

**AN EXPLORATORY SURVEY OF THE UNDERSTANDING  
OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION  
BY STAFF OF THE MINISTRY FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

By

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We accept this thesis as conforming  
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## **DEDICATION**

**I dedicate this Action Research Project to the Loving Memory of my niece, Synamon Roseanne Back (May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1969 – July 6<sup>th</sup>, 2000).**

I will remember you,

Will you remember me?

Don't let your love pass you by.

Hold on to the memories.

from the CD Mirrorball (1999), by Sarah

McLaughlin

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## **1. STUDY BACKGROUND**

### **1.1 A Brief History of the Ministry for Children and Families**

This Action Research Project surveyed the attitudes, knowledge and perceptions about Conflict Resolution (CR) and Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) held by line and management staff in a major government organization. The Capital Region Victoria of the B.C. Ministry Children Families (MCF) provides a representative organizational entity for investigation that has the potential to add to the theoretical knowledge of the field of Conflict Resolution. The survey aims to provide some objective understanding of this organization's orientation towards Conflict Resolution and Alternative Dispute Resolution.

It was hypothesized that Conflict Resolution is underutilized by the Ministry, due to a general lack of relevant knowledge and understanding of what this field of practice entails. Currently, the Ministry has a mandate for the use of ADR. However, in the Capital Region they have yet to utilize ADR. Further, a pilot project was undertaken 1992-1993 to introduce ADR between Ministry social workers and clients who were dealing with child welfare issues. This project failed, and according to an informant who was involved in the program's implementation, social workers' resistance to ADR was the primary cause. The informant attributed this resistance to social workers' perceptions that ADR would deprive them of autonomy and control. Additionally, the informant felt there was a possible resistance on the part of social workers to changing the way they conducted their work.

In order to assess these concerns, it was necessary to determine the level and nature of awareness of Conflict Resolution and ADR on the part of line staff and management of Capital Region Victoria of the MCF. The approach was one of exploration to gauge knowledge, perceptions and attitudes. By surveying individuals' understanding and attitudes about Conflict Resolution in the MCF, a basis was formed for the design of "Action Research" to assist the Ministry's decision making and to establish a foundation for the potential design of an ADR training and intervention system.

It was first necessary to elicit MCF staff and management's views on conflict within the organization, as well as between MCF personnel and their clients. For the purposes of assessing the hypothesis of underutilization, the focus of the interviews was on the perceived applicability of ADR in addressing the kinds of conflicts the workers face. The hypothesis presupposed that there were conflicts in the organization and between the organization, clients and other stakeholders.

## **1.2 The Potential Use of ADR Within the Ministry**

In the immediate sense, the significance of this research is to clarify the need for ADR specifically within the MCF; however, in a larger sense the lessons learned from this survey may provide indicators that can be used in future research in studies pertaining to similar complex groups.

During its massive restructuring in 1996, the Ministry for Children and Families amalgamated areas from five other Ministries which provided services for children and youth. Divisions such as Youth Mental Health, Youth Corrections, , Education Skills Training, and Drug and Alcohol became part of the new MCF. However, there was resistance from the employees of these other Ministries to coming under the umbrella of the MCF. For example, the majority of Probation Social Workers decided to switch from Youth Probation to Adult Probation rather than join the MCF. This resulted in a shortage of Youth Probation Workers that had to be filled.

In short, the restructuring and development of the new MCF and the discontentment of new employees assimilated from other Ministries has resulted in a lot of conflict. As in any situation when new people join a pre-existing group, there is always some defensiveness and a degree of struggle. In The Functions of Social Conflict (1956), L. Coser describes conflict within organizations such as the MCF as having two possible outcomes. Constant conflict in systems which “do[es] not contradict the basic assumptions upon which the relationship is founded tend[s] to be positively functional for the social structure. . . . Internal conflicts in which the contending parties no longer share the basic value upon which the legitimacy of the social system rests threaten to disrupt the structure” (Coser, 1956, p. 152). The recent changes within the MCF illustrate the impact conflict can have on both complex organizations and on individuals.

Knowledge and understanding of Conflict Resolution and Alternative Dispute Resolution on the part of MCF staff could help the Ministry deal with the growing pains of

restructuring. It would also help to ease the integration of new employees who have come from other Ministries. CR/ADR training could also be valuable to Ministry staff because of the nature of their work, which frequently involves dealing with clients who have mental health issues, drug and alcohol abuse problems, are victims of child abuse, are living in poverty, or are challenged by other socially dysfunctional disorders. As managing conflict is an integral part of the social worker's profession, an increased awareness of CR and ADR processes could only benefit Ministry staff by providing them with an alternative means to address the conflicting challenges of their day-to-day work.

To summarize, the central research questions will address (1) line workers' and managers' knowledge and understanding of and attitudes toward ADR in dealing with conflict in general, and (2) their perceptions and beliefs about actual ADR intervention in dealing with conflict situations that they face.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Review of Organization Documents**

In 1996, the newly created Ministry for Children and Families brought together 4,000 staff from various divisions within five separate ministries: the Ministry of Health; the Ministry of Women's Equality; the Ministry of Education, Skills and Training; the Ministry of the Attorney General; and the former Ministry for Social Service.

The formation of the new ministry came about as a result of the Gove Inquiry that was set up to investigate the death of a young boy who had been known to the Ministry for Social Service. The Gove Inquiry mainly focused on the Child Protection area of the ministry, later named the Ministry for Children and Families. One of the recommendations from the Gove Inquiry was to establish a Transition Commissioner for Child and Youth Services, Cynthia Morton, who was responsible for providing recommendations to the Premier regarding changes within the Ministry for Children and Families. This new Ministry's mandate involved "bringing the services of five ministries together [to] ensure that children, youth and families have access to a continuum of services and programs, from the voluntary and preventative to the required and treatment oriented" (Morton, 1996, p.17). However, this "mega" Ministry created conflict among the other Ministries that were assimilated into it. The Child and Youth sector of the Mental Health Division within the Ministry of Health protested being drawn into this "Costco" of social services, as they felt that they had a different mandate from the former Ministry for Social Service.

Ultimately, their objections were to no avail. On September 23, 1996, Premier Glen Clarke introduced the new Ministry for Children Families. The message from the Premier summed up the Ministry's responsibilities:

A Ministry for Children and Families must ensure a child-centered integrated approach that promotes and protects the healthy development of children and youth while recognizing their lifelong attachment to family and community. Communities and clients must be an integral part of the work of this ministry. Quality assurance, accountability and openness are fundamental to its success.

(Ministry for Children and Families, 1997, p. 4)

Since the MCF was formed in 1996, the body of literature pertaining to relevant issues addressed by the Ministry has been growing steadily. However, to date the only material that addresses the use of Alternative Dispute Resolution by Ministry staff consists of a study of its application in resolving Child Protection matters, a pilot project conducted by J. Campbell and M. Rodenburgh under the aegis of the former Ministry for Social Service.

