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China's birth rate push trumps gender equality, with women hit with 'parenthood penalty'

China's birth rate is declining so Beijing is encouraging couples to have more children, but employers are worried about extra maternity costs. China still exceeds the global average participation rate for women in the workplace at 60 per cent in 2019, but the rate has been falling since 1990.

By Sidney Leng

South China Morning Post (09.01.2021) - <https://bit.ly/2LnTS6k> - China's ongoing battle to boost its population is having a knock-on effect on its efforts to ensure gender equality in the workplace, with female applicants increasingly being told they are unsuitable for roles for "unsubstantiated" reasons, including because the role required overtime work, business trips, driving or even moving books.

"These excuses are so unsubstantiated. Overtime and business trips have nothing to do with gender. It's up to your abilities and tolerance. It can not persuade us at all," said Helen Tang, who has been battling gender equality while claiming to be the victim of discriminatory practices since 2018.

China has been struggling with a declining birth rate in recent years and so is encouraging couples to have more children. But with employers worried about maternity costs, discrimination, at least recently, has been rising, particularly since Beijing officially ended its one-child policy in 2016.

While China exceeds the global average participation rate for women in the workplace of 47 per cent with 60 per cent in 2019, the rate has fallen by more than 12 percentage points since 1990, according to the United Nations-backed International Labour Organization.

The gap between male and female labour participation rates in China expanded from 11.6 percentage points to 14.8 percentage points between 1990 and 2019, while it has been shrinking in major economies during the same period.

"I am puzzled. I don't understand why a clerk role is only offered to men," added Tang, who was told male applicants would be prioritised when she called to inquire about the position.

Her treatment saw Tang reach out to Workplace Gender Equality Watch, an informal social media group, and discovered that the problem was more prevalent than she first feared. She later volunteered to work for the organisation.

Founded in 2014, the group is made up of more than 50 part-time volunteers who regularly highlight on social media hiring practises that they believe are discriminatory. The group also files complaints with relevant authorities and companies, and sometimes provides legal help.

"Although China has laws and regulations to protect women's employment rights, gender discrimination in the workplace is still very serious," said Ren Zeping, chief economist at the Evergrande Research Institute.

"Generally speaking, a smaller labour participation gap between men and women means better protection of women's employment rights and higher fertility rates."

China ranked 106th behind Hungary last year on the annual gender gap index compiled by the World Economic Forum, having been 61st in 2008. The index considers employment opportunity, education attainment, health and political empowerment.

In a survey of more than 66,000 people conducted by recruitment portal Zhaopin last year, overall pay for female workers was 17 per cent lower than male workers, and only 5 per cent of women took management roles compared to 9 per cent of men.

Within the Communist Party, less than 30 per cent of members were women in 2018, and less than 27 per cent of party and government leadership roles were taken by women in 2017, according to government data.

Last year, Workplace Gender Equality Watch published notices on more than 100 discriminatory job listings on average per month, up from an average of 69 in 2019.

Based on submissions via social media, many of the roles involved law firms, public institutions, state-owned construction and engineering firms, as well as schools.

The civil service, particularly at the local level, is a hot bed for gender discrimination, according to an analysis of all published jobs from 2017 to 2020 conducted by the group.

The share of roles preferring men accounted for more than 10 per cent of all listings each year of the study, with women preferred for just over 1 per cent of roles last year, up from zero in 2019.

Based on official data, the government of Guangdong province, an economic powerhouse in the south of the country, had the most gender discriminatory roles than other provinces, offering 1,449 civil servant roles for men only last year, six times more than for female-only offerings.

Workplace Gender Equality Watch also argued that while some government agencies offered the same number of jobs for men and women, there remains discrimination in hiring practices with less qualified men often hired instead of more qualified women.

In a study conducted before and after China officially abolished its one-child policy in 2016, three researchers led by He Haoran from Beijing Normal University sent fictitious résumés with varied gender information to real job postings in the three most developed cities to test labour market discrimination against expected motherhood.

They found that women, particularly those seen to be within childbearing ages, received fewer responses than before 2016, indicating that women were suffering from a “parenthood penalty” that did not apply to men.

Unlike the planned economy era, when state-owned firms built schools and dormitories to take care of employees’ children and provide social services, China today has a large shortage of nurseries and childcare services that has forced some working aged women to leave the workforce.

In the Zhaopin survey, close to 60 per cent of women said they had encountered questions about their marriage and maternity status during the hiring process.

“For companies, maternity costs are a big consideration ... the costs of having children cannot be shared by the society, they can only be shared by firms,” added Tang.

“When they take this into consideration, they will reduce job opportunities for women and prefer men more.”

By law, China protects equal employment, and in 2019 the government started imposing a fine of up to 50,000 yuan (US\$7,700) for gender discriminatory job postings.

At the end of last year, the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security also published a notice banning gender discrimination via online recruitment.

But less than a third of women surveyed by Zhaopin believed that the rules could actually improve the work environment for women.

Lawsuits against gender discrimination during recruitment, though, are rare. One of the first such cases appeared in Zhejiang province in eastern China in 2014, when a new graduate sued a culinary school for repeatedly declining her applications for a clerk role. She was eventually awarded 2,000 yuan (US\$309), which failed to even cover her legal fees.

“We are fully aware that recruitment is only the first step. There is more hidden gender discrimination at work, too,” said Tang.

“What we can do is to get rid of discrimination in the hiring process first. And hopefully we can have more government oversight in the future.”

China jails citizen journalist Zhang Zhan for four years over Wuhan coronavirus reports

Court in Shanghai hands sentence down to Zhang after she was found guilty of 'picking quarrels and provoking trouble'. Supporters denied entry to the courtroom to see Zhang, who has been on a hunger strike while awaiting trial and attended court in a wheelchair.

By Guo Rui

South China Morning Post (28.12.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3hVLTtd> - Citizen journalist Zhang Zhan was sentenced to four years in prison in Shanghai on Monday for her reporting on the coronavirus pandemic in central Chinese city of Wuhan early this year, one of her lawyers said.

