ABSTRACT

Human trafficking is a public health and human rights issue. University students were stunned to discover this modern day slavery in their communities. After they began this course, they recognized how little they knew about the complexity of human trafficking. This service learning course raised the students’ consciousness and motivated them to create strategies for raising public awareness, and educating health care professionals, law enforcement officials, and legislative aides.

A research study was undertaken to determine students’ perceptions of human trafficking before and after completing a human trafficking course, and to describe the lived experience of participating in a service learning course. A mixed methods study using a convenience sample was implemented. Students were voluntarily surveyed at the beginning of the course, then surveyed and interviewed at the end of the course. Thirty students completed the pre and post course surveys, and 20 participated in audio-recorded interviews. Results indicated an increase in knowledge. There was recognition of the need for education and the identification of the issues and diverse needs of human trafficking victims. Interview transcripts were analyzed using Colaizzi’s phenomenological methodology. The findings included a description of human trafficking. Four themes were identified: 1) human trafficking happens here and everywhere, 2) awareness occurs through education, 3) everyone has a slavery footprint, and 4) solutions and victim services need to be developed. The students addressed how their projects enabled them to make a difference. Additional findings revealed students’ reactions to their naïveté about human trafficking in the United States.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To determine students’ perceptions and knowledge of human trafficking before and after completing a service learning course.
- To describe the lived experience of participating in a service learning course.
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MIXED METHODS DESIGN

Quantitative Research Question

Will a formal educational program which incorporates a service learning component change students’ perceptions and knowledge about the trafficking of human persons?

Hypothesis

There will be an increase in the perceptions and knowledge of students enrolled in a human trafficking course as measured by their pretest and post-test scores on a human trafficking survey.

Qualitative Research Question

What is the lived experience of participating in a service learning course on human trafficking?

Population

- Adult female and male graduate students with majors in Nursing, Law, and Communications
- Adult female and male undergraduate honor students in Biology, Political Science, and Gender and Women’s Studies
- Ages 18 years or older
- Able to read and write English
- Enrolled in the Human Trafficking service learning course

Sample

- Convenience sample of 30 students
- Sample sizes: 30 students completed pre – post tests
- 20 students were interviewed

Setting

- Mid-Atlantic region of the United States
- Interviews were held in a private conference room

Instrumentation

- Researcher-Developed Survey on Human Trafficking
- Open-ended interview question: Will you please describe the experience of participating in a Service Learning Human Trafficking course?
- Demographic data form

FINDINGS

Demographic Data

- Age: 19 – 26 years
- Ethnicity: 21 Caucasian, 6 African American, 3 Asian American
- Education: 22 Graduate Students, 8 Undergraduate Students

Quantitative Findings

- The t-test indicated that there was a significant difference in the pre and post test scores (t = 2.36; p = 0.012).
- All students rated their service learning experiences as positive or very positive and believed that their projects made a difference.
- All students indicated that the service project was “the best part of the course.” “Doing the community outreach challenged ignorance and helped break the silence about human trafficking.”
- Students presented their educational programs to the following audiences:
  - Health Care Professionals (n = 128)
  - Nurse Practitioner Students (n = 42)
  - Undergraduate Nursing Students (n = 53)
  - High School Teachers and Administrators (n = 14)
  - High School Students (n = 56)
  - Group of a U.S. Senator’s Aides (n = 7)
  - University Program (n = 92)
- All participants rated the programs as excellent or very good, and many requested additional information.

Qualitative Findings – Colaizzi’s Method (1978)

Themes

- Human trafficking happens here and everywhere
- Awareness occurs through education
- Everyone has a slavery footprint
- Solutions and victim services need to be developed and actually be available

Selected Student Statements

- “Health care professionals play an integral role in detecting and assisting human trafficking victims.”
- “I was shocked about people’s lack of knowledge and ability to discuss this worldwide problem.”
- “Just talking about the problem of human trafficking can make a difference in raising awareness and sensitivity.”
- “We need to address the demand issue of human trafficking.”

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

Selected Student Statements

- “I now recognize that health care providers and law enforcement people need to be not just informed, but be available to victims of human trafficking.”
- “Prior to this course I really didn’t know or understand about labor trafficking or trafficking of human organs.”
- “I think what we did in the larger community really did make a difference.”
- “We need to get information like hotline numbers and more public service announcements out there.”

Conclusions

- An inter-professionally taught educational course increased students’ perceptions and knowledge about human trafficking.
- Students effectively conducted educational projects and informal classes on human trafficking as indicated on the program evaluation forms.
- All students indicated that their service learning projects raised awareness, and addressed advocacy, aspects of prevention and survivor services.

Study Limitations

- Convenience sample with small sample size
- Testing effect along with participant maturation
- Researcher develop survey

Implications and Research Recommendations

- There is a need for the continuation, as well as further creation and dissemination of additional courses, classes and programs on human trafficking.
- Using a service learning strategy to educate students about human trafficking facilitated personal involvement and commitment to further the current efforts to end human trafficking in all its forms.
- All students left the class stating that they personally would continue some type of effort to stop human trafficking.
- Research is needed to determine the most effective strategies to use to educate and raise awareness of high school and university students, nurses, law enforcement officials, and the general public about their role in abolishing human trafficking.
- Studies are needed that address the health issues and needs of victims of human trafficking for the purpose of developing evidenced based care.