

BRUNCH & BRAINSTORM

Love and Labor Trafficking - A Conversation
with Expert Rucha Nimbalkar



February 19, 2025
Takeaways

Key Discussion Takeaways

- **Trauma bonding is intentionally created** through affection + manipulation + normalized abuse to build dependency and control.
- **Labor and sex trafficking grooming patterns often overlap** (isolation, control of resources, emotional manipulation), and survivors may experience both forms of exploitation.
- **Love can be real and still be used for control.** Survivors may feel real attachment even when harm is present, and “love” can be used as a recruitment/control tool.
- **Provider support starts with direct, empathetic questions** and a trauma-informed approach that prioritizes trust over timelines and pressure.

What’s Working

- **Universal screening** (asked of everyone) reduces singling out and supports safer identification. Let people know questions are optional.
- **Simple, survivor-centered questions can open the door:** “Do you feel safe?” “Are you being treated right?” “How did this happen?”
- **Helpful approach:** validate without debating details, offer choices and small next steps, name patterns gently, expect mixed feelings, and center safety planning (not pressure).

“When people listen, when people care, it’s healing.”

This work is hard. It can sit with you. Rucha reminded us that showing up, listening, and believing survivors matters.

Challenges in the Field

- **Harm can be hidden in plain sight.** Rucha shared how public charm & private abuse, along with early normalization of silence and shame, kept her trapped and quiet.
- **Systems and communities may miss or dismiss warning signs.** In her story, medical providers did not ask questions about injuries, and friends/community minimized concerns.
- **Manipulation can be culturally reinforced.** One case example highlighted religious loyalty (“be grateful”) being used to maintain control, even when violence was present.

Resources Shared

- [Framework TA](#)
- [Futures Without Violence safety cards/brochures](#)
- [NCTSN trafficking screening tools tip sheet](#)
- [Santa Clara County Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault, and Human Trafficking Pre-Screening Tool & Referral Guide](#)
- *Trauma and Recovery* by Judith Lewis Herman

Coming Soon at Framework

Join us for our next Brunch & Brainstorm session in **March** to learn more about Women and Labor Trafficking, Historically and Today.

 [March 19th at 12 p.m. ET — Register here!](#)

Agency Spotlight Sign-Up

Each month Framework offers a space for organizations to share resources, challenges, and successes in serving labor trafficking survivors. Please complete the [survey linked here](#) to apply to conduct a short 5-minute spotlight presentation during an upcoming Brunch & Brainstorm session.