

*Day Laborers in Tokyo, Japan:
Preliminary Findings from the San'ya Day Labor Survey*

Matthew D. Marr
Ph.D. Student
Department of Sociology
University of California, Los Angeles
m_marr@hotmail.com

Abel Valenzuela, Jr., Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
Cesar E. Chavez Center and Department of Urban Planning
University of California, Los Angeles
abel@ucla.edu

Janette Kawachi
Ph.D. Student
Department of Sociology
Yale University
jak53@pantheon.yale.edu

Takao Koike
Ph.D. Student
Department of Economics
Senshu University
t-koike@fa2.so-net.ne.jp

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University of California Los Angeles
Center for the Study of Urban Poverty
Institute for Social Science Research
Box 951484
Los Angeles, CA 90095-1484
TEL (310) 825-9156
FAX (310) 206-4472
<http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/issr/csup/index.html>

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Table of Contents

| | | |
|------|---|-----|
| I. | Executive Summary..... | iii |
| II. | Background..... | 1 |
| III. | Data Collection Procedures..... | 2 |
| IV. | Findings..... | 4 |
| | The Decline of the San'ya Street Hiring Market..... | 4 |
| | Demographics..... | 6 |
| | Housing and Homelessness..... | 8 |
| | Work and Earnings..... | 9 |
| | Job Acquisition..... | 14 |
| | Day Labor Abuses..... | 17 |
| | Job Skills and Work Histories..... | 18 |
| | Barriers to Full-Time Employment..... | 20 |
| V. | Conclusion..... | 22 |
| VI. | Sources Cited..... | 26 |

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

This report examines data collected from a unique survey of day laborers in the *yoseba*, or day labor district, of San'ya in Tokyo, Japan. It presents data on a host of indicators that allow us to empirically assess the status of San'ya day laborers and their work. The data presented in this report is purposefully descriptive, and future reports will delve more deeply into causal relationships. The San'ya Day Labor Survey is the only recent research effort conducted in San'ya in which data has been collected from day laborers primarily while they were seeking employment.

This survey is part of a larger research project on day labor in the US and Japan. In the summer of 1999, researchers at the Center for the Study of Urban Poverty (CSUP) at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) began the San'ya project to lay a foundation for an international comparison of urban day labor markets. This study complements earlier work undertaken on day laborers in Los Angeles through CSUP. This report presents for the first time our findings from Japan.

Methodology

As the US-Japan project was being conceptualized, CSUP researchers were completing a groundbreaking multi-method research project on day labor in Los Angeles. The Los Angeles project consists of a survey of day laborers (n=487), in-depth interviews of day laborers (n=45), in-depth interviews of employers (n=24), and ethnographic case studies of day labor hiring sites (n=10). The multi-method approach of the Los Angeles study served as the model for an empirical study of day labor in Tokyo. Two data collection efforts comprise the San'ya Day Labor Study: a survey of day laborers (n=119) and ethnography.

The survey instrument used in San'ya was similar to the one used in Los Angeles. The questionnaire was translated, modified, and tested to address issues unique to San'ya. The survey included 29 open- and close-ended questions. We queried day laborers on six broad areas of interest: 1) demographics, including housing; 2) work and earnings; 3) job acquisition; 4) employer abuses; 5) job skills and work histories; and 6) barriers to non-day labor employment.

A non-random, convenience sample was used to recruit respondents for the survey. The interviews were primarily undertaken during the months of November and December 1999 between 5:00 and 7:00 am on the streets of San'ya. Almost all surveys were conducted face-to-face in Japanese and lasted between 10 and 15 minutes. Respondents were not provided with incentives, though an occasional cup of coffee was offered for their participation. Anonymity was guaranteed and names, addresses, and other identification information (e.g., date of birth) were not requested.

Major Findings

Responses from workers in our sample paint a grim picture of day labor in San'ya. This market is riddled with unemployment and homelessness and only able to meet the employment needs of a select few laborers. Despite their difficulty, respondents remain diligent in their pursuit of employment and possess work experience and skills usable in construction and other industries. Structural barriers, mostly age discrimination and the lack of available jobs, prevent day laborers from obtaining full-time employment or even semi-consistent employment (2-3 times per week). Below, we summarize the major findings that empirically support these conclusions.

Decline of the San'ya street hiring market

- San'ya's street hiring market has greatly dwindled in size and hiring activity since the boom period during the bubble economy of the 1980s. At the peak hiring time of 5:15 a.m. on a morning in October 1999, we counted a total of 187 day laborers seeking employment on the streets of San'ya. This falls dramatically short of accounts from the 1980s of from 1,000 to 3,000 laborers lining the streets of San'ya. On a morning in December 1999, we counted only 378 laborers leaving San'ya for work, including those who commute directly without patronizing the hiring market. This number falls far short of the approximately 800 laborers leaving San'ya for work counted on a single morning by a day labor union during the early years of the recession.

Demographics

- Day laborers were predominantly older, single men who possess at least a junior high school education. The mean age was 52.3 years old. A great majority were single (94.7 percent), and most had never been married (61.4 percent). Nearly half (49.1 percent) responded that junior high school was their highest level of educational attainment, and an additional 39.3 percent completed at least high school.
- Most day laborers were either homeless or precariously housed. Nearly half (46.7 percent) were homeless the evening prior to the interview. Of those who did not sleep outdoors the prior evening, 78.7 percent lived in temporary housing arrangements such as *doya* (single room occupancy hotels) or business hotels. A spell of unemployment or an injury would likely push these laborers into homelessness.

Work and earnings

- Day laborers interviewed primarily work in unskilled (87.3 percent) and skilled construction (25.4 percent). Other jobs include demolition (13.6 percent) and moving/delivery (11.0 percent).
- Day laborers in San'ya fall under three groups: 1) a large group (76.3 percent) who infrequently find work and likely regularly experience homelessness (those who work less than 10 days per month); 2) a small group (13.6 percent) who find barely enough work to subsist (those who work 10 to 15 days per month), and 3) a small group of elite laborers (10.2 percent) who find work regularly (more than 15 days per month). A significant number of laborers (16.1 percent) failed to find a single day's work in the month prior to the interview.
- Most day laborers were unable to work enough to subsist independently. A large majority (66.1 percent) estimated their earnings for the previous month to be less than 100,000 yen (US\$962)—the minimum amount we estimate to be necessary to subsist in San'ya for a month. It is likely that these laborers faced difficulty in covering basic costs such as housing, food, clothing and transportation. A small group (13.6 percent) earned between 100,000 and 150,000 yen (US\$1,442) in the previous month, and 20 percent earned over 150,000 yen.

- Despite the paucity of jobs available in this market, our respondents were extremely diligent in their pursuit of employment. On average, day laborers sought work 5.5 days per week with half searching seven days per week, including Sunday.
- Many day laborers were willing to work for low wages. Respondents' mean reservation wage for day labor was 7,460 yen (US\$72), only slightly higher than the local minimum wage [5,536 yen (\$53) for an eight-hour day] despite the difficult, dangerous and unstable nature of their work.

Job acquisition

- In the tight day labor market of the 1980s day laborers would utilize their leverage to negotiate for the highest wage among a group of employers. However, current market conditions demand that most respondents (64.1 percent) be loyal and available to a single employer, whether it be a labor broker or subcontractor, so that the employer will call upon him first when a job is available.
- Of the 47 laborers who worked in *hanba*, or workman's boarding houses, in the previous year, 89.1 percent reported receiving all of their wages owed. All laborers who did not receive full pay for their work in the *hanba* were hired outside of San'ya in places like Ueno Park, Yoyogi Park, Takadanobaba and through the newspaper.

