



Frontline Workers Survey

Talking & Working Together

Charles Dent, MLA
Chairman

October 1993

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Special Committee on Health and Social Services

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FRONTLINE WORKERS SURVEY

Summary Report of Findings

**A Research Project conducted for the Special Committee
on Health and Social Services.**

Prepared by:

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Committee Coordinator**

October 1993

INTRODUCTION

To carry out its task, the Special Committee on Health and Social Services has consulted widely in all regions of the NWT and carried out 3 research projects. This report summarizes the information collected in the telephone interviews conducted for our major research project, the Frontline Workers Survey.

From the outset, members of our Committee wanted to listen carefully to the concerns and ideas of health and social services staff across the NWT who work directly with members of the public. Input from those serving in the frontlines was seen as crucial to ensure effective recommendations could be made. This involvement was accomplished in two ways. In each of the 21 communities visited, workers were encouraged to meet with visiting Committee members. Over 60 such meetings occurred during our regional consultations. To ensure that all frontline workers in any community also had a chance to share their views with our Committee, it was decided to carry out a telephone survey of all workers. A mail questionnaire seeking similar information was later administered to NWT nurses, RCMP members and church workers.

THE SURVEY

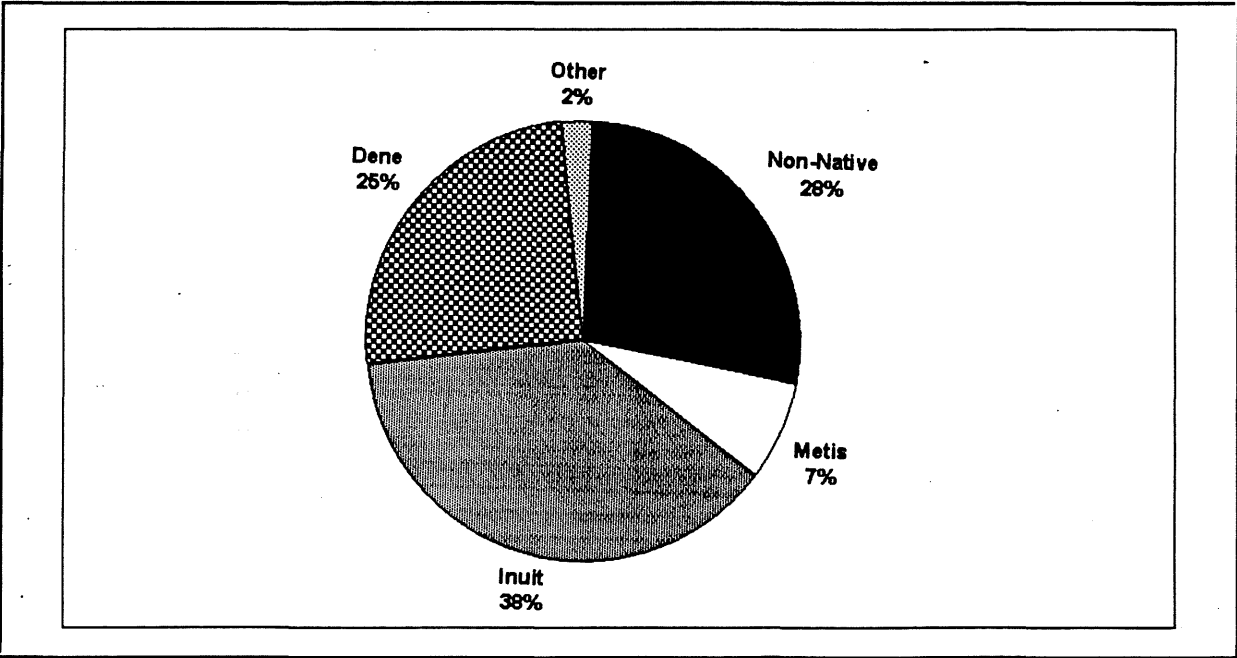
The literature review for the survey was conducted by Kim Zapf PhD, of the Faculty of Social Work, University of Calgary. The questions asked in both parts of the survey were based on this review of issues previously identified by frontline workers in other regions in northern Canada.

A total of 281 frontline workers participated in the telephone survey conducted early in 1993. Using staff lists provided by GNWT, people working as community social service workers, alcohol and drug workers, community health representatives, and family violence shelter staff were called. Over 95% of those reached participated. The following are profiles or snapshots of these groups and a summary of their opinions about the needs in their community and their views on the personal/professional issues that they face.

