

**BY AIR MAIL**  
PAR AVION



# MALE-ORDERED

*The mail-order bride industry  
and trafficking in women for  
sexual and labour exploitation*

*POPPY Project  
February 2009*

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putting women first



Male-ordered  
The mail-order bride industry and trafficking in women  
for sexual and labour exploitation

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### Mail-order brides as unidentified victims of trafficking for sexual and labour exploitation

This report explores the concept of servile marriage and the ways in which it overlaps with trafficking and violence against women and girls, especially those brought to the United Kingdom. The report reviews the social, political and economic contexts in the UK and on a global scale that have contributed to the development and proliferation of the mail-order bride (MOB) industry, the trends that can currently be observed and the ways in which the industry promotes trafficking, slavery, prostitution, pornography, exploitation of vulnerable groups and racial and ethnic stereotyping.

The report examines evidence from websites and marriage brokers as well as from men who have or intend to 'purchase' a wife. Much of this evidence reflects the disconcerting levels of racialisation, links with sexual abuse of children, and the use of deceit and coercion to lure women from their homes and communities into lives of servitude in the UK.

Statistical evidence is also analysed to highlight trends in ethnic representation, region and country of origin, and the issuing of fiancée/spousal visas, reported trends in prostitution, POPPY Project referrals of women trafficked for sexual and labour exploitation, abuse of migrant domestic workers and overall rates of domestic violence suffered by women in the UK.

The theme of this report – the trafficking of women and girls into servile marriage through 'mail-order bride' channels – is yet another frontier in the global struggle against contemporary slavery and the multiple ways in which women and girls are exploited. Trafficking is a primary example of the connection between poverty, development, migration, violence against women and sexual or labour exploitation.

A servile marriage will be understood here to be any situation wherein a woman is in a marriage that is either legally binding or sanctioned by her community in such a way that she has no reasonable possibility of asserting that the marriage is invalid; and wherein the woman is held in domestic and/or sexual servitude that defines her role as a wife.

The internationally recognised definition of trafficking, as established in the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime (The Palermo Protocol) and quoted in the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking (ECAT), states:

“Trafficking in persons’ shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs<sup>1</sup>”.

The dominant understanding of trafficking in persons at the moment reflects connections between what can be called 'supply and demand,' but does little to highlight that it is a unique crime because of its ability to overlap in public and private spheres, often simultaneously, making it harder to prevent, identify and eradicate.

<sup>1</sup> See United Nations (2000.) *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children (Palermo Protocol)*. Palermo: United Nations and Council of Europe (2005). *Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings*. Warsaw: Council of Europe.

<sup>2</sup> Belsar, P., M. de Cock, and F. Mehran. (2005). *ILO Minimum Estimate of Forced Labour in the World*. Geneva: ILO Pp 7.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) defines “forced labour” in Convention No. 29, adopted in 1930, as “all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily” (Art. 2.1)<sup>2</sup>.

The ILO has also suggested six elements which, either individually or together, can indicate forced labour<sup>3</sup>:

- Threats or actual physical harm;
- Restriction of movement and confinement to the workplace or to a limited area;
- Debt-bondage;
- Withholding of wages or excessive wage reductions, that violate previously made agreements;
- Retention of passports and identity documents (the workers can neither leave nor prove their identity and status);
- Threat of denunciation to the authorities where the worker is of illegal status.

In the context of mail-order brides, a woman who has been promised a marriage and family, but who is forced into domestic and sexual servitude, has been trafficked in part for forced labour because she is legally bound to her 'employer' (husband), has a vulnerable immigration status in the UK because of this arrangement, cannot access public funds, possibly cannot work outside the home and often has little or no English language ability or community support.

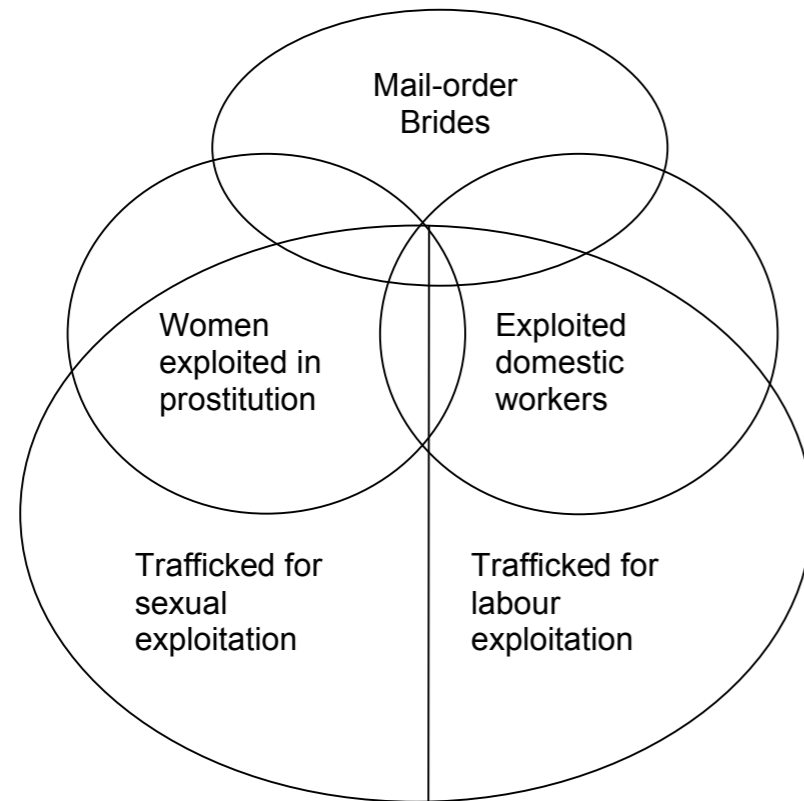
The exploitation suffered by trafficked women, for example, has thus far been less difficult to identify when it occurs in the public sphere or in the grey areas between the public and the private. Women trafficked into domestic servitude in private homes are very much in the private sphere but are still 'employees' so we are comfortable quantifying their exploitation in labour or employment terms. It is also easier to see that a woman has been trafficked into sexual exploitation when she is forced into prostitution – there is a direct and quantifiable economic benefit to the person selling her, and the men who pay for sex are 'strangers' so we are more comfortable identifying the violation.

Despite progress being made with regard to identifying trafficking for forced labour, it seems more difficult to recognise that a woman has been trafficked into domestic servitude when the person she is forced to serve is her husband, particularly when she lives in a community which fosters gendered divisions of labour and the relegation of women to the domestic sphere. This may also be the case for women who enter a marriage for predominantly socio-economic reasons; many fleeing conflict and poverty. Men 'rescuing' these women with marriage will often expect a certain level of domestic and sexual 'labour' on the part of these women as a form of repayment. Social pressures which regard women as primary providers of domestic labour, as well as a presumption of gratitude or debt, means that women in situations of servile marriage often find themselves in similar situations to women in prostitution with regard to ability to consent and fear of violence, immigration complications or other repercussions if they refuse.

When a woman is deceived or coerced into marriage, moved away from her home, and exploited as a 'wife' in domestic and sexual servitude, that woman has been trafficked, her 'husband' reaping the personal and economic benefits of both.

This report intends to shed light on a thus far widely ignored form of trafficking of women into the UK, the types of exploitation these women face in servile marriages, the protections that must be in place and the need to acknowledge these women as victims of trafficking and their consumer-husbands as traffickers as well as perpetrators of slavery, domestic violence and rape and other forms of sexual assault.

<sup>3</sup> ILO (2005). *A Global Alliance against Forced Labour. Report of the Director General. Global Report under the Follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work 2005 International Labor Conference 93rd Session, Report I (B)*. Geneva: ILO. Pp 6.



### Who should read this report?

- NGO, civil society, legal, medical and education professionals working with trafficked women, women in situations of domestic violence and vulnerable spouses in the UK;
- Researchers and policy analysts examining issues of migration, trafficking, violence against women, or gender and information and communication technology (ICT) issues;
- Policymakers and others in government involved in creating and enforcing policies with regard to fiancée and spousal visas, protections for women in domestic violence situations, trafficking in persons, regulation of businesses in the UK and internet safety (including combating posting and circulation of images of child sexual abuse).

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### Data collection methods

More than 150 mail-order bride (MOB) websites were surveyed, and data were collected from the 35 sites which offered the most comprehensive information, and which, according to ranking sites such as GoodWife.com, were 'authentic.' This means that the sites from which data have been analysed do not seem to have a reputation within the mail-order bride community for being scams. Many monitoring sites are concerned about sites that merely post fake profiles of women, collect money for expenses such as monthly memberships, letter translation, or gifts for the women, yet represent no actual 'match-making' service. Every effort has been made to exclude this kind of site from the data collection process, but it is possible that not all sites publish accurate information.

Data collected from the sites were entered into a database which held information related to the site description (marriage agency, dating, matchmaking), any 'speciality' in terms of ethnic origin, religion and so on, the number of women 'hosted' on the site, the country in which the site (or sponsoring company) is registered, the types of information provided (email, phone number, address), the site 'ownership,' i.e. small business, large corporation or other, whether or not they offered legal assistance, featured any kind of buy/purchase imagery and if they offered a guarantee of their services. This information was usually available on their home page, but when that was not the case (four sites), emails were sent to the owners to ask for this information. Sites were reviewed between 14 July and 5 October 2008. The basic data were collected between 14 July and 11 August, while quotes, images and other observations were made between 14 August and 5 October 2008. An average of 25 minutes was spent evaluating each page<sup>4</sup>, while no more than 2.5 hours per day was dedicated to this kind of information-gathering.

### Limitations and nature of the data

The nature of the MOB industry, much like trafficking in persons, relies on a demand in destination countries – in this case the UK – for women to be exploited sexually or for their labour. It is not surprising, then, that many men are reluctant to participate in data collection. The owner of a site which provides information about and rankings of all available sites as well as publishing *The Good Wife Guide*, wanted to know if researchers identified as 'feminist' before agreeing to respond to questions via email, and refers to feminists as 'feminazis' on the site<sup>5</sup>.

Questions regarding feminism were relatively common during the course of the research. For example many men involved in the MOB industry seem to blame feminism for the 'corruption' of western women which has driven them to seek a wife abroad. Men invited to participate in data collection indicated that they felt feminism indicates an inability to be objective. In this way, identifying as a feminist and working for a feminist organisation were barriers to accessing all potential research subjects.

The essential role played by the internet also means that significant amounts of data can be difficult to verify – for example many sites claim to have hundreds of thousands of 'happy customers.' This kind of information has been self-reported and it should be assumed that there will be some errors therein. It is also impossible to validate the reported nationalities of women, although given the preponderance of MOB sites based in Russia, other former Soviet Union states and in Asia, it is reasonable to believe that there is no incentive to fabricate this information.

Finally, there are at this time no reliable statistics gathered from women living in the UK who met and married their spouses through a 'mail-order bride' process. It is therefore difficult to establish a 'typical' profile or experience. Parallels can be observed which indicate that demand for MOB's will have certain similarities with demand for prostitutes and domestic workers. This is illustrated by evidence collected about consumer-husbands' expectations; many men seeking MOB's indicate that they expect sexual services akin to those that men reportedly expect from prostitutes<sup>6</sup> and domestic services usually provided by an employee (a 'maid').

<sup>4</sup> Approximately 62.5 hours were spent collecting this data

<sup>5</sup> Dyson, Cheryl (2005). *How to be a Good Wife: 1995 Revision*. Entitled on [www.goodwife.com](http://www.goodwife.com) as *The Feminazi version of how to be a Goodwife*. Retrieved 6 September 2008. <http://www.goodwife.com/?pid=26>

<sup>6</sup> Atkins, Helen and Bindel, Julie. (2008). *Big Brothel: A Survey of the Off-Street Sex Industry in London*. POPPY Project: London. Pp6, "You get to choose, like a catalogue" (Male sex buyer, London, December 2007)

As with all participatory research regarding vulnerable populations, the primary goal must be not to re-traumatise or cause further harm to any woman trafficked into servile marriage. To avoid any victimisation for the sake of research, this report has in part relied on interviews already conducted for other research. This is also due to the fact that many women in servile marriages are controlled by their consumer-husbands and therefore would not be 'permitted' to participate in this kind of data collection. Doing so may also seriously jeopardise their safety and/or immigration status.

