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Trafficking in Human Beings: Knowledge of Portuguese College Students

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ABSTRACT

Trafficking in human beings is a global problem, and countries worldwide have joined efforts and built strategies to fight this phenomenon. This study sought to examine the knowledge of Portuguese college students regarding trafficking in human beings. The study was conducted with 223 students from different Portuguese universities. The results revealed that college students presented high levels of knowledge about the phenomenon's dynamics, trafficker profile and criminal dynamics and trafficking in human beings' trajectories. Conversely, the students revealed lower levels of knowledge concerning trafficking in human beings' purposes, the victims' characteristics, and the victimization dynamics, and also trafficking in human beings' specificities in Portugal. This knowledge is influenced by age, studying area and through contact with various sources other than academic institutions, which suggests a low compliance by the academic institutions with the third National Action Plan against trafficking in human beings, implemented in Portugal from 2014 to 2017.

KEYWORDS

Trafficking in human beings; knowledge; college students

Article 3 of the UN Protocol, the Palermo Protocol, defines Trafficking in Human Beings (THB) as:

the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments and benefits to achieve the consent of a person, having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. (UN, 2000, p. 3)

EU Directive 2011/36/EU on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Protecting its Victims states that victims of THB are always in a position of vulnerability, meaning that a person has no real or acceptable alternative but to submit to the abuse (Europol, 2016). There are an estimated 20.9 million victims of THB globally (ILO, 2016), with 63251 victims being detected in 106 countries between 2012–2014 (UNODC, 2016). Over the last 10 years, the profile of the detected trafficking victims has changed. Although most detected victims are still women, children and men now make up larger shares of the total number of victims, comprised of 28% children and 21% men in 2014 (UNODC, 2016). In parallel with the significant increases in the share of men among detected trafficking victims, the share of victims who are trafficked for forced labor have also increased, with four out of 10 victims detected between 2012 and 2014 being trafficked for forced labor. Out of these victims, 63% were men (UNODC, 2016).

According to the statistics of Polaris Project, in the United States, 40,987 victims were identified between 2007 and 2017. In this last year, 10,615 victims of human trafficking were registered, mostly for sexual exploitation and/or labor exploitation. The most common THB purpose reported to Europol (2016) was sexual exploitation (90%), followed by labor exploitation (5.6%); However, other forms of exploitation were reported such as forced marriage (1.9%), forced begging and forced criminality (0.3%).

THB is a crime that involves victims' vulnerabilities, abuse, and exploitation. There are multiple risk factors, related to social determinants (e.g., poverty, lack of formal education, limited support systems), marginalization (e.g., runaways or homelessness youth, persons with disabilities, migrant workers, ethnic/racial minorities/immigrants, foreign/national domestic workers, violence) and trauma (e.g., child and adult adverse experiences), and globalization (e.g., migration, refugee displacement, victims in conflict zones, digital technologies, social networking sites) (Hachey & Philippi, 2017).

Therefore, THB is mostly a transnational crime, although it can occur in the internal context with victims being exploited in their own countries. International data show that the majority of offenders (60%) share the nationality with their victims (Siegel & De Blank, 2010); foreigners have a minimum participation (35%) and tend to be neighbor countries' nationals. In conjunction with this, statistics from 2010–2012 show that the traffickers were expected to be male (62%), although there is a significant participation of females (38%) (UNODC, 2014).

There are common characteristics and dynamics of THB throughout the world, regardless of geographic location or whether the country is considered industrialized or developing (Chawla et al, 2014). The dynamics of THB involves the recruitment of victims (e.g., work proposals, proximity strategies); transport or transition of the victim (domestic or cross-border); exploitation and control (exploitation of work, the inspection of her behavior and control) and the victim's reintegration into society (support provided in reception centers and protection to victims). Although the characteristics and dynamics of THB are known, its recognition is not an easy task. Traffickers are careful to minimize the risk of being discovered, which makes the process of investigation long and complex (Alvim, 2013).

Perceptions and Awareness about Trafficking in Human Beings

In many cases, THB is hidden by the appearance of normality. In particular, adult victims often interact with others outside the victimization background and may even engage in everyday transactions in the course of their victimization, yet their circumstances may be imperceptible to a general observer. This is true for both sex trafficking and labor trafficking. Traffickers rely on these conditions, that allows them to control the victims even when they interact with others. Community leaders can take action to increase general awareness by providing tools to enable the public to recognize the indicators of human trafficking, alert authorities to potential trafficking schemes, and empower vulnerable populations to protect themselves (US Department of State, 2018).