Zhang, 37, was found guilty by Shanghai Pudong New Area People's Court on Monday morning of "picking quarrels and provoking trouble", a broadly defined offence which carries a maximum sentence of five years and is often used by police to stifle dissent.

"Zhang Zhan attended the trial in a wheelchair and was in poor health," lawyer Zhang Keke said.

"She did not immediately say if she would appeal [against the sentence]."

On social media after the trial, Zhang Keke said: "[During the trial] the prosecutor only read out the list of evidence, without showing most of it, including the core evidence. Zhang Zhan said citizens' speech should not be censored. But apart from that, she basically did not speak."

Zhang Zhan, who has been held in a detention centre in Pudong district in Shanghai since mid-May, has maintained her innocence and in June she started refusing to take food to protest against her arrest, legal sources said.

She was one of the few citizen journalists in China to report on the early experiences of people in Wuhan during the city's lockdown. The others have either been detained or ordered to stop their online reporting.

In front of the Pudong court, dozens of people who came from all over the country to support Zhang Zhan were driven away by police, according to witnesses.

Li Dawei, 58, a rights activist and former police officer from Gansu province, said he took the train to Shanghai to show support. He said he arrived at the court at around 9am and asked to enter the courtroom to observe the trial but was stopped by police.

He said he argued with police, asserting that the charge against Zhang was only "provoking trouble", which did not involve state secrets or personal privacy, and questioned why, as a public trial, citizens could not walk in and listen.

Li said police told him he should have applied to the judge in advance, but Li said this violated the freedom of citizens to observe an open court case.

After an argument, Li was taken to the police station and was released at around 1pm, he said.

"I have not met Zhang Zhan, just chatted with her on social media, and after knowing that she went to Wuhan alone I was very worried," Li said.

"We kept in touch until she was arrested. Knowing that she was on a hunger strike made me even more anxious. I have to support her. I was shocked by the sentence. She should be released right now and get treatment."

A Wuhan resident who would only identify herself as "Xiaomu", travelled from Wuhan to Shanghai on Sunday. She had met Zhang Zhan in the central Chinese city in April.

"We were full of fears about the virus and the future during the Wuhan lockdown, so we thanked Zhang Zhan for arriving in Wuhan. So brave. I heard that she bought a train ticket to Chongqing and got off in Wuhan alone," she said.

She said she also tried to enter the court to observe the trial and was refused by the police who told her she could not go in because of epidemic prevention and control measures in place.

"Zhang Zhan is the one paying the biggest price for Wuhan, a price of blood and tears, of health and life. Zhang Zhan is unbelievably determined for the truth and faith. As a Wuhan native, I must support her," she said.

Wu Yangwei, a Guangzhou-based activist, was critical of the sentence.

"The four-year sentence is too heavy," said Wu who uses the pseudonym Ye Du on social media. "But for anyone who understands this regime, this was within expectations.

"This regime stands on two pillars: lies and power. It covers up the truth about the pandemic with lies so it can carry on its rule ... and uses power to intimidate and shut up the ordinary people, and heavy sentences [to punish] people who are not afraid of the intimidation."

Xinjiang government confirms huge birth rate drop but denies forced sterilization of women

By Ivan Watson, Rebecca Wright and Ben Westcott

CNN (21.09.2020) - <https://cnn.it/3hPVa4h> - Chinese officials have officially acknowledged birth rates in Xinjiang dropped by almost a third in 2018, compared to the previous year, in a letter to CNN in which they also denied reports of forced sterilization and genocide by authorities in the far western region.

The Xinjiang government sent CNN the six-page fax in response to questions for an article published in July that documented a campaign of abuse and control by Beijing targeting women from the Uyghur minority, a Muslim ethnic group numbering more than 10 million people. The fax didn't arrive until September 1, a month after the story was published.

These aren't the first accusations of widespread human rights abuses by the Chinese government in Xinjiang. Up to 2 million Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities are believed to have been placed in mass detention centers in the region, according to the US State Department, where they have allegedly been subject to indoctrination and abuse.

Beijing claims that these centers are voluntary and provide vocational training as part of a de-radicalization program in Xinjiang, which saw a spate of violent attacks in recent years.

But CNN's reporting found that some Uyghur women were being forced to use birth control and undergo sterilization as part of a deliberate attempt to push down birth rates among minorities in Xinjiang.

The article was based on a report by Adrian Zenz, a senior fellow at the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation known for his research on Xinjiang, who quoted official Chinese documents showing a surge in the number of sterilizations performed in the region -- from fewer than 50 per 100,000 people in 2016 to almost 250 per 100,000 people in 2018.

Zenz said that these actions fell under the United Nations definition of "genocide" specifically "imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group."

In its response, the Xinjiang government strongly denied the claims of genocide, arguing instead that the Uyghur population has been "growing continuously" during the past decade and that Zenz's report was not "in line with the real situation in Xinjiang."

According to the government, the population of Xinjiang rose by more than 3 million people, or almost 14%, between 2010 and 2018, with the Uyghur population growing faster than the region's average rate.

"The rights and interests of Uyghur and other ethnic minorities have been fully protected," the response said. "The so-called 'genocide' is pure nonsense."

Birth rate plunges

But the government didn't dispute the rise in sterilizations or the gap in the ratio of new intrauterine devices (IUDs) between Xinjiang and the rest of mainland China. While IUD implants have plunged in China overall, falling to just 21 per 100,000 people in 2018, in Xinjiang they are becoming increasingly common.

According to local government statistics, there were almost 1,000 new IUD implants per 100,000 people in Xinjiang in 2018, or 80% of China's total for that year.

The Xinjiang government said in its response that the birth rate in the region had dropped from 15.88 per 1,000 people in 2017 to 10.69 per 1,000 people in 2018. The fax said that the drop was due to "the comprehensive implementation of the family planning policy."

