

Prevalence Study of Human Trafficking in the County of Los Angeles



Human trafficking is the exploitation of human beings through force, fraud, or coercion for the purposes of commercial sex or forced labor for the benefit of their traffickers. Within the United States, human trafficking has had a particularly dramatic impact on the state of California. California is particularly vulnerable to human trafficking because of factors such as large runaway and homeless youth populations, proximity to international borders, the number of ports and airports, a significant immigrant population, and a large economy including industries that attract forced labor and sex trafficking.¹ Although human trafficking victims are not traditionally homeless, the annual 2018 Homeless Count for Los Angeles County found that almost **1 in 10** homeless individuals reported to be sex or labor trafficked,² and a recent survey found that approximately one in five homeless youth in California has experienced some form trafficking, with 14% experiencing sex trafficking, 8% experiencing labor trafficking, and 3% experiencing forms of both.³ Unfortunately, studies aimed at understanding and reducing this form of exploitation are oftentimes underfunded or disregarded altogether.

The Coalition to Abolish Slavery & Trafficking (CAST), a statewide nonprofit that provides life-saving services to survivors of human trafficking, is requesting funds for a research study of the prevalence of human trafficking in the County of Los Angeles. **A prevalence study focusing on all of Los Angeles County will cost approximately \$1.5 million and last for approximately three years.**

Currently, there is limited research focusing on the prevalence of human trafficking in the County of Los Angeles. Furthermore, much of the data that is currently available is largely imprecise and not fully representative. Many local statistics are based on policing priorities, which can be misleading and reflect prioritization of investigating certain populations. Generally, prevalence studies in the past have suffered from inaccuracies and gross over estimations.

This study aims to offer comprehensive, robust research on the annual number of victims, the nature of the trafficking (sexual exploitation vs. labor exploitation), demographic breakdowns of victims, and concentrations of victims in particular geographic areas within Los Angeles County. Specifically, the study would collect the following data points: **(1) age; (2) gender; (3) nationality; (4) type of trafficking; (5) length in trafficking; and (6) location of trafficking.** This study will involve data mining of reported cases, accessing intake records from victim service providers, and selected locations for primary data collection. Collecting robust data on this information will assist both law enforcement and service providers in understanding the scope and severity of the human trafficking epidemic in Los Angeles County.

Cost estimates for a prevalence study for Los Angeles County can be modeled after two prevalence studies which occurred in San Diego County: 1) “Looking for a Hidden Population: Trafficking of Migrant Laborers in San Diego County,” led by Dr. Sheldon Zhang, and 2) “The Nature and Extent of Gang Involvement in Sex Trafficking in San Diego County,” led by Dr. Jamie Gates and Dr. Ami Carpenter. These studies, which focused on San Diego County, provide a helpful comparison when estimating the costs of this study. Dr. Zhang’s study cost \$522,000 and lasted for three

¹ *What is Human Trafficking*, CALIFORNIANS AGAINST SEXUAL EXPLOITATION, <http://www.caseact.org/learn/humantrafficking/>.

² These statistics from the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority are not yet published.
303820650 v1

³ *Labor and Sex Trafficking Among Homeless Youth*, LOYOLA UNIVERSITY NEW ORLEANS, MODERN SLAVERY RESEARCH PROJECT, <https://nspn.memberclicks.net/assets/docs/NSPN/labor%20and%20sex%20trafficking%20among%20homeless%20youth.pdf>.

years. The study conducted by Dr. Carpenter and Dr. Gates lasted for two years and cost over \$400,000. Dr. Gates noted, “Estimating the number of victims in this clandestine activity has been profoundly difficult, time consuming and dependent on a wide range of partnerships and trusted relationships in our region that opened the door to the data we needed.” Dr. Zhang advised that covering both labor and sex trafficking in one study raises costs significantly, as these are different markets and require different sampling and field procedures.

As of the 2018 census estimates, the population of San Diego County was approximately 3.3 million and the population of Los Angeles County was approximately 10.1 million. Based on the cost of prevalence studies conducted by Dr. Zhang, Dr. Gates and Dr. Carpenter, and comparing the population between the two geographies, we conservatively estimate that an accurate, robust prevalence study focusing on both sex and labor

trafficking within Los Angeles County would cost approximately \$1.5 million and have a duration of three years.

As a result of a prevalence study, Los Angeles County will have a data informed, evidence-based estimate of the prevalence of human trafficking within its community. This study will provide valuable demographic information on trafficking victims, in order to help both law enforcement and service providers in strategically targeting their efforts, both within the County and in California at large. **With funding allocation for this prevalence study, and the information that this research will provide, the community of Los Angeles can help make a dramatic difference and fight to end the pervasive evils of human trafficking.**

Coalition to Abolish Slavery & Trafficking (CAST) Contacts:

- Stephanie Richard, Senior Policy Advisor, (213)-3655249, Stephanie@castla.org
- Kay Buck, Executive Director (213) 365-0887, Kay@castla.org