### Ethical considerations

Further ethical considerations arose during the research for this report, the most prominent being secondary trauma to researchers exposed to higher than anticipated levels of imagery of women being sexually abused, particularly that depicting the sexual abuse of children and other sexually explicit or otherwise exploitative images of vulnerable women and children. Provision of clinic supervision and other supervisory measures should be an integral part of any further research into this topic.

Many MOB sites also earn money from their advertisers based on the number of 'hits' to their website each day; in other words each person who visits these sites indirectly contributes to them. While this was unavoidable in the course of data collection, every effort was made to visit each site as few times as was necessary.

## 3. SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

- Servile marriages are characterised by gross power imbalances and high levels of control, sexual and labour exploitation and violence. These high levels of violence have been observed in situations of domestic and intimate partner violence, trafficking, prostitution and exploitation of domestic workers.
- The very existence of an industry designed to market and sell human beings, such as the mail-order bride industry, is a form of exploitation and degradation. This is true regardless of any alleged 'consent' on the part of the person being sold.
- Mail-order brides are at increased risk of becoming victims of international trafficking in women and girls. The global magnitude and impact of this traffic in women are already well documented<sup>7</sup>.
- Many websites which catalogue mail-order brides are venues for pornography and prostitution<sup>8</sup>; this is reflected in information gathered on the sites reviewed for this report<sup>9</sup>. Many women are pictured with their children, or in infantilising, child-like poses which can be construed as designed to appeal to adults who sexually abuse children or who seek sexually exploitative images of children.
- Many of the thousands of newly-wed mail-order brides become victims of violence, sexual exploitation and sex trafficking<sup>10</sup>. It may also be deduced from the images and stereotypes promoted that these women are intended to provide sexual and domestic services to their consumer-husbands.
- Women who find partners through marriage agencies are at higher risk of becoming victims of violence and exploitation<sup>11</sup>.
- International Marriage Brokers (IMB) market women as sexual objects dedicated to male subservience, and as solely oriented toward pleasing men<sup>12</sup>.
- Current trends in the industry show greater supply and demand for women from Russia and Eastern Europe, as well as women from the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam. Internet-based research revealed sites offering women from every region of the world and specialist sites for 36 countries<sup>13</sup> and religious and personal characteristics, such as skin tone, physical build or age.
- In Russia alone 25,000 women per year sign up to Russia's at least 600 marriage sites. Only 5-7% of the women who sign up – around 1,500 women per year – eventually find a foreign spouse, according to a study conducted by American University<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> Commissioner of the Immigration and Naturalization Service and the Director of the Violence against Women Office at the Department of Justice. (1997) *International Matchmaking Organizations: A Report to Congress [hereinafter INS Report]*. Washington D.C.: INS. Pp 1.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* at 1-3 "the International Marriage Broker (IMB) industry has close ties to Internet pornography, sex tourism, and prostitution: IMB websites often have links to sites specializing in 'Internet porn, sex tourism, and escort services,' and often advertise on adult websites and in magazines like Penthouse". See also Lindee, Kirsten M. (2007) *Love, Honor, or Control: Domestic Violence, Trafficking, and the Question of How to Regulate the Mail-Order Bride Industry*. *Columbia Journal of Gender and Law*, 16 (2): 551-601.

<sup>9</sup> See section entitled "data collection" for a more thorough discussion of research methodologies.

<sup>10</sup> Lindee, *supra* note 2, at 554 "[A]vailable information suggests not only that mail-order brides may become trafficking victims, forced into sex work or domestic service, but also that the IMB industry per se constitutes a form of sex trafficking"

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Countries documented by this research, as described by the sites themselves: America [sic] (United States), Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Great Britain, Bulgaria, Cambodia, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Czech Republic, Dominican Republic, Ethiopia, Philippines, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, India, Ireland, Iraq, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Korea [sic] (predominantly South Korea), Latvia, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Peru, Romania, Russia, Sweden, Thailand, Ukraine and Vietnam.

<sup>14</sup> Trade and Environment Database (2000.) Case 487: Russian Mail Order Brides. American University. Accessed 7 August 2008. <http://www.american.edu/ed/bride.htm>

## 4. MY LAWFULLY WEDDED WIFE: POLITICAL CONTEXT

A servile marriage is more than simply a marriage in which a woman is expected to remain in the home. Servile marriages are characterised by gross power imbalances and high levels of control, sexual and labour exploitation and violence. These high levels of violence have been observed in situations of domestic and intimate partner violence, trafficking, prostitution and exploitation of domestic workers.

Control of the women in these situations generally involves control over movement, including not being allowed to leave the home without her husband; control of activities; control of identity and travel documents; control of all financial resources; monitoring of communication with others; control of clothing, food, water and medical treatment; and threats of deportation to women with vulnerable immigration statuses, among others<sup>15</sup>.

Servile marriage, when understood correctly as a type of slavery, will be seen as prohibited in the UK initially with the 1833 Abolition of Slavery Act. It was then reinforced by the Slavery Convention, signed in 1926, and was specifically addressed by the Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, signed in 1956<sup>16</sup>. This convention provides an internationally-recognised definition of servile marriage. Article I prohibits any institution or practice whereby:

“(i) A woman, without the right to refuse, is promised or given in marriage on payment of a consideration in money or in kind; (ii) The husband of a woman, his family, or his clan, has the right to transfer her to another person for value received or otherwise; or (iii) A woman on the death of her husband is liable to be inherited by another person.”

With the rise of human rights activism, law and policy have come several other declarations and conventions which provide additional protections from the abuses of servile marriage. Among these are the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), which states that “Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses<sup>17</sup>”, The Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages (1964)<sup>18</sup>, The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1968)<sup>19</sup>, The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979)<sup>20</sup>, the Beijing Platform for Action (1995)<sup>21</sup> and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1999).

National legislation on marriage also now often focuses on the equal rights of men and women to marry and to do so legally and of their own free will, the absence of which will, in many jurisdictions, makes the marriage null and void.

No specific legislation exists in the UK with regard to “mail-order brides”, but some protective legislation has been developed in the Philippines and the United States, predominantly focusing on informing women about life abroad, limiting the number of women married to foreign spouses, regulating international marriage brokers and creating safeguards for women who suffer domestic violence or other exploitation in the country of their spouse.

<sup>15</sup> See *ibid* at Stephen-Smith, Sarah. (2008) *Routes In Routes Out: Quantifying the gendered experience of trafficking in the UK*. London: POPPY Project. 23. 38% of women disclosed being escorted, 69% had their movements controlled, 66% reported having their immigration documents withheld, 7% report being told they were ‘working off a debt’ and 69% experienced physical violence; Taylor, D. (2003). *Sex For Sale: New Challenges and New Dangers for Women Working On And Off The Streets*. London: Mainliners, at pp10, 63% of prostitutes report experiencing non-sexual violence and 37% experience sexual violence; and Kalayaan (2007). *Annual Report 2006-2007*. London: Kalayaan at pp6 69% of domestic workers report experiencing psychological abuse, 24% report physical abuse and 9% report sexual abuse.

<sup>16</sup> The United Kingdom is a party to the Slavery Convention and the Supplementary Convention; signed on 7 December 1953 and 30 April 1957, respectively.

<sup>17</sup> United Nations (1949). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Article 16(2). New York: UN.

<sup>18</sup> Article 1.1 states that ‘No marriage shall be legally entered into without the full and free consent of both parties, such consent to be expressed by them in person after due publicity and in the presence of the authority competent to solemnize the marriage and of witnesses, as prescribed by law.’

<sup>19</sup> Article 23 states that: 1. The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State. 2. The right of men and women of marriageable age to marry and to found a family shall be recognized. 3. No marriage shall be entered into without the free and full consent of the intending spouses. 4. States Parties to the present Covenant shall take appropriate steps to ensure equality of rights and responsibilities of spouses as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution. In the case of dissolution, provision shall be made for the necessary protection of any children.

<sup>20</sup> Article 16 states that: ‘The betrothal and the marriage of a child shall have no legal effect, and all necessary action, including legislation, shall be taken to specify a minimum age for marriage and to make the registration of marriages in an official registry compulsory’

<sup>21</sup> At Paragraph 274 (e), the Platform urges Governments to “[e]nact and strictly enforce laws to ensure that marriage is only entered into with the free and full consent of the intending spouses”

## UK law

Existing legislation which can be used to prosecute various components of forced or other forms of servile marriage in England and Wales:

### Possible offences committed in any situation of servile marriage

Offence	UK statute (England & Wales)
Aiding and abetting a criminal offence	Common Law Offence
False imprisonment	Common Law Offence
Murder	Common Law Offence
Theft (for example of a passport)	Section 1, Theft Act, 1968
Blackmail	Section 21, Theft Act, 1968
Rape	Section 1, Sexual Offences Act, 2003
Sexual assault	Section 3, Sexual Offences Act, 2003
Causing or inciting, engaging in, or inducing sexual activity with a person with a mental disorder impeding choice (also with the use of threat or deception)	Sections 30-34, Sexual Offences Act, 2003
Causing or inciting prostitution for gain A person commits an offence if: (a) he intentionally causes or incites another person to become a prostitute in any part of the world, and (b) he does so for or in the expectation of gain for himself or a third person.	Section 52, Sexual Offences Act, 2003
Common assault	Section 39, Criminal Justice Act, 1988
Common assault (domestic violence)	Chapter 28, Part 2, Section 10, Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act, 2004 (arrestable offence)
Cruelty to persons under 16	Section 1, Children and Young Persons Act, 1933 (including neglect and abandonment)
Harassment	Section 2, Protection from Harassment Act, 1997
Threats to kill	Section 16, Offences Against the Person Act, 1861

### Possible offences committed in the trafficking of persons for servile marriage

Offence	UK statute (England & Wales)
Trafficking for labour exploitation (slavery) or organ harvesting	Section 4, Chapter 19 Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants, etc.) Act 2004
Trafficking for sexual exploitation	Sexual Offences Act, 2003 Trafficking into the UK: Section 57 Trafficking within the UK: Section 58 Trafficking out of the UK: Section 59
Kidnapping	Common Law Offence

## 5. FOR RICHER, FOR POORER: ECONOMIC CONTEXT

The most often overlooked component of servile marriage is the economic context. In general there is a severe lack of research and data with regard to the economic value of unpaid domestic labour, predominantly performed by women, in their own households or those of their families. In the 2007-08 Human Development Report, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) collected data on 'Gender, Work and Time Allocation'. In the UK, women who also work outside the home (with an average work day of 7:41) spend an average of 187 minutes per day on non-market reproductive labour, such as cooking, cleaning and care of children<sup>22</sup>.

Predictions about the exact monetary value of this labour are difficult to calculate given that there are no universally accepted guidelines by which to evaluate the worth of domestic labour, neither by task or by time commitment. At 187 minutes per day, the average woman in the UK spends nearly 50 days per year working for free<sup>23</sup>. The current British national minimum wage<sup>24</sup> is £5.52 per hour, meaning that each woman could contribute more than £6,279 worth of reproductive labour per year. Based on nearly 20,000,000 women of working age, this is a potential annual national total of more than £124bn<sup>25</sup> or 11.3% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP)<sup>26</sup>.

Men who also work outside the home (an average day of 7:32) spend an average of 71 minutes per day on these same domestic tasks. A survey of domestic workers in London showed many reporting 16- to 20-hour workdays<sup>27</sup>. It is reasonable to conclude that women in situations of servile marriage would be forced to keep similar work hours, in addition to fulfilling their husbands' sexual demands.

When we attempt to quantify the labour of women in the home we can see how reliant the UK is on this 'voluntary' contribution. While we cannot characterise all, or even most of this labour as forced, it gives us an indication of the value that should be assigned to the work done by women in the home and provides guidelines for compensation that should be available to victims of servile marriage.

"Women are wonderful to watch as they walk and talk and play. Men are blessed to be able to enjoy this process of observation and interaction. It appears that men are lucky to be blessed with being men."  
Prospective buyer

<sup>22</sup> United Nations Development Programme (2008). *Fighting Climate Change: Human Solidarity in a Divided World*. Human Development Report 2007/08. New York: United Nations. 'Gender, Work and Time Allocation' at pp 342.

