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Changing Awareness of Human Trafficking

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Changing Awareness of Human Trafficking

Roma Patel, Krystal Letourneau & M. Alexis Kennedy

The issue of human trafficking has received increased attention since the Trafficking Victims Protection Act was enacted in 2000. We assume that awareness is growing in the United States but this has not been tested. The current study measures increases in awareness about the issue of trafficking. Nearly 400 students were polled about their awareness in the spring of 2007. Attitudes towards government responses, awareness of the issue and support for victims were surveyed. The study was replicated 5 years later with over 500 new participants. This paper will analyze changes in awareness over time. Gender differences will also be presented. Attitudes towards trafficking will be considered in light of the assumptions underlying the TVPA and its reauthorizations.

### Methodology

Awareness about the issue of human trafficking and estimations of the magnitude of the problem was polled. Participants were introductory criminal justice student volunteers. Subjects completed a self-administered questionnaire consisting of nominal and ordinal level measures of variables regarding perceptions and attitudes towards human trafficking. Responses to questions were in the form of a 5 point Likert Scale, in which 1 reflected disagreement and 5 reflected agreement.

Data was collected in 2007 and again in 2012-2013.

- **2007 – 398 participants**
  - 63% Women, 38% Men
- **2013 – 693 participants**
  - 59% Women, 41% Men

### Estimates of Problem

**Trafficking in Persons Report (Department of State)**

- **2007**: 17,500 – 18,500 foreign adults and 103 foreign children given visas to enter the United States.
- **2013**: 10,753 investigations with 736 suspects and 287 convictions.
- **Domestic Minor Children became 3rd category of victims**

- **2005 Trafficking Victim Protection Act**
- **2000 Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act**

### Immigration Relief

- **2005**: United States defined the age-old crime of forced labor and sexual activities as a federal offence.
- **2005 & 2008**: Revised the Immigration and Nationality Act to authorize the deportation of victims.
- **2008 & 2009**: Expanding the range of immigration relief that may be authorized for victims.

### Historically

United States defined the age-old crime of forced labor and sexual activities as a federal offence. There is little research examining attitudes toward human trafficking. The federal acts brought in since 2000 have been an integral step toward addressing human trafficking, but they are based on assumptions that have little empirical support behind them. These acts attempt to address three main aspects of human trafficking—protection, prosecution and prevention. They increased penalties for traffickers, expanded international activities and provides more assistance to victims. As this act continues to be reauthorized and more money earmarked for trafficking, it may be informative to look at public attitudes toward this issue and potential solutions.

Future research should focus on using a community sample or obtaining a random sample in an effort to increase the ability to generalize these findings.