



ILLICIT MASSAGE BUSINESSES: A COMMUNITY PROBLEM

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WHAT ARE ILLICIT MASSAGE BUSINESSES (IMB)?

Establishments with registered business names that operate under the guise of providing massage, wellness, and/or spa services while in fact deriving some clientele and revenue through the provision of commercial sex acts. IMBs operate in violation of state and federal laws, which may include criminal statutes regarding human trafficking (including sex trafficking and/or labor trafficking), debt bondage, and organized criminal activities such as money laundering, visa and immigration fraud, smuggling, and/or tax evasion.*

HOW IS THE ILLICIT MASSAGE INDUSTRY (IMI) CONNECTED TO HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN THE UNITED STATES?

According to Polaris, a global leader in combatting human trafficking, states:

- Currently, there are more than 9,000 illicit massage businesses (IMBs) open in America, and they can be found in every state.
- Both sex and labor exploitation happens in illicit massage businesses.
- Not every massage parlor is a trafficking situation. To be considered human trafficking in any venue, a situation must include one of the following:



FORCE: Violence or the threat of violence.



FRAUD: Deceitful recruitment practices, fraudulent debt accumulation.



COERCION: Exploiting and creating vulnerabilities through: emotional manipulation; debt bondage; isolation; document confiscation; threats of deportation, exposure and shaming; consequences to family members.

*Bouche, V., & Crotty, S. M. (2017, June 27). Estimating demand for illicit massage businesses in Houston, Texas. *Journal of Human Trafficking*. doi:10.1080/23322705.2017.1374080

HOW TO RECOGNIZE AN ILLICIT MESSAGE BUSINESS (IMB):



The windows are often covered, the front door may be locked and it is likely to be open late past traditional business hours.



Store clientele is predominantly (and oftentimes exclusively) male.



Women may occasionally appear to be living in the establishment, sometimes indicated by the presence of mattresses, kitchen items (not a typical break room) and stored clothes/luggage. This is typically easiest for authorities to determine.



IMBs are often reviewed online. A simple search into an address or business name may come up with sexually-oriented reviews and comments about what buyers can expect.



IMBs advertise their services on online review sites. The most popular review site receives 325,000 unique visitors per month.*

More information at
reset180.com/imb-report

*From Polaris, Human Trafficking in Illicit Massage Businesses, January 2018.

WHO ARE THE VICTIMS?

- Being recruited through IMBs, exploited women come from all ethnicities and countries of origin. Many providers, who are victim workers have recently arrived from China, South Korea, Thailand, and other countries in the region (but this can vary significantly between cities and regions of the US).
- Carry debts or are otherwise under extreme financial pressure.
- Speak little or no English.
- Have no more than a high school education.



Victim workers do not immediately identify as victims due to barriers such as immigration status, language and culture.

HOW TRAFFICKERS CONTROL WORKERS:

