

Officials: Suspected prostitution leads to search at business

Trista Thurston, Reporter, Updated 3:27 p.m. ET May 4, 2017

LANCASTER - Police executed a search warrant at a local massage studio with the reported potential for human trafficking Thursday.

The Major Crimes Unit, along with Lancaster Police and the Bureau of Criminal Investigation with the Ohio Attorney General's office, collected evidence from the Acupressure Tuina Studio after an investigation showed suspected prostitution and potentially human trafficking at the business, officials reported.

"We have been aware of its existence here for a few months," Major Crimes Unit Commander Dennis Lowe said. "Based on what we've learned to this point, there was certainly reason to execute our warrant."



No arrests were made, though officers reported they did find one woman inside the 616 Forest Rose Ave. location.

"The woman we encountered today is from China," Lowe said.

Investigators need to determine the woman's legal status in the United States, how she got here, and where she has been staying. Lowe said the woman might have been living inside the business.

In similar situations, a business is opened, and a woman is brought to the country in exchange for providing sexual services, though this may not necessarily be the case in this situation, Lowe said.

Patrons are thought to have frequently been coming from locations outside of Lancaster, which is the case in similar circumstances.

"We don't want this kind of activity in our community," Lowe said.

The investigation is still ongoing.

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Police: Sex for sale at 2 Lancaster massage parlors

GLENN MCENTYRE, UPDATED: 06/02/17 03:15 PM EDT.

LANCASTER, OHIO Major Crimes investigators in Fairfield County have raided two massage parlors in one week in Lancaster. They say both investigations began with tips from the community. 10TV spoke with one neighbor who alerted police after noticing suspicious activity at Jin's Wellness Center, which advertises itself as a massage parlor.

The neighbor, who 10TV is not identifying, said the clients were all male, and many of them were not local. He said the cars in the lot had license plates from "as far away as Utah and Texas and Florida. All the states that surround Ohio have been here."

He said he also witnessed women being dropped off at the business for days at a time.

"It looked like a family dropping off one of their relatives or something. A couple guys and a young child dropping off a 20, 30-year-old Asian lady. leaving her here for days, and then coming back days later and picking her up."

He took his concerns to law enforcement, and after months of investigation, Thursday the Fairfield Hocking Athens Major Crimes Unit raided Jin's Wellness Center.



"People were paying for what was listed as a massage and receiving not only a massage but sexual activity," said Commander Dennis Lowe.

They arrested 65-year-old Jinrong Hedrick of Columbus. Just last week, they raided Accupressure Tuina Studio, where they say sex was also for sale.

Lowe said there's no evidence the two were linked. "Finding these businesses here in Lancaster is somewhat unusual," he said. "But I think based on what we've seen not only in Ohio but across the United States, these businesses have started to appear in smaller communities."

One woman was taken into custody in last week's raid, but not charged.

In 2015, multiple massage parlors were raided in Dublin, Powell, and West Columbus. Investigators say in that ring, 18 women were brought to the US from Asia, held captive here, and forced to sell sex. Lowe said it's not clear yet whether the Lancaster operations involve human trafficking.

"These girls that were working here, who knows their situation? We feared for them too," said the neighbor.

He said he's grateful law enforcement took their complaints seriously and took action. "You see something you don't think should be there, you've got to let somebody know."

Hedrick is charged with two misdemeanor counts, including solicitation. Her husband spoke with 10TV off-camera. He said she came here from China three years ago in search of a better life. He said there is no way she is knowingly involved in prostitution.

After the 2015 massage parlor raid, the Salvation Army told 10TV about the difficult transition for trafficking survivors. They say the victims were kept in isolation by their traffickers- in a foreign country, unable to speak the language, without access to their money or legal documents. The Salvation Army connected them to counseling, English language classes, and support services. In that case, two sisters running the operation were each sentenced to 10 years in prison.