

Day Labor in New York: Findings from the NYDL Survey

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report examines data from the New York Day Labor Survey (NYDLS). It presents descriptive data on a host of indicators that allow us to empirically assess day laborers and their work in the greater New York metropolitan area. For this study, we define a day laborer or *jornalero* as someone who gathers at a street corner, empty lot or parking lot of a home improvement store (e.g., Home Depot), or an official hiring site, to sell their labor for the day, hour, or for a particular job. The data presented are preliminary only in the sense that they have not been previously analyzed and comprise only one part of a larger research project on day labor. In addition, most of the findings are purposefully presented descriptively in this report. The primary objective of this report is to present original findings about a highly visible yet relatively unknown labor market in New York.

Last summer (June to mid-July), a team of eight graduate students and trained interviewers used several traditional and novel research methods to randomly survey 290-day laborers at 29 different sites (out of a total of 57 identified sites) throughout metropolitan New York. We surveyed at all five New York City boroughs, and the counties of Putnam, Rockland, Westchester, Long Island and Bergen.

We estimate the day labor population in the greater metropolitan region to be between 5,831 and 8,283. These figures are likely to underestimate the total day laborer population in the region. The estimates do not take into account the many reasons why a day laborer will not look for a job on any given day (sickness, school, looking for a permanent job, etc.) and the actual number of sites in the region is unknown. We utilized standard sampling techniques that

allow us to generalize our findings to the overall day labor population in the New York region. Each survey was done face-to-face (e.g., interviewer and interviewee), lasted about one hour, was undertaken in Spanish and English, and involved mostly close-ended questions. A modest (\$20) incentive was offered to each participant for his or her time.

The study focused on six broad areas:

1. Who are Day Laborers?
2. What are the earnings of Day Laborers?
3. What do Day Laborers do?
4. Why work Day Labor?
5. Who hires Day Laborers?
6. Are Day Laborers abused?

Who are Day Laborers?

- Day laborers are overwhelmingly Latino; one-third from Mexico, another third from the rest of Central America, and the final third including workers from South America. They are also young, and are mostly recent arrivals (less than two years) in the United States.
- About one-third of the respondents in our study did not have permanent housing.
- Interestingly, in New York, women also day labor. They comprise slightly over 5 percent of the day labor workforce.
- About half of day laborers are single. However, an almost equal number (47 percent) have a spouse or are living with someone they support.

- A significant number of day laborers are educated. Their educational attainment ranges from nothing to college plus, with the mean number of years in school hovering around eight. Almost a third (30 percent) have over ten years of formal schooling.

What are the Earnings of Day Labor?

- In New York, day labor work is difficult, irregular, and often dangerous but it pays better than minimum wage. The average hourly wage (\$9.37) for day labor work is about \$4.22 more than the New York and federal minimum wage during normal demand conditions (i.e., spring and summer months). During difficult times (winter), this figure drops to \$7.61 or \$2.46 more than the minimum wage.
- Average monthly wages vary for day laborers depending on seasonal periods and demand. During a good month, day laborers on average earn \$1,450. During a bad month, they earn on average about \$500.
- Day labor work is a full time endeavor. Eighty-three percent of all day laborers work in this market full time; the other seventeen percent hold a part time job that on average occupies about 27 hours of their workweek (Monday – Sunday).

What do Day Laborers do?

- Day laborers perform a wide variety of jobs including dirty and/or dangerous tasks that might expose them to chemical wastes and other occupational hazards. They primarily work in the construction industry, including painting, carpentry, and landscape.

Why Work Day Labor?

- In New York, day labor seems to be a stepping-stone to employment in full-time/full year work. Forty-five percent of our survey respondents have worked in this industry for less than one year. Sixteen percent have worked for more than four years.
- Reasons cited for not working in the formal labor market are varied. About one-third cited lack of documents and another third cited lack of English proficiency as their primary reason. Other factors include poor labor market conditions, discrimination, and employer abuses.
- Despite earning low wages, day laborers assist family members or friends in their country-of-origin in a significant way. The average number and amount of remittances sent by a day laborer in 2001 was nine and \$3,641 respectively.

Who Hires Day Laborers?

- Homeowners (private individuals) and contractors are the primary employers of day laborers. Each accounts for more than 41 percent of day labor employment opportunities with contractors representing more than half of all employers.

Are Day Laborers Abused?

- Day laborers are routinely abused at the work place. A full 85 percent of all day laborers report at least one type of abuse including paying less than the agreed upon amount, abandoned at work site, bad checks (NSF) in the form of payment, no breaks or water at the work site, robbery, and threats.

INTRODUCTION

This report presents preliminary findings culled from the New York Day Labor Survey (NYDLS). The NYDLS is a collaborative project that was developed and implemented by a group of New School University and UCLA researchers under the direction of Dr. Abel Valenzuela Jr. and Dr. Edwin Meléndez. The NYDLS is one of two components of the New York Day Labor Project, a groundbreaking, multi-method study that seeks to understand how workers participate in and acquire access to jobs in a public setting (e.g., street corners). For this project, we define a day laborer as someone who gathers at a street corner, empty lot or parking lot of a home improvement store (e.g., Home Depot), or an official hiring site, to sell their labor for the day, hour, or for a particular job. This study also aims to better understand how the New York day labor market is organized and functions on a day-to-day basis.