Despite the variety of forms of exploitation already known in THB, according to the literature, society remains trapped in the exploitation for sexual purposes (Colipcă & Stan, 2012). A qualitative study with 216 Australians (70% female) was developed with the purpose of assessing perceptions of sex and labor trafficking and actions to reduce them. Results demonstrated that the participants were aware of sex trafficking and women perceived it to be more serious, concerning and important than labor trafficking. Women reported greater personal distress (but not empathy) for the victims than men, which was associated with women's greater willingness to take action. Women also perceived available actions to be more effective than did men, which predicted willingness to identify THB victims (Honeyman, Stukas, & Marques, 2016).

A qualitative study with the Moldovan community ($n = 30$) suggests that participants were also aware of organ trafficking and illegal adoption, which they consider to be the result of the relaxation of migration constraints, as well as international economic disparities (Robinson, 2011). Another study with a community sample of 682 residents of the Midlands of England concluded that: 78% were familiar with the term 'human trafficking'; 89% believed human trafficking was the 'smuggling of humans from one country to another', 'bringing people over from foreign countries, illegally', and 'illegally bringing immigrants into the country'; 58%, believed people were trafficked for prostitution; and 32% believed people were trafficked for financial gain. Related to THB causes: 42% believed that people were trafficked for reasons pertaining to the traffickers' needs (economic profit); and 84%

believed that victims were trafficked to improve their own and/or their families' lives (Honeyman et al., 2016). The participants also identified vulnerability factors present in the victims: 57% reported personal factors (e.g., low self-confidence, being a woman, being uneducated, and having a low IQ); and 64% identified situational factors (i.e., poverty, no home or money, no family to care for them, war, 'the economy in their home country', and 'having to provide for their family'). The main sources of contact with THB were newspapers (77%), followed by the internet (64%), social media (50%), television (31%), and radio (18%) (Dando, Walsh, & Brierley, 2016).

Some studies were performed in Portugal to evaluate the knowledge and perceptions about THB in different professional groups (Cunha, Gonçalves, & Matos, 2018; Lourenço, Gonçalves, & Matos, 2018). The first study aimed to analyze the knowledge and perceptions about THB between Portuguese social services and police officers on different problems (for example, victims and traffickers or anti-trafficking legislation), and the relationship between this knowledge and previous training in the area (Cunha et al., 2018). The results revealed that Portuguese professionals generally had a good level of knowledge about THB, revealing high-level scores in specificities of THB and purposes, the trafficker's profiles, criminal behavior, characterization of the victims and dynamics of victimization. On the other hand, the participants had a lower score regarding trafficking trajectories and specificities of trafficking in Portugal. This knowledge was influenced by professional experience, previous experience with trafficking cases and training related to trafficking intervention (Cunha et al., 2018). The second study sought to analyze the perception of THB among Portuguese judges in similar areas to those evaluated in the previous study (Lourenço et al., 2018). The results revealed that Portuguese judges generally had a good perception of THB, revealing high-level scores for issues such as Portuguese legislation, characterization of the problem, characteristics of the perpetrator, characteristics of the victim and THB in Portugal. In addition, it is possible to conclude that magistrates who exhibited more adequate perceptions were those who consolidated their professional practice with the information obtained through formal and informal contacts with THB (Lourenço et al., 2018).

As far as we know, there are few studies regarding students' knowledge and perceptions about THB. A study that involved a classroom random sample of 689 adolescents, aged between 16 and 20 in Nigeria (Omorodion, 2009) concluded that students identify poverty (69.8%), unemployment (58.1%), hope for better life (48.5%), illiteracy (46%), entrapment (28.7%) and false marriage (23.1%) as factors increasing the vulnerability of young people. Most students (52.5%) also reported that victims are likely not to report being coerced into being trafficked, while 44% thought victims tended to have inadequate information before being trafficked. Related to their assumptions towards THB, 58.5% of participants were aware that victims of trafficking experience sexual violence by working as prostitutes; 43.3% of respondents believed that victims experience torture and other forms of violence and 36.4% said victims experience forced confinement. Regarding preventive and community resources, only 25.8% of the students were aware of a non-governmental organization (NGO) involved in elimination of THB, while 35.1% were aware of a community-based prevention program. Another study in southwest Nigeria with college students ($n = 600$) revealed that 88% of the respondents believed that the major cause for THB was unemployment; 80% mentioned poverty, 78% insatiable desire for wealth and 30% discrimination against women (Oluniyi, 2012).

An exploratory study examined the criminal justice practitioners' knowledge and attitudes pertaining to the sex trade. The sample was composed of college students who intended to be criminal justice practitioners in the future ($n = 135$) and criminal justice practitioners ($n = 66$), specifically legal actors and law enforcement officers (Dando, Walsh, & Brierley, 2016). The authors concluded that future practitioners were significantly more likely to believe in common prostitution myths (i.e., women choose to work in the sex industry) and have inaccurate perceptions of human trafficking (i.e., trafficked people can only be immigrants from other countries). When focusing specifically on sex trafficking victims, individuals who had received training and had contact with victims were significantly less likely to agree with the statement that victims should be deported compared to their counterparts.