Up until 2015, the Chinese government enforced a "one-child" family planning policy countrywide, which allowed most urban couples no more than one baby. Ethnic minorities, such as the Uyghur people, were typically allowed to have up to three but Xinjiang expert Zenz said that families from these groups often had many more children. When China officially began the two-child policy in January 2016, Uyghur citizens living in cities were limited to two children for the first time as well -- their rural counterparts could still have up to three.

The Xinjiang government attributed the sudden drop in population to Beijing's family planning policies finally being properly implemented in the region after 2017.

"In 2018, the number of newborns decreased by approximately 120,000 compared with 2017, of which about 80,000 were because of better implementation of family planning

policy in accordance with law, according to estimates by the health and statistics department," the response to CNN said. The government insisted that those who complied with the family planning policies did so voluntarily.

The government attributed the remaining 40,000 fewer babies to increased education and economic development, resulting in fewer children in the region. The Xinjiang government did not include the 2019 birth figures for the region.

"As a part of China, Xinjiang implements family planning policies in accordance with national laws and regulations, and has never formulated and implemented family planning policies for a single ethnic minority," the response said.

But Zenz pointed out that changes to the natural birth rate should take place over several years or even a decade, not in the space of 12 to 36 months.

In reference to the government's claims that compliance with the family planning policies were voluntary, Zenz questioned how likely it was that "17 times more women spontaneously wanted to be sterilized."

"Han Chinese academics from Xinjiang have themselves written that the Uyghurs resist any type of contraceptive (and especially sterilization)," he said in a statement to CNN.

In their fax, the Xinjiang government also attacked Zenz personally, saying that he was "deliberately fabricating lies" and accused him of being a religious fanatic who believed he was "led by God" to oppose China.

Zenz dismissed the Chinese government's allegations, saying they were "resorting to personal attacks" because they couldn't disprove his research. "Far more egregious than these personal attacks on me are Beijing's smears against the Uyghur witnesses," he said in a statement.

Attacks on women

The Xinjiang government also zeroed in on claims made by two female Uyghurs quoted in CNN's article -- Zumrat Dawut and Gulbakhar Jalilova.

Dawut said she had been forced into sterilization by the local government in Xinjiang when she went to a government office to pay a fine for having one too many children. Dawut also said she had been in a detention center in Xinjiang for about three months from March 2018.

In their response, the government said that Dawut had never been inside a voluntary "education and training center," the name used by the Chinese government for the alleged detention centers, and that she had signed a form agreeing to the procedure known as tubal ligation.

In CNN's article, Jalilova, who is a citizen of Kazakhstan and an ethnic Uyghur, said she was held in a detention center for 15 months after being arrested suddenly and without explanation during a business trip to Xinjiang in May 2017.

Jalilova claimed she suffered humiliation and torture while inside the camps and said she was raped by one of the guards.

The Xinjiang government confirmed Jalilova's claims that she had been detained for 15 months from May 2017, alleging she was arrested "on suspicion of aiding terrorist

activities." In August 2018 she was released on bail, after which she returned to Kazakhstan.

In their statement, the government denied that Jalilova had been raped or tortured, saying that all of her "rights were fully guaranteed" and the staff who were in her cell could prove it.

When asked to respond to the Chinese government's statement, Jalilova stood by her claims and demanded the Xinjiang authorities provide their proof. "Why don't they show a video? Why don't they show a photo during my time in prison showing that I was well fed and not beaten. The cameras were working 24 hours," she said.

"I am a citizen of Kazakhstan, what right did they have to detain me for a year and a half?"

Gender equality in China, from birth ratio to politics and unpaid care work, still has a long way to go: report

Chinese government report published by the UN Population Fund finds business leadership and politics remain heavily skewed towards men. Gender disparity in education continues to be far higher in rural areas.

By Mandy Zuo

South China Morning Post (23.08.2020) - <https://bit.ly/34uFY9W> - From a biased sex ratio at birth to low representation of women in leadership positions, women in China are still at a great disadvantage in many areas, according to a new report by the Chinese government.

While most of the unpaid work is done by women, men still dominate important positions in the political system, top academies and judicial systems, according to the report, "Women and Men in China, Facts and Figures 2019".

Development of women in China had "reached a brand new level", but it was still an "arduous" task because of factors relating to economic growth, historical and cultural reasons, said the report, published on the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) website this week.

It was issued by the National Bureau of Statistics of China and is its sixth report on the theme since 1995. The UNFPA provided technical and financial support.

The ratio of boys to girls at birth, a reflection of sex preference, remained high. There were nearly 112 boys born for every 100 girls in 2017, according to the report.

The natural ratio in this regard is often considered to be around 105 boys for every 100 girls, according to the World Health Organisation.

In 2015, a year after China allowed a second child for some couples, the sex ratio for the second child was over 113 boys for every 100 girls. When it comes to the third child, whose parents need to pay a social support fee as punishment, the ratio was over 148.

In employment, women accounted for just 30 per cent of leadership positions, the report indicated.

The number of women in China's legislature is rising, but there are still far fewer than men. Women made up only one-quarter of the National People's Congress membership, it showed. There is just one woman in the 25-member Politburo of the Communist Party.

Taking care of family was the top reason women lost their jobs, while the time they spent on unpaid care work was more than double that done by men.

Gender disparity continued to be much higher in rural areas, the report suggested.

While China has closed the gender education gap with both sexes achieving universal literacy in urban areas after imposing a nine-year compulsory education, many born in poor villages are still not able to finish school. The average period of education received in rural areas is 7.3 years for girls, comparing to 8.1 years for boys.

For senior rural dwellers, about 57 per cent of women live supported by their family members, compared with 35 per cent for men, the report showed.

Feng Yuan, co-founder of Equality, an NGO for women's rights, said: "Progress is slow and in some ways it's even going backwards, because there has been no practical policy and measures [from the government]."

She urged the central government to take the major responsibility for pushing gender equality forwards.

"It needs more determination from the top leadership," she said.

China ranked 106th among 153 countries in the World Economic Forum's annual ranking on global gender equality last year.

