



# SEA-side salon speak

You must not believe all you read

South East Asian *Scratch* correspondent & CND education ambassador, **ANNA LEE** bites back at the controversy unleashed by UK national newspapers surrounding the claims of sex slaves working in Vietnamese nail bars and gives a wider, more plausible perspective...

**A**ccording to newspapers' reports, there are 100,000 Vietnamese nail technicians in the UK. Yet census data states that only 29,000 Vietnamese-born migrants officially live in the UK, so therefore there should be 71,000 Vietnamese people in the UK illegally posing as nail technicians.

Are you serious? Not 71,000 Vietnamese, not 71,000 illegal immigrants, not 71,000 nail technicians and not 71,000 sex slaves, but 71,000 Vietnamese illegal nail technicians working as sex slaves?! While it's not my place or position to question the figures published, I am feeling skeptical of the figures purely on the basis that they just don't seem plausible.

What I do know and have evidence of is that Sweet Squared and I have been working closely with the SEA nail community for the past two years and I have a personal understanding of who they are and what they do. A large percentage of the SEA community working in nail bars were born in Britain of legal immigrant parents, eliminating the possibility of being illegal immigrants themselves. They have British passports, businesses, houses and families. Most of them are legitimate and genuine salon owners; who pay their taxes, NI contribution and work hard for a living just like every other person surviving in the UK.

The negative impact and damage of these untrue allegations affects not only their businesses, but also reflects on their everyday personal lives. Many of these women are just your average innocent mothers, sisters and daughters who now have to deal with the reputation of doing something illegal within the salons and businesses that they have worked very hard to build. How do they explain to their children if they come home one day from school crying because ABC said his mother was a prostitute at night simply because she worked in a nail bar by day? How should these genuine salon owners react when a man walks into their shops asking what services they provide? Many of the SEA nail techs are actually very talented in what they do; my students have won places in international nail competitions, so to suggest otherwise degrades their professionalism and dignity.

While we should support the highlighting serious illegal issues to the general public, it must be done with sensitivity and not at the expense of the reputation of a whole community; this is totally unnecessary. The idea that Vietnamese nail salons are only flourishing because of illegally trafficked slave labour is as ridiculous as it is offensive. This is no longer an issue regarding the lack of education and hygiene or the use of MMA in SEA salons. This is a degrading, racist, manipulative and bullying matter that affects all SEA salons and nail technicians in the worse possible way.



"My father always taught me to think before I speak. It would seem that these so-called journalists speak and then have not a single worry about others having to clean up the mess and the hurt and pain caused by their poisonous pens. We fight every time we answer any questions with dignity and positivity.

How ridiculous that anyone can even believe for a minute anything that was written? It will make people feel rather silly for giving the articles the time of day. One of the things I respect the most is the work ethic of the SEAs - Bravo! I know how to work hard; so when I see it in others I really respect it and want to nurture it so that the hard work really prospers."

**Gigi Rouse, CND Goddess**

## Comments from the SEA community

"The Press has delivered a very bad view on Vietnamese people. I have a pain in my head, heart, hope and beliefs. The journalists do their work and the press does their business. What would they think if one day their children grew up and told them they wanted to live somewhere else, not the UK, because of being bullied for being different to others? We - nail technicians need to improve our skills to be better in our jobs in order to make a living, to pay tax and live a normal life. We don't do anything against the government or the laws. So please don't use the same brush for the whole community to degrade our pride and dignity."

**Linh Pham**

"I have read lots of untrue articles about the Vietnamese community. It makes me feel really upset and angry! My family and I love our job; we welcome both ladies and gentlemen into our salon and happily work while talking to our clients about their everyday lives. We love this country like it is our second home. We work hard to support our own family and to give our children a good education. And our families are very proud of what we do. "Everyday I like to learn new things, which is why I love to attend CND classes to improve my skills. We want to prove to our clients that we're not the non-standard salons that most people talk about. "Recently, in most of the newspaper articles, they called us 'sex slaves'. They also said that we are forced to work on drug farms - this is all untrue. I'm already busy at work. I find no time to do those kind of things as I'm a mother of two daughters. I would rather work hard as a nail technician because I want my children to always be proud of what I do and what I am doing for them!"

