

BROKERED DAY LABOR IN LAS VEGAS

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Partner Organization

Las Vegas Catholic Worker

Collaborating Agencies:

American Civil Liberties Union of Nevada, ACLU
Casual Labor Office of Nevada
Las Vegas Rescue Mission
Salvation Army

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Portions of this report may be reprinted or cited noting the Southwest Center for Economic Integrity.

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Key Findings

- One hundred interviews with day laborers were completed in July 2006 in Las Vegas, NV.
- The following companies employ the majority of workers interviewed in Las Vegas: Labor Ready (33%), Labor Max (25%) and Labor Express [now Labor Systems] (18%).
- Workers report seeing favoritism at these Day Labor Agencies despite having a “first come first served” system.
- Most workers report working in construction (42%) and landscaping (10%).
- Workers seek work on average 4.13 days/wk and get assignments 3.05 days/wk.
- The average wait time to get a job assignment at the day labor agency is 2hrs 20min.
- Most workers (86%) report being paid daily.
- Most workers (91%) report being paid with a check, voucher or coupon.
- The types of abuses at the workplace most commonly reported were:
 - 63% report having been assigned a different task than hired to do
 - 44% report having been left without water, food or breaks
 - 36% report having been paid less than agreed
 - 32% report having been abandoned at work site
 - 32% report having been insulted or threatened
- More than half (55%) of the workers interviewed don’t know where to report such abuses.
- Workers are often charged for equipment, transportation and cashing their paychecks by the Day Labor Agency.
 - Average charge for transportation is \$3.54
 - Average charge for gloves is \$2.11. A third of workers (31%) had to purchase gloves from the agency, that is, they couldn’t return them and not pay for their use.
 - Most workers (86%) are charged \$1 to \$2 for cashing their paycheck.
- 16 workers reported having been injured on the job. 11 of them reported the injury to the day labor agency. Only 3 of them had their situation addressed and

none received workers compensation. Some workers mentioned that if they report abuses, they won't get hired again.

- 64% of workers interviewed report earning \$6.50/hr or less. For half of these workers, this is pretty much their only source of income.
- Approximately 20% of the workers receive some type of government assistance.
- 27% of workers support someone else on their income.
- The main reasons given for doing day labor work are:
 - Need the money/survival (28%)
 - Only type of work they could find (22%)
 - Daily pay (16%) – couldn't survive two weeks without pay.
- The vast majority of workers (89%) would prefer the stability and security of a job with regularly scheduled hours.
- Most workers interviewed were men (95%), African American (47%) with an average age of 47 years old.
- 84% of workers report having a GED, high school diploma or higher.
- The majority of workers interviewed (75%) at the Casual Labor Office (the only site that was not a night shelter for men), reported being homeless living in a shelter or living outside.
- Only 15% report being able to rent a place on their own.
- Out of the 82 people interviewed who reported being homeless, 79% reported being homeless living on/off in a shelter. The average time they've been homeless is approximately 1 year and 2 months. Another 21% people reported being homeless living outside. The average time they've been living outside is 2.5 years.

II. INTRODUCTION

The Las Vegas Day Labor research project originated as an effort by the Southwest Center for Economic Integrity (SCEI) to document the experiences of day laborers in the Southwest. The goal of this effort was to use this information for advocacy purposes and to pursue legislation changes that better protect the rights of workers, by providing information to local organizations engaged in advocacy who can better promote change.

In July 2006, the Southwest Center for Economic Integrity (SCEI) completed 100 interviews with day laborers in Las Vegas. Interviews were conducted at three sites identified as having a high concentration of homeless day laborers who often seek work through private day labor broker companies. These interview sites were: the State of Nevada Casual Labor Office, a state-run day labor program; Las Vegas Rescue Mission's night shelter for men and Salvation Army's night shelter for men. Information was collected through 15 minute face-to-face interviews conducted in English and occasionally in Spanish. SCEI staff and volunteers from Las Vegas Catholic Worker formed the team of interviewers. Members of Las Vegas Catholic Worker reviewed and provided feedback on the questionnaire as well as input and support on field logistics, including recruiting a team of interviewers and providing space for training.

The goal of this study was to look at work conditions experienced by day laborers in Las Vegas, particularly the homeless who seek work through day labor agencies. These agencies form part of the temporary staffing industry, characterized by a "triangular employment relationship... in which the temporary agency is the legal employer, while the client organization supervises the employee" (Kalleberg, 2000). The use of staffing services has increased steadily in the past decades as businesses seek more flexibility to respond to business cycles. One way of doing this has been to reduce costs in personnel training and management by hiring temporary staff (Kalleberg, 2000).