It was the 11th decline in a row, mainly because of slow improvement in its male-dominated political landscape, the report said.

It was 63rd in 2006 when the organisation began compiling the rankings.

Sterilizations, IUDs, and mandatory birth control: The CCP's campaign to suppress Uyghur birthrates in Xinjiang

The Jamestown Foundation (29.06.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3iLdJbE> - Dr. Adrian Zenz is one of the world's leading scholars on People's Republic of China (PRC) government policies towards the country's western regions of Tibet and Xinjiang. Research performed by Dr. Zenz in 2017-2018 played a significant role in bringing to light the Chinese government's campaign of repression and mass internment directed against ethnic Uyghur persons in Xinjiang (China Brief, September 21, 2017; China Brief, May 15, 2018; China Brief, November 5, 2018). Dr. Zenz has also testified before the U.S. Congress about state exploitation of the labor of incarcerated Uyghur persons (CECC, October 17, 2019), and was the author earlier this year of an in-depth analysis of the "Karakax List," a leaked PRC government document relating to repressive practices directed against religious practice among Uyghur Muslims (Journal of Political Risk, February 17, 2020).

In this special Jamestown Foundation [report](#), Dr. Zenz presents detailed analysis of another troubling aspect of state policy in Xinjiang: measures to forcibly suppress birthrates among ethnic Uyghur communities, to include the mass application of mandatory birth control and sterilizations. This policy, directed by the authorities of the

ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP), is intended to reduce the Uyghur population in Xinjiang relative to the numbers of ethnic Han Chinese—and thereby to promote more rapid Uyghur assimilation into the “Chinese Nation-Race” (中华民族, Zhonghua Minzu), a priority goal of national-level ethnic policy under CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping.

Based on research in original Chinese-language source materials, Dr. Zenz presents a compelling case that the CCP party-state apparatus in Xinjiang is engaged in severe human rights violations that meet the criteria for genocide as defined by the U.N. Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

Chinese social justice activist ‘disappeared’

Li Qiaochu’s last tweet: ‘Let’s go through the tough time together’.

By Yaqiu Wang

HRW (11.03.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3dcZwS6> - Li Qiaochu, a Beijing-based women’s rights and labor activist, tweeted on January 24 about the Chinese authorities’ attempted coverup of the COVID-19 outbreak: “Wish everyone a peaceful [Lunar] New Year. Let’s remember the pain... and the lives that left us without even being tallied.... Let’s use civic engagement to pursue those responsible for trampling lives.”

Early on the morning of February 16, Beijing authorities took Li into custody. It is unclear where she is now and with what crime she has been charged.

Some international media have reported Li’s enforced disappearance in relation to the recent arbitrary detention of her partner, Xu Zhiyong, a prominent and previously imprisoned legal activist. But what has often been overlooked is Li’s own tireless work on social justice issues, and the repeated police harassment and intimidation she has endured.

During the freezing winter of 2017, when Beijing authorities forcibly evicted tens of thousands of migrant workers from their homes during a citywide “clean-up campaign,” Li worked with other volunteers to find free or cheap housing for the newly homeless. Since 2018, she played an active role in China’s #MeToo movement, collecting cases of sexual harassment and publishing reports online.

As the coronavirus crisis unfolded, Li joined a volunteer team that handed out free masks to sanitation workers in Beijing. She also helped pregnant women in quarantine areas to find doctors, and organized volunteers to help those who suffered domestic violence – instances of which rose markedly while households across the country were under quarantine or other forms of restriction.

“Let’s go through the tough time together.” This is the last tweet Li posted before her disappearance, in reply to a tweet by Luo Shengchun, the wife of the arbitrarily detained human rights lawyer Ding Jiaxi. In the past several years, despite the government of Xi Jinping’s ever-tightening grip on civil society, countless people have chosen to embrace one of China’s toughest life paths – challenging the powerful authoritarian government. Let’s remember the pain they endure in the struggle for human rights in China.

Rape, abuse and sterilisation in Xinjiang's 'boarding schools' for Uyghurs

A former inmate speaks out. "The screaming, pleading, crying, is still in my head," she says. According to the UN, around a million minority Muslims are being held in facilities built by Beijing in the region. For Chinese authorities, they are necessary to fight extremism.

AsiaNews (01.11.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2NcuQW3> - Tursunay Ziyawudun is 41-year-old Uyghur woman. For months, she was held in a facility that Beijing calls a "boarding school", which activists and international organisations describe as internment camps. Here, Ziyawudun says, "camp authorities regularly 'took women to the hospital and operated on them so that they no longer could have children' or 'forced them to take medicine'."

According to United Nations estimates, Chinese authorities are holding about a million Uyghurs as well as members of other Turkic Muslim minorities. Since 2017, they have been implementing a "scorched earth" policy in Xinjiang, claiming that the facilities exist to keep people away from extremism, and are a vital tool in the fight against separatism and religious extremism.

To stop possible radical influences from Afghanistan and Pakistan, China tightly controls mosques, young people, and the religious life of local Muslims. Here is the testimony of a former inmate.

Female detainees at internment camps in northwest China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) are routinely forced to take medication that affects their reproductive cycles, and are tortured, denied treatment for health problems, and subjected to sexual and other forms of abuse, according to a former inmate.

Tursunay Ziyawudun, a 41-year-old Uyghur woman from Kunes (Xinyuan) county, in the XUAR's Ili Kazakh (Yili Hasake) Autonomous Prefecture, spent a total of nine months at one of the region's vast network of camps, where authorities have held up to 1.5 million Uyghurs and other Muslim ethnic minorities accused of harbouring "strong religious views" and "politically incorrect" ideas beginning in April 2017.

Ziyawudun had married an ethnic Kazakh doctor from Kunes named Haliq Mirza in June 2008 and five years later the couple relocated to Kazakhstan, where they had a son and set up a medical clinic. While Mirza was granted Kazakh citizenship, authorities repeatedly refused Ziyawudun's applications because she is Uyghur, she told RFA's Uyghur Service from Kazakhstan where she now resides.