<sup>23</sup> 187 minutes per day amounts to 47 days 9 hours and 35 minutes of labour per year, based on a 365-day-year.

<sup>24</sup> The national minimum wage is listed as £5.52 per hour for workers aged 22 years and older, with a development rate of £4.60 per hour for workers aged 18-21 inclusive, per HM Revenue and Customs (2007). *National Minimum Wage*. Accessed 18 August 2008. <http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/nmw/>.

<sup>25</sup> 19,571,500 women earning £6279.46 each = £124,028,754,190

<sup>26</sup> The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) *Society Today*. UK GDP is listed for 2006 as \$1.93 Trillion (approx £1.09 Trillion). Accessed on 18 August 2008. <http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/facts/UK/index27.aspx?ComponentId=7102&SourcePageId=18129>

<sup>27</sup> *Kalayaan annual report 2006-2007*. 66% of workers reported a work day of 16 hours or more.

## 6. ANALYSIS

### 6.1 History of mail-order brides

The concept of 'mail-order brides,' while now linked inextricably to the worlds of online dating and international matchmaking, has much older roots. Historically, mail-order brides were listed in paper catalogues made available to single men who would 'choose' them for marriage. There has always been an international element to these arrangements, which often involve a woman from a developing country being purchased by a man from a more industrialised part of the world. The first recorded requests were for wives in North America sent to join early European settlers. The Virginia Company of London sent several shipments of mail-order brides in return for payments in tobacco. The first documented mail-order brides started where so many now end up: London.

The second surge in demand for mail-order brides followed shortly after the end of World War II. Men stationed overseas in the armed forces married women in the countries their armies occupied; these women were referred to as 'war brides.' In the UK a wealth of historical information is available about the more than 100,000 British women who married servicemen from the US, Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand<sup>28</sup>, yet relatively little is documented about the women who were brought back by British servicemen. It is known that as a result of the deployment of US troops in Asian countries, for example, more than 200,000 Japanese, Vietnamese, Thai, Korean and Filipina women have married US servicemen and immigrated to the United States since World War II<sup>29</sup>. The reasons many of these women left home – fleeing war torn countries, high rates of violence and poverty and few prospects for the future, are the same conditions in which many contemporary mail-order brides find themselves.

### 6.2 Current trends

Current trends can be difficult to identify given that media coverage of mail-order brides is infrequent and generally fails to link these women's situations to push factors such as poverty and rarely locates the MOB phenomenon within a larger context of gender-based violence. Additionally, not one publicised case reviewed for this report (11 cases in the news media since 1998) mentioned trafficking.

### 6.3 Supply and demand

The underlying 'push factors' contributing to greater levels of demand and supply in the countries listed in section 6.1 are similar to those of the 'war brides' of the last century. High rates of poverty, often combined with slow and arduous post-war reconstruction periods, lead to high rates of unemployment and few prospects for the future. When this is juxtaposed with media images of wealthy lifestyles, particularly in Western Europe and North America, many women feel that a kind of 'escape' is their only hope. Yet while many women seek the freedom and opportunity they see on their television screens and billboards, they are often pursued by Western men in search of so-called 'traditional' wives, prepared for a life of subservience, obedience and deference. These men, acting as 'consumer-husbands', hold all the power in the marriage transaction and therefore will demand that they are happy with the terms of their purchase – in other words, once bought, a woman will compromise her marriage and therefore often her immigration status, economic security and personal safety if she deviates from the behaviour desired by the consumer-husband.

As Marie-Claire Belleau has shown in her research, in addition to relying on this kind of economic and social inequality to fuel a supply of women, the mail-order bride trade feeds on highly unrealistic and contradictory expectations about marital relationships. The so-called 'First World husband' is typically looking for a docile, submissive, and subservient bride whom he can control and dominate<sup>30</sup>.

<sup>28</sup> Data Marine (2006). *War Brides*. Accessed on 13 August 2008, from <http://warbrides.co.uk/>

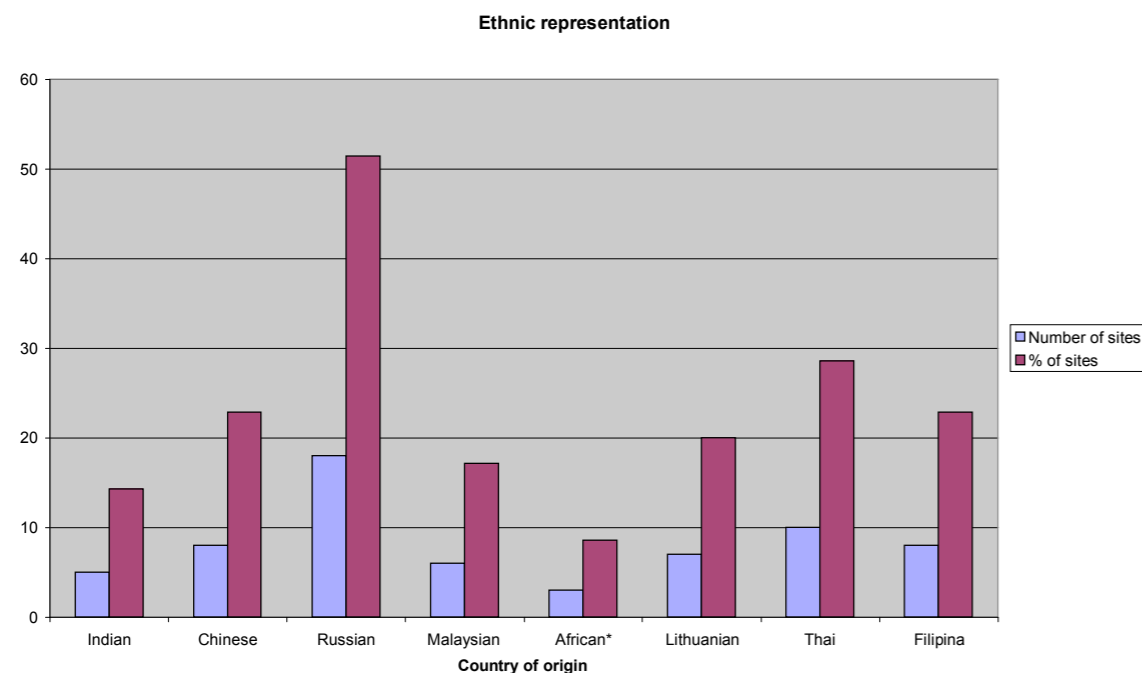
<sup>29</sup> Amott, Teresa and Matthaei, Julie (1991). *Race, Gender and Work: A Multicultural Economic History of Women in the United States*. Boston: South End Press. At 253 and Demrose, Bonnie Stone and Betty Sowers Alt (1990). *Uncle Sam's Brides: The World of Military Wives*. New York: Walker and Company, at 128-129.

“He seeks a MOB specifically because of sexist sentiments, and his hatred and fear of the feminist movement. He rejects women of his own nationality as wives because he considers them to be aggressive and egotistical. He believes they are too ambitious, make excessive demands in marriage, and have expectations of equality with their husbands. He criticizes the desire of women for autonomy, independence, and equality”<sup>31</sup>.

## 6.4 Ethnic (mis)representations

Current trends in the industry show greater supply and demand for women from Russia and Eastern Europe (predominantly Ukraine, but also the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Latvia and others), as well as women from the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. Internet-based research revealed sites offering women from every region of the world, and specialist sites for 36 specific countries<sup>32</sup>, religious preferences (Jewish, Muslim, Christian, Hindu and Buddhist) and personal characteristics such as skin tone, physical build, or age.

Below is a breakdown of the countries of origin most frequently represented on MOB sites. The vast majority of sites feature Russian women, women from other Eastern European countries and parts of Asia and the Indian subcontinent.



Racial and ethnic stereotypes are fuelled by the descriptions and promises made by the MOB websites.

Singlebrides.com promises:

“Each foreign man who has ever met a Ukrainian or Russian woman knows that the phenomenon of a Russian bride consists of simple things, as it may seem – femininity, beauty, her heart open for feelings, extreme devotion to children and, family-orientation.”<sup>33</sup>

Frantana, owner of Frantana.ru, which specialises in amputees, promises to find you a “pleasant, with well-amputated stumps woman, who is ready to realize your cherished dream.”<sup>34</sup>

\*Many MOB sites do not distinguish between African women of various nationalities. It is even possible that some women marketed as African are indeed Latin American, European or Asian.

30 Langevin, Louise and Marie-Claire Belleau (2000). *Trafficking in Women in Canada: A Critical Analysis of the Legal Framework Governing Immigrant Live-In Caregivers and Mail-order Brides*. Ottawa: Research Directorate, Status of Women Canada at 85–89.

31 Belleau, Marie-Claire (2003). *Mail-order brides in a global world*. *Albany Law Review* 67(2), at 596

32 Countries documented by this research, as described by the sites themselves: America [sic] (United States), Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Great Britain, Bulgaria, Cambodia, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Czech Republic, Dominican Republic, Ethiopia, Philippines, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, India, Ireland, Iraq, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Korea [sic] (predominantly South Korea), Latvia, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Peru, Romania, Russia, Sweden, Thailand, Ukraine and Vietnam.

33 [www.singlebrides.com](http://www.singlebrides.com)

These men spend thousands of dollars or pounds to obtain a wife who meets their specifications – a process replete with images of women as sexual commodities who will assume a submissive role toward their husbands<sup>35</sup>.

On the popular discussion site [russianwomendiscussion.com](http://russianwomendiscussion.com), for men in search of or married to mail-order brides predominantly of Russian and Eastern European descent, two of the most common topics of discussion include the characteristics they attribute to mail-order brides from what they call the ‘FSU’ (former Soviet Union) and the reasons that they do not want to pursue relationships with Western women. Many will admit readily to a physical preference, a desire for a woman with a pale complexion and hair tone, in part, they argue, so that these women will assimilate more readily into their communities.

“To be politically incorrect and totally honest I was looking for a white European featured woman, hence the FSU.”<sup>36</sup>

“Back in the early 80’s I got my first taste of “Mail Order Brides” as I received catalogues in the mail from several different companies. Most as I recall were Asian & South American. I found no interest in them & did not pursue them farther than the trash can.”<sup>37</sup>

## 6.5 Attitudes towards women and their “role” in marriage

Some are more interested in the ‘attitude’ of their future wife:

“I am European...and what seduced me with Ukrainian women is their behaviours, the way they think, they are proud, very feminine, they are independant [sic] but for them manhood is important too. And the importance for them to take care of themselves...At the end, this is for me, probably the most appealing cocktail.”<sup>38</sup>

“[Russian women] are very attractive to me because of their physical beauty, the likelihood of a high education, their increased femininity (over western women), and their great sense of culture. It also doesn’t hurt that they have a better grip on the roles that men and woman should play in a relationship.”<sup>39</sup>

Some men claim to be uninterested in women in their home countries; their complaints betray their intentions in marriage quite clearly:

“I am tired of western women complaining about how they’re looking for that perfect man that will be loyal to them.”<sup>40</sup>

“I think that the clue is that western women they try to compete with men, they fight with them, they try to show who is stronger in this or that way which is wrong, women should remain women... [They] no longer want to be mothers and so to say behind their hubbies, they want to be independent, business like, possessing some sort of power...they refuse their nature and are becoming like men.”<sup>41</sup>

An infantilising tone is also quite evident:

“Women are wonderful to watch as they walk and talk and play. Men are blessed to be able to enjoy this process of observation and interaction. It appears that men are lucky to be blessed with being men.”<sup>42</sup>

As is expressed by the comments above, and reinforced by the research carried out on consumer-husbands, typically “Western” women are seen as less fit to be mothers and wives because of their “non-traditional” values, and in part it is these very stereotypes<sup>43</sup> which make the husbands’ racially and sexually oppressive behaviours towards MOB acceptable by casting them as natural and desirable when imposed on a given racial or ethnic group<sup>44</sup>.