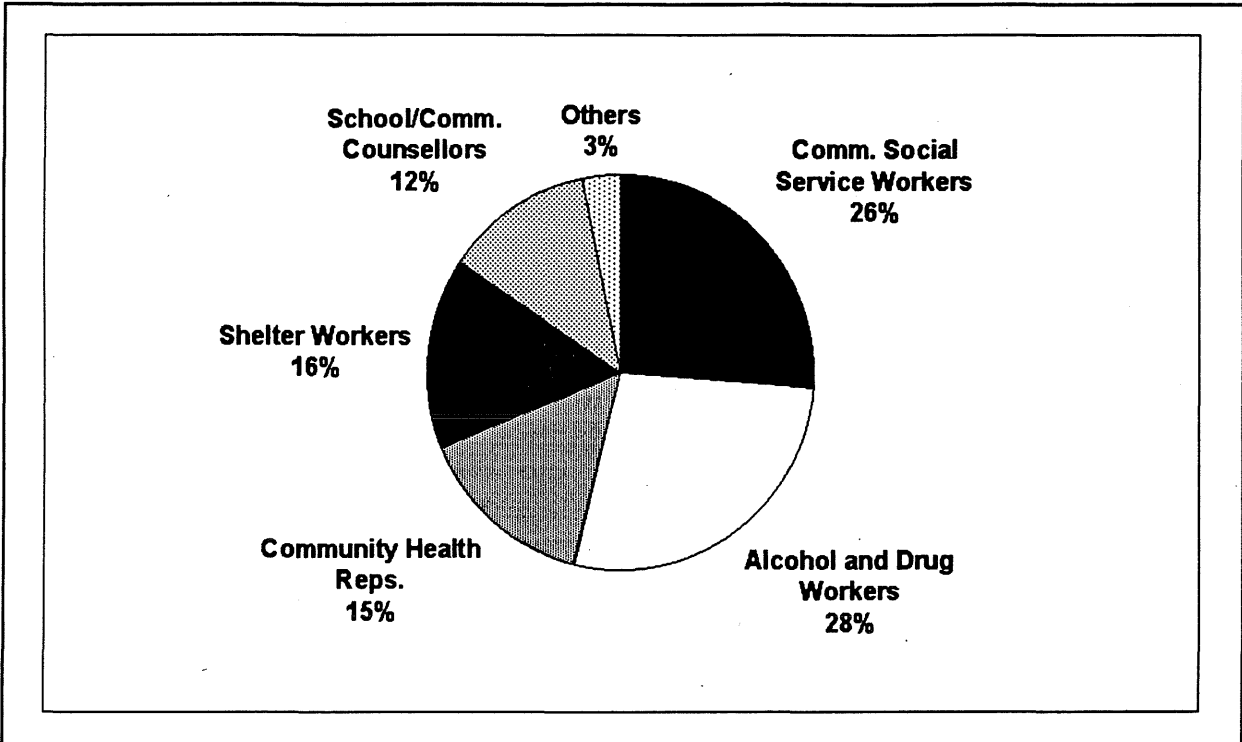
WHO ARE OUR FRONTLINE WORKERS?

Four out of five frontline workers (80%) in the NWT are women. Workers ages' ranged from 20 to 67 years, with an average age of 38 years. Previous studies have reported three-quarters of the frontline workers in northern British Columbia and the Yukon to be under 40 years of age. In the NWT, nearly half (46%) of the frontline workers were 40 years of age or older.

The diagrams below show the breakdown according to ethnicity, and job title of the 281 workers:



Ethnic Background



Job Title

TYPICAL FRONTLINE WORKERS

Job Title	Age	Years in the North	Years in Community	Years of Northern Experience	Years in Current Job
Community Social Service Worker	38.2	27.2	16.9	7.2	4.5
Alcohol & Drug Worker	40.6	25.2	17.9	4.5	2.4
School / Community Counsellor	38.3	35.2	25.1	5.4	2.8
Community Health Representative	36.6	36.4	27.0	5.8	3.1
FV Shelter Worker	37.1	21.5	12.3	3.0	1.8
Average - All Workers	38.1	28.0	18.8	5.3	3.1

Our findings suggest that NWT frontline workers have strong ties with their communities. Four out of every five workers (81%) have lived in the North for at least 10 years. In fact, nearly three-quarters (73%) have spent 20 or more years in the North. Most of the frontline workers (81%) were already living in the community when they were recruited to their current jobs. Another 9% were recruited from elsewhere in the North, leaving 10% who were hired from southern Canada or elsewhere. Nearly two-thirds of the frontline workers (62%) reported having lived in their community for at least 10 years. A similar proportion (68%) had members of their extended families living in the same community.

Workers had an average of 5.3 years of frontline experience in the north. They reported an average of only 3.1 years in their current job so many workers were already working in the field when they were hired. While a few workers (4%) reported more than 20 years of northern frontline experience, most (88%) have worked at their current job for five years or less. For example, among alcohol and drug workers, 67% had been in their jobs two years or less, for social service workers the figure was 47%. All 44 shelter workers reported five years or less, reflecting the relatively recent addition of family violence resources to the NWT network of social services.

