

# The Assets of Canadian Families, 1997

A National Survey of Clients Accessing  
Family Service Agencies

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# Executive Summary

Family Service Canada has a network of 120 agencies across Canada, many of which have extensive first-hand experience with individuals and families who present with a range of issues. These agencies provide services to thousands of clients and their families each week. While some families continue to struggle, many cope successfully and even thrive despite the most difficult of circumstances. Those who seek support and advice not only bring a set of issues but typically have an array of different “assets” or “strengths” that may ultimately serve as the building blocks for solutions to the apparent problems at hand. Thus the basic dilemma of how to intervene with troubled clients and their families can be reframed accordingly: How are families coping with the various challenges and stressors of daily living? Why are some coping more successfully than others? What are the types of resources to which some individuals and families have access that enhance their capacity to cope? What strengths and assets do they possess?

## Methodological Overview

Family Service Canada, with the research assistance of the Canadian Policy Research Networks (CPRN), conducted a snapshot study of clients accessing the services of family service agencies during one week in May 1997. The broad purpose of the study was to develop a profile of clients accessing family service agencies, including insights into their family functioning and assets or resources that might be relevant in the context of planning interventions. More specifically, the *Assets of Canadian Families, 1997* research study was designed to meet four main objectives:

1. To provide a snapshot of the demographic characteristics of clients who receive services from family agencies across Canada;
2. To provide new information on the positive aspects of how individuals and families function;
3. To provide a baseline for future surveys; and

4. To encourage agencies to focus on clients' *family strengths* and the assets of family, friends, and the community.

To achieve these objectives, the study investigators requested the help of Family Service Canada's network of member agencies who provide direct services to clients. A total of 25 agencies actively participated by administering questionnaires to their clients during the week of May 12-17, 1997. The agencies administered five instruments, two of which were completed by the service provider (a demographic instrument and an assets inventory). The clients themselves completed the other three instruments – which were available in English, French, and Spanish – including an assets inventory, a family functioning scale, and a family resiliency and dynamics scale.

## **Client Sample Characteristics**

The survey provided a rich description of 1,445 participating clients, with some interesting differences when compared to the Canadian population as a whole. The sample included proportionately more individuals from Ontario and the Prairies, while Quebec was under-represented. The client sample was more urban than the general population of Canada, with more younger and middle-aged adults, and twice as many women. The average household size was 2.68 individuals per household. More than one-fourth of the clients in the sample were adults who lived alone on a regular basis at the time of the survey.

Clients were more likely to be divorced or separated than individuals within the general Canadian population. Married couples with children, lone-parent females, and single adult females were more likely to access family service agencies, accounting for nearly two-thirds of all contacts during the study week in May 1997. The ethnicity and immigration data were often incomplete, though the sample appeared to be primarily of Canadian, British, French or of other European heritage. Some 5.7 percent had some Aboriginal heritage and 9.0 percent had other ethnic heritages.

In terms of education, employment, and income, there were some interesting findings in comparing these characteristics with the Canadian population in general. Clients were more likely to be high school graduates and hold university degrees, but less likely to have obtained a post-secondary certificate or diploma. They were less likely to be employed full time and much more likely to be unemployed than the population. Clients' household incomes were well below the Canadian average for family incomes (\$55,247 in 1995), as the average income reported fell within the \$20,000 to \$29,999 income range. One-third of the respondents indicated that they had received social assistance within the last six months and three-fourths of those recipients were women.

Service providers identified a total of 5,909 presenting issues for 1,430 clients, or 4.13 presenting issues per client on average. Three-fourths of the clients presented one or more issues listed under the category of "family relationships and parenting,"

while health and/or disability issues affected 44.7 percent of the sample, and 38.5 percent presented issues related to violence or abuse.

## **Presenting Issues and Services Provided**

The most common presenting issue was that of “couple relationship,” which affected three in eight clients. Other common issues included depression, parent-child problems, parenting issues, problems with social contacts, and separation and divorce. The female clients presented on a range of issues more often than males, including the various family relationships and parenting issues, health and disability, and violence and abuse issues. In contrast, males were more likely to present on issues of substance abuse. Clients who were classified as “poor” on the basis of family income presented on a variety of issues more frequently than their “non-poor” counterparts.

The services rendered were similar regardless of presenting issues, with counselling the most common service. Nearly 90 percent of couples, adults living alone, and “non-poor” families received counselling as a primary service. About two-thirds of those with health or disability problems or basic needs problems received counselling as well. Family life education, family advocacy, and homemaker services were more commonly provided for those families with children in comparison with couples or adults living without children in their homes. Support groups were most often provided for lone parents, followed by couples with children and then adults living alone.

Most of the contacts occurred in agency offices, though younger clients were somewhat more likely to meet outside of the agencies. The dominant payment methods included subsidized (non-EAP), sliding fee scales, free services and Employee Assistance Programs (EAP), which cumulatively accounted for nearly four-fifths of the payments offered by clients.

## **Clients’ Assessments of Assets**

The study results indicated that most clients were indeed connected to a wide variety of assets or resources, including family, friends, and professional services. Clients were asked to identify their personal assets that they had used during the two years prior to the study. The vast majority reported using a combination of resources or relationships to deal with their problems, including friends, counsellors, physicians, relatives, parents, and/or spouses.

In general, friends were the most frequently used assets as 91.6 percent of clients who responded identified that particular resource. Despite the heavy reliance upon family members and other intimates as measured by usage, these were *not* the resources typically deemed most helpful by the clients. In terms of the helpfulness of different assets, the professionals were generally ranked “very helpful” by most who had accessed them in the last two years. A broad range of other supportive

programs and services typically were ranked as “very helpful” by at least half of those who had accessed them, including in-home support workers, non-profits or charities, child or senior care, emergency shelters, preschool programs, and mutual support groups. The only other category to be considered “very helpful” by at least half of the client sample was friends.

While the rankings were similar between men and women, the female clients accessed a broader cross-section of assets and were more likely to rate these as “very helpful.” Men tended to find their spouses more helpful than women. Indeed, for women, spouses were on the 10 least helpful list. Regardless of family type, employment or income status, a clear majority within each group of clients drew upon friends, counsellors, relatives, parents, and doctors as assets within the last two years.

There were differences, however, in terms of which particular assets individuals within each category considered “most helpful.” In general, mental health professionals, non-profit organizations, in-home support workers, child or senior care, emergency shelters, women’s groups, mutual support groups, and 12-step programs were frequently ranked among the top ten “most helpful” assets.

The main sources of support for child care, household tasks, and employment or educational support came from informal sources, such as parents, spouses, relatives, and friends. The clients turned to others more often for emotional support compared to any other issue, which included an extensive array of both informal and formal networks of support.

## **Service Providers’ Knowledge of Client Assets**

The service providers identified a core group of assets that included counsellors, friends, parents, relatives, spouses, and doctors. Beyond these assets, the service providers typically expressed a rather narrow view of other assets that might be available to their clients. Non-profit and charitable organizations and the clients’ children were the only other assets believed to have been accessed by more than one-third of the clients in the past two years. In contrast, more than one-third of the clients themselves identified a total of 28 different assets that they had accessed.

In terms of the relative helpfulness of different relationships and resources, service providers appeared to have an understanding somewhat similar to that of their clients in the aggregate. In total, 9 of the 10 assets identified as “very helpful” by the service providers appeared on the clients’ lists as well. Similar percentages of both groups ranked in-home support, child or senior care, non-profit or charities, mutual support groups, and women’s organizations as “very helpful.” The service providers, however, tended to underestimate the helpfulness of counsellors, emergency shelters, and preschool programs by roughly 10 to 15 percent.

An analysis of each service provider’s views of the helpfulness of each asset of individual clients revealed only modest levels of agreement for most of the assets

considered. The broadest areas of agreement between clients and service providers tended to revolve around several categories of relatives, agencies and government services, with some examples of friends and other professionals, groups, and associations displaying a greater degree of shared understanding. The more specific areas of more widespread agreement between clients and service providers included in-home support workers, 12-step groups, government housing, community charities, child or senior care, emergency shelters, stepchildren, spiritual leaders, lawyers, pets, spouse's or partner's parents, and preschool programs.

## **Family Functioning and Family Dynamics**

The clients completed two additional scales to assess aspects of family functioning and family dynamics in general: General Functioning Subscale of the McMaster Family Assessment Device (Part III: Family Functioning) and an original measure developed by CPRN known as the Family Dynamics and Resiliency Scale. Both of these scales displayed high levels of reliability.

Compared to the general population norms, a much larger percentage of these clients accessing family service agencies for supportive counselling scored in the dysfunctional range. Several demographic variables were then examined to determine whether or not there were specific correlates of family functioning. There were no statistically significant differences identified for many of these factors, including gender, income, social assistance status, and age. On the other hand, three factors were correlated weakly with family functioning: family type, employment status, and education. More specifically, adults who reported living alone, those who were unemployed, and those with lower levels of education tended to score higher on the scale (indicating higher levels of family dysfunction) than the comparison groups.

The Family Dynamics and Resiliency Scale (FDRS) proved to be highly reliable as well, with lower scores indicating a healthier response or "positive coping strategy" in terms of the family's capacity to handle stress. While there were no population data available with which to compare FDRS results, the measure correlated strongly with the Family Assessment Device. Some of the variables were not correlated with the measure of family dynamics and resiliency, including income, social assistance status, and age. Gender was weakly associated with FDRS scores, such that female clients tended to score slightly higher than their male counterparts, indicating a somewhat more negative evaluation of their family dynamics. The more significant differences were associated with family type, labour force status, and education.

In particular, adults living alone scored significantly higher on the FDRS (29.8) than the other three family types identified. Those clients who were unemployed scored more than 2 points higher than clients who were employed and nearly 2 points above those not in the labour force. Finally, a significant difference emerged in comparing those with a high school education or less with those who had a professional or post-graduate degree. To some extent, these various correlates suggest that living with others, being employed or not in the labour force, and more

education are “protective” factors even among those families seeking professional assistance at family service agencies. Indeed, the small number of clients who were living alone, unemployed, and who had a high school education or less were clearly the most vulnerable group, with an FDRS score of 33.6. No other combination of demographic factors produced comparable results.

## **Policy Implications and Future Research**

The final sections of each chapter and the concluding chapter of the study discuss the policy implications of these results primarily from a service planning and delivery perspective. For example, a general conclusion that can be reached involves the distribution of clients who participated in the study and, by extension, who tend to access family service agencies across the country. The evidence points to a preponderance in the study sample of adult female clients, while children, men, seniors, visible minorities, and newcomers were under-represented in comparison with the general Canadian population. One implication suggests that family service agencies with a mandate to service the general population need to engage in more formal outreach activities, especially in the area of community needs assessments, and attempt to be as inclusive as possible in providing access to services.

There are at least three main conclusions that can be drawn from the survey results that pertain to the issue of service planning and delivery in the context of informal support networks. First, the evidence revealed that presenting problems consisted not only of family relationships and parenting issues, but involved a diverse array of other issues pertaining to health and disability, violence and abuse, basic needs, and work or school. Second, most clients indeed had access to or had recently turned to informal support networks consisting of friends, parents, children, family members, even as they cited as well a tendency to use health-related professionals (counsellors, physicians) or institutions (hospitals and clinics) to assist in coping with their problems.

Finally, the importance of certain types of professional supports cannot be underestimated for these individuals and families, many of whom were in acute crisis situations and seeking direct counselling support. Indeed, the evidence suggests widespread support for a variety of professional and quasi-professional assets, including mental health specialists, in-home support workers, non-profit or charitable organizations, child or senior care, emergency shelters, preschool programs, mutual support groups, women’s programs and organizations, and 12-step groups (among others).

These are the resources that the majority of the clients found most helpful – and yet, at the same time, many of the agencies that provide such services have experienced fiscal cutbacks, staff reductions, and other constraints that have reduced their capacity to deliver these services. The steady erosion of public support and funding for specific services has meant that some groups, such as lower-income households, are likely to continue to be at greater risk for negative social and economic outcomes even as the access and availability of supportive community services decline.

Informal support networks were certainly important as the “first line of defense” for most of those included in the client sample. Clients who were lacking in these assets were more isolated and perhaps more at risk than those who had ample supports to turn to in times of need. There may yet continue to be areas wherein family service agencies could help to promote further usage of informal supports or be catalysts in promoting neighbourhood networks of support or self-help groups. In particular, innovative strategies can be pursued by way of hiring more community development workers rather than maintaining a more narrow clinical or one-on-one focus with clients in agency settings.

The evidence appears to suggest that, apart from some basic demographic information evaluations of clients’ assets, service providers need to engage in a more concerted effort to broaden and monitor the effectiveness of different interventions. Counselling remains the dominant intervention provided, regardless of presenting problem. Yet little information exists to suggest that such an intervention yields more positive results than other possible interventions, or that specific problems tend to be addressed more effectively through other types of interventions. Moreover, the current study in no way could assess the long-term impacts of various interventions. These are issues that need to be considered in the context of future research directions in particular.

In conclusion, the study confirms that the vast majority of individuals and families who turn to family service agencies tend to evaluate the services provided by professionals as “very helpful.” Those who access these services clearly express high levels of satisfaction. Furthermore, a growing body of outcomes-based research points to the positive impacts that supportive services can have, particularly in regard to responding to the needs of “at-risk” families, in helping to reduce domestic violence or in providing essential resources to cope with violence, in helping children adapt to and cope effectively with separation and divorce, and for a range of other issues. While the evidence from the study seems to suggest that people tend to draw upon their informal support networks and assets before seeking more formal supports, any further erosion of public supports for family services may increase the risks for a great many families. The low-income families in the current study were especially likely to seek supportive services for a much broader range of problems than their wealthier counterparts. Thus any further reductions in funding or staffing will likely have the most direct negative impact on these families and may further marginalize those groups already struggling the most for social and economic survival in Canadian society.



# Foreword

One of the research themes of the Family Network of Canadian Policy Research Networks since 1995 has been designed to “open up the black box” and explore the transactions that take place inside families – who takes care of whom and in what ways. Suzanne Peters, Director of the Network, set out the foundation of this approach in her working paper *Examining the Concept of Transactions as the Basis for Studying the Social and Economic Dynamics of Families*. Since that time, CPRN has published three papers designed to develop the concept and begin to map the research agenda in a study called *How Families Cope and Why Policymakers Need to Know* by David Cheal, Frances Woolley and Meg Luxton.

The present study surveyed the clients accessing family service agencies across Canada in May 1997. The people interviewed were troubled and seeking help. As a result, we wanted to know what kind of assets or support systems these people might have within their own personal networks of family, work, and professional contacts. What we found was that family members are sometimes very helpful, but they are often the least helpful resources for many of these clients. Indeed, the client is often seeking help because of a troubled relationship in the family. At the same time, professional help across a wide range of public and non-profit sources of supports often make a very substantive contribution to the recovery of a family or an individual in difficulty.

This study is the first empirical analysis of the interaction within the family and with key individuals who are close to that family. It provides the first, preliminary but reliable, portrait of the social, economic and cultural characteristics and family circumstances of people who seek help from family service agencies in Canada. It provides a baseline of information against which to compare future findings, and also offers methodological suggestions about how to gather the information the next time around.

The research was commissioned by Family Service Canada as a means to build a profile of the needs of its clients, and to get a stronger sense of the resources that these clients can use as they begin to address their problems. As such, the executive directors of Family Service Canada and its associated agencies across Canada were

the prime audience for the results. However, the data and the approach will be useful to researchers interested in the internal dynamics of families and in the characteristics of individuals who are having trouble coping with the extraordinary array of social and economic stresses facing families these days.

I want to thank Joseph Michalski for his analysis of the data and the preparation of the report; and express my appreciation to Margaret Fietz and Family Service Canada for yet another productive partnership. Thanks are also due to the executive directors and anonymous reviewers who provided valuable comments on the first draft of the report.

Judith Maxwell  
February 1999

# Acknowledgments

First and foremost, the author wishes to thank the more than 1,400 users of family service agencies who took the time to participate in this study. Many thanks as well to the staff and directors of the more than two dozen agencies who assisted in the field testing, questionnaire development, and data collection. Their contributions were all the more remarkable in the face of increased workloads, staff reductions, and reduced funding.

The generosity of the project's specific funders – the J. W. McConnell Family Foundation and the Employability and Social Partnerships Division of Human Resources Development Canada, through their funding to Family Service Canada – was absolutely vital to the success of the project. Without their support, in combination with the commitment of Family Service Canada, the study simply would not have been possible.

The efforts of two of the original research team members, Mary-Jean Wason and Paul Gross, deserve special recognition. Both of these individuals were highly dedicated to ensuring that the agencies received adequate technical support, to overseeing the data collection process, and to conducting the preliminary analyses.

In addition, Paul Zarnke, Rod Rode, and Cathy Brothers are owed a debt of gratitude for their efforts in reviewing and commenting upon an earlier draft of this report. These individuals and their colleagues, who participated in the National Directors Training Program held in Vancouver earlier this year, have been enormously supportive of the study and have provided many helpful suggestions. Robert Glossop (Vanier Institute of the Family) and Bonita Long (University of British Columbia) provided excellent critiques of an earlier draft as well.

Finally, a number of individuals who provided direction and services to this study deserve special recognition, including Suzanne Peters (Director, Family Network), Margaret Fietz (Chief Executive Officer, Family Service Canada), Thomas E. Lengyel (Director of Research, Family Service America), and the entire project team, whose names appear in Appendix A.



# **The Assets of Canadian Families, 1997**

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Family Service Agencies



# Introduction

## 1.1 A Shift in Perspective

The newspaper headlines routinely trumpet a diverse array of stressors and social problems that affect families and communities across Canada. The issues range from persistently high unemployment, family breakdowns, and rising child poverty rates to domestic violence, substance abuse, and health concerns. The stakeholders affiliated with Family Service Canada (FSC)<sup>1</sup> understand quite well that families are struggling with many of these issues, even though some of their problems are highly personal or idiosyncratic in nature. Other problems can be traced to structural constraints, such as shifts in the definition and availability of jobs, declining purchasing power for middle- and lower-income families, the tensions between work and caregiving responsibilities, and a host of other social and economic pressures impacting upon contemporary Canadian families. Perhaps not surprisingly, separation and divorce rates continue to be relatively high, while substance abuse, unemployment, illiteracy, teenage pregnancies, and family violence continue to be prevalent in Canada as well.

Yet many individuals and families manage to cope successfully with the pressures of modern life, some of whom even thrive despite the most difficult of circumstances. Indeed, the focus in recent years – partially substantiated by anecdotal field evidence – has shifted somewhat in the direction of identifying clients' resources as an aid to effective

intervention. A study by Peters, Wason, and Grasham (1994), for example, provides evidence of the resiliency and innovative strategies adopted by younger families attempting to cope with profound challenges and difficulties (e.g., poverty, insecure employment, lone parenting, and so forth). Rather than evaluate clients solely in terms of their presenting problems or deficits, helping professionals recognize that those who seek support and advice have a great many "assets" or "strengths" that might serve as the building blocks for solutions to the problems at hand.

## 1.2 Emergence of the Strengths Perspective

The traditional focus of social service providers and social work practitioners in particular has emphasized the helping relationship between the social worker and the client. Indeed, human service professionals in general were presumed to have knowledge, skills, and access to key resources (empathy, money, therapy, practical supports, etc.) that they could transfer to the client. The model emphasized the client's "presenting problems," or the deficits that needed to be attended to in order to help individuals and families cope more effectively. In the extreme, Barnard (1994, p. 136) argues that "we are encouraged to perceive everyone we come in contact with as having some disorder, or if not in clear evidence, as having some sophisticated way

of disguising their various deficits.” Indeed, the “damage model” suggests that helping professionals may be overly attentive to deficits at the expense of identifying individual and family strengths (cf. Wolin, 1991). An approach that focuses only on deficits and pathology rather than strengths, assets, and factors associated with resiliency distorts or at least limits the opportunities for productive interventions.

Consequently, many social work practitioners have been interested for some time in starting from a “strengths” perspective or an “assets” approach to intervention. Saleebey (1996), for example, suggests that a strengths perspective emphasizes a different approach to working with individuals, families, and communities. In particular, the perspective focuses on capacities, talents, possibilities, visions, and hopes that prevail despite the fact that these might be distorted as a result of unusual circumstances. The perspective acknowledges that everyone has strengths and adaptive skills that can serve as vital resources necessary to transform or improve one’s circumstances (Schlesinger, 1998).

Thus the basic dilemma of how to intervene with troubled clients and their families can be reframed accordingly: How are families coping with the various challenges and stressors of daily living? Why are some coping more successfully than others? What are the types of resources to which some individuals and families have access that enhance their capacity to cope? What strengths and assets do they possess? All else equal, are some individuals and families more resilient than others? What can be done to enhance the resiliency of specific individuals and groups? These are the types of questions that increasingly inform current research on family adaptation and the development of effective coping strategies (cf. Drummond et al., in press; Mangham et al., 1997; and Palmer, 1997).

### **1.3 Needs Statement**

The 80 principal member agencies of Family Service Canada have extensive first-hand experience

with individuals and families who are struggling with a wide range of issues. These agencies provide diverse services and programs to thousands of clients and their families on a weekly basis. Much of their core servicing includes individual, couple, family, and group counselling for clients of varying ages and ethnocultural backgrounds. Other services include family life education, employee assistance programs, stress management, domestic abuse prevention, and, in some instances, child protection. By the same token, no systematic information about the nature of the clients, their assets, strengths, family functioning, and resiliency exists that might inform planning and delivery of family services. Moreover, Family Service Canada currently does not have any routine method of gathering such information to create a national portrait.

Hence the current project has been designed to collect data from individuals and families currently receiving services from family service agencies across Canada. The project partially parallels one undertaken by Family Service America during the spring of 1997, as researchers involved with both studies collaborated to develop the Demographic Instrument and two Assets Inventory questionnaires.<sup>2</sup> The studies parted company, though, in that only Family Service Canada’s member agencies used two other instruments: the General Functioning Subscale (GFS) of the Family Assessment Device (Part III: Family Functioning) and the Family Dynamics and Resiliency Scale.

### **1.4 Study Objectives**

Family Service Canada, with the research assistance of the Canadian Policy Research Networks (CPRN), conducted a snapshot study of clients accessing the services of family service agencies during one week in May 1997. The broad purpose of the study was to develop a profile of clients accessing family service agencies, including insights into their family functioning and assets or resources that might be relevant in the context of planning interventions. Furthermore, the results were intended to assist the umbrella organization

to support agencies in the network, particularly through policy work with the various levels of government. Thus the current research study was designed to meet four main objectives:

1. To provide a snapshot of the demographic characteristics of clients who receive services from family agencies across Canada;
2. To provide new information about the assets that clients draw upon for support, their family functioning, and their resiliency;
3. To provide a baseline for future surveys; and
4. To encourage agencies to focus on clients' *family strengths* and the assets of family, friends, and the community.

To help achieve these objectives, the study investigators requested the help of Family Service Canada's network of member agencies that provide direct services to clients. A total of 25 agencies actively participated by administering questionnaires to their clients during the week of May 12-17, 1997. The agencies administered five instruments, two of which were completed by the service provider. The clients themselves completed the other three instruments, which were available in English, French, and Spanish. A summary of the study instruments appears in Table 1. The details of the methodology employed in the study are explained in Appendix B.

## 1.5 Organization of the Study

The study is organized into several chapters based upon the results obtained from these various instruments. The second chapter presents a summary profile of clients who participated in the survey during May 1997. Chapter 3 examines clients' presenting issues and the services provided by the participating family service agencies. Chapter 4 summarizes the results of the Assets Inventory as completed by the clients themselves, including a series of analyses based on gender, family type,

employment status, and family income. The chapter also includes a discussion of the most important resources that the clients drew upon in the previous six months for various types of support (e.g., emotional, financial, child care, etc.). Chapter 5 presents service providers' views of their clients' assets, as

**Table 1**  
**Summary of Survey Instruments and Study Materials**

*Survey Instruments*

Part I:	Demographic Instrument Completed by Direct Service Provider English Based on Family Service America 1990 instrument, with modifications
Part II-A:	Assets Inventory Completed by Direct Service Provider English Based on Family Service America 1997 instrument, with modifications
Part II-B:	Assets Inventory Completed by Client English, French and Spanish
Part III:	Family Functioning Completed by Client English, French and Spanish Adapted from National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, Human Resources Development Canada and Statistics Canada
Part IV:	Family Dynamics and Resiliency Completed by Client English, French and Spanish Developed by Mary-Jean (M-J) Wason, Canadian Policy Research Networks

*Additional Study Materials*

Reference Guide  
For Direct Service Provider  
English

Introductory Letter  
For Client  
English, French, and Spanish

well as a comparison of the level of agreement between service providers and clients in terms of their assessments of assets. The next chapter examines the results of two additional measures of family functioning and dynamics: the General Functioning Subscale of the Family Assessment Device and the Family Dynamics and Resiliency Scale. The final chapter considers the more general policy implications of the current study and highlights possible directions for future research.

