

# Slipping Through the Cracks: Receptivity of healthcare professionals to an electronic screening tool for human trafficking



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## Introduction

- **Human trafficking** is the exploitation of an individual through force or coercion, for labor or services, including commercial sex.
- **Healthcare providers** are uniquely positioned to encounter trafficked people.<sup>1</sup>
- Prior research has found a need for **increased sensitivity in identifying trafficked persons** in healthcare settings, and for **provider education** about the issue.<sup>2</sup>

## Objectives

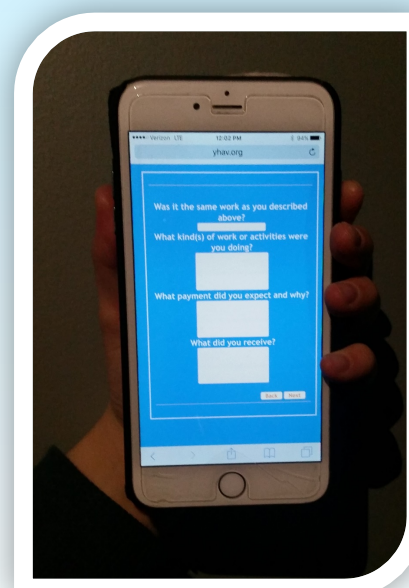
- **Assess healthcare worker receptivity** to the implementation of an electronic screening tool for human trafficking in various clinical settings.
- **Identify barriers to implementation** of current screening practices.
- **Promote awareness** among healthcare workers about the prevalence of human trafficking and the potential signs of trafficking among their patients.

## Methods

- Participants included 27 healthcare practitioners selected via convenience sampling.
- Surveys with Likert scale and open-ended responses were administered in person.
- Each participant encounter included an introduction to a prototypical electronic screening tool (pictured below),<sup>3</sup> and an educational discussion about human trafficking.

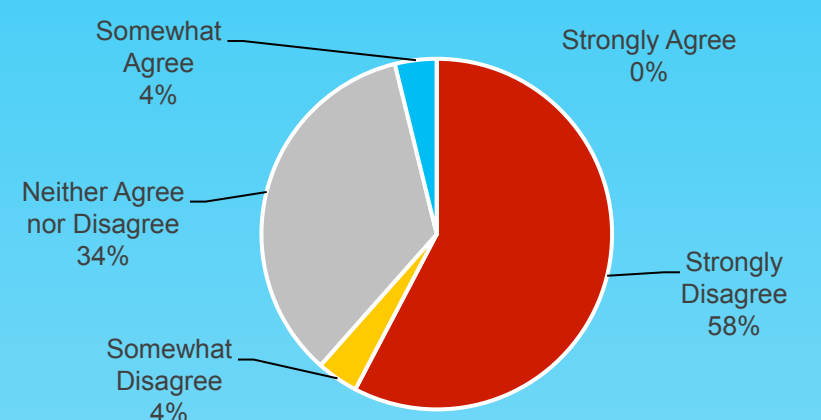
Our sample included:

- XX Family medicine physicians
- XX Emergency physicians
- XX Emergency medical technicians
- XX Registered nurses

