

Did twelve Vietnamese students disappear from a university in Taoyuan?

Friday 30 December 2022, by [HIOE Brian](#) (Date first published: 24 December 2022).

MEDIA REPORTS from pan-Blue outlets suggested earlier this week that 12 Vietnamese students had gone missing from a university of science and technology in Taoyuan. In particular, reporting on the incident suggested that three students from the university had been found to have been coerced into sex work by labor brokers.

This seems to have been reporting on an incident that occurred in early December when police, acting on a tip, arrested three Vietnamese women in their twenties working as sex workers in Linsen North Road. There are many hostess bars in the area around Linsen North Road and this sometimes involves sex work. The three women were found to have overstayed their visas, one of which was a former student. The raids were carried out as part of police actions targeting gangs that began on December 5th and the three women claimed to have been pushed into sex work by organized crime.

Reports appeared in late December from pan-Blue outlets [such as TVBS](#) and the [Want Want Group-owned China Times](#) stating that twelve students had disappeared from a university of science and technology in Taoyuan. These reports also cited a student at a university of science and technology in Tainan about the fees paid for sex work and the number of clients that sex workers receive.

These reports seem to have been based on [the incident in early December](#), but police stated in response that only one of the three women was a former student, and their investigation was that no coercion had taken place. The Ministry of Education has denied [any incident of there being twelve missing students](#).

These reports take place at a time in which universities in Taiwan are desperately seeking students to stay afloat, given the declining birthrate in Taiwan meaning less enrollment. Taiwan saw [an explosion in the number of colleges and universities from 28 in 1985 to 145 by 2005](#).

The result, however, is that some universities have turned towards recruiting students through labor brokers—or sending students to work in factories instead of providing them with education.

One of the most recent such incidents involved [Ugandan students being sent to work](#) at factories by the Chung Chou University of Science and Technology in Changhua in January 2022. In 2018, a similar incident involved students at the University of Kang Ning in Tainan [sent to work in a slaughterhouse](#). This was followed in 2019 by reports of [Indonesian students at the Hsing Wu University in New Taipei](#) being forced to make contact lenses in a factory, as well as at five other universities, and students at the [Yu Da University of Science and Technology in Miaoli from the Philippines](#) being forced to work in a tile manufacturing factory. Likewise, in June 2020, it was reported that 40 students from [Eswatini at Mingdao University were forced to work in a refrigerated factory skinning chickens](#).

Some of the involved universities reportedly used funding from the Ministry of Education to pay broker fees, to bring students over. In some cases, students did not receive wages for their labor.

Instead, factories made “donations” to universities. After their conditions were reported on, some of the students received funds for tuition, but still could not pay for their full education, and faced the difficult choice of whether to stay in Taiwan or return to their home countries. Universities also attempted to retaliate against students that went public with their experiences.

It is also becoming increasingly apparent in some parts of Taiwan that students, primarily from Southeast Asian companies, are recruited under the table to work in night markets and similar establishments. There have been relatively few reports of students being coerced into sex work, however, prior to this incident.

It is not impossible that Ministry of Education officials and the Taiwanese police are simply trying to sweep the incident under the rug. It is apparent that there are issues pertaining to students being forced to work in factories and other establishments in Taiwan. Nevertheless, much of the initial reports framed the incident as a product of the Tsai administration’s New Southbound Policy, drawing on other such incidents of coerced labor in recent memory. As such, the veracity of such reports is also somewhat to be questioned, with Want Want-owned outlets reported on by [the Financial Times](#) and [Apple Daily](#) as receiving Chinese state funding and allowing China’s Taiwan Affairs Office to have a say in their editorial direction.

Brian Hioe

[Click here](#) to subscribe to ESSF newsletters in English and or French.

P.S.

New Bloom

<https://newbloommag.net/2022/12/24/vietnamese-students-disappear/>