

Trafficking in Person Among Singkawang Women

Perdagangan Manusia di Kalangan Perempuan Singkawang

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Abstract

Trafficking in persons, involving modern slavery, sexual exploitation, forced labor, and organ trafficking, is a global issue in Indonesia, particularly in border areas like Sumatra and Kalimantan. Mail-order brides, promised marriages, are exploited, despite local village officials' disregard. This research aims to identify and examine the trafficking in persons still occurs between the women of Singkawang, West Kalimantan, and Taiwanese men. This qualitative research uses a descriptive method to study mail-order bride trafficking in Singkawang, West Kalimantan, a region bordering Sarawak-East Malaysia. The study involves observation, focus group discussions, and data analysis, identifying themes and addressing issues such as poverty, low education, and deeply rooted local culture. Mail-order brides in Singkawang, are a growing global phenomenon where women migrate for better livelihoods. Victims often face sexual and labor exploitation in their home countries. Stakeholders must monitor marriage brokers to address this issue

Keywords: trafficking in person; mail-order bridges; Taiwan; Indonesia

Abstrak

Perdagangan orang, yang melibatkan perbudakan modern, eksploitasi seksual, kerja paksa, dan perdagangan organ, adalah masalah global di Indonesia, terutama di daerah perbatasan seperti Sumatra dan Kalimantan. Pengantin pesanan, yang dijanjikan pernikahan, dieksploitasi, meskipun pejabat desa setempat mengabaikannya. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi dan meneliti perdagangan orang yang masih terjadi antara wanita Singkawang, Kalimantan Barat, dan pria Taiwan. Penelitian kualitatif ini menggunakan metode deskriptif untuk mempelajari perdagangan wanita pesanan di Singkawang, Kalimantan Barat, sebuah wilayah yang berbatasan dengan Sarawak-Malaysia Timur. Studi ini melibatkan observasi, diskusi kelompok fokus, dan analisis data, mengidentifikasi tema-tema dan menangani isu-isu seperti kemiskinan, pendidikan rendah, dan budaya lokal yang sangat mendalam. Pengantin pesanan di Singkawang adalah fenomena global yang semakin berkembang di mana perempuan bermigrasi untuk mencari kehidupan yang lebih baik. Korban sering menghadapi eksploitasi seksual dan tenaga kerja di negara asal mereka. Para pemangku kepentingan harus memantau perantara pernikahan untuk mengatasi masalah ini

Kata kunci: trafficking in person; pengantin pesanan; Taiwan; Indonesia

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Introduction

The phenomenon of trafficking in persons has become a serious and ongoing global issue (Winterdyk et al., 2011). Based on data collected by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in the Counter Trafficking Data Collaborative, as of October 2024, there were 4,066 victims of trafficking in persons in Indonesia, with a dominance of female victims amounting to 83% (The Counter Trafficking Data Collaborative, 2024). Trafficking in persons places more emphasis on human exploitation, including modern slavery, sexual exploitation, forced labor, and organ trafficking (Scarpa, 2008). Trafficking in persons refers to a form of modern slavery that is not only categorized as a violation of Human Rights (HAM) but also constitutes a criminal offense and violates international law due to its transnational nature, known as Transnational Organized Crime (TOC) (IOM, 2021; Stickle et al., 2019).

Trafficking in persons often occurs in border areas, such as Sumatra with Singapore and the Malay Peninsula, Kalimantan with Malaysia (Sabah and Sarawak) (Sulaksono, 2018; Ford & Lyons, 2012). Similarly, in border cities like Medan (North Sumatra) (Missbach & Sinanu, 2014), Dumai, Tanjung Balai Karimun (Riau), Batam and Tanjung Pinang (Riau Islands) (Sembada & Heryadi, 2020), Nunukan and Tarakan (East Kalimantan) (Esther, 2016; Prakoso, 2019; Mahalingam & Sidhu, 2021; Ramadani et al., 2023; Wahyudi et al., 2023), Singkawang and Sambas (West Kalimantan) (Sikki & Puspita, 2024; Naibaho, 2011), and Bitung (Sulawesi Utara). One of the most concerning modus operandi of trafficking in persons in Indonesia is the phenomenon of "ordered brides" or what is internationally known as mail-order brides. The term mail-order brides was first introduced in Indonesia by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to explain cases similar to marriage migration (Kemenlu, 2019; Kinasih et al., 2024; Romadhona et al., 2024).

