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Child Labor Trafficking within The US: A First Look at Allegations Investigated by Florida's Child Welfare Agency

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ABSTRACT

Federal legislation defining the child welfare system's response to human trafficking does not address labor trafficking of children. Yet the National Human Trafficking Hotline consistently identifies potential cases of labor trafficking involving children under age 18 within the United States. This paper uses administrative data to describe the number and characteristics of children with allegations of labor trafficking investigated by a state child welfare agency. Analyses are based on more than 6,000 allegations of labor or sex trafficking involving nearly 5,000 children between 2013 and 2017. Labor trafficking allegations comprised 9% of all human trafficking investigations, and were more likely than sex trafficking allegations to be verified following investigation. Children with labor trafficking allegations were younger, nine times more likely to be male, less than half as likely to have prior child welfare involvement, and half as likely to have subsequent child welfare involvement, compared to children with sex trafficking allegations. Findings suggest opportunities for research and practice to address labor trafficking of children, and the need for continued efforts to identify its occurrence in order to better prevent and alleviate victimization.

KEYWORDS

Human trafficking; labor trafficking; child welfare; children

Introduction

Labor trafficking is often absent from discussions of human trafficking of children within the United States. In many instances, discussions of minor victim trafficking are limited to sex trafficking, although the legal definition of human trafficking includes both sex trafficking and labor trafficking. Yet numerous sources document the occurrence of child labor trafficking. Among potential labor trafficking cases reported to the National Human Trafficking Hotline in 2016, 28% involved minor victims (National Human Trafficking Resource Center, 2017). Labor trafficking was the basis for 72% of all Eligibility Letters issued to foreign national child trafficking victims by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) in 2017 (Department of State, 2018). Labor trafficking allegations comprised 10% of human trafficking allegations investigated by Florida's child welfare agency in which the type of trafficking was specified (Gibbs, Henninger, Tueller, & Kluckman, 2018). Recent studies of runaway and homeless youth have identified labor trafficking to occur between 28% and 42% of youth reporting experiences of human trafficking (Murphy, 2016; Wolfe, Greeson, Wasch, & Treglia, 2018). However, "sex trafficking continues to dominate the narrative of human trafficking" (Walts, 2017, p. 60), and no reliable data on the prevalence or characteristics of child labor trafficking exists (Development Services Group, 2016; Zhang, 2012).

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Policy Related to Labor Trafficking of Children[1] in the United States

The Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2000 (TVPRA; Public Law 106–386)[2] establishes legal definitions for both sex trafficking and labor trafficking. The TVPRA defines "severe forms of trafficking in persons" as acts taken to obtain labor, services or any commercial sex act, when obtained through force, fraud, or coercion. These conditions need not be present when a sex trafficking victim is under the age of 18, but are required to establish labor trafficking regardless of victims' age. The distinction reflects the presumption that minors cannot legally consent to commercial sex (Axam & Leonardo, 2017), but can legally work in some situations (Owens et al., 2014). Legal conditions for youth employment are defined by the Fair Labor Standards Act, which sets the minimum age for employment in different settings and prohibits employment in hazardous occupations (U.S. Department of Labor, 2016). State laws may further restrict employment during school hours, or define additional types of hazardous occupations. Child labor may thus be illegal (if children are underage or working in prohibited settings) or exploitive (if children are not paid fairly) without meeting the definition of trafficking, which requires force, fraud, or coercion (Owens et al., 2014).

Two recent Federal laws define the child welfare system's response to human trafficking. Each amends the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA; U.S.C. 5101 et seq.) to require that states establish policies and procedures for their child welfare agencies. Both laws reference "severe forms of human trafficking," but cite only the parts of the TVPA definition that are specific to sex trafficking (22 U.S.C.7102 (9)(A) and (10)).

The Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act (PSTSFA; Public Law 113–83) of 2013 requires states to prevent, identify, and respond to sex trafficking victimization among children in their supervision (Administration for Children & Families (ACF), 2015a). In its title and provisions, the PSTSFA addresses sex trafficking but not labor trafficking. Required state activities include training child welfare workers, identifying and documenting victimization, reporting children who run away from care to a national hotline, and reporting annually on steps they have taken to address sex trafficking. The PSTSFA also requires Health and Human Services (HHS) to report annually to Congress on the number of children who are sex trafficking victims.

The Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act (JVTA; Public Law 114–22) of 2014 extends the PSTSFA by requiring that states respond to all child sex trafficking victims, including those not otherwise under child welfare supervision (Administration for Children & Families (ACF), 2015b). Although the child welfare system normally responds to child abuse and neglect (child maltreatment) committed by parents or primary caregivers (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013), the JVTA defines sex trafficking of children as maltreatment, regardless of its perpetrator. Required activities include training workers; establishing policies and provisions to identify, asses, and serve child victims; and coordinating with law enforcement and other child-serving agencies. The JVTA also requires that states report the number of sex trafficked children to the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS; Administration for Children & Families (ACF), 2015b).

Context of Child Labor Trafficking

Children may be particularly vulnerable to labor trafficking (Clawson, Dutch, Solomon, & Grace, 2009; Office on Trafficking in Persons, 2015). Children are inherently dependent on adults for physical, emotional, and financial support, and may be developmentally limited in their ability to recognize exploitation, or to seek help (Freedom Network USA, 2015; Polaris Project, 2011; Walts, 2017). This is particularly true if the trafficker is a relative and help-seeking could entail repercussions to the family's relationships, finances, or immigration status (Polaris Project, 2011). These characteristics of children

[1]In literature and in this article, "children" and "minors" refer to persons under age 18; the term "youth" refers more specifically to older children and adolescents.