Skills and work history

- Many day laborers possess work experience, skills and certificates (i.e., licenses, degrees, etc.). Most (78.8 percent) have worked full-time in a variety of areas such as retail/service, skilled trades, manufacturing, and construction. The mean year of tenure for their longest-held permanent job was 9.6 years. A large number (53.4 percent) possessed skills in construction, trades and machine operation. Many respondents (32.5 percent) possessed licenses for these and other skills.

Barriers to non-day labor employment

- Day laborers responded that key structural barriers prevented them from obtaining jobs in the formal economy. Respondents cited their age (48.7 percent), poor work history (13.3 percent), lack of permanent address (8.0 percent), and lack of means (i.e., money, tools, job seeking skills, etc.) to seek employment (7.1 percent) as the primary reasons for their inability to obtain full-time employment. Day laborers specified a strong desire to work full-time in areas such as service, building maintenance, freight/delivery, construction and in specific skilled trades such as carpentry, electrical work and others.

Conclusion

Currently, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government is developing “self-sufficiency centers” to aid homeless persons in Tokyo, a large number of whom are current or former day laborers. Additionally, community based organizations are stepping up efforts to promote the self-sufficiency of homeless persons in and around San'ya. We hope that data presented in this report will inform their efforts both to stop the flow of laborers into homelessness and to aid homeless laborers in their pursuit of self-sufficiency. We offer the following basic policy prescriptions not as a final comprehensive strategy, but as a few measures to be considered both by public policy makers and program developers in community based organizations.

1. Increase emergency food and shelter relief for homeless day laborers.

In order to meet the basic food and shelter needs of homeless day laborers, we recommend the development of adequate emergency shelters. Unemployed day laborers need stabilized living arrangements in order to secure employment and establish independence. These shelters should not enforce strict time limits without the provision of ample and effective employment services. We also recommend increased financial and material support from the public sector for community based organizations who are currently attempting to feed the thousands of homeless in and around San'ya.

2. *Increase public works projects for day laborers.*

An increase in the outlay of public works projects would contribute significantly to the monthly income of unemployed laborers struggling to avoid homelessness. The content of these work projects should be substantive and utilize the extensive skills and work experiences of day laborers. Because day laborers are often excluded from employment because of their age, a special public works program targeting older day laborers should be developed.

3. *Encourage public-private collaborative projects to employ day laborers.*

Given the numerous barriers to work that day laborers face, we recommend the development of public-private collaborative employment programs to address the long-term needs of unemployed day laborers. These might include a nonprofit transitional “workman’s boarding house” for younger unemployed day laborers administrated by a local community based organization and other creative programs that capitalize on laborers’ skills and experience as well as explore new areas of employment.

4. *Eliminate harassment of homeless day laborers.*

To better preserve the human rights of homeless laborers, barring public safety hazards and obstruction of current usage, they should be allowed to remain without harassment and removal from the parks and other unused public spaces.

BACKGROUND

This report examines data collected from a unique survey of day laborers in the *yoseba*, or day labor district, of San'ya in Tokyo, Japan. The San'ya Day Labor Survey is the only recent research effort conducted in San'ya in which data has been collected from day laborers primarily while they were seeking employment.¹ Additionally, we used a qualifying question to screen out persons not actively seeking day labor jobs. As a result, these data provide us with an opportunity to view day laborers seeking work on the streets of San'ya. Also, these data provide a lens to better understand day labor work, hiring processes, and the day-to-day mechanics of this street hiring market. Similar recent research in and around San'ya has focused either on homeless and down-and-out day laborers who may be discouraged and not actively seeking employment (Tamaki and Yamaguchi 2000) or on residents of single-room occupancy hotels called *doya*, excluding laborers who commute from other forms of housing (Johoku Welfare Center 1998).

The San'ya Day Labor Project is part of a comparative research project on day labor in the US and Japan. In the summer of 1999, researchers at the Center for the Study of Urban Poverty (CSUP) at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) began the comparative project in order to lay a foundation for an international comparison of urban day labor markets. A comparison of day labor in the US and Japan was chosen because of the two countries' shared status as post-industrial economies and the prevalence and history of day laborers in each. The multi-method research approach taken in the Los Angeles Day Labor Project served as the model for an empirical study of day labor in Tokyo.² As a result, accurate comparisons between both countries will be possible.

The San'ya Day Labor Project consists of two components: survey and ethnographic research. The survey collects key data on day laborer demographics, regularity and content of work, job acquisition, barriers to full-time employment, and employer abuses. The ethnographic

¹ Eguchi, Kato and Nishioka (1979) conducted survey and ethnographic research of day laborers in San'ya in the 1970s. In this study, surveys were administered outside of the street hiring market. However, because there were far fewer discouraged and elderly day laborers in San'ya at this time than in the current depressed market, it is likely that this study obtained a solid sample of active day laborers. More recently, Tanabe (1996) conducted a unique survey of day laborers using the street hiring market of Takadanobaba on the west side of Tokyo. All surveys for Tanabe's study were administered at the street hiring market in Takadanobaba, not in San'ya.

component focuses on the processes through which laborers obtain work, the main players in the street day labor market, and how laborers view their world in terms of work. This report presents data from the San'ya Day Labor Survey and is informed by the insights obtained during ethnographic research.

DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

Survey data was collected from interviews with 119 day laborers conducted primarily in November and December 1999 at the street day labor market in San'ya. Most of the survey questions are close-ended, with a few short answer but open-ended questions. A large portion of the San'ya survey replicates the Los Angeles Day Labor Survey. Several questions that address the unique conditions of the San'ya market were added. In total, the survey consisted of 29 questions and took approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete. All surveys were undertaken in Japanese and were voluntary. No monetary incentive was offered, though an occasional can of coffee was offered to the respondent to drink while completing the interview.³

A non-random, convenience sample was used to recruit respondents.⁴ Because our sample is not random, we are unable to generalize our findings to all day laborers in San'ya. However, our data is rich, our sample relatively large, and our questionnaire prods the respondents on a number of key characteristics. As a result, we have a unique lens through which to explore day labor work and life.

Every three years, data on the demographic characteristics and work content of San'ya day laborers is collected by the Tokyo Municipal Government's San'ya Countermeasures Bureau

² The Los Angeles Day Labor Study consists of a survey of day laborers (n=487), in-depth interviews of day laborers (n=45), in-depth interviews of employers of day laborers (n=24), and ethnographic case studies of day labor hiring sites (n=10).

³ Due to the prevalence of a large number of discouraged unemployed and homeless laborers in and around San'ya, we decided not to offer an incentive to avoid attracting persons who were not actively seeking day labor jobs.

⁴ Initially, an attempt was made to replicate a random sampling technique that was successful in gathering representative data on day laborers in Los Angeles. This sampling technique utilized a team of researchers who would count laborers at a hiring site, write up a list of brief descriptions of the day laborers, randomly select a number of laborers from the list, and approach and interview compliant laborers who were provided with a financial incentive of \$25 (Valenzuela 1999). However, when attempting this sampling technique in San'ya, laborers refused to respond to the survey, likely due to the awkwardness of the abrupt approach without an incentive and their need to focus on securing a job. As a result, a convenience sampling method was adopted in which interviewers approached any individual seeking day labor in San'ya and requested permission to administer the survey.

