

Article by Barbara Pulido-Flores

The 4B Movement started in South Korea as a response to misogyny, inequality, and violence. Women across the nation grew tired of constant oppression through patriarchal norms, gender discrimination, and mistreatment, and began the movement as a response. Also known as the "4 No's," the movement pushes against marriage, childbirth, dating, and sex with men. The 4B Movement is more than just a protest; it is a call to action for women to reclaim their power and autonomy.

The movement gained popularity during the 2010s, spreading quickly in response to a series of crimes against women: The murder of a woman in Gangnam, when a member of the Ilbe online community committed a vile act by murdering a woman in a public restroom in 2016. As reported by The Cut, he confessed to the police that he killed her because he felt ignored by women. Despite the clear confession, this crime was not officially recognized as a hate crime, causing significant outrage among Korean women on various online platforms, including forums, chat groups, and social media. Additionally, by 2018, The Guardian reported a dramatic increase in "molka" cases— crimes where hidden cameras capture images or videos of women without their consent. The number of such incidents soared from 1,110 in 2010 to 6,600 in 2014, with 98 percent of the offenders being men.

Wage inequality is another factor that influenced the creation of the 4B movement. By 1992, The Straits Times reported that women earned only about 47% of what men made in similar roles. This figure improved to over 60% by 2004 but remains the widest gender pay gap among OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries, standing at 68.8%. According to The Diplomat, this is due to perceptions surrounding maternity leave, with companies often viewing women as riskier and less reliable employees compared to men.

For the past 20 years, South Korea has experienced some of the lowest birth rates in the world. Many blamed the 4B Movement but failed to understand that some women want to grow as individuals, focusing on their careers, personal goals, freedom, and independence.

Some women may not want to deal with the financial burdens of having a child, while others might have health problems or genetic conditions that could pose risks during pregnancy or be passed on to their children. Others lack the support needed to raise children, or they have experienced traumatic events that make them feel unfit for motherhood. Additionally, some women do not want their children to face the challenges of climate change and societal issues. Finally, some women simply do not wish to be mothers, and others are physically unable to have children. All of these reasons are valid - women have the right to choose what they want to do with their bodies. They have to go through the entire process of pregnancy, an experience that men can never fully understand or 'fix'. Having a child is more than just giving birth; it involves a lifetime of commitment, and some women simply cannot undertake it.

Now, the 4B Movement went viral in the United States following the re election of former President Donald Trump in 2024, who was found liable for sexual abuse and whose appointment of three conservative Supreme Court justices led to the overturning of Roe v. Wade. Young women in the United States have seen the impact of the 4B Movement in South Korea and have decided to join the cause, claiming that "If men won't respect our bodies, they don't get access to our bodies." "It's supposed to be sort of a form of sacrifice, that for the rest of your life, you're going to be independent from men," said Shruti Sivakumar, a senior at Indiana University.

The 4B Movement is a powerful platform for women to reclaim what is rightfully theirs. It is the beacon of hope at the end of the tunnel, a constant reminder that you are not alone, that you are seen, and that you matter. Do not let anyone dictate your choices; you have rights that must be respected. In the 21st century, there is no place for mistreatment. As a society, we must stand united, protecting and caring for one another. We cannot remain idle while these injustices persist. Women continue to face challenges and discrimination, and we must fight for those who lack a voice or whose voices go unheard. Women have the right to choose what they want to do with their lives, and the 4B movement gives us our power back.

