

Raw deal for foreign brides in Taiwan: study

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More than a quarter of a million women have been sold as wives and baby-makers in South East Asia, but they are getting a raw deal in health care and social inclusion.

A PhD study undertaken by Queensland University of Technology nursing researcher Yung-Mei Yang has found that foreign wives often suffer low mental and physical health, and may suffer domestic violence or enter prostitution to make money.

Ms Yang surveyed more than 200 foreign brides living in Taiwan, most of whom were sold from Vietnam and Indonesia.

She said they were difficult to find, because their in-laws often hid them away from the public eye.

"It's a new phenomenon of the last 10 years in Korea and Taiwan, where men can't find a wife, so they buy one," Ms Yang said.

"From 1990 to 2007, 130,000 foreign brides were married to men in Taiwan. Around 89,000 of those wives came from Vietnam legally, but many more illegally."

Ms Yang said the young women sacrificed themselves to help their families, who were very poor and would receive money through the marriage.

"The men are often from a lower level of society and are usually quite

old, while the average age of their foreign wives is 21," she said.

"They pay around AU\$6000 to a marriage broker to select a wife from as many as 100 candidates.

"The men want the women to have a baby, especially a boy, to carry on the family line, and these women may have a high birth rate.

"The women are treated very well during birth and pregnancy, because babies are highly sought, but their health is very poor at other times, and if they have not had a baby, they are rejected."

Ms Yang said the wives she spoke with felt alienated and had great difficulty in adapting to their new culture, arriving in the country alone and unable to speak the local language.

"There is a stigma against foreign wives and they are not equal in the marriage," she said.

"Domestic violence is a big problem.

"They are not allowed to work, because they are on a spousal visa, not a working visa, and they may end up working as prostitutes."

Ms Yang said the foreign wives had a lower level of health compared to local women and had a difficult time accessing health care.

"They often suffer psychosomatic syndrome and may report that they cannot sleep or suffer bodily pain, when in fact it is a symptom of their anxiety and isolation," she said.

"So it is important when providing health care to these women that nurses pay attention to women who complain of pain.

"There may also be discrimination in patient-nurse/doctor relationships in these countries where foreign brides exist. The women are often ignored by doctors and nurses, who are sometimes afraid of them.

"We need culturally sensitive health care, because culture is changing quickly and becoming more multi-cultural in South East Asian countries."

Source: Queensland University of Technology

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