(*San'ya Taisakushitsu*).⁵ This data is collected exclusively through surveys of *doya* residents. However, our ethnographic research revealed that many laborers who live in *doya* do not use the San'ya street day labor market, and instead communicate by phone with employers about job availability and commute *chokko*, directly to day labor jobs. Additionally, the San'ya Countermeasures Bureau survey does not collect data from laborers who commute to the street hiring market from apartments, are homeless or are living in other non-*doya* living arrangements.⁶

Data on the number of hires and content of day labor work is also maintained by three public day labor hiring facilities: 1) the San'ya Day Labor Center, 2) the Tamahime Employment Bureau (*Shokugyou Anteisho*, or *shokuan*), and 3) the Kawaracho Employment Bureau. However, these facilities do not keep track of hires off of the street or the numerous laborers who do not use their services.⁷ Therefore, to address the shortcomings of the public data and to best capture active users of the San'ya street day labor market, surveys were primarily collected on the streets of San'ya in the early morning when laborers were seeking employment.

A majority of surveys (67.2 percent) were administered between 4:00 and 8:00 am on the approximately three city blocks of San'ya that make up the morning day labor market. Since some laborers were hesitant to respond to the survey because of the immediate need to secure the day's employment, we conducted a number of surveys at other times and locations, including: the residences of both housed and homeless day laborers⁸ (15); activities of San'ya Sogidan⁹ (12); and a free medical clinic for day laborers (12).

⁵ The San'ya Countermeasures Bureau was created by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government in 1968 primarily to contain the social unrest among unemployed men in San'ya. The Bureau continues to serve to direct public policy addressing issues in San'ya.

⁶ Only 45 (37.8%) of laborers in our sample reported to be living in *doya*.

⁷ A total of 60.9% of respondents in our sample were not registered at either of the local employment bureaus and only 21.2% of respondents used the San'ya Labor Center to seek employment.

⁸ Nine of these surveys (6.7% of the total sample) were self-administered by day laborers living in a local *doya*, or single room occupancy hotel. A *doya* manager who offered to assist us distributed the survey instrument to residents whom he knew to work day labor.

⁹ San'ya Sogidan (literally translated as the San'ya Dispute League) is San'ya's major day labor union. Their activities include: wage disputes with delinquent employers; activism for public action addressing the needs of unemployed laborers; a weekly *takidashi*, or soup line, that feeds approximately 1,500 persons; *yomawari*, or night patrols of areas in which homeless laborers sleep; and public benefits advocacy for unemployed laborers.

FINDINGS

Decline of the San'ya Street Hiring Market

In order to verify anecdotal accounts of the decline in availability of day labor in San'ya, two counts of workers were conducted. First, on a morning in October 1999, we counted the number of laborers lining the streets at 15 minute intervals from 4:15 to 6:15 am. Early visits found a high level of circulation of laborers, with many leaving to go to jobs or about other business as new laborers replaced them. As a result, we are only able to estimate the total number of laborers at the site at a given time on that particular day.

Table 1. Day Labor Count, San'ya Street Hiring Market, October 1999

| Time | Number of Laborers |
|-------------|---------------------------|
| 4:15 am | 20 |
| 4:30 am | 54 |
| 4:45 am | 76 |
| 5:00 am | 104 |
| 5:15 am | 187 |
| 5:30 am | 171 |
| 5:45 am | 155 |
| 6:00 am | 155 |
| 6:15 am | 100 |

Long-time day laborers and community activists estimate that 1,000 to 3,000 day laborers would line the streets of San'ya at during peak hours amid the bubble economy of the 1980s. While conducting participant observation research in San'ya in the summer of 1989 prior to the onset of the Heisei recession, American researcher Edward Fowler estimated up to 1,000 laborers lining the streets of the San'ya morning day labor market (Fowler 1997, 30). Table 1 shows the number of laborers seeking employment on the streets of San'ya peaked at 187 on a morning in October 1999. This demonstrates a considerable shrinking of the role of the streets of San'ya as a place of labor exchange.

Second, in order to estimate the number of laborers commuting to work from San'ya, including those who commute directly from their housing without using the street hiring market, a team of CSUP researchers and volunteers counted laborers leaving San'ya for work. For this count, a methodology used in the early 1990s by members of San'ya Sogidan to count the number of laborers commuting to work from San'ya was replicated. From 3:30 to 7:00 am on December 5, 1999 CSUP researchers and graduate students from the Department of Social

Engineering of the Tokyo Institute of Technology were stationed throughout San'ya: on the streets of the hiring market; at bus stops; in front of the Tamahime Employment Bureau; and at a passageway leading from San'ya to the Minami Senju subway and Japan Railway (JR) stations. Researchers stationed at the hiring market and outside the Tamahime Employment Bureau, the two primary sites for “off-the-streets” hiring in San'ya, counted laborers who boarded the vehicles of employers and were taken off to work. Researchers stationed at the bus stops and the passageway leading to the subway and JR stations counted persons who appeared to be day laborers heading off to work (i.e., men carrying shoulder bags or dressed appropriately for physical labor).

Table 2. Day Labor Count, Commuters From San'ya, December 5, 1999

| Location | Number of Commuters |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Streets | 79 |
| Subway/Japan Railways Stations | 297 |
| Bus | 2 |
| TOTAL | 378 |

The 378 laborers counted on December 5, 1999 demonstrates a sharp decrease in hires when compared to the San'ya Sogidan count in the early years of the Heisei recession of approximately 800 laborers leaving San'ya for work on a single day (Nakamura 1999). Anecdotal accounts from long-time day laborers report upwards of 4,000 day laborers commuting to work from San'ya in the boom years of the 1980s. The decline in number of day laborers going to work suggests a dramatic decline in job opportunities and increased difficulty in securing a viable livelihood through day labor. This decline parallels the decrease documented by the San'ya Labor Center, which found a drop from 35,297 hires in 1990 to 11,668 in 1997 (Johoku Welfare Center 1998).

Additionally, the small proportion of laborers being hired off the streets by *tehaishi*, or labor brokers hiring from vehicles (20.9 percent of all hires), demonstrates a decline in use of this traditional hiring method. Instead, it appears that more hires are occurring by *tehaishi* on foot, through networks among day laborers, and direct communication with employers via the phone and/or commuting *chokko*, directly to sites for an extended period of time.

Demographics

While day laborers consist of a diverse group of individuals, a large majority are men who are middle-aged or older, possess at least a middle school education, and have no marriage experience. Despite identifying a single female day laborer and a single non-Japanese day laborer during ethnographic research in San'ya, all of the respondents interviewed were male and native-born Japanese.

The age range of our sample is from 28 to 67 years of age with an overwhelming majority (94.9 percent) over 40 and over half (56.8 percent) between the ages of 40 and 49. The mean age is 52.3 years old, putting the average day laborer above the cut-off age of 50 applied by many employers.¹⁰ In addition to stagnation in the construction industry caused by the prolonged recession, the graying of the day labor population is often offered as a contributing factor to the decline in number of jobs available in San'ya. During our ethnographic research, day laborers and union activists stated that former employers of day laborers are now using methods to recruit younger laborers outside of San'ya through periodicals which target young job searchers such as *Arubaito Nyuusu* and temporary employment agencies which specialize in supplying manual labor.

Table 3. Age (n=116)

| Age Group | Percentage | | |
|--------------------|-------------------|-------------|------|
| 18-29 | 1.7 | | |
| 30-39 | 3.4 | Median Age | 52 |
| 40-49 | 22.0 | Mean Age | 52.3 |
| 50-59 | 56.8 | Minimum Age | 28 |
| 60 and over | 16.1 | Maximum Age | 69 |
| TOTAL | 100 | | |

Day laborers are not uneducated, considering Japan's compulsory education requirement (junior high school) and the demands of the labor market in the early postwar period, when most respondents were completing junior high school. During the early postwar industrial expansion, a junior high graduate could expect to find a reasonably secure job in physical labor and reap the benefits of Japan's lifetime employment system. Almost all (97.3 percent) day laborers in our sample completed junior high school. Additionally, 38.3 percent are high school or vocational school graduates.