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) defines contingent workers as "those workers who have no explicit or implicit contract for ongoing employment...which include workers who do not expect their jobs to last. ...In 2005, slightly more than one-half of contingent workers would have preferred a permanent job." According to the US Labor Market for 2005 published by the BLS, the contingent workforce made up 4% of workers in February 2005.

According to Valenzuela, while not a formal definition, day labor often refers to "a type of temporary employment that is distinguished by hazards in or undesirability of the work, the absence of fringe and other typical workplace benefits (i.e. breaks, safety equipment), and the daily search for employment (Valenzuela, 2003).

Many of the staffing companies hiring homeless day laborers in Las Vegas operate nationwide and have several locations in this city. Some of them are publicly traded multinational corporations such as Labor Ready and Manpower. These agencies provide temporary employees, mostly skilled and unskilled manual labor, to small and medium sized businesses locally. Some agencies offer additional staffing services for administrative, clerical, hospitality, special events and convention work, as well as staffing services for professional jobs. Staffing companies are responsible for recruiting and paying employees, withholding taxes from their paychecks and paying for workers

compensation. Since daily work is not guaranteed, it is common for workers to seek work through more than one company on a regular basis, in order to increase their chances of securing job assignments.

According to the American Staffing Association quarterly employment and sales survey, total sales in 2005 for this industry reached \$69.5 billion, an 8.5% increase from 2004. The survey also reports that staffing companies employed 2.9 million workers daily on average. Over a third (35.1%) of employees that go through staffing companies are employed in the Industrial sector (ASA, 2006).

While flexibility of temporary work arrangements translate into added benefits to the overall economic performance of hiring and staffing companies as shown by the ASA, such benefits hardly trickle down to the less skilled workers whose income from day labor is not sufficient to lift them out of poverty. This is documented in this study as well as in past research (SCEI 2003; Theodore 2000).

In this report we present the research findings in 6 sections. We start by looking at general experiences of workers hired through private day labor companies. We then look at abuses experienced by workers while working as day laborers. We also examine the different fees paid by workers to their day labor broker, such as charges for equipment, transportation or cashing their checks. We then look at work conditions in day labor, focusing on injuries workers may have suffered, whether they reported these injuries to the company and if they received workers compensation. We look at income from day labor and workers' strategies to supplement this income and finish with an overview of the demographic composition of the workers interviewed.

III. GENERAL EXPERIENCES IN DAY LABOR

Workers interviewed identified 11 companies they have worked for in the past year. Most workers interviewed have most recently worked for the following three companies: Labor Ready (5 locations in Las Vegas), Labor Max (4 locations in LV) and Labor Express, [now Labor Systems] (6 locations in LV).

Table 1. Day Labor Company Used Most Recently

Company	Number	Percentage (%)
Labor Ready	31	33
Labor Max	24	25
Labor Express/Labor Systems	17	18
Command Labor	6	7
Premier Staffing	5	5
Allegiance Staffing	3	3
Allied Force	3	3
Manpower	2	2
Labor Finders	2	2
Labor Nevada	1	1
United Temp	1	1
	95	100%

Job assignment method

Over half of the workers interviewed, that is, 60%, state that jobs are assigned on a “first come first served” basis, followed by 22% who report that it is based on seniority and 8% who say it is based on favoritism. When asked to describe “other,” workers mention that work is assigned in the following ways: based on experience or qualifications, based on the order of the list and if they speak Spanish.

Table 2. Job Assignment Method

Assignment Method	Number	Percentage (%)
First come first served	63	60%
Seniority	23	22%
Favoritism	8	8%
How you look	3	3%
Lottery	2	2%
Other	6	6%
	105	100%

* Some respondents gave multiple answers.

Minimum work period paid for

We were interested in finding out whether workers were assigned a four-hour minimum per work dispatch. As shown on Table 3, 77 (79%) workers report that the agency has a 4hr minimum workday for billing purposes. However, out of those 77 workers, only 56 (74%) got paid for at least 4 hours in their last day labor assignment. The fact that workers are not guaranteed an 8 hr workday, makes their income less predictable and reduces even further their monthly and annual earnings.¹

¹ This has been well-illustrated in the different scenarios presented by Theodore (2000).

Table 3. Agency Has a 4hr Min. Day

4 hrs min work day	Number	Percentage (%)
Yes	77	79
No	14	14
DK	6	6
	97	100%

Table 4. Agency Pays For at Least 4 hrs

Paid for 4 hrs	Number	Percentage (%)
Yes	56	74
No	20	26
	76	100%

Length of assignment

Table 4 shows that 34% of workers report that work assignments last for at least one day. A larger percentage (68%) of workers report that work assignments last for less than a week. The unstable nature of this labor market makes it difficult for workers to secure a predictable and steady income from day labor work.