[2]Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000 and subsequent reauthorizations, commonly referred to as the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA).

compound the more general conditions of human trafficking, which frequently involves covert activities, lack of victims' awareness of their own exploitation, and inadequate recognition by law enforcement (Farrell et al., 2012; National Human Trafficking Resource Center, 2015).

Data from the National Human Trafficking Hotline identifies labor trafficking in multiple sectors,[3] involving foreign-born children and youth, as well as those who are US citizens and legal permanent residents. The most common settings for labor trafficking are travelling sales crews, peddling rings, begging rings, and restaurants or food service (National Human Trafficking Resource Center, 2016). Within the Polaris Project's typology of sex and labor trafficking, begging rings are the only setting in which minor victims outnumber adults (Polaris, 2017). Begging rings typically involve youth soliciting donations or selling items in support of a fraudulent religious or charitable organization.

Traveling sales crews have been the subject of several well-publicized cases involving youth (Cunha, 2015). These operations recruit young people to sell magazines or other products, promising generous commissions or salaries (Polaris, 2015). Risks for young crew members include exposure to unsafe neighborhoods and harsh weather, transportation in unsafe vehicles or with unlicensed drivers, abandonment by crew leaders when workers do not meet quotas, sexual exploitation by crew leaders, and being arrested for selling without permits or licenses (Maki, 2016). Traveling sales crews can constitute labor trafficking when operators threaten or use physical or sexual force to control workers; fraudulently represent earnings or working conditions; or coerce workers through verbal abuse, psychological manipulation, threats of abandonment, or debt bondage based on charges for housing or transportation (Maki, 2016; Murphy, 2016; Polaris, 2015, 2017).

Child labor trafficking may also involve coerced illegal activities, also referred to as forced criminality (United States Department of State, 2014). In three recent studies of human trafficking among homeless youth, forced drug sales were the most common form of labor trafficking (Bigelsen & Vuotto, 2013; Murphy, 2016; Wolfe et al., 2018). Family members and caregivers were the most commonly identified adults coercing youth in these situations (Murphy, 2016; Wolfe et al., 2018). However, coerced drug sales have also been reported under duress from romantic partners (Bigelsen & Vuotto, 2013), sex trafficking facilitators (pimps) (Gibbs, Walters, Lutnick, Miller, & Kluckman, 2015), and gangs and drug suppliers (Murphy, 2016). Recent Safe Harbor laws in many states provide minors with immunity from prosecution for prostitution (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2017). However, Safe Harbor laws focused on minor victims of sex trafficking do not necessarily extend protection to property or drug-related crimes that are committed in the context of sex trafficking victimization or other forms of coercion. Minors coerced into illegal activities may face difficulties advocating for themselves as victims rather than offenders because of complicating factors such as runaway status or substance abuse (Farrell et al., 2012).

Foreign national children may be at risk for labor trafficking victimization during and after entry to the United States. Media stories have reported growing numbers of US citizen and foreign born youth arrested at the border while carrying drugs, engaged by fraudulent promises of large payments, or by threats of violence.[4] Children may be placed in situations of forced labor or debt bondage in order to pay smugglers who brought them across the border (Bruno, Meyer, Seelke, Taft-Morales, & Wasem, 2014). They may also be victimized by sponsors with whom they are placed after entering the country unaccompanied or being separated from the adult with whom they entered. Traffickers may use the threat of deportation to maintain control over foreign national children, compounding other factors that inhibit help-seeking by victims (Polaris Project, 2011). Hotline data from 2015 indicate that among labor trafficking cases involving minors, half involved foreign nationals (National Human Trafficking Resource Center, 2016), although information on immigration status was not available for all reports.

[3]Prior to 2017, the hotline was known as the National Human Trafficking Resource Center Hotline. The hotline has been operated by Polaris since 2007.

[4]See, for example, "Mexico drug gangs using more children as 'mules'," CBS News March 14, 2012, and "Inside the Life of a Drug-Trafficking Teen," CNN, August 13, 2015.

The William Wilberforce Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA; Pub Law 110–457) includes measures to protect unaccompanied foreign national children from trafficking. The TVPRA requires that children be placed in custody of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and released to a sponsor who can care for them and ensure their appearance at subsequent immigration proceedings (Kandel, 2017). A sponsor may be a parent, relative, another adult designated by a parent, or an adult approved by the HHS Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). ORR is required to verify the sponsor's identity and relationship to the child, and assess risks for abusive behavior or human trafficking. If risks are identified, ORR is required to conduct a home study and provide follow-up services. A 2016 Senate Subcommittee identified "serious deficiencies" in ORR's performance (Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, 2016, page, p. 2). Concerns included ORR's verification of relationships and completion of background checks and home studies, and its practice of allowing sponsors to refuse ORR follow-up services and contact with the child. The Subcommittee was convened following a 2014 case in which children released to sponsors were subsequently discovered to be living in dilapidated trailers and working in exploitive conditions on poultry farms, while being subject to threats and debt bondage (VanSickle, 2016).