Table 4. Educational Attainment (n=112)

| Highest Education Level Attained | Percentage |
|---|-------------------|
| Completed Elementary School | 1.8 |
| Dropped Out of Junior High School | .9 |
| Completed Junior High School | 49.1 |
| Dropped Out of High School | 8.9 |
| Completed High School | 32.1 |
| Completed Vocational School | 3.6 |
| Dropped Out of a University | 1.8 |
| Completed University | 1.8 |
| TOTAL | 100 |

Day laborers are primarily bachelors. Despite the finding that most respondents were middle-aged or older, Table 5 demonstrates that most (61.4 percent) have never been married. Only 5.3 percent of our sample responded that they were married at the time of the interview.

Table 5. Marital History (n=114)

| Marital Status | Percentage |
|-----------------------|-------------------|
| Never Been Married | 61.4 |
| Separated | 1.8 |
| Married | 5.3 |
| Widowed | 3.5 |
| Divorced | 28.1 |
| TOTAL | 100 |

¹⁰ Our ethnographic research found that it is common among employers of day laborers to boldly refuse to hire day laborers over 50, with some employers placing the limit even lower at 45 or 40. Many older day laborers will attempt to side-step this barrier by lying about their age and dying their hair to appear younger.

Day laborers migrate from throughout Japan to seek employment in San'ya. The place of birth of day laborers is varied, including a solid core of natives of the Kanto region (51.7 percent). Within those born in Kanto, almost 20 percent were born in Tokyo. The nearby Tohoku and Hokkaido regions of northern Japan are significantly represented with 14.7 percent and 10.3 percent, respectively. Some laborers were born on the southern island of Kyushu (12.6 percent), migrating to Tokyo due to the high unemployment levels on this island. Only a few laborers reported to have been born in the Tokai (4.3 percent) and Kansai (4.3 percent) regions, likely because both of these regions possess sizable *dai*, or major, *yoseba* of their own.¹¹

¹¹ Almost all cities of considerable size in Japan contain *yoseba*. However, the four largest *yoseba* are referred to as the *dai yoseba* and are: Kamagasaki in Osaka, San'ya in Tokyo, Kotobuki in Yokohama, and Sasashima in Nagoya.

Table 6. Place of Birth of Day Laborers by Region (n=116)

| Place of Birth | Percentage |
|-----------------------|-------------------|
| Kanto | 51.7 |
| Tohoku | 14.7 |
| Kyushu | 12.6 |
| Hokkaido | 10.3 |
| Tokai | 4.3 |
| Kansai | 4.3 |
| Chugoku | 1.7 |
| Okinawa | 1.7 |
| Shikoku | 0.9 |
| TOTAL | 100 |

Housing and Homelessness

For our survey, day laborers were determined to be homeless only if they spent the previous night outside of formal shelter. For example, homeless laborers who spent the previous evening in a sauna or a shelter provided through the Johoku Welfare Center were not considered homeless. Almost half (46.7 percent) spent the night prior to the interview outdoors. The depressed nature of the day labor market and our narrow definition of homelessness suggest that even more respondents may experience cyclical or broader definitions of homelessness but managed to find housing the night prior to the interview.

One measure of homelessness is tenure—the length of time, uninterrupted, that one is without shelter. The range of tenure for homelessness is from one day to 10 years and demonstrates that nearly all homeless laborers in our sample lost their housing since the onset of the Heisei recession in 1991. Slightly over half (51.8 percent) had been homeless for less than one year, reflecting the recent sharp upsurge in number of homeless persons throughout Japan in 1999.¹² The remainder of laborers had been homeless for an extended period of time and a large percentage (42.6 percent) homeless from one to five years. The persistence of their homelessness despite their efforts to secure day labor reflects the extreme shortage jobs available in San'ya.

Of the non-homeless day laborers, the large majority (73.8 percent) was living in and around San'ya in *doya*, and an additional 4.9 percent were living in business hotels. Given that both *doya* and business hotels are paid for by the day, these laborers face an immediate risk of

¹² According to estimates of local governments in major cities throughout Japan, there were approximately 16,000 homeless persons in Japan in 1998. It is estimated that the number of homeless persons increased to over 20,000 by 1999 (*Yomiuri Shinbun*, 1/31/99).

losing their housing when employment falters. Because such a large proportion (78.7 percent) lives in these precarious housing arrangements, even the most fortunate of day laborers are susceptible to homelessness should they experience an injury or extended spell of unemployment. The remainder of day laborers lived in and around San'ya in either an apartment they rented (14.8 percent); apartments, houses or rooms rented by family members or friends (3.3 percent); in a self-owned home (1.6 percent); or in other arrangements (1.6 percent).

Table 7. Housing of Non-Homeless Labors (n=61)

| Form of Housing | Percentage |
|--|-------------------|
| <i>Doya</i> | 73.8 |
| Apartment Rented By Self | 14.8 |
| Business Hotel | 4.9 |
| Apartment/House Rented By Family or Friend | 3.3 |
| House Owned By Self | 1.6 |
| Other | 1.6 |
| TOTAL | 100 |

Work and Earnings

Day laborers work in a variety of industries undertaking different occupations. The overwhelming majority (87.3 percent) works frequently in the construction industry as unskilled laborers. A smaller group (25.4 percent) works in skilled positions in construction such as *tobi shoku*, or scaffolding assembly, electrical work, roofing and pouring concrete. Small but significant groups of respondents reported to work in demolition (13.6 percent) and moving (11.0 percent).

Table 8. Content of Day Labor Work (n=118)

| Kind of Work | Percentage |
|------------------------|-------------------|
| Construction (General) | 87.3 |
| Skilled Construction | 25.4 |
| Demolition | 13.6 |
| Moving/Delivery | 11.0 |
| Manufacturing/Factory | 2.5 |
| Landscaping | 2.5 |
| Service/Retail | 2.5 |
| Overhaul | 1.7 |
| Driving | 1.7 |
| Other | 4.2 |

Note: Because respondents were allowed to provide more than one answer, these percentages total more than 100%.

We asked day laborers how many days they worked in the previous month to measure their frequency of employment. Respondents fall under three groups: a large group who infrequently find work (less than 10 days), a small group who work about half-time (10 to 15 days), and an even smaller group of elite laborers who find work regularly (more than 15 days). A large percentage (76.3 percent) worked 10 days or less, demonstrating that day labor has ceased to be reliable employment for most day laborers. An additional 13.6 percent worked 11-15 days, and only 10.2 percent worked over 15 days during the previous month.

Table 9. Number of Days Worked in Previous Month (n=118)

| Number of Days | Percentage | | |
|----------------|------------|--------|-----|
| 0 | 16.1 | | |
| 1-5 | 39.0 | | |
| 6-10 | 21.2 | Median | 7 |
| 11-15 | 13.6 | Mean | 8.5 |
| 16-20 | 5.1 | | |
| 21-25 | 1.7 | | |
| 26-31 | 3.4 | | |
| TOTAL | 100 | | |

We estimate that day laborers need to earn at least 100,000 yen (US\$962) per month to maintain an autonomous lifestyle in San'ya—paying for housing, food and other costs such as transportation, clothing and phone expenses¹³ without reliance on friends, community based organizations or loan sharks for aid.¹⁴ Respondents' earnings from day labor during the month prior to the survey demonstrate that most laborers were likely unable to subsist solely on wages from day labor in the previous month. The mean income for day laborers was 81,581 yen (US\$784), significantly below the 100,000 yen threshold we calculated.

