

Human rights of women and girls in North Korea

- Difficulties faced by North Korean women and girls in the process of crossing the border -

<Overview>

	Step	Responsible entity	Damage	Example
1	Before crossing the border	Broker in North Korea	Fraud, kidnapping, and sex crimes	Fraud (#1)
2	During crossing the border	North Korea Border Broker	Human trafficking, fraud, kidnapping, sex crimes	
		China Border Broker	Human trafficking, sex crimes, beating, threats	
3	After crossing the border	Broker in China	Human trafficking, sex crimes, beating, threats	
		Chinese husband	Forced labor, sexual assault, beating, childbirth	Forced labor (#2)
		Chinese public security	Sex crimes, beating, forced abortions, restrictions on movement, inability to move to hospitals, cell phone monitoring	
		Chinese authorities	Forced repatriation policy, psychological anxiety	
4	Forced repatriation process	Chinese public security	Sexual crimes, beating, forced abortion	Forced Abortion (#2)
5	After forced repatriation	North Korean State Security Department	Sex crimes, beatings, torture, forced abortion, infanticide	Forced abortion (#1)
		North Korean Kyohwaso	Sex crimes, beating, forced labor	Forced Labor (#1)
6	Re-defection		Process 1-5 repeated	

Through quantitative and qualitative research on North Korean refugee women living in China, Chinese husbands living in South Korea, and North Korean women living in South Korea, we found that the perilous journey that begins in North Korea has a profound impact on the lives of North Korean women. They seem to choose this journey voluntarily, but in fact, they are pushed back by personal and social hardship. In fact, among 15 interviewees, 3 defected voluntarily, that is, knowing that they would be trafficked, and the remaining 12 were sold into human trafficking either by force or through deception.

Before crossing the border, North Korean women and girls experience sexual harassment, molestation, sexual assault, beating, and human trafficking by various perpetrators. The reason they are in this situation is that brokers take advantage of the situation of North Korean women and girls. After crossing borders, most women are trafficked to their Chinese husbands. They secretly give birth in China or run away from China's forced repatriation policy.

Almost 100% of those who were sold into human trafficking and gave birth to children at the time of their first escape from North Korea escaped again because of the child. This is why they try to escape North Korea a second time, even though they know they will go through the second round of human trafficking. However, in this case, only 10% go to the original Chinese husband, that was sold for the first time. Eventually, they undergo secondary human trafficking.

According to testimonies who experienced forced repatriation, the issue of forced abortion was found to be serious in the human rights issue of pregnant women after forced repatriation to North Korea. Among North Korean refugee women forcibly repatriated, women pregnant with South Korean disappear somewhere. Women pregnant with Chinese men unconditionally have an abortion if the child's father is Han Chinese. If the child's father is ethnic Korean in China, they are left alone. The interviewee testified that she was pregnant with a child of a Chinese Han Chinese husband and that the baby was forcibly scraped when she was four months pregnant. She said that after a forced abortion, she was mobilized from a training camp to an apartment construction site. She lost consciousness at the site due to severe bleeding due to the problematic abortion while working. She said that after the forced abortion, she cried a lot as she lost 3 to 5 teeth while eating the food given to her by the labor training camp. It is said that the interviewee is still suffering from deteriorating health due to the aftereffects of a forced abortion at the time.

Among 15 interviewees, there are three people who have been sold through human trafficking twice in China, and tragedies occurred where they gave birth to children wherever they were sold. The three narrators have been sold through human trafficking more than twice in China because there was a lot of violence at the Chinese restaurant where they were first sold. Of the 15 interviewees, 10 had a 10-year age difference with the Chinese men who were sold into human trafficking, and 2 had a 20-year age difference. Four interviewees were sold to someone who had mental issues. The occupations of the Chinese men whom they were sold to mainly were farmers, and the rest were day laborers.

#1 Interviewee

- The motive for defecting from North Korea: While selling octopuses in North Korea, she lost all her belongings. While starving on the street for several days, she met a woman who seemed to be a broker. Believing that she could earn a lot of money, she crossed over to China unknowingly and escaped without even knowing she was in China. Even after escaping from North Korea, she was dragged around in fear and threatened that if she shouted out in the detention of only North Korean defectors, she could die in the mountains, and was sold to a Chinese man for 15,000 CNY who is 20 years older.