Current Study

Our understanding of labor trafficking among children in the US is in its earliest stages. This situation reflects overwhelming focus on sex trafficking within research on minor victim trafficking, as well as the exclusion of labor trafficking from the PTSFA and JVTA. Information on labor trafficking comes largely from hotline reports (National Human Trafficking Resource Center, 2015, 2016), surveys of homeless youth (Murphy, 2016; Wolfe et al., 2018), journalistic accounts (Cunha, 2015; VanSickle, 2016), or reports describing very small numbers of cases (Gozdziak & Bump, 2008; Owens et al., 2014). Among two articles describing human trafficking allegations from state-level child welfare populations, one used data from a state that does not report labor and sex trafficking separately (Havlicek, Huston, Boughton, & Zhang, 2016), and one, using data for 2011 through 2015, lacked sufficient numbers of labor trafficking allegations for comparison with sex trafficking allegations (Gibbs et al., 2018).

No national data exists to summarize states child welfare agencies' investigations of human trafficking allegations. However, Florida's child welfare system appears to have recorded far more human trafficking allegations than other states.[5] Further, Florida has used a specific allegation category for labor trafficking since 2013 (Florida Department of Children and Families, 2016). Therefore, this article uses recent data from Florida's child welfare system to describe the number and characteristics of investigated allegations for labor trafficking, and to compare children with labor trafficking and sex trafficking allegations in terms of their characteristics, prior child welfare experiences, and subsequent child welfare experiences.

Methods

Data Source, Study Population, and Variables

Data in this article are from the statewide child welfare information system of the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF). Additional context and case examples are provided by the second author, who has participated in numerous DCF labor trafficking investigations. As in other states, Florida's child welfare information system documents information for all children who are the subject of allegations of child abuse or neglect (child maltreatment) reported to the statewide Florida Abuse Hotline by professionals or other concerned individuals. Reports are accepted for investigation if the alleged minor victim is a victim of known or suspected maltreatment by a parent

[5]Information from states' Annual Progress and Service Reports, available on child welfare agency websites.

or caregiver, or is in immediate need of supervision. However, the Hotline accepts reports of suspected human trafficking regardless of whether the perpetrator is believed to be a parent or caregiver, consistent with the JVTA (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2017). When investigation findings suggest continued risk, children may be placed in out-of-home placements such as foster care, while services to support child safety and well-being are provided (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013).

The study population consists of all 4,711 children who were subjects of investigated allegations of labor or sex trafficking between January 1, 2013 and December 31, 2017 in Florida. Although DCF began recording human trafficking allegations in 2011, it did not implement separate allegation categories for labor trafficking and sex trafficking until January 1, 2013. For children in the study population, data include all events from birth through age 18, or through December 31, 2017, when data were extracted for analysis.

Variables used in these analyses include child characteristics, out-of-home placements, and maltreatment allegations. Child characteristics include date of birth, sex, race, and Hispanic ethnicity. Child status (in placement versus not in placement) at the time of human trafficking allegations was based on the relationship between investigation received dates and placement dates. Placements include supervised in-home care or out-of-home placement in foster care, relative care, group homes, residential treatment facilities, or other settings. Missing child reports represent episodes in which the child was on runaway status from placement.

Maltreatment data include maltreatment type, investigation dates, and investigation findings. We aggregated specific allegations (for example, failure to protect) to maltreatment types (for example, neglect), following the protocol used by DCF for reporting to NCANDS. These maltreatment types include child neglect; physical, sexual, or psychological abuse; medical neglect, and other maltreatment. Because NCANDS does not currently include a maltreatment type for human trafficking, Florida classifies labor trafficking allegations as psychological abuse and sex trafficking allegations as sexual abuse. In our analyses, we retained these allegations as separate maltreatment types. For simplicity, we combined medical neglect into the "other maltreatment" category, which includes allegations such as threatened harm and exposure to domestic violence.

DCF allegation categories for labor and sex trafficking are specified in statute and regulation (State of Florida, 2017). Labor trafficking is defined as obtainment of labor that does not appear to be sexual in nature, through force, fraud or coercion, for purposes of involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage or slavery (Florida Department of Children and Families, 2017). Sex trafficking is defined as the use of a child for sexual purposes in exchange for money or other things of value, or the promise of such things. It may include commercial sexual activity with or without the involvement of a trafficker (pimp); adult entertainment; escort services; or other acts. All Hotline workers received training on the newly separate allegation categories of labor trafficking and sex trafficking when they were first implemented in 2013. In addition to child welfare workers, DCF trains a variety of first responders on labor and sex trafficking, including law enforcement, juvenile justice, health care providers, educational personnel, contracted service providers working with the child welfare population.

State child welfare agencies vary in their categorization of investigation findings, which reflect both the risk of harm to the child and the strength of evidence. DCF categorizes investigation findings as verified (the preponderance of credible evidence indicates harm to the child), not substantiated (credible evidence exists but does not meet the standard of preponderance), or not indicated (no credible evidence supports the allegations). For investigations including multiple allegations of the same maltreatment type, we applied the most serious investigation finding to the aggregated maltreatment type.

As with any administrative data set, missing or discrepant data may exist. These may occur as a result of changes in allegation definitions, information system updates, or human error. We reconciled data issues based on best available information, with advice from DCF staff.

Specific to this study, we identified a small amount of potential miscoding of labor trafficking following Florida's adoption of specific allegations for sex trafficking and labor trafficking in 2013.