In the month prior to the interview, many day laborers (16.1 percent) interviewed were unable to make any income from day labor, and 50 percent of respondents made less than 50,000

¹³ Minimum monthly costs for a laborer on a tight budget in San'ya total 100,000 yen and include: 1,500 yen (US\$14) per day in the cheapest single room *doya* [45,000 yen (USD\$433) per month], at least 1,500 yen per day for food not including alcohol (45,000 yen per month), and an additional 10,000 yen (US\$96) per month for other costs not including gambling (i.e., clothing, laundry, transportation, phone, etc.).

¹⁴ There are a number of ways which day laborers make ends meet when jobs are scarce. The most common is likely the sharing of resources between *nakama*, or friends. However, members of local organized crime syndicates will also often illegally sell day laborers stamps to place in their *shiro techo*, or white day laborer registration notebooks, which they can redeem at the local employment agency for cash benefits when unemployed. The stamps are supposed to be provided by employers and serve as proof of a day's work. Once a laborer has acquired 26 stamps over a two-month period, the laborer is eligible for 13 days of unemployment benefits of slightly over 7,000

yen (US\$481). A large majority (66.1 percent) earned less than 100,000 yen-- these respondents were likely homeless at one point in the month or relied on outside aid. A small group (13.6 percent) hovered around the subsistence level of 100,000 to 150,000 yen (US\$1,442) per month. These laborers were likely able to remain housed in a *doya*, eat regularly and only occasionally indulge in an evening of drinking or pachinko. The 20.3 percent of respondents who were able to make more than 150,000 yen in the previous month likely lived at a higher standard of living and accumulated enough savings to buffer themselves against a sudden spell of unemployment.

Table 10. Income Earned From Day Labor in Previous Month (n=118)

| Income (Yen) | | Percentage | |
|------------------|--------------------|------------|-----------------------|
| 0 | (\$0) | 16.1 | |
| 1-49,999 | (\$1-\$481) | 33.9 | |
| 50,000-99,999 | (\$482-\$961) | 16.1 | |
| 100,000-149,999 | (\$962-\$1,442) | 13.6 | Median 49,000 (\$471) |
| 150,000-199,999 | (\$1,443-\$1,923) | 9.3 | Mean 81,581 (\$784) |
| 200,000- 299,999 | (\$1,924-\$2,885) | 6.8 | |
| 300,000-399,999 | (\$2,886-\$3,846) | 2.5 | |
| 400,000 and Over | (\$3,847 and Over) | 1.7 | |
| TOTAL | | 100 | |

Despite the paucity of work available, most laborers continue to diligently seek employment at the San'ya street hiring market. We found that half (50.0 percent) of laborers seek day labor jobs 7 days per week, including Sunday. This claim is supported by our observations at the street hiring market on Sundays. Our fieldwork found significantly fewer laborers seeking employment, but also the presence of a core of diligent laborers hoping to catch a job that more fortunate laborers may have forgone for a day of rest.

The mean number of days respondents seek work is 5.5 days per week. Using this mean, we can calculate a monthly mean for the number of days respondents seek work per month (24.3 days). By dividing the mean number of days worked by respondents in the previous month (8.5) by the mean number of days respondents seek work per month, we estimate that, on average, laborers had a 35.0 percent success rate securing jobs in the month prior to the interview. That is, on average, day laborers procure employment once every three days in which they seek work. However, this rate is skewed by the general bifurcation of the day labor force into a small group of elite laborers who are able to secure work regularly and a large group who find work only

(US\$67) yen per day. Day laborers who are unable to secure ample employment will often also utilize soup lines and inexpensive meals provided by community based organizations to subsist.

occasionally. Using the same formula as above for those who worked 10 days or less in the month prior to the interview, we estimate their success rate in job seeking to be 16.5 percent (less than one out five days).

Demand for day labor fluctuates greatly in response to changes in the volume of activity of construction and other industries. Additionally, each year day laborers experience four periods of *abure jigoku*, or unemployment hell, during *shogatsu*, the new year's holiday; golden week, the spring holiday; *tsuyu*, the rainy season; and *obon*, the summer holiday to honor deceased ancestors.

In order to assess how fluctuations in demand affect the income of day laborers, we asked respondents about their earnings in times of high and low demand. The mean monthly income in times of high demand was 187,432 yen (\$1,802)—an amount likely skewed by a small number who are able to secure daily employment in these periods. Table 11 shows that even when there is a high demand for day labor, 20.5 percent of respondents reported monthly incomes below 100,000-- our estimated income threshold to subsist in San'ya. Additionally, 46 of the 93 respondents (49.5 percent) who provided earnings amounts for months when work is most available responded “no” when asked if there was a time of year in which there was a lot of work. This suggests that these “good” months are most likely to be extremely rare.

Table 11. Monthly Income When Work Is Most and Least Available (n=93)

| Income (Yen) | | Percent (Work is Most Available) | Percent (Work is Least Available) |
|-------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 0 | (\$0) | 0 | 46.2 |
| 1-49,999 | (\$1-\$481) | 9.7 | 31.2 |
| 50,000-99,999 | (\$482-\$961) | 10.8 | 12.9 |
| 100,000-149,999 | (\$962-\$1,442) | 19.4 | 8.6 |
| 150,000-199,999 | (\$1,443-\$1,923) | 17.2 | 1.1 |
| 200,000- 299,999 | (\$1,924-\$2,885) | 23.7 | 0 |
| 300,000-399,999 | (\$2,886-\$3,846) | 11.8 | 0 |
| 400,000 and Over | (\$3,847 and Over) | 7.5 | 0 |
| TOTAL | | 100 | 100 |

A large number (46.2 percent) said that they are unable to make any money at day labor when demand is low. During bad months, the mean monthly earnings is 27,884 yen (\$268), and 90.3 percent of respondents are unable to make the subsistence level amount. The extremely low incomes when demand for day labor is low demonstrate that it is necessary for day laborers to make significantly more than subsistence level when work is available. As demonstrated above,

many day laborers are unable to do so even during the infrequent “good months.” Additionally, in the prolonged Heisei recession of the 1990s, “bad months” are becoming more frequent and have stretched into “bad years.”

In our conversations with veteran day laborers, men would reminisce about the glory days of the bubble economy of the 1980s when they could pick and choose their employers, negotiate for a high wage and sometimes even work two jobs in a single day. The general public and day laborers themselves often criticize today’s unemployed day laborers as being unwilling to work for less than boom era wages. Our findings contrast with this stereotype. When day laborers were asked about their reservation wage-- the minimum wage they would be willing to accept for a day’s work-- they responded with a mean reservation wage of 7,460 yen (\$72), an amount far below peak era wages of 12,000 to 15,000 yen (\$115-\$144). When converted to an hourly wage for an eight-hour day, on average, day laborers were willing to work for 933 yen (\$8.97) per hour—only slightly above the legal minimum hourly wage in Tokyo of 692 yen (\$6.65)—despite the difficult and dangerous nature of day labor work.

A significant majority (63.3 percent) was willing to work for less than 10,000 yen (\$96) per day. Likely the most desperate group, the bottom 13.8 percent, expressed that they were willing to work for less than 4,999 yen (\$48) per day or for “any wage”— wages unheard of in previous eras in the *yoseba*. Thirty-three percent set their reservation wage at between 10,000 and 12,499 yen (\$96-\$120) per day, a common low-end wage offered by employers at the morning hiring market in San’ya. Only 3.7 percent provided a reservation wage of 12,500 yen (\$121) and over—a wage considered good amid current conditions of the day labor market.