In 1994, Campbell and Rodenburgh carried out a pilot project entitled Mediation pilot project evaluation (1994) for the Ministry of Social Service. The purpose of this project was to introduce and evaluate the ADR process of Conflict Resolution in the Capital Region's Child Protection Services district offices. To this end, Child Protection Social Workers were trained in the ADR model of Conflict Resolution, which was to be utilized as a viable alternative to court proceedings, when appropriate. The project failed for

several reasons. The social workers involved were resistant to adding this ADR component to their strategic work with families. They shared the perception that the use of ADR would deprive them of both autonomy and control in their work. Finally, these Child Protection Social Workers were concerned that changing their current work methodology by implementing ADR would result in less than desirable outcomes for the children they were trying to protect. It is the researcher's view that Campbell and Rosenburgh's project did not work because of a lack of knowledge and understanding of Conflict Resolution and Alternative Dispute Resolution on the part of the participants.

Apart from this pilot project, no other information or literature from the MCF deals with the use of Conflict Resolution and Alternative Dispute Resolution among the five other occupational groups surveyed for this survey. Thus, recourse was made to various other non-governmental works on Conflict Resolution and Alternative Dispute Resolution, in order to arrive at acceptable definitions of these terms (see Appendix A), and to construct a theoretical framework for this study.

## **2.2 Definitions of Conflict Resolution and Alternative Dispute Resolution**

Conflict Resolution and Alternative Dispute Resolution are two separate processes for dealing with conflict, yet they are dependent on each other in order to resolve any conflict situation. Conflict Resolution is a systems process that examines the causes of disputes within a variety of organizations (commercial, economic, environmental, government,

etc.), any of which has the potential for conflict. Conflict Resolution involves studying an organization to find what is causing conflict and why; thus, it becomes a form of systems analysis. As Costantino and Merchant (1996) point out, Conflict Resolution is “the assessment phase” (p.105) of dispute management. At this stage, an individual or a team of qualified people enter an organization and assess the need for intervention in a conflict situation. To do this, the team “collect[s] information about the nature and state of the organization’s disputes from the appropriate stakeholders” (Costantino, Merchant, 1996, p. 105). After interviewing the stakeholders, the team analyses the information they have collected and can start to educate the stakeholders regarding how to deal with the conflict in question. As part of the assessment process, Conflict Resolution takes various factors into account, such as how conflict affects the stakeholders, what the cause of the dispute is, and how the conflict might best be resolved. After this assessment phase, Alternative Dispute Resolution comes into play.

Alternative Dispute Resolution is the process of trying to come to some resolution around conflict within any organization, or between two or more stakeholders. As such, Alternative Dispute Resolution refers to,

[a]n ever-expanding range of innovative dispute resolution techniques for better managing and resolving disputes outside the traditional and adversarial court process. The more common options for creative collaboration include dispute prevention, negotiated rule making, negotiation, facilitation, mediation, conciliation, mediation-arbitration, arbitration, [and] case management . . . .

(Ravick, and Powell 1999, p. 7)

Thus, ADR is comprised of “the tools of the trade.” It is also related to “Third Party Consultation,” a process where a third party outside the organization plays a “critical role . . . in arranging and facilitating productive confrontations, that is, dialogue meetings, in which the parties engage each other and directly discuss issues between them. This approach is rooted in a diagnostic model of interpersonal conflict that acknowledges both substantive and emotional issues and serves as a conceptual basis for intervention” (Fisher, 1997, p. 143).

### **2.3 Review of Supporting Literature**

Due to the lack of material related to Conflict Resolution and Alternative Dispute Resolution within the MCF, after arriving at working definitions for these terms, it was necessary to turn to various known and established theories to construct a theoretical framework from which to devise an interview schedule for this study. The concepts studied and incorporated during the creation of this survey included attitude measurement of personnel in conflict situations (Greenwald, 1989), theories of attribution (Kelley, 1972), and theories of needs (Maslow, 1968). The work of Costantino and Merchant (1996) provided helpful insights into theories of perceptions, power and authority, group and interpersonal dynamics, and structural factors (financial, policy, resources, etc.). Finally, Coser’s conflict theory (1956/1961) was also useful.

Two articles by A.G. Greenwald were helpful in understanding the relevance of attitude measurement in personnel, particularly as it pertains to individual reactions to conflict.

These were “Why are attitudes important?” and “Why attitudes are important: defining attitude and attitude theory thirty years later,” both of which were found in Attitude Structure and Function (Pratkanis, Breckler, and Greenwald, eds., 1989). Greenwald’s work demonstrated that attitudes serve people in a variety of ways, thereby helping people to maximize or minimize positive or negative experiences. As such, attitudes enable individuals to organize and make sense of the world around them while providing clues as to why people think and act the way they do. Ultimately, Greenwald’s attitudes theory clarified why the survey group responded as they did when questioned about Conflict Resolution and Alternative Dispute Resolution. Clearly, having negative attitudes about one’s self, one’s client, or one’s workplace causes both distress and conflict. When such conflict occurs on a daily basis, it impacts workers’ attitudes about life and about themselves; thus, if they are feeling negative about their jobs, it becomes correspondingly harder to deal with either clients or with the organization. In contrast, if workers’ attitudes are positive, they are more likely to feel better about their overall job performance. Hopefully, the acquisition of knowledge and skills in CR and ADR will assist the survey group. Then dealing with day-to-day conflict will become more manageable and a more positive professional attitude will result from their ensuing sense of empowerment.

H.H. Kelley’s work on attribution theory in social interaction was also helpful in understanding the value of the CR and ADR processes in relation to conflict situations. In particular, Kelley’s article coauthored with A.J. Stahelski (1970) entitled “Social interaction basis of cooperators and competitors’ beliefs about others” provided insight

into the negative impact conflict has on individuals. Indeed, Kelley observes, “personal interests are involved in attributing the merits of decisions made about actions, depending on whether these are made by the person involved, or by someone else” (qtd. in Powell, 1998, p. 37). For example, in the course of their work, the participants in the survey group usually impose their decisions on clients because of the nature of the authority vested in them by the ministry and/or the legal system. As a result, these decisions often meet with resistance from the client or the client family, and some sort of conflict often occurs. In much the same vein, the hierarchy of MCF upper management often imposes decisions on the field social workers (such as those within the survey group). This evokes a similar sense of disempowerment and resistance on the part of the workers to that experienced by their own client group. Accordingly, these feelings may also result in conflict on some level. Given Kelley’s attribution theory, Conflict Resolution and Alternative Dispute Resolution are clearly beneficial, as they would help alleviate possible conflict through a collaborative process rather than engendering it through a decision that is imposed. Kelley’s advocacy of an inclusive Conflict Resolution process creates a sense of collaboration and empowerment for all parties involved, thereby increasing the likelihood of a “win/win” outcome.

