

LOOKING BENEATH THE SURFACE OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

An unethical, but growing trend in the USA is the operation of reflexology businesses, often employing Asians, that front for the operation of human trafficking and prostitution. Cracking down on human trafficking is receiving support from several sectors of society: law enforcement, faith-based groups, and human rights organizations who are putting pressure on the government to do something to stop it.

An Overview

Human trafficking is a form of modern-day slavery. Victims of human trafficking are young children, teenagers, men and women. Victims of human trafficking are subjected to force, fraud, or coercion, for the purpose of sexual exploitation or forced labor. After drug dealing, trafficking of humans is tied with arms dealing as the second largest criminal industry in the world, and is the fastest growing.

Many victims of human trafficking are forced to work in prostitution or the sex entertainment industry. But trafficking also occurs in forms of labor exploitation, such as domestic servitude, restaurant work, janitorial work, sweatshop factory work and migrant agricultural work. Traffickers use various techniques to instill fear in victims and to keep them enslaved. Some traffickers keep their victims under lock and key. However, the more frequent practice is to use less obvious techniques including:

- Debt bondage—financial obligations, honor-bound to satisfy debt
- Isolation from the public—limiting contact with outsiders and making sure that any contact is monitored or superficial in nature
- Isolation from family members and members of their ethnic and religious community
- Confiscation of passports, visas, and/or identification documents
- Use or threat of violence toward victims and/or families of victims
- The threat of shaming victims by exposing circumstances to family
- Telling victims they will be imprisoned or deported for immigration violations if they contact authorities
- Control of the victims' money, e.g., holding their money for "safe-keeping"

In October 2000, the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA) made human trafficking a Federal crime. It was enacted to prevent human trafficking overseas, to protect victims and help them rebuild their lives in the U.S., and to prosecute traffickers of humans under Federal penalties. Prior to 2000, no comprehensive Federal law existed to protect victims of trafficking or to prosecute their traffickers. (Information from www.Polarisproject.com.)

Reflexology and Human Trafficking

There are ever increasing issues of illegitimate reflexology parlors involving human trafficking affecting our field. On the state level many legislatures are looking at ways to limit human trafficking. In late April a Reflexology Licensing Bill has passed in Washington State. This bill quickly passed through the legislative process because it was basically a response to the issue of

human trafficking: and reflexology parlors being a front for that kind of activity. The problem of human trafficking is extremely multi-faceted and complex as are levels of ability and desire to address the issue.

Human trafficking and reflexology first came to legislative attention in 2010 in the state of Georgia. The major challenge is how to write new legislation that closes down fronts for human trafficking, protects the public, and supports the right to practice reflexology as a separate discipline. With the bad press, another challenge is getting legislators and the public to recognize reflexology as a legitimate, respectable, and viable CAM therapy. To this end RAA and ARCB jointly designed and printed a brochure briefly stating the field's stand against human trafficking, introducing the existence of both organizations, and assuring the public that professional reflexologists follow a strict Code of Ethics and Business Standards. *Identifying the Legitimate Reflexology Practice* makes a public statement as to the position of the field on the issue. The brochure is designed to be an educational tool primarily for legislative work and working with health care professionals. However it may also be used to educate clients on the issue. RAA's *Discover Reflexology* is more suited for introducing potential clients and others as to what reflexology is and does. (*Discover Reflexology*, in print copy, may be purchased from RAA. *Identifying...Practice* is free in electronic form on line, or may be purchased in print copy from either RAA at 980-234-0159 or ARCB at 303-933-6921. Contact the respective office to order or for more information.)

Human trafficking affects all of us; and there's work to be accomplished at all levels even the personal one. Unless all reflexologists become involved in working on this challenge, legislative progress will be limited and our ability to grow as a profession reduced nationwide.

The subject of human trafficking is distasteful and reflexologists shouldn't have to deal with it, but sticking their heads in the sand is not going to make the issue go away. Already in 2012 reflexologists in Washington State faced this issue, and as mentioned above, a Reflexology Licensing Bill was introduced and passed quickly as a way to address human trafficking.

AN INTERVIEW: The Big Picture of Human Trafficking with Nydia Stephens, Canton, WA

Nydia Stephens is the co-chair with Liz Pyle of Seattle of the Washington Reflexology Association's legislative committee and worked directly on the licensing bill. Liz is involved now with the Department of Health in setting up procedures to implement the law.

ARCB: Didn't slavery die a hundred years ago?

NS: No. Did you know it is believed more people in the US are held in slavery in human trafficking right now than at the height of slavery in the 1800s? Yes, that's more now!

ARCB: How can that be?

NS: First, there's a disconnect in the public's understanding and our perception of what reflexology is and does. For example, in Washington we are all very well trained in school what

is “massage” and what is “reflexology.” We are clear—but the public at large is not. When we see “foot spa” or “foot massage” We think “massage”—not us. However, does the public? More importantly, legislators do not make a distinction. We have to move beyond the idea that unless it says “reflexology” it is not associated with us.

Beyond thinking reflexology and massage are the same, most people feel it is “not my problem.” I cannot tell you the number of conversations I have had where I have heard all about why human trafficking is someone else’s problem. The attitude is it is the state’s responsibility to regulate it and generally deal with it. The question becomes, are we prepared for the state to regulate us right out of business and make it impossible for anyone to get a quality reflexology session because that was easier for the state?