In the US, some studies evaluated the efficiency of a THB program training, in different professional groups, mostly among health professionals (Donahue, Schwien, & LaVallee, 2018; Grace et al., 2014) and law enforcement officers (Renzetti, Bush, Castellanos, & Hunt, 2015). The results with the health professionals revealed that the training programs increased the knowledge about human trafficking, the ability to identify the victims (Donahue et al., 2018; Grace et al., 2014) and how to intervene with them (Donahue et al., 2018). Related to the law enforcement program training, the findings show that the participation in the training produced positive, but limited effects, namely in raising awareness of human trafficking in the officers' jurisdictions, increasing officers' self-reported likelihood of identifying and investigating suspected human trafficking cases, and the dissemination of knowledge gained through training from executive-level and mid-level officers to patrol-level officers (Renzetti et al., 2015).

THB in Portugal

The crime *trafficking in persons* is an autonomous crime since 2007, part of the IV Chapter of the Portuguese Penal Code concerning crimes against personal freedom, in Article 160 (Law 59/2007 of September 4th, 2007). Since August 2013 (Law Decree 60/2013 of 23 August, 2007), the crime of *trafficking in persons* legally integrates all forms of exploitation that characterize the crime as described in paragraph 1 of Art.160:

Whoever offers, delivers, recruit, solicit, accept, transports, harbors or receives a person for the purpose of exploitation, including sexual exploitation, labor exploitation, begging, slavery, removal of organs or exploitation of other criminal activities: a) Through violence, kidnapping or serious threat; b) Through deceit or fraudulent misrepresentation; c) With abuse of authority resulting from; d) An economic, work or family hierarchical relation of dependence; e) Taking advantage of mental incapacity or of the particularly vulnerable situation of the victim; or f) Upon obtaining the consent of the person who has control over the victim. The same article established that this crime is punished with imprisonment of three to ten years.

Trafficking in persons is a public crime in Portugal, meaning that anyone can report it based on a suspicion and the investigation process is conducted independently of the consent and wishes of the victim (Alvim, 2013). The Portuguese Observatory of Trafficking in Human Beings (2016) reported that between 2011–2015, 903 victims were identified in Portugal. In 2015, 193 victims were identified, in which 135 (18 minors) were foreigner victims in Portugal and 58 were national victims in other countries. Regarding the nationality of the identified victims flagged in Portugal, the majority (70%) came from the European Union (EU) and the other 30% were from Africa, Asia, and South America.

At the national level, we must highlight three major National Plans against THB, created with different but complementary purposes by the Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality and whose implementation started in 2007 (1st National Plan Against THB, 2007–2010; 2nd NPTHB, 2011–2013; 3rd NPTHB, 2014–2017). The last plan (3rd NPTHB) was focused on strengthening the structures for support and protection of the victims, on deepening the cooperation between public authorities and also in the development of adaptive responses to new forms of THB and respective recruitment. It comprises five strategic areas of intervention: 1) To prevent, raise awareness, to know and to research; 2) To educate, train and habilitate; 3) To protect, intervene and build capacity; 4) To investigate criminally; and 5) To cooperate. The first and second areas of intervention draw attention to the importance of the collaboration between training institutions in the fight against THB. In this sense, given the lack of studies with college students in the THB area, this study sought to analyze whether the intended goals for the last national action plan, in terms of perceptions about the phenomenon, are being reached with this population.

In Portugal, the studies about THB are yet insufficient. A study carried out with secondary and higher education students concluded that the knowledge about the phenomenon was relatively low and influenced by a set of preconceived ideas, especially considering the characteristics of the crime itself and its victims. It also reiterated the common confusion between prostitution and trafficking,

and the perceived severity of trafficking appears to differ essentially as a result of the presence or absence of prior consent for involvement in the sexual market (Couto, 2012).

Objectives

Consistent with the issues previously described, the main objective of this study was to analyze the knowledge of Portuguese college students concerning the phenomenon of THB, namely the characteristics of the victims, the traffickers and the crime itself. For this analysis the following research questions were formulated:

- (1) What do university students know about THB, particularly regarding the characteristics of the victims, traffickers and the crime itself?
- (2) Are there differences at the level of knowledge about THB with regard to the students' age, sex, training area and course year?
- (3) Do university students with previous contact with THB phenomena, whether formal or informal, have higher levels of knowledge?