Similarly, A.H. Maslow’s theory of needs provided a contextual understanding of why the MCF social workers from the survey group would have difficulty resolving conflict in the workplace. Maslow demonstrates that in situations where workers believe that they are not valued by the organization, it is common for them to feel a sense of estrangement, as though they do not “belong” to the organization. This results in a sense of instability

and insecurity, where “risk taking” behaviors such as voicing one’s opinion, feeling trust, or expressing the differences that are essential to meaningful Conflict Resolution are rare.

C.A. Costantino and C.S. Merchant’s Designing conflict management systems: a guide to creating productive and healthy organizations (1996) demonstrated the connection between people’s perceptions and their experience of conflict situations in terms of power and authority, group and interpersonal dynamics, and structural factors within organizations. They show that at the organizational level, responses to conflict are “situation or context specific” (p. 7). They attribute such responses to the organizational “lens” which is created over time by the normative practices of the organization. Thus, they conclude that all the perceptions of an organization result from what the lens sees or allows through as perceptions. This results in essentially “fight or flight” responses to conflict at the organizational level (p.8). In some instances, conflict remains unresolved either intentionally or unintentionally, as the institution simply avoids or distances itself from the issue in question (p.9).

Costantino and Merchant use the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) as their primary construct for interpreting an individual’s perception of conflict. They suggest that an organization would benefit from utilizing this tool as a means to better understand its employees on an individual basis. Such an understanding could help an organization to strategize how to help its workers adjust to change and how to resolve intra- and extra-organizational conflict, i.e., through the use of processes like CR and ADR.

Additionally, Costantino and Merchant's theory of power and authority clarified why individuals within the MCF might resist embracing the ADR model for managing conflict situations. They attributed such resistance to several causes: a belief that the individual would lose something valuable; a sense of loss of control and loss of autonomy; a sense of a loss of purpose; and a loss of "win/lose" as an invested strategy for resolving conflict.

Thus, Costantino and Merchant's work was a valuable resource in many ways. In Designing conflict management systems (1996), they accurately describe the dynamics of organizations such as the MCF. Their description of the individual and organizational perceptions of change and conflict, and the need for and potential benefit of organizational Conflict Resolution models such as ADR were congruent with the researcher's experience and observations in the organization in question.

Finally, Costantino and Merchant also offered viable strategies for effectively implementing CR and ADR processes within an organization such as the MCF. These models need to be introduced under "user friendly," collaborative terms. Costantino and Merchant suggest that all parties involved in the implementation adopt an attitude of experimentation with the model, and that the organization create an effective feedback loop regarding both the model and the process of its implementation. In the case of the MCF, there could be an opportunity for all parties involved in the process (including clients), to respond. As participants experience positive results from this type of ADR

experiment, Costantino and Merchant suggest the model will be accepted as a common practice modality.

L. Coser's book, The functions of social conflict: an examination of the concept of social conflict and its use in empirical sociological research (1956), provided a helpful discussion and critique of Georg Simmel's classic work, Conflict. In short, Coser critiques sixteen of Simmel's propositions regarding social conflict. Ultimately, the conclusion Coser arrives at is that conflict has many positive attributes and is the fundamental precursor to change. Coser also points out that "not every type of conflict is likely to benefit group structure . . . . Whether social conflict is beneficial to internal adaptation or not depends on the type of issues over which it is fought as well as on the type of social structure within which it occurs" (1956, p. 151).

Coser speaks of conflict within groups such as the MCF as having two possible outcomes based upon the conflict variables. Constant conflict in systems which "do[es] not contradict the basic assumptions upon which the relationship is founded" tends to be positively functional for the social structure (Coser, 1956, p. 152). However, "Internal conflicts in which the contending parties no longer share the basic value upon which the legitimacy of the social system rests threaten to disrupt the structure" (Coser, 1956, p. 152).

Two primary conflict arenas may exist in the MCF organization as indicated by the researcher's previous experience. One arena of conflict is between the ministry workers

and the client group. The second arena of conflict occurs between the “system” or politically oriented upper management group, and the client/service delivery oriented group of lower management and front line workers. This conflict is exacerbated for the survey group by the perception that the basis of their conflict with the client group is a result of their being unsupported by the “system.”

Thus, Coser’s analysis of Simmel’s work in Conflict helped the researcher to conceptualize the systemic nature of the MCF’s internal conflict. At the root of this conflict may be the perception that the “system” or upper management group has a political agenda that does not reflect the needs of the worker group who, by contrast, have a client/service delivery agenda. Interestingly, Coser’s synthesis of Simmel’s conflict theory offers a glimmer of hope for such situations where significant systemic conflict seems to be inherent. If conflict is a precursor to change when the groups involved feel secure enough to voice their opinions, it is likely that the participants in this study are taking positive action through their participation. Thus, although the motivation for this study comes from a concern that the MCF is plagued by chronic systemic conflict, the research results may help to put a constructive process of change in motion.

### **3. CONDUCT OF RESEARCH STUDY**

#### **3.1 Research Methods**

Information regarding current perceptions of ADR was obtained from structured interviews with the line staff and management personnel of the B.C. Ministry for Children and Families in the Capital Region's district offices and regional headquarters. This group of respondents included Protection Social Workers, Youth Service Social Workers, Youth Probation Workers, Resource Social Workers, Team Leaders and Managers. Due to the size of the Ministry and time constraints, all the departments in this organization were not included in the study. This project only included the above-mentioned areas, as the researcher has first hand experience and knowledge in these particular areas.

The total number of staff in all the areas of the Ministry is 350 for the Capital Region of Victoria. By selecting a representative set of six areas, the population was reduced to 72 potential participants from the areas being surveyed. Within this group, people were solicited by being asked if they were interested in taking part in this project. The sample size was 44 participants, or 61% of the survey population.

The selection of subjects was on a voluntary basis. The researcher contacted the offices willing to take part in the survey and those persons who volunteered to do the survey.

The researcher then administered the questions during personal interviews. While some constraints were inevitable, a sufficient number of potential subjects participated.

The data was collected through a predetermined list of questions administered verbally during structured interviews. A cover letter was used to describe the project and to help clarify any potential misunderstandings. Research generally indicates that using verbal interviews as the method of data collection has the best response rate. However, if such interviews are impractical, research also shows that in the case of more homogeneous groups (for example, an organization such as the present Ministry where certain topics are perceived as particularly relevant to the group), a well-designed survey questionnaire may elicit an adequate response (de Vaus, 1996, pp. 107 - 110).