Table 4. Length of Assignment

Length of Assignment	Number	Percentage (%)
A few hours	3	3
One day	33	34
Several days	30	31
One week	11	11
More than a week	6	6
One month	3	3
More than one month	9	9
Other	2	2
	97	100%

Type of work

When asked about the type of work carried out in their most recent job assignment, a large number of workers report having worked in construction and landscaping. These job categories show high demand in the Southwest region of the country, particularly in fast growing cities such as Las Vegas.

Table 5. Type of Work

Description	Number	Percentage (%)
Construction	42	42
Landscaping	10	10
Loading/unloading	7	7
Grounds keeping	6	6
Light Industrial	5	5
Janitorial	5	5
Driving	5	5
Moving	3	3
Kitchen	3	3
Rental car company	3	3
Convention center work	3	3
Other	8	8
	100	100%

Frequency in the Use of Day Labor Agency

On average, workers interviewed seek work at day labor agencies 4.13 days a week and get job assignments 3.05 days per week. This means that workers get job assignments 75% of the days they report to the day labor company.

In addition, workers experience long wait periods before being assigned to a job for the day. As pointed out earlier, these wait periods are difficult to avoid given the short-term nature of job assignments. Most workers (66%) start their day before 5:00am at the labor hall, as shown on Table 6.

Table 6. Time Workers Report to Day Labor Agency

Time	Number	Percentage (%)
3:00 - 3:30	7	7
3:31- 4:00	17	18
4:01 - 4:30	13	13
4:31 -5:00	27	28
5:01 - 5:30	8	8
5:31 - 6:00	15	15
6:01 - 6:30	1	1
6:31 - 7:00	5	5
7:31 - 8:00	2	2
8:31 - 9:00	1	1
9:31 - 10:00	1	1
	97	100%

Table 7 shows that 41% of workers interviewed wait 1-2 hrs before getting a job assignment and almost a third of the workers wait 2-3 hrs. On average, workers wait 2hrs 20min (see Table 8). The minimum wait period reported is 45 minutes and the maximum is 7 hours. Waiting time is unpaid, as companies consider hours worked as those “on the clock” at the third party employer site.

Table 7. Wait Time Between Reporting to the Agency and Getting a Job Assignment

Wait time	Number	Percentage (%)
Less than 1hr	14	16
1hr - 2hrs	37	41
2hr - 3hrs	24	27
3hr - 4hrs	10	11
4hr - 5hrs	4	4
6hr - 7hrs	1	1
	90	100%

Table 8. Average Waiting Period

Wait period for assignments	Time
Average waiting period (mean)	2 hr 20min
Most common wait period (mode)	2 hrs
Minimum wait period	45min
Maximum wait period	7hrs

Type of payment

It is common practice in the brokered day labor industry to pay wages by check. One company in particular, Labor Ready, has a track record of charging a fee to cash worker paychecks through cash dispensing machines located inside their offices. Often times these machines provide only paper money, keeping the change in the check plus one dollar charged for the transaction. This is money earned by the workers that is kept by the labor broker agency.

Many day laborers are homeless living in shelters or outside and many of them don't have a bank account. Workers report that when they are unable to cash their check at the agency, they take it to a convenience store close by where their checks are accepted or to a check-cashing outlet where they are charged a percentage of their check, typically 2%. In addition to this, workers often receive payment on a daily basis or several times during the week. Such fees compounded daily, erode their already low wages.

Table 9. Payment Method

Type of payment at DLA	Number	Percentage (%)
Cash	9	9
Check	82	79
Coupon/voucher	13	12
	104*	100%

* Some respondents gave multiple answers.

Table 10. Payment Frequency

Often get paid	Number	Percentage (%)
Daily	84	86
Weekly	14	14
	98	100%

IV. WORKPLACE ABUSE

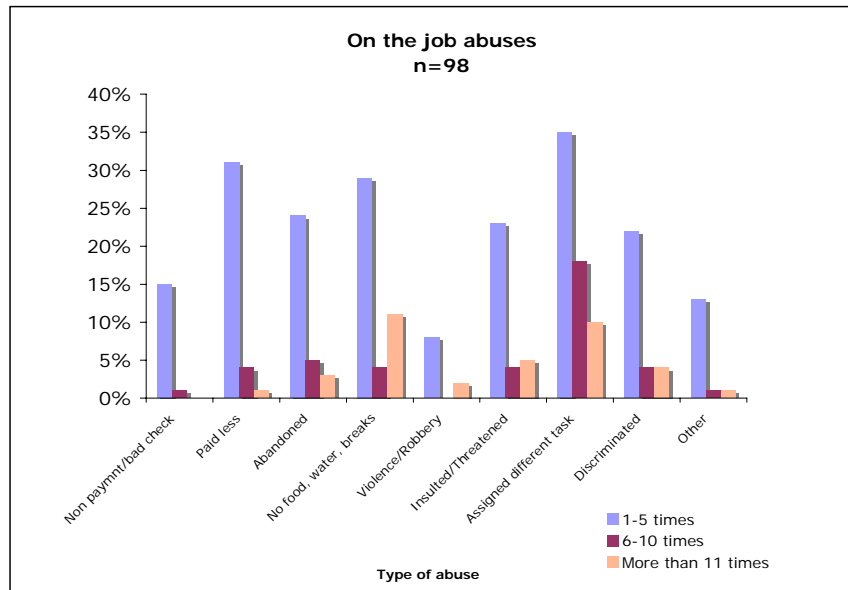
Day laborers form part of a contingent workforce characterized by the lack of a formal tie or contract between employer and employee and a high variation in length of assignments (Kalleberg, 2000). The informal nature of the day labor market allows for high incidence of abuse to day laborers at the work place. Day laborers are “vulnerable and exploited as evidenced by low wages, infrequent employment, workplace injuries, and ancillary employment charges” (Valenzuela 2003)