In addition, the report contains several appendices. The first, Appendix A, identifies the project team members. Appendix B provides the details of the methodology employed in the study, even though various methodological points are emphasized in the main body of the report as well. Appendix C presents information on the list of participating agencies in the study. Finally, Appendix D contains a copy of each of the instruments used in the study.

## Characteristics of Clients Surveyed

### *Highlights...*

- ◆ Of the 1,445 client participants in the study, the majority were living in Ontario and the Prairies, while Quebec was under-represented in the sample.
- ◆ There were more than twice as many female clients compared to male clients, with the average age of all clients just under 34; children and seniors were under-represented in comparison with their proportions in the general population.
- ◆ While 3 in 10 clients were legally married, almost as many had never been married and a slightly smaller percentage was either divorced or separated.
- ◆ Family structures were highly variable, although the majority of adults lived in one of three basic situations: non-widowed adult living alone, lone-parent family, or married couple with children. The average household size was 2.68.
- ◆ The ethnicity and immigration data were often incomplete, though the sample appeared to be primarily of Canadian, British, French or of other European heritage; fewer than 3 percent of the clients in the sample were “newcomers” to Canada.
- ◆ More than one-fourth of the clients had not completed high school, 28.8 percent had high school diplomas, 34.2 percent had at least some college or a degree, and 9.3 percent had a professional or post-graduate degree.
- ◆ Slightly more than half were working full- or part-time, while 14.2 percent identified themselves as unemployed and the remaining third were not in the paid labour force (i.e., they were retired, students or homemakers).
- ◆ The clients tended to be “poorer” than most Canadians, with total family incomes hovering near or below the \$20,000 - \$29,999 range. One-third had received social assistance within the past six months.

The current chapter summarizes the background characteristics of the clients who participated in the study. The results describe the information obtained from the “Demographic Instrument,” which was completed by the direct service providers. These data are then compared with those of the general Canadian population wherever possible. In reviewing the results, one should bear in mind that the sample consisted mainly of individuals and families who came to family service agencies in search of direct services from professionals. Family service agencies often provide a range of other services and engage in different types of activities not captured in the current methodology. Furthermore, family agencies differ in terms of their mission statements and their target populations.

Hence the current survey information reflects primarily data gathered from a certain segment of the population accessing direct services within a particular context (i.e., walk-in or appointments at specified agency locations) rather than the full range of clientele and services that may be available from different agencies scattered among different communities across Canada. The summary of the demographic information has been organized as follows: geographic distribution of clients (regional representation and area of residence); age, gender, and marital status; family size and structure; ethnicity and immigration status; educational attainment; employment status; occupational categories; household income; and social assistance information. As with each subsequent chapter, a

concluding section discusses the policy implications of the main findings presented.

## 2.1 Geographic Distribution

In total, participating agencies returned 1,445 surveys from five of six regions in Canada: Atlantic, Quebec, Ontario, Prairies, British Columbia (no agencies from the Northwest Territories and the Yukon participated in the study). As indicated in Table 2, the sample contained an over-representation of individuals from the Prairies compared to the Canadian population, i.e., more than twice as many (cf. Statistics Canada, 1998). The province of Ontario contributed more clients than any other region (45.8 percent), exceeding their proportion of the general Canadian population by roughly 8 percent. Both the Atlantic region and British Columbia were marginally under-represented in the sample, while Quebec (with 1 percent of the sample) was severely under-represented in comparison with national figures. The latter figure can partly be explained by the fact that there are no full family service member agencies in Quebec.

Indeed, perhaps the most meaningful way to judge the representativeness of the sample would be to have an accurate indication of family service agencies providing direct services and their target

populations within each region. Such information, however, does not exist. The absence of these types of population parameters partly served as the rationale for conducting the national survey, i.e., to establish baseline data on family service agency clients for future comparisons.

Of the 1,445 surveys that were returned, almost all had completed the first instrument on client demographics (99 percent), while the completion rates for the other four instruments were lower. The Assets Inventories were completed by four-fifths of the service providers and clients. The two instruments assessing family functioning and family resiliency were filled out by roughly three-fourths of the clients surveyed. Hence the subsequent analyses are affected somewhat by missing or incomplete information. The data presented in the current chapter, however, were largely unaffected since the vast majority of the 1,445 cases were analyzed for most variables. The actual figures associated with each analysis are presented within the tables.

Within the aforementioned regions, the majority of the clients (75.8 percent) in the sample were city dwellers, as indicated in Table 3. Another 13.5 percent lived in the suburbs, while the remaining 10.7 percent lived in a town, village, rural area, farm, or Indian reserve at the time of the survey. These results indicate that the sample of clients served by FSC agencies was more urban than the

**Table 2**  
**Regional Representation**

Region	Canada's population, 1996		Client sample	
	(Number)	(Percent)	(Number)	(Percent)
Atlantic	2,333,760	8.1	92	6.4
Quebec	7,138,795	24.8	14	1.0
Ontario	10,753,575	37.4	662	45.8
Prairies	4,800,965	16.7	570	39.5
British Columbia	3,724,500	13.0	107	7.4
Total	28,751,595	100.0	1,445	100.0

**Table 3****Area of Residence**

Residential area	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
City/urban core	1,070	74.0	75.8	75.8
Suburb	190	13.1	13.5	89.3
Town/village	91	6.3	6.4	95.7
Rural/farm	54	3.7	3.8	99.5
Indian reserve	6	0.4	0.4	99.9
Other	1	0.1	0.1	100.0
Missing	33	2.4		
Total	1,445	100.0	100.0	

general population of Canada. For example, some 89.3 percent of the clients lived in the city or suburbs, compared to 76.6 percent of Canadians as a whole (Statistics Canada, 1998).

## 2.2 Age and Gender

Clients in the sample ranged from 2 to 82 years of age. The “mean” or average age was 33.7, while the median was 34.0. The clear majority of clients fell within the 15-49 age range (84.2 percent). Only 9.2 percent of the clients surveyed were 50 years of age or older, including a mere 1.8 percent who were over the age of 60. Furthermore, only 6.0 percent of the clients were under 15 years of age. A comparison with the general Canadian population indicates that the client sample contained a proportionately larger percentage of clients between the ages of 25-44, or 62.9 versus 32.4 percent (Statistics Canada, 1998). Stated differently, the sample of individuals accessing family service agencies had a much *smaller* percentage of children (4.1 versus 20.5 percent) and older adults (1.2 versus 12.2 percent) than the Canadian population as a whole. The sample included more than twice as many women as men, or 68.5 versus 31.5 percent. The mean and median ages for males and females were similar, with females slightly older on average: females were just over 34 years of age, compared to just under

33 years for males. The numbers of males and females in the “14 and under” and “65 and over” age groups were relatively similar (see Chart 1).

## 2.3 Marital Status

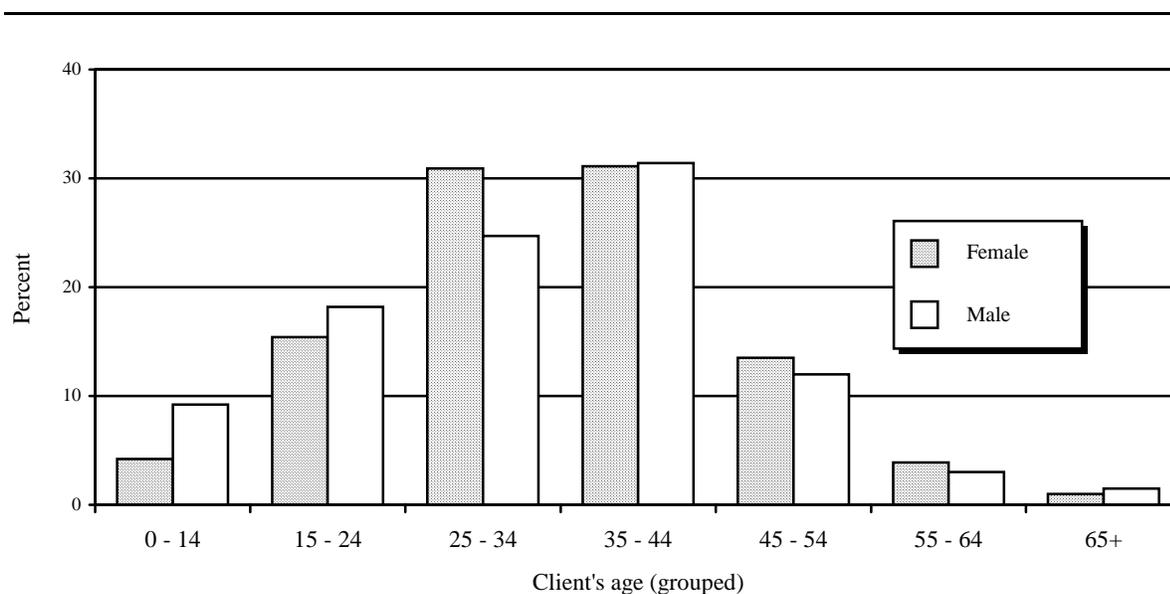
Some two-fifths of the clients aged 15 and over were either married (30.9 percent) or had a live-in partner (9.4 percent) at the time of the survey, while 3 in 10 had “never been married.” In 1996, some 59.1 percent of the Canadian population were married or in common-law relationships (Statistics Canada, 1998). Moreover, clients in the sample were more likely to be divorced (11.3 versus 5.1 percent) or separated (16.7 versus 2.6 percent), and less likely to be widowed (1.7 versus 6.2 percent) in comparison with the general Canadian population. A more detailed description of marital status among those clients in the sample aged 15 and older appears in Table 4.

## 2.4 Family Size and Structure

The average household size was 2.68 individuals per household, which parallels that of the general population (Statistics Canada, 1998). More than one-fourth of the clients in the sample (27.3 percent) were adults who lived alone on a regular basis at the time

**Chart 1**

**Client Age by Gender**



**Table 4**

**Marital Status, Clients Aged 15 and Over**

Marital status	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Legally married, not separated	413	28.6	30.9	30.9
Separated, still legally married	224	15.5	16.7	47.6
Divorced	151	10.4	11.3	58.9
Widowed	23	1.6	1.7	60.6
Never married	401	27.8	30.0	90.6
Common law	126	10.7	9.4	100.0
Don't know	26	1.8		
Missing/not applicable	81	5.6		
Total	1,445	100.0	100.0	

of the survey (compared to 24.2 percent in Canada as a whole). Slightly more than one-fifth (20.9 percent) of the sample lived in households consisting of two individuals (e.g., with a spouse or partner, a sibling, one child, roommate, etc.), while the remainder lived in households with three or more individuals.

In terms of family types, these could be broken down in a variety of different ways. The strategy employed here involved differentiating among the following 10 categories: non-widowed adults living alone, children listed alone (family situation unknown), lone parents with children, married couples

with and without children, common-law couples with and without children, widows, other more complex family types with children, siblings living together, extended family configurations without children, and adults living together as roommates. A detailed summary of family types found within the sample appears in Table 5.

Table 5 indicates the prevalence of the three most common family types in the sample: single (non-widowed) adults who were living alone (26.9 percent), married couples with children (25.8 percent), and lone-parent families with children (24.3 percent). The proportion of lone-parent families in particular far exceeded the figures for the general Canadian population (Statistics Canada, 1998). More specifically, lone-parent *females*, single adult *females*, and married couples with children were the most prevalent groups accessing family service agencies, registering nearly two-thirds of

all contacts during the study week in May 1997. Table 5 further reflects some of the diversity that exists in family and household structures, such as the importance of common-law arrangements, extended family configurations, sibling households, and unrelated roommates. These accounted for 13.3 percent of all households in the sample.

The data were then reconfigured further to establish four basic family types, which have been incorporated into several of the subsequent analyses and which may have additional implications for service planning and delivery: 1) adults living alone ( $n = 379$ ); 2) lone-parent families ( $n = 338$ ); 3) married or common-law couples with children ( $n = 428$ ); and 4) married or common-law couples without children ( $n = 151$ ). These basic family types excluded household situations wherein extended family and/or other unrelated individuals were present, but nevertheless captured 93.3 percent of all families included in the client sample.

**Table 5**  
**Family Structure<sup>1</sup>**

Family structure	Percent (n)	Family structure	Percent (n)
<b><i>Non-widowed adults, living alone</i></b>	26.9 (373)	<b><i>Other families with children</i></b>	3.0 (42)
Adult male	8.1 (112)	Married, children and parents	0.2 (3)
Adult female	18.1 (252)	Married, children/grandchildren	0.6 (8)
Gender unknown	0.6 (9)	Single, children/grandchildren	0.6 (9)
<b><i>Children listed alone</i></b>	1.8 (25)	Single, children and roommate	0.1 (2)
<b><i>Lone-parent families</i></b>	24.3 (338)	Single, children and other family	0.7 (10)
Lone-parent male	2.2 (30)	Foster parents with children	0.5 (7)
Lone-parent female	21.3 (296)	Same sex couple with children	0.2 (3)
Lone-parent – gender unknown	0.9 (12)	<b><i>Single with siblings (no children)</i></b>	0.6 (8)
<b><i>Married (no parents present)</i></b>	33.3 (462)	Siblings	0.4 (5)
Married without children	7.2 (100)	Siblings with extended family	0.1 (2)
Married with children	25.8 (358)	Siblings with roommates	0.1 (1)
Grandparents with grandchildren	0.3 (4)	<b><i>Extended family (no children)</i></b>	0.7 (10)
<b><i>Common-law (no parents present)</i></b>	8.5 (118)	Single and extended family	0.4 (5)
Common-law couple, no children	3.7 (51)	Married and extended family	0.1 (2)
Common-law couple with children	4.8 (66)	Common-law and extended family	0.2 (3)
Same sex couple	0.1 (1)	<b><i>Single adult with roommate</i></b>	0.5 (7)
<b><i>Widowed without children</i></b>	0.4 (6)	<b>Total</b>	1,389

1 Bold-faced, italicized categories are the main categories for family structures that could be determined.

## 2.5 Ethnicity and Immigration Status

Service providers were allowed to identify as many ethnic heritages for their clients as they wished. The clients typically were not consulted on the matter, which means that the data reflect primarily the service providers' knowledge of their clients' ethnic heritage. Most of the service providers (96.2 percent) identified one or two "ethnic or cultural groups to which this person's ancestors belonged." These are summarized in Table 6.

Two-thirds of the clients were identified as having Canadian heritage. Some 44.7 percent had some British, French, or other European heritage. The service providers identified 5.7 percent of the clients as having an Aboriginal heritage. Only 9.0 percent of the clients in the sample were identified as having ethnic heritages other than the above, compared to 14.9 percent in Canada (Statistics Canada, 1998). A high percentage of surveys, how-

ever, contained no immigration information. The proportionately fewer non-European or visible minorities in the client sample raises important questions about outreach and access to family services – issues that receive further attention at the end of the current chapter.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, 3.0 percent of the sample could be characterized as "newcomers," i.e., as having lived in Canada for less than five years at the time of the survey, which appears to be roughly consistent with recent immigration figures (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 1998; Michalski and George, 1996).

## 2.6 Educational Attainment

Among those aged 15 and older in the client sample, slightly more than one-fourth (26.8 percent) had less than a high school diploma, while another 28.8 percent had earned a high school diploma or equivalence as their highest level of

**Table 6**

**Ethnicity (n = 1,407)**

Ethnic heritage	Total count	Percent of responses	Percent of clients
Canadian	963	51.7	66.6
English, Irish, Scottish, Welsh	290	15.6	20.1
Other European	231	12.4	16.0
French	126	6.8	8.7
Aboriginal peoples	81	4.4	5.7
Don't know, n/a	42	2.3	2.9
Other	46	2.5	3.2
Chinese	15	0.8	1.0
West Indian	15	0.8	1.0
South Asian	12	0.6	0.8
Filipino	12	0.6	0.8
Latin-American	11	0.6	0.8
African	8	0.4	0.8
Arab, West Asian, North African	5	0.3	0.3
Japanese	3	0.2	0.2
Korean	2	0.1	0.1
Total	1,862	100.0	128.9

educational attainment (see Table 7). Some 44.4 percent of the clients had *more* than a high school education, with 10.3 percent holding university degrees, 5.8 percent with professional certification above the bachelor level, and 3.6 percent with post-graduate studies. These data indicate that the clients in the sample aged 15 and older were more likely to be high school graduates and hold university degrees or professional certifications than the comparable population in Canada (Statistics Canada, 1998).

Among adult clients in the sample (defined as aged 18 and older), the highest levels of education achieved for both men and women were virtually identical: approximately 80 percent of adults of both genders had graduated from high school, while roughly 26 percent reported attending some university or achieving an even higher level of educational attainment.

## 2.7 Employment Status

Half of the clients in the sample were working either full-time (37.2 percent) or part-time (12.9 percent) at the time of the survey (see Table 8). A significant proportion was unemployed, exceeding that of the general population in Canada.

Fifty percent of the males in the client sample were working full-time as compared with only 31.2 percent of the females. The percentage of females working part-time (15.4 percent) was more than twice that of males working part-time (6.8 percent). Some 15.6 percent of males were unemployed compared to 13.7 percent of the females. Finally, 17.6 percent of the females were identified as “homemakers,” whereas only 1.0 percent of the males held that status.

The data in Table 9 further reveal that those clients aged 15 and older were less likely to be employed full-time in comparison with the entire Canadian population in 1997 (38.6 versus 47.7 percent) and more than twice as likely to be unemployed (14.9 versus 5.9 percent). Subtracting those not in the labour force, the unemployment rate for the sample was 22.2 percent, compared to the national rate of 9.2 percent in 1997 (Statistics Canada, 1998).

The evidence further suggests that employment status varied to some extent by family type, as more than 60 percent of those aged 15 and older who reported living in married or common-law relationships – with or without children – were working full- or part-time. A slightly smaller number of adults living alone (57.7 percent) were employed

**Table 7**

**Highest Education Levels among Clients, Age 15 and Older, in Comparison with the Canadian Population**

Educational level	Client sample	Valid sample	Canadian population
	(Frequency)	(Percent)	
Less than high school	302	26.8	36.6
High school graduate/equivalent	324	28.8	22.9
Non-university diploma	193	17.1	17.6
Some university	86	7.6	9.7
Bachelor's degree	116	10.3	8.7
Professional certification	65	5.8	1.4
Post-graduate studies	40	3.6	3.1
Don't know	93		
Missing	22		
Total	1,241	100.0	100.0

**Table 8****Employment Status of All Clients Surveyed**

Employment status	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Full-time (30 hours+/week)	517	35.8	37.2	37.2
Part-time	180	12.5	12.9	50.1
Unemployed	198	13.7	14.2	64.4
Retired	30	2.1	2.2	66.5
Homemaker	172	11.9	12.4	78.9
Student	214	14.8	15.4	94.3
Other	79	5.5	5.7	100.0
Missing	55	3.9		
Total	1,445	100.0	100.0	

**Table 9****1997 Comparison of Employment Status between Canadian Population and Client Sample, Aged 15 and Older**

Employment status	Canadian population		Client sample	
	(Number)	(Percent)	(Number)	(Percent)
Employed full-time	11,291,300	47.7	468	38.6
Employed part-time	2,649,300	11.2	168	13.9
Unemployed	1,413,500	5.9	181	14.9
Not in labour force	8,332,500	35.2	395	32.6
Total population, 15+	23,686,600	100.0	1,212	100.0

at the time of the survey, while 42.9 percent of those who identified themselves as lone parents were in the paid labour force. One in five clients in these latter two family configurations were unemployed, which represented almost twice the proportion as those living in couples' households.

## 2.8 Occupational Categories

As presented in Table 10, the most common occupational categories were "executive, managerial, and other professional" (20.8 percent), "homemaker"

(16.6 percent), and "student" (17.0 percent). Other common categories were those employed in service occupations (12.1 percent) and those involved in clerical-related work (10.6 percent).

The males in the sample were more likely than the females to be working in primary occupations (3.5 versus 0.1 percent), processing, machining and fabricating (10.2 versus 1.8 percent), construction trades (8.8 versus 0.7 percent), transport equipment operating (3.7 versus 0.9 percent), and material handling (2.4 versus 0.7 percent). A much larger percentage of women were either homemakers

**Table 10****Occupational Categories**

Occupational category	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Executive, managerial, professional	271	18.8	20.8	20.8
Clerical	139	9.6	10.6	31.4
Sales	74	5.1	5.7	37.1
Service (e.g., cleaning, food services)	158	10.9	12.1	49.2
Primary occupations (e.g., farming)	15	1.0	1.1	50.3
Processing, machining, fabricating	55	3.8	4.2	54.5
Construction trades	40	2.8	3.1	57.6
Transport equipment operating	27	1.9	2.1	59.6
Material handling and other crafts	16	1.1	1.2	60.9
Homemaker	217	15.0	16.6	77.5
Student	222	15.4	17.0	94.5
Other	72	5.0	5.5	100.0
Don't know	67	4.6		
Missing	72	5.0		
Total	1,445	100.0	100.0	

(23.6 percent) or employed in clerical positions (13.9 percent) in comparison with the men in the sample (with figures of 1.3 and 2.6 percent, respectively).

Although the categories employed in the present analysis are not entirely comparable, a cursory review of data for Canada as a whole (Statistics Canada, 1998) indicated that the client sample had more individuals in the service category and less in the primary occupations; in processing, machining, and fabricating; and in material handling and other crafts categories.

## 2.9 Household Income and Social Assistance

As shown in Table 11, more than half of the clients (56.5 percent) reported an annual “total family income” (before taxes) of less than \$30,000. As might be expected, couples with children had

the highest median family income (in the \$40,000 - \$59,999 category), while couples without children had the second highest median income (between \$30,000 - \$39,999).

Moreover, there were gender differences in total family income. Almost half of the females in the full sample (47.5 percent) were living in households with an annual total family income of less than \$20,000 as compared with exactly one-third of the males. Some two-fifths of the males lived in households with total family incomes of at least \$40,000 compared to barely one-fourth (26.0 percent) of the females. Part of the gender gap can be accounted for by the fact that females in the sample were much more likely than males to be raising children in lone-parent households (30.8 versus 13.5 percent).

The median income for all families (excluding unattached individuals) fell well below the Canadian median for economic family incomes, which was

**Table 11****Household Income**

Income category	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Less than \$10,000	241	16.7	17.6	17.6
\$10,000 - \$19,999	350	24.2	25.6	43.3
\$20,000 - \$29,999	181	12.5	13.3	56.5
\$30,000 - \$39,999	184	12.7	13.5	70.0
\$40,000 - \$59,999	229	15.8	16.8	86.7
\$60,000 and above	181	12.5	13.3	100.0
Missing	79	5.5		
Total	1,445	100.0	100.0	

**Table 12****Median Income Category by Simplified Family Structure**

Income	Adult living alone	Single parents	Couple with children	Couple without children
	(Percent/number)			
Less than \$10,000	27.6 (97)	22.4 (74)	5.3 (22)	13.5 (20)
\$10,000 - \$19,999	27.8 (98)	43.9 (145)	12.2 (51)	16.2 (24)
\$20,000 - \$29,999	11.4 (40)	14.2 (47)	12.5 (52)	14.9 (22)
\$30,000 - \$39,999	11.9 (42)	9.7 (32)	17.5 (73)	13.5 (20)
\$40,000 - \$59,999	12.8 (45)	7.0 (23)	25.9 (108)	27.0 (40)
\$60,000 and more	8.5 (30)	2.7 (9)	26.6 (111)	14.9 (22)
Total	100.0 (352)	100.0 (330)	100.0 (417)	100.0 (148)

\$46,951 in 1995 (Statistics Canada, 1998). The median income for unattached individuals in the sample fell within the range of \$10,000 to \$19,999, also below the 1996 Canadian average for unattached individuals of \$24,535. These results verify that clients served by participating FSC agencies were much poorer, on average, than the population as a whole. The most compelling fact, though, was that almost two-thirds (66.3 percent) of lone-parent households had total family incomes of less than \$20,000 (compared to the Canadian average for these families of \$27,138 in 1996), as

described in Table 12. In contrast, only 17.5 percent of couples with children had comparably low family incomes.

