

<http://www.theguardian.com/law/2015/mar/19/arrest-raid-human-trafficking-police-nail-bar>

10 arrested after human trafficking victims rescued from UK nail bars

Police swoop on properties – including six nail bars – in Berkshire, Yorkshire and London and find victims of human trafficking



Officers raid a nail bar in a photo posted on Twitter by Thames Valley police. Photograph: Thames Valley police/Twitter

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More than 150 police officers have carried out a number of raids across the country, including at six nail bars, as part of an operation to tackle human trafficking.

Thames Valley police executed the warrants at 17 premises in Berkshire, Yorkshire and London at about 10am on Tuesday.

These included three nail bars and three addresses in Reading, two nail bars and two addresses in Wokingham, one address in West Berkshire, five addresses in London and one nail bar in York.

Six victims of human trafficking were found, Thames Valley police said; they were sent to rest centres supported by the British Red Cross and the Salvation Army. The raids took place after an 18-month investigation, Operation Rehoboam, and were supported by the National Crime Agency, the Metropolitan police and North Yorkshire police, who provided tactical advice and personnel.

Ten men and women were arrested, ranging in age from 19 to 40. All but one have been released on police bail until 23 June.

The investigating officer, Det Ch Insp Rebecca Mears, said in a statement: “It is a criminal offence to traffic people into the UK. It is an offence to force people, by threats or coercion, to work unpaid or to pay off a debt. It is an offence to make people carry out acts against their will.

“The key aim of this operation is to protect vulnerable people. The victims have been taken to rest centres where they are being supported by Thames Valley police, the British Red Cross and the Salvation Army.

“Extra police community support officers will be out on patrol today speaking to residents and businesses to inform them of today’s operation and provide reassurance.”

— Thames Valley Police (@ThamesVP) [March 17, 2015](#)

This morning we have carried out a no. of warrants across the country as part of [#Op_Rehoboam](#) <http://t.co/NKQ5fIWu2s> pic.twitter.com/2Mz7vAPqcA

It is not known which nail bars were involved in the operation.

[A report by the Sunday Times in 2013](#) revealed that many nail salons across the country were staffed by victims of trafficking, particularly from Vietnam.

The Sunday Times estimated that there were 100,000 Vietnamese manicurists working in the UK, even though there were only 29,000 Vietnamese-born migrants officially registered in census data. It said that some were victims of “what appears to be a human-trafficking network”.

On its website, the [British Association of Beauty Therapy and Cosmetology](#) says: “Human trafficking is a problem in the beauty industry, especially in seemingly legitimate nail bars and other businesses that are in reality being used as fronts for brothels.”

It urges the industry to take action against the crime, “not only for the poor women who are already suffering under the hands of traffickers, but also the up-and-coming trained therapists who could find themselves falling victim to this situation.”

Tatiana Jordan, a project development coordinator at the [Human Trafficking Foundation](#), whose primary aim is to raise awareness of human trafficking and help shape policy, said that nail bars are used as centres for human trafficking because they are closed communities that present work opportunities to those – mainly from Asia – who want to move to the UK.

“A lot of trafficking is about opportunity, and nail bars present one of the opportunities to bring people to the UK under the pretext of working, but at the end of the day exploiting them,” Jordan said. “We don’t think that these people could be victims of trafficking when we go to these nail

bars. We don't ask ourselves whether these people are working voluntarily, and if they're getting any salary.

“Very often they don't speak English, so even if they are experiencing some exploitation they're not able to talk about it. There's also the whole immigration issue around their status, they're afraid to go to the police in case they get deported.

“Once we raise awareness of the trend, there will be more proactive action. We hope instances like this raid will happen more often, especially with the new modern slavery bill.”

Earlier this week, MPs rejected an amendment to the modern slavery bill that would change the system of “tied visas”, under which workers brought to the UK by their employer cannot legally leave their job and find employment elsewhere.