Undergraduate Students’ Perceptions, Knowledge, and Attitudes Towards Human Trafficking

Katrina Gainey and Anthony Hill, PhD
Winthrop University, Rock Hill, SC

Introduction

Human trafficking is a crime that affects every country, including America. Human trafficking is a violation of human rights because the victims are stripped of their dignity, abused, and forced to work.

• **Human trafficking** is when victims are compelled into labor or sex trafficking through fraud, coercion, or exploitation.
• There are two common forms of human trafficking, which includes sex trafficking and forced labor.
• **Sex trafficking** is when people are forced to engage in commercial sex. (What is Human Trafficking?, 2019).
• According to Polaris (2018), **Labor trafficking** is when individuals perform labor or services through the use of force, fraud, or coercion.
•Victims can be either foreign internationals or Americans trafficked nationally.
• Human Trafficking can affect anyone, whether they are males or females.
• Hepburn and Simon (2010) add, "Women and girls make up 56% of persons trafficked for the purposes of forced labor while men and boys make up 44%.

Methods

**Participants**
- 100 undergraduate students completed the survey
  - 50 males, 50 females
  - The participants were at least 18 years old
  - They were from diverse racial backgrounds, genders, and classifications

**Materials**
- Online survey hosted by Qualtrics
  - This survey was modified from the Bush-Chamardas (2017) to better fit the study.
- There were twenty-two questions, including five demographic items and sixteen Likert style items in regards to their perceptions, knowledge, and attitudes towards human trafficking
- SPSS was used to analyze the data

**Procedure**
- The survey was distributed through social media platforms and email.
- Participants read the informed consent form at the beginning of the survey
- The survey took about 10-15 minutes
- This research was a quantitative study.

Results

- We developed hypotheses and alternative hypotheses for each of the demographic variables, which were age, major, classification, race, and gender.
- We did not find a significance between the age, major, and classification.
- However, we found a relationship between gender and knowledge.
  - Interestingly, males and females think they know about the same but females are more knowledgeable regarding human trafficking.
- We also found that there is a relationship between race and knowledge.
  - Blacks have more knowledge about human trafficking than other minorities
  - But, Whites knowledge is the same as Blacks and other minorities
  - They are caught in the middle.
- We also found that there was a relationship between race and perception
  - Black and Whites have the same perceptions
  - While other minorities have lower perceptions that White and Black.

Discussion

• Some of our hypotheses were supported which helped to further our understanding of undergraduate students’ perceptions, knowledge, and attitudes towards human trafficking.
• The demographic factors that were chosen affected the study because we found these factors aren’t the ones shaping their perceptions, knowledge, and attitudes towards this topic.

**Future Direction:**
In the future, we plan to modify this survey to add more questions and to ask questions about the socioeconomic status and media presence to see if there would make a huge difference. We also plan to add questions that targets specific constructs instead of multiple, because in this study that was one of the other limitations that plan to fix. We also plan to aim for a higher sample size because this was limitation in terms of choosing statically tests and finding statistically significant items. Although, there were some limitations in this study we are proud that our hypotheses were supported.

With human trafficking happening on college campuses around America, additional research is needed to understand undergraduate students’ perceptions, knowledge, and attitudes about the topic. The study’s results can inform programs and other interventions to increase understanding of the warning signs, impact, and safeguards to lessen the effects of human trafficking.

References


Contact
Katrina Gainey
Kgainey5@winthrop.edu

Anthony J. Hill
hilla@winthrop.edu

Acknowledgements:
Winthrop McNair Scholars Program
Dr. Anthony Hill
Winthrop University