**Mai Chi Vu - Nang Nails Boutique**

"I have four children age 13, nine, five and two. Instead of staying at home and claiming benefits, I choose to work in a salon that's an hour away from home. I drive to work everyday with my two children who are studying in a primary school near the salon. All the school children and parents know I work in the village nail bar. Even though it's a journey for us everyday, I never want to change my job. The clients love to have their nails done by me because I always come up with new ideas for their nails. As a nail tech, I like to improve my knowledge and skills by continuously learning and practicing. I never rush my work even at the busiest times. Every set of nails that I've created is of a high standard. All the products I use need to be top of the range.

"I am most happy when I see my clients happy with their nails. After the article in the newspaper, I was angry with the small percentage of illegal Vietnamese who have damaged our reputation by lying about their situation to get sympathy from the immigration office so they are able to stay in the UK. The hard work that we have built our livelihoods on was shattered in just one day.

"Since the articles, many of my appointments have been cancelled or no-shows. Today at the salon, two strange men came for a pedicure. They looked at us very strangely, I've never seen them in the village before. Maybe they are expecting a different kind of service? I feel sick. From now on, I will remain very nervous if there is a male client in the salon.

**Angela Do**

"I have been in the nail industry over 16 years and only recently took a course with CND. I live by the theory that there is always something new to learn and education and development is key to a successful

business. I am continually trying to educate, not only myself, but also the staff in my salon. The majority of Vietnamese salons are full of hard working technicians trying to make a living. I believe that the claims of sex slavery are just untrue allegations made up by selfish people who do not realise how much they are harming the Vietnamese community."

**Lan-Anh Nguyen**

"The article only mentioned cases, which are considered to be a very rare minority. Yes there are cases such as undocumented staff, but this does not reflect the true picture of majority of the genuine hard working nail salon staff struggling to survive in this current recession. The article sent a very negative message to readers that can harm the SEA nail industry as a whole".

**Minh Hoi**

"As a salon owner and according to these articles, I must be a pimp, human trafficker or a prostitute. And all my staff that works with me must be sex slaves forced to work by me. It really has made me paranoid! I am thinking all the time whether or not my clients are thinking the same of me. As salon owners, we have to work hard physically and mentally to get the clients to trust us and to build up a good relationship. To be branded or labelled this way has really taken a strain on all of us SEAs in this industry! It has influenced the way clients see us and could possibly take food off our tables. They didn't think twice before posting whatever they wanted because they know that a lot of Vietnamese people in this industry do not have good enough English to fight back or share their thoughts. Not all of us are doing these things. Didn't they think about the innocent SEA people in this industry? And how much damage they would do by branding us all this way? If they are trying to really help or bring to people's attention about human trafficking, then why was only one race mentioned and one type of business? Human trafficking happens in all races and all sorts of businesses. It is not fair and is most racist of them to pick on one community. Most of us take great pride in what we do and really work hard for it and to be bashed down like this is making us have to work harder than we already do. Every working day is a battle so why did they have to make it harder for us?"

**Anna Trieu**

"I own a nail salon called American Nails & Beauty in Dartford. I have read the stories about Vietnamese nail bars in England and I just want to say that I own two salons and have been working in the nail industry for over 10 years. I have no idea why some people are making these untrue allegations, as I'm a family man and my wife is working as a professional nail technician too. We have two beautiful children and most of my staff are married and have children also. How can they claim we are sex slaves? We Vietnamese nail techs work very hard and have wonderful lives."

**Danny Nguyen, American Nails & Beauty**

"It feels like the only thing on these journalists' (if I can call them that) minds was to write an attention-grabbing article to sell papers. I don't think they stopped to think that in the process of trying to put food on their own table, they could possibly be ruining the reputations of honest-working people and robbing food off others' tables. Look at the reaction it has had so far. It makes us have to work harder; pick up slack and clean up the mess and try not to be tarnished with the same brush. It is terrible how the actions of a handful of individuals can put so much negativity on a whole community."

**Lee Hogan**

"I believe that the claims of sex slavery are just untrue allegations made up by selfish people who do not realise how much they are harming the Vietnamese community."

**Lan-Anh Nguyen**

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