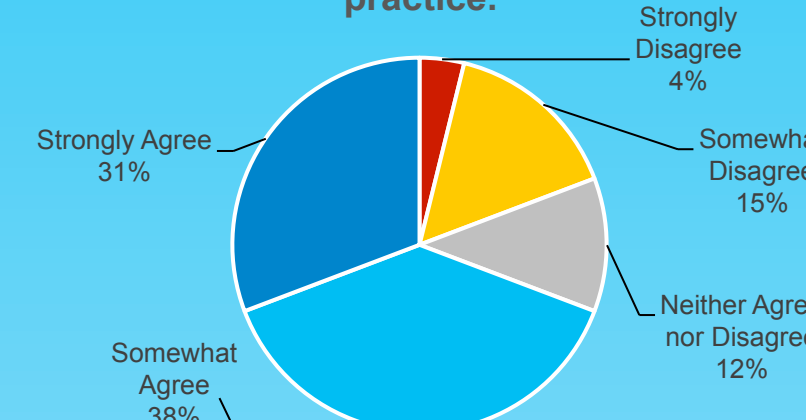


## Results

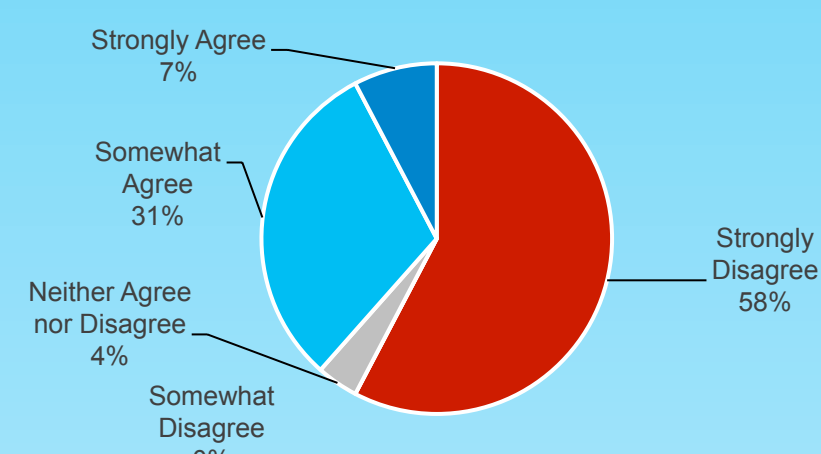
Our clinic/hospital has an existing protocol for identifying people at risk of trafficking.



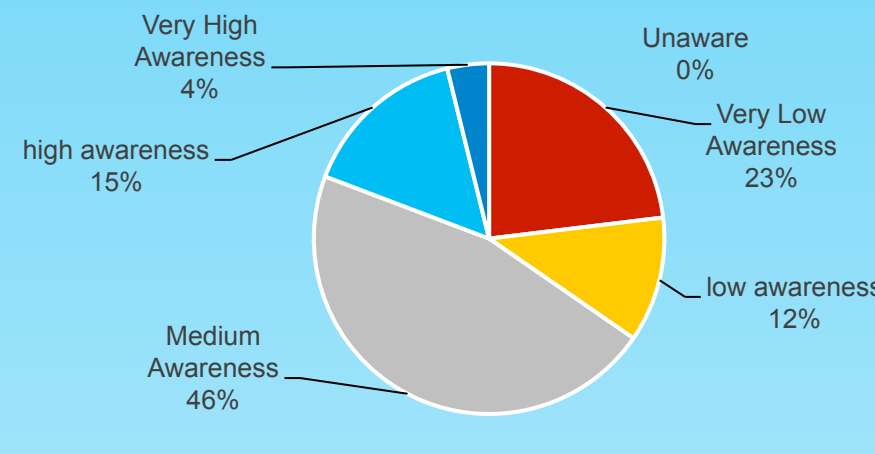
I am unsure of what to do if I encounter a trafficked person, or someone at risk, in my practice.



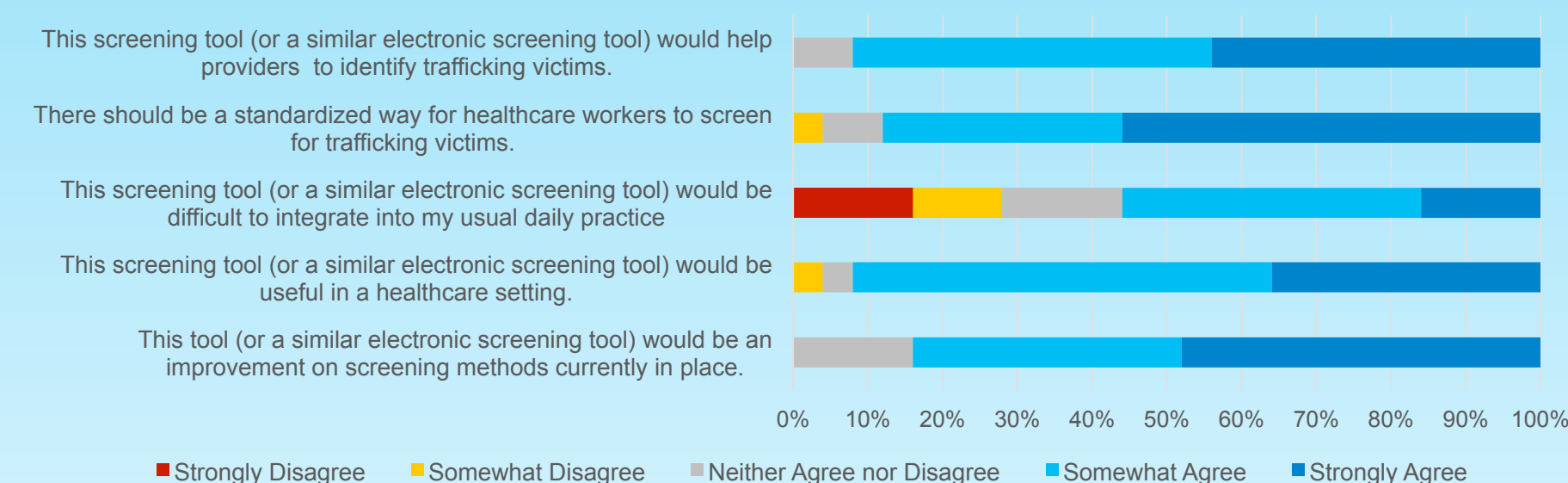
The issue of human trafficking has been addressed in my professional training.