Methodology

Participants

This study uses a non-representative sample of 223 college students, mostly female (63.7%), with a mean age of 23.26 years (SD = 6.15), ranging between 18 and 50 years of age. Most of the participants were Portuguese (92.4%), single (92.4%) and from a medium socioeconomic status (69.1%). Regarding the area of academic training, the majority were from social sciences (52%) and engineering and technological sciences (31.8%), with most attending the first and second years of their course (39.9% and 22.4%, respectively). A detailed description of the sample is given in Table 1.

Measures

To answer the research questions of this study, a specific questionnaire was designed (Human Trafficking Knowledge Inventory, adapted and validated for Cunha, Gonçalves, and Matos, 2018), the objective was to assess the knowledge and perceptions of university students on the phenomenon of THB. The questionnaire was based on the version developed by Dulce Couto, which was originally created to collect data on the knowledge and public perceptions about THB (Couto, 2012). After the permission of the author for using the instrument, it was adapted and completed in order to meet our goals. Before producing the final version, the instrument was discussed and analyzed by three experts in the field of trafficking in human beings in Portugal. The final version of the inventory has three parts: first, sociodemographic information (e.g., sex, age); second, questions regarding the type of training in THB: informal training (e.g., “saw campaigns in the media about the THB”), formal training (e.g., “participated in lectures about THB”) or no training (e.g., “I had no contact with this theme”), comprised of 25 statements with three possible answers (“true, false, I do not know”); and a third area composed of two open-ended (e.g., “Briefly describe what is, in your view, the profile of a victim of THB” and “Briefly describe what is in your opinion, the profile of a THB perpetrator”). The third segment including the qualitative data, were not analyzed for this study.

The 25 statements were considered to be true based on factual information (e.g., “THB is recognized by Portuguese Law”) and/or statistical data (e.g., “When it involves women victims, THB aims, in most cases, their sexual exploitation”) and false when based on myths (e.g., “THB affects only the so-called ‘third-world countries’”). Each correct response was scored with one point and each incorrect or unknown answer was scored with 0, with the total score varying between 0 and 25. This instrument was previously validated (Cunha et al., 2018) with a sample of 446 justice and

Table 1. Sociodemographic characterization of participants.

| | <i>n</i> = 223 | % |
|----------------------------------|----------------|-----------|
| Sex | | |
| Feminine | 142 | 63.7 |
| Masculine | 81 | 36.3 |
| Nationality | | |
| Portuguese | 206 | 92.4 |
| Foreign | 17 | 7.6 |
| Marital State | | |
| Single | 206 | 92.4 |
| Married/Civil Partnership | 16 | 7.2 |
| Divorced/Separated | 1 | 0.4 |
| Socioeconomic Level | | |
| Low/Medium Low | 60 | 26.9 |
| Medium | 154 | 69.1 |
| Medium High/High | 9 | 4 |
| Course Area | | |
| Social Sciences | 116 | 52 |
| Engineer and Technology Sciences | 71 | 31.8 |
| Medical and Health Sciences | 26 | 11.8 |
| Exact Sciences | 5 | 2.2 |
| Natural Sciences | 5 | 2.2 |
| Course Year | | |
| 1st year | 89 | 39.9 |
| 2nd year | 50 | 22.4 |
| 3rd year | 31 | 13.9 |
| 4th year | 27 | 12.1 |
| 5th year | 17 | 7.6 |
| 6th year | 4 | 1.8 |
| Master | 3 | 1.3 |
| PhD | 2 | 0.9 |
| | <i>Mean</i> | <i>SD</i> |
| Age | 23.26 | 6.15 |

social professionals, using a minimum of 15 participants per item. An exploratory analysis with *varimax* rotation allowed the extraction of six factors, which explained 50.77% of variance. The assumptions of KMO = 0.88 and BTS, $p < .001$, were also fulfilled. The survey revealed good internal consistency (Cronbach alpha = .88). As the instrument variables were dichotomous, the correlation matrix was computed using tetrachoric correlations. The factorability of the matrix was tested using Bartlett test of sphericity and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy. The extraction of the initial solution was carried out using the principal factors method with squared multiple correlations for the prior communality estimates. The optimal number of extracted factors for the final solution was determined with the Scree plot using the 'elbow' rule and setting the percentage of variance equal to 100%. Factor loadings were analyzed to identify factor patterns. As a rule of thumb, factor loadings greater than or equal to 0.30 in absolute value were considered to be significant (Thompson, 2004). All the eigenvalues of the factors were greater than 1. The six extracted factors were: THB criminal idiosyncrasies (24.5% variance; eigenvalue = 6.37), THB purposes in Portugal (7.29% variance; eigenvalue = 1.89), Trafficker profile and criminal dynamics (5.81% variance; eigenvalue = 1.51), Victim profile and dynamics of victimization (4.95% variance; eigenvalue = 1.29), THB trajectories (4.29% variance; eigenvalue = 1.12) and THB specificities in Portugal (3.94% variance; eigenvalue = 1.03). This instrument revealed also good internal consistency for this sample (Cronbach alpha = .87)

Procedures

A convenience sampling system was used in this study. Contacts with universities from all national territory were established, in order to ask for their collaboration in the dissemination of the online survey. Although we requested the collaboration of higher education institutions throughout the continental territory, we only received positive answers from three universities. Because we had no access to the number of students contacted, we were not able to calculate a response rate.