The construction of the questions was derived from the writer's knowledge and understanding of the subject material, and his familiarity with the history of the organization. The collection of data and information focused on (1) behavior, (2) beliefs, (3) attitudes, and (4) attributes (Dillman cited in de Vaus, 1996, p. 81). In this manner, data was collected on what people do, e.g. their job description; on what people believe to be true or false, e.g. if Conflict Resolution and ADR are useful or not; on what people feel is desirable, e.g. wanting training in Conflict Resolution or not, and examining how conflict affects their behavior either positively or negatively; and on the characteristics of the respondents, e.g. their positions in the ministry, years of service, ages, genders, job classifications (de Vaus 1996, pp. 81-83).

Other questions presented were derived from existing theory on how conflict affects people's behavior, beliefs, attitudes, and attributes. In addition, they addressed the issue of whether ADR can play a role in dealing with conflict. The work of Folger, Poole & Stutmann and others influenced the structure of the questions for this survey and helped to explain how conflict affects people.

### **Respondent Roles**

The purpose of the survey was to elicit information from line staff of the Ministry for Children and Families (MCF). These individuals were drawn from six different areas of job descriptions or roles. The first was comprised of Child Protection Social Workers, whose role is to investigate any child abuse allegations that come into the Ministry. The worker takes the information down and explores its validity by investigating. If the Child Protection Worker feels there is a potential concern regarding child abuse, he or she can remove the child from the home. If the child is deemed in need of protection, the social worker must report his or her findings to the court within seven days. The court then sets a trial date for the hearing.

The second occupational group was Youth Service Workers, whose role is called "continuing care custody". This area of the MCF has the responsibility to care for children from the age of twelve until they reach the age of majority, after the court has ruled that they cannot return home because of protection concerns. The Social Worker, acting by mandate on behalf of the Director of Child Protection, becomes the legal

guardian of such youth. When this survey was conducted, there were approximately three hundred continuing care wards in the region.

The Youth Probation Worker's role is to deal with any youth that has been ordered by the court to fulfill a probation order set out by the courts. The Probation Worker's responsibility is to make sure that the youth in question follows the court order. The order can include a broad range of conditions, from required community work, to those conditions related to sentencing, or to the breaching of probation. (In the latter circumstance, the youth has not followed the court order and can be arrested and brought before a judge). The Probation Worker only deals with youth that have committed crimes.

The Resource Social Worker's role is to find placements for children and youth that come into the care of the Ministry. The Resource Worker assesses people who wish to be foster parents, or community resources like group homes and other facilities that deal with children and youth in the care of the Ministry. The Resource Social Worker is responsible for the home, while the Youth Services Worker or Child Protection, Family Service Worker is responsible for the child or youth in that home.

The Team Leader's role is to supervise a district office for each of the groups mentioned above. The Team Leader has the authority to spend money to meet such basic needs as food, shelter, and the educational or medical requirements of children or youth in care. If there are expenses outside the fiscal authority of the Team Leader, he or she can approach

the Managers and request the additional funds be approved or an exception to policy to cover the cost. The Team Leader is responsible for all staff working in a particular office. Thus, the Team Leader is in charge of the district office.

The Manager's role is to handle a part of the region's financial, oversee the delivery of service budget and to supervise the Team Leaders. Managers are responsible to the RED who may have direct contact with the Deputy Minister or the Minister for the MCF. The Manager has direct control over the region he or she is working in. In the case of this study, the RED is in charge of the entire Capital Region in Victoria. The author also interviewed the Manager for Child Protection Workers whose role is to supervise the protection teams in the Capital Region. This manager is subordinate to the RED, who is in charge of the whole region. The Child Protection Manager reports to the RED.

The author studied these six groups because of his experience in the Ministry for the past twenty years as a Child Protection Social Worker, a Youth Services Social Worker, a Resources Social Worker, and through his close collaboration with Youth Probation Workers, Team Leaders and Managers.

### **Focus of the Survey**

The researcher hypothesized that Conflict Resolution is underutilized by the Ministry due to a general lack of relevant knowledge and a poor understanding of what this field of practice entails.

In order to assess these concerns, it was necessary to determine the level and nature of awareness of Conflict Resolution and ADR on the part of line staff and management of the Capital Region Victoria, of the MCF. The approach was one of exploration to gauge knowledge, perceptions and attitudes on the part of these individuals. By surveying understanding and attitudes about conflict resolution in the MCF, a knowledge base was formed which could allow for the design of “action research” to assist the Ministry’s decision making and to establish a foundation for the possible creation of an ADR training and intervention system.

It was first necessary to elicit MCF staff and management’s views on conflict within the organization, as well as between MCF personnel and their clients. For the purposes of examining the hypothesis of underutilization, the focus of the interviews was on the perceived applicability of ADR in addressing the kinds of conflicts the various workers face. The hypothesis presupposed that there are conflicts both within the organization and between the organization, clients and other stakeholders.

### **3.2 Formulating the Survey**

Regarding the collection of information, the research method employed was a survey using a structured interview schedule (see Appendix D and Appendix E). This method was chosen because interviewing tends to have a higher rate of accuracy than

questionnaires. The workers' willingness to participate was a great advantage for collecting data for this project.

### **Collection and Interpretation of Data**

The methodology used to gather information was to collect data through a predetermined list of questions, presented in personal interviews.

The survey was designed to garner responses reflecting the behavior, attitudes, beliefs, and the level and nature of awareness of Conflict Resolution and ADR on the part of line staff and management, as well as identifying each group's attributes. Before soliciting responses to the Alternative Dispute Resolution Questionnaire (Appendix E), the interviewer provided a brief definition of what mediation, negotiation, and arbitration involve (see Appendix B). Mediation was considered to be a third party intervention between two or more people. Negotiation was explained as a process where there is a face-to-face meeting between the two parties involved in the dispute. Arbitration was defined as a pseudo-legal process whereby a third party makes a decision after hearing both sides of the dispute. Once these terms were clarified, the survey groups responded on a common base of understanding.

Given that the data was at the nominal or ordinal level, it was first necessary to perform a content analysis (i.e. by grouping responses according to their similarities and by tabulating their frequencies). These frequency distributions then began to provide clusters of categories (de Vaus 1996, pp. 287-288). Interpretation of this data then depended upon the clarity of relational patterns; often they coalesce into readily

distinguishable patterns and relationships, which can be represented by tables and graphs. In the former case of clearly identifiable relational patterns, statements were then made about the support for or the rejection of ADR, as well as recommendations for the implementation of an ADR intervention system. In the case of weak patterns of association, the interpretive task became a retrospective analysis of how theory related to the questions administered, of how the data was collected, and speculations about the impact of various impediments, design insufficiencies, or any other learning experiences which might contribute to future research of this type.