The data collected from this project will be used to enhance our understanding of the day laborer's situation and to formulate programs and policies to better address many of the complex issues surrounding immigration and work. The other component of the New York Day Labor Project, currently underway, focuses on the role that community based organizations have in shaping and reshaping the day labor industry. When this component is completed, a report presenting our findings and discussion will be forthcoming. The data presented here are purposefully descriptive. Future research articles will delve more deeply into analysis, causal relationships, and public policy implications.

The origin of the NYDLS comes from Los Angeles when, in 1999, an almost identical survey was implemented (see www.sscnet.ucla.edu/issr/csup/ to

download a copy of the report) there by the Center for the Study of Urban Poverty under the direction of Professor Abel Valenzuela Jr. The New York Day Labor Project seeks to understand how workers (who are mostly Latino immigrants although significant numbers of non-Latinos and women also day labor) participate in and acquire access to jobs in a public setting (e.g., street corners or curbside, open-air markets). One of our primary objectives will be to build a bridge between actual day labor practices and the development of policies and programs regarding day laborers. Currently, there are several institutions, including private industry, government, and community based organizations who already provide or who wish to provide services or who mandate and/or implement policies on this type of work.

However, the few policies and programs regarding day laborers are not grounded in empirical evidence and conceptual frameworks that take into account larger social and economic forces such as immigration, economic change, and labor demand that shape informal and formal labor markets. As a result, this study, we hope, will fill a negligible void and also contribute to a greater understanding of a labor supply that has rarely been analyzed in a systematic fashion.

The report is organized as follows: we first present some general background information on day labor work, particularly as it relates to New York City. We then describe the procedures for collecting the data on which this report is based, including a brief discussion of our sampling frame, site selection, and interviewing techniques. We then present findings on several key topics with a brief discussion of each and then conclude.

BACKGROUND

An early morning walk, drive, bus ride, or other commute through many communities in greater New York City usually provides a glimpse of one or two curbside, open-air labor markets filled with groups of men standing, sipping coffee and patiently waiting for prospective employers to arrive and select them for a day's work.

If you were to observe this group of men more closely, you would notice that most are wearing work clothes for performing often difficult and dirty manual labor, both skilled and unskilled. You would probably also notice that most were speaking Spanish and appeared to be Latino. Every morning at more than fifty-seven hiring sites throughout New York City's five boroughs and surrounding suburbs and counties, hundreds of workers and their employers converge to exchange labor for individually negotiated wages.

This market acts as an extremely effective device for bringing together prospective employers and seekers of work. For many workers, day labor is a chance to gain a foothold in the urban economy. For others, it is a first job in the United States, or a last chance at securing some type of employment. For still others, it represents an opportunity to earn some income when temporarily laid off from a job in the formal economy, or a viable alternative to wage employment in a formal economy that pays poorly and requires legal documentation. As a result of these and other factors, many workers, including non-immigrants and U.S. citizens, and a host of different employers rely on this industry. New York has a particular and well-documented history of day labor.

In New York (and other New England cities), the location of men gathering to informally search for work is often called a "shape-up" site (Leonardo & O'Shea 1997) in reference to the stevedores that once lined up daily at docks and ports in hope of getting hired for the day. In today's vernacular, men "shaping-up" are undertaking day labor or *jornalero* work, the term used by the mostly Spanish-speaking workers.

Since at least the mid 1800s, shape-up sites in New York and other Northeast ports provided a system of hiring dockworkers for the day or half-day (minimum of four hours) by seemingly arbitrary selection from a gathering of men (Larowe 1955). Under this casual labor system, longshoremen seeking work were forced to gather on the docks every morning to await the "shape-up" call from a hiring foreman signaling for the men to gather around him, usually in the shape of a circle or horseshoe to be selected for work for the day or a four hour shift. Then, as is still the case now, the number of men seeking work typically outnumbered the available jobs.

Between 1788 and 1830, Wilentz (1984) documents that day laborers found work along the waterfront with more than half of New York City's Irish men working as day laborers or cartmen and one-quarter of Irish women in the city working as domestics. Martinez (1973:8) noted that in 1834 a "place was set aside on city streets [New York] where those seeking work could meet with those who wanted workers." This exchange worked for both men and women, with employment for women (primarily African American) concentrated in the domestic labor market sector.

Currently, day laborers continue to be primarily immigrants and we also found women day laborers in New York City. The vast majority of day laborers are immigrants

from Mexico and Central America. However, given the diversity of immigrant populations in the city, we also found sites that were predominantly Irish, Sikhs, Haitian and Chinese. Women day labor at informal sites much less frequently than do men. In Los Angeles for example, women do not seek work in this manner (Valenzuela 2002) while in New York City, as our report documents, two sites (out of twenty-nine) had majority concentrations of women searching for day labor.

Why do so many workers, so many sites, and so many employers exist? Certainly, the abundant supply of inexpensive and hard-working workers plays an important role in the resurgence of this unique labor market. But this simple supply and demand formula does not adequately explain why this market has grown so rapidly, why immigrant Latino workers predominantly undertake this type of employment, and why day laborers continue to exist and search for work during robust and recessionary times. These and other questions drive the New York Day Labor Survey.

DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

Any scientific study of day laborers, a highly mobile, highly visible, yet largely unknown population requires creative research approaches. In addition, other unique factors come into play when attempting to study mostly Spanish-speaking men attempting, seemingly haphazardly, to secure employment for the day or week in an open and public space.

