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(Un)Covering human traffickingJoana Barbosa^{1*}, Maria João Guia^{2,3,4}, Maria João Vidal-Alves^{1,5}¹Department of Public Health and Forensic Sciences, and Medical Education, Faculty of Medicine, University of Porto, 4200-319 Porto, Portugal.²UCILeR, University of Coimbra Institute for Legal Research, University of Coimbra, 3000-018 Coimbra, Portugal.³Ratio Legis, Centre for Research and Development in Legal Sciences, Corpus Delicti Project on Transnational Organized Crime Studies, Autonomous University of Lisbon, 1169-023, Portugal.⁴Ius Gentium Conimbrigae, Centre for Human Rights Faculty of Law, University of Coimbra, 3000-018 Coimbra, Portugal.⁵TOXRUN – Toxicology Research Unit, University Institute of Health Sciences, CESPU, CRL, 4585-116 Gandra, Portugal.

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Introduction: Human trafficking is a form of organized crime based on manipulating the victim's free will. Sexual or labor exploitation, forced begging, or illegal organ removal are examples of that. Being a crime that thrives on economic and social crises, it has benefited from the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing armed conflicts. Although this is a global crime, it remains very difficult to fight against, to investigate and to prove, resulting in an increasing prevalence of victims invisibility by the formal instances of control. As a public crime, it is important to know its indicators so that it can be better recognized, identified and reported to the authorities.

Objectives: To analyze the scientific literature about the factors that contribute to human trafficking; the professionals who contact with suspected victims; the ways of detecting and identifying suspected cases.

Material and Methods: A literature review by searching scientific articles in the PubMed search engine, among other scientific literature, using the keywords “human

trafficking”, “human exploitation”, “crime identification” and in grey literature. **Results:** It is estimated that 88% of victims come into contact with healthcare providers during their exploitation. These professionals can play a crucial role in detecting human trafficking cases. Due to the complexity of the problem, there are international guidelines and protocols to be adopted in suspicious cases. The training of frontline professionals is strongly recommended as they are in a privileged position for identifying and referral. However, until now, no reference was found regarding informatic tools/algorithm's checklists specific to detection of human trafficking cases by healthcare practitioners and other first-responders, in Portugal. **Conclusions:** In addition to educating and training, developing technologically advanced tools would undoubtedly contribute to this crime detection and also to mitigate the invisibility where trafficking victims remain, leading to reducing the dark figures and to their wider and more successful protection.

Keywords: human trafficking; identification; organized crime; victimization; criminal investigation.

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