On Nov. 13, 2016, Ziyawudun returned to Kunes county to stay with her family and during the ensuing months saw authorities implement several new policies targeting Uyghurs, including the confiscation of their passports and the criminalization of those who had travelled abroad.

Authorities took Ziyawudun to an internment camp on April 11, 2017 without offering her or her family a reason, amid a rollout of a new policy of mass incarceration in the region, she said, although "the situation was not so severe, as it was only when they had just started arresting people" and she was released after one month, in part due to poor health.

However, Ziyawudun was unable to obtain a passport and could not join her husband in Kazakhstan, and on March 10, 2018 was again detained without reason.

This time, she said, the situation at the facility had become much worse, and many of the dozen women she shared quarters with endured poor treatment, including forced sterilization.

"There were women who were inside for one year and during that entire time they never had their monthly period," Ziyawudun said, adding that camp authorities regularly "took women to the hospital and operated on them so that they no longer could have children" or "forced them to take medicine."

"I was taken to a hospital to undergo a [sterilization] operation, but because I have always suffered from a gynaecological condition the doctor said I could suffer complications that include death, so they spared me," she said.

Ziyawudun also described torture, and suggested that her minders wanted to find out why she and her husband had moved to Kazakhstan.

"Their methods of torture were always different, but a common practice was to tie you up on a metal chair during interrogation," she said.

"They cut off our hair, after pulling it through the bars of [our cell], including that of elderly women. We were all handcuffed, shackled, and frequently called out for interrogation. The screaming, pleading, crying, is still in my head."

In addition to forced political indoctrination and what she called "brainwashing about how the U.S. is the enemy," Ziyawudun said that women in her cell were made to monitor one another for transgressions of camp rules and were regularly fed either a substandard diet or nothing at all.

She also described wilful negligence on the part of camp authorities who she said often ignored detainees' requests for medical treatment.

"They didn't care—there were cases of women suffering from infections who could not pass water, and there were elderly ladies in their 70s or 80s who couldn't walk properly, but they just left them to suffer," she said.

When asked about recent reports by former detainees of rape and other abuse in the XUAR camp system, Ziyawudun broke down.

"We were all helpless and unable to defend ourselves," she said.

"We all went through all kinds of mistreatment, but even when we saw such abuse, we were powerless to do anything about it."

Camp officials would come in the middle of the night and take women away, she said.

"They would shout, 'Get up and come with us,' and after that, we would never see them again," she said. "I later learned that several people died in the hospital."

According to Ziyawudun, at one point, authorities dragged the women out of the cell and informed them that they would be charged with crimes and sentenced to prison in show trials.

"The poor women cried and screamed in horror, but [the guards] didn't care about their pleading," she said.

"Some women received sentences of between five and 10 years. Elderly women were crying out, asking, 'What is happening to my life now? How can I spend 10 years in prison? What life do I have left? What have I done to be given a prison sentence?' They cried so helplessly."

Ziyawudun said that of all the women in the cell, only she and one elderly lady were spared from allegations of crimes committed, adding that she believes officials were afraid to charge her because her husband is a Kazakh national.

Eventually, Ziyawudun was released from the camp on Dec. 25, 2018, and said that on returning to the home of her family she could see the toll that Beijing's policy of mass incarceration was taking on the Uyghur community.

"Women who were let out turned to alcohol, saying that they had been forced to renounce their God," she said.

"We wondered what we had done wrong to deserve such treatment. As a people, we couldn't face such reality, so many people numbed themselves by drinking alcohol."

While Ziyawudun was later given her passport and allowed to return to Kazakhstan to join her husband and their son, she told RFA that many of her relatives back in Kunes county have since been taken to internment camps themselves.

"Nearly all of my family and friends are in their hands," she said. "I cannot imagine what kind of horror they are going through."

While Beijing initially denied the existence of internment camps, China this year changed tack and began describing the facilities as "boarding schools" that provide vocational training for Uyghurs, discourage radicalization, and help protect the country from terrorism.

Reporting by RFA's Uyghur Service and other media organizations, however, has shown that those in the camps are detained against their will and subjected to political indoctrination, routinely face rough treatment at the hands of their overseers, and endure poor diets and unhygienic conditions in the often overcrowded facilities.

Mass incarcerations in the XUAR, as well as other policies seen to violate the rights of Uyghurs and other Muslims, have led to increasing calls by the international community to hold Beijing accountable for its actions in the region.

In September, at an event on the side-lines of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, U.S. Deputy Secretary of State John J. Sullivan said that the U.N. has failed to hold China to account over its policies in the XUAR and should demand unfettered access to the region to investigate reports of the mass incarceration and other rights abuses against Uyghurs.

Attacked for gender, not views: Hong Kong women protesters facing rape threats from troll army

A young female protester, Ka Yau Ho, said a photograph shared online of her being detained by the police during a rally was altered so it appeared her nipples were showing.

News 18 (02.09.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2IP75YK> - Rape threats, body-shaming and doctored photos: women supporting the anti-government protests in Hong Kong say they are being harassed online by suspected pro-Beijing trolls.

Hundreds of thousands of demonstrators have taken to the financial hub's streets week after week in the biggest challenge to China's rule of the semi-autonomous city for decades.

But female protesters posting support for the pro-democracy movement said they have experienced a slew of sexist online attacks in response.

"They are not attacking my views or anything, they just attack me because I am female," said Hong Kong student Mickey Leung Ho Wun.

The 17-year-old discovered a doctored picture of her at a pro-democracy rally was being spread on Facebook via a page supporting the city's police.

In the original, Wun is standing next to a banner reading 'I am a secondary school student' but in the altered version, the sign reads 'I am not wearing any underwear.'

"These are Hong Kong people who are pro-Beijing," Wun speculated of the users sharing the picture.

Another young female protester, Ka Yau Ho, said a photograph shared online of her being detained by the police during a rally was altered so it appeared her nipples were showing.