34 [www.frantana.ru](http://www.frantana.ru)

35 Brocato, Vanessa. (2004). *Profitable Proposals: Explaining and Addressing the Mail-Order Bride Industry through International Human Rights Law*. *San Diego International Law Journal* 5 at 225, 230

36 <http://www.russianwomendiscussion.com/Forum/index.php?topic=5556.msg98428#msg98428>

37 <http://www.russianwomendiscussion.com/Forum/index.php?topic=5556.msg98831#msg98831>

38 <http://www.russianwomendiscussion.com/Forum/index.php?topic=5556.msg98612#msg98612>

39 <http://www.russianwomendiscussion.com/Forum/index.php?topic=5556.msg98751#msg98751>

40 <http://www.russianwomendiscussion.com/Forum/index.php?topic=5556.msg98759#msg98759>

41 <http://www.russianwomendiscussion.com/Forum/index.php?topic=5317.msg93192#msg93192>

42 <http://www.russianwomendiscussion.com/Forum/index.php?topic=5317.msg93224#msg93224>

43 *Ibid*



Several sites offer 'psychological tests' to determine suitability to the matchmaking process – not suitability to an individual partner.

Each potential bride must read a selection of statements and then rate them generally on a numerical scale of 1-10, based on how closely the statement reflects the woman's perspective.

The 75 questions reviewed seem to reflect three dominant themes:

**1 Likelihood of submitting to a husband:**

I don't interfere in anything, I prefer the role of a detached on-looker  
Discipline is not a burden, I try to fulfil requests exactly and in specified time

**2 Behaviours and habits:**

It is not a chore to regularly polish shoes  
Feeling sorry for yourself is a sin!

**3 Perceptions of marriage and sex/sexuality:**

A real man remains a sexual hunter anywhere  
A person's intimate life is not subject to social standards

Many websites are quick to play into these stereotypes about behaviour and attitude. Getmarriednow.com promises:

"These gorgeous woman [sic], who outnumber the men by 7 to 1, are as true and honest as you could ever hope for. Like their city, they have yet to be spoiled by Western influence. They still appreciate the simple pleasures of life; nature, culture, reading, and, of course, the love of a good man."

In their study of mail-order brides, Glodava and Onizuka conducted several interviews with consumer husbands and the wives they purchased. The desire for a better life is reflected: for example Sue Cormick comments on her marriage to Jim: "Here I am appreciated. And here I have many appliances". The racialisation and 'othering' that is necessary is also reflected, as Don Springer (age 46) says: "The Philippines are loaded with homemakers. A man like me is not going to find a woman like this (his 26-year-old wife) here".<sup>45</sup>

In addition to values, appearances and attitudes, however, one cannot underestimate the role of economics in these transactions. While the transatlantic slave trade hid the gendered and sexualised components of slavery under a conspicuous layer of economics, the mail-order bride industry hides economic inequality under the erotic, or the alleged pursuit of romantic bliss.

It is clear that the great amount of money that is spent on acquiring a wife – subscription costs, overseas visits, telephone calls, translation fees, legal fees for marriage and immigration purposes and gifts – cause consumer-husbands to believe that they have purchased, and therefore now own, their foreign-spouse<sup>46</sup>. These men believe that because they have purchased their wife they are entitled to place very specific demands on her behaviour and to exert much higher levels of control than they may be willing to attempt with a woman from their own community.

Some sites feature links entitled "Order Now", "Check Out" or "Shopping Cart". Sites also generally cast Asian women as submissive, obedient and loyal.

Getmarriednow.com promises:

"Our 100% Client Satisfaction Guarantee! We guarantee our service with the best no-nonsense guarantee in the business. Try our service for a full-year, and if you are not engaged or married by the end of your one year we will continue to provide service at no charge until you find a bride!"<sup>47</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Ibid

<sup>45</sup> See Glodava and Onizuka supra note 57 at 38 and 73.

<sup>46</sup> Vergara, Vanessa B.M. (2000). *Abusive Mail-Order Bride Marriage and the Thirteenth Amendment*. Northwestern University Law Review (94) at 1555

<sup>47</sup> www.getmarriednow.com

In February of 2008 Al Jazeera conducted an in-depth investigation into the nature of marriage-brokering in Singapore, and followed the purchase and transfer of two 18-year-old Vietnamese women. The following statements were made during the 'marriage' arrangement of women described as looking "not for a man of their dreams, but for a man of means"<sup>48</sup>.

The 'marriage broker' describes his services to two Singaporean men, aged 34 and 36 respectively, who are interested in the 18-year-old women. "We're the only agency in Singapore doing 100% virgins" he asserts. He then promises a doctor's certificate and money-back guarantees if she is not a virgin. "Other agents let you sleep with her for a week first, but of course, they are not offering you virgins. They are not authentic women. Bringing an 18-year-old home for \$10,000 is cheap."

Once her virginity has been confirmed and he has paid \$10,000 in cash, he speaks his first words to his now fiancée: "You have never slept with a man before, right?" to which she replies: "No." He smiles, but reminds her: "If you have, men won't want you, do you understand?"

In her documentary *Diary of a Mail Order Bride*, director Lucy Leveugle followed three western men (two from the UK and one from the US) as their relationships with mail-order brides unfolded.

Rod from Texas, one of 15 men on a 'love tour' of St. Petersburg, paid \$4,000 and was guaranteed to meet more than 300 women in ten days – a cost of around \$13 per woman. He was promised that 50% of men are engaged by the end of their visit. In the documentary, the men on Rod's tour are aged 35-65 and they are in Russia to go to 'socials', where the ratio of women to men will be 10:1. According to the coordinator of the trip, who had met his 21-year-old Russian girlfriend three years prior: "The socials are like a fishing contest, the odds are so good, in your favour, that every cast you can catch a fish. Now there are going to be some trash fish in the water – and you don't keep trash fish do you? But...they look a lot alike. Try to keep a bigger pool of fish that you're thinking about taking home to mount"<sup>49</sup>.

Painted as virginal and sincere women waiting to be conquered, seeking love in a foreign land, these reconstituted visions fail to disclose, and yet are constructed by, the harsh realities that many of these women have suffered.

## 6.6 In their own words

When asked why she signed up on a marriage site, 22-year-old Liuda from Siberia says that she was: "Feeling lonely and depressed, so why not give it a try?". Within a few weeks she began to communicate with a British man from London, met him in Egypt and was engaged within four days. She says she did not think twice about accepting the proposal. Her mother, on the other hand, is not so sure. "I'm worried and scared by this...I've got a lot of questions."<sup>50</sup>

After arriving in a village of 1,200 inhabitants in Lancashire, 25-year-old Alexandra from Russia said: "I imagine England like in a fairy tale...with knights, beautiful ladies, queens, kings and castles...I like the atmosphere in the town, but I've found out a few things...he likes alcohol more than Russians...he drinks his beer in huge glasses and downs it...this was a big surprise, and not a pleasant one"<sup>51</sup>.

<sup>48</sup> Al Jazeera. (29 February 2008) "Everywoman: Vietnamese Brides" [Television Broadcast]. Doha: Al-Jazeera English. <http://english.aljazeera.net/programmes/everywoman/2008/02/20085251859955128.html>

<sup>49</sup> Leveugle, Lucy (Director) (2006) *Diary of a Mail Order Bride* [Documentary]. UK: Channel 4.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid

## 6.7 Background information about MOB sites

As is explained in the methodology section of this report (Section 2), more than 150 sites were surveyed, and data were collected from the 35 sites which offered the most comprehensive information and which, according to ranking sites such as GoodWife.com, were 'authentic.' The following tables and charts reflect identified trends in the collected data.

While some sites describe themselves as "dating" or "matchmaking" sites, the vast majority (77%) identify as marriage sites.

### 6.7i Site descriptions: matchmaking, dating or marriage

Marriage	77% (n=27)
Matchmaking	17.1% (n=6)
Dating	5.7% (n=2)

Some, however, do attempt to distance themselves from the "mail-order bride" stereotypes.

["We are not a mail order bride service in the traditionally defined sense of the word; but do facilitate interracial marriage between like-minded individuals."](#)  
East Meet West

Sites differ in size, from small businesses often owned by men who themselves purchased a bride overseas, to small companies with offices in a Western country and one in the source country. Some are part of much larger corporate networks which offer more than 20 different sites catering for different interests.

### Site ownership

Small business	57.14% (n=20)
Corporate (20+ sites)	22.86% (n=8)
Individual	20.0% (n=7)

### 6.7ii Numbers of women

The majority of sites feature fewer than 2,500 women; the average number of women available on a site was approximately 486 women<sup>52</sup>.

Most sites guarantee that these are all "Active profiles". Very few sites make any mention of the numbers of men involved, although some claim to have had a certain number of engagements, marriages and even children born to couples created by their service.

### Numbers of women with "active profiles"

100-2,500	37.1% (n=15)
2,501-5,000	11.4% (n=4)
5,001-7,500	5.7% (n=2)
7,501-10,000	5.7% (n=2)
10,000+	5.7% (n=2)
15,000+	5.7% (n=2)
25,000+	8.5% (n=3)
50,000+	14.3 (n=5)

Most websites (57%) are based in Western countries, the US and the UK being the most popular. Others are based in source countries, predominantly in Asia and Eastern Europe.

### Countries where MOB sites are registered

Africa	5.7% (n=2)
Asia	11.4% (n=4)
Australia	5.7% (n=2)
UK	22.8% (n=8)
US	28.5% (n=10)

Most sites rely heavily on internet-based services such as email and web chat. Most will also offer a woman's personal contact details, such as mailing address and phone number, for a fee. A smaller percentage of sites arrange "Romance Tours" or "Love Tours", which are short-term holidays to source countries where men are generally promised to meet hundreds of women and are told that success rates are high. Around one-third of sites also offered some kind of legal assistance for a fee, generally for securing a fiancée or spousal visa for the destination country or help with arranging a marriage in the woman's home country.

### Services offered

Email addresses for purchase	100% (n=35)
Contact information (address and phone number) for purchase	80% (n=28)
Visa/legal assistance	37.1% (n=13)
Assistance with marriage in the woman's home country	34.3% (n=12)
Romance Tours – all inclusive	31.4% (n=11)
Web chat	28.5% (n=10)

["Safer, international dating personals: Heart of Asia Online is for singles who seek marriage and sincere long distance relationships. Not Mail order brides but marriage minded singles who want to chat online or trade emails in a safe, sincere, family values oriented environment"](#).  
Heart of Asia

While most sites require a log-in and password to view profiles, and certainly to order and receive contact details, one site, Muslim Marriage Service UK, posts information online with no security measures. This means the woman's details are available to all, including men looking to exploit women who have expressed an interest in pursuing romantic relationships.

["Muslim Marriage Service UK offers a more PERSONAL service, providing email addresses or telephone numbers without the need for logins or passwords"](#).  
Muslim Marriage Service

Adding to the sense that this is merely an economic transaction, 65.7% of sites (n=23) use some kind of 'buy' or 'purchase' imagery or language.

LoveMe.com features an 'ordering form' when you pay for their services<sup>53</sup>. On Anastasia International you can 'view your shopping cart' and your 'orders'<sup>54</sup>.

The Ekaterina Marriage Agency invites men to:

[Please, click on "I would like to become your client"](#).  
[You can pay our services as follows.](#)  
[We accept credit cards.](#)  
[We are happy to make your dreams come true!](#)<sup>55</sup>

<sup>51</sup> *ibid*

<sup>52</sup> There were a total of 259,050 counted as of 2 October 2008. It is impossible to calculate an exact sum because of the frequency with which sites are updated and the difficulty in establishing which profiles are genuine

<sup>53</sup> <http://www.loveme.com/tour/order/order.shtml>

<sup>54</sup> <http://www.russianbrides.com/asp/showcart.asp>

<sup>55</sup> <http://www.yourrussianlady.ck.ua/service.html>

## 7. LINKS WITH OTHER FORMS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

As with trafficking, prostitution and other forms of exploitation, the mail-order bride (MOB) industry and its derivatives are part of a culture of violence against women. The construction of the MOB industry, and its parallels with prostitution, trafficking and slavery, highlight the underlying connection between idealised masculinity and violence towards women. With MOB, this ideology is given practical form through capitalist notions of supply and demand, as supported by the research presented here.