Between 2013 and 2015, 17 investigations included allegations of both types of trafficking. However, record reviews indicated that in many cases, these entries frequently reflected misconceptions of the department's definitions for labor trafficking. For example, an instance of a youth working in a strip club was coded as a labor trafficking allegation, which would be inconsistent with the state's definition. Therefore, we recoded these allegations as sex trafficking. More recently, 25 investigations in 2016 or 2017 included allegations for both sex trafficking and labor trafficking. Selective record review indicates that these are likely to represent valid instances of both allegation types. These investigations included youth engaged in commercial sex and also being coerced to sell drugs, drive other youth, cook, or work in flea markets. Investigations that included both labor and sex trafficking comprised 0.7% of all trafficking allegations and 7.1% of labor trafficking allegations for 2016 and 2017. For simplicity, we combined children with these investigations with other children with labor trafficking allegations, and compared them to children with sex trafficking allegations only.

Analysis

Analyses include both descriptive and multivariate methods. Descriptive statistics included frequencies, medians, and Chi-square tests. We used these to compare allegations of labor trafficking versus sex trafficking, and children with any labor trafficking allegations versus those with sex trafficking allegations only. Child-level analyses compared children with investigated allegations of labor trafficking and sex trafficking in terms of their demographic characteristics, prior child welfare experiences, and subsequent maltreatment allegations. We used odds ratios (ORs) and 95% confidence intervals to assess the magnitude of associations between trafficking type and investigation characteristics, child characteristics, and child experiences. ORs greater than 1 indicate higher probability of a characteristic. OR confidence intervals that do not include 1 indicate statistical significance at the selected level of 95%.

Some analyses involve characteristics that may be affected by a child's age, such as the likelihood of prior child welfare involvement. For these variables, ORs were generated using a logistic regression model that included the child's age at the most recent investigation. To avoid biases created by children aging out of the child welfare system's supervision at age 18, we limited analyses of maltreatment allegations subsequent to a child's initial trafficking allegation by excluding children ages 17 years, and examining only maltreatment allegations within one year following the first trafficking allegation.

Findings

Number and Characteristics of Labor and Sex Trafficking Allegations

DCF investigated 558 labor trafficking allegations and 5,498 sex trafficking allegations between 2013 and 2017. The number of sex trafficking allegations investigated by DCF climbed steadily during those years, while labor trafficking allegations fluctuated, ranging between 65 (2014) to 159 (2016). Labor trafficking allegations as a percentage of human trafficking allegations varied between 7% (2107) and 15% (2013), and represented 9% of human trafficking allegations for the five-year period. Proportions of labor and sex trafficking allegations varied regionally, representing 13% of human trafficking allegations in the Florida's Central Region, and between 7% and 9% in other regions.

Several characteristics of labor trafficking allegations are distinct from those of sex trafficking allegations. Allegations of labor trafficking were one-quarter as likely to involve children who were in out-of-home placement, compared to allegations of sex trafficking (OR = 0.26), as shown in Table 1. Labor trafficking allegations were more likely to be verified than sex trafficking allegations (OR = 2.49). However, they were also more likely to be not indicated (no credible evidence of harm), compared to sex trafficking allegations (OR = 2.47).

Investigations for labor and sex trafficking frequently included allegations of other types of maltreatment. Investigations for labor trafficking had 1.71 times the risk of including other types of maltreatment, compared to investigations for sex trafficking. Although child neglect was the most

Table 1. Number and characteristics of sex and labor trafficking allegations, 2013–2017.

	Labor Trafficking (N = 558)		Sex Trafficking (N = 5,498)		All Human Trafficking Allegations with specified type of trafficking[7] (N = 6,056)		Odds Ratio (95% Confidence Interval)	Chi-Square *p*-value
Child status on day before allegation								
In placement	34	6.1	1108	20.2	1142	18.9	0.26 (0.18–0.37)	<.0001
Not in placement	524	93.9	4390	79.8	4914	81.1		
Most-serious investigation findings for trafficking allegations								
Verified[8]	159	28.5	1332	24.2	1491	24.6	2.49 (1.84–3.36)	<.0001
Not substantiated	64	11.5	1334	24.3	1398	23.1		
Not indicated[9]	335	60.0	2832	51.5	3167	52.3	2.47 (1.87–3.25)	<.0001
Other (non-trafficking) allegations within investigation								
Yes	212	38.0	1453	26.4	1665	27.5	1.71 (1.42–2.04)	<.0001
No	346	62.0	4045	73.6	4391	72.5		
Percent verified[10]	42	19.8	387	26.6	429	25.8	0.68 (0.48–0.97)	0.0338
Allegation types within trafficking investigation								
Neglect	177	31.7	1017	18.5	1194	19.7	2.05 (1.69–2.48)	<.0001
Physical abuse	48	8.6	254	4.6	302	5.0	1.94 (1.41–2.68)	<.0001
Sexual abuse	21	3.8	598	10.9	619	10.2	0.32 (0.21–0.50)	<.0001
Psychological abuse	27	4.8	89	1.6	116	1.9	3.09 (1.99–4.80)	<.0001
Other[11]	31	5.6	181	3.3	212	3.5	1.73 (1.17–2.56)	0.0056

frequently identified co-occurring allegation within all human trafficking investigations, investigations for labor trafficking had twice the risk of including allegations for neglect (OR = 2.05), compared to allegations for sex trafficking. Investigations for labor trafficking were also more likely to include allegations of physical abuse (OR = 1.94) and psychological abuse (OR = 3.09), compared to investigations of sex trafficking allegations. By contrast, sexual abuse allegations were one-third as likely to occur within investigations for labor trafficking, compared to those for sex trafficking (OR = 0.32). Allegations for all types of co-occurring maltreatment were less likely to be verified in investigation for labor trafficking than in investigations for sex trafficking (OR = 0.68).