- At the time of repatriation to North Korea, she was repatriated to North Korea with a 4-month-old baby. She was forced to have an abortion according to the measures of the North Korean authorities.

- After the forced abortion, she had to live in a labor training camp for three months. The interviewee, who had just had the forced abortion, worked at an apartment construction site and bled so much blood into her uterus that the cotton pants she wore in winter were soaked in blood. While doing so, she was taken to the hospital. After losing consciousness for three days, she woke up, but there was no medicine for treatment, so she sold her clothes from China and received a penicillin injection.

#2 Interviewee

- When she was pregnant with her second child, she was caught by the Chinese police and received two abortion injections. The reason why she got two abortion injections is when she was about to get her injection, The baby in her belly shifted the leg slightly to the side in a different direction than where the police were giving the injection. However, the cruel public security waited 30 minutes to check if there was fetal movement, and since the baby was alive, they tied up the pregnant woman's legs again, gave her an abortion injection again, and examined her to see if the baby's heart was beating.

- She was taken to a chicken farm for forced labor. She lived in a warehouse-like place of less than 6.6 m², where she received no money, like a slave, and she lived like a beggar. She had to get up at 3 am to clean up feces and pick up eggs and work until 11 pm. After three years, ethnic Korean people said to other people that there are one North Korean enslaved there for three years for the first time.

According to the results of quantitative research, 90% of respondents experienced human trafficking, and 75% of Chinese husbands living in South Korea agreed about the seriousness of the human trafficking market in China. Not all human trafficking marriages are like that, but marriages where the bride is paid for are likely to be accompanied by unfair labor, domestic or sexual violence, and surveillance. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that marriage does not begin on an equal footing, but relationships are determined unfairly and hierarchically from the start. Any such relationship is bound to be unstable and vulnerable because North Korean women are often escaping from human trafficking marriage. The problem here has a negative impact on all family members, not only the North Korean refugee women, but also their husbands, their families, and ultimately their children.

Quantitative and qualitative research has confirmed that North Korean women and their Chinese husbands live uncertain lives with the constant threat of forced repatriation and that they are traumatized in severe cases. They have repeated nightmares or feel anxious not only in China but also while living in South Korea. It's not just female North Korean defectors. Husbands and family members who live together also feel pressured and have nightmares of being chased. The psychological health of North Korean refugee women is most alarming. The trauma engraved deep into the heart through repeated traumatic experiences can sometimes bring negative symptoms such as depression and anxiety and lead to avoidance and isolation in relationships. It is easier to adapt to family or social life when a healthy identity that recognizes and respects oneself is formed and a social network of trust is established in which people can support each other. However, through quantitative or qualitative research, psychological risk signals such as avoidance, denial, and trivialization were latent. And if the latent problems are not addressed but continue to accumulate, it can lead to more significant psychological health problems.

Of the 221 women, 13 (5.9%) had experience of redefecting after forced repatriation. Considering the cases of those who could not return to China after repatriation, the proportion of repatriation to North Korea would have been higher. Eleven people (5.0%) were in danger of being repatriated to North Korea but were released after paying money, and 37 (16.7%) women escaped from Chinese public security. Only half of the North Korean refugee women had the freedom to go outside in China (51.1%), and the other half were found to be living without the freedom to go out due to the repatriation policy. When the 300 Chinese husbands residing in Korea were asked of their repatriation experiences in China, 37% said they had run away after marrying a North Korean refugee woman.

In the process of repatriation in China, five women responded that they were beaten by Chinese police or witnessed it, four women said they were raped or witnessed it, and 34 people heard of beatings or rapes. In addition, there were four cases of seeing a pregnant North Korean refugee woman having a forced abortion by Chinese police and two cases of drowning a baby born through forced abortion; 22.7% of women had heard of such a drowning.

After repatriation to North Korea, six women responded that they were beaten by North Korean police or witnessed it, and three women were raped or witnessed it. Three women witnessed the drowning of a baby immediately after a forced abortion, and 72 people said they had heard of it.

Damage during the repatriation to North Korea by the Chinese authorities was suffered not only by women but also by Chinese husbands and family members. According to the Chinese husband survey, 11 cases (3.7%) in which he and his family were beaten were investigated. In addition, 11.7% saw North Korean women being beaten, and 27.7% of Chinese husbands said they had heard of beatings/sexual harassment/rape against North Korean women in China.