

NATIONAL

Activist slams indifference to sexual exploitation of girls in 'JK' industry

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An activist fighting the notorious “JK” industry has called on Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to initiate efforts to eradicate the increasingly knotty problem of sex trafficking involving high school girls in Japan, describing the nation as too indifferent toward curbing child prostitution.

Speaking at the Foreign Correspondents’ Club of Japan in Tokyo on Thursday, Yumeno Nito, 25, founder of Colabo, a Tokyo-based support group for marginalized teen girls, said the situation surrounding the part-time job industry and sexual exploitation of *joshi kosei* (high school girls) has gotten worse.

Although progress has been made by police to round up the girls and ban the distribution of racy flyers on the streets, Nito said the traffickers who hire them continue to outsmart authorities by exploiting legal loopholes to create variants of their businesses.

But perhaps most problematic, she said, is that the central government apparently is not interested in stamping out such commercial sex involving teens.

“Japan significantly lags behind other industrialized nations in cracking down on child prostitution. Instead, the government downright ignores what is happening to those girls,” Nito said.

The misguided assumption that the girls, not the traffickers or customers, are to blame runs deep within the government and society, she said.

“But this thinking does not solve the problem. The society instead must think how to change the background or environment of the girls by providing them with care and support so they don’t find themselves in these businesses,” Nito said.

Many girls ensnared by the industry, the activist said, come from underprivileged backgrounds at home, including poverty, neglect and abuse. Some are battling mental illnesses as well.

Those judged not attractive enough or deemed to have learning disabilities tend to be marginalized to the point where they work in extremely dirty, stinky places that resemble nothing but brothels and are treated “as if they were sex slaves,” Nito said.

The JK industry’s best known forms used to be “rifure” (reflexology), where the girls massage customers and lie alongside them, or “osanpo” (walking), where the girls take a stroll with customers as if on a date.

Nito said that despite the purportedly nonsexual nature of these services, almost all of the girls she has encountered providing them confessed to having been pressed for sex by male clients. The U.S. State Department, too, cited JK osanpo as an example of sex trafficking in its annual report on the problem released last June.

In a recent development, a shop owner in Tokyo's Toshima Ward was arrested earlier this month for allegedly running an enterprise in which girls were instructed to fold origami cranes with their legs wide open, allowing customers to peek at their underwear through a one-way mirror.

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