We asked workers if they had ever suffered any of the abuses listed below and if so, to tell us an approximate number of times in the past year they experienced such abuses. We found that 63% of workers interviewed had been assigned a different task than they were hired to do (from one to more than 11 times). A high percentage of workers, 44%, reported having been left without food, water or breaks, while 36% were paid less than agreed. 32% of the workers reported having been abandoned at the work site and 30% reported having been discriminated against.

Table 11. Workplace Abuse

Type of abuse	1-5 times (%)	6-10 times (%)	More than 11 times (%)	Total (%)
Assigned different task	35	18	10	63
No food, water, breaks	29	4	11	44
Paid less	31	4	1	36
Abandoned	24	5	3	32
Insulted/Threatened	23	4	5	32
Discriminated against	22	4	4	30
Non payment/bad check	15	1	0	16
Violence/Robbery	8	0	2	10
Other	13	1	1	15

Figure 1. Type of Abuse



When asked if they knew of an organization, place or person to whom they can report these abuses, less than half of the workers (45%) answered yes. Four workers, who answered no, mentioned that when workers report a complaint they don't get hired again.

Table 12. Organization Where They Can Report Abuses

Know of org.	Number	Percentage (%)
Yes	44	45
No	53	55
	97	100%

Organizations mentioned where they can report abuses:

- State Labor Board (50%)
- Day Labor Agency dispatcher, supervisor or corporate office (21%)
- Better Business Bureau (10%)
- Nevada Casual Labor Office (7%)
- Other including: Police, EEO, Small claims court, ACLU, Union hall, NAACP (12%)

V. ADDITIONAL CHARGES

Another common practice by day labor agencies is to charge workers for different items needed to perform the job assignment, including tools and equipment, transportation as well as fees for cashing their paychecks. This has been documented in previous research by the SCEI² in New Mexico and Arizona.

Transportation

As shown on Table 11, 74% of workers report being charged for transportation. The average amount charged was \$3.54. The minimum amount charged was \$1 and the maximum amount was \$8. It is common for workers who have a car to get paid from other workers for a ride to and from the work site. This means that workers either have to pay the company for transportation, pay a co-worker with a car or take the bus.

Table 11. Transportation Charges

Charged Transportation	Number	Percentage (%)
Yes	73	74
No	25	26
	98	100%

Table 12. Average Amount Charged

Charged for transportation	
Average charge (mean)	3.54
Most common charge (mode)	5
Minimum charge	1
Maximum charge	8
Total # of Respondents	70

Gloves

Given that most of the jobs reported by day laborers interviewed are in the areas of construction, landscaping, loading/unloading and light industrial, workers need tools and safety equipment to do their jobs. Workers are regularly charged for the use of necessary equipment to perform their jobs. About half of the workers interviewed report being charged for gloves. The average charge is \$2.11. The most common charge is \$2, with the maximum reported being \$5 and the minimum \$1.

Out of 96 workers who responded to this question, 30 workers who were provided with gloves were not allowed to return them so they would not get charged; they were told to keep them and had to pay for them.

Cashing paycheck

As we explained earlier, 82 workers (79%) reported getting paid with a check. Out of these workers, 40% reported being charged to cash their check (see Table 13). Of the 29 workers who told us the amount they are usually charged, 86% are charged from \$1 to \$1.50 (see Table 14) This is approximately 3% of the daily pay of a worker who earns the minimum wage of \$5.15 and works for a full 8hrs, earning \$41.20/day. The only alternative available to workers is to cash their checks at convenience stores and check cashing outlets where they are also charged on average 2% of the amount of the check.

² *Brokered & Street Corner Day Labor in New Mexico*. A report by the Southwest Center for Economic Integrity. April, 2004.

