

Child Welfare Response to Labor Trafficking

Why is Child Labor Trafficking Important to the Child Welfare System?

Child Welfare Systems are charged with protecting children and youth from abuse. Recently, child sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) have risen to the forefront of public attention, and U.S. legislation has placed child sex trafficking prevention and response within the purview of the child welfare system. Child labor trafficking has received comparably little attention. To ensure that victims are not overlooked, child welfare agencies need to systematically address child labor trafficking.

What are the trends?

Although the research is limited, we know that...

Labor trafficking is often hidden in plain sight

- Victims of child labor trafficking rarely self-identify as victims.
- Children and youth may experience labor and sex trafficking simultaneously.
- Child labor trafficking can be linked to criminal enterprises that are difficult to recognize.
- Common industries of concern include agriculture, domestic work, health and beauty, restaurants, small businesses, gang-involved drug sales/gun carrying, traveling sales crews, and peddling/begging rings.

California youth are in need of services and support

- Since 2007, the National Human Trafficking Hotline, operated by Polaris, received reports of more than 7,800 labor trafficking cases inside the United States.
- 58 Cases of Child Labor Trafficking were reported for California in 2017, up from 39 cases in 2016 and 21 cases in 2015.¹
- In a survey of 98 homeless transition aged youth in California, labor trafficking (reported by 9% of youth) appeared to be just as common as sex trafficking (reported by 8%).²

What is Child Labor Trafficking?

Child labor trafficking is the use of “force, fraud, or coercion” leading a child or youth to perform a labor or service.³

- ➔ **Force** involves physically restraining or harming a victim.
- ➔ **Fraud** deceives victims about aspects of their employment including job duties, work conditions, and payment.
- ➔ **Coercion** includes threats of serious psychological/physical harm to the victims or their loved ones, or real or threatened abuse of the legal system (i.e., threatening youth with deportation or prosecution by the police).⁴

Warning Signs of Labor Trafficking

- Performing work without pay, or not being paid what promised
- Limited or no access to identification or legal documents
- Gaps in attendance or inability to go to school because they “had” to work
- Been arrested or committed a crime they felt someone else forced them to do
- Transported to multiple states or regions selling magazine subscriptions or other products
- Got into trouble for holding or selling drugs for others
- Has a “parent,” “guardian” or other adult “sponsor” with no evidence of legal guardianship
- Performs extensive household work beyond common chores
- Demonstrates visible signs of malnourishment, bruises and/or other forms of abuse
- Isolated, fearful of and/or controlled by an “employer”

Real Life Examples

- A young male answers an ad for easy money and travels in a van selling magazines door to door for an abusive and exploitative crew leader.
- A young female is offered an opportunity to enter the U.S. as a child bride and then is forced to work as the family housekeeper and sleep on the floor.
- A 16-year-old is forced to carry drugs over the Tijuana border for her “boyfriend;” upon entering the U.S. she is also sold for sex.
- A 17-year-old is kicked out of her house after revealing she is gay. She finds work as a nanny and faces threats from her employer who denies her any pay.
- A teenage male is forced to work long hours on a marijuana farm and steal for his employer.
- A family is tricked into believing their young child will have a better life in the U.S. under the guise of fraudulent adoption papers.

¹ Data from Polaris and the National Human Trafficking Hotline

² Murphy, L.T. *Labor and Sex Trafficking Among Homeless Youth*. Modern Slavery Research Project.

³ Administration on Children, Youth and Families 2013

⁴ Office on Trafficking in Persons. 2015. Fact Sheet: Human Trafficking. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Administration for Children, Youth and Families