Most of the frontline workers (91%) reported the presence of other workers in their community with whom they could discuss work-related matters. For 79% of the workers, their immediate supervisor also lives in their community. It is notable, however, that more than half (53%) of the 74 social service workers reported that their supervisor lives somewhere else.

Almost one half [42%] of the 74 social service workers had a degree or diploma in social work. Of this group, two thirds [68%] held a Community College Diploma, 30% held a BSW, and one person reported an MSW. Half of all frontline workers (51%) reported a degree or diploma in a field other than social work. A total of 43% of all workers completed high school while 26% finished some high school. Finally, 31% of the workers surveyed had completed grade nine or less.

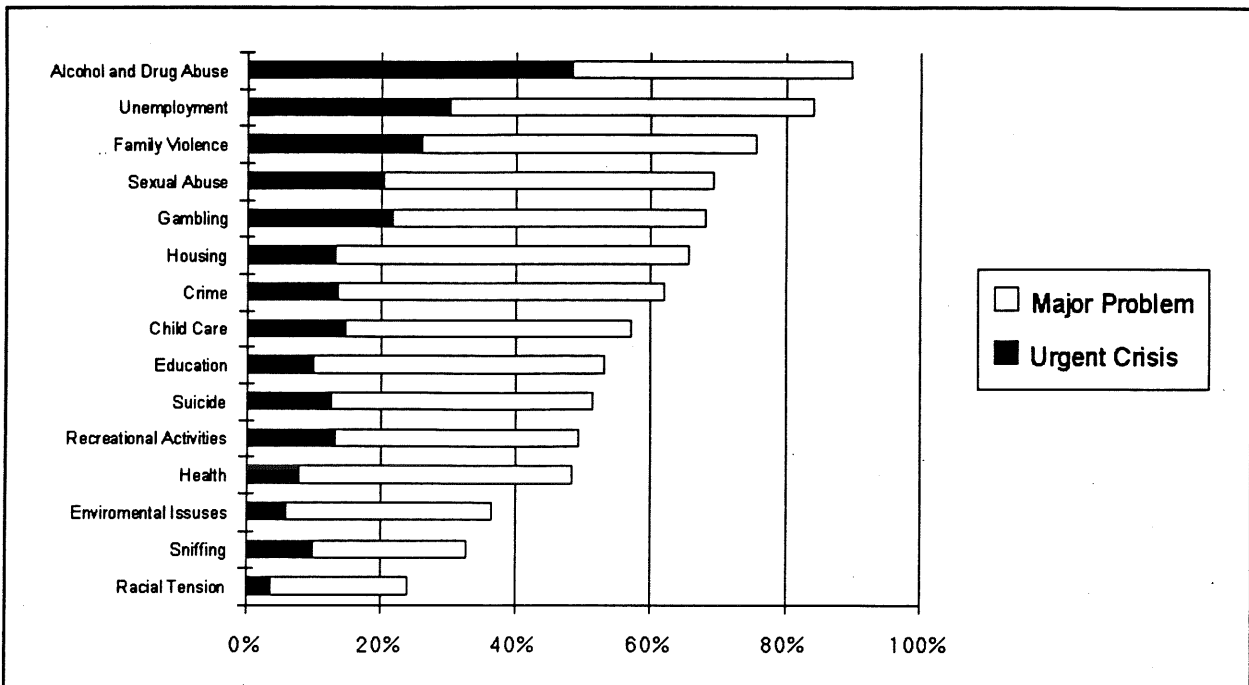
Rating Scale

During the interviews, workers rated the impact of various issues on their work or their communities using the following scale:

0	1	2	3	4
Don't Know	Not a Problem	A Minor Problem	A Major Problem	An Urgent Crisis

COMMUNITY NEEDS

Considerable variation was apparent in the scores assigned to the issues presented to workers. Each issue was designated as "an urgent crisis" by some, just as each issue was also considered "not a problem" by others. In the following graph, the issues are ranked in descending order according to the percentage of workers who rated each as at least a "major problem" in their community.