Celebrity Hong Kong singer turned activist Denise Ho said on Facebook the aim of the online attacks against her was to "ignore her will, ignore her vision, focus on her exterior and dress, and then demonise."

These women said they suspected pro-Beijing trolls were behind the sexist abuse, as the majority of messages were in simplified Chinese — predominantly used in mainland China.

They added that the abuse has intensified since Beijing ramped up its hardline rhetoric over the protests.

On Wednesday evening, thousands rallied against alleged police sexual violence, holding aloft purple lights in solidarity with abuse victims.

Attendees shared the #ProtestToo hashtag, a play on 2017's global #MeToo movement that exposed sexual assault and harassment in high-profile industries — and helped improve attitudes towards abuse survivors.

But women at the protest told AFP they had stopped posting online as the rhetoric against the protesters increased.

A spokesperson for Hong Kong's Association Concerning Sexual Violence Against Women said online harassment was "a weapon to harm women," adding that it was linked to outdated social norms and cultural values.

Social media has been a key battleground for both sides during the protests.

Earlier this month tech giants Twitter and Facebook said they had suspended nearly 1,000 active accounts emanating from China, aimed at undercutting the legitimacy of the Hong Kong protest movement.

Twitter said it had shut down a further 200,000 accounts before they could inflict any damage.

Laurel Chor, 29, said as a female reporter covering the protests in Hong Kong she had received a "constant barrage" of abuse in her comments and Instagram DMs.

"They were using words like whore or prostitute and bitch," she said.

A Twitter post which called on people to shun a list of female Asian journalists — including Chor — was indicative of how "women do get disproportionately targeted and it is not only gendered but also racial," she said.

Similarly, journalist Vicky Xiuzhong Xu, born in mainland China but writing about the protests from Australia, said her Twitter account was swamped by negative comments, including rape threats.

"The insults that were towards me they were a really weird combination of nasty nationalism, sexism, and racism," she said. "I felt physically sick."

It is not only pro-democracy demonstrators who have endured abusive gendered attacks.

Photographs of Carrie Lam, Hong Kong's chief executive, have been superimposed onto scantily-clad models' bodies and pasted on walls in the city.

Meanwhile, the wives of a number of serving police officers were identified by Telegram users who created a poll on the encrypted messaging service to vote on which wife they would rather "sleep with", a senior police source said.

A Twitter spokesperson told AFP that "abuse, harassment and hateful conduct have no place on our service".

Neither Instagram nor Facebook immediately responded to comment but Instagram confirmed they were actively investigating the issue.

Pakistani Christian girls trafficked to China as brides

By Kathy Gannon and Dake Kang

AP News (07.05.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2PSpNtD> - Muqadas Ashraf was just 16 when her parents married her off to a Chinese man who had come to Pakistan looking for a bride. Less than five months later, Muqadas is back in her home country, pregnant and seeking a divorce from a husband she says was abusive.

She is one of hundreds of poor Christian girls who have been trafficked to China in a market for brides that has swiftly grown in Pakistan since late last year, activists say. Brokers are aggressively seeking out girls for Chinese men, sometimes even cruising outside churches to ask for potential brides. They are being helped by Christian clerics paid to target impoverished parents in their congregation with promises of wealth in exchange for their daughters.

Parents receive several thousand dollars and are told that their new sons-in-law are wealthy Christian converts. The grooms turn out to be neither, according to several brides, their parents, an activist, pastors and government officials, all of whom spoke to The Associated Press. Once in China, the girls — most often married against their will — can find themselves isolated in remote rural regions, vulnerable to abuse, unable to communicate and reliant on a translation app even for a glass of water.

“This is human smuggling,” said Ijaz Alam Augustine, the human rights and minorities minister in Pakistan’s Punjab province, in an interview with the AP. “Greed is really responsible for these marriages ... I have met with some of these girls and they are very poor.”

Augustine accused the Chinese government and its embassy in Pakistan of turning a blind eye to the practice by unquestioningly issuing visas and documents. The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs denied that, saying China has zero tolerance for illegal transnational marriage agencies.

Human Rights Watch called on China and Pakistan to take action to end bride trafficking, warning in an April 26 statement of “increasing evidence that Pakistani women and girls are at risk of sexual slavery in China.”

On Monday, Pakistan’s Federal Investigation Agency arrested eight Chinese nationals and four Pakistanis in raids in Punjab province in connection with trafficking, Geo TV reported. It said the raids followed an undercover operation that included attending an arranged marriage.

The Chinese embassy said last month that China is cooperating with Pakistan to crack down on unlawful matchmaking centers, saying “both Chinese and Pakistani youths are victims of these illegal agents.”

The Associated Press interviewed more than a dozen Christian Pakistani brides and would-be brides who fled before exchanging vows. All had similar accounts of a process involving brokers and members of the clergy, including describing houses where they were taken to see potential husbands and spend their wedding nights in Islamabad, the country’s capital, and Lahore, the capital of Punjab province.

“It is all fraud and cheating. All the promises they make are fake,” said Muqadas.

Supply and demand

In China, demand for foreign brides has mounted, a legacy of the one-child policy that skewed the country’s gender balance toward males. Brides initially came largely from Vietnam, Laos and North Korea. Now men are looking further afield, said Mimi Vu, director of advocacy at Pacific Links, which helps trafficked Vietnamese women.

“It’s purely supply and demand,” she said. “It used to be, ‘Is she light-skinned?’ Now it’s like, ‘Is she female?’”

Pakistan seems to have come onto marriage brokers’ radar late last year.

Saleem Iqbal, a Christian activist, said he first began to see significant numbers of marriage to Chinese men in October. Since then, an estimated 750 to 1,000 girls have been married off, he said.

Pakistan's small Christian community, centered in Punjab province, makes a vulnerable target. Numbering some 2.5 million in the country's overwhelmingly Muslim population of 200 million, Christians are among Pakistan's most deeply impoverished. They also have little political or social support.