As further evidence of their financial struggles, slightly more than one-third (34.3 percent) of the adults in the client sample (aged 18 and older) indicated that they had received social assistance within the last six months. This greatly exceeded the approximately 11.0 percent of all Canadians that received social assistance during the year, as well as the 17.9 percent of Canadian families classified

as “low income.” A larger percentage of female clients (37.6 percent) had received social assistance than male clients (26.8 percent).

## 2.10 Policy Considerations

The results indicated that the clients surveyed were more often “white” women or of European descent, between the ages of 21-50, most of whom were mothers of at least one child regardless of their current marital status. The proportion of children identified as clients was rather low, which may be an indication that children are accessing other informal supports or systems (such as schools) to deal with their problems. Nor were gays and lesbians prominent among the clients included in the sample (with only one same sex couple identified). The questions of how and to what extent family service agencies can be more successful in attracting men, visible minorities, the elderly, and gays and lesbians deserve some additional consideration.

There was some apparent regional bias in the client sample, as well as some bias in the selection process through which clients ultimately were asked to participate in the study. For example, the participating agencies may not have been fully representative of agencies providing direct services that were affiliated with Family Service Canada. Some agencies that serve a preponderance of visible minorities did not participate in the research, such as the Family Services Association of Greater Vancouver and Catholic Family Services of Calgary. Both of these agencies serve many ethnocultural populations and have pamphlets published in many different languages. In Ontario, services for new immigrants and refugees generally have *not* been delivered through family service agencies, but rather for the most part through ethno-specific (or immigrant-specific) agencies funded by the federal government. Under these circumstances, the fact that visible minorities and newcomers to Canada were not included as widely in the study should not be surprising.

Some agencies, however, have recognized the limitations of serving only those that “knock on

their doors” and have revised their mandates accordingly. The Family Service Association of Metropolitan Toronto, for example, views equity of access as a social justice issue and thus has a policy mandate to provide services to everyone in the population, regardless of their linguistic or cultural background. From such a perspective, the agency has attempted to broaden the cultural diversity and sensitivity of staff in an effort to be more proactive in recognizing and facilitating alternative interventions to mainstream counselling. Hence there are agencies, particularly in larger metropolitan areas, that may already be more responsive to such issues.

There are additional lessons to be learned with respect to the demographic profile of those individuals and families that are more likely to access family service agencies. Many of the clients in the current study were living alone or were separated or divorced. The vast majority were women and many were single mothers. The proportions of clients who were unemployed or who had received social assistance in recent months were significantly higher than in the general Canadian population, which may be reflected in greater levels of financial hardship. These may be chronic demographic considerations with which agencies are well acquainted.

A core policy (and program development) question that must be considered is agency outreach. There are clear variations across agencies in terms of their mission statements and the client bases to whom their resources are targeted. Often these issues are resolved locally between agencies and their funders and customers. Nevertheless, a legitimate question can be posed as follows: To what extent are family service agencies making their services available and accessible to certain subgroups within their mandated populations, such as services in rural areas or for new immigrants, refugees, or visible minorities? These are key concerns from an agency outreach perspective, although no information was gathered that would speak directly to the matter of community outreach.

Future research should examine not only the demographic profile of who accesses family service

agencies, but the extent to which agencies are in fact meeting their objectives with respect to reaching their target populations. For example, if visible minorities, newcomers, and refugees are indeed less likely to access mainstream family service agencies, then information on the presence of ethno-specific agencies in different communities should be considered for purposes of service planning,

coordination, and delivery. As a final consideration, agencies tend to set priorities for subsidized services based on those groups most in need and for services not available through other social services in the community. Consequently, there need to be mechanisms in place that ensure a more systematic monitoring of the changing demographic profiles and needs of communities across the provinces.

## Clients' Presenting Issues and Services Provided

### *Highlights...*

- ◆ Service providers identified a total of 5,909 presenting issues for 1,430 clients, or 4.13 presenting issues per client on average.
- ◆ Three-fourths of the clients presented one or more issues listed under the category of “family relationships and parenting,” while health and/or disability issues affected 44.7 percent of the sample, and 38.5 percent presented issues related to violence or abuse.
- ◆ The most common presenting issue was that of “couple relationship,” which affected 37.4 percent of the full sample. Other common issues included depression, parent-child problems, parenting issues, problems with social contacts, and separation and divorce.
- ◆ The female clients presented on a range of issues more often than males, including the various family relationships and parenting issues, health and disability, and violence and abuse issues, while males were more likely to present on issues of substance abuse. Clients who were classified as “poor” on the basis of family income presented on a variety of issues more frequently than their “non-poor” counterparts.
- ◆ The services rendered were similar regardless of presenting issues, with counselling the most common service, especially among couples (90.1 percent) and adults living alone (86.5 percent), as well as among the non-poor families (85.1 percent) compared to the poorer families (70.8 percent).
- ◆ Most of the contacts occurred in agency offices, though younger clients were somewhat more likely to meet outside of the agencies.
- ◆ The dominant payment methods included subsidized (non-EAP), sliding fee scales, free services and Employee Assistance Programs, which cumulatively accounted for nearly four-fifths of the payments offered by clients.

This chapter summarizes the remaining sections of the first instrument that the service providers completed, including information on clients' presenting issues and the services that the agencies provided for their clients. One section offered service providers a menu of 33 choices (32 plus “all others”) for identifying their clients' “presenting issues” under eight different subsections. Another section identified a range of 29 different services (28 plus “all others”) that the agencies may or may not have provided on behalf of their clients. From both of these menus, the service providers were instructed to check off as many of the issues and services that applied for each client's situation. Finally, the services providers indicated the payment methods their clients used for the services rendered.

### 3.1 Client Presenting Issues

In addition to the demographic profile, service providers were asked to identify the full range of presenting issues and then indicate which one was the most important, since a client might come to the agency seeking assistance for more than one issue. The presenting issues were divided into the following categories: 1) family relationships and parenting; 2) health and disability; 3) material, financial and legal; 4) social problems; 5) substance abuse; 6) violence and abuse; 7) work and school; and 8) all others.

The results indicated that for 1,430 completed surveys,<sup>4</sup> service providers identified a total of 5,909 presenting issues, or 4.13 issues per client. The median or mid-point in the distribution was three presenting issues. Most service providers (72.4 percent) identified anywhere from one to five presenting issues, though a small number (6.5 percent) checked off at least 10 or more issues. The complete breakdown of presenting issues by categories appears in Table 13.

Presenting issues concerning “family relationships and parenting” were easily the most common, accounting for more than one-third of all issues presented. Other rather prominent categories were health and disability issues (15.2 percent), violence and abuse (13.9 percent), and material, financial, and legal issues (11.7 percent). These groups of presenting issues were followed by work and school problems (9.0 percent), social problems (8.3 percent), substance abuse issues (3.5 percent), and a range of “other” problems that included such issues as bereavement, self-esteem issues or anger management (2.9 percent).

Perhaps even more significant, three-fourths of *all* clients in the sample presented one or more of the issues listed under the category of family relationships and parenting. As well, at least one health and/or disability issue affected 44.7 percent of the sample directly. Another 38.5 percent of the clients had presenting issues related to violence and abuse, 34.1 percent mentioned school or work-related problems, and 31.4 percent of the clients had an issue relating to material, financial and legal difficulties.

The “most important” of the issues presented typically were identified under the “family relationships and parenting,” “health and disability,” and “violence and abuse” categories.<sup>5</sup> In examining the specific issues, those that were frequently identified as the “most important” by those who offered a selection were the following: couple relationship (104 cases), parenting or child-rearing problems (90 cases), depression (71 cases), separation and divorce (48 cases), sexual abuse (42 cases), and domestic violence (39 cases).

The single most frequent presenting issue was that of “couple relationship,” which was identified in 535 cases (37.4 percent of the full client sample). Several other issues affected nearly one-fourth of the clients or more, including depression (30.2 percent), parent-child problems (24.5 percent), parenting issues (23.4 percent), problems in social contacts (23.1 percent), and separation and divorce (23.0 percent). Some of the other frequently identified issues were abuse/violence in general (17.2 percent), inadequate income for basic needs (16.1 percent), domestic violence (15.9 percent), physical health problems (14.4 percent), lone-parenting issues (14.0 percent), sexual abuse (13.1 percent), unemployment (12.7 percent), and school-related problems (12.7 percent).

In general, then, the clients as a whole tended to access family service agencies to deal with problems related to family relationships, parenting issues, depression, abusive or violent relationships, and problems in their social contacts. A significant proportion presented a range of other issues as well, however, including problems related to securing basic needs (inadequate income, housing problems, unemployment), physical health problems, and school-related issues.

Some notable differences in presenting issues occurred on the basis of both gender and income levels. With respect to gender, the female clients were more likely to present on issues that fell within the categories of family relationships and parenting, health and disability, and violence and abuse. The males in the sample were more likely to present on issues of substance abuse. There were no statistically significant differences on material, financial, and legal issues, social problems, or work- and school-related problems.<sup>6</sup>

The gender analysis further revealed that female clients presented a higher number of problems on average than their male counterparts (4.3 versus 3.8). More specifically, female clients were more likely to present on the following issues (i.e., there were statistically significant differences): separation/divorce, parent-child relationship, parenting,

**Table 13**

**Presenting Issues**

Family relationships and parenting (n = 2,095)	Health and disability (n = 899)	Material, financial, and legal (n = 690)	Social problems (n = 493)	Substance abuse (n = 206)	Violence and abuse (n = 822)	Work and school (n = 530)	Others (n = 174)
35.5% (2,095)	15.2% (899)	11.7% (690)	8.3% (493)	3.5% (206)	13.9% (822)	9.0% (530)	2.9% (174)
Couple relationship (n = 535)	Depression (n = 432)	Inadequate income (n = 230)	Social contacts problems (n = 330)	Alcoholism (n = 120)	Abuse/violence (n = 246)	Unemployment (n = 182)	Bereavement (n = 25)
Parent-child, under 21 (n = 351)	Physical health issue (n = 206)	Management of money (n = 153)	Leisure time problems (n = 163)	Drug abuse (n = 86)	Domestic violence (n = 228)	School-related problems (n = 182)	Self-esteem and identity (n = 13)
Parenting (n = 334)	Other mental illness (n = 103)	Housing problem (n = 109)		Sexual abuse (n = 188)		Work-related problems (n = 166)	Family of origin problem (n = 12)
Separation and divorce (n = 329)	Developmental disability (n = 85)	Management of home (n = 91)		Child abuse/neglect (n = 155)		Anger management (n = 11)	
Lone parenting (n = 200)	Physical disability (n = 63)			Elder abuse/neglect (n = 5)		Relationship problem (n = 10)	
Delinquency (n = 100)	Living with HIV/AIDS (n = 10)					Managing children (n = 8)	
Co-parenting (n = 100)						Post-traumatic stress disorder (n = 6)	
Teen-parenting (n = 84)						All other issues (n = 89)	
Step-parenting (n = 62)							

lone parenting, physical health, abuse or violence, child abuse, sexual abuse, and depression. The latter issue affected more than one-third of the females in the sample as compared with 22.3 percent of the males. Service providers recorded that men were more likely than women to present on issues of step-parenting, co-parenting, living with HIV/AIDS, legal problems, and especially drug abuse (but not alcoholism).

There was a relationship between a number of presenting issues and income, to be explored in greater detail later. In brief, those families characterized as “poor” (either having received social assistance in the previous six months or with household incomes of \$8,000 per person or less) were statistically more likely to present on the following issues: parent-child relationships, parenting, lone parenting, all health and disability issues *except* living with HIV/AIDS, all material, financial, and legal problems, social contact problems, alcoholism, all forms of violence and abuse *except* elder abuse, and unemployment. A significantly higher percentage of “non-poor” families (i.e., those with household incomes of more than \$8,000 per person) presented to family service agencies with couple

relationship problems, work-related problems, and “other issues” such as bereavement, anger management, self-esteem, self-image, and self-identity problems.

### 3.2 Services Provided to Clients

A parallel section of the first instrument permitted an opportunity to identify the services provided for the clients. Service providers selected from any of 28 specific services that their agencies might provide. There was also space to describe other services that were not captured on the list. In total, clients received 1.32 services per person, with one or possibly two services provided the standard allotment (69.0 percent of the full client sample). It should be remembered, however, that these were the services provided at the time of the survey; the survey by no means was meant to assess long-term service plans. The results of the section on services provided are summarized in Table 14.

As a reminder, the methodology employed in the study privileged the inclusion of those individuals

**Table 14**  
**Services Provided (n = 1,430)**

Services	Count	Percent responses	Percent cases	Services	Count	Percent responses	Percent cases
Counselling	1,118	56.5	78.2	Minorities services	15	0.8	1.0
Family life education	117	5.9	8.2	Divorce mediation	14	0.7	1.0
Support group	115	5.8	8.0	Emergency shelter	11	0.6	0.8
Child care	103	5.2	7.2	Hotline/helpline	10	0.5	0.7
Homemaker service	93	4.7	6.5	Residential facilities	10	0.5	0.7
All “others”	91	4.6	6.4	Home health care	8	0.4	0.6
Employee assistance	65	3.3	4.5	Services for AIDS	7	0.4	0.5
Family advocacy	57	2.9	4.0	Foster placement	7	0.4	0.5
Credit counselling	42	2.1	2.9	Elder care	5	0.2	0.4
Psychological testing	22	1.1	1.5	Volunteer service	5	0.2	0.4
Psychiatric service	22	1.1	1.5	Resettlement	3	0.1	0.2
Protective service	19	1.0	1.3	Adult day care	2	0.1	0.1
Managed care	17	0.9	1.2	<b>Total</b>	<b>1,978</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>138.3</b>

who were voluntarily accessing agencies to request help for their problems. Under these circumstances, one should expect counselling to be the definitive choice among service alternatives: some 78.2 percent of clients received counselling. The only other examples of services provided to at least 50 clients were family life education (8.2 percent), support groups (8.0 percent), child care (7.2 percent), homemaker services (6.5 percent), Employee Assistance Programs (4.5 percent), and family advocacy (4.0 percent). About one-third (34.0 percent) of clients accessing these agencies received services other than counselling.<sup>7</sup>

The services provided varied to some extent by key client characteristics. For example, women were more likely than males to receive services for child care and family life education, while males were more likely to be referred to residential or institutional facilities. For the other services provided, however, there were no statistically significant differences based on gender. Family income was correlated with a greater range of services provided. Those families classified as “poor” were more likely than the “non-poor” to receive services related to family life education (10.4 versus 5.7 percent), child care (14.2 versus 1.3 percent), homemaker services (12.1 versus 1.9 percent), family advocacy (6.5 versus 1.9 percent), psychological testing (2.5 versus 0.8 percent), and managed care (2.5 versus 0.1 percent). The non-poor families received counselling (group, family, marital or individual) more than the poor (85.1 versus 70.8 percent), as well as availed themselves of Employee Assistance Programs (7.1 versus 1.7 percent).

Finally, family composition was correlated with certain variables, including counselling, family life education, support groups, child care, homemaker services, and family advocacy. More specifically, counselling was provided more often for couples (90.1 percent) and individuals living alone (86.5 percent) than for either couples with children (76.0 percent) or lone parents (68.2 percent). The agencies provided family life education, family advocacy, and particularly homemaker services more commonly for those families with children in

comparison with either couples or single adults living without children in their homes. The agencies offered support groups most often for lone parents (12.8 percent), followed by couples with children (8.2 percent), adults living alone (6.9 percent), and couples without children (0.7 percent).

### **3.3 Presenting Problems and Services Provided**

The next issue concerned the relationship between presenting problems and services that agencies provided. As Table 15 demonstrates, there was little variation in terms of services offered in response to presenting problems. The most common service offered to clients for any problem was some type of counselling (group, family, marital or individual). Even those with health or disability problems (65.5 percent) or basic needs problems (68.8 percent) received counselling as a primary service. The second most common service that agencies provided was “support group” for all presenting problems except parenting issues, health or disability issues, and basic needs. Agencies typically offered child care or homemaker services to individuals presenting on these issues. Finally, a third common service was “family life education.” Indeed, for couples’ relationships, delinquency, mental health, leisure time and social contacts, violence and abuse, and work or school-related problems, the pattern of counselling, support groups, and family life education remained constant.

### **3.4 Case Information**

The service providers offered some additional contextual information, such as whether these represented new or existing cases and the location where they made initial client contact. Almost three-fourths (73.5 percent) were existing or active cases with the agency at the time of the survey. Some 21.5 percent were new cases, while the remainder were “reopened cases” or clients who were accessing the agency’s services once again after

**Table 15****Presenting Problems by Services Provided**

Presenting problem	Most common service	Second common service	Third common service
Couple's relationship (n = 732)	Counselling 84.7%	Support group 8.3%	Family life education 6.5%
Parenting issue (n = 661)	Counselling 71.7%	Child care 14.1%	Homemaker service 12.1%
Delinquency (n = 100)	Counselling 80.0%	Support group 18.0%	Family life education 11.0%
Health or disability (n = 296)	Counselling 65.5%	Homemaker service 15.9%	Child care 15.5%
Mental health (n = 483)	Counselling 86.1%	Support group 11.8%	Family life education 10.8%
Basic needs (n = 449)	Counselling 68.8%	Child care 12.5%	Support group 12.2%
Leisure time and social contacts (n = 396)	Counselling 80.3%	Support group 11.4%	Family life education 10.4%
Substance abuse (n = 173)	Counselling 79.8%	Support group 12.1%	Child care 8.7%
Violence and abuse (n = 550)	Counselling 86.7%	Support group 10.2%	Family life education 8.5%
Work or school (n = 486)	Counselling 78.2%	Support group 10.7%	Family life education 8.6%

having already terminated a previous contact with the agency. There was a significant and direct relationship between the status of the case and the number of presenting issues: those opened previously had more presenting issues on average (4.8) than those labelled as “existing cases” (4.4). Finally, clients within both of these categories of cases presented more issues than those identified as “new cases,” which averaged 3.3 issues per client.

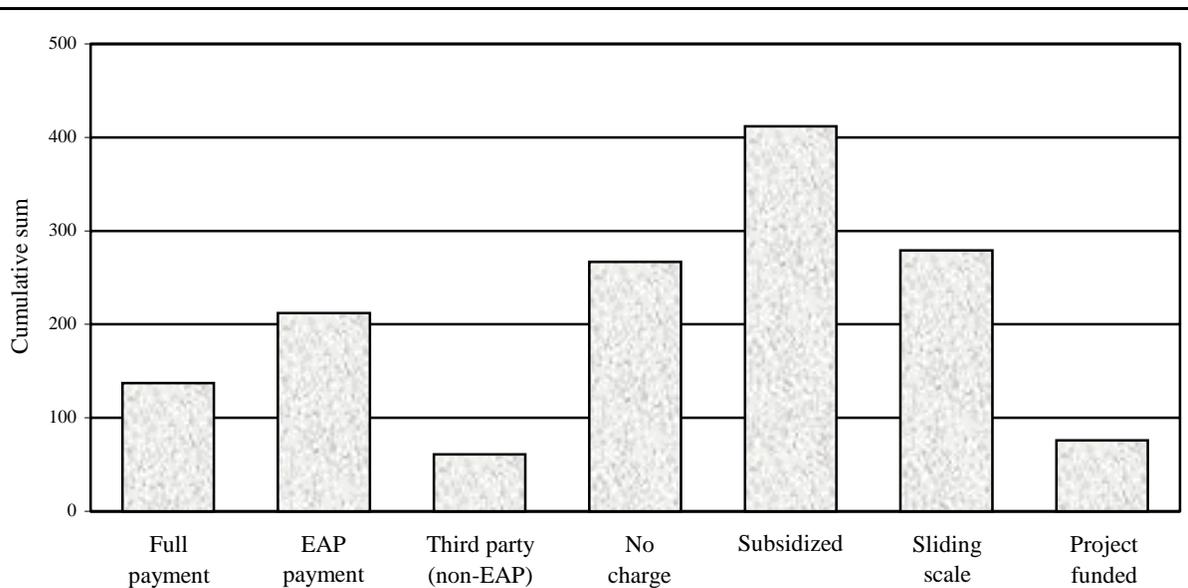
The places of contact were categorized on the surveys as agency, community, home or other. The “other” places included schools, telephone calls, church and parish offices, outpostting in community agencies, learning class books, private practice, and the workplace. The vast majority of contacts occurred in agency offices (83.5 percent), followed by the home (8.9 percent), other places such as schools (4.3 percent), and the community (3.3 percent). The place of contact did not vary with the gender of the clients. There was slight variation with clients’

ages, although the most common place of contact for all age groups was the agency. Younger clients, especially those 14 and under, were more likely than older clients to meet outside of the agency (though the difference was not significant in a statistical sense).

### 3.5 Method of Payment

The service providers indicated one or more methods of payment from a list of eight options, including an “other” category. The results are summarized briefly in Chart 2. Nearly everyone in the sample (97.0 percent) listed only one form of payment; the maximum number of payment methods for any particular client was three. The three most common methods of payment were subsidized, non-EAP (28.0 percent), sliding scale (18.9 percent), and no charge (18.1 percent). Slightly less than 1 in 10 clients (9.3 percent) paid full fee. As

**Chart 2**  
**Method of Payment**



expected, the majority of those who paid full fee (86.4 percent) were those identified as “non-poor.”

### 3.6 Policy Implications

The client presenting issues and patterns of service provision have some clear service planning and delivery implications. The results confirmed, for example, the importance of counselling as a core service delivered by agencies across Canada. In total, 90 percent of the clients accessing family service agencies were experiencing difficulties related to one or more of the following: couple relationship, parenting issues, depression or some type of domestic violence or abuse. These are areas that in most instances probably should be supported at least by some type of counselling intervention.

Another lesson learned was that clients tended to present multiple issues rather than just one issue, as five out of six presented at least two issues and nearly two-thirds of the clients presented three or

more issues. At the same time, these issues often cut across several categories, such as “family relationships and parenting” combined with “health and disability,” “material, financial, and legal,” or “violence and abuse.” Unlike the family service study in the United States (cf. Lengyel et al., 1997), even in situations where the clients’ primary concerns were related to basic needs, there were nearly always other relevant presenting issues at the same time (in roughly 95 percent of the cases). A key aspect of the intake or assessment process clearly involves some degree of prioritization around the issue or issues to be considered, as the interventions should be targeted accordingly.

Moreover, are agencies actively engaging the diverse groups within their catchment areas to learn about how the cultures within their communities deal with issues other than through mainstream counselling? Simply because a great many clients are asking for help does not necessarily mean that they prefer counselling, or that counselling would be the most effective type of support. Family service agencies may wish to consider developing

other alternatives that target more specific needs or provide for more culturally-appropriate interventions.

The fact that essentially the same services were offered regardless of the presenting problem should be examined more carefully. The emphases on counselling, support groups, and family life education were clear and consistent across presenting problems. More generally, a question that requires further investigation would be the relationships among presenting issues, services provided, and treatment effectiveness. The current study was by no means intended to be an “outcomes” study of family service agencies’ interventions. Some additional research should be conducted, however, to determine whether or not a clear linkage can be

established among the above factors, as well as the extent to which models of agency interventions are related to clients’ rates of repeated usage, i.e., their repeated access of family services.

Finally, the study revealed that nearly 80 percent of the sample represented “re-opened” cases. The question should be raised, therefore, about the service planning implications for chronic users and the interventions available. The nature of short-term versus long-term interventions requires additional consideration, not to mention the relevance of follow-up contacts. In addition, serious thought should be given in regard to where else one might either look for or direct clients to other needed services.