Naivety is also a problem. I think reflexologists have been “brought up” to believe that we want to not risk offending anyone. In general, we are mild mannered people who just want to work with our clients quietly. And we think that is enough. But the reality is, it is not. We tend to stay low under the radar and out of the way of “nasty” big brother. We don’t want to make trouble. None of this makes anyone a bad person or a poor reflexologist, but it does limit our ability to grow our profession. We’ve moved beyond being a “start-up” modality where we have flyers and demonstrations at health shows and athletic event tents a few times a year. The playing field is no longer the same. We’ve grown to a status that requires representation and fuller engagement and we aren’t sure how to do that. We just do not realize how the various systems work—including what it takes to play with “the big boys” in health care or in legislation.

ARCB: Isn’t human trafficking a huge problem?

NS: The problem of human trafficking is extremely multi-faceted and complex as are levels of ability and desire to address the issue. We have to start breaking it down into tinier bits: sex trade (international and domestic, which includes pornography, sex abuse, lack of healthy touch education, lack of self-worth, runaways, etc.), indentured servitude, slave labor, and so forth; and then we have the issues that relate to the lack of bilingual education, lack of bilingual website information. For instance, workers in Chinatown might be trained, but are they to US standards? Could they even get training here because of the language and cultural barriers? Are we supporting bilingual education? Or perhaps immigrant reflexologists are fully trained to US standards, and beyond, with a wealth of information, but what are we doing to connect with these communities that are outside mainstream? We just don’t know.

The problem is a deep societal one for us domestically, and then internationally just feeds into that. I know I didn’t feel like pornography was a nice thing and I never wanted to see it, but I certainly didn’t understand it is “prostitution in pictures” until the group *WA Engage* explained why this is true. We have to work at the problem from as many levels as we can—multi-leveled where the women are never forgotten.

ARCB: What can the field of reflexology do about this?

NS: I believe that it would be ideal if the national leadership were driving a positive and fully engaged response to the issue of human trafficking. Before we can really do anything, we have to stop passing the buck and really step up to the plate. Human trafficking is a moral issue for me.

However, it must also be acknowledged, not everyone sees this as something they should be asked to even give the time of day to. There's the *ick* factor. Let's be honest, the idea of working with the sex trade is icky. Yet from the most self-serving perspective, unless reflexologists get out and ahead of this, it will limit legislative progress and reduce our ability to grow as a profession nationwide. We must educate ourselves about the problem itself, about it within our industry, and offer a resource to educate others—this could be as simple as setting up links to websites.

We need to have stronger state and national relationships with other modalities. Where is ABMP and AMTA in all of this? Are we fostering a relationship with them? What can we change in ourselves that could open the door for healing the relationship with the AMTA?

WA Engage has a pledge to not hire someone suspected of human trafficking—we can adapt that for the sole-practitioner in support of ending exploitation in body work.

We need to change our attitude to licensing. I believe exemption (as Washington had) is dead. So how do we shift to address the new day? Do we teach lobbying in our educational programs? Do we teach how to be a full presence in our state capitals? Do we understand why we need that year round? No one, that I found, has a list of exactly how many of these places there are or how many say reflexology—so we need to do some field work research. You cannot be proactive with legislatures without clear data in any case. However, if all we do is legislate these businesses to close, we fail. We fail when these children and women get shuffled off to other states.

Nationally, I think we need a centralized resource place that can then empower states to meet the needs of their regions. Human trafficking is all over media in the Northwest but that doesn't mean it isn't happening in small towns too or in other cities across the nation. We need a centralized information source like the RAA website with state level specific information. Only it needs to be user friendly. Perhaps one section for the public. One for reflexologists, with an invitation for other body workers to join in the work.

We can create a spectrum of ways to quietly fight against the degradation of women: write a letter to the editor of the local newspaper; don't allow offensive language to be downgraded in the vernacular—keeping words like “pimp” offensive; talk to your children about healthy touch; we could create a list of 20 things that anyone can do and then give links to help each of those action items move forward; we can offer reflexology to those who have been abused—think of the healing that reflexology can bring; sign a petition to end pornography being available at the local public library and so on.

ARCB: Are you saying education is one of the key weapons?

NS: Yes, we need to first educate ourselves, then educate our clients openly using clear and specific language about what is happening and how they can spot it. We can create a guide sheet on how to report human trafficking safely and then a list county by county on a state site that gives printable instructions on how to report human trafficking. But this could also become a

hiding place for us. If we limit our actions to “educating our clients” we are not really addressing the problem.

We can teach safe touch with reflexology to kids and parents. I’m doing this in July. We could create an outline document for ways to do that. I’m talking to a counselor about working with abused kids—first reflexology and then counseling. We can educate ourselves about the legislative process in our state and stay up to date on legislation involving reflexology and other modalities. We can offer to support bills ending human trafficking in other realms.

An organization in Washington did a marathon to raise money for beds for women trying to leave a life of human slavery. There is a high return rate because the women have nowhere to go. I think a marathon is perfect for body workers. Body workers lining up to work on people as they finish is a great opportunity for public education. Proceeds go to a charity or organization that supports these women. The potential here is huge! This is the first thing I have seen that could address in a concrete way how we could begin to create relationships with other body workers and help generate dollars to help those who have already been abused. Did you know that the life expectancy for a prostitute is 7 years? Really! The average age targeted is girls between 12 and 14. And they have 7 years left to live, each one of them hell.

ARCB: Wow! Nydia, thanks for enlightening us to this issue.

NS: You are welcome. I know we are all so busy, but working as a team within our state and national organizations to create ideas and work on tasks, not only makes it easier to do but helps us accomplish more while moving forward. We need each other to stay on track and to really address the problem.

These 2 articles on human trafficking are used with permission from the American Reflexology Certification Board and were published in Reflexology Today, Spring 2012