Fact Sheet: Child Labor in the U.S.

CRIME VICTIMS' INSTITUTE

COLLEGE OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE
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Child Labor in the United States: The Facts

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What is Child Labor?

Child labor refers to employing minors in work that interferes with their education, health, safety, or development. In the United States, child labor laws are mainly governed by the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA). It sets minimum ages for employment, restricts working hours, and prohibits minors from hazardous occupations.[5] However, exemptions exist in agriculture, family businesses, and certain small employers. Recent research and enforcement data show an increase in child labor violations across the United States. Between 2019 and 2024, the U.S. Department of Labor reported a 31% rise in children employed in violation of federal child labor laws.[5] Thousands of minors have also been found working in hazardous conditions in manufacturing, agriculture, and food processing.[4] Scholars note that labor shortages, financial stresses, and enforcement gaps increase risks of exploitation among youth workers.[1,3] These trends highlight ongoing concerns about the effectiveness of child labor protections and minors' vulnerability in the workforce.

Have You Heard?

- In 2023, more than 5,800 children were found working in violation of labor laws in the U.S.[5]
- In Texas, children ages 14 and 15 may work during certain hours and times of day.[6]
- Youth workers may face hazardous conditions, long hours, and limited legal protections depending on industry exemptions.[3]

What are the Consequences?

Child labor can cause physical injuries, mental health issues, and academic disruption. Youth workers may experience fatigue, stress, and exposure to hazardous environments.[3] Long-term effects include reduced educational attainment, lower lifetime earnings, and greater vulnerability to exploitation.[2] Unfortunately, these negative outcomes also contribute to broader social and economic gaps.

How to Raise Awareness and Support Survivors

- Learn federal and state child labor laws and age restrictions.[5]
- Report suspected child labor violations to appropriate agencies.
- Educate youth and families about workplace safety and legal protections.
- Support policies strengthening child labor enforcement and protections.[1]
- Encourage schools and community organizations to promote youth worker safety.

Increasing knowledge of child labor laws and youth workplace safety can help reduce exploitation and support safer working conditions for minors.

Resources

Texas

- **Texas Department of Family and Protective Services – https://www.dfps.texas.gov**
- **Texas Workforce Commission Child Labor Laws – https://www.twc.texas.gov**

National

- **U.S. Department of Labor Child Labor Laws – https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/child-labor**
- **U.S. Department of Labor Youth Employment – https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/youthrules**

References

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[6]Texas Law Help. (2025). Child Labor: Youth Minimum Wage. https://texaslawhelp.org/article/child-labor-youth-minimum-wage

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Resources

• Aging and Disability Resource Center	855-937-2372
• Cyber Civil Rights Initiative	844-878-2274
• Mothers Against Drunk Driving	877-623-3435
• National Child Abuse Hotline	800-422-4453
• National Domestic Violence Hotline	800-799-7233
• National Human Trafficking Hotline	888-373-7888
• National Sexual Assault Hotline	800-656-4673
• National Suicide Prevention Lifeline	988
• Texas Abuse Hotline	800-252-5400
• Texas Council on Family Violence	https://tcfv.org/survivor-resources/
• Texas Association Against Sexual Assault	https://taasa.org/get-help/
• Victim Connect Resource Center	855-484-2846
• Victims Of Immigration Crime Engagement (VOICE)	1-855-48-VOICE (1-855-488-6423)

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