

Human Trafficking and Illicit Massage Parlors

Dominique Roe-Sepowitz, MSW, PhD

Associate Professor/Director

Office of Sex Trafficking Intervention Research

Arizona State University

What is Labor Trafficking?

Per the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA)

- The recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision or obtaining of a person for labor or services
- Through the use of force, fraud or coercion
- For the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.

Process

- Recruitment
- Transportation
- Transferring
- Harboring
- Receiving

Means

- Force/Fraud/Coercion
- Abduction
- Threat
- Deceit
- Abuse of Power

Goal

- Forced Labor
- Indentured Servitude
- Debt Bondage
- Slavery

Where Does Labor Trafficking Occur?

Agriculture	Domestic Servant	Restaurant/Food
Assisted Living/ Healthcare	Drugs	Selling goods (e.g., pencils)
Child Care	Magazine	Sexualized labor (massage parlors, strip club)
Construction	Hotel	Traveling sales crew
Factory/ Manufacturing	Petty Theft	

Vulnerabilities

- Poverty
- Homelessness
- Seasonal worker
- Forced migration – war, economic instability, class systems, political persecution
- Lack of legal status, documentation
- Lack of basic needs
- Lack of economic opportunities
- Language barriers
- Women and children
 - Women and girls account for 71% of modern slavery victims (ILO, 2016)
 - 1 in 4 victims of modern slavery are children (ILO, 2016)

What is sex trafficking?

According to the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000, sex trafficking is defined as a situation “in which a commercial sex act is induced by **force, fraud, or coercion**, or in which the person induced to perform such an act has not attained 18 years of age”.

Always sex trafficking when under age 18 if there is an exchange.

Males, females, and transgender persons can be victims of sex trafficking.

Case Study- Nina

NYT

Nina was 49, deep in debt to a loan shark in China and a recent immigrant to the U.S. She had responded to an employment ad three years ago that promised thousands of dollars a month but no job description.

She was expected to give massages and sexual services to up to a dozen men per day. Some customers were violent, others were rude. She had to pay \$10 per day to sleep in a sofa in a room at the massage parlor where rats ate her food.

Many times, 'after you performed a service, the customer would find a way to take the money away and then do even worse things.'

Risk & Protective Factors



- Family instability
- Poverty
- Special education attendance
- Gang involvement
- History of abuse
- Substance use
- Trauma
- Child welfare involvement
- History of running away
- Sexual orientation



- Family stability
- Social support network
- Education/school Connectedness
- Positive peer support
- Future goals
- Limited drug/alcohol exposure
- Healthy relationship boundaries

Sex Trafficking and Illicit Massage Parlors

Polaris (2018)

Illicit massage parlors are a unique form of human trafficking (they can include actions of labor and sex trafficking) as they are registered as if they were legitimate businesses.

The actual owners of the businesses are often hidden behind the laws governing business registration. In a study by Polaris (2018) only 21% of illicit massage parlors had an identified person as an owner.

The estimated income is \$2.5 billion.

There are an estimated 9,000 illicit massage parlors in the United States. There are 377 in Maricopa County today listed online. And 77 in Tucson.

<https://www.rubmaps.ch/phoenix-massage-parlors-az#rubmaps>

<https://www.rubmaps.ch/tucson-massage-parlors-az>

Criminal Nexus

“The epicenter of this national underground is the bustling Chinatown in Flushing, in the New York City borough of Queens. Women — typically Chinese, but also Korean, Thai and East European — arrive at Kennedy International Airport, learn the trade and are sent out to places like Virginia, Iowa, Texas and Florida. Women are recruited locally through ads in Chinese-language newspapers or over the social network WeChat.” New York Times, N. Kulish, March 2, 2019.

Illicit Massage Parlors cont.

What we know about the victims- very little.

- ❖ Most are foreign born.
- ❖ Have few resources – often do not have a place to live or work opportunities.
- ❖ Are in the United States legally- brought by the business network of the illicit massage parlors.
- ❖ Are rotated to different locations often- believed to be between every 2-6 weeks.
- ❖ Arresting the massage therapists strengthens the hold of the traffickers- they are told that law enforcement sees them as prostitutes and not as victims.
- ❖ Threat to their families if they talk or return them to the situation they were in - in their home country.
- ❖ They are forced to pay for their own supplies and charged to live on-site.

Ways to intervene

- ❖ Use business laws to require the identification of the owners.
- ❖ Require reports of any beneficial owners.
- ❖ Inform potential victims of their rights in the United States.
- ❖ Inform potential victims about sex and labor trafficking and how to report if they believe they are victims.
- ❖ Disallow cash only transactions/companies to track money.
- ❖ Notice the wide use of credit cards in these illicit transactions and act accordingly.
- ❖ Require customers to be accountable for soliciting an illicit massage parlor:
 - ❖ Require a copy of the customer's driver license to be collected.
 - ❖ Require each customer to sign a document that states that they know that receiving sexual services at the massage therapy location is illegal.

References

<https://polarisproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/How-Corporate-Secrecy-Facilitates-Human-Trafficking-in-Illicit-Massage-Parlors.pdf>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/02/us/massage-parlors-human-trafficking.html>

Thank you!

Dominique Roe-Sepowitz, MSW, PhD

Dominique.roe@asu.edu

www.socialwork.asu.edu/stir

www.sextraffickinghelp.com

[**Projectstarfish.education**](http://Projectstarfish.education)