## Clients' Assessments of Their Assets

### *Highlights...*

- ◆ The vast majority of clients reported using a combination of resources or relationships to deal with their problems, including friends, counsellors, physicians, relatives, parents, and/or spouses.
- ◆ The assets most often considered to be “very helpful” were counsellors, in-home support workers, non-profits or charities, child or senior care, emergency shelters, preschool programs, and mutual support groups.
- ◆ While the rankings were similar between men and women, the female clients accessed a broader cross-section of assets and were more likely to rate these as “very helpful.”
- ◆ Regardless of family type, employment or income status, a clear majority within each group of clients drew upon friends, counsellors, relatives, parents, and doctors as assets within the last two years. There were differences, however, in terms of which particular assets individuals within each category considered “most helpful.”
- ◆ Mental health professionals, non-profit organizations, in-home support workers, child or senior care, emergency shelters, women’s groups, mutual support groups, and 12-step programs were frequently ranked among the top 10 “most helpful” assets.
- ◆ The main sources of support for child care, household tasks, and employment or educational support came from informal sources, such as parents, spouses, relatives, and friends.
- ◆ The clients turned to others more often for emotional support compared to any other issue, which included an extensive array of both informal and formal networks of support.

The Assets Inventory provided a portrait of clients in relation to their potential support networks and immediate communities. The “assets” were defined as *“people, groups and organizations, agencies, and businesses that often are helpful to individuals and members of a family in reaching goals, getting things done, providing support, or meeting needs.”* There were two versions of the Assets Inventory to be completed independently by the service provider and by the client. The current chapter describes the assets that clients most often used and their degree of helpfulness, while the next chapter examines service providers’ knowledge of their clients’ assets. Subsequent analyses examine the differences in assets on the basis of gender, income, employment status, and family type. Finally, the results from a special section on the “most important sources of support” are presented both for the full sample and the aforementioned subgroups.

### **4.1 Client Assets: Full Sample Results**

The clients who completed the Assets Inventory were asked to identify their personal assets (*not* those of their family members) that they had used for *any* purpose during the two years prior to answering the survey. The instrument contained a menu of 62 assets, grouped under five categories: relatives, friends and other people, groups and associations, agencies and government, and businesses.

There were two spaces for other assets not captured by the list. If the respondents had used the asset listed, they were then asked to rate that resource in terms of its degree of helpfulness: “not at all helpful,” “somewhat helpful,” or “very helpful.” If they had *not* used the resource, then they were asked to choose an option that explained why, such as “not available,” “chose not to use,” or “had no knowledge” (of the resource).

The main limitation of the Assets Inventory was that the resources identified were not linked to specific problems, i.e., one could not determine the circumstances under which the clients either had access to or attempted to draw upon certain sources of support and for what purposes. To help compensate for this limitation, a supplemental section asked clients to identify their most important sources of support in the past six months for a variety of different issues (e.g., emotional support, financial support, child care, household maintenance, etc.). These results are presented later in the chapter under subsection 4.6.

The first analysis considered the full range of assets that clients identified as having used and their degree of helpfulness (see Table 16). Without identifying the specific purpose for which particular resources were accessed, the clients reported having drawn upon a variety of assets within the last two years. The typical mix included some combination of friends, family members, relatives, professionals, and some institutional forms of support.

The results indicated that clients in the sample identified friends as the assets most commonly used. Some 91.6 percent of those who completed the Assets Inventory suggested that they had recently drawn upon friends for support. Clients listed family members and relatives as highly prominent assets as well. Nearly everyone in the sample, for example, identified at least one or more of the following as someone they had called upon in the last two years for some type of help: intimate family relation, parents, a spouse or a child.

Another prevalent resource included various health professionals, such as counsellors, psychologists,

psychiatrists, and physicians: more than four-fifths of the sample had used these types of resources in the last two years. Other resources often used included institutional supports such as hospitals, clinics, lending institutions, and libraries. Finally, co-workers and neighbours were each identified as the only other resources used by at least half the sample (results not shown).

Despite the heavy reliance upon family members and other intimates as measured by usage, these were *not* the resources typically deemed most helpful by the clients. In terms of the helpfulness of different assets, the professionals were generally ranked “very helpful” by most who had accessed them in the last two years. Indeed, “counsellors, psychologists, and psychiatrists” were at the top of the list in terms of the proportion of the client sample (71.4 percent) that ranked them as “very helpful.” A broad range of other supportive programs and services typically were ranked as “very helpful” by those who had accessed them, including in-home support workers (61.3 percent), non-profits or charities (60.7 percent), child or senior care (57.4 percent), emergency shelters (55.4 percent), preschool programs (54.0 percent), and mutual support groups (50.7 percent). The only other category that at least half of the client sample considered “very helpful” was friends.

At the other end of the continuum of helpfulness, ex-spouses and their relatives were usually rated as “not at all helpful” by those who had drawn upon these resources recently. More than one-third of the sample did not consider political representatives, their spouse’s relatives, landlords and managers, fraternal service organizations or neighbours to be particularly helpful. The ranking of usage and helpfulness of different assets changes, however, when one breaks the data down further in terms of gender.

## 4.2 Client Assets by Gender

Male and female clients were compared to evaluate which assets they typically used and the degree to which these were rated as more or less helpful by

**Table 16**

**Client Assets Rank-Ordered by Usage and Degree of Helpfulness<sup>1</sup>**

Rank	Total usage	Percent used	Considered “very helpful”	Percent	Considered “not at all helpful”	Percent
1	Friends	91.6	Counsellor	71.4	Ex-spouse’s relatives	70.6
2	Counsellor	85.1	In-home support	61.5	Ex-spouse’s parents	67.1
3	Doctor/physician	79.9	Non-profit and charitable organizations	60.7	Political representative	64.8
4	Relatives	73.4	Child or senior care	57.4	Ex-spouse	60.1
5	Parents	72.9	Emergency shelters	55.4	Spouse’s relatives	44.3
6	Spouse or partner	68.9	Preschool program	54.0	Stepchildren	38.5
7	Hospitals or clinics	59.7	Mutual support groups	50.9	Spouse’s parents	37.5
8	Lending institutions	58.7	Friends	50.0	Landlord or manager	36.5
9	Own children	55.3	Women’s programs/organizations	47.6	Fraternal/service organizations	36.5
10	Libraries and programs	54.1	12-step group	46.2	Neighbours	35.6

<sup>1</sup> Variables with fewer than 50 responses given were not used in the “helpfulness” analyses.

each group. Perhaps the most compelling observation is that men as a whole tended to draw upon their resources less frequently than women. In the aggregate, the females in the client sample reported accessing a somewhat broader range of relatives, friends, and other people, especially in terms of their own children, ex-spouses' family members, friends, neighbours, physicians, and in-home support workers. There were some notable exceptions, as a slightly higher percentage of men reported using their spouses, spouses' relatives, co-workers, managers, accountants, and employment counsellors.

Table 17 presents a comparison of the assets most frequently accessed by male and female clients over the past two years. In general, the lists for assets used were fairly similar for both groups. Although men used both friends and mental health professionals somewhat *less* than women, both ranked these as the top two most widely used resources. Female clients emphasized the use of physicians far more than men, but otherwise the rankings for parents, relatives, and spouses/partners were comparable for both groups. Both lists contained lending institutions and "neighbours." Other significant differences included men's greater reliance upon co-workers, women's greater reliance

upon their children, and women's greater usage of libraries.

Another interesting point, however, was the fact that there were some significant differences in access to resources beyond those listed in the top 10. For example, whereas men counted on their spouses more often than vice-versa, the women were more likely to contact their ex-spouses and their ex-spouses' relatives for support. Women were especially more likely to avail themselves of supports provided by agencies and government, such as non-profit organizations, community centres, charities, women's programs and organizations, libraries, emergency shelters, clinics and hospitals, government housing, the police, and public transportation. Men were more likely to tap into their networks of support through co-workers, informal social clubs, and fitness-related groups or organizations (such as outdoor clubs, sports clubs, health and fitness groups, and other similar types of organizations).

In summary, the lists for both men and women shared in common 8 of the 10 most commonly used assets. The evidence further suggested that women as a whole tended to access a broader and more comprehensive set of resources and relationships.

**Table 17**  
**Top 10 Assets Used among Male and Female Clients**

Rank	Male (n = 300)		Female (n = 746)	
	Assets used	Percent	Assets used	Percent
1	Friends	88.9	Friends	92.6
2	Mental health professionals	83.6	Mental health professionals	85.3
3	Parents	73.3	Doctor	83.6
4	Spouse	73.1	Relatives	74.6
5	Relatives	72.4	Parents	73.3
6	Doctor	70.9	Spouse	66.3
7	Co-workers	60.0	Lending institutions	60.6
8	Lending institutions	55.5	Own children	58.4
9	Neighbours	51.1	Library	56.3
10	Public transportation	48.4	Neighbours	54.4

Their assets were especially more wide-ranging with respect to relatives (including those of their ex-spouses), some categories listed under “friends and other people,” and especially many of the assets listed under “agencies and government.” In contrast, the men in the sample relied more upon their spouses and co-workers as key supportive assets.

Another issue examined was the degree to which male and female clients rated their different assets as “very helpful” (see Table 18). Not only did females tend to access a broader cross-section of assets more often than men, but their likelihood of rating these assets as “very helpful” was significantly higher as well. More than three-fifths of the female clients considered several programs and services to be helpful, including the following: mental health professionals, in-home support workers, preschool programs, emergency shelters, non-profit organizations and charities, and child or senior care. At least half the females who used friends, mutual support groups, women’s programs, and transportation rated these highly as well.

The list of resources that men found “very helpful” differed somewhat, although their ranking of mental health professionals, non-profit organizations, and

mutual support groups (the three most highly ranked assets in terms of helpfulness) were comparable to that of women. Men highlighted further the importance of in-home support workers and friends, although their percentages were significantly lower than that of females. Finally, the male clients stressed several other assets as very helpful that were *not* found on the women’s list, including their spouses, 12-step groups, elementary and high schools, and community charities.

Apart from assets ranked as “very helpful,” there were many assets that had been accessed previously that both men and women considered to be “not at all helpful.” The next analysis therefore compares their responses, the results of which are summarized in Table 19.

As expected, the evidence confirms that neither men nor women tended to find their ex-spouses, their ex-spouse’s parents or their ex-spouse’s relatives very helpful. In addition, more than one-third of both male and female clients indicated that political representatives, neighbours, landlords or apartment managers, and their spouse’s relatives were not at all helpful. Finally, stepchildren and unions made both top 10 lists of least helpful assets.

**Table 18**  
**Most Helpful Assets Used among Male and Female Clients**

Rank	Male		Female	
	Assets rated “very helpful”	Percent	Assets rated “very helpful”	Percent
1	Mental health professionals	66.5	Mental health professionals	73.6
2	Non-profit and charitable organizations	56.1	In-home support workers	65.3
3	Mutual support groups	51.9	Preschool programs	62.5
4	Spouse	47.4	Emergency shelters	62.4
5	In-home support workers	47.3	Non-profit and charitable organizations	62.0
6	12-step group	46.2	Child or senior care	60.4
7	Elementary and high schools	44.2	Friends	52.6
8	Friends	43.8	Mutual support groups	52.5
9	Community charity	43.1	Women’s programs/organizations	51.1
10	Child or senior care	42.6	Special transportation	50.0

**Table 19****Least Helpful Assets Used among Male and Female Clients**

Rank	Male		Female	
	Assets rated “not at all helpful”	Percent	Assets rated “not at all helpful”	Percent
1	Ex-spouse’s relatives	81.3	Ex-spouse’s relatives	68.9
2	Ex-spouse’s parents	69.4	Political representative	67.7
3	Political representative	57.5	Ex-spouse’s parents	66.1
4	Ex-spouse	49.2	Ex-spouse	64.1
5	Unions	42.1	Spouse’s relatives	47.7
6	Neighbours	38.6	Stepchildren	47.5
7	Landlord/apartment manager	38.5	Spouse’s parents	40.8
8	Crisis line	36.4	Landlord/apartment manager	37.6
9	Spouse’s relatives	36.1	Neighbours	35.9
10	Stepchildren	30.8	Unions	29.7
11	Manager or supervisor	30.7	Employment counselling	27.3

On the whole, the lists of assets characterized as “not at all helpful” were remarkably similar for both male and female clients. Although the percentages and relative rankings differed somewhat, 9 of the 10 assets most commonly identified as unhelpful appeared on both lists. The next section of the report shifts the focus to an examination of clients’ assets in the context of four different family types as defined by members who were co-residing in the same household at the time of the survey.

### 4.3 Client Assets by Family Type

The next analysis involved a comparison of client assets by different family situations as defined by a typology of predominant household types: 1) adults living alone (26.2 percent); 2) married/common-law couples without children (23.4 percent); 3) married or common-law couples with children (29.7 percent); and 4) lone parents with one or more children (10.4 percent). These four configurations accounted for nearly 90 percent of all families in the sample. The common assumption, supported to some extent by previous research, suggests that

different family types – such as married couples – will usually have access to more extensive informal support networks. More assets are assumed to be available through the extended kinship and friendship structures of two adults, for example, in comparison with households where only one adult is present. The assets used among different family types may reflect such differential access or availability. In Table 20, the results of an analysis breaking down assets used by family types are presented.

The analysis confirms that at least two-thirds of the clients drew upon friends, counsellors, relatives, parents, and doctors as assets – regardless of family type – for various purposes during the past two years. Other common assets that each group utilized were lending institutions and hospitals.

Among the notable differences, couples typically turned to their spouses or partners as an immediate source of support. The adults living alone were considerably less likely to call upon a spouse or partner, while lone parents excluded the category altogether from their list of top 10 assets used. The members of households where children were present (couples with children and lone-parent families)

**Table 20**

**Top 10 Assets Used among Different Family Types**

Assets used	Adults living alone (n = 303)		Couples, no children (n = 113)		Couples with children (n = 331)		Lone parents (n = 275)	
	Percent	Assets used	Percent	Assets used	Percent	Assets used	Percent	Assets used
Friends	92	Spouse	95	Friends	91	Friends	93	Friends
Counsellor	88	Friends	88	Spouse	84	Counsellor	84	Counsellor
Doctor	83	Counsellor	87	Counsellor	82	Doctor	82	Doctor
Parents	70	Relatives	69	Doctor	81	Relatives	78	Relatives
Relatives	67	Doctor	68	Relatives	78	Parents	75	Parents
Hospitals	60	Parents	66	Parents	76	Own children	70	Own children
Spouse	58	Lending institutions	65	Own children	57	Hospitals	64	Hospitals
Lending institutions	57	Employer	55	Lending institutions	57	Lending institutions	61	Lending institutions
Co-workers	57	Hospitals	54	Hospitals	56	Neighbours	58	Neighbours
Library	53	Library	53	Co-workers	56	Police	57	Police

often mentioned them as an asset used within the last two years. Adults living alone and couples with children turned to co-workers more often than the other two family types. Lone parents relied more heavily on neighbours and the police than any of the other groups.

Finally, libraries earned the tenth spot among the two types of households where children were *not* present. The prominence of libraries has an intriguing dimension and one might consider delving further into the nature of the usage. For example, are those who list the library as a key asset primarily seeking work-related information, legal advice, internet access or other types of supportive information, or are libraries used mainly for “non-instrumental” purposes?

In comparing the clients’ ratings of assets they considered to be “very helpful,” a different picture emerges, as shown in Table 21. Most important, counsellors were ranked at the top of three of the lists and fifth among lone parents, albeit with a percentage comparable to the others. The rankings were highly variable across categories thereafter, with only “friends” and “non-profit organizations or charities” appearing on all four lists as “very helpful.” The adults living alone, many of whom were recently separated or divorced women, and the lone parents in the sample (who were predominantly women as well) emphasized the helpfulness of “formal assets” such as emergency shelters, in-home support, women’s organizations, and non-profit organizations or charities. The lone parents were the most emphatic in their claims about the helpfulness of a range of public and non-profit assets, including in-home support, preschool programs, child or senior care, non-profits, counsellors, emergency shelters, women’s organizations, and government housing. The high probability of rating these assets as “very helpful” overshadows somewhat the fact that these were not utilized quite as broadly as some of the other assets (see Table 20). Finally, couples *without* children were less likely in general to rate assets as very helpful than the other groups. Their top 10 list ranked assets such as pets, parents, religious groups, and spiritual leaders as “very helpful” more often than the other family types.

## 4.4 Client Assets by Employment Status

Another interesting point of comparison consisted of breaking the sample down by employment status to determine whether or not clients who had different relationships with the labour market drew upon assets in different ways. There were three categories of “employment status” used to compare clients’ assets: 1) currently employed (54.1 percent); 2) unemployed (15.3 percent); and 3) those not in the labour force at the present time, including retired individuals, homemakers, and students (30.6 percent). The results are presented in Table 22.

Regardless of employment status, each group highlighted the use of friends, counsellors, doctors, relatives, and parents. These were ranked in identical fashion for clients currently employed and unemployed, while those “not in the labour force” turned to their parents slightly more often (the group included students) than the other two groups. Each group included as well their spouses and hospitals as among the 10 most common assets accessed within the last two years. Those who were employed emphasized co-workers and employers as commonly used assets. The unemployed and those not in the labour force both highlighted the importance of public transportation.

In terms of what each group considered to be “very helpful” assets, the largest percentages within each group ranked counsellors number one. As can be seen in Table 23, a majority of each group rated several other assets as “very helpful,” including non-profit organizations, in-home support, and child or senior care. Those who were currently employed tended to rank mutual support groups and friends as particularly helpful resources, while the other assets listed were rather diverse – ranging from emergency shelters to spouses. The unemployed clients stressed the importance of women’s services and organizations, as well as 12-step programs, mutual support groups, colleges, community charities, and doctors. Finally, those not in the labour force highlighted the helpfulness of a range of public services such as emergency shelters,

**Table 21**

**Most Helpful Assets Used among Different Family Types<sup>1</sup>**

Assets used	Adults living alone (n = 303)		Couples, <i>no</i> children (n = 113)		Couples <i>with</i> children (n = 331)		Lone parents (n = 275)	
	Percent	Assets used	Percent	Assets used	Percent	Assets used	Percent	Assets used
Counsellor	74	Counsellor	62	Counsellor	74	In-home support	74	
Emergency shelter	66	Hospitals	55		64	Non-profit and charitable organizations	73	
Non-profit and charitable organizations	56	Spouse	54		54	Child care	70	
Mutual support groups	53	Friends	50		53	Non-profit and charitable organizations	68	
In-home support	52	Public transportation	49		52	Counsellor	67	
Public transportation	50	Pets	48		51	Emergency shelter	65	
Friends	50	Parents	45		50	Women's organizations	55	
12-step group	49	Religious group	43		47	Government housing	53	
Women's organizations	47	Non-profit and charitable organizations	43		43	12-step group	51	
Own children	46	Spiritual leader	42		43	Friends	51	

<sup>1</sup> Variables with fewer than 30 responses given were not used in the "helpfulness" analyses.

**Table 22**

**Top 10 Assets Used by Employment Status**

Assets used	Currently employed ( <i>n</i> = 548)		Unemployed ( <i>n</i> = 155)		Not in labour force ( <i>n</i> = 310)	
	Assets used	Percent	Assets used	Percent	Assets used	Percent
Friends	92	89	Friends	89	Friends	92
Counsellor	85	83	Counsellor	83	Counsellor	85
Doctor	78	82	Doctor	82	Doctor	81
Relatives	75	72	Relatives	72	Parents	78
Parents	73	70	Parents	70	Relatives	74
Spouse	72	70	Public transportation	70	Spouse	64
Co-workers	72	67	Hospitals	67	Public transportation	63
Lending institutions	62	64	Spouse	64	Hospitals	62
Employer	62	61	Library	61	Teachers	58
Hospitals	56	58	Lending institutions	58	Neighbours	55

**Table 23**

**Most Helpful Assets Used by Employment Status<sup>1</sup>**

Assets used	Currently employed (n = 411)		Unemployed (n = 108)		Not in labour force (n = 241)	
	Percent	Assets used	Percent	Assets used	Percent	Assets used
Counsellor	72	Counsellor	76	Counsellor	68	
Non-profit and charitable organizations	65	Non-profit and charitable organizations	60	Emergency shelters	66	
In-home support	61	Child or senior care	57	Child or senior care	66	
Mutual support groups	55	Women's organizations	57	In-home support	65	
Friends	55	In-home support	56	Women's organizations	61	
Child or senior care	53	12-step group	51	Non-profit and charitable organizations	61	
Emergency shelters	51	Mutual support groups	51	Preschool program	57	
Government housing	48	Colleges	50	Public transportation	56	
Preschool programs	48	Community charity	47	Government housing	55	
Spouse	46	Doctor	45	Special transportation	54	

<sup>1</sup> Variables with fewer than 30 responses given were not used in the "helpfulness" analyses.

preschool programs, public transportation, special transportation, government housing, and women's organizations in general. Moreover, the latter group ranked as "very helpful" more assets than either of the other two groups.

## 4.5 Client Assets by Income Status

A fourth analysis compared client assets with their relative income status, as presented in Table 24. More specifically, the sample was divided between those who were characterized as "poor" versus "non-poor." The "poor" families included those who had either received social assistance within the past six months or who had reported "total family incomes" of less than \$8,000 per person. The "non-poor" were those individuals who identified their total family incomes as at least \$8,000 per person *and* who had not received social assistance within the past six months. Thus while nearly one-third of the sample had recently received social assistance, some 46.4 percent of the clients in the sample were classified as "poor."

As indicated in Table 24, the poor and non-poor shared in common 8 of their top 10 assets. A higher percentage of those classified as poor used hospitals, public transportation, and their own children. The non-poor, who were employed at a much higher rate than the poor, were more likely to turn to co-workers and their employers, as well as their spouses, as key assets. The next analysis examines which were considered to be the most helpful assets among the poor and non-poor families.

The poor and non-poor clients diverged more in their ratings of assets as "very helpful" (see Table 25). Both groups highlighted counsellors, non-profit organizations or charities, child or senior care, women's groups, mutual support groups, and 12-step groups positively. The poor families, however, tended to emphasize as well the helpfulness of public institutions such as preschool programs, emergency shelters, public transportation, and schools. The non-poor included friends, spouses, and their own children as "very helpful" assets.

## 4.6 Most Important Sources of Support

The previous analysis considered assets that clients identified as a "resource" or "relationship" that they had used on any occasion during the past two years, but without indicating the circumstances under which the assets were accessed. A subsequent section inquired as to the "most important sources of support in the past six months" in relation to seven generic types of support: 1) emotional support; 2) financial or material support; 3) child care support; 4) household tasks support; 5) transportation support; 6) personal care support; and 7) employment or school support.

The questionnaires contained several items such as the following: "To whom do you turn for emotional support?" In response to each of these questions, clients could identify up to three different sources of support, or select "no one" if they did not feel as though they had turned to anyone or any group in particular for specific types of support during the past six months. The first analysis summarizes the aggregate responses to each of the seven categories.

First, Table 26 reveals that a large proportion of the clients in the sample (93.3 percent) reported drawing upon at least one or more sources of emotional support within the last six months. Some 82.4 percent reported at least two sources of emotional support, while more than half (56.6 percent) listed at least three different sources. By comparison, roughly three-fourths identified as least one source of financial or material support specifically accessed in the past six months. As well, a clear majority identified at least one source of child care support (67.8 percent of applicable cases), help with household tasks (61.1 percent), and transportation support (62.8 percent).

Significantly fewer clients identified themselves as "sick, disabled, or elderly" and thus in need of personal care support (assistance with bathing, brushing teeth, hair care, etc.). Among those who reportedly might have needed some personal care

**Table 24****Top 10 Assets Used among “Poor” and “Non-poor” Clients**

Rank	Poor		Non-poor	
	Assets used	Percent	Assets used	Percent
1	Friends	90.8	Friends	92.4
2	Doctor	82.2	Counsellor	88.0
3	Counsellor	81.8	Doctor	78.0
4	Parents	74.1	Relatives	73.6
5	Relatives	73.1	Spouse	72.5
6	Hospitals	66.1	Parents	72.0
7	Spouse	64.9	Co-workers	64.6
8	Public transportation	64.2	Lending institutions	57.9
9	Own children	61.7	Hospitals	53.7
10	Lending institutions	59.3	Employers	53.3

**Table 25****Most Helpful Assets Used among “Poor” and “Non-poor” Clients**

Rank	Poor		Non-poor	
	Assets rated “very helpful”	Percent	Assets rated “very helpful”	Percent
1	Counsellor	72.9	Counsellor	70.3
2	In-home support workers	68.3	Non-profit and charitable organizations	58.3
3	Preschool programs	66.1	Mutual support groups	54.8
4	Non-profit and charitable organizations	62.5	Friends	53.9
5	Child or senior care	60.4	Child or senior care	51.9
6	Emergency shelters	59.8	Own children	46.6
7	Public transportation	51.3	Women’s groups/organizations	45.5
8	Women’s groups/organizations	49.1	12-step groups	44.9
9	Mutual support groups	47.8	Spouse	43.7
10	12-step groups	47.5	In-home support workers	42.4
11	Schools	47.5		

assistance, some 45.5 percent reported actually accessing such support in the past six months. A slightly higher percentage (49.8 percent) turned to others for help with their employment or their

schooling. The results suggest that certain types of support are more often sought than others, particularly in regard to emotional, financial, and child care support.