### **3.3 Implementation of the Survey**

#### **Research Ethics**

According to de Vaus (1996), those for whom the research may have ethical implications include (1) the research participants, (2) the field of study and professional colleagues, and (3) sponsors and funders of the research (p. 332).

The research participants were personnel of the Ministry for Children Families (MCF); therein lay the first potential ethical dilemma surrounding voluntary participation. When the writer first approached the Regional Executive Director of the MCF for permission to perform this survey, a stipulation, which was agreed upon, was that participation of the personnel in the research survey must be entirely voluntary. This, of course, conflicted with the research ideal of random (i.e. representative) sampling – the concern was that some unknown variable would be inherent in the self-selection of those who voluntarily

participated in the research. The significance of this issue becomes apparent by considering the other methodological option: selecting participants at random and making their participation mandatory. As de Vaus points out, compulsory participation, while satisfying the need for unbiased samples, can degrade the quality of the responses (1996, p. 332). Hence, in a less than perfect world of research possibilities, it was best that the researcher address this limitation with honest disclosure and information. Subsequently, it was evident that the more potential participants were informed about the research, the clearer their informed consent was, and consequently this clarity was also reflected in the quality of their responses.

In order to achieve this informed consent of project participants, the writer first met with the proposed interviewees to give information sessions, and attended staff meetings, as well as one-to-one consultations where appropriate. During these information presentations, the nature of the research project was described in general terms, including the basic questions to be explored, the purpose and place of Conflict Resolution and ADR in the field, and the basic procedures to be used for the interviews. The potential impact of the survey's results to the professions of Conflict Resolution, ADR, and social work, was also mentioned, including how, as an Action Research Project, the results might be of direct benefit and relevance to the Ministry for Children Families. In addition, clear information was provided about the researcher, the school, and the relationship of the project to the Ministry and how the data gathered might be applied. All of this was discussed in order to ensure that those who consented to participate were sufficiently well informed about the project.

Another obvious but important consideration was that of the anonymity of the participants. Anonymity was first mentioned in the phase aimed at achieving informed consent from those volunteering to participate. However, the issue of anonymity required additional elaboration in its own right. Through learning the details of provisions for maintaining anonymity in relation to the distribution, collection, coding and scoring of responses, participants gained confidence in the process. Their greater confidence became apparent in the forthright and honest nature of their responses (de Vaus, 1996, p. 337). Finally, an informed consent form was made available for the interviewee to sign (see Appendix C). The concern about anonymity was also addressed by keeping the consent forms separate from the interview responses and by destroying the informed consent forms at the end of the project.

A further ethical consideration was the inclusion of a description of how the research results were to be analyzed and reported, both to the participants and to the management of the sponsoring Ministry (de Vaus, 1996, pp. 340-341). The goal here was to declare principles that lent themselves to honest and professional handling of the information collected and to an awareness of the potential impact of any part of either the collected material or the interpretation of that material. At the end of the interviewing process, each subject was informed that if they wanted, a summary would be sent describing the results of the survey.

## **4. SURVEY RESULTS**

### **4.1 Survey Findings**

The groups who participated in the survey included Child Protection Social Workers, Youth Service Social Workers, Youth Probation Workers, Resource Social Workers, Team Leaders, and Managers. As previously mentioned, these groups were chosen because of the researcher's knowledge and understanding of these groups from working in the field as a Child Protection Social Worker, a Youth Service Social Worker, and a Resource Social Worker for the past twenty years. Otherwise, the participation levels of social workers in the other job categories was as follows: Resource Workers, 10/10; Youth Services Workers, 9/10; Youth Probation Workers 7/9; Team Leaders/Managers, 7/9; and finally Youth Child Protection Workers, 11/11.

Interestingly, the most striking difference among the respondents pertained to their number of years in service (Question 1, Introduction in Appendix D). Resource Social Workers had an average of 19.9 years of service. Team Leaders and Managers served an average of 17.8 years. Youth Service Social Workers averaged 17.2 years. However, Probation Social Workers averaged 8.2 years of service, and the average number of years for Child Protection Workers was only 5.2. This low average in the case of Probation Social Workers is due, in part, to the fact they have only come under the aegis of the Ministry for Children and Families since 1997. Otherwise, the discrepancies in average number of years of service can be attributed to the differences in the job descriptions for the various occupational groups surveyed.

On the whole, the survey results indicate a general lack of knowledge and understanding of what CR and ADR are and what they accomplish (Question 1, Appendix D and Question 1, Appendix E). Only 20% of the total survey group felt they were knowledgeable in Conflict Resolution. All respondents who were Probation Workers said this, as did two Team Leaders/Managers. Conversely, none of those surveyed felt they were knowledgeable regarding Alternative Dispute Resolution.

Not surprisingly, the most striking similarity in terms of responses pertained to the issue of training (Question 2, Appendix D and Question 2, Appendix E). Of the participants, 95.4% want training in Conflict Resolution and Alternative Dispute Resolution as they feel it would help them do their work better. The only two respondents who declined training in these areas did so because they would be retiring within the next year. However, they qualified their answers by stating that if they were not leaving the Ministry in the near future, they would definitely want training in CR and ADR.

The widest variety of responses occurred in the answers to Question 3 of the Survey of Conflict Resolution (Appendix D), which addressed areas of conflict between the workers and various groups they dealt with professionally. The total number of responses indicating conflict between the respondents and Ministry clients was 49.2%. Of those surveyed, 12.4% also reported conflict with peers. Those who experienced conflict with Team Leaders or Managers comprised 11.3%. Finally, 21.4% of all participants stated that “the system” was a significant source of conflict.

The answers regarding the emotional impact of conflict on the various respondents (Question 4, Appendix D) indicated that 23% felt nervous or anxious as a result of conflict. Another 30% stated that conflict made them uncomfortable, while 11% of the survey group found that conflict made them defensive, angry or excited.

In most cases, conflict is a daily occurrence in each group's occupation (Question 5, Appendix D). Of the survey group, 72.2% said that conflict was a daily occurrence. Only 27.2% of the entire survey group do not experience conflict on a daily basis. Probation Workers deal with conflict most frequently: 85.7% of their group indicated that conflict was part of an average day's work. Similarly, 81.8% of the Child Protection Workers said they experienced a high incidence of daily conflict in performing their jobs. (This likely accounts, at least in part, for the high attrition rate in the Child Protection Workers' sector.) Team Leaders and Managers had a rating of 71.4% for such encounters. Youth Service Workers responded that 66.6% of their group experienced conflict every day on the job, while 60% of the Youth Resource Workers also claimed conflict was a daily occurrence.