Among all faiths in Pakistan, parents often decide a daughter's marriage partner. The deeply patriarchal society sees girls as less desirable than boys and as a burden because the bride's family must pay a dowry and the cost of the wedding when they marry. A new bride is often mistreated by her husband and in-laws if her dowry is considered inadequate.

By contrast, potential Chinese grooms offer parents money and pay all wedding expenses.

Some of the grooms are from among the tens of thousands of Chinese in Pakistan working on infrastructure projects under Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative, a project that has further boosted ties between the two countries in recent years. Other grooms search directly from China through networks. They present themselves as Christian converts, but pastors complicit in the deals don't ask for any documentation.

They pay on average \$3,500 to \$5,000, including payments to parents, pastors and a broker, said Iqbal, who is also a journalist with a small Christian station, Isaac TV. Iqbal has gone to court to stop marriages and sheltered runaway brides, some as young as 13.

Muqadas' mother Nasreen said she was promised about \$5,000, which included the cost of the wedding and her daughter's wedding dress. "But I have not seen anything yet," she said.

"I really believed I was giving her a chance at a better life and also a better life for us," Nasreen said.

Priests and brokers

Dozens of priests are paid by brokers to find brides for Chinese men, said Augustine, the provincial minorities minister, who is Christian. Many are from the small evangelical churches that have proliferated in Pakistan.

Gujranwala, a city north of Lahore, has been a particular target of brokers, with more than 100 local Christian women and girls married off to Chinese in recent months, according to Iqbal.

The city has several mainly Christian neighborhoods, largely dirt poor with open sewers running along narrow slum streets. Tucked away in the alleys are numerous evangelical churches, small cement structures unrecognizable except for small crosses outside.

Pastor Munch Morris said he knows a group of pastors in his neighborhood who work with a private Chinese marriage broker. Among them, he said, is a fellow pastor at his church who tells his flock, "God is happy because these Chinese boys convert to Christianity. They are helping the poor Christian girls."

Morris opposes such marriages, calling them an insult. "We know these marriages are all for the sake of money."

Rizwan Rashid, a parishioner at the city's Roman Catholic St. John's Church, said that two weeks earlier, a car pulled up to him outside the church gates. Two Pakistani men

and a Chinese woman inside asked him if he knew of any girls who want to marry a Chinese man.

"They told me her life would be great," he said. "Everything would be paid for by them."

They were willing to pay him to help, but he said the church's priest often warns his flock against such marriages, so he refused.

Brokers also troll brick kilns, where the poorest work essentially as slaves to pay off debts, and offer to pay off their workers' debts in exchange for daughters as brides.

Pakistani and Chinese brokers work together in the trade. One prominent broker in Gujranwala is a Pakistani known only as Robinson. He refused to talk to the AP, but his wife Razia told the AP that they make arrangements through a Chinese marriage bureau in Islamabad.

Muqadas and another young woman from the same neighborhood, Mahek Liaqat, said Robinson arranged their marriages, providing photos of potential grooms. Afterward, they each described being taken to the same, multi-story house in Islamabad, a sort of boarding house with bedrooms. There, each met her husband for the first time face-to-face and spent her wedding night.

Mahek, 19, said she stayed there with her husband for a month, during which she saw several other girls brought in. She attended several weddings performed in the basement.

Other brides told of meeting their husbands at a similar house in a posh neighborhood of Lahore.

Simbal Akmal, 18, was taken there by her parents. Two other Christian girls were already there in a large sitting room, picking grooms. Three Chinese men were presented to Simbal, and her father demanded she choose one. She told him she didn't want to marry, but he insisted, claiming "it was a matter of our honor," she said.

"He had already promised I would marry one," she said. "They just wanted money."

She married, but immediately fled. She was joined by her sister, who refused her parents' demands to marry a Chinese man. Both escaped to a refuge run by the activist, Iqbal.

In China

Muqadas said her husband had claimed to be a man of money, but when she arrived in China in early December, she found herself living "in a small house, just one room and a bedroom."

She said he rarely let her out of the house on her own. He forced her to undergo a battery of medical tests that later she found were attempts to determine why she was not yet pregnant. On Christmas Eve, when she pressed him to take her to church, he slapped her and broke her phone, she said.

"I don't have the words to tell you how difficult the last month there was," said Muqadas. "He threatened me."

Finally, he agreed to send her home after her family said they would go to the police.

Mahek said she hadn't wanted to get married, but her parents insisted. Her Chinese husband was possessive and refused to let her leave the house. "He was just terrible," she said.\$

In China, her husband, Li Tao, denied abusing Mahek. He said he was a Christian convert and worked for a state-owned Chinese company building roads and bridges when he met Mahek through a Pakistani matchmaker introduced by a Chinese friend.

He was taken by her at first sight, he said. "If you look at her and you see she's right for you, that's it, right?"

Li returned with Mahek last winter to his hometown of Chenlou, a village surrounded by wheat fields in coastal Jiangsu province. They moved into his mother's home, a one-story courtyard house.

After Malek's family reached out to their government for help to bring her back, the police showed up at Li's home and said they were told he was illegally confining a woman in his home.

He said it was Mahek who refused to go outside.

"I wouldn't force her into doing anything," Li said. "She just had to learn to adapt to a new environment. I wasn't asking her to change right away." Still, he bought plane tickets to take her back to Pakistan.

Others, however, are unable to come back.

Mahek's grandfather Idriis Masih said he contacted the parents of several other Pakistani girls whom Mahek had befriended through a phone app in China and who were desperate to return home. All the parents were poor and shrugged off his attempts to convince them to retrieve their daughters.

Each told him, "She is married now. It is her life," he said.

Asia's expanding illicit market: brides

By Tharanga Yakupitiyage

IPS News Agency (25.01.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2FYYgEM> - Paradoxically, the world's most populated countries are facing a population crisis: a woman shortage. And it's women who are paying a brutal price for it.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), the natural sex ratio at birth is approximately 105 boys to every 100 girls.