Number and Characteristics of Children with Labor and Sex Trafficking Allegations

Investigated human trafficking allegations involved 4,711 children, including 532 children with any labor trafficking allegations and 4,179 children with sex trafficking allegations only.[6] Demographic characteristics varied between the two populations, as seen in Table 2. Median age was similar (15 years for children with any labor trafficking allegations and 16 years for children with sex trafficking allegations). However, children with labor trafficking allegations were twice as likely to be age 15 or less (OR = 2.06) at their most recent investigation. More than half of children with labor trafficking allegations were male, compared with fewer than one-eighth of children with sex trafficking allegations, so that children with labor trafficking allegations had more than 9 times the likelihood of being male (OR = 9.27). Children with labor trafficking allegations had higher odds of being Black or other race (OR = 1.42), and were more likely to be Hispanic (OR = 1.62), compared to children with sex trafficking allegations.

[6]As noted earlier, 25 children had allegations of both labor and sex trafficking that were judged to be valid, in 2016 or 2017.
[7]Excludes 1,326 allegations of human trafficking of unspecified type before 1/1/2013 (when specific allegations for sex and labor trafficking were implemented) and 635 allegations of human trafficking of unspecified type after 1/1/2013.
[8]Odds Ratio values are from comparing verified allegations to not substantiated allegations.
[9]Odds Ratio values are from comparing not indicated allegations to not substantiated allegations.
[10]Based on percentage of 1,665 investigations for trafficking allegations that include allegations of other types of maltreatment.
[11]"Other" maltreatment type those a variety of allegations categorized as such by DCF, and medical neglect, which is a separate category in Florida data.

Table 2. Characteristics of children with investigations for human trafficking, as of most recent investigation, 2013–2017 (N = 4,711).

	Children with Any Labor Trafficking Allegations N = 532		Children with Only Sex Trafficking Allegations N = 4,179		All Children with HT Allegations N = 4,711		Odds Ratio (95% Confidence Interval)	Chi-Square *p*-value
	n	%	n	%	n	%		
Age at most recent investigation								
Median	15		16		16			
0 to 9 years[12]	59	11.1	301	7.2	360	7.6	2.06 (1.71–2.48)	<.0001
10 to 15 years	274	51.5	1574	37.7	1848	39.2		
16 or 17 years	199	37.4	2304	55.1	2503	53.1		
Sex[13]								
Male	287	54.6	475	11.5	762	16.3	9.27 (7.61–11.28)	<.0001
Female	239	45.4	3665	88.5	3904	83.7		
Race								
Black or other	357	67.1	2464	59.0	2821	59.9	1.42 (1.17–1.72)	0.0003
White	175	32.9	1715	41.0	1890	40.1		
Hispanic ethnicity								
Hispanic	136	25.6	732	17.5	868	18.4	1.62 (1.31–2.00)	<.0001
Non-Hispanic	396	74.4	3447	82.5	3843	81.6		
Prior child welfare involvement								
Yes[14]	349	65.6	3490	83.5	3839	81.5	0.40 (0.33-.49)	<.0001
No	183	34.4	689	16.5	872	18.5		

Many children with human trafficking allegations had prior child welfare involvement. Among children with labor trafficking allegations, two-thirds (65.6%) had investigated allegations for children maltreatment prior to their most recent investigation, compared to 83.5% of children with sex trafficking allegations. Controlling for age, children with labor trafficking allegations had less than half the odds of prior child welfare involvement than those with sex trafficking allegations (OR = 0.40).

Child Welfare History of Children with Labor and Sex Trafficking Allegations

Among children with prior child welfare involvement, those with labor trafficking allegations had lower rates of child welfare events such as maltreatment allegations, out-of-home placements, and missing child reports, as seen Table 3. In addition to lower odds of any prior child welfare involvement, children with labor trafficking allegations were half as likely to have had multiple previous investigations (OR = 0.43), compared to children with sex trafficking allegations. This pattern applied to prior investigations for all types of maltreatment, although in varying degrees. Children with labor trafficking investigations and prior child welfare involvement had between 0.62 and 0.76 times the risk of prior allegations for neglect, psychological abuse, and physical abuse, compared to children with sex trafficking allegations. They had far lower rates of prior allegations for sexual abuse (OR = 0.36) and sex trafficking (OR = 0.12).

Child welfare involvement was less likely to have occurred prior to age 8 for children with labor trafficking allegations than for those with sex trafficking allegations (OR = 0.76). Consistent with their lower rates of maltreatment allegations, children with labor trafficking allegations had approximately one-half the risk of prior out-of-home placement (OR = 0.52) and missing child reports (OR = 0.31), compared to children with sex trafficking allegations.

[12]OR compares children aged less than 16 years of age to children aged 16 or 17.
[13]There were 6 children (1.1%) with any labor trafficking allegations and 39 children (0.9%) with only sex trafficking allegations whose sex was unknown.
[14]Generated from logistic model, which also included age at most recent investigation.