**Table 26****Types of Support by Number of Sources Identified**

Types of support	One source identified	Two sources identified	Three sources identified
	(Percent/number)		
Emotional support ( <i>n</i> = 1,184)	93.3 (1,105)	82.4 (976)	56.6 (670)
Financial support ( <i>n</i> = 1,184)	75.2 (890)	43.8 (519)	16.9 (200)
Child care support ( <i>n</i> = 690)	67.8 (468)	47.4 (327)	22.9 (158)
Household tasks ( <i>n</i> = 1,184)	61.1 (723)	30.7 (363)	8.6 (102)
Transportation ( <i>n</i> = 1,184)	62.8 (743)	37.3 (442)	13.4 (159)
Personal care ( <i>n</i> = 453)	45.5 (206)	19.2 (87)	5.1 (23)
Work or school help ( <i>n</i> = 1,184)	49.8 (590)	28.7 (340)	12.3 (146)

## 4.7 Common Sources of Various Types of Support

Another issue concerns the *sources* of different *types* of support accessed and by whom, since previous research has shown that individuals tend to receive “different strokes from different folks” (Wellman and Wortley, 1990). The next analyses examine which sources of support were more prevalent for each need identified, as well as provide gender comparisons. The first issue considered was “emotional support,” with the results of the analysis presented in Table 27.

Friends were the single most common source of *emotional* support, especially among the female clients in the sample. Spouses were the second most common source of such support. A gender comparison reveals, however, that the male clients were just as likely to turn to their friends as their spouses for such support, while the female clients ranked their spouses a distant second to their friends. Three other relatively common sources of emotional support (accessed by between 20 to 35 percent of both

men and women) were relatives, parents, and counsellors. No other sources of such support were accessed by even 10 percent of the client sample.

With respect to financial or material supports, a great many clients reported that they had not turned to anyone in particular in recent months. Among the more common sources of financial support were parents, spouses and relatives, followed by lending institutions, social services, and friends. More female clients relied upon their spouses, social services, and even ex-spouses for financial support. The male clients targeted parents and relatives in greater proportions, while lending institutions were much more commonly accessed by men. The full results for the top 10 sources of financial support by gender appear in Table 28.

To the extent that clients in the sample received help for child care, the support usually came from a combination of informal familial relations and the professional or private child care sector (see Table 29). The main sources of child care support included relatives, parents, friends, formal child care services, and spouses.

**Table 27****Sources of Emotional Support by Gender (n = 1,109)**

Rank	Source of support	Full sample	Female	Male
(Percent)				
1	Friends	59.2	63.4	47.9
2	Spouse	40.7	36.9	48.2
3	Relatives	34.1	35.3	30.6
4	Parents	29.8	29.1	32.7
5	Counsellor	29.6	32.3	22.5
6	Own children	8.2	9.3	6.0
7	Mutual support groups	7.3	7.6	6.3
8	Non-profit and charitable organizations	6.3	6.8	5.3
9	Spiritual leader	4.4	4.1	4.6
10	Doctor/physician	4.3	3.9	6.0

**Table 28****Sources of Financial Support by Gender**

Rank	Source of support	Full sample	Female	Male
(Percent)				
1	Parents	31.3	30.5	34.2
2	Spouse	20.3	22.4	13.4
3	Relatives	18.4	18.0	20.4
4	Lending institutions	14.2	11.8	21.8
5	Social services	14.2	16.1	9.9
6	Friends	14.1	13.4	16.5
7	Employers	6.1	5.4	6.7
8	Partner's parents	3.2	3.4	3.5
9	Ex-spouse/partner	2.3	3.1	0.4
10	Community charity	1.3	1.5	1.1

Female clients appeared to be more responsible for the issue of child care support, as their percentages (generally 10 to 15 percent) overshadowed the percentages of men seeking such support. In addition, women were more likely to be single mothers and hence more often in need of such assistance, which ex-spouses or partners sometimes provided. Other sources that ranked in the top 10 included non-profit agencies, social services, spouse's parents, and in-home support services, though none of these had been used by more than 5 percent of the client sample in the last six months.

With respect to support for household tasks, these were clearly the responsibility of the immediate family members. Regardless of the family situation or other factors, most clients in the sample or others within their immediate families assume the lion's share of responsibility for household tasks. In particular, spouses or partners, children (or parents), and often relatives living within the household typically contributed support for household tasks, as Table 30 demonstrates. Apart from these types of supports, there were several clients who had recently turned to in-home support workers (4.9 percent)

**Table 29****Sources of Child Care Support by Gender**

Rank	Source of support	Full sample	Female	Male
(Percent)				
1	Relatives	13.3	14.9	10.6
2	Parents	12.9	15.3	8.8
3	Friends	12.5	15.3	6.3
4	Child care (formal)	10.9	12.7	8.1
5	Spouse/partner	8.7	9.7	7.0
6	Non-profit and charitable organizations	4.5	5.1	3.2
7	Ex-spouse/partner	4.0	5.3	1.1
8	Social services	2.8	2.6	1.8
9	Spouse's parents	2.1	1.9	2.5
10	In-home support	2.0	2.0	1.4

**Table 30****Sources of Support for Household Tasks by Gender**

Rank	Source of support	Full sample	Female	Male
(Percent)				
1	Spouse/partner	32.7	29.9	38.7
2	Own children	17.3	18.9	12.7
3	Parents	11.7	10.1	15.8
4	Relatives	8.7	9.1	9.2
5	Friends	8.1	9.1	5.6
6	In-home support	4.9	5.3	3.2
7	Non-profit and charitable organizations	1.4	1.6	0.7
8	Landlord	1.2	1.5	0.7
9	Spouse's parents	1.0	0.8	1.4
10	Neighbours	0.8	0.9	0.4

and/or non-profit organizations (1.4 percent) for additional assistance.

There were some modest differences that could be observed on the basis of gender. For example, male clients drew upon spouses, parents, and their spouses' parents more often than the female clients. In contrast, the women relied more often on their own children, friends, and other external sources than men in the sample.

Next, the sources of transportation support were considered. The results are summarized in Table 31. Clients in general called upon any of five main sources of support for their transportation needs: friends, spouses, parents, public transportation, or relatives. Women had to rely upon each of these sources more often than men, as well as their own children and their ex-spouses or partners. The men were slightly more likely to have called upon co-workers or their spouse's parents for transportation assistance. No men reported

having used an ex-spouse or ex-partner for support in this regard within the last six months.

As a final consideration, the issues of employment or educational support were examined in tandem. The summary results are presented in Table 32. Friends were clearly the most commonly accessed source of support with respect to employment or education, as roughly one-fifth of the sample had turned to friends in the past six month for advice, job leads, help with homework, and so forth. No other source of support was cited by even 10 percent

of the full sample. Hence the evidence suggests that employment and educational supports are not commonly sought.

## 4.8 Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

Respondents showed some ambivalence regarding the use of family members as “assets.” Family members (parents, relatives, spouses or partners) were prominent among the 10 most often used

**Table 31**

**Sources of Transportation Support by Gender**

Rank	Source of support	Full sample	Female	Male
(Percent)				
1	Friends	22.2	23.4	21.1
2	Spouse/partner	19.0	20.3	14.8
3	Parents	17.9	19.1	16.2
4	Public transportation	16.7	17.3	13.4
5	Relatives	14.5	15.3	14.4
6	Co-workers	2.7	2.3	3.5
7	Own children	2.5	3.0	1.4
8	Spouse’s parents	1.9	1.6	3.2
9	Counsellor	1.4	1.4	1.4
10	Ex-spouse/partner	1.3	1.9	0.0

**Table 32**

**Sources of Employment or Educational Support by Gender**

Rank	Source of support	Full sample	Female	Male
(Percent)				
1	Friends	21.4	20.8	20.1
2	Spouse/partner	9.1	8.4	9.5
3	Parents	8.1	7.2	10.6
4	Relatives	8.0	8.1	8.8
5	Employment centre	7.1	7.4	7.0
6	Counsellor	7.0	7.6	6.0
7	Teachers/professors	6.9	7.7	4.2
8	Co-workers	6.3	5.9	7.4
9	Employers	3.4	3.2	3.2
10	Libraries	3.4	3.2	3.2

resources, although they were considered to be “very helpful” by only about one-third of the sample and among the 10 *least* helpful assets by some clients. Family members clearly did not always live up to expectations. On the other hand, professional help was often considered very helpful by the clients. For instance, clients turned to counsellors, psychologists and psychiatrists frequently (85.1 percent) *and* considered these to be “very helpful” more often than any other asset (71.4 percent).

The sheer range of public and non-profit sources of support considered “very helpful” by a majority of these clients was quite impressive: mental health professionals, in-home support workers, non-profit and charitable organizations, child or senior care, emergency shelters, preschool programs, and mutual support groups. Included in the most helpful top 10 list were women’s groups and 12-step programs. Hence the case could be made that, especially for families in crisis and many of those who were choosing to access family service agencies, an extensive public and non-profit support system should continue to be funded as an important line of defense protecting vulnerable individuals and families in Canadian society.

There were some differences observed on the basis of gender, family type, employment status, and income that should be noted as well. For example, men relied more upon spouses and co-workers, suggesting that marital breakdowns and/or loss of employment may have even more of an adverse impact than for women, who were more likely to find a range of supports more helpful, from public and non-profit agencies to women’s organizations to their friends. Men appeared to have stronger and longer-term attachments to the labour market, such that they may have been somewhat more inclined to view their workplaces as supportive environments in comparison with the women in the sample. Women had less opportunity or longevity in the paid labour force and were more likely than men to turn to community services.

There were no major surprises that arose in examining slight differences in the usage and helpfulness of assets by family types (e.g., couples called upon their spouses much more often and lone parents did not or could not call upon their ex-partners), employment status (e.g., the unemployed and those not in the labour force used public transportation more, while currently employed individuals turned to their employers and co-workers as assets to be used), and income status (e.g., the poor relied more upon public institutions for helpful support while the non-poor were able to draw more often and more successfully upon their informal networks of friends and family members).

Family service workers nevertheless should recognize the differing likelihood of the availability and helpfulness of different assets, in part based upon the aforementioned demographic characteristics. Couples (either with or without children) appeared to have more informal support networks at their disposal compared to those living alone and lone parents. A more systematic assessment of their clients’ assets as a routine part of the evaluation process may help to guide the direction of helpful and effective interventions more successfully, but more formal research on the matter needs to be conducted.

As a final consideration, the results revealed that there were variations in the sources of support for different issues, such that child care, household tasks, and employment or educational support stemmed mainly from informal sources such as parents, spouses, relatives, and friends. Less than 1 in 10 clients used more formal public programs or non-profit supports for any of these issues within the last six months. There was, however, a greater reliance upon mental health professionals, mutual support groups, non-profits, physicians, or spiritual leaders with respect to emotional support. The social services system and lending institutions were more relevant with respect to financial assistance, while public transportation was important with respect to local mobility.

## Service Providers' Knowledge of Client Assets

### *Highlights...*

- ◆ Consistent with the evidence presented by the clients, the service providers recognized the importance of family, friends, and health professionals in coping with problems.
- ◆ Service providers were much less likely to acknowledge a range of other assets that many of the clients identified as having used within the past two years.
- ◆ Service providers, consistent with the clients themselves, often recognized that the most helpful assets were not necessarily those most often used. They included such assets as in-home support workers, child or senior care, non-profits or charities, mutual support groups, and women's organizations in their listing of the most helpful assets.
- ◆ An analysis of each service providers' views of the helpfulness of each asset of individual clients revealed only modest levels of agreement for most of the assets considered.
- ◆ The broadest areas of agreement between clients and service providers tended to revolve around several categories of relatives, agencies and government services, with some examples of friends and other professionals, groups, and associations displaying a greater degree of shared understanding.
- ◆ The more specific areas of broader agreement between clients and service providers included in-home support workers, 12-step groups, government housing, community charities, child or senior care, emergency shelters, stepchildren, spiritual leaders, lawyers, pets, spouse's or partner's parents, and preschool programs.

As noted previously, both the clients *and* the service providers independently completed the Assets Inventory. The current chapter first summarizes the service providers' impressions of their clients' assets. A second analysis compares the responses of both clients and service providers to determine their grouped or "aggregate" levels of agreement with respect to the resources that clients had used in the past two years and their usefulness. Lastly, service providers' assessments of clients' assets are compared directly with the perspective of the clients to determine how closely responses matched up at the individual level.

### 5.1 Service Providers' Views of Client Assets

The first analysis identifies the most common assets that service providers believed their clients had accessed in the past two years, a ranking of those assets described as "very helpful," and a ranking of those more often rated as "not at all helpful." Table 33 summarizes these results.

The service providers identified a core group of assets that included counsellors, friends, parents, relatives, spouses, and doctors. These were the assets believed to have been accessed by clients within the past two years "to help individuals and members of a family in reaching goals, getting things done, providing support, or meeting needs."

**Table 33**

**Service Providers' Ranking of Client Assets by Usage and Degree of Helpfulness**  
*(n = 1,155)<sup>1</sup>*

Rank	Total usage	Percent used	Considered "very helpful"	Percent	Considered "not at all helpful"	Percent
1	Counsellor	79.7	In-home support	61.2	Ex-spouse's relatives	81.6
2	Friends	79.4	Child or senior care	57.7	Ex-spouse's parents	74.5
3	Parents	72.6	Counsellor	56.2	Ex-spouse	70.9
4	Relatives	66.6	Non-profit and charitable organizations	56.0	Spouse's parents	42.9
5	Spouse or partner	60.0	Mutual support groups	53.1	Spouse's relatives	42.0
6	Doctor/physician	56.5	12-step group	50.8	Step children	37.0
7	Non-profit and charitable organizations	46.5	Colleges or universities	47.2	Landlord	36.6
8	Own children	44.2	Emergency shelters	45.9	Spouse or partner	26.4
9	Neighbours	33.1	Women's programs/organizations	45.7	Manager or supervisor	23.8
10	Co-workers	33.0	Preschool programs	42.1	Police	23.3

<sup>1</sup> Variables with fewer than 50 responses given were not used in the analysis.

The particular circumstances under which clients accessed these relationships or specific resources could not be determined with the Assets Inventory. The results nevertheless point to the service providers' perceptions of the importance of immediate family, friends, and health professionals in coping with a variety of challenges. Beyond these assets, the service providers typically expressed a rather narrow view of other assets that might be at their clients' disposal. Non-profit and charitable organizations (46.5 percent) and the clients' children (44.2 percent) were the only other assets believed to have been accessed by more than one-third of the clients in the past two years. In contrast, more than one-third of the clients themselves identified a total of 28 different assets that they had accessed.

The list of assets most often considered to be "very helpful" differs considerably from the total usage listing. The only two categories to appear on both lists are counsellors and non-profit or charitable organizations. Service providers emphasized as well the perceived helpfulness of assets such as in-home support workers and child or senior care. Other key groups, associations, and agencies included the following: mutual support groups, 12-step programs, emergency shelters, women's groups or organizations, colleges or universities, and preschool programs.

The resources most often considered to be "not at all helpful" included ex-spouses/partners and their various parents and relatives. For most of the clients, the termination of their relationship with a significant other meant the end of any type of helping relationship with that individual or the individual's family. The clients' spouses themselves, as well as their parents and relatives, were considered by many to be "not at all helpful." Finally, a diverse array of other individuals and relationships deemed by many service providers not to be particularly helpful included stepchildren, landlords, managers or supervisors, and the police.

In summary, service providers had a particular view of their clients' assets that stressed the impor-

tance of formal support groups and services, whether in the non-profit sector or sponsored by government more directly. By the same token, service providers recognized that their clients most often drew upon more immediate support networks of friends and families, as well as certain key health professionals, to deal with many of their problems or help meet their needs – even if these were not always considered to be "very helpful." An interesting issue emerges, then, concerning the degree to which service providers and clients shared similar perceptions of clients' assets, as well as the degree to which these were considered more or less helpful.

## **5.2 Service Providers' and Clients' Views of Assets: Group Differences**

Despite some similarities in the assets identified, the service providers had different views of their clients' assets in terms of the prevalence and the degree of helpfulness. The core assets, for example, were quite similar for both groups, as service providers highlighted the significance of counsellors, friends, parents, relatives, spouses, and doctors as those most often used within the past two years. Clients ranked these as their most prevalent sources of support as well (see Table 16), though their ordering was slightly different. More important, a significantly higher percentage of clients reported accessing each of these resources (with the exception of parents) in comparison with the service providers. Other assets included on both lists were clients' own children, neighbours, and co-workers, although the percentage of service providers identifying these as relationships used by their clients was again substantially lower than that of the clients themselves. Lastly, service providers were not nearly as likely to acknowledge the prevalence of a variety of other resources mentioned by clients, such as hospitals, lending institutions, and libraries.

In terms of the relative helpfulness of different relationships and resources, service providers appeared to have an understanding somewhat similar

to that of their clients in the aggregate. In total, 9 of the 10 assets identified as “very helpful” by the service providers appeared on the clients list as well. Similar percentages of both groups ranked in-home support, child or senior care, non-profit organizations, mutual support groups, and women’s organizations as “very helpful.” The service providers, however, tended to underestimate the helpfulness of counsellors, emergency shelters, and preschool programs by roughly 10 to 15 percent.

There was considerable overlap in terms of identifying assets that were “not at all helpful,” including seven of the top eight responses: ex-spouse’s (or ex-partner’s) relatives, ex-spouse’s parents, ex-spouses, spouse’s or partner’s parents, relatives, stepchildren, and landlords. Interestingly, the service providers had a more negative view than their clients with respect to the helpfulness of the ex-spouse and his or her parents and relatives, as well as the current spouse’s parents. The clients themselves more often viewed their spouses’ relatives, stepchildren, and landlords in a more negative light than the service providers. Other assets considered by clients to be “not at all helpful” were political representatives, landlords, fraternal service organizations, and neighbours; none of these appeared on the service providers’ listing. Finally, service providers identified their clients’ spouses and the police more negatively than the clients themselves.

These group differences suggest that service providers were not as aware of the full range of client assets, although there were some striking similarities in terms of which resources and relationships were typically viewed by both as “very helpful” versus “not at all helpful.” Yet the analysis must be tempered with the realization that these are *aggregate* differences, based on the full sample comparisons of the responses of both clients and service providers. A more significant comparison in some ways consists of examining the extent to which clients and service providers converged in terms of their responses at the *individual* level. Stated differently, the question then becomes the following: “To what extent did a particular service provider share a similar or dissimilar view of a specific client’s assets?”

### 5.3 Service Providers’ and Clients’ Views of Assets: Individual Differences

The next analysis involved a direct comparison of each service provider’s assessment of the client’s assets with that offered by the client herself or himself. For each relationship or resource listed in the assets inventories, the assessments of service providers and their clients were compared to determine the degree to which their responses matched. If service providers and clients alike had similar understandings of the resources available and accessed in the last two years, then their responses should have been quite similar. On the other hand, one could argue that service providers have only limited knowledge at best of their clients’ assets and even less knowledge of the extent to which these have been accessed and the relative “helpfulness” of different relationships and resources.

Thus, for each asset listed, service providers and clients were compared on a total of four possible responses: 1) no usage of the asset in last two years; 2) asset was used, but “not at all helpful”; 3) asset was used and “somewhat helpful”; and 4) asset was used and “very helpful.” Three specific tests were performed to compare more formally the level of agreement between service providers and clients. First, a chi-square test was performed to determine whether or not there was a statistically significant relationship between service providers’ judgments of the helpfulness of their clients’ assets and the assessments of the clients themselves. The basic logic of the chi-square test can be summarized accordingly:

$H_R$ : For any specific assets being compared, service providers’ and clients’ ratings will be related to or “correlated” with one another.

$H_O$ : For any specific assets being compared, service providers’ and clients’ ratings will be independent of one another, i.e., our knowledge of one group’s ratings will not help us to determine the ratings of the other group.

The results of the chi-square test revealed that the ratings between service providers and clients were similar enough to be able to state that a “statistically significant” relationship existed for each of the assets where the statistic could be computed. In other words, the proportions of service providers and clients who rated each asset as either not used, not at all helpful, somewhat helpful, or very helpful were similar enough to be able to state that a “statistically significant” relationship exists for each pair of variables included in the assets inventories. This particular result provides some cause for optimism with respect to the degree of common understanding of assets between service providers and their clients.

Two additional measures were used to measure the strength of the correlation. The statistic lambda measures the strength of a correlation with a range of 0.0-1.0, such that a value approaching 0 indicates a weak to virtually non-existent relationship, while a value of 1.0 indicates a perfect correlation between the variables in question. Another measure, Cohen’s kappa, assesses the agreement between the evaluations of two raters (i.e., service providers and clients) when both are rating the same object. The difference between the observed proportion of cases in which the raters agree and the proportion expected by chance is divided by the maximum difference possible between the observed and expected proportions, given the marginal totals. A value of 1.0 indicates perfect agreement, while a value approaching 0 indicates a level of agreement that is no better than chance.

In Table 34, the results of these latter two measures for each of the resources and relationships contained in the assets inventories are presented. The strength of the associations reveal a somewhat more complicated story. Ideally, the ratings should be similar enough to generate relatively high correlation and kappa coefficients, which would in turn indicate high levels of agreement between service providers and clients. In most instances, the levels of agreement are only modest, with some positive and some negative exceptions.

Within the subcategory of “relatives,” the more highly correlated assessments were for spouses or partners, the client’s own children, pets, and parents. The knowledge of clients’ ex-spouses and their families as possible assets was an area of weakness in terms of common understanding, as was the category of spouse’s or partner’s relatives.<sup>8</sup>

In comparing the assessments for friends and other individuals, the strongest levels of agreement were assessments about the helpfulness of in-home support workers, co-workers, lawyers or legal advisors, and spiritual leaders. The areas of more widespread disagreement included assessments regarding the helpfulness of employment counsellors, landlords or apartment managers, political representatives, health care specialists, medical doctors, and counsellors.

The levels of agreement were relatively high for several of the groups and associations listed, including 12-step groups, religious or spiritual organizations, mutual support groups, and health and fitness groups. There was considerably less agreement between clients and service providers in assessing those groups and associations with a focus on the more informal or recreational aspects of clients’ lives, such as sports clubs or teams, informal social clubs, ethnic clubs or organizations, outdoor clubs, and youth organizations.

With respect to agencies and government assets, there were a number of areas that displayed a more common understanding between clients and service providers. Foremost among these were government housing, community charities, child or senior care, emergency shelters, preschool programs, unions, crisis lines, and schools. There was only moderate to weak agreement with respect to libraries and their programs, colleges and universities, the police, employment centres, hospitals and clinics.

Finally, there was some common recognition of the relative importance of public transportation, special transportation, and employers. There was less agreement between clients and service providers with respect to neighbourhood merchants, lending institutions, and utility companies.

