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## The Shape of Trafficking

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# The Shape of Trafficking

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A WEBSITE BY ABBY SHIFLEY  
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A photo taken during the play “Free to Fly” — a play at Bowling Green High School about the subtle methods of sex trafficking.

## **ABSTRACT**

“Much of the popular writing on human trafficking has been anecdotal or sensationalistic, and most scholarly publications are either general overviews of the problem or critiques of the literature” (Weitzer 2014).

A 2017 report estimated 24.9 million people were victims of human trafficking globally. Of those 24.9 million, 71% are women and girls and 25% are under the age of 18. Research on human trafficking is limited, and training is lacking within organizations essential to the fight against human trafficking. Additionally, members of the public are typically ignorant of the true nature of human trafficking, which is multifaceted and much more prevalent in society than the number of arrests and investigations suggests.

For my honors project, I created a website with resources detailing red flags of human trafficking and links to training resources. It also contains four articles written by me on human trafficking in the area.

Among researchers, it is typically agreed that human trafficking is an underestimated market and is growing. I hope my project will help health workers, law enforcement agencies, as well as the general public in identifying victims and perpetrators of human trafficking, and aid in stopping the expansion of this horrifying industry.

**Link to the website:** <http://bgsujournalism.com/theshapeoftrafficking/>

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Medical professionals*

Hospitals are one of the few locations where trafficking victims can be observed with their abusers. However, because medical professionals have a lack of awareness and training of anti-trafficking methods, as well as red flags of human trafficking, many victims go unidentified. (Ramnauth et. all, 2018).

“A majority of health care professional may have had contact with potential victims, yet little to no action occurred due to lack of awareness.” (Ramnauth et. all, 2018).

Most of the research highlights the complexity of the human trafficking issue, and there must be a multifaceted response to the problem (Stoklosa, MacGibbon, Stoklosa, 2017).

Additionally, there is a low rate of victim identification in rural areas of the U.S. and the local health workers’ lack of training and knowledge of human trafficking contributes to this low rate (Brooks, 2018). However, much of the research on medical practitioners’ contributions to anti-trafficking efforts found that the participants showed great interest in having a training program.

### *Law enforcement*

Like medical professionals, Georgia law enforcement expressed great interest in a training program on anti-trafficking efforts (Grubb, Bennett, Dec. 2012). However, a general lack of training has been found in research of law enforcement practitioner’s awareness of human trafficking. Additionally, most law enforcement practitioners do not know how to properly handle victims of human trafficking (Farrell, Fahy, 2009).

Law enforcement entities can find training through the U.S. Department of Justice’s Bureau of Justice Assistance and the International Association of the Chiefs of Police. These training programs detail not only red flags of trafficking cases, but also how to respond to traumatized victims who may have mental health issues. Despite this training being available, only 12 states require training (Grubb, Bennett, Dec. 2012).

“More training for officers and the public, more screening and identification procedures, and more victim services are necessary.” (Hancock 2019)

Law enforcement agencies are essential to combating human trafficking and must have an extensive knowledge of the issue. Sheriff agencies are especially essential because their broad jurisdictions aid in stopping criminal activity that involves the moving of people (Hancock 2019).

### *General population*

People within the general public who are knowledgeable in the signs of human trafficking are essential to identifying victims. The FBI receive many reports of human trafficking from citizen complaints and victim services organizations (fbi.gov). However, there is very little research on public awareness of human trafficking (Overhold, 2013).

There is also a lack of awareness among members of the public, and the public’s knowledge of human trafficking is often made superficial by media portrayals. These surface-level depictions are also incorrectly adopted in research on the subject.

“Such sensationalized depictions are all too common and mask the complexities, nuances, and contingencies characterizing many empirical cases.” (Weitzer, 2013)

### *Resources in Toledo*

Toledo is an area that is known to house a large human trafficking market (Wilson, Dalton, 2007). However, it also has many resources for the general public to gain knowledge of human trafficking.

Just in September, the University of Toledo hosted the International Human Trafficking and Human Justice Conference. The University of Toledo also houses the Human Trafficking and Social Justice Institute, which has programs that help victims of human trafficking ([utoledo.edu](http://utoledo.edu)).

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