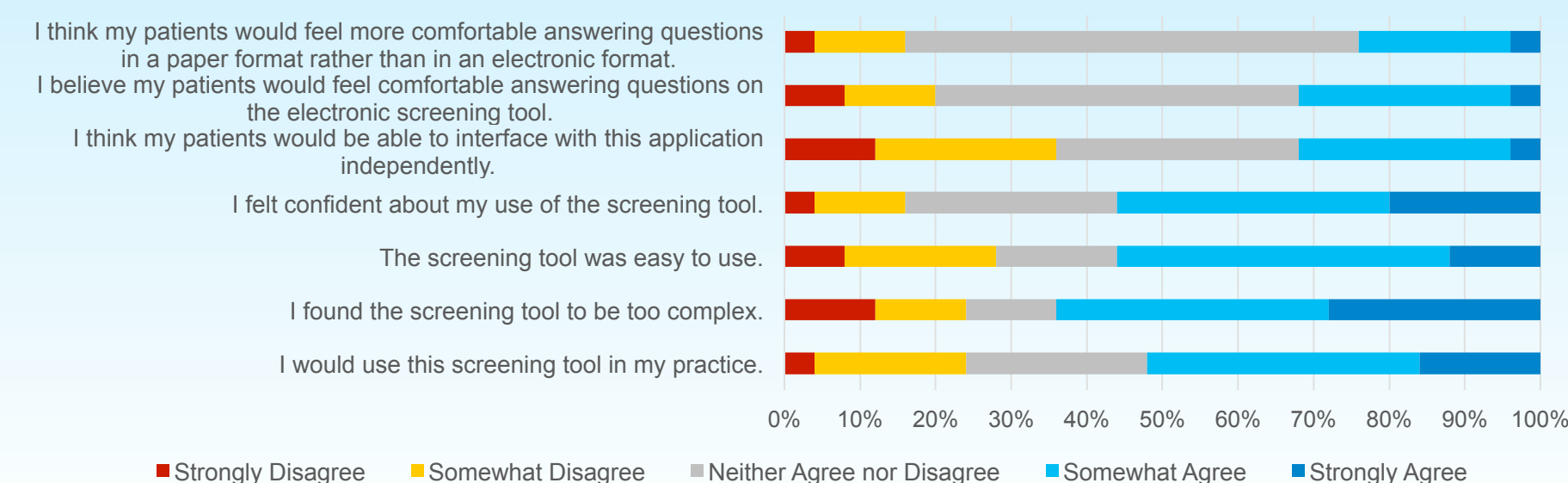
Self-Reported Level of Awareness Regarding Human Trafficking



### Applicability of an Electronic Screening Tool



### Ease of Use of this Application as a Possible Screening Tool



## Common themes in open-ended responses

### Awareness and education:

- “Education for providers is lacking and outreach across the state is essential.”
- “If nothing else, tools like this raise the awareness of providers who are then more likely to recognize the victims of human trafficking.”

### Barriers for implementation:

- “If providers feel it is not a problem that occurs frequently, they will not feel it is relevant.”
- “Given the low prevalence of human trafficking, I feel that this would subject many patients to a long screen in the waiting room for a relatively rare situation.”

“Trying to carve out time and space and hardware could be challenging... also considering that we are being asked to screen for many things in primary care and DO something about it: depression, suicide, obesity, DM, HTH, activity level, etc.”

### Suggestions for the screening tool:

- “I think that maybe 5 well-chosen questions would be better.”
- “I think this has potential. It could be a good option on a mobile device to be administered while someone is waiting in the exam room. Somewhere private. Sometimes the victims are accompanied by the perpetrator so giving them a safe place would be essential.”

## Discussion

- The healthcare providers had a **positive opinion** of the usefulness of the electronic screening tool, with 92% responding that such a tool would help providers identify victims.
- Implementation would need to address the **time constraints**, provider buy-in, and primary care ‘screening fatigue’ that some providers identified as barriers.
- The survey itself served as a **valuable source of education** for healthcare providers. However, educating healthcare providers remains essential.
- A shorter form of the screening tool with a few sensitive questions could prompt the use of more specific methods of identification.
- Future direction: pilot testing of the application in a clinical setting.

References:  
 1. Isaac, R., Solak, J., & Giardino, A. P. (2011). Health care providers' training needs related to human trafficking: maximizing the opportunity to effectively screen and intervene. *Journal of Applied Research on Children: Informing Policy for Children at Risk*, 2(1), 8.  
 2. Wisconsin Office of Justice Assistance. (2012). Wisconsin Human Trafficking Protocol & Resource Manual. Madison, WI. 105 p. Available at: [https://www.wcasa.org/file\\_open.php?id=336](https://www.wcasa.org/file_open.php?id=336).  
 3. Dunston, D. (2015). You Have A Voice [Mobile Application Software]. Obtained from the developer.

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