**Table 34****An Individual-level Comparison of Service Providers and Clients<sup>1</sup>**

Assets	Category of relationship	Lambda	Kappa
Parents	Relatives	<b>0.296</b>	<b>0.407</b>
Relatives	Relatives	<b>0.117</b>	<b>0.322</b>
Spouse/partner	Relatives	<b>0.431</b>	<b>0.475</b>
Spouse's/partner's parents	Relatives	<b>0.176</b>	<b>0.420</b>
Spouse's/partner's relatives	Relatives	0.070	<b>0.353</b>
Ex-spouse or ex-partner	Relatives	<b>0.162</b>	<b>0.421</b>
Ex-spouse's parents	Relatives	0.081	<b>0.423</b>
Ex-spouse's relatives	Relatives	0.038	<b>0.380</b>
Own children	Relatives	0.367	<b>0.457</b>
Stepchildren	Relatives	0.091	<b>0.493</b>
Pets	Relatives	<b>0.318</b>	<b>0.477</b>
Friends	Friends and others	<b>0.200</b>	<b>0.333</b>
Neighbours	Friends and others	<b>0.221</b>	<b>0.319</b>
Co-workers	Friends and others	<b>0.380</b>	<b>0.450</b>
Manager or supervisor	Friends and others	<b>0.226</b>	<b>0.439</b>
Teachers or professors	Friends and others	<b>0.225</b>	<b>0.380</b>
Counsellor	Friends and others	<b>0.128</b>	<b>0.295</b>
Doctor/physician	Friends and others	<b>0.141</b>	<b>0.307</b>
Other health care individual	Friends and others	<b>0.108</b>	<b>0.281</b>
Lawyer or legal advisor	Friends and others	<b>0.343</b>	<b>0.478</b>
Accountant or financial advisor	Friends and others	0.108	<b>0.418</b>
Employment/career counsellor	Friends and others	0.009	<b>0.327</b>
In-home support workers	Friends and others	<b>0.554</b>	<b>0.658</b>
Spiritual leader	Friends and others	<b>0.330</b>	<b>0.483</b>
Landlord/apartment manager	Friends and others	0.039	<b>0.385</b>
Political representative	Friends and others	<b>0.077</b>	<b>0.311</b>
Religious or spiritual congregation	Groups and associations	<b>0.285</b>	<b>0.462</b>
12-step group (NA, AA, etc.)	Groups and associations	<b>0.391</b>	<b>0.608</b>
Mutual support group	Groups and associations	<b>0.267</b>	<b>0.455</b>
Sports club or team	Groups and associations	0.025	<b>0.347</b>
Informal social club	Groups and associations	0.041	<b>0.348</b>
Outdoor club	Groups and associations	–	<b>0.169</b>
Health and fitness group	Groups and associations	<b>0.167</b>	<b>0.443</b>
Ethnic club or organization	Groups and associations	0.029	<b>0.351</b>
Youth organization	Groups and associations	0.011	<b>0.326</b>
Non-profit and charitable organizations	Agencies and government	<b>0.243</b>	<b>0.334</b>
Community centre	Agencies and government	0.070	<b>0.347</b>
Community charity	Agencies and government	<b>0.255</b>	<b>0.525</b>
Women's programs and organizations	Agencies and government	<b>0.131</b>	<b>0.386</b>
Recreation programs	Agencies and government	–	<b>0.271</b>
Libraries/library programs	Agencies and government	<b>0.204</b>	<b>0.324</b>
Child or senior care	Agencies and government	<b>0.280</b>	<b>0.517</b>

**Table 34 (cont'd)**

Assets	Category of relationship	Lambda	Kappa
Crisis line	Agencies and government	0.115	<b>0.454</b>
Emergency shelters	Agencies and government	<b>0.241</b>	<b>0.495</b>
Preschool program	Agencies and government	0.143	<b>0.472</b>
Elementary and high schools	Agencies and government	<b>0.270</b>	<b>0.410</b>
Colleges or universities	Agencies and government	<b>0.118</b>	<b>0.387</b>
Hospitals and clinics	Agencies and government	<b>0.224</b>	<b>0.290</b>
Government housing	Agencies and government	<b>0.253</b>	<b>0.537</b>
Employment centre	Agencies and government	<b>0.090</b>	<b>0.344</b>
Unions	Agencies and government	<b>0.116</b>	<b>0.456</b>
Police	Agencies and government	<b>0.140</b>	<b>0.385</b>
Neighbourhood merchants	Businesses	<b>0.159</b>	<b>0.395</b>
Lending institutions	Businesses	<b>0.168</b>	<b>0.343</b>
Public transportation	Businesses	<b>0.345</b>	<b>0.446</b>
Special transportation	Businesses	<b>0.164</b>	<b>0.435</b>
Employers	Businesses	<b>0.222</b>	<b>0.414</b>
Utility companies	Businesses	0.093	<b>0.324</b>

1 Bold-faced figures indicate “statistically significant” relationships.

## 5.4 Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

The results of the analysis should not be considered unusual for the most part. One would not expect, for example, that service providers typically would have had a more in-depth awareness of the full range of assets accessed within the last two years for a variety of issues that may not have been identified when clients presented their issues. The fact that most clients identified a much broader range of assets reflects their familiarity with the intimate details of their lives, many of which will not necessarily find expression during the relatively small amount of time that any service professional can commit to a particular client. On the other hand, service providers generally highlighted similar assets as clients in terms of relative usage and degree of helpfulness. The specific knowledge that service providers had of individual clients’ assets was measurably weaker.

The obvious conclusion, however, suggests that there may indeed be a great many more assets – specific relationships and resources – that might be considered in developing plans for interventions. One means for addressing the discrepancy between clients and service providers to assist in service planning and delivery would be to incorporate some type of modified assets inventory as part of the intake process. The key, though, appears to lie in the identification specifically of those assets considered to be “very helpful” – or perhaps that had not been considered previously – as opposed to merely providing a laundry list of every resource available. Many of the areas of common misunderstanding or “disagreement” about the utility of different assets could be resolved quite readily through a clear and simple process of identifying key assets. Future practice-oriented research should address the extent to which interventions can or should be modified vis-à-vis the availability of different informal sources of support, or how these can be integrated to serve clients more effectively.

At the same time, service providers must continue to recognize that many of the “most helpful” assets are indeed to be found among the public and non-profit sectors, as described in the previous chapter. In that sense, there should continue to be concerted efforts directed at the coordination of

complementary services. As well, the role of faith communities and other para-professional organizations should not be discounted in considering possible options, as these were more often recognized and utilized than family service agency representatives believed.

# 6

## Family Functioning and Family Dynamics

In addition to the assessments of clients' backgrounds, presenting issues, services provided, and assets at their disposal, the Family Service Canada survey examined various aspects of family functioning and family dynamics among the client sample. The 12-item General Functioning Subscale (GFS) of the Mc-Master Family Assessment Device (cf. Byles, Boyle, and Offord, 1988) was included to help determine the overall level of family dysfunction, with a minimum possible score of 12 and a maximum possible score of 48. The basic logic of the scale suggests that the higher the score, the higher the level of dysfunction. In previous research, scores of 27 or higher are "used to classify families as dysfunctional."

The clients filled out a second measure, the Family Dynamics and Resiliency Scale, as part of their survey package. M-J Wason of the Canadian Policy Research Networks developed the scale based on a review of the resiliency literature and fieldwork conducted in 1996 with a sample of households in British Columbia (cf. Michalski and Wason, 1999). The purpose of the scale, which was modelled closely after the GFS, was to assess the family dynamics that characterized families during a recent time of crisis or in response to an incident of particular stress. Depending on the results of reliability and validation procedures, a long-term aim for the instrument will be predicting which families are more or less likely to cope successfully with particular crises that inevitably occur. The

Family Service Canada study provided the first opportunity to more systematically investigate the viability of the Family Dynamics and Resiliency Scale as a standardized measure.

### 6.1 Family Functioning Results

The reliability and validity of the GFS of the Family Assessment Device have been investigated previously (cf. Byles, Boyle, and Offord, 1988; Miller, Epstein and Bishop, 1986). The measure has been included in the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY) and in the Ontario Child Health Survey (OCHS). The Cronbach's alpha has been established as quite high (0.89), with a "mean" or average score of 19.43 and a standard deviation of 5.33. These figures are used to provide a baseline comparison with the results from the client sample.

Since many of the individuals are accessing family services specifically as a result of problems or crises with which they are struggling, the expectations were that the mean score for the sample should be higher than that of the general population *and* that a significant proportion of the families would be in the dysfunctional range of 27.0 or higher. Both of these hypotheses were confirmed in examining the GFS results.

Of the 1,168 clients to whom the GFS scale was administered, a total of 1,079 (92.4 percent) reported

having family around and attempted to complete the scale. The other 7.6 percent indicated that they had no family around at present and believed, therefore, that they were not appropriate candidates to complete scales assessing either family functioning or family dynamics. Of the 1,079 clients for whom the scales were appropriate, 94.0 percent completed the entire GFS by answering each question clearly.<sup>9</sup> These 1,014 cases have been included in most of the subsequent analyses.

The General Functioning Subscale proved comparable to previous research in terms of internal consistency, achieving a Cronbach's alpha of 0.916 for the full sample.<sup>10</sup> The average score for those in the client sample was 27.3 (with a standard deviation of 7.3), which exceeded that of the general population by nearly 8 full points. Moreover, half the sample (50.1 percent) scored higher than the "dysfunctional" cut-off of 27.0, whereas only 13.7 percent had summative scores at or below the average for the general population. These data are highly consistent with the belief that individuals and families accessing service agencies are more likely to be characterized as "dysfunctional" at that particular moment than in comparison with the general population.

The use of analysis of variance (ANOVA) procedures permitted a more formal comparison of demographic variables to determine whether or not there were specific correlates of family functioning, including gender, family type, labour force status, income, education, social assistance status, and age. The procedure allowed for a more rigorous test of differences observed in mean scores of samples drawn from different subpopulations of clients (e.g., men versus women). The results are presented in summary form in Table 35.

There were no statistically significant differences identified for many of the demographic factors tested, including gender, income, social assistance status, and age. On the other hand, three factors were correlated weakly with family functioning: family type, employment status, and education.

More specifically, adults who reported living alone scored higher (29.1) on the scale than the three other categories of comparison, which included lone parents (27.2), married or common-law couples with children (27.1), and married or common-law couples *without* children (25.6). The finding implies that adults who were living alone at the time of the survey were in family situations that could be characterized as more dysfunctional on average than the other family types to which they were compared, while couples without children were more likely to score lower on the scale.

In addition, those who were unemployed had the highest average score (28.7), followed those not in the labour force (27.5), and then by those working either full- or part-time (26.9). Educational attainment was weakly correlated, such that those clients with lower levels of education tended to score higher on the GFS. Those with either high school diplomas or who had not completed high school were significantly higher than those with professional or graduate degrees. In short, those who were living alone, who were unemployed, and with less education were further challenged by living within the context of dysfunctional families, as their aggregate score (29.9) reveals.

Apart from the influence of demographic factors, one might argue that family assessment scores might vary on the basis of presenting issues. The next analysis explores the extent to which different presenting problems were correlated with higher levels of family dysfunction. The 33 different presenting problems were collapsed into 10 separate or distinct categories: couples' relationships (including those who identified an issue associated with being separated or divorced), parenting issues, problems with delinquency, health or disability problems, mental health issues (mainly depression), problems associated with basic needs, problems with leisure time and social contacts, substance abuse, violence and abuse (e.g., domestic violence, child abuse, elder abuse, etc.), and work- or school-related problems. The results of these comparisons are presented in Table 36.

**Table 35****Family Assessment Device GFS Results for Full Sample and Selected Demographic Characteristics**

Category	Sample size	Mean score	Standard deviation
<b>Full sample</b>	1,005	27.3	7.3
<b>Gender</b>			
Male	260	27.0	6.8
Female	667	27.7	7.5
<b>Family type</b>			
Adults living alone	242	29.1	7.7
Lone parents	240	27.2	6.8
Couples with children	320	27.1	7.4
Couples without children	108	25.6	6.5
<b>Labour force status</b>			
Employed	507	26.9	7.1
Unemployed	133	28.7	8.1
Not in the labour force	275	27.5	7.2
<b>Income</b>			
Poor	476	27.2	7.5
Non-poor	525	27.4	7.1
<b>Education</b>			
High school or less	492	27.9	7.1
Some college or college graduate	328	27.3	7.6
Professional and post-graduate degree	78	24.2	7.3
<b>Social assistance recipients</b>			
Current/recent social assistance recipient	303	27.8	7.8
Not current or recent recipient	666	27.0	7.1
<b>Age</b>			
Under 20 years of age	101	27.9	7.4
20 - 29 years of age	201	27.2	7.5
30 - 39 years of age	326	27.4	7.4
40 - 49 years of age	220	27.7	7.5
50 years and older	72	26.1	5.9

For the most part, there was not much variation in family functioning scores in relation to presenting problems. For 7 of 10 presenting problems, the average scores on the General Functioning Subscale were between 27.8 – 28.8. Only those presenting health or disability problems scored below the dysfunctional cut-off (26.8), while only one category of presenting problems, “leisure time and social contacts,” scored higher than the others at 29.2.

Finally, the question concerned whether or not multiple problems tended to be associated with

higher levels of family dysfunction. Where clients presented only one or two problems, their scores were in fact significantly lower (25.8) than those presenting three or more problems (28.2). The level of family dysfunction gradually edged upwards until a peak of 29 for those presenting eight or more problems. Thus there were relatively few predictors or correlates of high levels of family dysfunction, perhaps in part because the vast majority of clients accessing family services were already likely to be classified as in the dysfunctional range.<sup>11</sup>

**Table 36****Family Assessment Device GFS Scores by Presenting Problems**

Category	Sample size	Mean score	Standard deviation
Couples' relationship	542	27.8	7.3
Parenting issue	494	27.3	6.9
Delinquency	89	28.8	6.5
Health or disability	199	26.8	7.3
Mental health	343	28.5	7.5
Basic needs	332	28.0	7.6
Leisure time and social contacts	122	29.2	7.4
Substance abuse	132	28.2	7.2
Violence and abuse	359	28.8	7.9
Work or school	348	27.8	7.3

## 6.2 Family Dynamics Assessment

The second standardized measure, the Family Dynamics and Resiliency Scale (FDRS), was completed by 978 clients, or 88.3 percent of those who had family available and to whom the scale was administered. Although the language and structure were quite similar to that of the GFS, clients had a slightly more difficult time completing the scale as successfully, as indicated both by the lower completion rate of useable surveys and the occasional written comments accompanying the scale. Nevertheless, despite the fact that the FDRS had not been validated previously, the initial results from the Family Service Canada study were somewhat encouraging.

The internal reliability of the scale was quite high, achieving a Cronbach's alpha of 0.903, which can be considered comparable to that of the GFS. The inter-item correlation statistics was lower than that of the GFS, with a mean score of 0.322. The lower inter-item correlation corroborates in part that the scale was capturing more than one aspect of family dynamics, i.e., that the 20 items were measuring multiple dimensions of family dynamics. As a result of a factor analysis, which confirmed the presence of at least three different

underlying constructs, 12 items were selected from the Family Dynamics and Resiliency Scale to represent a healthy response or "positive coping strategy" for the family's capacity to handle stress. The positive coping strategy included several aspects of family dynamics: 1) a shared sense of commitment and optimism toward the family; 2) role acceptance, flexibility and adaptability; 3) communication; and 4) general satisfaction with daily tasks and their overall situation.

The reliability data for the truncated scale improved to 0.915, with an inter-item correlation of 0.47. These figures were virtually identical to those of the GFS. Moreover, the scoring results for both scales were remarkably similar. The average score for the FDRS scale of 27.9 was almost identical to that of the GFS (27.3), with slightly more than half (54.5 percent) scoring at least 27 or higher. In fact, the GFS and the subscale of the FDRS correlated highly at a level of 0.77. Finally, just as a higher score on the GFS indicates a higher level of family dysfunction, a higher score on the FDRS suggests a more negative evaluation of family dynamics and a potentially lower level of family resiliency.

The next question concerned once again whether or not there were any demographic predictors of

FDRS scores. The same factors examined in relation to the GFS were tested for a possible association with the FDRS by using analysis of variance procedures: gender, family type, labour force status, income, education, social assistance status, and age. The results are presented in Table 37.

Some of the variables were not correlated with the measure of family dynamics and resiliency, including income, social assistance status, and age. Gender was weakly associated with FDRS scores, such that female clients tended to score slightly

higher than their male counterparts, indicating a somewhat more negative evaluation of their family dynamics. The more significant differences observed, as in the case of the GFS, were associated with family type, labour force status, and education.

In particular, adults who were living alone at the time of the study scored significantly higher on the FDRS (29.8) than the other three family types identified. Those clients who were unemployed scored more than two points higher (29.6) than clients who were employed and 1.7 points above

**Table 37**

**Family Dynamics and Resiliency Results for Full Sample and Selected Demographic Characteristics**

Category	Sample size	Mean score	Standard deviation
<b>Full sample</b>	978	27.9	6.6
<b>Gender</b>			
Male	261	27.4	6.2
Female	640	28.4	6.7
<b>Family type</b>			
Adults living alone	234	29.8	6.9
Lone parents	237	28.1	6.4
Couples with children	308	27.1	6.1
Couples without children	101	27.0	6.6
<b>Labour force status</b>			
Employed	492	27.5	6.2
Unemployed	125	29.6	7.0
Not in the labour force	268	27.9	7.0
<b>Income</b>			
Poor	463	28.0	6.8
Non-poor	504	27.9	6.4
<b>Education</b>			
High school or less	476	28.5	6.7
Some college or college graduate	319	27.6	6.7
Professional and post-graduate degree	75	26.4	6.2
<b>Social assistance recipients</b>			
Current/recent social assistance recipient	290	28.5	7.2
Not current or recent recipient	650	27.7	6.3
<b>Age</b>			
Under 20 years of age	101	28.2	7.2
20 - 29 years of age	198	27.7	6.8
30 - 39 years of age	320	27.7	6.1
40 - 49 years of age	201	28.8	6.8
50 years and older	74	28.5	6.4

those not in the labour force. Finally, a significant difference emerged in comparing those with a high school education or less (28.5) with those who had a professional or post-graduate degree (26.4). To some extent, these various correlates suggest that living with others, being employed or not in the labour force, and more education are “protective” factors even among those families seeking professional assistance at family service agencies. Indeed, the small number of clients who were living alone, unemployed, and who had a high school education or less were clearly the most vulnerable group, with an FDRS score of 33.6. No other combination of demographic factors produced comparable results.

The next analysis considered the extent to which presenting problems were correlated with family dynamics as measured by the FDRS. The same breakdown of presenting problems into 10 distinct categories was utilized for the present analysis that was used in examining the results of the GFS (see Table 38).

As with the previous analysis, presenting problems were not particularly effective in predicting mean scores of family dynamics. For 8 of the 10 problem areas identified, FDRS scores averaged between 28.5 and 29.5. The only two presenting

problems that tended to produce slightly lower FDRS scores were “parenting issues” and “health or disability-related problems” (27.8 and 27.6, respectively). The highest scores, which again represent negative evaluations of family dynamics and potentially less family resiliency, were associated with the areas of violence and abuse, as well as leisure time and social contacts. These were followed closely by mental health issues, substance abuse, and delinquency.

The number of presenting problems had a weak association with FDRS scores. In particular, those clients who presented either one or two problems scored 26.5 on average, while those who presented three problems averaged 27.8, and those who presented four or more problems averaged 28.7. The clients presenting five or more problems averaged at least 29 on the scale.

### 6.3 Discussion and Analytic Limitations

The measure of family functioning (GFS) indicated that individuals and families accessing family service agencies reported higher than average levels of family dysfunction compared to population

**Table 38**  
**Family Dynamics and Resiliency Scores by Presenting Problems**

Category	Sample size	Mean score	Standard deviation
Couples’ relationship	518	28.5	6.4
Parenting issue	480	27.8	6.4
Delinquency	77	29.1	6.3
Health or disability	195	27.6	7.1
Mental health	153	29.2	6.7
Basic needs	317	28.9	6.6
Leisure time and social contacts	269	29.3	6.8
Substance abuse	130	29.1	6.2
Violence and abuse	344	29.5	7.3
Work or school	330	28.6	6.7

norms. The measure displayed a robust correlation with the newly developed measure of family dynamics and resiliency (0.77), which thereby provided some additional validation of the FDRS. Indeed, the factors that were associated with family functioning were further correlated with the family dynamics and resiliency scale. Three factors in particular deserve some additional consideration in light of their shared correlations across both scales: family type, education, and labour force status.

The preliminary evidence suggests a small, positive effect of higher levels of education upon healthy family functioning and enhanced family dynamics and resiliency. In addition, there was a modest correlation between family type and the GFS and FDRS measures: those adults classified as “living alone” reported higher levels of family dysfunction and higher scores on the FDRS (once again, indicating “risk” in some sense). Finally, those who were unemployed were worse off on both measures compared to those who were employed or not in the labour force.

The tentative conclusion points to the importance or potential significance of variables at the individual, familial, and societal levels in some senses. For example “human capital” factors such as education may have a positive impact through the acquisition of knowledge or skill sets that might be helpful in dealing with family life or other routine challenges or stressors. The availability of informal support networks or dependable assets may further enhance the capacity of individuals to cope, whereas those who are relatively more isolated on average (e.g., living alone) may be at greater risk for certain negative outcomes. Finally, structural factors that transcend personal problems, such as the availability of employment opportunities (or, conversely, high unemployment), may have substantial impacts upon individuals and families.

The current analysis was limited by the cross-sectional design of the study, as well as the nature

of the study sample (i.e., a high percentage of individuals and families already “in crisis”). Hence it was not possible to conduct a more definitive test of the relative importance of the above and other factors to determine the “resiliency” of these families or any other outcomes of interest. For example, consider a typical definition of resiliency, such as the following:

Resilience is the capability of individuals and systems (families, groups and communities) to cope successfully in the face of significant adversity or risk. This capability develops and changes over time, is enhanced by protective factors within the individual/system and the environment, and contributes to the maintenance or enhancement of health (Mangham et al., 1994, p. 1).

By definition, the notion of resiliency or “the ability to bounce back after adversity” requires a longitudinal time frame. The design of the current study precluded the possibility of testing for differences between “resilient” and “non-resilient” individuals or families. Similarly, the importance of having a comparison group from the general population should be emphasized if one has an interest in assessing what specific family strengths or other assets may help to promote positive outcomes. In the present context, the research design accommodates a more narrow exploration of clients’ assets and their overall levels of family functioning and dynamics.

Finally, one has to be clear in defining the outcomes one wishes to measure. Future research should identify specific outcomes and focus on the manner in which different assets and other family strengths contribute positively toward the desired results. Based on the exploratory results of this study, the modelling of possible effects ideally should include individual, familial, and even community-level variables as a means of testing more formally the concept of resiliency and what types of other assets may be most helpful in promoting effective family service interventions.



## Conclusions: Service Implications and Future Research

The first national study of clients accessing family service agencies confirmed a great many expectations about clients' demographic characteristics, the most common types of presenting problems, and services offered. The study provided considerable insight into the nature of the assets available to clients, the extent to which these had been accessed, their usefulness, and service providers' impressions of their clients' resources. Finally, the study demonstrated that the clients in general tended to score in the dysfunctional range on a measure of family functioning, while the results from a pilot test of the Family Dynamics and Resiliency Scale suggested that the majority of the clients evaluated their overall capacity to handle stress or cope effectively in a somewhat negative fashion.

Based on the overall results, the question then becomes: What are the implications for service planning and delivery among family service agencies across Canada? A subsequent issue concerns what future research should be conducted to complement the baseline data already gathered? These questions form the core of the concluding chapter.

### 7.1 Serving a Diverse Clientele

Several implications of the data have been considered in the preceding chapters. A general conclusion that can be reached involves the distribution of clients who participated in the study and,

by extension, who tended to access family service agencies across the country. The evidence points to a preponderance in the study sample of adult female clients, while children, men, seniors, visible minorities, newcomers, gays and lesbians were underrepresented in comparison with the general Canadian population. Some of the observed differences may be attributable to selection bias, as explained further in Appendix B. Yet there are two other important possibilities as well: there may be differences in different groups' willingness to turn to professional family service agencies for help and/or the agencies themselves are not as responsive to community needs as they could be.

With respect to the first possibility, the only evidence clearly suggestive of group differences can be gleaned from the fact that men on average reported accessing fewer types of assets and with less frequency than the females in the client sample. That men appear to be less willing to "ask for help" certainly may reflect a deeper cultural pattern. Nevertheless, the question as to why adult females born in Canada are the most prevalent service group cannot be answered adequately without additional research on the general population that investigates the reasons why some groups are more or less likely to seek professional help for their family concerns. In general, family service agencies arguably have developed in response to the demands that consumers have placed upon them by dropping by for consultations.