The responses regarding the impact of conflict on the various occupational groups were remarkably similar (Question 6, Appendix D). A total of 81.1% of those interviewed found conflict physically tiring. Another 95.4% found conflict emotionally draining, and 86.3% found conflict frustrating. On the other hand, 59% of all respondents said they were exhilarated by conflict. When questioned as to their strategies in dealing with

conflict (Question 4, Appendix E), 95.4% indicated they had used mediation, 97.7 % had used negotiation, and 40.9% had used arbitration. In particular, the Child Protection Workers felt the need for alternatives to the current processes in place for managing conflict in family court cases (Question 8, Appendix E). Presently, there is an alternative process of this nature available. It is known as the family court conference, in which all parties go before a Judge and try to resolve the issues causing their conflict. It is not a court process, but one in which all members have a chance to talk about the issues. The main drawback to this process is that the Judges' time is limited to sessions of 1 to 1 1/2 hours. Often, this does not provide enough time to resolve the issues in question. When these remain unresolved, all parties involved must return to the regular court process.

The survey outcomes are presented in tables with bar graphs as a means of showing the results of the survey in a manner that can easily be understood and analyzed. The graphs are histograms which, "by using the same arrangement of the vertical and horizontal scales, . . . indicate the frequency [of responses]" (McNemar, 1969, p.7). Bar graphs were used in this study to present the same data across groups as the tables. The varying length of the bars indicates the similarities and differences of each group's responses in a way that is both visually accessible and easily interpreted. This allowed for representation of separate group responses as well as an all-division summary for each question on the Survey of Conflict Resolution and the Alternative Dispute Resolution Questionnaire.

## 4.2 Survey Responses by Group

### a. Child Protection Workers

The Child Protection Workers' responses to the Survey of Conflict Resolution (Appendix D) were quite different from those of the other groups who participated in the survey. As indicated in Figure 1: Group Responses to Question 1, Survey of CR (Appendix D), when the participants responded regarding their degree of knowledge of Conflict Resolution, 8 said they had "some knowledge" of CR, while only 2 individuals claimed "no knowledge."

In response to Question 2 concerning any Conflict Resolution training respondents might have had (Appendix D), five members of the group had undergone some form of CR training some time ago. The other six group members indicated they had no CR training at all. However, all of the Child Protection Workers stated they wanted to receive such training.

The responses to Question 3, Appendix D, about the percentage of Child Protection Workers' activities involving conflict with different parties demonstrated that 56.5% of group members experienced conflict with clients. The next highest source of conflict was the system, at 20%. In describing the feelings which "would most apply to [them] in a typical conflict situation" (Question 4), six respondents chose the adjective "nervous," while eight chose the term "uncomfortable." The distinction between these responses and those of other groups is well illustrated in Figure 7 (p. 58).

In response to Question 5 on the Survey of Conflict Resolution, nine out of eleven Child Protection Workers stated that conflict situations were a “day-to-day occurrence” with their work (see Figure 9, p. 60). As the graph further demonstrates, the effects of conflict on the respondents were high in all six occupational categories. All of the Child Protection Workers stated that conflict was “physically tiring,” “emotionally draining,” and “frustrating”. Paradoxically, eight respondents also claimed that the personal effect of conflict was exhilarating.

In terms of Question 7 regarding employees’ comfort level in dealing with conflict (Appendix D), Figure 13 (p 64) shows that seven out of eleven answered that they were neither comfortable nor uncomfortable. Of the four remaining respondents from this group, the results were equally divided: two indicated they felt uncomfortable in dealing with conflict, and two felt comfortable.

Question 8 addressed the issue of whether members of the survey group managed conflict differently when dealing with clients, than when dealing with “Team Leaders/Managers,” “Peers,” or “Others”. As Figure 15 (p.66) shows, ten respondents stated that their handling of conflict with Team Leaders/Managers differed from when they experienced conflict with clients. Another eight also indicated there was a distinction between the way they handled conflict with Peers and the way they dealt with clients in conflict situations. The majority of the Child Protection Workers said that they had to act more professionally with clients than with Peers or Team Leaders/Managers. Three

participants stated there was no difference in the manner in which they handled conflict with clients and how they dealt with Peers.

In responding to the Alternative Dispute Resolution Questionnaire (Appendix E), a majority of the Child Protection Workers (9 out of 11) indicated they had some knowledge of ADR. Only two did not have any knowledge of ADR. When questioned as to their experience with ADR and their desire for training in this area, five participants stated they had some training, whereas six members of the group had none (Question 2, Appendix E). However, all members of this group expressed an interest in being trained in ADR. As indicated in Figure 6: Group Responses to Question 3, ADR Questionnaire, when asked whether they felt ADR would be useful in their line of work, 72.7% of the respondents said that ADR would be very useful, while the other 27.3% felt that ADR would be “of some use.”

Questioned whether they had employed such ADR techniques as mediation, negotiation, or arbitration in solving conflict (Question 4), all of the respondents claimed to have used mediation and negotiation as part of their jobs. Three participants stated that they had also resorted to arbitration to help resolve an issue. In response to Question 5 as to whether they found “one method more effective/less effective in dealing with conflict situations” (Appendix E), 81.8% of the group felt they had an effective method for solving conflict, while only 18.2% said they did not. That so many members of this group felt confident in their means of dealing with conflict is likely due, in part, to the fact that Child Protection Workers have a legislative mandate to act in child protection

matters. If mediation or negotiation fails, Child Protection Workers have the courts to turn to.

In describing their degree of involvement with the court system through their work, 36.4% of the Child Protection Workers said they were in court at least once a week, whereas 63.6% selected the “Other” response. They elaborated that since the Ministry for Children and Families incorporated Family Protective Services (an area not included in this study), workers from this section of the Ministry are required to attend court more frequently than Child Protection Workers.

When asked whether “the court system is efficient in dealing with conflict situations” (Question 7, Appendix E), 90.9% responded “no,” and only one individual stated, “yes.” The Child Protection Workers elaborated on their reasons for finding the court system inadequate in dealing with conflict situations, by stating that it is too impersonal and is set up to be confrontational. They felt both the language of the court system and its process were not geared to the average person, but to lawyers. Furthermore, respondents felt most lawyers were more interested in their clients’ rights than what was in the best interest of the children involved in the conflict. Given their knowledge of ADR, all eleven-group members felt that ADR “could be an adjunct to the court system” (Question 8, Appendix E). Workers felt that the family court processes should be handled differently than they currently are. They suggested that some form of process that was less confrontational or less “rights based/biased” would be more appropriate for dealing

with child welfare matters. Currently, there is an alternative process of this nature available. the family court conference as mentioned previously

**b. Youth Service Social Workers**

The response to the survey from Youth Service Social Workers was good in that nine out of ten members of the group completed the survey. These participants were both enthusiastic about the survey and cooperative with the researcher. They felt there was a need for this type of research and hoped it could shed some light on improving their job performance and their ability to cope with the stress of their work.