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs Returns Indonesian Citizens Who Became Victims of Mail-Order Brides to Indonesia from the People's Republic of China (PRC) (Yoteni, 2021). Data from the Directorate of Protection for Indonesian Citizens and Indonesian Legal Entities (PWNI-BHI) of the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the number of mail-order bride cases in Indonesia between 2015 and 2019 amounted to 115 cases, while according to the Indonesian Migrant Workers Union, from 2017 to 2020 there were 26 cases spread across several regions in

Indonesia, such as in Banten 3 cases, West Java 4 cases, Central Java 1 case, DKI Jakarta 9 cases, and West Kalimantan 9 cases. In the scheme of trafficking in persons, the perpetrators exploit the hopes of Indonesian women for a better life. They promise marriage to men from countries considered more prosperous, but in reality, this is just a cover for carrying out acts of exploitation. This phenomenon is deeply rooted in society, both involuntarily and voluntarily, for women from developing countries with less capable economic backgrounds to improve their living standards through marriage practices with men from developed countries (Wilk, 2017).

In Indonesia, the first cases of mail-order brides were found in West Kalimantan, specifically in Singkawang, which borders East Malaysia, in 1995, with 1,243 cases recorded (Sikwan et al., 2004). This process occurs due to the existence of syndicates from Taiwan and Indonesia that have systematically and structurally organized the registration, recruitment, housing, and sending processes abroad. The term mail order bride was first used to describe the migration cases of Singkawang girls, referred to as amoi (Yokota, 2022). The Singkawang area often targeted by matchmaking agency agents and "matchmakers" to find and obtain potential mail-order bride victims (Sandel & Lie Owens, 2024). In the practice of fraud with the mail-order bride modus in Singkawang, the victims are promised to marry Taiwanese citizens with high social and economic status. The groom, a Taiwanese citizen, is required to pay around IDR 400 million to the matchmaking agency in Taiwan. Meanwhile, the Indonesian woman is paid a dowry of around IDR 20 million by the matchmaking agency. The victim was also promised that they could regularly send money to their family every month and if they felt uncomfortable, they could easily return to Indonesia. From the above explanation, it is very important to examine why trafficking in persons still occurs between the women of Singkawang, West Kalimantan, and Taiwanese men, and why local village officials still ignore this issue because it clearly exploits women.

Research Methods

This research uses a descriptive research type with a qualitative approach. There are several stages used in this research. The first stage is the purposive determination of the research location as the research site in Singkawang, West Kalimantan. The consideration taken in establishing Singkawang, West Kalimantan is that first, Singkawang, West Kalimantan is a

region directly bordering Sarawak-East Malaysia. Second, Singkawang is a place where trafficking in persons occurs in the form of mail-order brides. Third, Singkawang has been a development area of the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia since 2018 due to numerous issues that contribute to the existence of mail-order bride cases that have not yet been resolved, including high poverty levels, low education levels, and the idealism of parents and deeply rooted local culture. The second stage is data collection, conducted through observation to identify the process of mail-order brides and the cases found in that location. In addition to observation, a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was conducted with various parties such as the Indonesian National Student Movement (GMNI), the Islamic Student Association (HMI), the Tarbiyah Science College (STIT), the Indonesian Muslim Youth (PMI), the Madura Family Association of Singkawang (IKAMA), the Malay Customary and Cultural Council, the Madura Family Association, students and lecturers from the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences at Tanjungpura University (UNTAN), village officials, and local community leaders. The final stage is data analysis. The data collected from observations and FGDs are transcribed, then classified and identified based on themes, and finally analyzed.

Results and Discussion

Mail-Order Brides not only happen in Indonesia but also in Sri Lanka and India (Nguyen, 2014). Mail-order brides are a phenomenon that is no longer unfamiliar in the global landscape of international marriages with the help of matchmaking agencies (Meng, 1994). In addition, Jackson (2002) added that mail-order brides refer to a practice that occurs worldwide, where women migrate from their countries to marry for a better livelihood (Jackson, 2002). For most people, a mail-order bride is the only option due to the family's socioeconomic conditions, as there are no other alternatives. Generally, young women who are usually referred to as "amoi" are offered to marry Taiwanese men with the promise of a more stable life (IOM, 2021).