Despite these difficulties, explained in more detail in an appendix to this report, we identified a total of fifty-seven sites. Of this total, we selected twenty-nine representative sites and randomly surveyed respondents at each. Table A, below, lists the number of hiring sites and their location in the greater New York area

Table A.
Location and Number of Hiring Sites Chosen

<u>Location</u>	<u>Number of Sites</u>
Bergen (NJ)	3
Bronx	1
Brooklyn	4
Long Island	6
Manhattan	1
Putnam	1
Queens	3
Rockland	1
Staten Island	1
Westchester	8
Total	29

Source: New York Day Labor Survey, 2003

In examining the fifty-seven day labor sites, three basic categories of sites emerged. The first type we call ‘*Connected*’ which represents those sites “connected” to some specific industry such as painting (Dunn Edwards, Standard Brands), landscaping or gardening (nurseries), moving (U-Haul), and home improvement (Home Base, Home Depot). The second type of site that we identified is referred to as ‘*Unconnected*’.

These sites seemingly do not have any connection to a specific industry but may very well exist for other reasons such as foot or vehicular traffic, police cooperation, or historical reasons (i.e., site that has existed for many years). Finally, there is a third category of sites that we designate as 'Regulated'. Regulated sites are those that are formal hiring sites either controlled by a city or county (e.g., Westchester) or managed by a community-based organization.

The respondents to the survey on which this study is based were found at the following site types in the greater New York area.

Table B. Day Laborer Sites

<u>Day Laborer Site Types</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Number of Respondents</u>
Connected	3	23
Unconnected	22	226
Regulated	4	41
Total n	29	290

Source: New York Day Labor Survey, 2003

Budget restrictions and time factors prevented us from surveying at all of the identified day labor sites. Due to these limitations, we selected twenty-nine sites based on several criteria. These criteria included their location in the metropolitan area, the ethnic background and the number of workers (size) at the site, and whether or not the identified site was regulated or unregulated. Our aim was to obtain a geographically dispersed and diverse number of hiring sites that would represent all five of New York's boroughs and surrounding counties and neighborhoods.

A total of 290 surveys were completed. The majority of the surveys were administered in Spanish; each survey was done face-to-

face. The survey was undertaken during a continuous six-week period (June to mid-July, 2002). Each interview included more than 250 questions including charts, extremely detailed questions, and skip patterns and took about one hour to complete.

We estimate the day laborer population in the greater metropolitan region to be between 5,831 and 8,283 (see the appendix for more details on the method used to estimate these figures). These figures are likely to underestimate the total day laborer population in the region. The estimates do not take into account the many reasons why a day laborer will not look for a job on any given day (sickness, school, looking for a permanent job, etc.) and the actual number of sites in the region is unknown. A more rigorous model will take into account the degree to which factors such as immigrants in a particular area, or the distance traveled by day laborers to gain employment, influence the creation or demise of sites. In sum, these estimates represent a lower boundary for the population of day laborers in the region.

Following, we present some of the findings from this unique survey. Please note that the small number of missing responses, as is customary, have been omitted from the tabulated data.

FINDINGS

Who are Day Laborers?

As most would expect, the overwhelming majority of day laborers are Latinos, with a third from Mexico, another third from the rest of Central America, and the remaining third from South America, the Caribbean, Europe, and Canada. Three percent of our respondents were U.S. born.

Table 1. Country of Origin (n=288)

	Percentage
U.S.	3.1
Mexico	32.8
Guatemala	17.2
Ecuador	17.2
Honduras	8.6
El Salvador	7.6
Peru	4.5
Other ²	9.0

Source: New York Day Labor Survey, 2003

About 71 percent of day laborers have been in the United States five years or less with 14 percent having been here between 6 and 10 years and about 15 percent having been here longer than ten years. Almost a third (31 percent) of day laborers are currently homeless.

Table 2. Years Living in the United States (n=270)

	Percentage
< 1 Year	17.8
1 – 2 Years	34.4
3 – 5 Years	18.9
6 – 10 Years	14.1
10+ Years	14.8

Source: New York Day Labor Survey, 2003

Typically, women do not day labor; this is especially true in other regions of the United States such as Los Angeles (Valenzuela 1999) and Northern California (Worbey 2002). Surprisingly, about 5 percent of day laborers surveyed in New York were women. Preliminary analysis of the data suggests that these women work as housekeepers, janitors, and factory workers.

Day laborers are diverse on several other important demographic characteristics. They range in age from 18 to 64 and on average comprise a relatively young workforce with a mean age of 32. Consistent with their overall youthfulness, a significant number (46 percent) of day laborers have never been married. A slightly greater amount (47 percent) of day laborers are either married or living with a partner. Finally, the educational attainment of day laborers is mixed. At one end of the spectrum, more than half either have one to six years of education or none whatsoever. At the other end, more than 30 percent have more than ten years of education, with the mean number of years of education slightly less than eight.

As a group, day laborers vary in legal status. For example, 3.1% are U.S. born. Almost 16% had documents when they first entered the U.S. Finally, more than a third believed they qualify for permanent residency— of those, 32% intend to apply for permanent residency.

What are the Earnings and Work Conditions of Day Laborers?