An online survey was developed and Universities were invited to disseminate the link to all their students, via the institutional mailing lists. Participants were then provided with a link to the self-administered online survey inventory, where the main goals and the importance of this research, the target sample and data collection method were explained (using the Survey Creator program). Once the participants agreed to participate (via informed consent), they were directed to a demographic information page, followed by the questionnaire survey. The data were collected during April and May of 2015.

Analysis Strategy

Initially, a descriptive analysis of the sample was conducted (e.g., age, sex). Subsequently, t-tests for independent samples were applied to determine if differences in THB understanding based on the participants' sex existed. One-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted to determine if there were differences in knowledge based on previous training (formal and/or informal) and study area. Pearson correlation coefficients were used to assess the magnitude of associations between THB knowledge and participant age, and Spearman correlation to educational level. Finally, a hierarchical linear regression analysis was conducted to predict THB knowledge. The first step included socio-demographic variables (e.g., sex, age); the second step included educational variables (course area); and the third step included training experience. Once the variable study area and previous training presented more than two categories, dummy variables were calculated.

Results

Knowledge about THB

Participants scored, on average, 17.43 ($SD = 5$, $Min = 3$, $Max = 23$) of the potential 25 points possible on THB. Overall knowledge was calculated from the totals of each cluster, based on the responses to each item (see Table 2).

In addition to the correct answers identified by the participants, the average score per participant was calculated in order to standardize and compare the results obtained in each domain. We found that the domain with the highest knowledge was the one referring to the THB criminal idiosyncrasies ($M = .85$, $SD = .21$), followed by the traffickers' profile and criminal dynamics ($M = .74$, $SD = .26$) and THB trajectories ($M = .74$, $SD = .25$). In contrast, the domains where the participants showed lower scores were those related to THB purposes in Portugal ($M = .69$, $SD = .28$), the victims' profile and dynamics of victimization ($M = .68$, $SD = .21$) and THB specificities in Portugal ($M = .42$, $SD = .3$).

The lack of knowledge about THB was evident in different statements. Relating to the THB purposes inscribed in Portuguese legislation, 59.2% did not recognize begging as a form of THB and 24.2% did not recognize organ extraction. The majority (52.5%) indicated that traffickers are normally unknown to the victims; 46.2% indicated that THB always involves physical violence against the victims; 77.6% indicated that the victims are not from European countries and 19.7% related that the victims are always foreigners or immigrants. With regards to the Portuguese reality concerning THB, 56% of the students considered that Portugal is not a destination country; 23.3% considered that THB is not recognized by Portuguese legislation and 52% was unaware of the existence of public policies to combat THB in their own country.

Table 2. Descriptions of human trafficking knowledge inventory.

