



IDENTIFYING LABOR-TRAFFICKED CHILDREN IN CALIFORNIA

As part of our advocacy efforts to improve the identification and support of children impacted by labor trafficking through forced criminality, the Sunita Jain Anti-Trafficking Initiative provided training to **8 of the 12 community-based organizations funded by the Los Angeles County Department of Youth Development (DYD)**. The training focused on how to identify and respond to trafficking situations in which youth are forced or coerced into criminal activity as a form of labor trafficking.

Before the training, participants completed a survey about their knowledge, experiences, and ability to recognize warning signs, report possible cases, and connect youth to services and benefits. The findings showed that providers may already be working with labor-trafficked youth without identifying them as victims. The results also highlighted the need for clearer organizational procedures, better tracking systems, and additional training on forced criminality and available survivor benefits.

SJI used these findings to support its broader advocacy for systems that identify trafficked youth earlier. Based in part on the survey findings and our work with DYD-funded organizations, [SJI submitted a letter to the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors in response to the motion on Strengthening Services and Aligning Resources for Youth Impacted by Human Trafficking](#). The letter included recommendations to improve identification, training, referral pathways, coordination, data collection, and access to services for labor-trafficked youth.

OVERVIEW

The survey mainly reflects the experiences of service providers who work directly with children and families. Most respondents worked at community-based organizations and were case managers. Based on information about the training audience, many participants also work with youth involved with gangs.

- **60 people** completed the survey, although some questions had fewer responses.
- Of the 52 people who answered the agency question, **45 respondents, or 86.5%**, worked at community-based organizations.
- Of the 53 people who answered the role question, **37 respondents, or 69.8%**, were case managers.

KEY FINDINGS

MANY RESPONDENTS MAY BE WORKING WITH LABOR-TRAFFICKED CHILDREN WITHOUT REALIZING IT



Of the 48 people who answered whether they had worked with a labor-trafficked child:

- **11 people, or 23%, said yes**
- **23 people, or 48%, said no**
- **14 people, or 29%, said they did not know**

Together, 77% of respondents said they had not worked with a labor-trafficked child or did not know whether they had.

At the same time:

- More than half of respondents said they were likely or very likely to work with children who were being controlled or forced to work.
- **65%** also said they were likely or very likely to work with children who had been forced to grow, sell, or transport drugs.

This suggests that some respondents may be working with children experiencing labor trafficking or forced criminality without recognizing those situations as trafficking. As a result, children may not be connected to trafficking-specific services, legal protections, or benefits.

MOST RESPONDENTS BELIEVED THEY HAD WORKED WITH FEW OR NO LABOR-TRAFFICKED CHILDREN

When asked about the past five years:

- **38 people, or 63%,** believed they had not worked with any labor-trafficked children.
- **17 people, or 28%,** believed they had worked with one to five children.
- **5 people, or 8%,** believed they had worked with more than five children.

This is important because many respondents also reported working with children in jobs or activities where exploitation may happen.

CHILDREN WERE WORKING IN MANY DIFFERENT INDUSTRIES AND ACTIVITIES

Among the **59 people** who answered this question, the most common types of work were:

- Restaurant work: **22 people**
- Construction: **16 people**
- Retail: **15 people**
- Forced drug sales: **12 people**
- Forced theft or stealing: **12 people**
- Janitorial work: **12 people**
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- Street sales: **12 people**
- Housekeeping or domestic work: **11 people**

Also, **13 people, or 22%**, said they did not know what type of work the children were doing.

These responses show that child labor trafficking may happen in many settings, including regular jobs and illegal activities that children may be forced to do.

Because many respondents work with children who are employed or involved in income-generating activities, they need information about both legal and illegal forms of work. This can help them recognize unsafe or exploitative conditions, educate children about healthy workplaces, prevent further harm, and identify situations that may involve labor trafficking.

ORGANIZATIONAL GAPS

MANY ORGANIZATIONS MAY NOT HAVE CLEAR PROCEDURES FOR TRAFFICKING CASES

Only **17 out of 60 respondents, or 28%**, said their organization had a specific person to contact when a child labor-trafficking case was identified.

- **14 people, or 23%**, said their organization did not have a designated person.
- **29 people, or 48%**, did not know.

This suggests that many staff members may not know who to contact or what steps to take when they are concerned about a child.

MOST RESPONDENTS DID NOT KNOW WHETHER THEIR ORGANIZATION TRACKED TRAFFICKING

Only **7 out of 60** respondents, or 12%, said their organization had a system to document and track child labor-trafficking cases.

- **16 people, or 27%**, said their organization did not have a tracking system.
- **37 people, or 62%**, did not know whether a tracking system existed.

Without clear tracking systems, cases may be recorded under other categories, missed, or not counted at all. This can make it difficult to understand how many children are affected and what services are needed.



KNOWLEDGE & TRAINING GAPS

RESPONDENTS UNDERSTOOD SOME KEY PARTS OF LABOR TRAFFICKING

Among those who answered the knowledge questions:

- **20 out of 30 people, or 67%**, correctly said labor trafficking involves force, fraud, or coercion.
- **24 out of 32 people, or 75%**, correctly understood that a child forced to commit crimes can still be a labor-trafficking victim.
- **23 out of 32 people, or 72%**, said labor-trafficking survivors need services similar to those provided to sex-trafficking survivors.
- **27 out of 33 people, or 82%**, understood that traffickers use coercion to take advantage of children's vulnerabilities.

These results show that many respondents understood the basic trafficking framework. However, the earlier responses suggest that they may not always apply that knowledge when identifying labor trafficking among the children and youth they serve.

KNOWLEDGE ABOUT CALVCB WAS LOW

One of the biggest gaps was knowledge about financial support through the California Victim Compensation Board (CalVCB)

Of the 48 people who answered:

- Only **13 people, or 27%**, knew that trafficking survivors may be eligible for up to \$20,000 in lost-income compensation.
- **3 people, or 6%**, answered incorrectly.
- **32 people, or 67%**, said they did not know.

This suggests that many providers may not know about an important resource that could help survivors recover lost income and pay for necessities such as rent, education, transportation, food, or other basic needs.

OVERALL TAKEAWAY

The survey suggests that many direct service providers are likely coming into contact with children who may be experiencing labor trafficking, forced criminality, or other forms of exploitation. However, these situations may not always be recognized as trafficking.



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The results also show a need:

- More training on how to identify child labor trafficking and forced criminality.
- Clear procedures for reporting and responding to possible cases.
- Better systems for documenting and tracking cases.
- More information about services, legal protections, and financial benefits.
- Education about healthy work environments and the difference between lawful work, labor exploitation, and labor trafficking.

ABOUT SJI

The Sunita Jain Anti-Trafficking Initiative (“SJI”) is an evidence-based, community-informed think tank that intentionally fills gaps in human trafficking through an intersectional framework that fosters systemic change and progressive policy innovations.

SUNITA JAIN ANTI-TRAFFICKING INITIATIVE



Paloma Bustos, MSW
Policy Associate
Sunita Jain Anti-Trafficking Initiative
919 Albany St
Los Angeles, CA 90015
paloma.bustos@lls.edu