Table 3. Demographic Characteristics

	Percentage
Gender (n=290)	
Women	5.2
Men	94.8
Age (n=285)	
18 – 25	28.8
26 – 35	37.5
36 – 45	21.8
46 – 55	9.8
55 +	2.1
Median Age	30
Mean Age	32
Marital Status (n=288)	
Never Married	45.5
Separated	5.6
Married	40.6
Widow	0.3
Divorced	1.7
Living w/Partner	6.3
Educational Attainment (n=286)	
No Education	4.5
1 – 6 Years	45.1
7 – 9 Years	20.3
10 – 12 Years	23.8
13+ Years	6.3
Mean	7.7

Source: New York Day Labor Survey, 2003

Calculating an hourly wage rate or monthly income for day laborers is difficult because day labor work fluctuates seasonally and work is rarely with the same employer, or consistently the same type of work. As a result, it is difficult to calculate a mean wage for day labor work. The Day Labor Survey queried day laborers on several different income and wage indicators. We summarize only a few below that provide us with a general understanding or approximation of a day laborer's earnings.

One way to determine a minimum wage of sorts for day laborers is to ask them information regarding what economists call a reservation wage. A reservation wage is the lowest amount (usually per hour) a person is willing to work for. The mean reservation wage for day laborers under normal (spring and summer months) conditions was \$9.37 per hour. That is, on average day laborers refused to work at a rate lower than \$9.37 per hour, about four dollars higher than the present federal minimum wage. The reservation wage under low demand conditions (i.e., winter/rainy season, and/or consistently bad luck securing jobs) fell to \$7.61 per hour. Clearly, wages for day laborer work is significantly higher than both the state and federal nominal minimum wage rates .

Table 4. Day Laborer Reservation Wage

	Day Labor Reservation Wage	Fed. Min. Wage	NY State Min. Wage
Reservation Hourly Wage (n=279)	\$9.37	\$5.15	\$5.15
Reservation Hourly Wage (n=276) (Under Low Demand Conditions)	\$7.61		

Source: New York Day Labor Survey, 2003

We asked day laborers to recall what they had earned in May 2002 (a month prior to when the survey was undertaken) and likewise, what they might normally earn during a good month (i.e., summer) and during a bad month. More than half of day laborers reported that 3-5 days constituted a typical good week while 1-2 days constituted a bad week, with the mean number of days at 5 and 2 respectively. The mean rate of all the responses to this question is tabulated below.

Table 5. Days Worked

Good Week (n=281)	<u>Percentage</u>
1 – 2 days	2.14
3 – 5 days	54.80
6 – 7 days	43.06
Mean	5.17 days
Bad Week (n=273)	
1 – 2 days	68.50
3 – 4 days	29.30
> 5 days	2.20
Mean	2.09 days

Source: New York Day Labor Survey, 2003

We have included both the federal and state minimum rates computed at full-time (forty hours per week) for a month (e.g., a good month) and a rate computed at part-time (20 hours per week) for a month (e.g., a bad month). In New York, day labor work is clearly competitive, and according to our preliminary calculations, better than working under federal and state minimum wage employment. When coupled with other “day labor benefits” such as daily cash payments and non-payment of taxes, day labor work, even under difficult conditions (i.e., poor weather or low demand) may prove advantageous when compared to minimum wage employment.

The mean earnings for May 2002 was \$855, with a good month bringing in \$1,471 and a bad month totaling about \$504— a little less than a third of what is earned in a good

month. What is surprising is that even under difficult conditions (i.e., poor weather or low demand) day laborer work may bring greater returns when compared to nominal minimum wage employment, which in New York is at the Federal rate (\$5.15).

A further analysis of monthly earnings by reservation wage and time worked reveals that the returns on day laboring are far greater than working full time at minimum wage. Monthly earnings for day laborers using the reservation for full-time and part-time employment under low demand are \$1,218 and \$609, respectively, a couple hundred dollars higher than nominal minimum wage employment. Similarly, reservation wage for full and part-time employment is much higher than what is earned in a good month and bad month.

A further breakdown of hourly wage per weekday reveals that 77% of respondents earn \$10 or less per hour. There is no notable difference between the hour wage earned during the weekday compared to the weekend. The majority of day laborers work a full day with the mean hours worked at 8 (see Table 7 below).

Wage preference is important to day laborers because it helps them control and limit to some extent employer abuses of non-payment. As a result, day laborers rarely accept payment for their labor in the form of a check and greatly prefer their payment to be in cash. As seen in Table 8, less than 2 percent accept payment in the form of a check and an overwhelmingly majority prefer their payment to be in cash. Moreover, the greatest percentage of workers prefers to be paid by the hour with the second highest percentage preferring to be paid by the day. This in part reflects the general perception that being paid per day is more risky with regard to potential employer abuse. For example, an hourly or contractual rate is fixed and represents specifically

Table 6A . Monthly Earnings

	May 2002 n=281 (mean)	Good Month n=268 (mean)	Bad Month n=260 (mean)	\$5.15 Rate @ Full-time per Month (Good Month)	\$5.15 Rate @ Part-time per Month (Bad Month)
Earnings	\$ 855	\$1,471	\$504	\$824	\$412