A further implication, however, might be that family service agencies need to engage in more formal outreach activities, especially in the area of community needs assessments. A number of research studies in Toronto, for example, have shown that there are many groups – particularly among ethno-specific groups and newcomers to Canada – who are not familiar with many of the professional services available to help with family problems, problems of adjustment, and so forth (cf. Michalski and George, 1996; Michalski, 1997). Thus agencies may be inclined to achieve a “steady state” with respect to the types of clients and problems they are accustomed to servicing. More resources devoted to community-oriented needs assessments could assist in the identification of broader needs that may not surface as readily in mainstream agencies that assume a more passive role in attracting clients. Herein agencies must continually strive to increase their outreach activities and tap into the pulse of their communities, ideally with the support of provincial ministries and other relevant funding bodies in the non-profit sector.

## **7.2 Service Delivery and Informal Support Networks**

There are at least three main conclusions that can be drawn from the survey results that pertain to the issue of service planning and delivery in the context of informal support networks. First, the evidence revealed that presenting problems consisted not only of family relationships and parenting issues (the dominant category among those examined), but involved a diverse array of other issues pertaining to health and disability, violence and abuse, basic needs, and work or school. Second, most clients indeed had access to or had recently turned to informal support networks consisting of friends, parents, children, family members, even as they cited as well a tendency to use health-related professionals (counsellors, physicians) or institutions (hospitals and clinics) to assist in coping with their problems. Finally, the importance of certain types of supportive services dominated the discussion of assets that clients considered to be “very helpful.”

The results from the study seem to suggest that the general pattern of the population parallels that of traditional responses to physical ailments or illness. First, most individuals draw upon their own resources, including informal supports, in response to a perceived problem. If these resources or supports prove inadequate, or the problem too severe, then people tend to engage the more formal machinery of professional supports. The clients participating in the study for the most part were clearly experiencing more severe social or familial distress than the general population (as measured by the higher scores on standardized measures of family functioning and more diffuse measures such as the proportion of clients separated or divorced), which in part likely prompted their usage of professional services. The evidence confirms further the significance of these supports for such families, as many of the professional or quasi-professional assets were considered to be “very helpful” by a majority of those who had accessed them within the past two years: mental health specialists, in-home support workers, non-profit or charitable organizations, child or senior care, emergency shelters, preschool programs, mutual support groups, women’s programs and organizations, and 12-step groups (among others).

Hence the study results reflect the importance of maintaining or even enhancing the professional and non-profit infrastructure that already exists in support of clients experiencing high levels of family distress or crisis. These are the resources that the majority of the clients found most helpful. At the same time, however, many of the agencies that provide such services have experienced fiscal cut-backs, staff reductions, and other constraints that have reduced their capacity to deliver these services. The steady erosion of public support and funding for specific services has meant that some groups, such as lower-income families, are likely to continue to be at greater risk for negative social and economic outcomes as the access and availability of supportive community services decline.

For many families, the issues are at least partly “structural” in nature (e.g., limited employment

opportunities) and transcend a specific focus on the mental health of a particular individual or the resiliency of the family unit. Nevertheless, supportive counselling for depression, other mental illnesses, addictions or substance abuse, and issues such as anxiety or anger management should remain a part of core servicing across family service agencies. In addition, the complex array of services required to assist with coping includes several with a more practical focus, i.e., services that will help individuals and parents in particular by relieving pressures relating to issues such as family dissolution, violence or abuse, balancing work and family responsibilities, and coping with particular job- or school-related demands.

Informal support networks were certainly important as the “first line of defense” for most of those included in the client sample. Clients who were lacking in these assets were more isolated and perhaps more at risk than those who had ample supports to turn to in times of need. There may yet continue to be areas wherein family service agencies could help to promote further usage of informal supports or be catalysts in promoting neighbourhood networks of support or self-help groups. In particular, innovative strategies can be pursued by way of hiring more community development workers rather than maintaining a more narrow clinical or one-on-one focus with clients in agency settings.

The clients accessing family service agencies in the present study typically were much more emphatic in their support of government-sponsored services and the contributions of non-profit agencies than further reliance on informal support networks. From such a perspective, the fact that service providers were less likely to be aware of the full range of resources that clients had tapped into for support may not be as problematic. On the other hand, knowledge of other assets within the clients’ more immediate social sphere or more extended informal supports within the community may provide service providers with a knowledge of particular options that might not otherwise be considered. More generally, though, the failure to assess accurately clients’ most pressing concerns or to be able

to refer to appropriate or supportive services would be much more egregious problems from a planning and service delivery perspective.

### 7.3 Effective Interventions

As suggested earlier, the current study demonstrated that individuals accessing family service agencies were for the most part in serious distress, such that existing informal supports were not adequate to the task of ensuring client well-being or positive family functioning. The current study pointed to some weak correlates of family dysfunction, but the broader lesson appeared to be that there were relatively few groups that might be characterized as “more vulnerable” than others, as suggested by the standardized measures employed: adults living alone, the unemployed, and those with less education. These are groups that by definition imply at least slightly more attenuated support networks or that might have more limited routine access to important supportive resources, such as other household members, colleagues or co-workers, or perhaps even the knowledge or social contacts associated with the pursuit of more schooling beyond high school. Hence these findings suggest that there may yet be some groups marginally at greater “risk” than others. The most effective *interventions*, however, were not examined in the current study.

The evidence appears to suggest that, apart from some basic demographic information evaluations of clients’ assets, service providers need to engage in a more concerted effort to broaden and monitor the effectiveness of different interventions. Counselling remains the dominant intervention provided, regardless of presenting problem. Yet little information exists to suggest that such an intervention yields more positive results than other possible interventions, or that specific problems tend to be addressed more effectively through other types of interventions. Moreover, the current study in no way could assess the long-term impacts of various interventions. These are issues that need to be considered in the context of future research directions in particular.

## 7.4 Future Research

In February 1998, the executive directors from family service agencies across Canada convened for their annual conference in Victoria, British Columbia. One of the issues considered for general discussion was what might be helpful to know from a service planning and delivery perspective. There were several suggestions for questions that might be answered in part through the client survey, including the following:

- What are the trends in presenting problems and where do clients turn for support under different circumstances?
- To what extent were assets linked with the particular problems identified?
- Which assets did clients tend to find most helpful among those that they had accessed?
- Should family service agencies be assisting in the development of more informal or “natural” helping networks for their clients?
- To what extent were either presenting problems or clients’ assets linked either with family functioning or family dynamics and resiliency?
- Were there client groups that tended to score higher or lower on either the family functioning or the family dynamics scales?

Many more issues emerged, however, that highlighted the necessity to pursue further research that might complement that which has already been done. The suggestions generally fell into one of five distinct categories: 1) generalizability of research results or comparability with the general population; 2) the nature of and reasons for selecting interventions; 3) intervention effectiveness; 4) agency assumptions or frameworks for intervention; and 5) enhancing agency outreach and community linkages.

In terms of the generalizability of results, one suggestion was that a more rigorous sampling

approach needed to be developed for any future research, especially at the level of a national study. For that matter, an open question remains whether or not the results would be different for those groups either not captured or adequately represented in the current sample. The most informative analysis would be one that compares a sample of individuals or families from the general population with those who are accessing agencies in terms of their reasons for turning to professional help, their available assets or resources, and measures of family functioning and resiliency. Another specific stream of research would involve comparing the family functioning results with those incorporated in existing studies (such as the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth) to determine whether comparable sets of variables or “models” help predict the results for either or both samples.

Another issue for further research involved the nature of the interventions that service providers and front-line workers engaged in with their clients. More specifically, research should help to clarify “what we do and for whom.” Part of the process would involve examining how service providers use such information for planning interventions, including the assumptions that guide the process of evaluating alternative approaches. Furthermore, does the collection of specific information such as assets inventories, family functioning, and so forth influence how workers think about their clients and what might be considered reasonable options to pursue?

The issue of intervention effectiveness or “what really works for people” received considerable discussion. At a general level, some executive directors talked about the need to explore how to use the existing data with other sources of support or with those who might be interested in these families. The issues of sharing information and coordinating services remain key problems that must be addressed to enhance further service efficacy at the community level.

Another issue to be examined concerns the linkage between interventions and “situational” versus

“long-term” problems. The same interventions cannot be assumed either to be equally appropriate or effective for situation-specific versus chronic problems, yet the information available from a practice standpoint remains highly limited. A related problem is to examine the efficacy of an intervention at the early stages in the “crisis” versus the impact of the intervention with families further along in the crisis.

Finally, some participants in the discussion suggested a need to examine more directly the processes associated with enhancing community linkages. One issue involves the degree to which agencies have formally studied the availability or accessibility of their services. Moreover, rather than simply completing assets inventories with their clients, some executive directors believed that more attention needs to be devoted to exploring what counselors are doing to help develop linkages with other groups, organization, or community resources? One specific suggestion was to focus on the workplace as a potential source of support that might be exploited further. More broadly, in thinking about enhancing linkages with the community or civic society, there was a suggestion that more research should be done with respect to redirecting resources to the conditions that lead people to seek out family services in the first place.

In conclusion, the study confirms that the vast majority of individuals and families who turn to family service agencies tend to evaluate the services

provided by professionals as “very helpful.” Those who access these services clearly express high levels of satisfaction. Furthermore, a growing body of outcomes-based research points to the positive impacts that supportive services can have, particularly in regard to responding to the needs of “at-risk” families, in helping to reduce domestic violence or in providing essential resources to cope with violence, in helping children adapt to and cope effectively with separation and divorce, and for a range of other issues. While the evidence from the study seems to suggest that people tend to draw upon their informal support networks and assets before seeking more formal supports, any further erosion of public supports for family services may increase the risks for a great many families.

The low-income families in the current study were especially likely to seek supportive services for a much broader range of problems than their wealthier counterparts. Hence a strict focus on resiliency or family strengths, without considering broader structural issues such as employment opportunities or the distribution of wealth, may tend to distort our understanding of clients, their circumstances, and their particular reasons for turning to more formal or professional supports. Finally, any further reductions in funding or staffing will likely have the most direct negative impact on these lower-income families and may further marginalize those groups already struggling the most for social and economic survival in Canadian society.



# Appendices



# A

## Project Team Members

Suzanne Peters, Director, Family Network of Canadian Policy Research Networks

Margaret Fietz, Chief Executive Officer, Family Service Canada

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# B

## Methodological Details

### Instrument Development

The survey approach followed the 1990 and 1997 cross-sectional design used by Family Service America. The actual survey included five separate instruments that were developed in collaboration with Family Service America, which took the lead in designing the demographics instrument and the two assets inventories (see Appendix D, which contains a copy of each instrument). Those three instruments were then adapted to suit the Canadian context and Family Service Canada's needs. In addition, the Family Service Canada study included two additional scales to tap into family functioning and family resiliency. The General Functioning Subscale of the Family Assessment Device has been studied extensively and accepted widely as a reliable and valid measure of family functioning and included in the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (cf. Byles, Boyle, and Offord, 1988; Miller, Epstein, and Bishop, 1985; and Statistics Canada, 1995). The Family Dynamics and Resiliency Scale was developed by M-J Wason of the Canadian Policy Research Networks in part through an exploratory, qualitative study of families in British Columbia (cf. Wason and Michalski, 1998).

### Field Testing

Four agencies (located in Winnipeg, Regina, Ottawa, and Kitchener) participated in field testing

during the week of March 10, 1997. Some 25 draft survey packages were sent to each agency: evaluation questionnaires for both the service provider and the client accompanied the survey instruments. Two slightly different versions of the assets inventory were tested. Eighteen completed packages were returned from two agencies, as well as a large number of comments and suggestions. These comments were considered and included in the design, where applicable. Family Service America offered suggestions as well during their field testing that helped inform the design of the Canadian study.

### Agency Participation

The investigators mailed letters to 57 agencies in the Family Service Canada network inviting them to participate in the study, including 55 full members in eight provinces and two associate members in one province (Quebec). There were no FSC agencies in Newfoundland at the time of the study. The 27 agencies that declined participation were spread throughout six provinces and the two territories. These agencies were a mixture of large and small family service centres. The directors reported two main reasons for declining the invitation: 1) staff were reluctant to undertake such a project because it would increase their workloads, which were already unmanageable due to financial cutbacks leading to staff and service reductions; and 2) some agencies were already involved in the

implementation of an outcome evaluation project that required the use of client surveys.

In total, there were some 30 agencies distributed across Canada that agreed to participate (see Table B-1). Of the initial sample of 30 agencies, some 25 actually ended up participating by distributing and collecting surveys. Three agencies that originally agreed to participate declined once the surveys were distributed. In addition, two agencies did not return any questionnaires. Of the 3,451 surveys distributed, a total of 1,445 were returned with information that could be used in subsequent analyses. That figure represents 41.9 percent of all surveys distributed, or 47.4 percent of the surveys distributed to the 25 agencies that participated fully.

## Agency Preparation and Support

Executive directors were alerted to the possibility of the research study as early as July 1996. Further communication was held in late 1996 and early 1997 to explain the study, invite participation, and finally to confirm participation. Questionnaire

packages were sent to agencies two weeks before the research week. About half of the agencies providing feedback indicated that they had received enough preparation time and the rest noted that more time would have been appropriate.

Support, information, and informal training was provided throughout the process by Family Service Canada. Generally, agency staff found the liaison and telephone support provided to them before and during the research week to be helpful and accessible. There was no on-site training with front-line staff who administered the questionnaires, but rather a “reference guide” (see Appendix D), which most considered “somewhat useful.” A client letter was provided with each questionnaire package explaining the study process and thanking participants. Most agencies also provided a staff, intern or volunteer to assist clients if necessary.

## Sampling Procedures for Clients

The original intention was to survey every client who attended every family service agency during

**Table B-1**

**Agencies Agreeing to Participate**

Province/territory	Number of agencies	Number participating	Percent
Newfoundland	0	0	0.0
Prince Edward Island	2	1	50.0
Nova Scotia	1	1	100.0
New Brunswick	6	2	33.3
Quebec	2	1	50.0
Ontario	24	13	54.2
Manitoba	2	2	100.0
Saskatchewan	4	4	100.0
Alberta	6	3	50.0
British Columbia	8	3	37.5
Northwest Territories	1	0	0.0
Yukon	1	0	0.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>52.6</b>

every day of the research week. This would give a clear snapshot picture of the demographic characteristics and strengths of everyone seeking service during a typical week. However, many agencies in the Family Service Canada network are under pressure because of reduced funding, limited staff, and other ongoing client surveys. The researchers wanted to ensure that as many agencies as possible were able to participate, without needlessly increasing sampling bias. Therefore agencies were allowed to choose one or more entire days within the data collection week to survey clients. They were asked to distribute questionnaires to all clients attending sessions and programs during the days chosen.

Within that design, service providers (counsellors, caseworkers, etc.) of each participating agency were asked to survey every client with whom they had professional, face-to-face contact during the data collection week. Clients were to be surveyed only once during that week, in the event that staff had repeated contact with them.

Several weeks before the data collection week, participating agencies were asked to estimate the number of clients who would be surveyed. Agencies were then sent slightly more than the requested number. Many agencies indicated that they found the sampling procedures straightforward but difficult to follow. In order to verify the sampling procedures used, a questionnaire was distributed to each participating agency: 23 agencies returned the questionnaire. Agencies surveyed clients on one to six full days during the data collection week. Six of the agencies surveyed every client; two of the agencies gave two or three questionnaires to each service provider; the remaining surveyed most clients, with exceptions. Many of the exceptions were clients:

- in crisis
- not literate
- clients in large groups
- served in satellite locations or the community
- served in the programs of medical home support, EAP, interpreter services, adult protective services

Since there is no standardized method of keeping client statistics across the network, it is difficult to determine whether the clients who were surveyed are representative of all clients who attend all family service agencies. However, it is safe to assume that understanding our sample will help understand the demographic characteristics and strengths of some of the clients who attended family service agencies.

## Implementation of Survey Instruments

The surveys were implemented in each agency across Canada during the week of May 12-17, 1997. Two of the instruments were completed by the service provider and three by the client. Each client received an introductory letter explaining the project, while the service providers used a reference guide to assist with the implementation of the survey. The client survey instruments were available in English, French, and Spanish. All surveys for one client were linked together by a common numbering system. If more than one client from the same family was also seen by the agency, all of the surveys were also linked together using the system. All five instruments can be found in full in Appendix D, in English. See the Reference Guide in Appendix D for a detailed description of procedures for the delivery of each questionnaire.

Staff took between 10 and 30 minutes to complete the demographics instruments and assets inventory; too complicated and time consuming for some. Clients took between 15 and 40 minutes to complete the package, and although many had no difficulty, some found the questions complex and experienced frustration.

One of the methodological points that was discussed at length was the administration process of the demographic instrument. The strategy was to ask the service provider to complete the instrument using prior knowledge, files, or by asking the client. This information, therefore, may or may not match the client's perception of their demographic profile.

## Data Coding and Entry Procedures

Data entry of all of the questionnaires took about 60 days. One of the challenges was to ensure consistency between the three data entry personnel, who were unpaid volunteers supporting Family Service Canada, with limited research training and background. The coders completed the initial coding and data entry of the questionnaires by using a set of templates designed to mirror the appearance of the forms completed by the service providers and clients. Paul Gross developed the templates that the coders used in the program Access. The process required approximately 60 working days to complete.

The data were eventually downloaded to d-Base III files and transported to the data analysis package SPSS. The results from each of the separate databases were integrated into one comprehensive database by identifying the common linking code for each survey. The data for the 1,445 cases were then rechecked and re-entered (if necessary) by Glen Link, a student intern employed by CPRN. This final set of procedures, which took five weeks to complete, produced a final, clean dataset upon which all of the analyses in this report are based.

## Data Analysis Procedures

The data analysis was organized first in accordance with the results of the five instruments: full descriptive information that summarizes the distribution of clients across the different variables of

each instrument. A second cut at the data involved examining the possible influence of gender, family type, employment status, and income on a number of the important issues. These factors were emphasized both because of their prominence in other comparable research (see, for example, the NLSCY data) and their presumed relevance to policy development within family service agencies.

The results presented in the report reflect primarily descriptive statistics applied to the entire sample or sub-samples, where relevant. A number of the analyses were cross-tabulated to present subgroup comparisons based on gender, family type, employment status, and income status. The analyses of the scale results included standard reliability analyses and analysis of variance procedures, which are briefly described in the text of the report (cf. Norusis, 1997). The reliability coefficient used to assess internal consistency of the scales was Cronbach's alpha, which assesses the average correlation of items within a test.

The means and standard deviations are presented in the text for both the Family Assessment Device and for the Family Dynamics and Resiliency Scale, with the results further broken down by gender, family type, labour force status, income, education, social assistance receipt, and age. Finally, these scaled results are compared on the basis of presenting problems to determine whether or not there were statistically significant differences in presenting problems and family functioning or family dynamics. While there were a number of other possible analyses, the researchers involved in the project had to make some strategic decisions around which were the most relevant.

# C

## Participating Agencies

### **Nova Scotia**

1. Breakthrough Co-op, Halifax

### **New Brunswick**

2. Family Service, Moncton

### **Prince Edward Island**

3. Community and Family Service of P.E.I.,  
Charlottetown

### **Quebec**

4. Jewish Family Services, Montreal

### **Ontario**

5. Catholic Family Services, Waterloo
6. Family Service Association of Metropolitan  
Toronto, Toronto
7. Family Services Durham, Durham
8. Jewish Family Service of Ottawa-Carleton,  
Ottawa
9. Family Service Centre of Ottawa-Carleton,  
Ottawa
10. Family Services Centre of Sault Ste. Marie and  
District, Sault Ste. Marie

11. Community Counselling, North Bay
12. Sudbury Family Services, Sudbury
13. Family Services Thunder Bay, Thunder Bay
14. Catholic Family Development Centre,  
Thunder Bay

### **Manitoba**

15. The Family Centre of Winnipeg, Winnipeg
16. Service de Conseiller, Winnipeg

### **Saskatchewan**

17. Saskatoon Family Service Bureau, Saskatoon
18. Catholic Family Services of Saskatoon,  
Saskatoon
19. Catholic Family Services of Regina, Regina
20. Family Services Regina, Regina

### **Alberta**

21. The Family Centre, Edmonton
22. Youth Probation Unit, City of Calgary, Calgary
23. Catholic Social Services, Edmonton

### **British Columbia**

24. Family Services North Shore, Vancouver
25. Catholic Family Services, Vancouver



# D

## Survey Instruments and Reference Guide

### 1997 NATIONAL SURVEY OF THE CANADIAN FAMILY Family Service Canada Part I: Demographic Instrument Completed by Direct Service Provider

#### SECTION A: CASE INFORMATION

Name of Service Program (if applicable): \_\_\_\_\_

Place of Contact (check one only):  Agency  Community  Home  Other \_\_\_\_\_

Status of Case (check one only):  New  Existing  Reopened

Today's Date (dd/mm/yy): / / 1997 Date of First Contact (dd/mm/yy): / / 19

#### SECTION B: FAMILY COMPOSITION

1. Please print clearly when required.
2. List client first, followed by all individuals living in the household, whether related or not, whom client considers to be part of his/her family.
3. Use the codes provided to the right of the table to indicate the relationship of the family member to the client. If the relationship is missing from the categories given, write the relationship on the form.
4. If other **listed** family members are being surveyed as well, please enter their corresponding survey numbers (found in the top right corner) in the column provided (Survey #).