Table 3. Child welfare history of children with prior involvement and investigations for sex and labor trafficking, as of most recent investigation (N = 3,839).

	Children with Any Labor Trafficking Allegations N = 349		Children with Only Sex Trafficking Allegations N = 3,490		All Children with HT Allegations N = 3,839		Odds[15] Ratio (95% Confidence Interval)	Wald Chi-Square *p*-value
	n	%	n	%	n	%		
Total prior investigations								
1	102	29.2	490	14.0	592	15.4		
2+	247	70.8	3000	86.0	3247	84.6	0.43 (0.33–0.55)	<.0001
Prior allegations								
Neglect	264	75.6	2902	83.2	3166	82.5	0.62 (0.48–0.80)	0.0003
Physical abuse	184	52.7	2171	62.2	2355	61.3	0.76 (0.61–0.96)	0.0201
Sexual abuse	73	20.9	1502	43.0	1575	41.0	0.36 (0.28–0.48)	<.0001
Psychological abuse	65	18.6	987	28.3	1052	27.4	0.65 (0.49–0.87)	0.0032
Labor trafficking	158	45.3	0	0.0	158	4.1	n/a	0.9697
Sex trafficking	43	12.3	1934	55.4	1977	51.5	0.12 (0.08–0.16)	<.0001
Unspecified human trafficking[16]	16	4.6	249	7.1	265	6.9	0.74 (0.44–1.25)	0.2612
First allegation before age 8	182	52.2	1838	52.7	2020	52.6	0.76 (0.60–0.96)	0.0231
Prior out-of-home placement								
Yes	80	22.9	1322	37.9	1402	36.5	0.52 (0.40–0.68)	<.0001
Prior missing child report								
Yes	24	6.9	749	21.5	773	20.1	0.31 (0.20–0.48)	<.0001

Subsequent Child Welfare Involvement of Children with Labor and Sex Trafficking Allegations

Children with labor trafficking allegations were less likely than those with sex trafficking allegations to have subsequent maltreatment allegations. As noted earlier, this analysis is limited to children aged 16 years or less at the time of their first trafficking allegation, and to allegations within the year following the first trafficking allegation. Children with labor trafficking allegations had half the risk of allegations for any type of maltreatment during the following year (OR = 0.52), compared to those with sex trafficking allegations, as shown in Table 4. As with prior child welfare involvement, neglect was the most common form of maltreatment in subsequent investigations, but was half as likely to be noted among children with labor trafficking allegations (OR = 0.50), compared to children with sex trafficking allegations. Children with labor trafficking allegations, were also less likely to experience subsequent allegations for physical abuse (OR = 0. 62) or psychological abuse (OR = 0.61), and especially sexual abuse (OR = 0.40).

Some children did experience human trafficking allegations following their initial allegation of labor or sex trafficking. Among children with labor trafficking allegations prior to their 17th year, 8.5% had labor trafficking allegations during the subsequent year. Subsequent labor trafficking allegations were more than four times more likely to occur among children whose initial labor trafficking allegation was not verified, compared to those whose initial allegation was verified (10.5% vs 2.5%; OR = 4.55 data not shown). Among children with sex trafficking allegations prior to their 17th year, none experienced subsequent labor trafficking allegations.

Sex trafficking allegations were investigated for 14.7% of children following their initial human trafficking allegations, including 5.2% of children with labor trafficking allegations and 16.0% of children with sex trafficking allegations only. Children with labor trafficking allegations

[15]Generated from logistic model, which also included age at most recent investigation.
[16]Human trafficking allegation not identified as either labor or sex trafficking, the allegation category used primarily before 2013.

Table 4. Maltreatment allegations within one year following first labor or sex trafficking allegation (n = 3,770)[17].

	Children with Any Labor Trafficking Allegations N = 461		Children with Only Sex Trafficking Allegations N = 3,309		All Children with HT Allegations N = 3,770		Odds Ratio (95% Confidence Interval)	Chi-Square *p*-value
	n	%	n	%	n	%		
Allegation within 1 year following first trafficking allegation								
Yes (any type)	135	29.3	1462	44.2	1597	42.4	0.52 (0.42–0.65)	<.0001
No	326	70.7	1847	55.8	2173	57.6		
Type of subsequent maltreatment								
Neglect	74	16.1	909	27.5	983	26.1	0.50 (0.39–0.65)	<.0001
Physical abuse	33	7.2	364	11.0	397	10.5	0.62 (0.43–0.90)	0.0118
Sexual abuse	18	3.9	304	9.2	322	8.5	0.40 (0.25–0.65)	0.0001
Psychological abuse	12	2.6	139	4.2	151	4.0	0.61 (0.34–1.11)	0.1012
Labor trafficking	39	8.5	0	0.0	39	1.0		<.0001
Sex trafficking	24	5.2	529	16.0	553	14.7	0.29 (0.19–0.44)	<.0001

were less than one-third as likely to have subsequent sex trafficking allegations (OR = 0.29), compared to children with sex trafficking allegations.

Discussion

This article contributes to the meager body of literature on child labor trafficking within the United States. Notably, analyses reported here include all instances of labor trafficking reported by professionals and other concerned individuals statewide, resulting in a robust data set with consistent data on child history and subsequent experience. These descriptive analyses extend what has been learned from hotline reports and studies of runaway and homeless youth (Murphy, 2016; National Human Trafficking Resource Center, 2016; Wolfe et al., 2018). Key findings include those related to patterns of identified victimization, child characteristics, and child welfare experiences. Notwithstanding the limitations noted below, these findings suggest opportunities for addressing labor trafficking of children, including prevention, training, screening, services, and policy efforts.