Source: New York Day Labor Survey, 2003

Table 6B. Monthly Earnings

	Reservation Wage Full-time per Month	Reservation Wage Part-time per Month	Reservation Wage Under low Demand Full-time per Month	Reservation Wage Under low Demand Part-time per Month
Earnings	\$1,499	\$750	\$1,218	\$609

Source: New York Day Labor Survey, 2003

Table 7. Employment Characteristics (in %)

Hourly Wage	Weekday (Mon. – Fri.)	Weekend (Sat. & Sun.)
\$5.00 – 7.00	14.08	11.88
\$7.01 – 10.00	63.10	59.41
\$10.01 –15.00	19.44	26.73
\$15.01 –20.00	2.54	1.98
> \$20.00	0.85	---
Mean	\$ 9.92	\$ 9.83

**Hours
Worked**

	Weekday (Mon. – Fri.)	Weekend (Sat. & Sun.)
< 5	5.26	5.10
5 – 8	66.0	61.22
9 – 13	28.31	33.67
> 13	0.43	----
Mean	8.14	8.22

Source: New York Day Laborer Survey, 2003

Table 8. Wage Preference & Type of Payment

	Percentage	
Hour	37.6	
Day	29.4	
Contract	24.1	
No Difference	8.9	
Type of Payment	Cash (n=281) (%)	Check (n=270) (%)
All the Time	92.5	1.9
Sometimes	4.6	10.7
Seldom	0.7	4.4
Never	2.2	83.0

Source: New York Day Labor Survey, 2003

the amount paid for services completed over time or for a specific task. Being paid by the day may be more risky because of the ambiguity of how an employer might define a day's labor. More importantly, there are significant differences in working for a day as a painter's assistant compared to work-

ing for a day digging 3-foot deep ditches. Hourly and contract wages provide less ambiguity and thus less risk to a day laborer than does a daily wage.

The majority of day laborers look for work Monday through Sunday. Twenty-one percent only look for work on the weekdays. Surprisingly, 17 percent of day laborers surveyed reported that they had a job other than seeking work as a *jornalero*. Of those who have another job, over 60 percent work more than 20 hours a week with mean hours worked totaling 27 hours. When asked whether they would prefer to work as day laborers instead of having a permanent job, an overwhelming majority (81 percent) said they would prefer to have a permanent job.

Table 9. Day Labor Work

	Percentage
Days Seeking Day Labor Work (n=278)	
Monday-Friday	20.9
Monday-Sunday	74.5
Saturday-Sunday Only	4.7
Hold Other Job? (n=198)	
Yes	17.2
No	82.8
Hours Spent Working at Other Job (n= 31)	
< 10 Hours	22.6
10-20 Hours	16.1
21-35 Hours	22.6
36 or More Hours	38.7
Mean Number Hours	27.2

Source: New York Day Labor Survey, 2003

What Do Day Laborers Do?

Day laborers perform a wide variety of jobs including dirty and/or dangerous tasks that might expose them to chemical wastes and other occupational hazards. Table 10 highlights the most common jobs performed by day laborers. Each respondent was asked to state the occupation(s) in which they have training. Among the most specialized trades were construction, painting, gardening, and carpentry.

Table 10. Job Specialization (n=288)

	Percentage
Construction	82.6
Painting	70.8
Gardening	59.7
Plumbing	24.3
Carpentry	41.3
Mechanic	13.5
Electricity	17.0
Other	33.0

Source: New York Day Labor Survey, 2003

Why Work Day Labor?

Day labor may be perceived as a stepping-stone to better employment opportunities or as a temporary holdover from a firing, layoff or other work interruption. Table 11 shows that while a large majority of day laborers have been doing this type of work for less than a year, a small minority (16 percent) has been working as day laborers for over four years.

Table 11. Tenure as Day Laborer (n=284)

	Percentage
Less than 1 year	45
1 – 3 Years	39.1
4 – 10 Years	13.4
10 + Years	2.5

Source: New York Day Labor Survey, 2003

Table 12, following, lists the primary reasons preventing a day laborer from getting a job in the formal economy. Among the most cited reasons include lack of English proficiency, lack of documents, and because there are few jobs available or because available jobs pay poorly.

In the calendar year 2001, day laborers sent remittances an average of nine times. The mean amount sent was \$3,641.

Table 12. Barriers to Employment in the Formal Job Market (n= 288)

	Percentage
Lack of Documents	31.3
Lack of English Proficiency	34.7
Pay Rate is too Low	12.2
Few Jobs Available	19.1
No Specific Job Skill to Market	3.5
Racial Discrimination	3.8
Employer Abuses	6.9
Other	6.9

Source: New York Day Labor Survey, 2003

Table 13. Remittances

	Percentage
Frequency (n=266)	
None	23.3
1 – 5 Times	23.3
6 – 10 Times	17.3
11+ Times	36.1
Mean	9.2
Amount (n=196)	
< \$ 1,000	20.4
\$1,000 – \$1,999	17.6
\$2,000 – \$3,999	27.6
\$4,000 – \$5,999	15.3
\$6,000 – \$10,000	16.3
> \$10,000	3.0
Mean Amount	\$3,641

Source: New York Day Labor Survey, 2003

Table 14. Employers of Day Laborers (n=288)

	Percentage
Private Individual	41.0
Contractor	56.3
Private Company	20.8
Factory	6.9
Restaurant	6.9
Other Day Laborers	11.8
Other	1.4

Source: New York Day Labor Survey, 2003

Who Hires Day Laborers?