However, decades of gender discrimination, which favoured having boys over girls, has left India and China with 80 million more men than women.

"When women lack equal rights and patriarchy is deeply engrained, it is no surprise that parents choose to not to have daughters," said Human Rights Watch's (HRW) Senior Researcher in the Women's Rights Division Heather Barr.

Now that there is a shortage of women doesn't mean that women become more treasured or valued, she noted. Instead, there are very harmful consequences.

"[Women have] become a commodity which is in demand, so in demand that people will use violence to acquire it," Barr told IPS.

"The stories we heard were really unbelievably shocking even after having spent many, many years on human rights issues," she added.

The "bride shortage" has triggered trafficking as women are lured under false pretences and sold as brides.

Bordering China is Myanmar's Kachin and northern Shan states which has seen iterations of conflicts over the last decade.

HRW found that traffickers often prey on women and girls in those regions, offering jobs in and transport to China. The women are then sold for 3,000 to 13,000 dollars to Chinese families struggling to find a bride for their sons.

Once purchased, women and girls are often locked in room and raped so that they can quickly provide a baby for the family.

Often times, women and girls are even sold by people they know—sometimes even by family members.

"The idea that there is a situation, a set of social pressures, a sense of lawlessness that is so extreme that it is causing people to sell their own relatives...it is shocking," Barr said.

In India, bride trafficking has become common in the northern states such as Haryana which has only 830 girls to every 1,000 boys.

In a study, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) found in over 10,000 households, over 9,000 married women in Haryana were brought from other States.

Most of those women came from poor villages in Assam, West Bengal, and Bihar where their families, desperate for money, struck deals with traffickers. There are also cases of girls being resold to other people after living a married life for a few years.

According to the 2016 National Crimes Records Bureau, almost 34,000 were kidnapped or abducted for the purpose of marriage across India, half of whom were under the age of 18.

While the immediate consequences for women are clear, there may also be long-term consequences of the distorted sex ratio.

"Part of the reason that we should be worrying about it is that we simply don't know what the long-term consequences of this are. We don't know how this might change societies, but this is something that is going to have an effect through generations," Barr told IPS, highlighting the need for action including better prevention efforts and law enforcement on trafficking and violence against women.

But at the end of the day, governments must do more to address the root cause of the imbalance—gender discrimination.

Though sex-selective abortion is illegal in India, it is still a widespread practice in the country. In fact, approximately five to seven million sex-selective abortions are estimated to be carried out in the South Asian country every year.

China's now two-child policy may also continue to pose a threat to women and girls, as well as the future stability of the country's population.

"The most fundamental problem is gender inequality and most fundamental solution to this is that you have to change the dynamics in society that makes sons valued and daughters not valued," Barr concluded.

Uyghur woman details life inside Chinese 're-education camp' in Xinjiang

A Uyghur woman has detailed conditions she says were tantamount to torture inside one of China's "re-education camps" in far western Xinjiang province.

By Flint Duxfield and Ian Burrows

ABC News AU (08.01.2019) - <https://ab.co/2VCQSDy> - The UN has cited estimates that up to 1 million ethnic Muslim-minority Uyghurs may be held involuntarily in extralegal detention in Xinjiang.

China's Government says the camps are vocational training centres providing language training and re-education of extremists.

But reports from inside the centres tell a very different story.

Gulbahar Jelilova, who says she spent 15 months inside one of the camps, has given a rare firsthand account of the conditions.

"We were kept in dark rooms with rats and mice," she told the ABC's PM program.

"Sometimes they were tying up a weight of 5 kilograms to our feet as a way of punishment.

"If they wanted to punish even heavier, they would put handcuffs [on us] and we would be forced to look at the wall across for about 17 hours."

Ms Jelilova, who is originally from Kazakhstan, has spent the last two decades doing business on the Chinese-Kazakhstani border.

She said in May 2017 she was arrested in the Chinese city of Urumqi on charges of illegal transferring 17,000 yuan (\$3,500) between China and Turkey.

"While I was in the camp I told them that I was a foreigner and that I didn't have any wrongdoings," she said.

"We were told we didn't have any rights there. We didn't have any rights to make phone calls outside ... we were like dead people."

Most Uyghurs who have been inside the camps won't speak about their experiences because of fears other family members will be detained in retaliation.

Despite Ms Jelilova's concerns that Chinese police are keeping tabs on her in Turkey where she currently lives, she said she felt compelled to speak out on behalf of other young women currently in detention.

"I cannot eat comfortably when I think about those people. Under those circumstances how can I keep quiet?" she said.

Forced to take unknown medicines

Ms Jelilova outlined how the women were forced to take unknown medication while in the centre.

"While I was in the camp, they used to give us injections, take blood samples, give medications that we didn't know," she said.

"If we asked what medication it was, they would penalise for asking this question.

"And none of the female people were having monthly periods because they were giving us specific medication that was stopping the periods."

Ms Jelilova's accounts contradict the Chinese Government but they do match up with reports of other Uyghurs and human rights groups.

She said she was beaten inside the camp and when she first entered she weighed 76 kilograms but within a month had lost more than 20 kilograms.

"The total aim of those concentration camps is to eliminate the Uyghur people, the Muslims," she said.

Ms Jelilova said she was let out of the camp following a sustained lobbying effort by her family.

"I was released from the concentration camps three months ago, but every single day the situation in the concentration camps is in front of my eyes.

"The cries of the people are in my ears."

The ABC has repeatedly sought comment from Chinese officials but has received no response.

China has said Xinjiang faces a serious threat from Islamist militants and separatists who plot attacks and stir up tensions between the mostly Muslim Uyghur minority and the ethnic Han Chinese majority.

Other reading:

['I begged them to kill me', Uighur woman describes torture to US politicians](#)

[I'm a Uyghur Muslim who fled China's brutal crackdown – it's time the world showed us some support](#)

[Police are reportedly cutting too-long dresses off ethnic minority women in the middle of streets in China](#)