Donna Lee, a researcher in the US and the Philippines who has looked exhaustively at violence against women in the context of the MOB industry, claims that the male consumer views the mail-order bride as ideal because she fulfils both sides of one typified male fantasy: she is both the 'good' and 'bad' girl by being proficient at the stove and in the bed<sup>56</sup>. While many men may marry and subjugate their wives for domestic service while satisfying their sexual desires by abusing women in prostitution, mail-order brides are bought for their domestic and sexual services.

### 7.1 Prostitution

It is also worth noting the links between the mail-order bride industry and prostitution. Lee also argues that the mail-order bride industry "rests on the same historical, social and cultural institutions", as well as assumptions and biases, which "have been and continue to be the genesis of prostitution"<sup>57</sup>. Both prostitution and the mail-order bride industry promote commodification of women through masculine constructions of female sexuality<sup>58</sup>. For instance, if autonomy, independence and intellectual freedom for women become "transaction costs" to the male consumer's impulse for a submissive and female object<sup>59</sup>, ie characteristics which detract from the overall "value" of his "purchase," then he will have to ensure that those traits are not present in his wife, or control her to such an extent that she cannot express them.

Ethnicity	Women reported by brothels	%	MOB sites	%
Indian SC	125	11.04	2	5.71
Asia	206	18.20	12	34.29
Eastern Europe	260	22.97	16	45.71
African	30	2.65	3	8.57
'Global' (no specification)	33	2.91	2	5.71

### 7.2 Abuse of vulnerable groups

#### 7.2i Women with disabilities

One particularly disturbing site, <http://www.frantana.ru>, offers a gallery of Russian amputees and women with various physical limitations, most of whom are photographed without their prostheses and some in suggestive poses. One potential bride is described as follows:

"This is a pretty and very feminine girl. She always knows when to be silent and when and where she should express her own opinions. [She] does like everything beautiful and all the beauty beside her, and she, herself, can surely be a real decoration and ornament in family life."

A second gallery, called "Tastes Differ", presents women who have had polio or spinal injuries and are para- or quadriplegic. Most women are advertised as speaking no or "simple" English. Similarly St. Petersburg Amputy [sic] alleges to be almost a support-group for women who have undergone amputation, yet the nature of the women's profiles shows them as commodities, highlighting their physical, emo-

<sup>56</sup> Lee, Donna R. (1998). *Mail Fantasy: Global Sexual Exploitation in the Mail-Order Bride Industry and Proposed Legal Solutions*, *Asian Law Journal* (Berkeley): 139 and 140

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>59</sup> See Zelizer, Viviana A. (4 February 2006). *Money, Power, and Sex. Keynote Address, Sex for Sale: a symposium introducing cutting-edge research on commodified sex*. Yale: Yale UP. See also Lindee, *supra* note 2, at 562 "By knowingly placing women in potentially dangerous situations, therefore, IMBs appear to have exacerbated the informational imbalance that already contributes to the probability of domestic violence occurring in these relationships."

otional and financial difficulties and appealing to men from abroad for assistance. Some of the women featured also have children, and all profiles contain a selection of photos, many of which are sexually suggestive.

#### 7.2ii Children

In both sites, some women can be seen posing with their children – often with the children playing on a beach or, if they are quite young, perhaps taking a bath; seemingly innocent poses that may however appeal to men intending to sexually exploit vulnerable women and children.

Frantana.ru also links to a parallel project, framed as a children's charity, which is described by the owner as 'child-invalids, abandoned by parents,' although she notes that it has now been closed as, after posting photos of the children, only three men from America came to 'help.'

Some sites, while not explicitly linking the images of the women and children, also feature links to other children's "charities" or projects. When a man has been browsing images of women he can "buy," and is then met with images of similarly vulnerable children, it is reasonable to believe that a feeling of what he sees, he can purchase, may prevail.

Kherson Girls, a site specialising in women from Ukraine, features the "Kherson Girls Children fund"<sup>60</sup>. According to the website, "One can not live in the country without feeling sad for the children". Photos are available of the children, who seem to range in age from five to perhaps 13 or a bit older, although ages are not indicated. One photo shows a young girl who appears to be about six or seven years old on the shoulders of a 'volunteer' man from the west, with a caption that reads "These children are very precious"<sup>61</sup>. There is also a link to the fund's children's centre, for those aged nought-four years. Several photos are available of these children as well; the vast majority appear to be under two years of age. The project for street children includes a spreadsheet of boys and girls, their photos, ages, names, family history and any medical needs. Most children's family members are listed as 'dead', 'alcoholic', 'abusive' or 'unknown.'

These children are not portrayed as being "for sale," so to speak, but their vulnerability is highlighted and their proximity to the mail-order bride profiles is concerning.

RussianBrides.org.uk, which describes itself as "A marriage agency [where] only Russian women and men with serious intentions are welcomed," alleges to offer nearly 50,000 "girls, women and ladies" from Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. As of the latest search run on 25 September 2008, the site featured profiles of four women under 17, all of whom had photos posted. One profile contained pornographic photos containing partial nudity and extremely sexualised poses, including one of a mostly naked young girl covered in a substance which appears to be food<sup>62</sup>, and a photo of a girl in a highly sexualised pose holding a gun<sup>63</sup>. More than 350 profiles are available for girls aged 17. Screen names include 'naked', 'nasty\_3', 'above price girl' and several that begin with 'baby.' Many profiles feature girls in towels, posing on the hoods of cars and consuming alcohol. A dominant theme seems to be young women dressed as much younger children, often holding stuffed toys (one photo is captioned 'baby day'), and women dressed as animals in submissive poses. Approximately 10% of these profiles contain photos of children in sexually explicit poses or partial nudity<sup>64</sup>.

While researching this report the profiles containing photos of children being sexually abused were reported to the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF), which responded saying: "We have assessed the material specified in your report, a sample of the profiles were (sic) examined and no images of child sexual abuse were found. Therefore we are unable to take any further action"<sup>65</sup>. Further emails explaining the nature of the content were not responded to. The IWF also suggested contacting the London-based Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP). The same material was forwarded to CEOP, which also stated that it found no evidence of abuse. This raises concerns both about the ability of 'watch dog' organisations to effectively monitor these sites, and the increased risk that children face when these authorities are reluctant to take action.

<sup>60</sup> <http://www.khersongirls.com/children/index.htm>

<sup>61</sup> <http://www.khersongirls.com/children/summer2004.htm>

<sup>62</sup> [http://russianbrides.org.uk/fotoalbums\\_48840\\_2.html?resize=1&noheader=1&sid=33f7296d7751b423412d3db77cef39b2](http://russianbrides.org.uk/fotoalbums_48840_2.html?resize=1&noheader=1&sid=33f7296d7751b423412d3db77cef39b2)

<sup>63</sup> [http://russianbrides.org.uk/fotoalbums\\_62454\\_2.html?resize=1&noheader=1&sid=33f7296d7751b423412d3db77cef39b2](http://russianbrides.org.uk/fotoalbums_62454_2.html?resize=1&noheader=1&sid=33f7296d7751b423412d3db77cef39b2)

<sup>64</sup> Of 150 profiles surveyed, 16 contained pornographic material

<sup>65</sup> Email received by the author on 21 July 2008, from the Internet Watch Foundation RE: Your report to the IWF: 558012

### 7.2iii Trafficked MOBs

Research undertaken in the United States has indicated that a significant number of mail-order bride agencies are connected to commercial sex trafficking operations<sup>66</sup>. As has been noted in this research, the websites that catalogue mail-order brides are venues for pornography and prostitution, including sexually exploitative images of children<sup>67</sup>. Further research has also shown that mail-order brides become victims of violence, sexual exploitation and sex trafficking<sup>68</sup>.

The most widely-publicised case involving a mail-order bride in recent years was the story of Anastasia Solovyova, who, in 2000, moved from Kyrgyzstan to Seattle, Washington in the US to marry Indle King Jr. Unbeknown to Anastasia, her new husband had been divorced by Yekaterina Kazakova, another mail-order bride, only a few years earlier. According to Yekaterina's court petition, she sought a divorce due to domestic violence.

She reported that King punched her in the head, threw her against the wall and continuously pounded her head against the wall. Anastasia was described as being a dedicated student of English who was also admitted to the University of Washington to study law – perhaps to assist in her own battles against King. After her death it was discovered that she had kept journals detailing the abuse she suffered, including rape and sexual assault. In the months before her death she had the journals placed in a safe deposit box at a local bank; presumably to prevent her husband from reading them.

King filed for a divorce from Anastasia in August of 2000, shortly before she travelled to visit her parents. She returned to Seattle, but not to work – prompting colleagues to report her missing in early October. After three months of investigation, police were led to her body by Daniel Larson, a 20-year-old registered sex offender with whom King had had an affair during his marriage. He claimed that King had confessed the murder and location of the body to him, but the two men's stories were wrought with inconsistencies. Eventually King effectively convicted himself on the witness stand where he admitted sabotaging Anastasia's immigration paperwork.

He also admitted to abandoning her in Kyrgyzstan during a trip there in June 2000 and to then stealing her passport and other documents in an attempt to keep her from re-entering the United States to contest a divorce. Faced with emails taken from his home computer, he admitted to contacting another prospective foreign wife three weeks before Anastasia King's death, promising her that he would be free within a month. It was eventually concluded that Larson strangled Anastasia to death while her husband pinned her down. He was convicted of murder in 2002 and was sentenced to 29 years in prison; Larson will serve 20 years as well<sup>69</sup>. They also found King guilty of witness tampering for trying to pressure a co-defendant into changing his story<sup>70</sup>.

This is not a phenomenon exclusive to the US, however. In early 2007 a woman in the UK was contacted through [www.shaadi.com](http://www.shaadi.com), a UK-based site describing itself as "The World's Largest Matrimonial Service" and alleging more than 800,000 'matches' since 1997.

This particular woman was lured by romantic text messages and letters sent by Anil Tangotra, a 53-year-old GP from Ilford, Essex. He was using the matchmaking site under a pseudonym and was also lying about his marital status, age and job. He deceived his victim into meeting him in London in April 2007.

66 INS Report pp3

67 Ibid. at 1-3 ("Like the IMB industry abroad, the IMB industry operating in the United States has close ties to Internet pornography, sex tourism, and prostitution: IMB websites often have links to sites specializing in 'Internet porn, sex tourism, and escort services,' and often advertise on adult websites and in magazines like Penthouse"). See also Lindee at supra note 2. 551, 553 (2007) ("IMBs provide a cover for organized prostitution rings that traffic and victimize recently immigrated mail-order brides").

68 Ibid. See Lindee, supra note 2, at 554 ("[A]vailable information suggests not only that mail-order brides may become trafficking victims, forced into sex work or domestic service, but also that the IMB industry per se constitutes a form of sex trafficking"). See also ibid. at 562 ("[R]ather than simply facilitate trafficking in women, the IMB industry might per se constitute trafficking in women").

69 NW Source (17 March 2004) Murder conviction in mail-order bride case is upheld. *Seattle Pi*. [http://seattlepi.nwsource.com/local/165123\\_king16.html](http://seattlepi.nwsource.com/local/165123_king16.html)

70 Fisher, David (22 February 2002). Indle King found guilty of killing mail-order bride. *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. [http://seattlepi.nwsource.com/local/59387\\_king22.shtml](http://seattlepi.nwsource.com/local/59387_king22.shtml)

The night they met Dr Tangotra plied her with alcohol and may have drugged her food, forcing her to endure what she described as a night of "pain and devastation" as he physically and sexually assaulted her. She described the attack and the indifference of her rapist, saying: "There was this horrible pain. I was saying to him: 'I can't breathe'. He said, 'If you scream I will do it for five minutes more'". Then he "suddenly" stopped, announcing that he was going to watch a cricket match on television instead<sup>71</sup>.

He was eventually caught and put on trial, during which The Crown claimed that despite being arrested and questioned about this attack, he consequently targeted another woman he met through the same service and attempted to rape her as well; a pattern which can be observed in many consumer-husbands. The second victim said: "I remember walking around the room a bit and that is when I collapsed... then there was nothing". Between bouts of unconsciousness she realised Tangotra was trying to rape her; she managed to fight him off and escape. Despite pleading Not Guilty to both charges, he was convicted and sentenced to 11 years in jail<sup>72</sup>.