In Singkawang, mail order brides have undergone significant changes. Currently, the presence of organizations that manage ordered brides is growing rapidly, is transnational in nature, and involves the recruitment of women from developing countries as well as marriage agents in developed countries who create catalogs to attract prospective husbands, becoming increasingly prevalent in society (Yoteni, 2021). It is not uncommon for mail-order bride victims in the

husband's home country to experience sexual and labor exploitation. This conveyed by a UNTAN lecturer:

“The Amoi’s (meaning in Singkawang) are indeed very popular among Taiwanese people, who are of Chinese ethnicity and come as tourists. They are looking for a partner or a mistress. However, it is also possible that they, besides being wives, will become unpaid laborers in their families”.

The Taiwanese people come to Singkawang not to settle but only as tourists. They only stay for one to two weeks. The goal is indeed to get a wife and bring her to Taiwan. A similar sentiment expressed by HMI students explaining:

“These young women are always being lured by brokers or matchmaking agencies. The matchmakers or dating agencies here (in Singkawang) are quite secretive; even we find it very difficult to know who they really are and what their networks are like. From what I see, the brokers or matchmaking agencies come from their own circles, ma'am, and the parents also play a role in introducing them to the brokers or matchmaking agencies, because their daughters want to help their families economically.”

Participants of the FGD from STIT also added that:

“Marriage in Singkawang, the Amoi are on average 17 years old and above, and if I hear from the Amoi's parents, the Taiwanese men are mostly elderly, because it is said that men have difficulty finding a partner”

The term "amoi" in Singkawang refers to a girl who is typically around 17 years old. This Amoi is always pursued and sought after by Taiwanese men to marry because she is still innocent and obedient to her husband. Taiwanese men prefer women from Singkawang because their appearance is similar to Taiwanese women, and they can speak with the dialect of one of the languages in Taiwan, making it easy to adapt to their culture. In addition, Singkawang women are more obedient, willing to serve, skilled in managing household affairs, and willing to accept a smaller dowry than Taiwanese women (Yenny et al., 2020). Children under the age of 18 are in a very vulnerable position to become victims of human trafficking. Marriages such as mail-order bride often overlooked by the community or local village authorities. Marriage involving children under the age of 18 violates the provisions of Law No. 35/2014 on Amendments to Law No. 23/2002 on Child Protection. Next, in Article 76 (f), there is a rule that prohibits child

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trafficking stating that *"Everyone is prohibited from placing, allowing, committing, ordering, or participating in the abduction, sale, or trafficking of children."* This is also reinforced by a case in West Kalimantan involving the trafficking of two children around the ages of 15 and 16. For the people of Singkawang, their marriages are legally recognized in both Indonesia and Taiwan, but they do not realize that mail-order brides are considered trafficking in persons and a criminal offense.

This is what then makes it difficult for the Indonesian government and the local government, in this case, the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to collaborate with the West Kalimantan Provincial Government to approach the victims directly. In the practice of fraud with the mail-order bride modus in Singkawang, the victims are promised to marry Taiwanese citizens with high social and economic status. The groom from Taiwan is required to pay around Rp.400 million to the matchmaking agency in Taiwan. Meanwhile, the Singkawang woman is paid a dowry of around Rp.20 million by the matchmaking agency. The victim was also promised that they could regularly send money to their family every month and if they felt uncomfortable, they could easily return to Indonesia. In Singkawang culture, parents are very pleased when these amoi migrate to Taiwan and find a match who is also of Hakka Chinese descent. It seems that the marriage between Singkawang amoi and Taiwanese men is not only a solution to escape poverty but also because they come from the same culture, which is the Hakka ethnic group, and share the same belief, which is the worship of deities. Their relationship is taught that all Hakka people are a unity among family members who are encouraged to help and give to each other and to maintain the bonds of brotherhood among them (Tanggok, 2017). This is what has caused the marriage between the Singkawang amoi and the Taiwanese man to continue until now. Another reason for the marriage between the Singkawang amoi and Taiwanese men is the norms in choosing a partner for Taiwanese men. Generally, Taiwanese men who are economically capable of meeting their wife's needs have the freedom to choose a girl from a wealthy background.