Table 12. Reservation Wage (n=109)

| Wage (in Yen) | | Percentage | | |
|------------------------|----------------|------------|--------|--------|
| “Any Wage” | | 8.3 | | |
| Less than 4,999 | Less than \$48 | 5.5 | | |
| 5,000-7,499 | \$49-\$72 | 27.5 | Median | 10,000 |
| 7,500-9,999 | \$73-\$95 | 22.0 | Mean | 7,460 |
| 10,000-12,499 | \$96-\$120 | 33.0 | | |
| 12,500 and Over | \$121 and Over | 3.7 | | |
| TOTAL | | 100 | | |

A large majority in the sample (74.4 percent) relied completely on earnings from day labor for their livelihoods. Of the 25.6 percent who did have other sources of income, only a single laborer had a job in the formal economy. Other sources of income included gambling

(34.5 percent) and collection of recyclables and discarded appliances that are repaired and sold to pawn shops (17.3 percent). Since many laborers likely do not consider the sharing of resources among friends as a source of income, this activity is likely much more prevalent among laborers than the 10.3 percent reported. The 37.9 percent who reported other alternative methods for making money engaged in activities such as *narabiya*, or waiting in line overnight for baseball tickets or scalpers; selling goods at San'ya's *asaichi*, or morning market; and collecting and selling *ginnan* nuts. The fact that these methods are not very lucrative reflects the desperation when employment opportunities are few.

Job Acquisition

In order to obtain an understanding of where day laborers search for employment, we asked laborers where they most often seek jobs. Since most interviews were conducted at the street hiring market in San'ya, it is not surprising that 80.5 percent responded that they most often seek work at the San'ya market. Other responses revealed that significant numbers also seek employment at publicly regulated hiring sites such as the San'ya Labor Center (21.2 percent), and the Tamahime Employment Bureau (26.3 percent).

With a paucity of jobs available both on the streets and in the public hiring sites in San'ya, some day laborers seek jobs at alternative hiring sites in and around Tokyo. A small number seek work at informal hiring sites such as: Takadanobaba on the west side of Tokyo (8.5 percent); the Asakusa horse track (5.1 percent); others (15.3 percent) both within Tokyo such as Ikebukuro, Shinjuku, Shimbashi, Ueno and Shibuya; and sites in neighboring cities including Kawasaki and Yokohama.

Table 13. Where Laborers Most Often Look for Work (n=121)

| Location | Percentage |
|---|-------------------|
| San'ya Street Labor Market | 80.5 |
| Tamahime Employment Bureau | 26.3 |
| San'ya Labor Center | 21.2 |
| Takadanobaba Street Labor Market | 8.5 |
| Asakusa Horse Track | 5.1 |
| Other | 15.3 |

Note: Because respondents were allowed to provide more than one response, these percentages total more than 100%.

Day laborers use a variety of methods to seek day labor. For example, 48.4 percent used classified ads in newspapers including *supotsu shinbun*, or daily sports newspapers, to look for short-term *keiyaku*, or contract, jobs. Day laborers also used informal networks of friends and acquaintances (20.3 percent). The next most common method was over the phone (7.8 percent). It is likely that most of these laborers had regular work relationships with employers who they would phone regarding the availability of work and commute directly to jobs. A small number (3.1 percent) reported seeking daily jobs at a local office of *Nittsu*, one of Japan's major delivery services.

A majority of day laborers interviewed (56.8 percent) reported that they were most often hired by *tehaishi*, or labor brokers, who conduct the hiring of day laborers for construction subcontractors. Traditionally, these labor brokers have been either members of local *boryokudan* (organized crime syndicates), or paid significant monetary dues to the local *boryokudan* for the right to hire on the streets of San'ya. During the boom years of the day labor market, the *boryokudan* were able to make significant earnings in San'ya by charging employers fees for laborers hired, dipping into the wages of day laborers, and extorting labor brokers not affiliated with the organization.

As a result of the sharp decrease in demand for day laborers, the hiring has ceased to be as profitable for the *boryokudan*, and they apparently have reduced their brokering activities. This is reflected in the significant number of day laborers who reported to obtain their jobs through other day laborers (44.8 percent) and directly from bosses or subcontractors (15.8 percent), rather than the labor brokers.

Table 14. Employers of Day Laborers (n=114)

| Type of Employer | Percentage |
|--------------------------|------------|
| Labor Broker | 56.8 |
| Other Day Laborers | 44.8 |
| Boss/Subcontractor | 15.8 |
| Public Employment Office | 5.3 |
| Friend/Acquaintance | 5.3 |
| Other | 3.5 |

Note: Because respondents were allowed to provide more than one response, these percentages total more than 100%.

Ethnographic research in San'ya prior to the implementation of the survey suggested that a strong relationship with an employer was fundamental to securing work on a regular basis. In

the tight day labor market of the 1980s day laborers would utilize their leverage to negotiate for the highest wage among a group of employers. However, current market conditions demand that day laborers be loyal and available to a single employer, whether it be a labor broker or subcontractor, so that the employer will call upon him first when a job is available. Table 14 demonstrates that 64.1 percent of laborers were frequently hired by the same employer. Aside from the most fortunate of day laborers, the 35.9 percent who were not frequently hired by the same employer likely faced difficulty in landing jobs while seeking employment from different employers each day.

Our survey collected data on the contractual conditions of day labor jobs. A large majority (84.7 percent) worked *genkin*, or cash, single-day contracts most often in the month prior to interview. About 12 percent worked *keiyaku*, or contract jobs that lasted more than one day. A small percentage (4.1 percent) worked on an almost daily basis with the same employer. We have termed these arrangements “regular work” relationships in which, although the laborer has an informal guarantee of regular employment with one employer, the employer can terminate employment at anytime with no responsibility.¹⁵

In addition to commuting to day-to-day or short term jobs from San'ya, day laborers will often take jobs at *hanba*, or workers' boarding houses, in which laborers are provided housing and hired out to construction sites by the housing management. Management takes a percentage of each laborer's daily wage, as well as charges them for room, board, and in many instances, cigarettes, alcohol, and bathing. When *hanba* owners are able to provide jobs on a daily basis, most laborers are able to make a small profit even after these costs are extracted. In fact, many laborers have preferred *hanba* to day-to-day employment out of the *yoseba* due to the regularity of employment.

However, even during times of high demand for day labor, there have been crooked *hanba* owners, most often affiliated with *boryokudan*, who run *takobeya*, or “octopus room” *hanba*. In *takobeya hanba*, laborers are physically intimidated by managers and are either

¹⁵ Observations during ethnographic research suggest that regular work relationships have proliferated among an elite set of day laborers in San'ya and appear to work to the benefit of both the employer and, at least in the short-term, the employee. The employer has the guarantee of a dependable worker without the costs of full-time employment or hiring at the street labor market. The employee has access to a source of somewhat regular work and does not necessarily have to compete for jobs at the street hiring market. These regular work relationships eliminate the need for laborers to seek work on the streets and allow laborers to commute *chokko*, meaning literally to go directly. Our sampling of laborers at the street hiring market likely explains the small presence of laborers with such relationships in our sample.

bluntly denied their wages or are provided only enough work to pay the costs of their monthly housing and increase the profits of the *boryokudan*. In the prolonged recession, the number of laborers bringing claims of nonpayment of wages to San'ya Sogidan from such *hanba* have increased, suggesting that *boryokudan* are increasingly using *hanba* to prey on desperate laborers.