Key Findings

The number of labor trafficking allegations recorded by DCF during the 5 years following implementation of this allegation category is itself a substantive finding. Over five years, these comprised more than 500 allegations and 9% of all human trafficking allegations. Although allegations should never be interpreted as representing prevalence, these findings lend support to the existence of child labor trafficking, the feasibility of child welfare agencies investigating labor trafficking in collaboration with other partners, and the value of including it as part of policies addressing child trafficking.

Patterns of labor trafficking allegations offer insights into its nature, as well as opportunities for addressing it. For example, fluctuations in the number of allegations per year may reflect court-ordered restrictions limiting alleged traffickers' contact with youth, as well as the instability of small numbers. Geographic variations in the proportion of labor trafficking and sex trafficking allegations may reflect patterns of traffickers' activities, or uneven identification of potential trafficking by first responders. Labor trafficking allegations were more likely to be either definitely established or not (verified or determined not to occur) and less likely to be indeterminate (not substantiated), compared to sex trafficking allegations. This may suggest that labor trafficking victims may be less

[17]Does not include 941 children aged 17 years (71 with any labor trafficking and 870 with sex trafficking only).

susceptible to the bonding and perceived romantic attachment that can inhibit youth's recognition of sex trafficking (Clayton, Krugman, & Simon, 2013), although victims of either labor or sex trafficking may identify with their traffickers (Hopper & Hidalgo, 2006)

Higher rates of co-occurring maltreatment indicate the potential harm to children in labor trafficking situations, relative to children with sex trafficking allegations. However, lower rates of verification for co-occurring allegations for other forms of maltreatment suggest that these likely represent maltreatment by someone other than a parent or caregiver. For example, DCF might investigate a co-occurring neglect allegation if a child were exposed to an unsafe environment within the labor trafficking situation. Because maltreatment other than human trafficking requires that the perpetrator be a parent or caregiver, the neglect allegation could apply if that individual had contributed to or allowed the situation to occur. Otherwise, responsibility for addressing child endangerment would fall within the purview of the criminal justice system.

Several findings underscore substantial differences among identified labor and sex trafficking victims. Although these distinctions may inform prevention and services, it is also possible that they reflect differential identification. Children with investigated labor trafficking allegations were more likely to be younger, male, Black or other race, and Hispanic, compared to those with sex trafficking allegations. Notably, the proportion of males is 9 times greater for labor trafficking than sex trafficking victims, and similar to the that of youth in Florida's child welfare population generally (Gibbs et al., 2018). Although males are almost certainly under-identified among sex trafficking victims (Friedman & Willis, 2013), these characteristics together may collectively suggest youth who are targeted for recruitment for exploitive work, and who could be prioritized for prevention activities.

Children with labor trafficking allegations had substantial maltreatment histories, including human trafficking and other types of maltreatment. However, they had less prior involvement with the child welfare system than those with sex trafficking allegations. This pattern was consistent for allegations for all kinds of maltreatment, allegations in early childhood, and out-of-home placements. As with child characteristics, this finding underscores the need for prevention activities in community settings such as schools, and training for law enforcement personnel and other first responders. In addition, nearly one-third of children aged 16 or less at their first labor trafficking allegation had subsequent investigated allegations. These findings suggest the ongoing need for services that can reduce children's vulnerability after trafficking allegations are identified, both through the child welfare system and elsewhere in the community.

Limitations

Several limitations to these analyses should be noted. First, we reiterate that investigated allegations cannot be interpreted as representing the prevalence of child labor trafficking. Because identification of labor trafficking depends on awareness of its indicators and knowledge about how to report it, potential trafficking may be unseen, or seen but not reported. Law enforcement, educators, child welfare personnel, and community members are essential to this task. Similarly, the likelihood of under-identification and uneven identification means that the characteristics of labor trafficking victims described here may imperfectly represent those of actual victims. Our understanding of the extent and patterns of labor trafficking will continue to grow as additional data are compiled, and more extensive inquiries conducted.

Variables available for this analysis lacked several types of information that could inform our understanding of labor trafficking victimization. These include allegation data on the hotline reporting source, relationships between victims and alleged perpetrators, and contextual data on labor trafficking situations. These data exist in investigation notes or case records, and could support further research, as discussed below. Additionally, we excluded a small number of labor trafficking allegations within investigations for sex trafficking based on data concerns, although co-occurring

labor and sex trafficking are known to occur (Administration for Children & Families (ACF), 2017; Gibbs, Hardison Walters, Lutnick, Miller, & Kluckman, 2015).

Florida's labor trafficking allegation, noted earlier (Florida Department of Children and Families, 2017) may be different from that used elsewhere. DCF defines labor trafficking as labor that does not appear to be sexual in nature, which would exclude a situation such as coerced involvement in pornography or stripping. This definition has the advantage of clearly distinguishing between labor trafficking and sex trafficking, but could introduce variability when compared to other states that include coerced sex acts in their definition of sex trafficking or exclude them from sex trafficking allegations but do not address them as labor trafficking.