The day labor market could not possibly function without the large demand from prospective employers for this type of labor. Indeed, from conversations with day laborers and others who work with this group, the proliferation of sites throughout metropolitan New York is mostly explained by the increased number of employers seeking this relatively inexpensive, hard working, and trouble-free work force. When asked to list, in a typical week, what type of employer hires most often, contractors and private individuals ranked the highest. Almost two-thirds (65 percent) of the survey respondents are hired repeatedly by the same employer.

Are Day Laborers Abused?

Almost all (85%) of New York's day laborers have experienced some type of abuse in this industry. For example, 50 percent experienced non-payment of wages, 56 percent were paid less than was agreed, and 62 percent were not allowed food or water at the work site.

Table 15. Frequency of Employer Abuses

	Never (%)	1-5 Times (%)	6-10 Times (%)	+ 11 Times (%)
Any abuse	14.6	82.2	1.8	1.4
Non-Payment	50.2	45.3	2.8	1.8
Pay Less Than Agreed	39.7	49.1	6.7	4.6
Abandoned at Work Site	60.9	32.0	3.9	3.2
Bad Checks	86.3	12.3	0.7	0.7
No Food or Water	38.3	42.8	7.0	11.9
No Breaks	47.4	31.2	7.0	14.4
Violence	84.2	12.0	1.1	2.8
Robbery	92.6	5.6	1.1	0.7
Threats	81.4	13.3	1.8	3.5
Other	92.6	4.6	0.0	2.8

Source: New York Day Labor Survey, 2003

CONCLUSION

The preliminary findings presented in the preceding pages paint a complex and cursory picture of day labor practices, livelihood, and employment. These findings describe day laborers and their experience as workers selling their labor in a public setting. The richness of the New York Day Labor Survey will allow for further analysis that is more detailed and conclusive generalizations will be drawn in future reports and research articles. The data presented in this report represent an original first look at a highly visible though relatively unknown labor market in greater New York.

Day labor, its processes, and its day-to-day activities are varied and rich in information. This report just scratches the surface. Equally complex and detailed are the larger factors that induce the burgeoning of this market and fuel the demand among private individuals and contractors. Part of planning and instituting policies on behalf of different segments of a populace is an accurate portrayal of that population in question. This of course requires meticulous work, painstaking studies, and careful data collection. The work presented in this report represents in part an attempt at understanding day laborers and accurately portraying their life and labor market experiences in an accurate and thoughtful way.

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ENDNOTES

¹ Throughout this report, we use day laborer and *jornalero* interchangeably. *Jornalero* is the Spanish equivalent of day laborer.

² Includes day laborers from Brazil (1.7%), Chile (.7%), Colombia (1.4%), Nicaragua (.3%), Venezuela (.7%), Cuba (.3%), Dominican Republic (.3%), Haiti (.7%), Jamaica (.3%) Puerto Rico (.7%) Poland (.7%), Ukraine (.7%) and Canada (.3%).

³ Counting day laborers at different hiring sites was difficult. At most sites, a basic strategy was to begin the count of a group of men from left to right or visa versa, from right to left. Counting groups of men proved even more difficult than counting for example, men lined up along a wall. With practice, counting day laborers at different hiring sites became easier and more thorough. The point here is that no particular order or method was utilized in counting men at different sites. As a result, the listing (counting) of men for our study was done randomly. Thus, when the selection count (predetermined set of numbers) was administered, we had a group of men who had randomly fallen into our count.

APPENDIX

Data Collection Procedures

Any scientific study of day laborers, a highly mobile, highly visible, yet largely unknown population requires creative research approaches. In addition, other unique factors come into play when attempting to study mostly Spanish-speaking men attempting, seemingly haphazardly, to secure employment for the day or week in an open and public space. Despite their ubiquity, day laborers are not a population that is easily defined. This in turn makes them a difficult population to research.

- Day labor work is not an easily defined occupational category. It does not exist in the Standard Occupational Classifications (SOC) or the Standard Industrial Classifications (SIC) used by the United States Bureau of the Census and other government agencies that monitor labor statistics, such as the Department of Labor.
- Day laborers are employed by many different employers for a variety of jobs ranging in length from several hours to several weeks. As a result, the status of a worker in the day labor market constantly fluctuates from looking for work (as a day laborer) to working in the formal or informal market (employed). This means that hiring sites, depending on the season, the current demand for day labor work, and the time of day may not provide the most accurate count of day laborers.
- Hiring sites, while quite visible to most, are nevertheless difficult to keep track of in their totality. New sites emerge, old sites disappear, and some sites are difficult to find. Any attempt at calcu-

lating a total population of day laborers (based on a total count of hiring sites) would at the very least require a total or a close approximation of the total number of hiring sites in a given region.

- Day labor may be a temporary occupation. Some day laborers may be doing this type of work as a temporary hold-over from a layoff or firing. Alternatively, workers in this market may be holding part or full-time employment in the formal (i.e., 9:00-5:00 market) labor market and undertaking day labor work as a supplement to their wages. On the other hand, *jornaleros* may be using day labor work as a stepping-stone to regular employment in the formal labor market. The point is that at any given time, who is and who is not a day laborer is fluid.

