

ABSTRACT

THESIS: Knowledge of Registered Dietitians about Nutrition-Related Issues of Human Trafficked Individuals and their Perceptions Regarding Inclusion on the Interprofessional Health Care Team

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Human trafficking (HT) consists of a multiple step process that results in the exploitation of individuals. Negative health consequences a human trafficked person endures include malnutrition, depression, dehydration, and physical abuse. There is a unique role for health care professionals to help identify potential cases and to aid in the care of these individuals. However, despite identifying malnutrition and dehydration as being negative consequences of these survivors, no research was identified that indicated the need for the inclusion of a registered dietitian (RD)/registered dietitian nutritionist (RDN) on the interprofessional team (IPT) that treats these individuals. Thus, the purpose of this study was to measure registered dietitians (RDs/RDNs) knowledge about potential nutrition-related issues of HT individuals, to identify if RDs/RDNs serve on interprofessional teams that care for trafficked individuals who have been rescued, to identify barriers that have prevented RDs/RDNs from becoming involved with this vulnerable population, and to identify perceived role of RDs/RDNs in working with this population. An online, anonymous survey was emailed to RDs/RDNs who were currently working in Indiana and who were apart of the Women's Health Dietetic Practice Group (WHDPG) to identify the knowledge, barriers, and prevalence of RDs/RDNs who have worked with

this vulnerable population. An estimated 375 completed surveys were needed to obtain results that were representative of this population. However, only 241/279 (86.4%) RDs/RDNs participated in this research study from Indiana Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (IAND), WH DPG, and preceptors affiliated with BSU. Results indicated only 13% (n=32) of RDs/RDNs have or may have worked with a HT individual. The mean HT knowledge score was 78.5 ± 16.4 . The highest HT knowledge was seen in RDs/RDNs aged 30-44 years and those with 3-5 years of employment. Although most RDs/RDNs correctly identify the nutrition-related conditions HT individuals face, most indicated they had little to no confidence regarding responding to HT, making lack of knowledge one of the biggest barriers that prevent RDs/RDNs from becoming involved. Most RDs/RDNs believed RDs/RDNs have a role in working with this population, suggesting education is warranted to help bridge this gap. Results from this study can be used to teach members of the dietetic profession about their role in caring for this vulnerable population who face many nutrition-related consequences, as well as general information regarding HT. Education on how to identify HT, steps to take if trafficking is suspected, and nutrition-related conditions trafficked individuals would increase confidence and knowledge of RDs/RDNs.