



# Labor Trafficking and Other Labor Abuse in Houston's Construction Industry

Prepared by Kelle Barrick & Rebecca Pfeffer | RTI International

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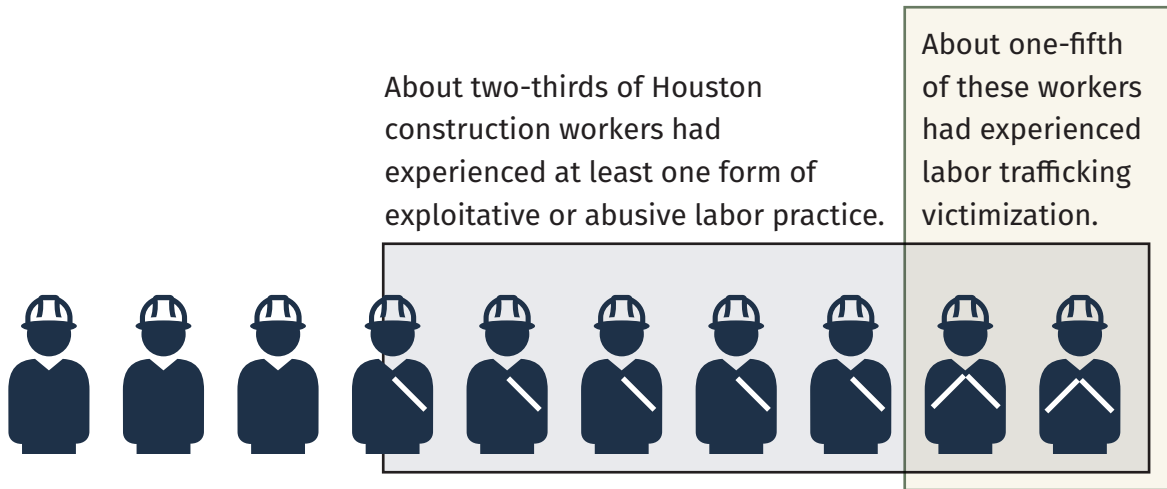
## Study Overview

As part of the Human Trafficking Policy and Research Analyses Project, funded by the Administration for Children and Families' Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation and the Office on Trafficking in Persons, RTI International conducted a study on the prevalence of labor trafficking within the construction industry in Houston, Texas. The objectives of the study were to advance knowledge of promising methods for estimating human trafficking prevalence and to better understand substantive issues around construction workers' experiences with labor trafficking and other labor abuse. The findings reported here are based on surveys of 903 construction workers in Houston between August 2022 and August 2023. Learn more about this study at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/report/measuring-human-trafficking-prevalence-construction-field-test-multiple-methods-final>.



## Labor Trafficking and Other Labor Abuse: By the Numbers

Labor trafficking and other labor abuse in the construction industry are common.



What is the prevalence of labor trafficking among construction workers in Houston:



- Additionally, 42% of construction workers reported experiencing other labor abuses in their work in construction within their lifetime that, while exploitative, did not meet the threshold of labor trafficking.

### Labor Trafficking in Disaster Recovery and Reconstruction



Construction workers who have worked in natural disaster recovery and reconstruction are significantly more likely to experience labor trafficking and other forms of labor abuse than those who have not worked in this setting. The prevalence of labor trafficking among individuals who worked in construction post-disaster was two times higher than those who did not (32% compared to 16%). Specific types of exploitation that were significantly higher among individuals who worked in construction post-disaster include experiences with coercive and deceptive recruitment, having pay or benefits withheld or deducted, completing hazardous work without proper protective gear, emotional or psychological abuse, and threats of violence, among others. For more detailed information about these findings, see <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/report/labor-trafficking-construction-during-recovery-and-reconstruction-natural-disaster>.

## Construction Workers' Experiences of Exploitation

Construction workers in Houston experienced a broad range of labor exploitation.

- The most common forms of exploitation included working without a contract (38%), being deceived during recruitment about working and living conditions (30%), paying recruitment fees (18%), and being made to work long and unusual hours without adequate compensation (17%).
- Although less serious forms of abuse appear to be the most common, non-trivial percentages of workers were subjected to more serious forms of abuse, such as having their pay withheld (13%), being deceived during recruitment about the work they would be doing (13%), and being subjected to emotional or psychological abuse (8%).

Although the focus of this study was on labor trafficking, other forms of exploitation should not be ignored or overlooked. It is important to understand the frequency of other types of labor exploitation to increase workplace safety and justice for all workers.

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The labor trafficking prevalence estimation project is part of the [Human Trafficking Policy and Research Analyses Project](#), which aims to advance the scope of knowledge and data around human trafficking by identifying priority areas for learning, and conducting a series of studies that can immediately impact practice. All studies are overseen by the ACF Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) in collaboration with OTIP, and conducted by RTI International.

For additional information about the Human Trafficking Policy and Research Analyses Project or the labor trafficking prevalence estimation project, please contact OPRE Project Officers Mary Mueggenborg ([Mary.Mueggenborg@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:Mary.Mueggenborg@acf.hhs.gov)) and Kelly Jedd McKenzie ([Kelly.McKenzie@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:Kelly.McKenzie@acf.hhs.gov)) or RTI Project Director Rebecca Pfeffer ([rpfeffer@rti.org](mailto:rpfeffer@rti.org)).

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