| | True | | False | | Do not know | |
|---|----------|------|----------|------|-------------|------|
| | <i>n</i> | % | <i>n</i> | % | <i>n</i> | % |
| Cluster 1: THB criminal idiosyncrasies | | | | | | |
| THB is recognized and penalized by Portuguese legislation. | 171 | 76.7 | 32 | 14.3 | 20 | 9 |
| THB is a public crime (e.g., everyone can denounce it). | 177 | 79.4 | 25 | 11.2 | 21 | 9.4 |
| THB is a problem exclusive to “third-world countries” ^a . | 22 | 9.9 | 200 | 89.7 | 1 | 0.4 |
| THB normally involves organized criminal networks. | 191 | 85.7 | 26 | 11.7 | 6 | 2.7 |
| THB is one of the most serious forms of violation of human rights. | 202 | 90.6 | 15 | 6.7 | 6 | 2.7 |
| Every THB victim is an illegal immigrant ^a . | 20 | 9 | 193 | 86.5 | 10 | 4.5 |
| Cluster 2: THB purposes in Portugal | | | | | | |
| Begging is a form of THB. | 92 | 41.3 | 107 | 48 | 24 | 10.8 |
| Slavery is a form of THB. | 198 | 88.8 | 19 | 8.5 | 6 | 2.7 |
| Organ removal is a form of THB. | 170 | 76.2 | 41 | 18.4 | 12 | 5.4 |
| Cluster 3: Trafficker profile and criminal dynamics | | | | | | |
| Traffickers normally do not know their victims ^a . | 95 | 42.6 | 106 | 47.5 | 22 | 9.9 |
| Traffickers are exclusively men ^a . | 21 | 9.4 | 186 | 83.4 | 16 | 7.2 |
| Traffickers operate always within their country ^a . | 27 | 12.1 | 189 | 84.8 | 7 | 3.1 |
| Traffickers take advantage of the vulnerability and fragility of their victims. | 204 | 91.5 | 14 | 6.3 | 5 | 2.2 |
| Cluster 4: Victim profile and dynamics of victimization | | | | | | |
| THB's causes are mostly poverty and social exclusion. | 101 | 45.3 | 117 | 52.5 | 5 | 2.2 |
| THB for sexual exploitation involves mostly women. | 185 | 83 | 31 | 13.9 | 7 | 3.1 |
| THB affects mostly women and children. | 130 | 58.3 | 76 | 34.1 | 17 | 7.6 |
| THB for labor exploitation involves mostly men. | 168 | 75.3 | 32 | 14.3 | 23 | 10.3 |
| Only foreigners and immigrants are THB victims ^a . | 26 | 11.7 | 179 | 80.3 | 18 | 8.1 |
| Cluster 5: THB trajectories | | | | | | |
| THB always involves the movement of victims to another country ^a . | 28 | 12.6 | 193 | 86.5 | 2 | 0.9 |
| It is easy to identify a THB victim ^a . | 18 | 8.1 | 183 | 82.1 | 22 | 9.9 |
| THB always involves physical violence against their victims ^a . | 85 | 37.7 | 120 | 53.8 | 19 | 8.5 |
| Cluster 6: THB specificities in Portugal | | | | | | |
| Portugal is a destination and transit country for THB. | 98 | 43.9 | 88 | 39.5 | 37 | 16.6 |
| Portugal has specialized institutions to shelter and help THB victims. | 107 | 48 | 68 | 30.5 | 48 | 21.5 |
| Portugal has anti-traffic policies. | 116 | 52 | 65 | 29.1 | 42 | 18.8 |
| In Portugal, THB victims are mostly from Europe. | 50 | 22.4 | 127 | 57 | 46 | 20.6 |

^aThese items are considered false.

The *t* tests for independent samples allowed us to conclude that there were significant differences in the total score, as a function of sex, $t(221) = 3.416$, $p < .001$, $d = .27$, with a small effect size. In general, women demonstrated greater knowledge than men.

Age and Education Level

Significant positive correlations were found between age, $r = .18$, $p < .01$ and course level, $r_{sp} = .14$, $p < .05$. Significant differences were found at the level of total knowledge as a function of the academic training area, $F_{(3, 219)} = 10.088$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .12$, with a small effect size. Participants in engineering and technology areas demonstrated significantly less knowledge when compared to participants from other studying areas (social, medical and health sciences, and natural sciences).

Previous Training in Trafficking in Human Beings and Knowledge of THB

Although most participants had some type of previous contact with the subject of THB, more than a quarter of the sample (27.4%) reported not having previous informal and/or formal training on the subject; 46.2% reported having contact through informal channels (mass media campaigns on THB and/or reading on the matter on their own initiative); 14.8% reported having contact through the two channels, formal and informal; only 11.7% reported formal training sources (classes on the subject);

In the total score, significant differences were found, as a function of previous training on the phenomenon, $F(3, 219) = 6.229$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .08$. Participants with no training in THB scored significantly lower in levels of knowledge about human trafficking.

Predictors of THB Knowledge

Table 3 displays the hierarchical linear regression results in predicting THB knowledge. Model 3 was significant, $F(9,212) = 5.89$, $p < .001$, explaining 27% of the variance of THB knowledge. Age, $B = .1$, 95%CI [0.02,0.17], being in engineering and technology vs other areas, $B = -3.08$, 95%CI [-5.43, -0.72], informal training, $B = 1.07$, 95%CI [0.08,2.21], and both informal and formal training, $B = 1.99$, 95%CI [0.49,3.49] were significant predictors of THB knowledge. Thus, a higher level of THB knowledge was observed in older college students, those from social and human science areas and/or those that had contact with THB through formal and/or informal training.

Discussion

The main objective of this study was to evaluate college students' knowledge about THB, with the results suggesting that Portuguese college students have higher levels of knowledge about THB criminal idiosyncrasies, the trafficker's profile and the criminal dynamics trajectories. These results are congruent with other Portuguese studies with different groups of professionals, magistrates (Lourenço et al., 2018), and police and social workers (Cunha et al., 2018) that revealed a higher level of knowledge and adequate perceptions in these areas.