Less than half of day laborers (41.2 percent) responded that they worked in a *hanba* during the previous year. The majority was hired for these *hanba* jobs either at the San'ya Labor Center (48.9 percent) or the San'ya street hiring market (19.2 percent). An additional 10.6 percent reported that they found *hanba* jobs through friends or acquaintances, 4.3 percent through periodicals, and others were recruited by labor brokers in and around Tokyo such as Ueno Park (4.3 percent), Takadanobaba (4.3 percent), Kawasaki (4.3 percent), and Yoyogi Park (2.1 percent).

Of the 47 laborers who worked in *hanba* in the previous year, 89.1 percent reported receiving all of their wages owed. The mean amount owed for the 10.9 percent of laborers who worked in *hanba* and did not receive their full wages was 150,000 yen. All laborers who did not receive full pay were hired outside of San'ya in places like Ueno Park, Yoyogi Park, Takadanobaba and through the newspaper. In conversations during ethnographic research, laborers suggested that campaigns by San'ya Sogidan against corrupt labor brokers have pushed them out of San'ya, and that they are now preying on desperate, homeless day laborers in parks throughout Tokyo.

Day Labor Abuses

Due to the informal nature of day labor employment arrangements, one might suspect that day laborers experience abuses by their employers in the form of nonpayment of wages, unpaid overtime, lack of breaks or other workplace abuses. However, the results of our survey paint a different picture. While abuses may be underreported, a large majority in our sample (76.9 percent) responded that they had never experienced abuses despite their lengthy mean tenure (16.2 years). It is possible that the aggressive efforts of San'ya Sogidan in obtaining retributions against abusive employers has served to reduce abuses since the 1980s. Table 15 displays the frequencies of each type of abuse reported by day laborers.

Table 15. Type of Day Labor Abuse (n=26)

| Type of Day Labor Abuse | Percentage |
|---|------------|
| Arguments With Boss | 34.6 |
| Content of Work Different Than That Agreed Upon | 30.8 |
| Non Payment of Wages | 26.9 |
| Paid Less Than Agreed | 8.0 |
| Other | 15.4 |

Note: Because respondents were allowed to provide more than one answer, these percentages total more than 100%.

Job Skills and Work Histories

Day laborers in our sample have worked for varied tenures as day laborers, ranging from three months to 47 years with an average tenure of 16.2 years. The largest group of respondents (36.4 percent) reported to have worked from 11 to 20 years as day laborers. This group began working day labor in the 1980s, likely both pulled by a booming construction industry and pushed by unemployment in rural areas resulting from urban-centric economic growth. The next largest group (35.6 percent) has worked day labor for from 0 to 10 years and began working day labor in the 1990s during the ongoing Heisei Recession when nationwide unemployment rates have been the highest since just after World War II. The next group (22.0 percent) has worked day labor for 21 to 30 years, beginning in the 1970s, a period of simultaneous boom in the construction industry and decline in low-tech manufacturing and rural industries. A smaller group (5.9 percent) reported working as day laborers for 31 years or over. This group began working day labor as Japan's economy rapidly expanded, driving a growing construction industry.

Table 16. Tenure as Day Laborer (n=118)

| Tenure (years) | Percent | | |
|--------------------|------------|---------|------|
| 0 to 10 | 35.6 | Median | 15 |
| 11 to 20 | 36.4 | Mean | 16.2 |
| 21 to 30 | 22.0 | Minimum | 0.25 |
| 31 and Over | 5.9 | Maximum | 47 |
| TOTAL | 100 | | |

Although much of day labor work is unskilled, over half of our sample reported having skills usable in the workplace. Table 17 provides data on job skills. Day laborers possess a variety of skills, including scaffolding assembly, or *tobi shoku* (37.5 percent), skilled trades (33.3 percent), machine operation (25.4 percent), and driving (7.9 percent). Nearly all skills possessed

by laborers were applicable in construction and related work. Trade skills included: carpentry, welding, electrical work, glass work, landscaping, painting, plastering, plumbing, sheet metal and other metal work, and tile/bricklaying. Laborers with machine operation skills could operate machines such as: jackhammers, bulldozers, cranes, forklifts, and others. This abundance and variety of skills demonstrates that day laborers possess skills which could be applicable in better paying and more secure jobs in the formal economy.

Table 17. Type of Job Skill (n=67) and Certificate (n=41)

| Type | Percentage (Job Skills) | Percentage (Certificates) |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| Tobi Shoku (Scaffolding Assembly) | 37.5 | 31.6 |
| Skilled Trades | 33.3 | 5.3 |
| Machine Operation | 25.4 | 36.8 |
| Driving | 7.9 | 34.2 |
| Other | 0 | 5.3 |

Note: Because respondents were allowed to provide more than one response, percentages total more than 100%.

Additionally, a significant number in our sample reported to have certificates or licenses. Of the 41 respondents (32.5 percent) who reported to have licenses or certificates, 31.6 percent had the proper qualification to assemble scaffolding (*tobi*), 36.8 percent to operate machines, 34.2 percent had driver's licenses of varying classes, and 5.3 percent qualifications in skilled trades. As with the job skills outlined above, the certificates and licenses were concentrated in the construction and related industries. The certificates and licenses held by machine operators were for the operation of jackhammers, bulldozers, cranes, forklifts, and excavators. The day laborers with licenses in skilled trades held them in electrical work and auto mechanics.

In order to obtain a complete understanding of day laborers' work experience, we asked respondents about their experience in full-time work, the content of this work, their tenure, and the reason they left these jobs. The great majority of respondents (78.8 percent) reported that they had once worked a permanent job. Table 18 shows that laborers had once worked in a variety of industries with the three largest groups in retail/service (26.4 percent), skilled trades (20.9 percent), and manufacturing (16.5 percent). Only 15.4 percent had worked previously in full-time positions in construction.¹⁶ Day laborers worked in permanent jobs for a range of less

¹⁶ While a few (8) respondents who worked in skilled trades worked in construction-related trades as carpenters, painters, electricians, and plasterers, inclusion of these respondents under the category of construction would only push the percentage of day laborers who had previously worked full-time in construction to 24.2 percent. Other trades that respondents reported to have worked in full-time include welding, mechanics, forestry and fishing.

than one year to 30 years, with the mean tenure at their longest job of 9.6 years. The largest group (55.7 percent) worked in permanent jobs for two to ten years.

Day laborers left their longest-held permanent jobs due to both structural and personal reasons. Of respondents who provided reasons for leaving their longest-held permanent job, 31.7 percent reported that they left these jobs because either their employer went out of business or restructured, and 29.1 percent responded that they left because they were either tired of their job or because they preferred day labor. Others responded that they left due to bad interpersonal relations (e.g., the inability to get along with co-workers or their boss) (19.0 percent), personal problems or circumstances (e.g., family break-up) (13.8 percent), and physical problems (on-the-job injuries) (8.9 percent).

Table 18. Reason for Leaving Longest-Held Permanent Job (n=81)

| Reason | Percentage |
|---|-------------------|
| Employer Went Out of Business/Restructured | 31.7 |
| Tired of Job/Prefer Day Labor | 29.1 |
| Bad Interpersonal Relations | 19.0 |
| Personal Problems/Circumstances | 13.8 |
| Physical Problems | 8.9 |
| TOTAL | 100 |

Barriers to Full-Time Employment

The lack of permanent jobs available, reflected in the highest national unemployment rate in postwar history (4.7 percent), combined with numerous barriers to employment, make landing a job in the formal economy very difficult for day laborers. However, when asked whether or not they were seeking full-time jobs at the time of the survey, 39.1 percent of respondents replied that they were.