Table 13. Check Cashing Charges

Charge for cashing check	Number	Percentage (%)
Yes	33	34
No	64	66
	97	100%

Table 14. Amount for Cashing a Check

Amount	Number	Percentage (%)
\$1.00	12	41
\$1.50	4	14
\$1 plus change	9	31
change on check	1	3
\$2.00	2	7
\$5.00	1	3
	29	100%

When we add check cashing and transportation charges, we find that workers are paying almost \$5 in fees from their daily earnings. It is worth noting that for a worker making the federal minimum wage of \$5.15 per hour, these deductions amount to almost 1 hour of their salary and brings their wages below the poverty threshold for a household of one person. This is assuming full-time employment, but as we discussed earlier, many workers report not getting regular work and having to wait on average a day between assignments.

VI. WORKING CONDITIONS

One of the main goals of this research was to look at the working conditions of day laborers in Las Vegas, particularly injuries suffered by workers requiring medical treatment. We found that 16% of workers have been injured on the job, as shown on Table 15. Out of those 16 who were injured and needed medical attention, 11 reported their injury to the day labor agency. Only 3 out of those workers who reported the injury had their situation addressed as illustrated on table 17. None of them received workers compensation, as shown on table 18.

Table 15. Injuries

Ever injured	Number	Percentage (%)
Yes	16	16
No	82	84
	98	100%

Table 16. Reported Injury to the Agency

Report injury	Number	Percentage (%)
Yes	11	73
No	4	27
	15	100%

Some injuries reported:

- Working at golf course, lifted something heavy and had to go to the doctor. It was a hernia.
- Degenerative spinal injury due to carrying cabinets in bad footing conditions. Hospitalized.
- Holding up [lifting] air conditioners for months, back ached, needed medical attention.

Reasons given for not reporting injuries to the agency:

- Injured knee for jumping a fence. You look like a "sissy" [if you report]. You have to take it like a man.
- If you do, you can easily be replaced. You have to stay healthy.
- They don't pay attention. Will not hire you again.
- [Company] left. [Owners] sold the company

Table 17. Consequence of Reporting the Injury

What happened	Number	Percentage (%)
Terminated/not assigned	4	29
Nothing	3	21.5
Situation addressed	3	21.5
Paid not to file claim	2	14
Other	2	14
	14*	100%

* 11 people reported suffering an injury. Some respondents gave multiple answers.

Table 18. Received Workers Comp

Workers Comp.	Number	Percentage (%)
Yes	0	0
No	11	100
	11	100%

Below are some of the answers given by workers when asked to describe if the situation was addressed:

Situation addressed:

- Taken to hospital, insurance paid.
- Sent to workers compensation doctor.

Other category includes:

- Told "since not on the clock, not covered." Dispute; "Third party" responsibility called into question (site employer or Labor Express responsible?) Couldn't get to Labor Express doctor because this happened around Thanksgiving. Got a lawyer; still suing over workers comp.
- "They took me to get drug tested before giving me medical attention".

Paid not to file claim:

- Injured but didn't go to the doctor. Got paid a lot of money by Day Labor business not to report. Split head on backhoe.

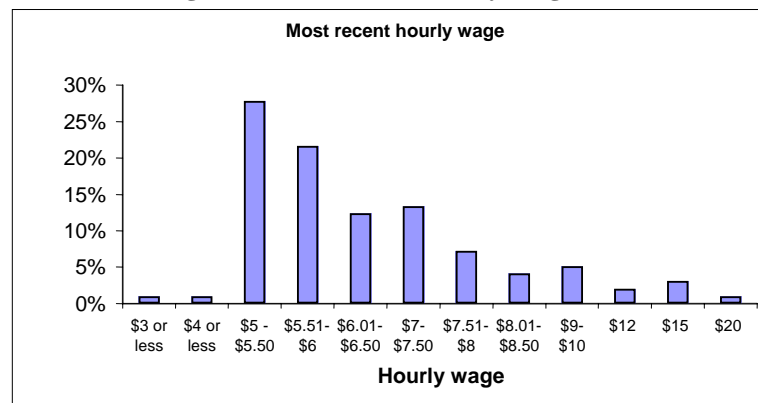
VII. INCOME FROM DAY LABOR

One of the goals of this study was not only to document wages earned by day laborers but also to look at some of the reasons and circumstances that determine why they perform this type of work. Wages from day labor often fall in the range of \$5 to \$7 depending on workers skill level and their standing at the agency (Theodore 2000). On Table 19, we see that 73% of workers report income in this range. The average hourly wage reported is \$6.89.