Anastasia had been promised a life of opportunity, education, love and support in her marriage to Indle King Jr. She moved more than 6,000 miles to begin this life and instead was subjected to control, rape, violence and eventual murder. King lied about his past, his intentions and his guilt. He exploited Anastasia's desire for a better life, lured her far from her family, abused her and discarded her, all the while courting her replacement. Anastasia was deceived, her vulnerability and lack of knowledge about her husband was exploited, and once she was several thousand miles from her country, friends, family and native language, she was physically, psychologically and sexually abused, murdered and disposed of; all at the whim of a violent and malicious man. As this pattern of events so clearly illustrates, Anastasia was trafficked to the US, yet it was not suggested to charge King with trafficking or a similar charge.

Dr Tangotra's victims were deceived as to his name, age, profession and other information. At least two of them were then persuaded to travel within the UK to meet him near London where they were incapacitated before he physically and sexually assaulted them. This also meets the international definition for trafficking.

Thankfully, both known victims escaped with their lives; his longer-term intentions for his victims remain unknown.

### 7.3 Statistics on violence

While little attention has been paid to the purchase, transfer and treatment of mail-order brides in the UK, a report prepared for the US government in 1999 highlighted that attention to mail-order marriages reflects growing concern regarding the global recruitment and transportation of women in a variety of exploitative ways. The information on trafficking suggests that mail-order brides may become victims of international trafficking in women and girls. The global magnitude and impact of this traffic in women are already well documented<sup>73</sup>. It is necessary that the government of the United Kingdom takes an interest in the purchase of these women and their subsequent entry into and treatment in the UK.

While no national figures exist on the abuse of immigrant wives in the UK, there are several factors that suggest the incidence is higher in this population than for the nation as a whole; language barriers, isolation and no recourse to public funds for the first two years of their marriage to British men make these women exceptionally vulnerable. They are also much less likely to access support services.

We can draw on statistics from the United States, also a primary destination country for MOBs, in terms of evaluating prevalence of violence against immigrant women.

According to a comprehensive health study conducted in 1998, nearly 31%<sup>74</sup> of all US women are physically abused by their husbands or male-cohabitants at some point in their lives. Statistics show that 23-26%<sup>75</sup> of British women experience some form of domestic violence as well. Incidents of domestic violence have constituted the largest increase in violent crime in the UK since 1981<sup>76</sup>.

71 Sanderson, David (29 November 2007). Marriage agency bride 'raped by doctor.' *Times Online*. <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/crime/article2964010.ece>

72 BBC News Source (1 February 2008). Rape case doctor drugged victims. *BBC News*. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/london/7222636.stm>

73 INS Report, at 7

Married immigrant women in the US experience higher levels of physical and sexual abuse than unmarried immigrant women; 59.5% compared to 49.8% respectively<sup>77</sup>.

Abuse of married immigrant women is therefore nearly twice as high (192% higher). No official national figures exist for rates of domestic violence among immigrant women (married or unmarried) in the UK, but if rates are similar to those observed in the US, we can estimate rates of 44-50% of immigrant women in the UK suffering physical, psychological and sexual abuse.

According to the government National Delivery Plan, less than 24% of domestic violence crime is reported to the police<sup>78</sup> and, as mentioned above, women with vulnerable immigration statuses, limited English skills and whose husbands intentionally isolate them will be even less likely to report their abuse. It is thought that abuse against immigrant wives tends to be particularly violent and often includes “the drugging, isolation, stalking, sexual abuse, mental abuse, physical abuse, and, in some instances, even the murder of the female, immigrant spouse”<sup>79</sup>. The World Organisation against Torture’s 2003 country report on the United Kingdom addressed the increased vulnerability of minority women and women due to their immigration status.

Women who arrive in the United Kingdom to join their husbands are subject to a two-year probationary period. During this period the immigrant spouse has “no recourse to public funds.” According to the 2008 Southall Black Sisters and Amnesty UK report: *No Recourse No Safety: The Government’s Failure to Protect Women from Violence*, those subject to the requirement cannot claim most social security benefits or housing under the Housing Act 1996, the Housing Act 1985, the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987, the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1981 or the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1988. In addition to housing, ‘public funds’ includes benefits under the Social Security Contribution and Benefits Act 1992, such as child benefit and severe disablement allowance, among others<sup>80</sup>.

Those subject to the “no recourse to public funds requirement” have no right to access Local Authority housing or the main welfare benefits, including income support. Yet, in order to access a place in a refuge, women with no personal financial means need to claim housing benefit to cover the costs of their safe accommodation. They also need to claim income support to provide the basic means to live<sup>81</sup>.

While a “domestic violence concession,” does exist, which provides that victims of domestic violence may apply for indefinite leave to remain, provided they can prove that they are a legitimate victim, it requires proof in the form of a criminal conviction against the husband, police caution or an injunction, or any two of the following: a police report, a letter from a GP, hospital doctor or social worker, an undertaking given to the Court by the abuser, or a report from a shelter caseworker<sup>82</sup>.

There has been no comprehensive UK-wide research into the numbers of women fleeing gender-based violence who are affected by the “no recourse to public funds requirement”. National research carried out by Southall Black Sisters indicates a consistent level of about 600 domestic violence cases a year. However, it is believed there may be up to 1,000 cases a year – with many going unreported because of the difficulties women face in seeking help<sup>83</sup>.

74 The Commonwealth Fund (1999). *Health Concerns Across a Woman’s Lifespan: 1998 Survey of Women’s Health*. New York: Commonwealth Fund.

75 Sen, Purna and Liz Kelly (2007). *Violence against Women in the UK: CEDAW Thematic Shadow Report on Violence against Women in the UK*. London: London Metropolitan University, Child and Woman Studies Unit.

76 Chantler, Khatidja, Erica Burman and Janet Batsleer (2003). *South Asian Women: exploring systemic service inequalities around attempted suicide and self-harm*. *European Journal of Social Work* 6 (1). At 37.

77 Dutton, Mary, Leslye Orloff and Giselle Aguilar Hass (2000). *Characteristics of Help-Seeking Behaviors, Resources, and Services Needs of Battered Immigrant Latinas: Legal and Policy Implications*. *Georgetown Journal on Poverty Law and Policy* 7(2). At 7.

78 Varying between 23% (Walby, Sylvia and Jonathan Allen (2004) *Domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking: Findings from the British Crime Survey*. Home Office Research Study 276. London: Home Office) and 35% (see also Mirrlees-Black, Catriona, Tracey Budd, Sarah Partridge and Pat Mayhew. (1998) *The 1998 British Crime Survey: England and Wales*. Home Office Statistical Bulletin 21/98. London: Home Office.)

79 Fox v. Encounters Int’l, (1996). No. 05-1404. United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit. [www.legislationline.org/upload/legislations/a9/01/db2336794ec21f12dbecde4afdc4.pdf](http://www.legislationline.org/upload/legislations/a9/01/db2336794ec21f12dbecde4afdc4.pdf)

80 Southall Black Sisters and Amnesty International. (2008) *No Recourse, No Safety: the UK Government’s failure to protect women from violence*. London: Amnesty UK. At 6.

81 Ibid

82 World Organisation against Torture (2003). *Violence against Minority Women in the United Kingdom: A Report to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination*. Geneva: OMCT at 394.

New Philanthropy Capital, a London-based organisation which advises philanthropists on effective giving, has recently released a well-documented report on funding violence against women initiatives. Its estimated costs per year in England and Wales relating to domestic violence and rape are more than £20bn and more than £12.25bn respectively – a total of more than £32.25bn<sup>84</sup>. £1.6bn is spent on violence against BME women, including forced marriage and ‘honour’ violence, and £2.1bn is spent on prostitution. While no figures exist on what percentage of these women were trafficked for servile marriage, or which women entered the country as spouses of British men, we can estimate, based on observed patterns in the marriages of mail-order brides, that treatment of these women contributes directly to the local and national cost of combating violence against women.

#### Experience of violence by groups of women in the UK

Group experiencing violence	Non-sexual violence	Sexual violence
POPPY referrals <sup>85</sup>	68.6%	61%
Prostitutes in the UK <sup>86</sup>	63%	37%
Domestic workers in the UK <sup>87</sup>	34.6%	4.4%
Women in the UK <sup>88</sup>	26%	23%
Average	48.05%	31.35%

#### 7.4 Willingness of MOB agencies to work with violent men

In 1999 Equality Now undertook an undercover research experiment to examine the willingness of MOB companies to provide services to violent men. Posing as men with histories of violence and marital problems, they sought the extent to which such men would be “readily accepted and assisted in their search for foreign brides”<sup>89</sup>.

The Equality Now research project sent “mail-order bride” companies an email purportedly from a man seeking a MOB. In the email he states that he pleaded guilty to disorderly conduct in the context of criminal charges of assault brought by his two ex-wives. The email also mentioned that he had substantial alimony and child support obligations and asked if any of these facts would prevent him from using their services. Sixty-six responses were received.

According to the summary of responses, three companies refused the fictitious customer service; four requested additional information and 59 were willing to accept him as a customer. Only one of the companies which refused him service said they did a background check to assure their female clients that the male customer has “no prior criminal history and most importantly no domestic abuse history.” Those companies which hesitated to accept him as a customer asked for more information about the circumstances of the assault charges, how he had changed and how he would be able to support a foreign wife without English language skills who would not be able to work for some time. One company willing to work with the customer stated, “We never refuse any clients that come to us with the exception of incarcerated people.” Some companies advised the customer not to reveal anything about his abusive background to the potential bride<sup>90</sup>.

83 See supra note 111 Southall Black Sisters and Amnesty International. (2008) at 6

84 New Philanthropy Capital, *Hard Knock Life*, pp7. 2008.

85 Information gathered between 2003-2007 by the POPPY Project, *Eaves Housing for Women*, London, UK.

86 See Taylor, D. (2003). *Sex For Sale: New Challenges and New Dangers for Women Working On And Off The Streets*. London: Mainliners at 8; Hunter, G., T. May, and the Drug Strategy Directorate (2004). *Solutions and Strategies: Drug Problems and Street Sex Markets: Guidance for Partnerships and Providers*. London: Home Office, Drug Strategy Directorate at 23; May, Tiggey, Alex Harocopos and Michael Hough. (2000) *For Love or Money: Pimps and the management of sex work*. London: Home Office at 18, and Home Office (2006). *A Coordinated Prostitution Strategy and a summary of responses to Paying the Price*. London: Home Office at 10.

87 Kalayaan Annual reports, 2003 through 2007. London: Kalayaan.

88 See Chantler, Khatidja, Erica Burman and Janet Batsleer (2003) supra note 106

89 Equality Now. (1999). *The Willingness of “Mail-Order Bride” Companies to Provide Services to Violent Men Summary of Research Results*. London: Equality Now.

90 Ibid at 3

One particularly disturbing respondent stated: “As far as sponsoring your alien fiancée, the government couldn’t care less if you’re Jack the Ripper as long as you’re out of jail and free to marry”<sup>91</sup>.