However, an in-depth analysis of each domain allowed the identification of areas in which students showed lower levels of knowledge, namely the profile of the victims plus the dynamics of victimization, the specificities of THB in Portugal, related with the national political and social responses to fight THB in their own country, and about some specificities of the legislation, related with the purposes of THB. On the victim's characterization, knowledge gaps included origin of victims as college students were unaware that the majority of the victims exploited in Portugal come from European countries, according to the statistics

Table 3. Hierarchical linear regression to predict human trafficking knowledge.

| | B | Standard Error | Beta | t | 95% CI for B | |
|---------------------------------------|-------|----------------|-------|-------------------|--------------|-------------|
| | | | | | Lower Limit | Upper Limit |
| Model 1 | | | | | | |
| (Constant) | 17.20 | 1.15 | | 14.94*** | 14.93 | 19.46 |
| Sex | -1.81 | 0.50 | -0.23 | -3.58*** | -2.80 | -0.81 |
| Age | 0.12 | 0.04 | 0.19 | 2.94** | 0.04 | 0.19 |
| Model 2 | | | | | | |
| (Constant) | 17.70 | 1.56 | | 11.35*** | 14.63 | 20.77 |
| Sex | -0.66 | 0.57 | -0.09 | -1.16 | -1.79 | 0.46 |
| Age | 0.11 | 0.04 | 0.17 | 2.70** | 0.03 | 0.18 |
| Social sciences vs. others | -1.32 | 1.16 | -0.18 | -1.14 | -3.60 | 0.96 |
| Health Sciences vs. others | -0.47 | 1.31 | -0.04 | -0.36 | -3.05 | 2.11 |
| Engineering and Technology vs. others | -3.37 | 1.21 | -0.42 | -2.79** | -5.75 | -0.99 |
| Model 3 | | | | | | |
| (Constant) | 16.98 | 1.57 | | 10.84*** | 13.90 | 20.07 |
| Sex | -0.60 | 0.57 | -0.08 | -1.06 | -1.72 | 0.52 |
| Age | 0.10 | 0.04 | 0.16 | 2.47* | 0.02 | 0.17 |
| Social sciences vs. others | -1.27 | 1.14 | -0.17 | -1.11 | -3.52 | 0.99 |
| Health Sciences vs. others | -0.48 | 1.29 | -0.04 | -0.38 | -3.02 | 2.05 |
| Engineering and Technology vs. others | -3.08 | 1.20 | -0.38 | -2.58* | -5.43 | -0.72 |
| Informal training vs. others | 1.07 | 0.58 | 0.14 | 1.84 ⁺ | -0.08 | 2.21 |
| Formal training vs. others | -0.54 | 0.82 | -0.05 | -0.66 | -2.16 | 1.08 |
| Formal and Informal vs. others | 1.99 | 0.76 | 0.19 | 2.61** | 0.49 | 3.49 |

Note: Sex: 1 = female; 2 = male; Others = 0; Social Sciences = 1; Others = 0; Health Sciences = 1; Others = 0; Engineering and Technology = 1; Others = 0; Informal training = 1; Others = 0; Formal training = 1; Others = 0; Informal and Formal training = 1; Others = 0.

+ $p = .1$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

reported by the Observatory of Human Trafficking (2017). These results are worrying, because as Portuguese and European students, with the possibility of studying abroad, this unfamiliarity and lack of awareness leaves this population more vulnerable and at a higher risk to potential traffickers and it could also prevent them from identifying potential victims. It is also important to highlight that participants who believe that THB always involves physical violence are less likely to recognize trafficking situations when there are no signs of physical violence.

Regarding the Portuguese reality, most students did not recognize Portugal as a destination country of THB, and almost one in four participants considers that THB is not a Portuguese issue and is not recognized in Portuguese legislation, despite all of the information campaigns carried out since 2007. This makes us think that they do not know that THB is a crime in Portugal. So, if participants faced a situation as victims, as citizens or even as professionals, they may not be able to recognize or identify the signs. Even more surprising is the fact that the majority did not know that Portugal has political and social resources to tackle THB, although the third national plan against THB is currently in progress, and one of its major strategic areas is the prevention and information of the civil society.

Still, most participants correctly recognized that THB does not always include traveling or dislocation to another country. According to Siegel and De Blank (2010), THB is a crime often committed within the country of origin of the victims and the traffickers, which involves at least 2 million victims per year worldwide (Couto, Machado, Martins, & Gonçalves, 2012).

In general, participants acknowledged that THB is a crime that involves various purposes such as slavery, organ removal, sexual exploitation, labor exploitation among others (e.g., begging). It is important to underline that begging was included as part of the article 160 of the penal in August 2013, and only recently was included in preventive campaigns in Portugal.

