

Sex on the move: sex work, migration and trafficking



info@coyoteri.org
(401)-525-8757

Who is a victim and who is a criminal? This zine will cover questions of migration and movement by sex workers in the context of the international discussions on human trafficking.

Sources

U.S. Citizen & Immigration Services
Victims of Trafficking Form I-914 (T) Fiscal Year 2018

US Department of Justice 2002 press release
"DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE ISSUES T VISA TO PROTECT WOMEN, CHILDREN AND ALL VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING"

"Prostitution may lead to deportation" by Peter Chu for Voices of NY

"ICE is using prostitution diversion courts to stalk immigrants" by Melissa Gira Grant for The Village Voice

Further Readings

"Why spa raids and the marginalization of sex workers must stop" by Mary Caparas for The Hill

"Feminists Should Support Decriminalizing Sex Work. Here's Why." by Erica Moen & Lux Alptraum for The Nib

People move for work all the time. So often that we've developed several words to talk about how and why people move.

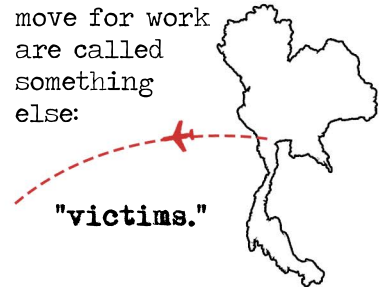
Some are "expats."



Others are "immigrants,"

Or sometimes "illegals," or some other names we can't write here.

But sometimes people who move for work are called something else:



"victims."

turn over ↙

Doesn't it feel a lot better to "re-patriate a victim of trafficking to their home country" than it does to "deport a prostitute?"



But in reality, sex workers get nearly the same treatment regardless of how they are labeled. For migrant sex workers, this often means being deported. The only difference is that acting like migrant sex workers are victims needing to be rescued makes the "rescuers" feel better about kicking them out.

By equating all sex workers' movements to trafficking, sex workers are treated like victims instead of criminals. In theory, this would be a good thing, since sex workers would be able to receive services instead of just being thrown in prison.

open me up! ↘

*** Remember:**

Just like with all forms of labor, there ARE real victims of trafficking for sex. But it's wrong to assume that anyone who migrates in order to do sex work is being exploited.

Because sex work isn't considered "real work," those who move to do sex work are often lumped into the category of people who are "transferred for improper purposes." Even if the means are proper and there was no force, fraud, or coercion, sex workers are still treated as trafficking victims.



Let's focus on that last part for a bit: "sexual exploitation."

Human trafficking is officially defined by the UN as the transfer of people by improper means (force, fraud, abduction, coercion) and for improper purposes (forced labor, sexual exploitation).

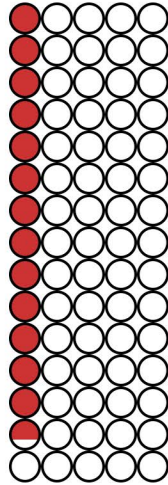
In 2000, the TVPA, or Trafficking Victims Protection Act, was passed, creating a new visa called the T-Visa. To qualify, someone has to be a victim of "severe" trafficking. Only 5,000 T-Visas are made available each year.

In the last 15 years, 75,000 T-Visas were made available.

But only 13,856 were issued.

That comes out to only **924** T-Visas per year on average.

On top of that, over 4,000 applications have been **denied** to date.



The US government estimates that over 50,000 people are trafficked into the US every year. But if there are ten times more trafficked people than there are available visas, **why are so few T-visas actually being issued?**

Case study: Massage parlors

"Happy ending" massages have been known for a while, but only recently have Asian massage parlors become the sites of some of the most high profile deportations of sex workers. Typically, women arrested in raids of massage parlors would be charged with a misdemeanor and then released. But over the last few years, they've been arrested and deported.

"Overall arrests of Asian-identified people in New York City charged with both unlicensed massage and prostitution increased by 2,700 percent between 2012 and 2016."

-Melissa Gira Grant for The Village Voice, 2017

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) have also gotten involved very recently - just in 2017, there has been an uptick. But why would they get involved if these women are supposed to be victims? And why now, 15 years after the TVPA was passed?

Cases like this show that the purpose of these raids still ultimately achieves same goal - deporting sex workers.

And what happens to all the people who don't get the T-Visa? All the "victims" we're supposed to be helping?



All of this plays into a binary of the good helpless victim and the bad criminal whore. It's a good narrative for securing funding or making an organization look good to the public - but it's just not the reality.

