

## Roundtable: What does the Atlanta Tragedy Mean? Korean Diaspora Speaks

24 March 2021

WIND Korean Feminist Group

Thank you to Hae Yeon and Yoonkyung for inviting WIND to the Roundtable tonight. I am Yeon Ju Heo, a member of the WIND Korean feminist group.

Our WIND Members discussed the Atlanta tragedy last week. We got to know that today's Roundtable was organized just before our meeting. It was good though that we were able to share our thoughts and feelings about the Atlanta tragedy with each other. Today, I would like to talk about what we discussed in three aspects, which are the media's reporting attitude, how we felt about this tragic event, and what we can or should do on behalf of our WIND members.

First, it was unpleasant to see how the media has framed the motivation of this crime. Although the conservative media mentioned that the liberal media needs to wait for facts before placing blame, the fact is that six of the eight people killed in the shooting were Asian women regardless of what the motivation was. However, some media and police seem to focus the motivation on his sex addiction problem. It was upsetting that even South Korean media<sup>1</sup> was focused on the location where the shooting occurred. The media was centered around the fact that the location was named a Spa, but its surrounding area was filled with prostitution shops. The media said there seem to be many Korean people worrying about the American public options and they will target the problem of how the prostitution business was operated by Korean Americans.

It cannot be rationalized that he had carried out the shootings at the massage shops solely because of his sex addiction. He intentionally targeted three Asian spas. Six Asian women could have been targeted because of their race, their gender, and their job. This tragic event shows how strong the prejudice against Asian women or Asian massage workers is. We don't know whether the massage workers who were killed would have considered themselves sex workers.

How much longer should Asian women endure sexualized racism? I don't think this behavior should be tolerated as much as it is present in our society. For decades, the Asian stereotype and fetishization of Asian women have become extremely prevalent and we can no longer just sit idly by. It is important to shed some light and expose these behaviors for what it is- a racially charged and gender-motivated hate crime. Whether or not his motivation was sex addiction, this is a hate crime against Asian women. We must stop labeling it as COVID anxiety or sex addiction. The investigators must distinguish between excuses and motivations for this tragic event. This is their duty.

In our meeting, our discussion moved to our daily lives in Canada. As an Asian woman, we talked about how many invisible threats related to race and gender we have to face in the workplace, at school, on the streets, or in the store. Even if we just live without perceiving any race or gender-

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<sup>1</sup> <https://m.nocutnews.co.kr/news/5518624>

related threats in our daily lives, these tragic events continue to imprint our identity as a minority on our minds and make us live our lives in tension.

Racism towards Asians has been so normalized in this day and age, that it is sometimes hard to recognize, or it's even brushed off because it is so common, which only contributes to the problem and shows how we need to change. It is not uncommon to hear racial discrimination cases<sup>2</sup> below from Asian people in Canada. There are many unreported racial discrimination cases that the public plays off because of the normalized racial discrimination towards Asians.

*“When my child wanted to ask a question in class, their teacher answered everyone else’s question before helping my child. My child was discouraged.”*

*“A big dog kept trying to approach me. While I was trying to avoid it, the dog’s owner pulled the dog away and said that I was a piece of garbage towards the dog.”*

*“We submitted an offer to bid on a house we were looking at, but it was rejected. When we looked into what happened, we found that the house was sold at the same price we bid for it, but our offer was rejected due to the owner’s racist tendencies.”*

Lastly, we discussed what we can and should do. It was difficult to clarify what we can do. Is it easy to perceive discrimination and prejudice regarding race and gender in our daily lives? I can’t say it is because there are many invisible experiences. How and where can we share these experiences? How common is discrimination in day-to-day life? I still don't know enough to answer these questions. I want to find more granular data that show the quantified results of hate crimes broken down by race, gender, job, etc.

The recent report of police-reported hate crime in Canada 2018<sup>3</sup> showed that the number of police-reported hate crimes decreased by 13%, for a total of 780 incidents, compared to the previous year. However, the Ottawa police said that hate crime reports were up 57% in 2020, with 182 incidents reported last year compared with 116 cases reported in 2019<sup>4</sup>, and in Vancouver, the number of anti-Asian hate crimes increased by 717% from 12 cases in 2019 to 98 cases in 2020.<sup>5</sup> The important thing is not only to gather police-reported hate crimes but also to gather the data on “invisible” hate and to understand the psychological and physical negative effect of hate crimes on individual victims and their communities. Thompson (2020, p. 1)<sup>6</sup> stated hate crimes can cause trauma to victims, family, and friends; increase fear of being targeted for future crimes; and can escalate and prompt retaliation. The government-funded survey of anti-Asian racism across Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>7</sup> showed the data on racial attack incidents, which were self-reported. 59% of those who reported racial attack incidents are those who identify as women. The top 3 locations where racist attacks occurred were a public space/park/street/sidewalk (49%), a grocery or food store/restaurant (17%), and public transport (9%). The top 3 types of discrimination were verbal harassment (73%), physical force/aggression or unwanted physical contact (11%), and coughed

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<sup>2</sup> The cases were collected from Toronto Korean Community

<sup>3</sup> [Report of the Police-reported hate crime in Canada, 2018](#)

<sup>4</sup> <https://globalnews.ca/news/7662271/ottawa-police-hate-crimes-2020>

<sup>5</sup> <https://globalnews.ca/news/7647135/horgan-bc-presser-feb-18/>

<sup>6</sup> Thompson, Sara (2020). [SME Research Brief: Hate Crimes](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Government-funded report of anti-Asian racism across Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)

at/spat on (10%). The top 3 consequences of the racist attacks were mental distress/emotional harm (73%), physical harm (8%), and loss of services and/or benefits to meet my needs (3%).

I hope racism and misogyny identification resources will be popularized and brought to life. To call for action against racism, please refer to the [resources in the FIFSW statement of solidarity against anti-Asian racism](#).

Make the invisible visible!