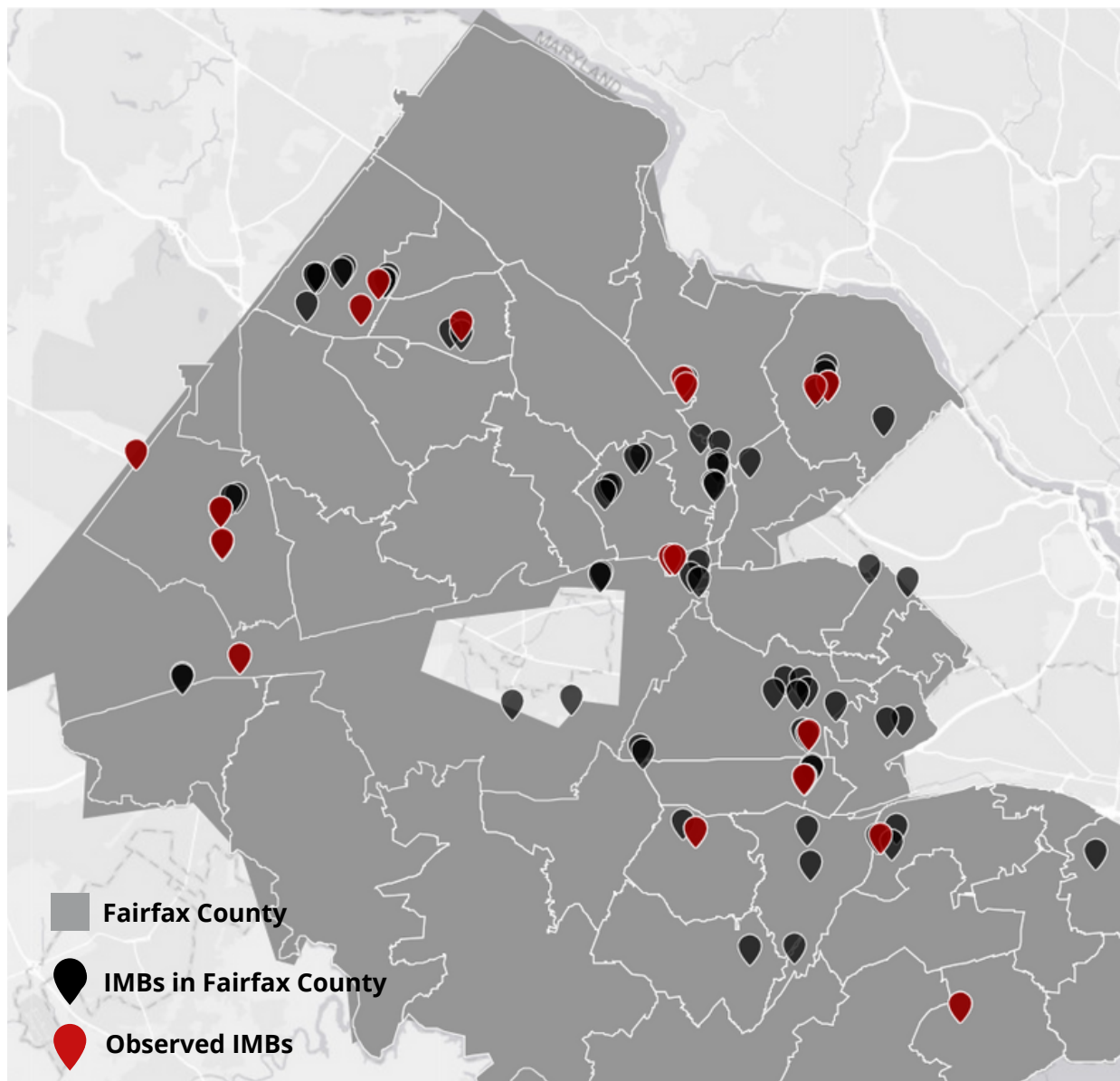
- **Fear** instilled by perpetrators that they have committed criminal acts and will be arrested or deported.
- **Debt bondage** that is accrued and cannot reasonably be paid back, and/or existing debt that is exploited.
- **Lack of understanding** of their own vulnerabilities, and cultural and legal norms (such as legal rights for workers) in the United States.
- **Controlled movement** outside of the business and confiscation of passports.



*Data, signs and indicators adapted from Texas Illicit Massage Industry Takeaway & Polaris Human Trafficking in Illicit Massage Businesses, January 2018.

A NORTHERN VIRGINIA PROBLEM

A Case Study of the Impact of IMBs in Fairfax County, VA



85 IMBs identified from an online source for Fairfax County having at least one review indicating a sexual service had been purchased.

18 IMBs with single entrances were video recorded with no audio to determine the number of individuals entering/exiting an IMB.

Full report can be found at reset180.com/imb-report

IMPACT OF ILLICIT MASSAGE BUSINESSES IN FAIRFAX COUNTY

558 Customers/Day*

Each day, it is estimated that 558 customers are visiting the 85 IMBs in Fairfax County. This equates to more than 203,000 customer visits each year.