Table 19. Most recent Hourly Wage

Hourly Wage	Number	Percentage (%)
\$3 or less	1	1
\$4 or less	1	1
\$5 - \$5.50	27	28
\$5.51-\$6	21	22
\$6.01-\$6.50	12	12
\$7-\$7.50	13	13
\$7.51-\$8	7	7
\$8.01-\$8.50	4	4
\$9-\$10	5	5
\$12	2	2
\$15	3	3
\$20	1	1
	97	100%

Figure 2. Most Recent Hourly Wage



Workers interviewed were asked to determine what percentage of their monthly income came from day labor. We find that 51% of workers report that more than three quarters of their income comes from day labor work. A third of the workers (32%) report that day labor makes up a quarter or less of their monthly income.

Table 20. Percentage of Income from Day Labor

%Of monthly income	Number	Percentage (%)
Less than 25%	31	32
25% - 50%	9	9
50% - 75%	8	8
75% - 100%	49	51
	97	100%

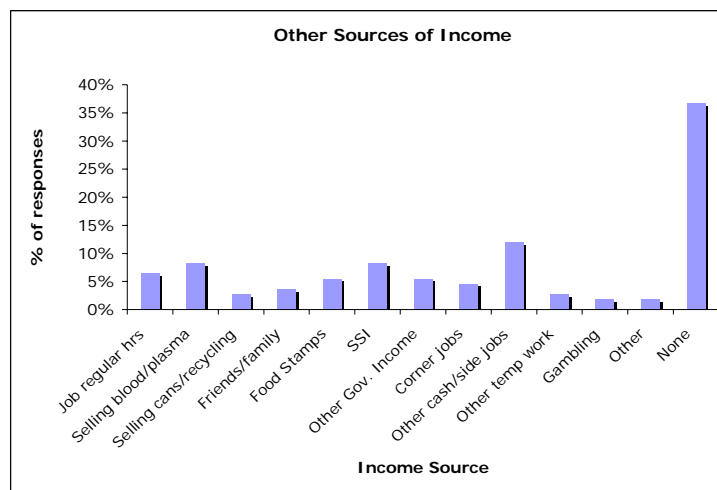
When asked what other source of income they have, 37% of responses indicate that workers have no other source of income. Out of 109 responses, 20% indicate other informal jobs (corner jobs, cash/side jobs and other temp work) as another source of income. Only 20% of responses indicate that workers receive some type of government assistance such as food stamps and SSI.

Table 21. Other Sources of Income

Sources	Frequency	Percentage (%)
None	40	37
Other cash/side jobs	13	12
Selling blood/plasma	9	8
SSI	9	8
Job regular hours	7	6
Food Stamps	6	6
Other Gov. Income	6	6
Corner jobs	5	5
Friends/family	4	4
Selling cans/recycling	3	3
Other temp work	3	3
Gambling	2	2
Other	2	2
	109*	100%

* Some respondents gave multiple answers.

Figure 3. Other sources of income



We asked workers how many people they support on their income. Most of the workers (73%) report only supporting themselves. The remaining 27% support at least one more person on their income. When calculating average annual income based on an average time worked of 4 days/week at an average hourly wage of \$6.89, without taking into account any deductions, workers supporting one or more people (27%), fall below the 2006 poverty threshold.

Table 22. Number of People you Support

# Of persons	Number	Percentage (%)
None	71	73
1	17	18
2	4	4
3	4	4
6	1	1
	97	100%

We were interested in finding out why workers choose day labor despite the unstable nature of this work and if this is employment of last resort for them. Approximately one third of the responses (28%) indicate that they do it is a matter of survival. Another 22% of responses indicate this is the only type of work they were able to find. Some workers (16%) choose day labor because they get paid daily. Some respondents mentioned that they simply couldn't wait two weeks to get paid because they don't have money to survive during that period of time. Some responses (8%) indicate workers see this as an entry point to the labor market and expect to move out of day labor relatively soon.

Table 23. Main Reason for Working as a Day Laborer

Reason	Number	Percentage (%)
Better pay	1	1
Flexible schedule	4	4
Daily pay	17	16
Only work could find	24	22
Lead to permanent job	9	8
Ex convict	2	2
Survival/Need money	30	28
In between jobs/unemployed	6	6
Lost ID/No address	2	2
Need for shelter/rehab program	2	2
Lack of Skills	3	3
Other	7	7
	107	100%

Some of the workers, who stated that this is the only type of work they could find, mentioned the following reasons:

- Medical reasons
- Lack of skills
- Criminal record
- Age
- Need for daily pay
- Being homeless
- No jobs around
- Gambling problems
- Had tools stolen

When we asked respondents to describe the response category “other” as a reason for doing day labor, they gave the following answers:

- No taxes
- They [the labor agency] always have work for me
- New in town
- Gambling problems
- Lack of transportation
- Convenience

As shown on Table 24, the majority of workers interviewed (89%) would much rather have jobs with regular scheduled hours than doing day labor. Only a small percentage (11%) prefers engaging in day labor.

