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Changing Awareness of Human Trafficking

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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 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. 2007 – 398 participants
62%, Women; 38%, Men

2013 – 693 participants
59%, Women; 41%, Men

### Immigration Relief

Items that measured awareness of human trafficking revealed that students were not very aware of trafficking in the US. It is very difficult to assess the true extent of this underground problem so this may contribute to the mixed estimates about the extent of the problem. It could be argued that criminal justice students have more knowledge about the nature of crime than the general population. If knowledge about human trafficking is low for criminal justice students, it may be even lower for the general population. Also due to the nature of human trafficking, there is a hidden underground problem. Therefore, if the students in this city are less aware than others, this may be due to the law enforcement's lack of awareness and resources. The United States is known as a destination for human trafficking, the students in this city may be more informed than the students in other cities. Assuming that knowledge of the topic is positively correlated to support of the victim, more knowledge and awareness may result in more public support and thus a higher likelihood that more laws will be put in place to aid victims, enforce current laws, and capture perpetrators.

There was more agreement than disagreement between the genders. Women were more likely to be aware of domestic minor sex trafficking, the fact that children in detention for prostitution are really trafficking victims. Students supported the idea that the United States should support this issue and could do more to combat trafficking.

### Limitations

The fact that the sample consisted of a non-random sample of criminal justice students limits the ability to generalize this study.

### Future Research

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.