A large majority of day laborers offered structural barriers as the main reason for their lack of permanent employment with only 16.8 percent saying that they preferred day labor. Day laborers offered age discrimination (51.3 percent) as the primary reason for the lack of ability to secure a permanent job. This claim of age discrimination is supported by the mean age of day laborers in our sample (52.3 years) and evidence obtained during ethnographic research. Many laborers told stories of being turned away in both phone inquiries and face-to-face interviews with potential employers, being refused bluntly because of their age.

In addition to age discrimination, day laborers face many other barriers to employment. Many (31.0 percent) said that the lack of jobs was the main reason why they were unable to secure a permanent job. Day laborers also cited: poor work history (13.3 percent), the lack of a permanent address (8.0 percent), the lack of adequate means to search for employment (7.1 percent), the lack of education (5.3 percent), poor social skills (3.5 percent) and other reasons (8.8 percent).

Table 19. Reason for No Permanent Employment (n=116)

| Reason | Percentage |
|--|-------------------|
| Age Discrimination | 51.3 |
| No Work Available | 31.0 |
| Prefer Day Labor | 16.8 |
| Poor Work History | 13.3 |
| No Permanent Address | 8.0 |
| No Means to Look For Employment | 7.1 |
| No Education/Skills | 5.3 |
| Poor Social Skills | 3.5 |
| Other | 8.8 |

Note: Because respondent were allowed to provide more than one answer, these percentages total more than 100%.

Of those laborers who are actively searching for work, the most commonly used method was through use of newspapers and magazines (40.0 percent). This is followed by the use of the local employment bureau (35.6 percent), friends and/or acquaintances (24.4 percent), the San'ya Labor Center (6.6 percent), and other sources such as directly approaching potential or former employers (4.4 percent).

We asked day laborers what types of jobs they would prefer to working day labor in order to obtain a more clear understanding of their desire for work. Of the 65 respondents who offered specific types of jobs, the largest group (26.6 percent) responded that they would prefer working in a service-sector job. These responses included jobs at fast food restaurants, gas stations, bread stores, supermarkets, and in recycling—jobs that would require minimum training. The second largest group (18.8 percent) responded that they were willing to work “any job.”

Table 20. Type of Work Preferred (n=65)

| Type of Work | Percentage |
|----------------------------------|------------|
| Service | 26.6 |
| Janitor | 17.2 |
| Delivery/ Freight/Transportation | 17.2 |
| Construction | 15.3 |
| Skilled Trade | 15.3 |
| Factory | 9.4 |
| Any Work | 18.8 |

Note: Because respondent were allowed to provide more than one answer, these percentages total more than 100%.

CONCLUSION

The data presented in this report depict San'ya as a day labor market afflicted by rampant unemployment, underemployment and homelessness and only able to fully meet the employment needs of a select few laborers. A large majority (66.1 percent) who utilize the morning hiring market in San'ya are unable to earn enough to meet a conservative monthly subsistence budget of 100,000 yen, and nearly half (46.7 percent) are homeless. As this chronic unemployment and homelessness persists, the ability and will of day laborers to maintain self-sufficiency are likely to decline significantly.

Currently, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government is developing “self-sufficiency centers” to aid homeless persons in Tokyo, a large number of whom are current or former day laborers. Additionally, community based organizations are stepping up efforts to promote the self-sufficiency of homeless persons in and around San'ya. We hope that data presented in this report will inform their efforts both to stop the flow of laborers into homelessness and to aid homeless laborers in their pursuit of self-sufficiency. We offer the following basic policy prescriptions not as a final comprehensive strategy, but as a few measures to be considered both by policymakers and program developers in community based organizations.

1. Increase emergency food and shelter relief for homeless day laborers.

The dramatic increase in number of homeless persons in and around San'ya over the past decade has been neglected by the public sector. Further delay in the provision of adequate housing and food to unemployed day laborers will only hasten the deterioration of the physical and psychological ability of laborers to obtain housing and independence. Therefore, emergency and transitional shelters for homeless day laborers should be created immediately.

Persons who use these facilities should be allowed adequate time to stabilize before beginning the transition to self-sufficiency. In order to discourage cyclical homelessness, shelters should provide adequate transitional services including intensive employment training and placement and housing placement and avoid strict enforcement of time limits on shelter stays.

Additionally, the public sector should contribute to the private efforts to feed the thousands of homeless laborers in and around San'ya. Most local community based organizations are only able to provide rice balls and soup to a small group of laborers once or twice per week. Many homeless laborers are thus forced to scavenge through trash for their meals. Prolonged nutritional deprivation will weaken homeless laborers' physical and psychological ability to re-attain self-sufficiency. The public sector should provide food donations and donation incentives to local merchants to aid local community based organizations to ensure that homeless laborers are able to eat nutritious meals on a regular basis.

2. Increase public works projects for day laborers.

Currently, day laborers registered at the local *shokuan* are only able to obtain approximately two days per month of employment in public works projects. While income from these jobs falls dramatically short of the minimum monthly subsistence income of 100,000 yen, funds from public works projects provide some income to unemployed housed laborers. For those who are homeless, they provide much-needed funds to obtain a minimum amount of food. An increase in the outlay of these projects would significantly improve the lives of unemployed and homeless day laborers. Also, because older day laborers are often structurally excluded from employment because of their age, a special public works program targeting them should be developed. It is to the benefit of both the general public and day laborers that these public works projects utilize the varied skills of day laborers.

3. Promote public-private collaborative projects to employ day laborers.

Given the size of the unemployed and homeless population in and around San'ya, a number of employment programs sensitive to the attributes and needs of the population are necessary. Employment programs need to be creative, ambitious and persistent in order to provide

significant employment opportunities.

Our data demonstrates that day laborers in San'ya make up a labor pool with extensive work experience, various skills and certifications and a willingness to work for low wages. Creative employment programs should utilize this ample pool of labor. Recently, the local community based organization "Furusato no Kai" has implemented a program in which homeless persons in and around San'ya are trained and certified to be home helpers for elderly persons. Such creative projects should be encouraged and provided with public financial support.

Additional possible projects include a nonprofit, transitional "workman's boarding house" in the style of a *hanba*. Such a project could be administered by a local community based organization in which day laborers are provided housing, food, and introductions to jobs. Public funds could be used to cover capital costs and operating expenses could be obtained through private fundraising and revenue gained from the out-hiring of residents. In contrast to the exploitative nature of the *hanba*, laborers' contributions would be recycled into the system and used to fund transitional services such as employment training and placement in full-time work and permanent housing.

Also, our findings suggest that many laborers are willing to work in a variety of areas, including the service sector. While low skill service sector jobs pay low wages, placements in this and other sectors should be pursued to provide as many laborers as possible with income. Wage subsidies should be considered as incentives for local businesses to hire homeless laborers. Given the varied backgrounds of San'ya's laborers, employment programs will need to be tolerant and supportive enough to allow laborers to succeed.

Increased employment of San'ya's laborers would benefit the local economy and promote self-sufficiency. Laborers would use wages to pay for food and housing in San'ya, contributing to the revitalization of the depressed local economy and preservation of the area's affordable housing resources. Additionally, with increased employment, day laborers would be less dependent on loan sharks and community based organizations for emergency relief.

4. *Eliminate policies and actions of harassment of homeless day laborers by police and public parks employees*

Although the development of emergency and transitional housing for homeless laborers will help many laborers transition to self-sufficiency, it is likely that demand will not be met

completely. Consequently, many homeless laborers will remain living in parks in and around San'ya. We recommend that in order to preserve the fundamental human rights of homeless laborers, barring any public safety hazard or obstruction of other park uses, they should be allowed to remain without harassment.

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