Research Opportunities

The limitations noted above suggest several avenues for further research in states where labor trafficking allegations are being recorded. Additional allegation data on reporting sources and relationships between victims and alleged perpetrators could inform training efforts. Qualitative analysis of investigation notes could add substantially to our understanding of the context of labor trafficking, including labor sectors in which trafficking occurs, children's immigration status, and factors differentiating exploitive or illegal employment from labor trafficking. Assessment data on risk and protective factors could inform prevention efforts, data on service needs could inform capacity development within child welfare and community agencies. Finally, investigation of co-occurring or sequentially occurring labor and sex trafficking is needed to better understand poly-victimization and coerced illegal activities.

Practice Implications

Experience from Florida and elsewhere suggests several opportunities for addressing child labor trafficking. These include measures aimed at prevention, identification, and reporting. Notably, efforts focused on labor trafficking will likely offer collateral benefits in addressing labor exploitation of children that does not meet the criteria for human trafficking.

Prevention efforts addressing labor trafficking may include education, regulation or programmatic remedies. In Florida, DCF distributed flyers warning students and families about potential exploitation and human trafficking after traveling sales crew operators attempted to recruit near schools and through other students. Florida has also defined door to door sales as hazardous labor, making it illegal for young workers under the state labor laws. Wisconsin enacted "Malinda's Act" (Statute 103.34), which requires businesses using traveling sales crews to document vehicle safety and compliance with employment regulations; and prohibits financial exploitation, abandonment, threatened or actual abuse, and excessive charges for travel and living expenses. For foreign national children released to sponsors by ORR, measures that could prevent trafficking victimization include mandatory (and funded) follow-up, better coordination between ORR and child welfare agencies, and required school enrollment (Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services, 2015).

Training that addresses labor trafficking is particularly critical given its lower profile within professional and public awareness. Many states have embarked on extensive training on human trafficking for child welfare personnel and other professionals in response to requirements of the PSTSFA. However, given the law's exclusive focus on sex trafficking, labor trafficking is often absent from these efforts. DCF includes content on labor trafficking in all training on human trafficking delivered to law enforcement, child welfare, and juvenile justice professionals. Although reporting source was not in included in the data used for this analysis, reports from law enforcement have been critical in identifying several labor trafficking allegations. For example, patrol officers who encountered youth working in traveling sales crews have made hotline reports that led to both investigated investigations and crew leaders' arrests for human trafficking.

Screening represents an opportunity to identify labor trafficking among youth served by child welfare and juvenile justice agencies. Screening instruments that have been validated with youth include questions that identify both labor trafficking and sex trafficking (Bigelsen & Vuotto, 2013;

Dank et al., 2017). Within juvenile justice systems, screening for labor trafficking victimization may be particularly important in identifying youth whose illegal activities may have been coerced, including youth who are sex trafficking victims. Florida's juvenile justice department screens youth who meet specified risk criteria for both labor and sex trafficking, using an instrument developed in collaboration with DCF.

Services for children who experience labor trafficking should be defined based on their risk and protective factors, and any co-occurring maltreatment. For children who experience labor trafficking, services may include addressing parental abuse or neglect, or if parents or caregivers were involved with or not appropriately attentive to, the child's victimization. DCF also refers youth to summer employment programs if their engagement in a traveling sales crew resulted from a desire to earn money. Such referrals may be appropriate even when the labor trafficking allegation is not verified, as indicated by the finding that subsequent labor trafficking allegations occur frequently. For unaccompanied foreign national children, DCF may provide shelter, connect victims with immigration attorneys, or coordinate with ORR, depending on the situation.

Systematic documentation of labor trafficking allegations could substantially improve our understanding of both the extent and characteristics of child labor trafficking (Walts, 2017). Currently, Federal legislation requires HHS and state child welfare agencies to report only sex trafficking. However, at least ten states (in addition to Florida) have established or planned maltreatment allegation categories for labor trafficking.[18] Data from these states will eventually contribute to our understanding of labor trafficking as allegations are documented.

Conclusions

Information from multiple sources confirms the existence of child labor trafficking within the United States (among others, Department of State, 2018; Murphy, 2016; National Human Trafficking Resource Center, 2016; Polaris, 2017). Analyses in this paper add further evidence that labor trafficking of children does occur, and can be identified by child welfare agencies and first responders. Yet policies, awareness campaigns, and service programs frequently focus explicitly on sex trafficking, or include labor trafficking only as a minor or implicit focus.

If state child welfare agencies only document sex trafficking, they will never understand labor trafficking, nor develop capacity to respond to it (Richard, Stephenson, & Knickodem, 2015). Notwithstanding the exclusive focus on sex trafficking within the PSTSFA and JVTA, nothing prohibits child welfare agencies from incorporating child labor trafficking into their policies and reporting requirements. With efforts comparable to those devoted to sex trafficking, child labor trafficking might be identified far more frequently than it currently is.

Findings from this study support the potential value of policies, training, documentation, and continued research addressing labor trafficking. The specific exclusion of labor trafficking from federal guidance to child welfare agencies is inconsistent with broader mandates to identify and protect children from commercial exploitation. Further, by not requiring states to report both child labor trafficking and sex trafficking, federal policy perpetuates the apparent absence of child labor trafficking within the United States. Relatively modest expansion of current efforts could yield enormous impact on understanding and addressing the human rights violations of child labor trafficking.

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[18]Information from states' Annual Progress and Service Reports, available on child welfare agency websites.

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