As Figure 1: Group Responses to Question 1, Survey of CR indicates, 8 out of 9 of the survey group had some knowledge of Conflict Resolution. The majority of respondents, 7 out of 9, had some training in Conflict Resolution, while only 2 had none. Out of this group, 7 out of 9 wanted further training, and the other two respondents stated they would have wanted Conflict Resolution training were it not for the fact that both were retiring soon. Thus, neither felt the need for it given their circumstances.

In response to Question 3 in Appendix D, which asked what portion of participants' work involved conflict with various parties, 38.8% of the respondents perceived clients as the source of most of the conflict in their jobs. The next highest source of conflict was "the system" at 25.5%, followed by Team Leaders/Managers at 13.8%. "Peers" were also identified as a source of conflict by 7.2% of the Youth Worker respondents.

As Figure 9 (p. 60) illustrates, 6 out of 9 participants said that conflict was a daily occurrence in their jobs. Furthermore, in answering Question 6 regarding the personal impact of conflict, the clear majority of the survey group, 8 out of 9, found conflict situations to be emotionally draining and frustrating. Asked to gauge their degree of comfort or discomfort in dealing with conflict (Question 7), 4 respondents felt “comfortable” in conflict situations, 2 felt “uncomfortable”, and 3 felt neither “comfortable” nor “uncomfortable.”

Question 8 of the survey asked participants whether they handled conflict differently when dealing with clients, Team Leaders/Managers, or Peers (Appendix D). The majority, 7 out of 9, stated “yes” to managing conflict differently with Team Leaders/Managers, while 8 out of 9 replied that they handled conflict with Peers differently than they did with clients.

The Youth Service Workers’ responses to the Alternative Dispute Resolution Questionnaire (Appendix E), clearly indicate a need for Alternative Dispute Resolution training for workers in this occupational category. Although 6 respondents had some knowledge of ADR, 3 had none at all (Figure 2, p. 52). Furthermore, no one in this group felt their knowledge of ADR was adequate.

Responding to Question 2 regarding previous training in Alternative Dispute Resolution (Appendix E), only 3 of 9 participants had received any (Figure 4, p. 55). However, 77% replied that they wanted training in this area. The two respondents who did not want any

were retiring within the next year; thus, in their case, the issue of such training was redundant. Nonetheless, both said that if they were not retiring in the near future, they would have answered the question affirmatively.

In answering Question 3, Appendix E, regarding the perceived usefulness of ADR in their line of work, 4 respondents believed they would have “some use” for ADR. The other 5 group members felt ADR would be of great use to them professionally (Figure 6, p. 57). Asked whether they had ever employed such ADR techniques as mediation, negotiation, or arbitration to resolve conflict, all group members stated that they had used mediation and negotiation in carrying out their work. Only 3 participants had ever been exposed to arbitration (see Figure 8, p. 59). However, 6 of the 9 Youth Service Workers felt they had effective methods for resolving conflict (see Figure 10, p. 61).

Queried as to the frequency of their professional involvement with the court system (Question 6, Appendix E), all respondents from the Youth Service Social Worker group selected the “other” response, which suggests they are only occasionally required to attend court in the course of their work (see Figure 12, p. 63). In response to Question 7 pertaining to “[the efficiency of] the court system in dealing with conflict situations” (Appendix E), 88.8% of the survey group felt the courts were ineffective in this capacity (see Figure 14, p. 65). Several reasons were provided to justify this perception. Youth Service Workers felt that when dealing with family matters, the court system was too impersonal, the process took too long, and the legal system was excessively adversarial. Group members also expressed a general dislike for lawyers. Thus, when asked whether

they felt that Alternative Dispute Resolution would be a beneficial adjunct to the court system, 77.7% of the respondents said “yes” (Question 8, Appendix E).

**c. Youth Probation Workers**

In their responses to Question 1 of the survey, 71.4% of the Youth Probation Workers said they were “knowledgeable” about Conflict Resolution, while the remaining 28.6% stated they had “some knowledge” of it. None of the respondents from this group claimed to have “no knowledge” of Conflict Resolution. One reason for these workers’ familiarity with the issue is that they are required to undergo an intensive training program at the Justice Institute in Vancouver before doing their jobs. Part of this instruction teaches workers about Conflict Resolution and the Alternative Dispute Resolution process.

As seen in Figure 2, Group Responses to Question 2, Survey of CR (p. 53), all seven of the Probation Workers said they had training in Conflict Resolution. Nonetheless, all respondents stated they wanted further training in this area as they felt they had not had enough and would like to have more. They felt Conflict Resolution training was an important skill for the type of work that they do.

Responding to Question 3 regarding the percentage of their work that involved conflict with clients, Team Leaders/Managers, or Peers (Appendix D), 62.9% dealt with conflict between themselves and clients. The reason given for this was that Probation Workers have to confront their clients if the latter do not follow the court’s orders. Probation

Workers can breach clients, have them return to court, and even have them arrested. Team Leaders/Managers were ranked as the next highest source of conflict by 12.1% of respondents; 11% found “the system” was a source of conflict, and 7.9% encountered conflict with their “Peers” (see Figure 5, p. 56).

In terms of their emotional responses to conflict situations (Question 4, Appendix D), 5 out of 7 participants stated conflict made them “nervous,” while 6 further stated that they were “uncomfortable” when dealing with conflict. These Probation Workers cited the frequently confrontational nature of their involvement with clients as part of the problem. Having to breach someone or to recommend a jail term for a client made participants “nervous” and “uncomfortable” because clients can become verbally abusive or violent towards their workers.

As Figure 9 (p. 60) illustrates, 6 out of the 7 Probation Social Workers said that conflict was a daily occurrence in their type of work (Question 5). They attributed this to the fact that they must deal with hostile clients and confront them on issues pertaining to their probation orders if clients are not following them satisfactorily. In such instances, the worker may have to tell the client that s/he has to return to court or to jail. Clients who are on probation must report to their workers as the court order stipulates; some clients take offense to this and vent their anger on the Probation Workers.

When describing the emotional impact of conflict situations (Question 6), respondents affirmed that they found conflict “physically tiring,” “emotionally draining,”

“frustrating,” and “exhilarating.” The day-to-day conflict between Probation Workers and their clients, “the system,” and their Team Leaders/Managers takes its toll on the workers; thus, feelings of frustration and of both physical and emotional fatigue affect their health and well being.

As Figure 13 (p. 64) shows, there was a split regarding Probation Workers’ comfort level in dealing with conflict (Question 7). Three respondents felt “comfortable” in such situations. One felt “uncomfortable” handling conflict, and the other three claimed they felt neither “comfortable” nor “uncomfortable” with it. However, most of the workers added that their comfort level was also entirely dependent on the given situation.