\$23.6M Revenue/Year*

Each year, it is estimated more than \$23.6 million of taxable revenue is being generated at IMBs in Fairfax County.

170 Providers (Victim Workers)*

Each day, it is conservatively estimated that 170 women are being exploited in IMBs in Fairfax County. Each worker will have approximately 1,200 customer visits each year.

5,100 Students*

Each day, more than 5,100 students attend a public school within a 1,000 feet of an IMB.

*Numbers for the 85 IMBs for customer, revenue, and workers were calculated based on the numbers observed for the 18 IMBs. These are conservative estimates.

OBSERVED IMB DATA

One hundred and twenty-five customers and 44 providers were observed entering and/or exiting one of 18 IMBs within a 24 hour period in spring 2019. All customers were male. All observed providers were female and Asian. Four providers were believed to live onsite and ethnicity could not be determined. On average customers stayed 49.2 minutes and providers stayed 12.1 hours. The busiest arrival time was between 1-3 pm for customers and 9-10 am for providers.

Gender

Males



125

Customers

0

Providers

Females



0

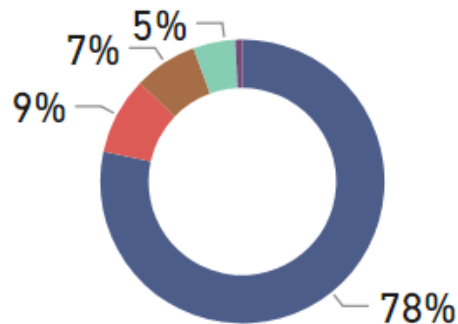
Customers

44

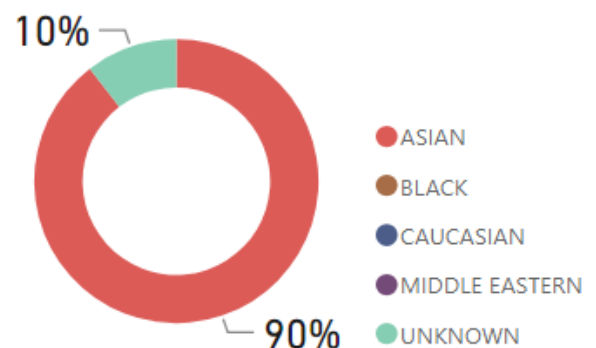
Providers

Ethnicity

Customers



Providers



Average Time and Busiest Arrival Time

Customers



49.2

mins average length of stay

1-3 pm

busiest arrival time

Providers



12.1

hours average length of stay

9-10 am

busiest arrival time

YOU CAN STOP EXPLOITATION!

Here are some simple steps you can take to disrupt the illicit massage industry's* unacceptable exploitation of women in your community:

D **Discuss property ownership with authorities— find out who owns properties leased to illicit massage businesses (IMBs) in your community.** If a storefront has the signs of being an IMB, ask property owners to conduct basic due diligence on their tenants.

I **Inform your local leaders about what is happening in our neighborhoods—and demand change!** Call your elected officials. Let them know that bringing freedom to exploited women matters to you.

S **Share accurate, compelling information about the issue with your community to raise awareness and create lasting change.** Host an awareness event in your community. Reset180 will provide the speaker.

R **Report suspicious activity to the National Human Trafficking Hotline (888.3737.888) and to your local police.**

U **Understand the complex circumstances facing women exploited in these businesses, so you can be an effective advocate for survivors who need help.** It is critical to advocate for sustained local resources to bring lasting freedom and support to victim workers.

P **Practice safety for both the workers and yourself when looking into a suspected illicit massage business.** Let authorities handle the onsite investigations; intervening or confronting owners on your own can put victim workers at risk.

T **Thank and support law enforcement officers, service providers and public officials when they take the time to focus on the issue.** Publicly affirm good work and advocate for more resources.



*The term illicit massage business does not encompass legitimate, therapeutic massage businesses. To find out whether a massage business is properly licensed in Virginia, visit dhp.virginiainteractive.org/Lookup/Index