not commonly documented amongst women in the clubs for two reasons: first, there is a generally well-enforced condom use policy for GI customers in the clubs where sexual services are provided, and; second, women who do contract STDs (normally as a result of unprotected sex with Korean or migrant worker customers) are normally sent by their manager back to their

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stated baldly, “I went to Songtan four nights straight, once until 6 am... My initial observation is that if you want some quick pussy and are willing to pay USD 75 – USD 100 for it, the sluts are not hard to find”.

home country rather than being treated in Korea. Generally women on bar fines were more exposed to contracting STDs because they were outside this regime of control of condom use enforced in the clubs themselves. Women often encounter physical violence, particularly from Korean customers when they refused to either have penetrative sex altogether or without a condom. Therefore, despite the rigid enforcement of condom-use in the clubs, outside the clubs and particularly with non-GI customers unprotected sex was quite common for the women and, consequently, exposure to STDs was far greater in this context. Some participants have stated that the US military in Korea is involved in the regulation of the sexual health of women in the camp town clubs through the CPs monitoring of women for STDs.

Women get pregnant to both customers and boyfriends. Whilst some women wish to keep their babies and run away from the clubs, others abort or miscarry. If club owners or managers discover women are pregnant they either force abortions on them or return them, unsupported, to their home country. Abortions are often performed unsafely, either in abortion clinics in the camp towns or are self-induced by women through taking drugs. If in a clinic, club owners normally pay the cost of the abortion and the woman must repay this at an inflated price through her labour in the club. That is why many women self-abort. Alcoholism and drug abuse amongst the women are highly prevalent. Only two participants in this research said that they did not either drink or take drugs on a regular basis. The reasons the women drink are related to the sexual services they perform, loneliness, shame and depression. Women would drink and take drugs to forget, albeit temporarily, their life in Korea. Some women suffer from pre-existing illnesses such as ulcers and heart problems, which made them particularly vulnerable in their living and working circumstances in Korea (sleep deprivation, poor diet, lack of exercise apart from strip dancing on stage, substandard living conditions such as no hot water, and regular consumption of alcohol). Other women became sick or unhealthy as a result of these same conditions.

Some women are subject to a strict system of punishments (arbitrarily imposed verbal, physical and emotional/ psychological abuse of the women) and penalties (arbitrarily imposed fines, salary deductions and other payments exacted from the women). These punishments and penalties are most commonly meted out for "breaking club rules" or failing to meet drink quotas. In addition, women are often subject to the removal of some of their "privileges", such as free time to go outside the club, holding of a cell phone or even being able to sit down at work if they break rules or do not meet drink quotas. Every participant in this research could recount some personal experiences of physical, sexual or verbal abuse whilst working in a US military camp town club in Korea, with some women experiencing all of these. 71 participants experienced repeated verbal

abuse from one of their Korean bosses, which usually meant being yelled at by the club owner or Korean staff working in the club or, in some cases, their Korean promotion manager. Other participants were also regularly subject to verbal abuse by their customers, including 20 by Korean customers, 18 by migrant worker customers and 23 by GI customers. Many participants stated that they were also physically or sexually abused on a regular basis whilst working in the club. For participants who admitted that they experienced physical, sexual and emotional or psychological abuse on a regular basis, the person primarily responsible for inflicting this abuse was most commonly a Korean, primarily the owner or other employee at the club and secondly Korean customers. Although GIs were less commonly cited by participants as their primary abusers GI customers were still identified by many women as responsible for inflicting some of the abuse they experiences. Of the Korean owners who inflicted verbal, physical and emotional or psychological abuse on the women, the vast majority were female club owners and managers (the mamasans or ajummas in the clubs). Many of these Korean women were themselves engaged in prostitution in the clubs when younger and many are likely to have been victims of internal trafficking in the 1970s and 1980s in Korea.

Only by beginning to understand these complexities in the system of trafficking of foreign women to US military bases in Korea can we begin to address the real needs of the women and the location of both the patterns and perpetrators of abuse to these women. In doing so we can begin to work towards overcoming the complex, transnational system of trafficking that compromises the health of the women and inflicts gendered violence and sexual abuse upon them.

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