The participants acknowledge that THB mostly affects women and girls for sexual exploitation, who may or may not be foreigners or immigrants and whose identification is often difficult (e.g., in the case of victims for sexual exploitation). Men were recognized as the main victims in labor exploitation, however, they were not recognized as victims of sexual exploitation. This indicates the belief in a myth, since there are also men (3%) that are included in the group of victims for sexual exploitation (Europol, 2016; OTSH, 2017; UNODC, 2016).

THB was also considered by the participants the most serious form of violation of human rights, most also stated that THB does not always involve physical violence against the victims. The characteristics of THB (e.g., possession of visas and victims' identity documents) indicate various forms of domination exercised against the victims (UNODC, 2014) by their traffickers, not always implying the use of physical violence to dominate and humiliate victims. Finally, participants identify THB as an organized crime network, where traffickers exploit the vulnerability and fragility of their victims. However, more than half of participants consider that the traffickers are usually strangers. This documents a fairly rooted misbelief which makes difficult to have full awareness of the phenomenon as well as making harder the recognition of the risk to victimization when facing possible known traffickers.

The group of participants who revealed a higher level of knowledge regarding the subject were women and students of social and human science areas. Relatedly, an international study concluded that women perceived THB to be more serious, concerning and important than men (Honeyman et al., 2016). Nevertheless, it would be very important that students from engineering and technology areas would increase their knowledge since technology can facilitate or complicate trafficking activities. If these courses start to address these issues in their academic curricula, students would have more sensitivity to THB and be able to actively participate in the fight against it.

Although most of the participants had contact with the theme of THB through informal (e.g., mass media) or formal (e.g., classes/lectures) sources, more than a quarter of the sample did not have any kind of contact with the subject. Despite the fact that the 3rd National Plan against

Trafficking in Human Beings stipulates that the academic curriculum should include this theme, the data showed contradictory results (only 11% of the participants had classes about the phenomena). Since 2007 the National Plans against Trafficking in Human Beings have been drawing attention to the importance of (1) preventing, raising awareness, knowing and investigating; (2) educating, training and habilitating. The answers given by the participants regarding their contact with the theme of THB in the school/college context, suggest a low compliance by the academic institutions regarding these strategic and national plans. However, the fact that most participants were in their first or second year of the course may suggest the possibility that this issue could be addressed later, in their final years of study.

As for the participants' contact with the phenomenon, participants who have never had contact with the subject showed greater lack of knowledge about THB compared to those who had contact with the phenomenon, with informal exposure assumed an important source of information. According to Couto et al. (2012), media represents a powerful means of information transmission worldwide due to the number of people it can reach. Thus, one of the best ways to prevent THB is through the dissemination of information in the media with reliable information sources, the implementation of the subject in the academic curriculum starting in the first year of university and also through the training of professionals (as outlined in third NP THB).

These results show some of the weaknesses/gaps in knowledge of these students, which may be considered as a starting point for developing awareness and sensitization programs about THB for this population, and to integrate this phenomenon in academic curriculum. The human, health and social science areas involve the helping professions so students must be trained to be capable professionals and to be prepared to recognize, identify, refer and intervene with the victims of this crime. Engineering and technology are important areas too to fight this crime, specifically by developing strategies to detect and dismantle trafficker networks that increasingly operate at a virtual level.

Conclusion

Trafficking in human beings still remains an insufficiently studied subject, especially concerning the level of knowledge in students' communities, but also regarding the understanding of the phenomenon by society in general. This study's main objective was to understand the college students' level of knowledge of THB, contributing as well to a better understanding of the participants' knowledge gaps (e.g., knowledge of the victims of THB, as well as the policies developed to fight it) and the needs related with the development of awareness and prevention programs.

One of the limitations of this study relates to the scarcity of literature comprehensively addressing the points raised in the questionnaire thus making it difficult to compare our data with data from previous studies. Another limitation is related with the characteristics of the sample, with women being the majority of the participants, the Portuguese college student population was not represented, this should be taken into consideration in future studies.

In spite of these limitations, this study may be considered an initial effort to focus on students of higher education in Portugal, allowing a better understanding of the phenomenon and opening doors to the urgency of improving awareness among this population. To achieve this goal, national and community entities must develop anti-human trafficking campaigns targeting vulnerable groups as well as the wider public, with the primary goal of informing and educating. They must also focus on addressing misconceptions, such as confusion between human trafficking and migration, conflating prostitution with human trafficking, sexualization/erotization of women, victimization, the role of anti-human trafficking organizations, data shortcomings, and oversimplification of human trafficking (Szablewska & Kubacki, 2018).

The extension of this study to a larger sample of students, as well as its improvements considering the identified limitations, would allow a data collection that could more robustly justify the adoption of new policies and training strategies for students, enabling their education in the universal values of citizenship and human rights and contributing to improvements in the global prevention of the phenomenon of THB.

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Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Ethical approval: All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Informed consent: Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants includes in the study.

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