Table 24. Preference Between Day Labor and Regular Job

Preference	Number	Percentage (%)
Day Labor	10	11
Regular job	85	89
	95	100%

Some of the reasons mentioned for preferring a job with regularly scheduled hours are:

- Stability, predictability, consistency of pay and security.
- Being able to plan schedule and budget
- More money
- Benefits
- Better conditions (out of sun); better jobs (day laborers get jobs nobody else wants); Day labor places are degrading.
- Being able to afford a place to live, have a car, pay bills.
- Save money
- Feel better
- Better lifestyle
- Having a normal life
- Peace of mind
- Knowing where you’re going; no charge for equipment.

A small percentage (11%) mentioned they prefer doing day labor. Here are some of the reasons they gave for this:

- Flexibility and convenience; can switch around.
- Variety of jobs
- Being able to refuse if can’t handle the work.
- Get paid daily.
- Paid in cash in addition to government assistance.
- Waiting to start own business.
- Likes to gamble.

VIII. DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

The demographic composition of workers interviewed can best be summarized as African American male, in his late forties-early fifties with a high school degree or some college education, living in a shelter.

While most of the people interviewed were men (95% as shown on Table 25), we cannot say that day labor is exclusively carried out by men. In fact, the research sites defined the population of this study to a large extent: Two of the research sites we chose were night shelters for men, which explains the low number of women interviewed. The average age of workers interviewed is 47 years old and the most frequent age reported is 52 years old.

Table 25. Gender

Gender	Number	Percentage (%)
Male	93	95
Female	5	5
	98	100%

Table 26. Average age

Descriptive Statistics	Year	Age
Average year of birth (mean)	1959	47
Most common birth year (mode)	1954	52
Birth year of oldest person interviewed	1933	73
Birth year of youngest person interviewed	1984	22
Count	98	

According to statistical information from 2005 reported by the U.S. Census Bureau, African Americans make up 10.1% of the population in Clark County³. It is worth noting that African Americans are overrepresented in this study with respondents identifying themselves as African American in 47% of responses. Note that one person may have identified himself with more than one ethnic group; therefore the total number of answers is 103 even though only 98 people responded to this question.

According to the same statistics, persons of Hispanic or Latino origin make up 26.1% of the population in Clark County. The under representation of Hispanics in our study may be partially explained by the fact that immigrant day laborers (mostly Hispanic) seek work mainly on street corners (Valenzuela and Theodore, 2006). Also, undocumented immigrants can not seek work through day labor agencies, since they lack the necessary identification.

³ US Census Bureau. State and County QuickFacts. Clark County.
Available at: <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/32/32003.html>

Table 27. Race and ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity	Number	Percentage of responses (%)
African American	48	47
Caucasian	33	32
Latino/Hispanic	3	3
Asian	3	3
Native American	5	5
Multiracial	2	2
Something else	9	9
	103	100%

Education level

A high percentage of workers interviewed (41%) report having a high school degree or a GED, while 13% report having completed some high school. Another 29% report having completed some college. Only 16% did not complete high school.

Table 28. Education level

Education Level	Number	Percentage (%)
Junior High School	3	3
Some high school	13	13
Graduated high school	32	33
Some college	28	29
Graduated College	7	7
Graduate/Prof degree	3	3
GED	8	8
Technical school	4	4
	98	100%

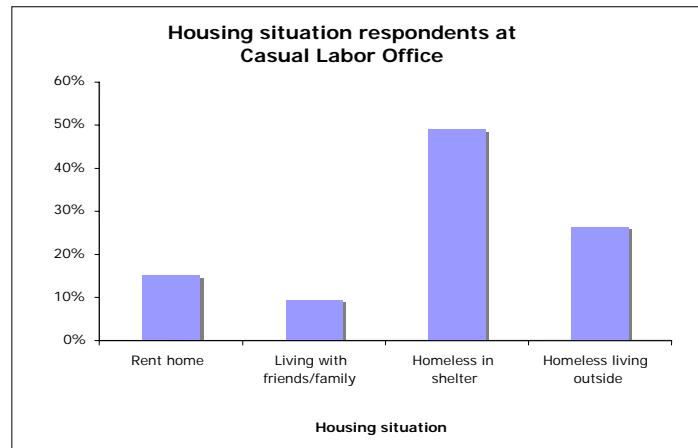
Current housing situation

Given that two of the sites where we interviewed workers were night shelters for men, we only include information on housing situation for 53 workers interviewed at the Nevada Casual Labor Office in Table 29. 75% of these workers reported being homeless either staying in a shelter or living outside. 15% reported being able to rent a place. It has been widely documented how day labor is employment of last resort for workers and given its low wages and unstable nature it contributes to perpetuate homelessness (Theodore, 2000).