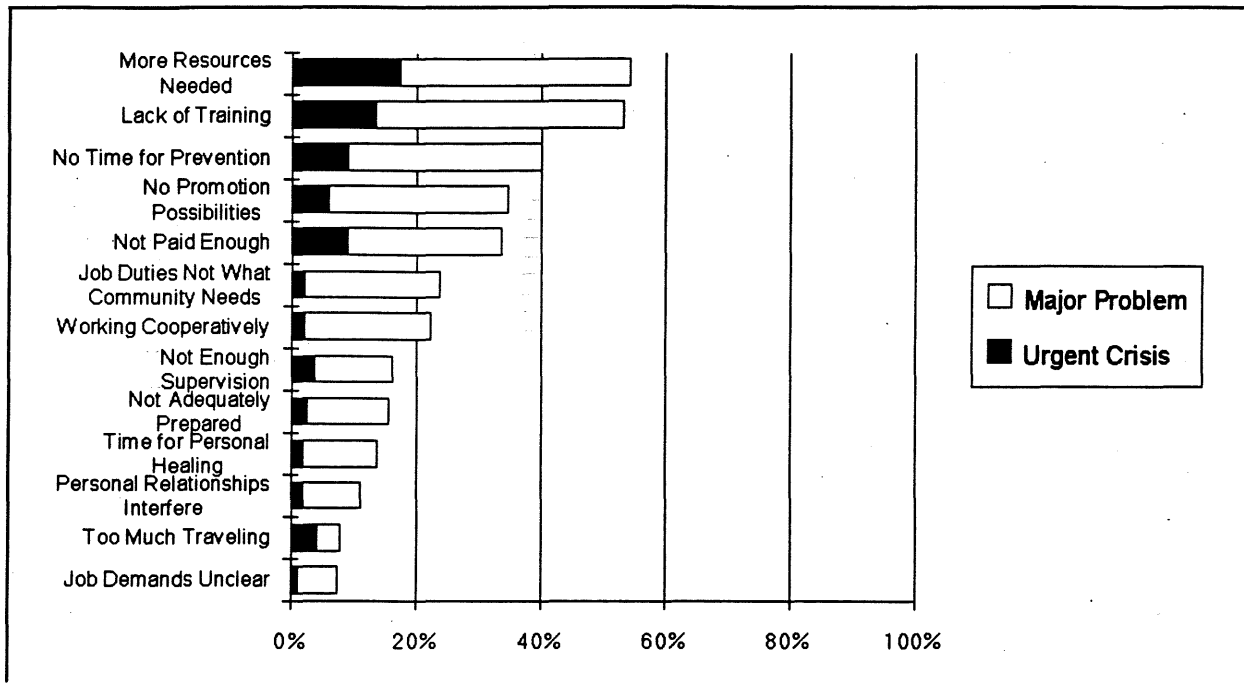


The ranking of the issues suggest that frontline workers see **alcohol and drug abuse**, **unemployment**, and **family violence** as the 3 major problems facing their communities. The next four issues in order of priority; **sexual abuse**, **gambling** **housing** and **crime** are seen to be at least a "major problem" by more than 60% of respondents.

These ratings may be of use to decision makers at a number of levels as they look for guidance as to where scarce resources most need to be deployed to meet perceived community needs.

PERSONAL/PROFESSIONAL NEEDS

Using the same scale, the 281 frontline workers rated various factors as to the degree to which they caused pressure or stress on them when doing their job. The following graph shows the issues arranged in descending order according to the number of workers that rated each as at least a "major problem".



Lack of resources to do an effective job and lack of training opportunities in the community emerged as key problem areas for frontline workers across all regions and job categories.

However, the overall scores again mask to a degree, the specific needs of particular groups. For example, more than half (56%) of the 78 alcohol and drug workers rated inadequate pay as a "major problem" or "urgent crisis." compared to 30% of social service workers. Similarly, 70% of the 74 social service workers rated moving from crisis to crisis with no time for prevention work as a "major problem" or "urgent crisis" [compared with 33% of A & D workers]; nearly half (47%) of social service workers also rated the poor fit between job requirements and community needs as at least a "major problem".

MAIL SURVEY

In the follow up mail survey, a total of 290 RCMP members, nurses and clergy responded. They were asked to respond to questions similar to those asked in the telephone survey. The response rate in this survey was approximately 40%. Some caution is therefore necessary in comparing their responses to those of the frontline workers we telephoned as there is the chance that those who mailed back the questionnaire are not representative of their colleagues. This concern does not apply in the phone survey as our response rate was so high.

Having said this, it is worth noting that there was marked agreement across all groups surveyed as to the most pressing issues facing their communities. **Alcohol and drug abuse, family violence, and sexual abuse** were similarly rated by all as being the most problematic.

SUMMARY

This survey "snapshot" gives us an accurate profile of frontline health and social service workers now working in the NWT and their assessment of the most pressing issues that face them and the communities they serve. While a wide range of opinion was reported, as the charts show, there appears to be agreement on the major problems most affecting both workers and their communities.

Information from this unique profile of NWT frontline workers has already been in demand by other interested groups.

This is a summary report only. All percentages have been rounded. For more information on the findings or methodology of this survey, please contact [before **November 30th, 1993**]:

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