These four methodological challenges pose serious obstacles to any scientific study of this population. To address these issues, we decided to identify as many day labor sites as possible, develop a random sampling frame, and employ a screening mechanism that would allow us to identify day laborers. Prior to implementing our survey, we identified over twenty-five hiring sites. By the end of the survey, we had identified fifty-seven sites. Of the total fifty-seven sites, we selected twenty-nine representative sites and randomly surveyed respondents at each. Even though we did not survey at all of the known sites, we are confident that our results are statistically representative of all day laborers in the New York metropolitan area. Table A below lists the number of hiring sites and their location in the greater New York area.

To identify hiring sites throughout New York we first contacted CBOs, advocacy groups, churches, and others with knowledge of the location of day labor sites.

Table A. Location and Number of Hiring Sites Chosen

<u>Location</u>	<u>Number of Sites</u>
Bergen (NJ)	3
Bronx	1
Brooklyn	4
Long Island	6
Manhattan	1
Putnam	1
Queens	3
Rockland	1
Staten Island	1
Westchester	8
Total	29

Source: New York Day Labor Survey, 2003

Through this method, we identified about half of all the sites. We then used a “referral” system that in many ways resembles snowball sampling, or rather snowball identification. We approached day laborers at different sites and asked them where else they go to hire themselves out and if they knew of other sites. We then visited the newly identified sites and asked the workers at those sites the same question. Detailed field notes including total counts of day laborers, time of day, surrounding stores, foot and automobile traffic, and labor exchanges that we witnessed were recorded.

Categories of Day Labor Sites

In examining the fifty-seven day labor sites, three basic categories of sites emerged. The first type we call ‘*Connected*’ which represents those sites “connected” to some specific industry such as painting (Dunn Edwards, Standard Brands), landscaping or gardening (nurseries), moving (U-haul), and home improvement (Home Base, Home Depot). The second type of site that we identified is termed ‘*Unconnected*’. These sites seemingly do not have any connection to a specific industry but may very well ex-

ist for other reasons such as foot or vehicular traffic, police cooperation, or historical reasons (i.e., site that has existed for many years). Finally, there is a third category of sites that we designate as ‘*Regulated*’. Regulated sites are those that are formal hiring sites either controlled by a city or county (e.g., Westchester) or managed by a community-based organization.

The respondents to the survey on which this study is based were found at the following site types in the greater New York area.

Table B. Day Laborer Sites

<u>Day Laborer Site Types</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Number of Respondents</u>
Connected	3	23
Unconnected	22	226
Regulated	4	41
Total n	29	290

Source: New York Day Labor Survey, 2003

Sampling Framework

The Day Labor Survey adapted conventional survey sampling techniques, and supports statistical generalizations regarding:

- Day laborers found at the 29 New York sites on a typical day.
- Day laborers found at all sites in the greater New York area on a typical day.
- Persons in the New York metropolitan area who seek work as day laborers.

Utilizing the data (i.e., field notes, counts of day laborers) from our site identification research carried out prior to survey implementation, we were able to establish “selection” counts for each site based on the size (number of men) of the hiring sites.

Selection counts (a predetermined set of numbers) were based on the total number of workers identified at each site prior to the survey. Upon arrival at a given site at 7 a.m. a count of all workers was taken. The count was continued until 10 a.m. and included laborers who arrived after the initial count had been made. For consistency and comparability purposes, the total count of day laborers at each site was always undertaken between seven and ten in the morning. Included in the count was a general description of each worker (usually based on physical features and/or clothing attire). After all the workers had been counted, the selection count was administered and potential survey participants identified. Each worker who fell within the selection count (a random number) was then approached and asked to participate in the survey.

Budget restrictions and time sensitive factors prevented us from surveying at all of the identified day labor sites. Due to these limitations, we selected twenty-nine sites based on several criteria. These criteria included their location in the metropolitan area, the ethnic background and the number of workers (size) at the site, and whether or not the site identified was regulated or unregulated. Our aim was to obtain a geographically dispersed and diverse number of hiring sites that would represent all five of New York's boroughs and surrounding counties and neighborhoods.

A total of 290 surveys were completed. The majority of the surveys were administered in Spanish; each survey was done face-to-face. The survey was undertaken during a continuous six-week period (June to mid-July 2002). Each interview included more than 250 questions including charts, extremely detailed questions, and skip patterns and took about one hour to complete.

Interviewing Day Laborers

Approaching *jornaleros* in a public setting as they attempt to secure a day's labor is not easy. Day laborers, in general, are suspicious of "official" looking people. One becomes wary of outsiders after experiencing many instances of employer abuse, police harassment, merchant and public complaints, and other travails suffered from seeking employment in this manner. In addition, most of these men are immigrants—many without legal documents. Being an immigrant in any context is difficult but this group is particularly vulnerable.

To convince day laborers that our study was legitimate, worthwhile, and not a ruse for some government agency trying to round them up for some other purpose, we developed a process that we called "reconnaissance" fieldwork. We arrived at a site at or before 7 a.m., parked nearby, and then approached groups of day laborers. At the same time, a "counter" (usually one person who also served as a site leader/trouble shooter) would begin doing her job of counting all the workers at the site. The reconnaissance team would pass out flyers in Spanish which explained our presence at the site, the objective of our visit (i.e., to recruit respondents for our survey), and that the selection procedure to participate in the survey was undertaken through a random process. We also explained verbally the objectives of the study, the fact that we were from the New School University (and UCLA), and that their participation was purely voluntary and that if they were selected and chose to participate, their responses would remain confidential. That is, there could be no way that a completed survey could be traced back to them at some future time.