The annex of responses reveals high levels of misogyny and dangerously dismissive attitudes towards the women advertised, for example:

“As far as bitches go, I think I understand. They assert that “No” means “No” except when they’re nagging, in which case, “No” means, “Keep nagging and try to get beaten.” I think the language barrier actually helps here; it’s hard to squawk through a language barrier.”  
Tom Alciere (service name not indicated)<sup>92</sup>

“Having also been accused of assault by western women, who are usually the instigators of domestic violence I can tell you: A) don’t let it bother you and B) most Thais avoid confrontation, Buddhist philosophy, so they are not likely to start something that may end in violence.”  
Noy and Wayne of Loveasia.com<sup>93</sup>

The following responses were from female staff members:

“About your conduct, really guess can prejudice very much your relationships and your love-life, bringing you problems. Could be better for you try to control yourself and mood, maybe finding a loyal and kind Brazilian wife. Please, choose the girls in my catalogue you would like to get in touch, and we can start working together.”  
Solange Santos, of Brazilianlove.com<sup>94</sup>

“As we can learn from your email, you are a responsible, kind, honest and hard-working gentleman. You are the right type that Chinese ladies would like to get acquainted and share true love and lifetime with. Under the different culture, our ladies will find out the virtue on you that will be quite different with the ones your ex-wives both valued. So please do not worry about it.”  
Miss Yang of ‘A China Doll’<sup>95</sup>

91 Ibid at 2  
92 Ibid at 2  
93 Ibid at 3  
94 Ibid at 10  
95 Ibid at 10

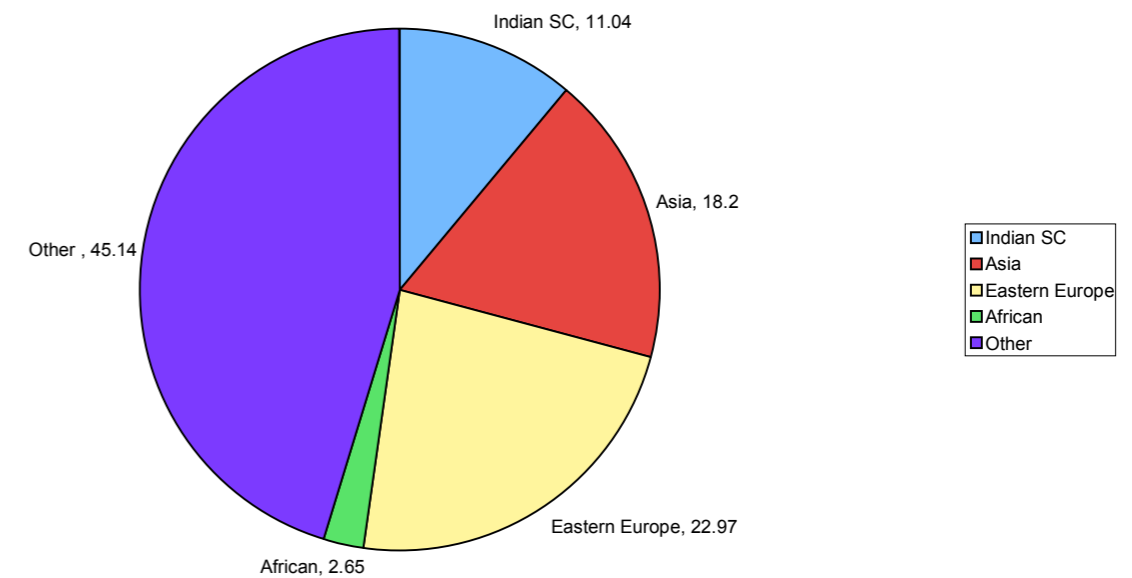
## 8. ETHNICITY

### 8.1 Ethnic representation in prostitution, trafficked women and domestic workers

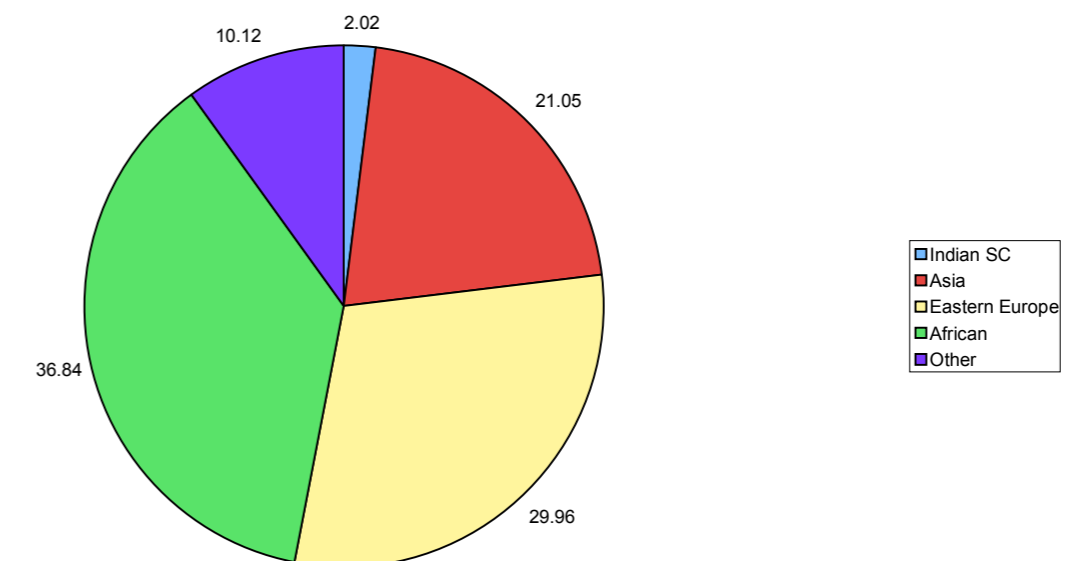
Illustrating the similarities in the profiles observed in prostitution, trafficking and domestic work can be seen in reported ethnicities. The figures below represent data collected in 2007, indicating women working in prostitution (as reported by brothels polled), POPPY Project data on countries of origin of trafficked women and data on domestic workers in the UK as collected by Kalayaan<sup>96</sup>.

#### 2007 data

Women reported by brothels: percentage of women representing indicated ethnicity

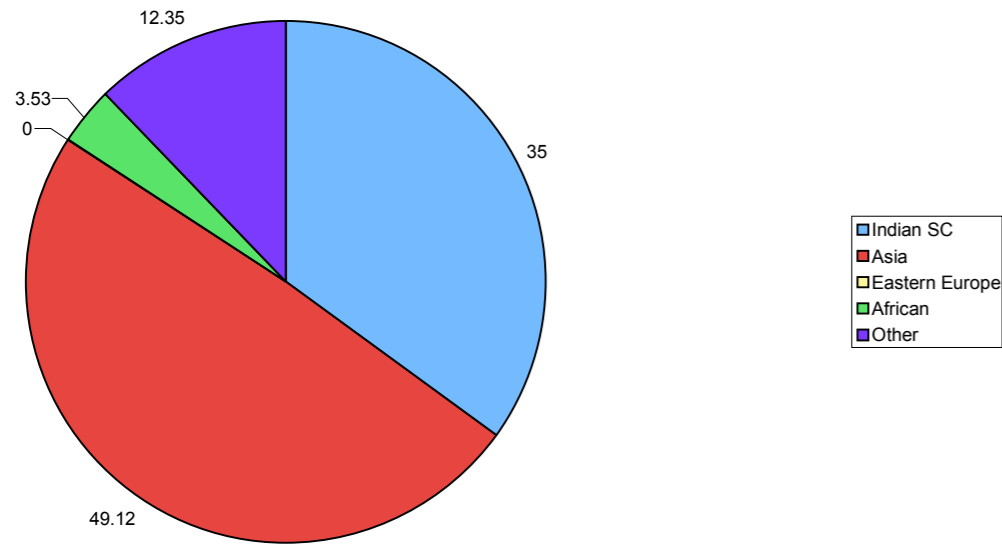


Percentage of POPPY referrals by ethnicity

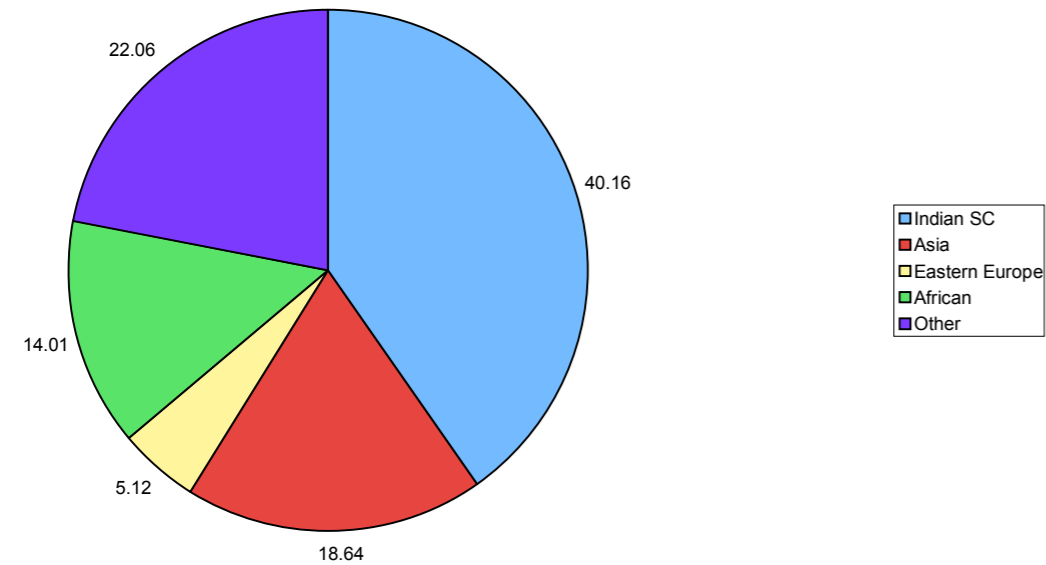


96 Atkins, Helen and Bindel, Julie. (2008). *Big Brothel: A Survey of the Off-Street Sex Industry in London*. POPPY Project: London, and Kalayaan (2007) *Annual Report 2006*. Kalayaan: London.

Percentage of domestic workers registering with Kalayaan by ethnicity



Percentage of visas issued to women entering the UK as spouses or fiancées



Similarities can also be observed in types and levels of violence experienced by these groups in the UK. The role of the mail-order bride as part prostitute, part domestic worker, and like all trafficked women, living thousands of miles from home, means that observing trends in violence in these groups may provide some insight into the experiences of mail-order brides as well.

## 2007

Ethnicity	Women reported by brothels	%	Visas issued to foreign wives	%	POPPY Project referrals	%	Domestic workers registered with Kalayaan	%
Indian SC	125		10,190	40.16	5	2.02	119	35.00
Asia	206		4,730	18.64	52		167	49.12
Eastern Europe	260		1,300	5.12	74		0	0.00
African	30	2.65	3555	14.01	91		12	3.53
TOTAL	1,132		25,372	77.94	247		340	87.65

## 8.2 Current immigration requirements

### Visas issued to foreign spouses and fiancées in the UK 2003-2007<sup>97</sup>

Wives	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	TOTAL
Europe	2,340	1,920	1,925	2,335	1,410	9,930
Africa	2,445	2,935	3,250	3,680	3,505	15,815
Indian Sub-Continent	7,280	8,095	10,260	10,045	9,905	45,585
Asia and Middle East	4,435	5,355	5,435	7,215	6,325	28,765
TOTAL	18,503	20,309	22,875	25,281	23,152	100,095

Fiancées	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	TOTAL
Europe	785	580	745	885	505	3,500
Africa	110	115	195	275	210	905
Indian Sub-Continent	195	245	295	325	280	1,340
Asia and Middle East	785	750	995	1,500	1,225	5,255
TOTAL	1,875	1,690	2,230	2,985	2,220	11,000

At the moment the immigration requirements related to entering the UK as the fiancée or spouse of a British citizen are related to the background, financial security and presumed suitability of the potential spouse to reside in the UK. To qualify for a UK fiancée visa, the following requirements must be met<sup>98</sup>:

- Have met each other;
- Are legally married or plan to marry within a reasonable time (usually six months);
- Plan to live together permanently;
- Have a place to reside for the applicant and any dependants to live until they are married without help from public funds;
- Be able to support dependants without working or receiving help from public funds.

The potential spouse must also have "sufficient knowledge of the English language" and sufficient knowl-

<sup>97</sup> As reported by the Home Office Control of Immigration Statistics in various reports 2004 through 2007. See <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration-asylum-stats.html>  
<sup>98</sup> <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/policyandlaw/immigrationlaw/immigrationrules/part8/>

edge about life in the UK. The British spouse must be either a British citizen or permanent resident of the UK, at least 21 years of age, and will have to register their intent to marry abroad and to whom, before they leave the UK<sup>99</sup>. The sponsor must also demonstrate that they possess suitable living accommodation and are financially stable. Both parties must be legally free to marry – ie not currently married to someone else – and the relationship must be considered “genuine,” ie not a tactic for securing a visa.