Relationship to Client	Age	Sex	Survey #
Client		M <input type="radio"/> F <input type="radio"/>	
		M <input type="radio"/> F <input type="radio"/>	
		M <input type="radio"/> F <input type="radio"/>	
		M <input type="radio"/> F <input type="radio"/>	
		M <input type="radio"/> F <input type="radio"/>	
		M <input type="radio"/> F <input type="radio"/>	
		M <input type="radio"/> F <input type="radio"/>	
		M <input type="radio"/> F <input type="radio"/>	

#### RELATIONSHIP TO CLIENT

*Stepchildren, adopted children and children of a common-law partner should be considered sons and daughters.*

1. Husband or wife
2. Common-law/partner
3. Son or daughter
4. Son-in-law or daughter-in-law
5. Grandchild
6. Father or mother
7. Father-in-law or mother-in-law
8. Grandparent
9. Brother or sister
10. Brother-in-law or sister-in-law
11. Cousin
12. Niece or nephew
13. Room-mate
14. Don't know/Not available

#### SECTION C: SOCIAL DATA FOR THE CLIENT

*Residence: Fill in one circle only.*

- City/Urban Core  Suburb  Town/Village  
 Rural/Farm  Indian Reserve  Other \_\_\_\_\_

*Income: What was the total family income during 1996 (before taxes) from all sources? (estimate if necessary)*

- Less than \$10,000  \$30,000 to \$39,999  
 \$10,000 to \$19,999  \$40,000 to \$59,999  
 \$20,000 to \$29,999  \$60,000 and above

**Ethnicity:** Specify one or more ethnic or cultural groups to which this person's ancestors belonged.

- Canadian
- English, Irish, Scottish, Welsh
- French
- Other European
- African
- West Indian
- Japanese
- Chinese
- Korean
- Filipino
- South Asian (eg. East Indian, Pakistani, Punjabi, Sri Lankan)
- South East Asian (eg. Cambodian, Indonesian, Laotian, Vietnamese)
- Arab/West Asian, North African (eg. Armenian, Egyptian, Iranian, Lebanese, Moroccan)
- Latin-American
- Aboriginal Peoples of North America (eg. North American Indian, Metis, Inuit/Eskimo)
- Other \_\_\_\_\_
- Don't know/Not available

**Immigration:** Length of time client has been in Canada. Fill in one circle only.

- 2 years or less
- 2 to 5 years
- More than 5 years

**Couple Status:** Fill in one circle only

- Legally married, and not separated
- Separated, but still legally married
- Divorced
- Widowed
- Never married
- Living common-law/with a partner  
*Common-law refers to two people who live together as partners but who are not legally married to each other.*
- Don't know/Not available

**Education - highest level:** Fill in one circle only

- Less than high school
- High school graduate or equivalent
- Non-university certificate/diploma (community college, CEGEP, trade or technical institute)
- Some university or university graduate below bachelor level
- Bachelor's degree
- Professional certification
- First professional degree in medicine (M.D.), dentistry (D.D.S., D.M.D.), veterinary medicine (D.V.M.), law (LL.B), optometry (O.D.), or divinity (M.DIV.), or 1-year B.Ed.
- Post-graduate studies
- Don't know/Not available

**Employment status:** Fill in one circle only. We are looking for the primary employment status.

- Employed full-time (30 hours or more per week)
- Employed part-time (less than 30 hours per week)
- Unemployed
- Retired
- Homemaker
- Student
- Other \_\_\_\_\_
- Don't know/Not Available

**Occupation:** Fill in one circle only. We are looking for the primary occupation.

- Executive, managerial, and other professional
- Clerical
- Sales
- Service (e.g. cleaning, food services)
- Primary occupations (farming, fishing, forestry, mining, etc.)
- Processing, machining, fabricating, etc. (e.g. working in a factory)
- Construction trades
- Transport equipment operating (e.g. driving a bus)
- Material handling and other crafts (e.g. making furniture, sewing)
- Homemaker
- Student
- Other \_\_\_\_\_
- Don't know/Not Available

**SECTION D: SERVICE INFORMATION**

**Presenting Issues** (Fill in the circle for all concerns reported by the client and circle the problem he or she saw as most important):

Family Relationships and Parenting

- Couple relationship
- Separation and Divorce
- Parent-Child (child under 21)
- Parenting/child rearing problems
- Lone parenting
- Step-parenting
- Teen parenting
- Co-parenting
- Delinquent behaviors

Health and Disability

- Physical health problems
- Developmental disability
- Physical disability
- Living with HIV/AIDS (client, family member, friend)
- Depression
- Other mental illness

Material, Financial, and Legal

- Housing problems
- Inadequate income for basic needs
- Legal problems
- Management of home
- Management of money

Social

- Problems with leisure time
- Problems in social contacts

Substance Abuse

- Alcoholism
- Drug Abuse

Violence and Abuse

- Abuse/violence
- Child abuse/neglect
- Domestic violence
- Elder abuse/neglect
- Sexual abuse

Work and School

- Unemployment
- School related problems
- Work related problems

All Others ( \_\_\_\_\_ )

**Service Provided by Agency for Client** (Fill in the circle for all that apply):

- Adoption Service
- Child Care
- Counselling - Group/Family/Marital/Individual
- Credit Counseling
- Day Care Service for Adults
- Divorce Mediation
- Elder Care/Supportive Services to Aging
- Emergency Shelter
- Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
- Family Advocacy
- Family Life Education
- Foster Placement for Children
- Homemaker Service
- Home Health Service
- Hotline/Helpline
- Managed Care Program
- Meals on Wheels
- Plays for Living
- Protective Service for Adults
- Psychiatric or Mental Health Clinic
- Psychological Testing
- Resettlement
- Residential/Institutional Facilities
- Service for Persons with AIDS and/or their Families
- Service for Homeless
- Special Service to Minorities
- Support Group
- Volunteer Service
- All Others ( \_\_\_\_\_ )

**Payment** (Check all that apply):

- Full
- EAP payment
- Third party (non-EAP)
- No charge
- All Others ( \_\_\_\_\_ )
- Subsidized
- Sliding scale
- Project funded

*If Consumer is 13 years or older, please proceed to Part II*

**1997 NATIONAL SURVEY OF THE CANADIAN FAMILY**  
**Family Service Canada**  
**Part II-A: Assets Inventory**  
*Completed by Direct Service Provider*

***NOT completed for clients who are less than 13 years old ↪ STOP HERE***  
***NOT completed for intake or first contact cases ↪ GO TO PART II-B***

The purpose of this inventory is to develop a picture of the client in relationship to his/her potential support network and immediate community.

Listed below are people, groups and organizations, agencies, and businesses that often are helpful to individuals and members of a family in reaching goals, getting things done, providing support, or meeting needs.

In some cases, individuals and family members may belong to the group or organization (participate in activities) and in other cases they may be a beneficiary of the group or organization (receive something without being a member of the organization).

In some cases individuals and family members may receive the assistance free and in other cases they may pay for it.

This questionnaire asks you to report **your knowledge** of the client's resources and relationships, and indicate how helpful each one has been to the client, **during the last two years**. Please fill in the circle under the response that best describes the client's link to the listed resource. Think of the **client only (person surveyed)** and not other members of his/her family.

If the client **USED** the resource, please fill in the circle under the response which best describes how helpful this resource has been to them **during the last two years**, on the occasions when he/she has used it.

If the client **DID NOT USE** this resource during the last two years, please fill in the circle under this column.

If you **DON'T KNOW** or are not sure about the client's link to the resource, **leave the item blank**.

**IMPORTANT:** This questionnaire is completely anonymous and confidential. There are no right or wrong answers. Please fill in the circles when required; do not simply make a check mark. Please print clearly when required. It is best to use a pencil or black pen. Thank you!

If you *DON'T KNOW*, leave the item blank.

	RESOURCE USED			RESOURCE NOT USED
	Not at all Helpful 1	Somewhat Helpful 2	Very Helpful 3	
<b>RELATIVES</b>				
Parents	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Relatives	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Spouse (husband or wife) or partner (boyfriend or girlfriend)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Spouse's or partner's parents	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Spouse's or partner's relatives	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ex-spouse or ex-partner	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ex-spouse's parents	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ex-spouse's relatives	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Own children	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Step children	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pets	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>FRIENDS AND OTHER PEOPLE</b>				
Friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Neighbours	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Co-workers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Manager or supervisor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teachers or professors	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Counsellor, psychologist, or psychiatrist	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Doctor/physician	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other health care individual	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lawyer or legal advisor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Accountant, or financial advisor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Employment or career counsellor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In-home support workers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Landlord/apartment manager	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Political representative	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

If you DON'T KNOW leave the item blank.

	RESOURCE USED			RESOURCE NOT USED
	Not at all Helpful 1	Somewhat Helpful 2	Very Helpful 3	
<b>GROUPS AND ASSOCIATIONS</b>				
Religious or spiritual congregation or group	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12-step group group (NA, AA, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mutual support group	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Senior citizens' group	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sports club or team	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Informal social club (dancing, bridge, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Outdoor club	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Health and fitness group	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ethnic club or organization	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fraternal and service organization	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Alumni organization	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Political organization	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Youth organization	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>AGENCIES AND GOVERNMENT</b>				
Non-profit organization or charity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Community centre	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Community charity (food bank, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Women's programs and organizations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Recreation programs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Libraries/library programs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Child or senior care	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Crisis line	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Emergency shelters	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Preschool program	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Elementary and high schools	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Colleges or universities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Hospitals and clinics	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Government housing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

If you DON'T KNOW leave the item blank.

	RESOURCE USED			RESOURCE NOT USED
	Not at all Helpful 1	Somewhat Helpful 2	Very Helpful 3	
Employment centre	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Unions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Police	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>BUSINESSES</b>				
Neighbourhood merchants	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lending institutions (banks, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Public transportation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Special transportation (Paratranspo)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Employers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Utility companies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>OTHER</b>				
Other _____	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other _____	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## 1997 NATIONAL SURVEY OF THE CANADIAN FAMILY

### Family Service Canada Part II-B: Assets Inventory *Completed by Client*

*Completed by ALL clients 13 years of age and older, including intake cases*

**IMPORTANT:** This questionnaire is completely anonymous and confidential. There are no right or wrong answers. Please fill in the circles when required; do not simply make a check mark. Please print clearly when required. It is best to use a pencil or black pen. Thank you!

#### SECTION A

The purpose of this section of the questionnaire is to develop a picture of you in connection with your potential support networks and immediate community. This section asks you how helpful each of these relationships and resources has been to you personally during the last two years.

Listed below are people, groups and organizations, agencies, and businesses that often are helpful to individuals and members of a family in reaching goals, getting things done, providing support, or meeting needs.

In some cases, individuals and family members may belong to the group or organization (participate in activities) and in other cases they may be a beneficiary of the group or organization (receive something without being a member of the organization).

In some cases individuals and family members may receive the assistance free and in other cases they may pay for it.

If you **USED** the resource or the relationship for some purpose, please fill in the circle under the response which best describes how helpful this resource has been to you on the occasions when you have used it, **during the last two years**. Think of yourself only and not other members of your family.

- (1) Not at all helpful
- (2) Somewhat helpful
- (3) Very helpful

If you **DID NOT USE** this resource or relationship during the last two years, please fill in the circle under the reason which best describes why you did not:

- (4) If the resource was **not available**, either because it didn't exist, was not accessible, or you were not eligible to use it.
- (5) If you **chose not to use** an available resource, for whatever reason.
- (6) If you **had no knowledge** or were **not aware** of the resource.

	RESOURCE USED			RESOURCE NOT USED		
	Not at all Helpful 1	Somewhat Helpful 2	Very Helpful 3	Not Available 4	Chose Not to Use 5	Had No Knowledge 6
<b>RELATIVES</b>						
Parents	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Relatives	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Spouse (husband or wife) or partner (boyfriend or girlfriend)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Spouse's or partner's parents	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Spouse's or partner's relatives	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ex-spouse or ex-partner	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ex-spouse's parents	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ex-spouse's relatives	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Own children	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Step children	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pets	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>FRIENDS AND OTHER PEOPLE</b>						
Friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Neighbours	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Co-workers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Manager or supervisor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teachers or professors	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Counsellor, psychologist, or psychiatrist	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Doctor/physician	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other health care individual	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lawyer or legal advisor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Accountant, or financial advisor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Employment or career counsellor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In-home support worker	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Spiritual leader (minister, priest, rabbi, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Landlord/apartment manager	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Political representative	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	RESOURCE USED			RESOURCE NOT USED		
	Not at all Helpful 1	Somewhat Helpful 2	Very Helpful 3	Not Available 4	Chose Not to Use 5	Had No Knowledge 6
<b>GROUPS AND ASSOCIATIONS</b>						
Religious or spiritual congregation or group	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12-step group group (NA, AA, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mutual support group	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Senior citizens' group	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sports club or team	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Informal social club (dancing, bridge, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Outdoor club	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Health and fitness group	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ethnic club or organization	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fraternal or service organization	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Alumni organization	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Political organization	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Youth organization	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>AGENCIES AND GOVERNMENT</b>						
Non-profit organization or charity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Community centre	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Community charity (food bank, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Women's programs and organizations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Recreation programs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Libraries/library programs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Child or senior care	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Crisis line	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Emergency shelters	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Preschool program	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Elementary and high schools	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	RESOURCE USED			RESOURCE NOT USED		
	Not at all Helpful 1	Somewhat Helpful 2	Very Helpful 3	Not Available 4	Chose Not to Use 5	Had No Knowledge 6
Colleges or universities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Clinics and hospitals	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Government housing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Employment centre	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Unions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Police	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>BUSINESSES</b>						
Neighbourhood merchants	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lending institutions (banks, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Public transportation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Special transportation (Paratranspo)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Employers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Utility companies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>OTHER</b>						
Other _____	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other _____	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

---

## SECTION B

Have you received social assistance or welfare in the last 6 months?  Yes  No

If **YES**, which public resources are the most important to you? Please fill in the circle for the three most important.

- |  |                                      |                                    |
|--|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> cash assistance      | <input type="radio"/> child care     | <input type="radio"/> job training |
| <input type="radio"/> health care/Medicare | <input type="radio"/> transportation | <input type="radio"/> housing      |

**SECTION C**

Please list your most important sources of support over the past six months. Put the most important source first, then the second most important, then the third. The sources of support may be people, groups, or organizations. For some questions you may have no sources of support, one, two, or three. Use the categories in Section A. Please print clearly.

To whom do you turn for emotional support?  
First: \_\_\_\_\_ Second: \_\_\_\_\_  
Third: \_\_\_\_\_ No One:

To whom do you turn for financial or material support (in money or in kind)?  
First: \_\_\_\_\_ Second: \_\_\_\_\_  
Third: \_\_\_\_\_ No One:

To whom do you turn for child care support?  
First: \_\_\_\_\_ Second: \_\_\_\_\_  
Third: \_\_\_\_\_ No One:  Not Applicable:

To whom do you turn for support in household tasks (meal preparation and clean-up, shopping, house cleaning, laundry and sewing, or house maintenance and outside work)?  
First: \_\_\_\_\_ Second: \_\_\_\_\_  
Third: \_\_\_\_\_ No One:

To whom do you turn for transportation support (eg. rides to and from work, emergency trips to pick your children up, etc.)?  
First: \_\_\_\_\_ Second: \_\_\_\_\_  
Third: \_\_\_\_\_ No One:

If you are sick, disabled, or elderly, to whom do you turn for personal care support (assistance with bathing, toileting, care of nails, brushing teeth, and hair care)?  
First: \_\_\_\_\_ Second: \_\_\_\_\_  
Third: \_\_\_\_\_ No One:  Not Applicable:

To whom do you turn for employment or school support (eg. advice, job leads, help with homework, etc.)?  
First: \_\_\_\_\_ Second: \_\_\_\_\_  
Third: \_\_\_\_\_ No One:

**1997 NATIONAL SURVEY OF THE CANADIAN FAMILY**  
**Family Service Canada**  
**Part III: Family Functioning**  
*Completed by Client*

Everybody defines their own family in different ways. Your family may be the group of individuals, perhaps related or not, perhaps living in the same household or not, whom you consider to be your family. However, if you don't consider that you have a family around you right now, please fill in the circle below and do not complete this questionnaire. If you do have a family around you right now, please continue.  
 No family around right now

The following statements are about families and family relationships. For each one, please fill in the circle for the response which best describes your family: strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree.

	1 Strongly Agree	2 Agree	3 Disagree	4 Strongly Disagree
1 Planning family activities is difficult because we misunderstand each other.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2 In times of crisis we can turn to each other for support.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3 We cannot talk to each other about sadness we feel.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4 Individuals (of the family) are accepted for what they are.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5 We avoid discussing our fears or concerns.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6 We express feelings to each other.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7 There are a lot of bad feelings in our family.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8 We feel accepted for what we are.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9 Making decisions is a problem for our family.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10 We are able to make decisions about how to solve problems.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11 We don't get along well together.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12 We confide in each other.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Source: Statistics Canada, National Longitudinal Survey of Children, Family Functioning: FNC-Q1A to FNC-Q1L

**1997 NATIONAL SURVEY OF THE CANADIAN FAMILY**  
**Family Service Canada**  
**Part IV: Family Dynamics and Resiliency**  
*Completed by Client*

Everybody defines their own family in different ways. Your family may be the group of individuals, perhaps related or not, perhaps living in the same household or not, whom you consider to be your family. However, if you don't consider that you have a family around you right now, please fill in the circle below and do not complete this questionnaire. If you do have a family around you right now, please continue.  
 No family around right now

Think about a particularly stressful time for you and your family recently. The stress can be the birth of a child, change in residence, illness, loss of a job, conflict between family members, etc. You decide on what stress you will think about.

The following statements are about what happens between family members. For each one, fill in the circle for the response which best described your family during that time of stress: strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. Every family responds differently: there are no right or wrong answers!

	1 Strongly Agree	2 Agree	3 Disagree	4 Strongly Disagree
1 We discussed our goals and priorities for the family with each other.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2 We spent time together as a family.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3 We had friends who provided us with support.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4 Solving problems was difficult for us as a family.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5 We were satisfied with our day-to-day tasks for the family.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6 We all wished we could have had more input into decisions about the family.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7 We accepted our roles within the family.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8 We talked about our roles and tasks with each other.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9 We were satisfied with how decisions were made in the family.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10 As individuals, we were hesitant to take on new household and family tasks.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
		<b>Strongly</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly</b>
		<b>Agree</b>			<b>Disagree</b>
11	We avoided talking to each other about important things.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12	We were proud of our family.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
13	We could not depend on our relatives.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
14	We were willing to change our roles within the household to meet our family's goals.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
15	We believed that what would happen in the future to our family was beyond our control.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
16	We each had different goals and priorities for the family's future.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
17	We had a sense of commitment to the family.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
18	We believed that things would work out well for us as a family.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
19	We had stress related mental and physical illnesses.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
20	We were satisfied with our overall situation.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

April 16, 1997

# 1997 NATIONAL SURVEY OF THE CANADIAN FAMILY

## Family Service Canada

### REFERENCE GUIDE

**NOTE: The survey is self-administered, and meant to be self-explanatory. Read the survey forms before consulting this Guide.**

#### **PURPOSE:**

The goal of this National Survey is to take a snapshot of the clients served by Family Service Canada member agencies in 1997. To achieve a cross-section of these Canadians, we seek to survey **all** of the individuals with whom your agency has direct contact and whom you regard as recipients of your services **during those days which you have targeted for distribution of the survey.**

#### **SURVEY PERIOD:**

The clients to whom you intend to give the questionnaire cannot be selected and have to represent a cross section of your clientele. Therefore **it is imperative that you determine ahead of time the days of the week during which the questionnaire will be administered.**

On those days, **all the clients** coming into your agency for service on the days chosen will be asked to complete the questionnaire until you have exhausted the number of copies sent to your agency, or until you have reached your target number of clients.

#### **TARGET POPULATION:**

1. **Individual clients** who have face-to-face, professional contact with your staff, during the period of May 12 May 17, whom you regard as recipients of your services, and for whom delivery of service depends to an important degree on the service provider's knowledge of their life circumstances and characteristics. In operational terms, these are clients which your agency **assesses** in some fashion.

If a client comes in more than once during the survey week, he/she should only be surveyed on the first contact.

2. **Clients seen in groups:** In situations where a service provider relates to a **group**, the service provider has the option of having the clients in the group complete the demographic information in Part I, under his or her guidance. In most cases the service provider would not have enough information on individual clients to complete Part II-A, the Service Provider Assets Inventory, but the clients can proceed to complete those parts which are self administered, name Part II-B, Part III and Part IV.

Copies of a letter addressed to clients, explaining the purpose of the survey, are included in this package.

3. **SEVERAL FAMILY MEMBERS AS CLIENTS:** If you are seeing more than one member of a family during those days chosen for the survey, it is necessary to survey each member.

**Therefore each family member will have a separate survey package with a different survey number**, which is found typed in red in the top right hand corner of every survey package. As you complete Part I - Demographic Instrument for the client member of the family, the name of the client who is being surveyed appears at the top of the family composition list with his or her survey package number. The other family members who **are being seen during those days**, will follow in the list with the survey number which appears on their respective survey package.

This will involve keeping close track of the surveys for a family, if you know you are seeing several family members. If members of the same family are being seen by two or more service providers, please coordinate the survey numbers.

Since each family member has different perceptions, different needs and different knowledge of resources, the only way which we can match their perceptions is by keeping track of their respective survey numbers.

## **CLIENT REFUSAL**

As with all research, clients may refuse to participate. In this event, please write "**Declined**" on the client Assets Inventory, but **remember to complete the Service Provider portions** for that individual. Return "Declined" surveys with all of the completed surveys.

## **PART I - DEMOGRAPHIC INSTRUMENT**

- Purpose: To gather case information, family composition, social data, and service information.
- Coverage: ALL of target population, including intake cases and children. **If the client is unable** (because he or she is in crisis or is too confused or upset) **to complete any part of the survey, the service provider should still fill out Part I.**
- Completed by: Service provider. You may also wish to ask the client to complete Section B (except for the survey numbers) and Section C by themselves.
- Method: Can be completed from prior knowledge, files, or by asking the client.

## **PART II-A: SERVICE PROVIDER ASSETS INVENTORY**

- Purpose: To document service provider knowledge of the client's resources for comparison with the client's account. We fully expect that even service providers with considerable, intimate knowledge of their clients will leave blank major portions of the Service Provider Assets Inventory. Absolutely no stigma attaches to blank items, nor to entire inventories which remain blank.
- Coverage: Completed for all ONGOING cases in which the client is 13 years of age or older. NOT completed for clients younger than 13 years, or for intake cases.
- Completed by: Service Provider. **If the client is unable** (because he or she is in crisis, is confused or upset) **to complete any inventories, the service provider should still fill out Part II-A.**
- Method: Completed independently by the service provider, based on prior knowledge or records. The client is NOT to be interviewed to provide this information.

## **PART II-B: CONSUMER ASSETS INVENTORY**

- Purpose: To document the resources used by your clients, their knowledge of resources, and how helpful the resources have been during the last two years.
- Coverage: ALL clients age 13 years and older. This includes intake cases.
- Completed by: Client.
- Method: The Consumer Assets Inventory is self-administered. **If the client needs assistance completing the Inventory, the service provider should complete the Service Provider version first, and then provide help.**

## **PART III: FAMILY FUNCTIONING**

- Purpose: This is a popular scale used by many organizations, including Statistics Canada. The questionnaire will give us an understanding of the family functioning of clients of Family Service Canada agencies. We will also be able to compare with a national sample from Statistics Canada.
- Coverage: ALL clients 13 years and older. This includes intake cases.
- Completed by: Client.

## **PART IV: FAMILY DYNAMICS AND RESILIENCY**

- Purpose: Resiliency is the ability to bounce after crises. There are many factors which enhance resiliency. Family dynamics, or how, why and in what way family members interact is one factor. This questionnaire will give us an idea of how the families of clients interact in order to sketch a picture of family resiliency.
- Coverage: ALL clients 13 years and older. This includes intake cases.
- Completed by: Client.

## **RUNNING OUT OF TIME**

It is best if the client completes Part II, Part III, and Part IV at the time of contact.

This ensures that the questionnaires will not be lost, or fail to be returned. However, if not practical, the questionnaires can be given to the client to take home. Then, it is very important to make certain they come back. A self-addressed, stamped envelope from your agency may help. Otherwise, request that the client return the questionnaires the very next day.

## **LITERACY AND ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE**

All of the instruments completed by the clients are self-administered. However, if the client has difficulty reading or understanding the questionnaires, the assistance of your agency's staff or volunteers would be very much appreciated. If help is not available at your agency, as the client to take the questionnaires home, and suggest they get help from a household member or friend.

**Please note: All copies of the questionnaires must be returned to FSC, including those where the clients have declined and unused copies.**

## **Process of Filling out Survey**

The questionnaires will be scanned by computer. Therefore, please ensure that the following are done:

- use black pen or pencil
- fill in the circles carefully, when required
- take time to print carefully, when required

## **Copies of Survey**

Additional copies must be requested from FSC, since they are individually numbered. We will courier them. **DO NOT** copy surveys to make up for a shortfall.

## **Resource People**

Margot Belanger: 613-230-9960 (work), 613-446-6380 (home), fsc@igs.net (e-mail)

<p><b>WE RECOGNIZE THE TIME AND PATIENCE INVOLVED IN COMPLETING THIS SURVEY AND WE THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE!!</b></p>
--

# Notes

- 1 Family Service Canada was founded in 1982 as a non-profit national, voluntary association representing the concerns of families and agencies serving families across Canada. The member agencies, some of which have a history of service dating back to the early part of the twentieth century, are governed by volunteer boards representing the interests of their local communities.
- 2 Family Service America assumed more of a leadership position in the development of these three instruments. The results of their study have been published in *Strength in Adversity: The Resourcefulness of American Families in Need* (Lengyel, Thompson, and Niesl, 1997).
- 3 Some agencies were highly protective of their clients, which included visible minorities in some instances, and engaged in a “pre-selection” process rather than offering the survey to each client (see Appendix B for a further discussion).
- 4 In total, 15 surveys contained no information about presenting issues or services rendered and therefore have been excluded from the current analysis.
- 5 These data should be interpreted with extreme caution, however, in that the “most important” issue was not identified in more than half of the completed surveys.
- 6 A more refined analysis revealed that, despite the fact that women were significantly more likely to be classified as “poor” than the men (roughly one-half compared to one-third), they were nevertheless no more likely to identify material needs as an issue.
- 7 The results partly reflect the issue of selection bias, as many agencies surveyed mainly their counselling clients. Clients attending support groups or educational groups typically would not have been included in the sample.
- 8 The correlation for the variable “step-children” was quite weak, although the kappa indicated a relatively high level of agreement. The result can be explained by the fact that an overwhelming majority of the clients and service providers agreed that stepchildren were not a resource that was relevant to the vast majority of clients. Where stepchildren *were* present, however, there was not a strong sense of agreement about their relative helpfulness.
- 9 The 65 cases that were excluded from the analysis failed to answer at least one or more questions from the GFS. Therefore, composite scores could not be computed due to incomplete information.
- 10 The inter-item correlation (homogeneity) of the items comprising the scale was 0.48, or slightly higher than in previous research.
- 11 The reduced variation in family functioning scores in essence means that less variability exists on that factor than in comparison with the general population. Hence the challenge of identifying correlates that might help to explain such limited variation increases considerably.



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