Because the possibility of missing work for the day as a result of partaking in our survey was real, we offered an incentive of \$20 for each worker’s participation. Of course, we also hoped that the modest monetary incentive would compel reluctant day laborers to participate in our study. We estimated that \$20 for a little more than an hour of their time, even if they didn’t get hired for the day, was a reasonable payment. In many instances, we observed that those who did participate in our study were still able to secure employment for the day.

Estimates of the Day Laborer Population in the Greater New York Area

The number of persons included in the survey count in each site is assumed to be less than 100% of the day labor population accessing the day labor market. The model to be developed assumes:

- (1) the workers do not use multiple sites to access the market,
- (2) that the definition of day labor allows that workers may not be at the site everyday if they found work of several days duration,
- (3) the number of workers observed in the survey count likely *underestimates* the day labor population, because it only includes the day laborers who were seeking employment at the time of the survey or excluded for other reasons.
- (4) the number of sites identified are the only sites in the greater metropolitan area, thus the estimates offer at best a lower bound estimate since it is likely that there are many other sites that were not identified during the time of the survey.

Estimating the total labor population relies on several simplifying assumptions. We counted the workers prior to the day of the survey and during the day of the survey, as

explained in the method section. First, we assume that if a worker was at the site when we conducted the survey that the worker probably did not work that day. In actuality, we had a few surveys that were not completed because the worker obtained work while we were interviewing them. However, in almost all of these cases we were able to finish the interview afterwards (since most workers had cellular phones, a common way for employers to contact them and arrange time and place for pick ups). We were also able to determine the likelihood that a worker was employed while we conducted the survey since we kept a record and description of every worker at the site between 7:00 and 10:00 am. Prior to the beginning of the survey we identified 25 sites. By the end of the study, workers at the sites referred us to 27 additional sites for a total of 57 sites. From this total, we selected 29 representative sites for the study. In order to select a representative group of sites we counted the number of workers prior to the survey team visit. Six of the sites were identified after we completed the fieldwork and no data for the number of workers at the sites is available.

Table C. Observed Average Number of Day Laborers at the Sites

		Number of Sites	Average Workers at Site	Total Workers Observed At Sites
Small	5-29	15	15	232
Medium	30-69	19	47	892
Large	70-165	17	91	1,552
Other Identified		6	NA	NA
Total		57	52	2,676

Source: New York Day Labor Survey, 2003

The average total number of workers at the sites was 2,676, as indicated in the table below. It is important to notice the variability of the size of the sites. The number of workers in any given site is an overall

indication of the pool of day laborers in the area. We identified 15 “small” sites (5 to 29 individuals during the hours that the research team was at the site), 19 “medium” sites (30-69), and 17 large sites (70 to 165).

Table D. Estimated Total Day Laborers in the Greater New York Metropolitan Area

	Lowest Count	Total Workers	Highest Count	Total Workers
Average per site	39	128	68	162
All Sites	1,339	4,349	3,822	8,283

Source: New York Day Labor Survey, 2003

To estimate the total population in the greater New York metropolitan area we are assuming that, for any given worker, the probability of being at the site is equal to the inverse of the average days looking for work in a typical week minus the days employed in a typical week. Thus, each worker at a site in any given day represents:

$$\text{Weight} = 1 / [(\text{DLW} - \text{DWW}) / (\text{DLW})]$$

$$2.179 = 1 / [(6.35 - 3.436) / (6.35)]$$

Where:

DLW = 6.35 = average days looking for work in a week;

and,

DWW = 3.346 = average days worked in a week.

These two coefficients are estimated from the survey data and discussed elsewhere in the report. Thus, based on these parameters, the day labor population in the area is estimated as follows:

$$\text{Total DL Workers} = 2.179 \times 2,676 = 5,831.$$

Furthermore, we can estimate a more accurate range by using two points of observations: the counted total workers before we visited the site to conduct the survey and the counted workers the day we conducted the survey. To estimate the range we first add all the data for the lowest of the two counts of workers at the site, and then for all of the highest. Using this method, the lowest count yields a lower estimate of 4,349 total day laborers in the region during the period of the survey, and of 8,283 using the highest count.

The lowest bound of 4,349 could be interpreted as the number of workers in the area assuming that workers in that area were experiencing a “good week,” and therefore less likely to seek work at the site. Conversely, the highest count of 8,283 represents a figure assuming a “bad week,” when day laborers in the area used the site to gain employment. Given that the study took place a few months after September 11, 2001, and most workers reported that they were experiencing “bad weeks,” a more accurate range for the day labor population will use the estimate using the average of workers at the site during the two visits of 5,831 and the estimate using the highest count of 8,283 as the upper bound.

These figures are likely to underestimate the total day laborer population in the region. The estimates do not take into account the many reasons why a day laborer will not look for a job on any given day (sickness, school, looking for a permanent job, etc.). A more difficult factor to account for is the number of sites that are unknown to the research team. A more rigorous model will take into account the degree to which factors such as immigrants in a particular area, or the distance traveled by day laborers to gain employment influence the creation or demise of sites. In sum, these estimates represent a lower boundary for the population of day laborers in the region.

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