If a fiancée visa is granted it may be valid for up to six months, at which point it will change to a spousal visa with strict requirements for two years. This provisional visa means a spouse can work, travel in and out of the UK, and, more importantly, count the time towards requirements for citizenship. It is during this period that new spouses have no recourse to public funds, which includes access to many domestic violence-related services.

The sponsoring spouse does not have to prove anything about his intentions with regard to the marriage, beyond that he intends to live with his spouse. Men with a history of domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse or other offences are therefore just as likely to be able to bring a vulnerable woman, and perhaps her children, into the UK.

“As far as bitches go, I think I understand. They assert that “No” means “No” except when they’re nagging, in which case “No” means “Keep nagging and try to get beaten.” I think the language barrier actually helps here; it’s hard to squawk through a language barrier.”

Prospective buyer

<sup>99</sup> Home Office (23 July 2008) *Marriage Visa Age Raised to Prevent Forced Marriages*. Press Release <http://press.homeoffice.gov.uk/press-releases/Reducing-Forced-Marriages>

## 9. 'TIL DEATH DO US PART: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The very existence of an industry designed to market and sell human beings, such as the mail-order bride industry, is a form of exploitation and degradation. This is true regardless of any alleged “consent” on the part of the person being sold.

The inclusion of exploited mail-order brides in the concept of trafficking is an important step both in ensuring that the current protections are made available to a so far unidentified group of victims, and in encouraging greater regulation of an industry which exploits vulnerable women and children for gain. The following recommendations illustrate the necessary changes in research priorities, policy, law enforcement, legal services and regulation of businesses and the internet:

### 9.1 Research and development (government and civil society)

- Adequate data must be collected about violence against immigrant women, particularly women married to British men and others with no recourse to public funds. Data should be disaggregated by relevant demographic factors such as ethnicity, sexual and gender identity, religion, age, parental status, abilities or special needs.
- This research must be updated regularly so that a current and relevant profile of women affected by domestic violence can inform developments in victim care and policy.

### 9.2 Law enforcement and legal services

- The UK government must continue to charge and prosecute perpetrators of domestic violence, trafficking in human beings, prostitution and sexual assault.
- The UK government and law enforcement agencies should continue their financial and other commitments to specialist services such as the Metropolitan Police Sapphire and Human Trafficking Teams, the UK Human Trafficking Centre and various victims’ service providers.
- The UK government should ensure that adequate legal aid and access to appropriate and helpful legal advice and support is available to all victims of crime, especially vulnerable women in domestic violence situations.
- The Crown Prosecution Service should ask for strong penalties for those accused of domestic violence, child abuse or neglect, sexual assault or rape, trafficking or prostitution, especially when a victim is identified as ‘particularly vulnerable’ per sentencing guidelines<sup>100</sup>. Mail-order brides subject to domestic violence and/or with vulnerable immigration statuses should be considered particularly vulnerable.

### 9.3 Policy

- The UK government must extend the Domestic Violence Rule to include all women subjected to abuse, regardless of immigration status.
- UK government must provide immediate interim measures to allow women with vulnerable immigration statuses to flee situations of domestic violence and sexual or labour exploitation.
- When the experience of a mail-order bride constitutes trafficking, that woman must be identified as a victim and all support provisions must be made available to her, and when applicable, her children.

<sup>100</sup> *Overarching Principles: Domestic Violence*. Sentencing Guidelines Council. December 2006. *Aggravating and Mitigating Factors in Domestic Violence*. Aggravating factors (ii) *The Victims is Particularly Vulnerable*. 3.7 For cultural, religious, language, financial or any other reasons, some victims of domestic violence may be more vulnerable than others, not least because these issues may make it almost impossible for the victim to leave a violent relationship.

3.8 Where a perpetrator has exploited a victim’s vulnerability (for instance, when the circumstances have been used by the perpetrator to prevent the victim from seeking and obtaining help), an offence will warrant a higher penalty.

3.9 Age, disability or the fact that the victim was pregnant or had recently given birth at the time of the offence may make a victim particularly vulnerable.

3.10 Any steps taken to prevent the victim reporting an incident or obtaining assistance will usually aggravate the offence.



## 9.4 Marriage broker regulation and immigration

Regulation of the companies that promote the purchase of mail-order brides may help to cut down on targeting of vulnerable women and children, as well as indicate which companies are involved in smuggling or trafficking of persons.

It is suggested that the UK government regulate this industry in the following ways:

**Informed consent:** Any international marriage broker should not be allowed to provide any personal information about any foreign national to any person unless until the company has:

- Provided the foreign national client with information in the language in which that person is most comfortable, which explains the laws and regulations relating to immigration in the UK and the rights of victims of domestic violence, including the right to apply and the requirements for indefinite leave to remain in the country as a victim of domestic violence<sup>101</sup>.
- Received from the foreign national client a signed consent to the release of such personal contact information.

**Information collection:** The agencies should be required to ensure that those using their services have reported:

- Any arrest, charge or conviction record for:
  - Controlling prostitution for gain
  - Trafficking in human beings
  - Homicide
  - Rape
  - Assault
  - Sexual assault
  - Kidnapping or other deprivation of liberty
  - Child abuse or neglect
- Any current or former court-ordered restrictions on contact with another person, including any temporary or permanent injunctions.
- Their marital history, including if the person is currently married, has previously been married and how many times, how previous marriages were terminated, and if the person has previously sponsored an immigrant to whom the person has been engaged or married.
- The ages of any and all children under the age of 18.
- When available, if the person has resided in any other country for an extended period of time.

**Criminal background disclosure:** Those using these services should be subject to an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check if they plan to sponsor a fiancée or spouse for a UK visa. The foreign national (potential fiancée or spouse) should be provided with a copy of the information gathered about the sponsor.

**Penalties for violation:** The UK government should establish civil and/or criminal penalties for companies failing to fulfil these requirements, or intentionally misleading any client.

<sup>101</sup> 289A. The requirements to be met by a person who is the victim of domestic violence and who is seeking indefinite leave to remain in the United Kingdom are that the applicant:

(i) was admitted to the United Kingdom for a period not exceeding 27 months or given an extension of stay for a period of 2 years as the spouse or civil partner of a person present and settled here; or;  
(ii) was admitted to the United Kingdom for a period not exceeding 27 months or given an extension of stay for a period of 2 years as the unmarried or same-sex partner of a person present and settled here; and  
(iii) the relationship with their spouse or civil partner or unmarried partner or same-sex partner, as appropriate, was subsisting at the beginning of the relevant period of leave or extension of stay referred to in (i) or (ii) above; and  
(iv) is able to produce such evidence as may be required by the Secretary of State to establish that the relationship was caused to permanently break down before the end of that period as a result of domestic violence.

## 9.5 Internet

- The UK government must make renewed a commitment to prohibit the creation, possession, sale and transfer of any websites, especially those registered in the UK, which are operating as a platform for pornography or media depicting child sexual abuse.
- Pressure must be placed on search engines, internet service providers and those buying and selling internet advertising to boycott mail-order bride sites.

“[Russian women] are very attractive to me because of their physical beauty, the likelihood of a high education, their increased femininity (over western women), and their great sense of culture. It also doesn't hurt that they have a better grip on the roles that men and women should play in a relationship.”

Prospective buyer

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## APPENDIX B MAIL-ORDER BRIDE WEBSITES

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1. A Foreign Affair (2008): [www.loveme.com](http://www.loveme.com)
2. A Perfect Wife (2008): [www.aperfectwife.com](http://www.aperfectwife.com)
3. A Pretty Woman (2008): [www.aprettywoman.com](http://www.aprettywoman.com)
4. Ab3 (2008): [www.ab3.com](http://www.ab3.com)
5. African Princess (2008): [www.africanprincess.com](http://www.africanprincess.com)
6. Alena Marriage Agency (2008): [www.alena-marriage-agency.com](http://www.alena-marriage-agency.com)
7. Amputees PB (2008): [www.amputeespb.com](http://www.amputeespb.com)
8. Anastasia International: [www.russianbrides.com](http://www.russianbrides.com)
9. Brides 4 U: [www.brides-4u.com](http://www.brides-4u.com)
10. Cherry Blossoms: [www.blossoms.com](http://www.blossoms.com)
11. China Bride: [www.chinabride.com](http://www.chinabride.com)
12. Chn Love: [www.chnlove.com](http://www.chnlove.com)
13. East Meet West: [www.eastmeetwest.com](http://www.eastmeetwest.com)
14. Ekaterina Marriage Agency: [www.yourrussianlady.ck.ua](http://www.yourrussianlady.ck.ua)
15. Elena's Models: [www.elenasmodels.com](http://www.elenasmodels.com)
16. Filipina Heart: [www.filipinaheart.com](http://www.filipinaheart.com)
17. Frantana: [www.frantana.ru](http://www.frantana.ru)
18. Get Married Now: [www.getmarriednow.com](http://www.getmarriednow.com)
19. Heart of Asia: [www.heart-of-asia.com](http://www.heart-of-asia.com)
20. Interbride: [www.interbride.ru](http://www.interbride.ru)
21. Japan Cupid: [www.japan cupid.com](http://www.japan cupid.com)
22. Kherson Girls: [www.khersongirls.com](http://www.khersongirls.com)
23. Love of Asia Vietnam: [www.loveofasiavietnam.com](http://www.loveofasiavietnam.com)
24. Mail Order Brides: <http://www.mailorderbrides.com/>
25. Marry a Chinese: [www.marryachinese.com](http://www.marryachinese.com)
26. Muslim Marriages: [www.muslim-marriages.com](http://www.muslim-marriages.com)
27. My Afro Love: [www.myafrolove.com](http://www.myafrolove.com)
28. Russian Brides: [www.russianbrides.org.uk](http://www.russianbrides.org.uk)
29. Shaadi: [www.shaadi.com](http://www.shaadi.com)
30. Single Brides: [www.singlebrides.com](http://www.singlebrides.com)
31. Single Russian Women: [www.single-russian-women.com](http://www.single-russian-women.com)
32. Thai American and European Introduction Service: [www.thaisdc.com](http://www.thaisdc.com)
33. Thai Professional: [www.thai-professional.com](http://www.thai-professional.com)
34. The International Bride: [www.theinternationalbride.com](http://www.theinternationalbride.com)
35. Tver Angels: [www.tverangels.com](http://www.tverangels.com)

## **APPENDIX C ABOUT EAVES**

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Eaves is a London-based charity which provides high quality housing and support to vulnerable, homeless women – including those trafficked into prostitution and those who have experienced domestic violence – through two housing projects. We also carry out research, advocacy and campaigning to prevent all forms of violence against women.

### **Accommodation projects**

#### **Eaves Women's Aid (EWA)**

One of the largest refuge providers in London, offering 66 bed spaces across four boroughs to women and children fleeing domestic violence. Services include child and family work, outreach support for women who wish to remain in their homes and free specialist legal advice. EWA also provides resettlement support for women moving on from the refuge.

#### **The POPPY Project**

Provides accommodation and support to women trafficked into the UK for the purposes of sexual exploitation. It is the only specialist service in the UK – and the only Government-funded service – for women trafficked into prostitution. It has 35 bed spaces and an outreach team which works with women still involved in the sex industry. It also offers resettlement support for women moving on from POPPY accommodation.

### **Research & development projects**

#### **The Lilith Project**

The Lilith Project is a dynamic London-based organisation which works to eliminate all aspects of violence against women. It has a wide remit and work ranges from research into various aspects of violence against women, to training and education for the women's sector, to lobbying for legislative change and to working directly with women who have experienced sexual violence. A major part of its work is to provide support and networking opportunities for the women's sector – to enable them to keep up-to-date with new legislation, best practice and developments in the field. It also works to demonstrate, through campaigning and training, that violence against women is both a cause and effect of gender inequality.

#### **POPPY Research and Development**

POPPY Research and Development is a centre of excellence for research, education and training on issues relating to trafficking of women for sexual exploitation and women wishing to exit prostitution. Its unique position of conducting research about trafficking, alongside providing support and accommodation for women who have been trafficked, results in detailed and informed analysis that can help to shape public policy around prostitution and trafficking.

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