

The Inclusive Human Trafficking Checklist: A Dialectical Measurement Methodology

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Abstract : The identification of victims of human trafficking and consequential service provision is characterized by a significant disconnection between the estimated prevalence of this issue and the number of cases identified. This poses as a tremendous problem for human rights advocates as it prevents data collection, information sharing, allocation of resources and opportunities for international dialogues. The current paper introduces the Inclusive Human Trafficking Checklist (IHTC) as a measurement methodology with theoretical underpinnings derived from dialectic theory. The presence of human trafficking in a person's life is conceptualized as a dynamic and dialectic interaction between vulnerability and exploitation. The current paper explores the operationalization of exploitation and vulnerability, evaluates the metric qualities of the instrument, evaluates whether there are differences in assessment based on the participant's profession, level of knowledge, and training, and assesses if users of the instrument perceive it as useful. A total of 201 participants were asked to rate three vignettes predetermined by experts to qualify as either a human trafficking case or not. The participants were placed in three conditions: business as usual, utilization of the IHTC with and without training. The results revealed a statistically significant level of agreement between the expert's diagnostic and the application of the IHTC with an improvement of 40% on identification when compared with the business as usual condition. While there was an improvement in identification in the group with training, the difference was found to have a small effect size. Participants who utilized the IHTC showed an increased ability to identify elements of identity-based vulnerabilities as well as elements of fraud, which according to the results, are distinctive variables in cases of human trafficking. In terms of the perceived utility, the results revealed higher mean scores for the groups utilizing the IHTC when compared to the business as usual condition. These findings suggest that the IHTC improves appropriate identification of cases and that it is perceived as a useful instrument. The application of the IHTC as a multidisciplinary instrumentation that can be utilized in legal and human services settings is discussed as a pivotal piece of helping victims restore their sense of dignity, and advocate for legal, physical and psychological reparations. It is noteworthy that this study was conducted with a sample in the United States and later re-tested in Colombia. The implications of the instrument for treatment conceptualization and intervention in human trafficking cases are discussed as opportunities for enhancement of victim well-being, restoration engagement and activism. With the idea that what is personal is also political, we believe that the careful observation and data collection in specific cases can inform new areas of human rights activism.

Keywords : exploitation, human trafficking, measurement, vulnerability, screening

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