Conversely, if a Taiwanese man cannot meet his wife's needs, he must look for a girl from the common society. Taiwanese men have a greater obligation to their wives because they are the head of the household. These norms are what lead economically less capable Taiwanese men to seek a life partner in a Singkawang amoi who will accept them as they are. For the Hakka tribe,

the custom after marriage is to live in the husband's family environment. Amoi who have married Taiwanese men must live in Taiwan and are allowed to return to Singkawang once a year, which is during the Lunar New Year celebration. This socio-cultural factor of the Hakka tribe strengthens Taiwanese men to seek their life partners among Singkawang amoi. Mail-order bride is one form of trafficking in persons. Trafficking in persons or human trafficking is regulated in Law No. 21/2007 on the Eradication of the Crime of Trafficking in Persons (UU PTPPO). In this law, specifically Article 1, human trafficking is defined as encompassing 3 (three) stages, namely the process, method, and purpose of exploitation. The process is defined as the act of recruiting, transporting, harboring, transferring, or receiving a person by means of threat, force, abduction, confinement, forgery, deception, abuse of power or a position of vulnerability, debt bondage, or giving payments. The purpose of trafficking in persons is for exploitation such as prostitution, forced labor, slavery or similar to slavery, oppression, extortion, physical exploitation, sexual exploitation, reproductive organ exploitation, organ trafficking or transplantation, and physical labor exploitation. Generally, trafficking in persons obtains consent from those in control, which can be from close relatives such as parents or siblings. Trafficking in persons can occur within a country or across countries.

Trafficking in persons is also a crime that violates international law because it is transnational in nature. This transnational crime demands international cooperation to prevent, apprehend perpetrators, and protect victims, and to address the root causes that make individuals vulnerable to exploitation. In general, trafficking in persons is a complex process involving extensive coordination with many agents at every phase, in the country of origin, transit, and destination (Clark, 2003). Trafficking in persons can occur in various ways, ranging from organized criminal groups operating large-scale transnational networks with political and economic contacts in both sending and receiving countries, to small-scale operations that only trade one or two people at a time (Barnett, 2011). The complexity of the causes behind the ongoing practices of mail order brides, which is a form of trafficking in persons, remains unresolved because the marriage of Singkawang women to Taiwanese men has been a long-standing tradition. Even the village authorities in Singkawang cannot break the chain of human trafficking because the role of the parents is quite significant. The complexity of the causes behind the continuation of mail order bride practices has become an unresolved chain problem. The role of stakeholders such as village

officials, universities, the government, religious/community organizations, and the public is to start monitoring marriage brokers or agents to promptly address and mitigate the surge in mail-order bride cases. Without cooperation from these stakeholders, mail-order bride practices will continue.

Conclusion

Mail-order brides are a global phenomenon where women migrate to Taiwan for better livelihoods due to socioeconomic conditions. These women, often referred to as "amoi" by their families, are offered a stable life by Taiwanese men. This practice is becoming more prevalent in international marriages, with matchmaking agencies playing a significant role in facilitating these relationships. In Singkawang, Indonesia, mail-order brides have experienced significant changes due to the growing presence of transnational organizations that manage ordered brides. These organizations recruit women from developing countries and marriage agents from developed countries to create catalogs to attract prospective husbands. Mail-order bride victims often experience sexual and labor exploitation in their home countries. Taiwanese people come to Singkawang as tourists, staying for one to two weeks to get a wife and bring her to Taiwan. The term "amoi" in Singkawang refers to a girl typically around 17 years old, who is pursued and sought after by Taiwanese men to marry because she is still innocent and obedient to her husband. Taiwanese men prefer women from Singkawang because their appearance is similar to Taiwanese women, they can speak with the dialect of one of the languages in Taiwan, and Singkawang women are more obedient, willing to serve, skilled in managing household affairs, and willing to accept a smaller dowry than Taiwanese women. Children under the age of 18 are in a very vulnerable position to become victims of human trafficking. Marriages such as mail-order brides are often overlooked by the community or local village authorities, as they violate the provisions of Law No. 35/2014 on Amendments to Law No. 23/2002 on Child Protection. Additionally, Article 76 (f) of the law prohibits child trafficking, which has been reinforced by a case in West Kalimantan involving the trafficking of two children around the ages of 15 and 16.

Research Limitation

This research mainly focusing to identify the human trafficking among women in Singkawang, understanding the term of "mail-order bride" from the perspective such as the government

institution, NGO, educational institutions, and other organization. However, the future research topic could more specific by identifying and analysis of Rethinking Human Trafficking among Singkawan Women and Regulatory Framework and the Women Experiencing Trafficking.

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