Table 29. Current Housing Situation

Housing situation	Frequency	As a percentage (%)
Rent home	8	15
Living with friends/extended family	5	9
Homeless in shelter	26	49
Homeless living outside	14	26
	53	100%

Figure 5. Housing Situation



Length of Homelessness

Out of 82 workers interviewed who reported being homeless, the average time they reported living in a shelter on and off was 13.6 months. For those who reported being homeless living outside, the average months on the street is 30.5, about 2.5 years.

Table 30. Length of Homelessness

Preference	Average months	Minimum (days)	Maximum (months)	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Homeless living in shelter	13.6	2 days	14	65	79
Homeless living outside	30.5	7 days	20	17	21
				82	100%

IX. Conclusions

Based on our research findings we can conclude that day labor is not an employment of choice for many workers in Las Vegas, particularly those who are homeless. Day labor not only does not pay enough to lift workers out of poverty, but it rarely leads to better employment given its unpredictable and unstable nature, the types of job assignments and the lack of opportunities it offers for workers to learn and develop new skills.

Our sample shows that homeless African American men are more often employed in day labor compared to other ethnic groups. While this study does not offer an explanation for the high number of African American respondents and the low number of Hispanic respondents in our sample, it is worth noting that Hispanic men tend to be overrepresented in the corner day labor population, as has been documented in other research (Valenzuela et al. 2006). It is beyond the scope of this study to draw conclusions about the whole population of day laborers in Las Vegas. Future research could address why certain minorities tend to perform this type of work more frequently than others.

Day laborers are subject to poor working conditions, often putting at risk their physical well-being. Our research shows that there is a high incidence of abusive practices at job sites towards day laborers, including: being assigned different tasks than they were hired to do; being left without food, water or breaks; being abandoned at work site; being paid less than agreed and being discriminated against. Despite these precarious work conditions, workers are discouraged from reporting abuses or accidents for fear of retaliation such as not getting job assignments in the future.

Homeless day laborers face many barriers in finding permanent employment. For some of them the main barrier is subsistence, having enough money to make it to the next day. Other reasons mentioned for not being able to find another type of work include: age, lack of skills, criminal record and being homeless. It is worth noting that only 20% of workers interviewed receive some type of government assistance. Most workers struggle to complement their income from day labor, by doing odd jobs, recycling cans or selling blood and plasma.

The increase in temporary work arrangements is an economic trend that benefits staffing companies and businesses alike. This is evidenced in the increase in profits as well as the expansion of staffing companies around the country. This trend of increasingly relying on a temporary and contingent workforce, which day laborers are a sub-group of, has a negative impact on the wages and employment stability of unskilled workers who most often perform this type of work. These companies should be responsible for offering employment on fair terms to their employees, more so to vulnerable workers who barely subsist on this type of work. This includes paying a fair wage that will allow workers to have an independent life and not just perpetuate the cycle of poverty. It also means providing the tools and equipment necessary for workers to do their job and not charging fees that undermine their wages.

X. Recommendations and Action Plan.

The following recommendations for future action emerged from our research findings and from further conversations with members of our research partner organization, Las Vegas Catholic Worker and the ACLU of Nevada.

- **Disseminate Research Findings** among partner organizations and other social services agencies serving day laborers, particularly those who are homeless. These organizations have a unique perspective on the barriers preventing their clients from finding other types of work and are in a privileged position to develop concrete actions to address some of the issues identified in our research. Such actions may include: Client referral to organizations that can handle wage and worker's compensation claims; Client referral to existing programs for skills and trade training and developing jobs programs such as an alternative staffing program.
- **Hold a Policy Roundtable** that would bring together policy makers who are interested in working to improve the lives of the poor and working poor for a roundtable discussion. The goal of the roundtable discussion would be to explore ways in which the government and private employers can better address workplace abuses experienced by day laborers.
- **Promote the Nevada Casual Labor Office**, a state-run day labor program that provides daily or temporary job assignments mainly to homeless day laborers. Further conversations may help develop strategies to complement the work of the Nevada Casual Labor Office.
- **Develop a Non-profit Alternative Staffing Program** to address some of the issues identified in this research affecting day laborers, such as: fees charged for equipment, transportation and check cashing and injuries that go unreported for fear of retaliation. An Alternative Staffing Program would not charge check cashing fees, and would provide safety equipment to the worker for free as well as complementary services such as, résumé preparation, free lunch to take to job assignments, etc.⁴
- **Conduct future research** focusing on better understanding how belonging to an ethnic minority as well as length of homelessness affects differently the working conditions experienced by day laborers. It might be worth conducting similar research in other cities of the state to better understand the experiences of day laborers in Nevada. It would also be worth looking at the experiences of corner day laborers separately to see how these two populations are affected differently despite performing similar work.

⁴ A model of this program is Primavera Works in Tucson. This program provides temporary day labor job opportunities for workers as part of a broader strategy to help homeless workers reattach to the labor market.

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