Asked whether they managed conflict differently when dealing with clients, Team Leaders/Managers, or Peers (Question 8), 6 out of 7 respondents said “yes.” This is because Probation Workers have to follow a legal mandate from the courts. If their client does not follow the court order, the Probation Worker must enforce it. As previously stated, this can involve a variety of repercussions for the client who has failed to abide the court order. On the other hand, when Probation Workers encounter conflict with Peers and Team Leaders/Managers, the playing field is more level than it is with the clients. Only one group member stated s/he handled all conflict situations the same way, regardless of the parties involved.

The Probation Workers’ responses to the Alternative Dispute Resolution Questionnaire (Appendix E) showed that they would like to have a greater knowledge and

understanding of ADR. The group felt that any training or knowledge would benefit them in carrying out their work.

As shown in Figure 8 (p. 59), the Youth Probation Workers wanted to utilize both of the ADR techniques of mediation and negotiation; however, they felt that the process of arbitration is more like the legal system, where a third party makes a decision for those involved.

Responding to Question 1 of the Alternative Dispute Resolution Questionnaire (Appendix E), 85.7% of the group claimed to have “some knowledge” of ADR. The remaining 14.4% said they had “no knowledge” of ADR. None of the respondents felt they were “knowledgeable” in this area (see Figure 2, p. 53).

Asked whether they had ever received any training in ADR (Question 2), 71.4% stated they had taken some training. Probation Officers have to take a period of training at the Justice Institute in Vancouver before entering their work. CR/ADR is part of this training. The remaining 28.6% felt ADR would be of some use, saying that any training in dealing with conflict would assist them in doing their jobs.

In response to Question 4 regarding previous use of such ADR methods as mediation, negotiation, or arbitration (see Figure 8, p. 59), 71.4% of the group claimed to have used mediation. A further 85.7% said they had employed negotiation. However, only 23.3% had ever entered arbitration as a means to resolve conflict situations.

As Figure 10 (p. 6661) indicates, 85.7% of the Probation Worker participants felt they had an effective method for handling conflict (Question 5). In contrast, 14.3% of the group felt they did not have an effective means for dealing with conflict unless they used the court system. When questioned as to the frequency of their professional involvement with the court system (Question 6), 14.3% of the Probation Workers said they were in court on a daily basis. Another 14.3% of respondents said they were in court “at least once a week,” while 71.4% replied that they were there “more than once a week.” The frequency of court appearances required by Probation Workers depends entirely on their client population. Some clients are required to appear before judges more often than others are. Furthermore, each Probation Worker has a “duty day” when s/he has to take on new cases referred to her/him by the courts. Some days are also busier than others. For example, the Probation Worker whose “duty day” falls on a Monday must take all the court referrals from the weekend. Thus, Probation Workers alternate their “duty days” so that the same person does not always take new cases on a Monday.

Questioned as to the effectiveness of the court system (Question 7), 28.6% of respondents stated that it is efficient in dealing with conflict situations as there is no other system currently in place to handle Young Offenders. The remaining 71.4% felt that the court system was ineffective for the following reasons: there are not enough facilities to deal with Young Offenders; the process is excessively long – it can take months or even years to resolve some cases; and the judicial system is very costly.

In response to the issue of whether Alternative Dispute Resolution could be an adjunct to the court system, 85.7% of the workers responded “yes” (Question 8). They felt that any techniques like the use of ADR that could speed up the process of the court system would be a decided advantage, reducing the number of remanded cases and lessening the system’s backlog. The remaining 14.3% said they did not know.

**d. Resource Social Workers**

This group’s responses to the survey were similar to those of the Youth Service Social Workers. As indicated in Figure 1 (p. 52), only 1 respondent claimed to have no knowledge of Conflict Resolution. The other 9 stated they had “some knowledge” (Question 1). None of the workers felt they were “knowledgeable” in this area.

Asked whether they had any formal training in Conflict Resolution (Question 2), 2 respondents said they had received training many years before while at university. The other 8 had no training in Conflict Resolution. However, all of the Resource Social Workers expressed interest in receiving such training.

In response to Question 3 regarding the percentage of their work that involves conflict with clients, the system, Team Leaders/Managers, or Peers, 57% answered that clients were their main source of conflict at work. Another 20.8 % felt that Peers were a source of conflict. The “system” was identified as another source of conflict by 11.4%, while 10.8% cited Team Leaders/Managers.

Describing their emotional state during conflict (Question 4), 6 participants said they felt “nervous,” 6 answered that they were “uncomfortable,” 2 responded that they were “comfortable,” and 1 answered “defensive.” In addition, 2 of the workers said conflict situations made them “angry,” 1 found conflict exciting, and 3 participants claimed conflict evoked “other” emotional responses in them.

Asked whether conflict was a daily occurrence on the job (Question 5), 60% of the group said “yes.” In terms of the emotional impact of dealing with conflict on a regular basis (Question 6), 9 Resource Workers said it made them feel physically tired. All 10 respondents found conflict to be “emotionally draining.” While 8 group members claimed conflict was “frustrating,” 5 felt exhilarated in conflict situations. Another 4 workers chose the “other” response and elaborated that they found handling conflict a challenge that made them both anxious and upset, but their reactions depended on the situation.

As Figure 7 (p. 58) illustrates, 2 Resource Workers said they were “uncomfortable” dealing with conflict (Question 7, Appendix D). Another 2 group members claimed to be “comfortable,” and 6 respondents stated conflict made them neither “uncomfortable” nor “comfortable.”

In answering Question 8, “Do you deal with conflict differently with clients as compared to [Team Leaders/Managers, Peers, or Other] (Appendix D), 6 workers said they dealt

with clients differently from Team Leaders/Managers. Similarly, 8 stated there was a distinction between how they handled conflict with clients and how they managed it with Peers. These group members explained their responses by saying they felt they had to be more professional with clients than with Team Leaders/Managers and Peers.

As is evident in Figure 2 (p. 53), the Resource Social Workers' responses to Question 1 of the Alternative Dispute Resolution Questionnaire (Appendix E) about their degree of knowledge of ADR mirrored their response to Question 1 of the survey (Appendix D) regarding their degree of knowledge about Conflict Resolution. Two members of the group stated they had "no knowledge" of Alternative Dispute Resolution, while 8 claimed to have "some knowledge" of it. Asked about their previous training in this field, 3 respondents had some training, but 7 stated they had no training whatsoever in ADR. All 10 members of the group wanted ADR training (Question 2). Furthermore, 5 felt such instruction would be somewhat useful, and the other 5 felt it would be very useful (Question 3).

In terms of their familiarity with ADR techniques such as mediation, negotiation, and arbitration (Question 4), all 10 Resource Workers had used mediation and negotiation, while 4 also had experience with arbitration. Ultimately, 8 respondents felt they had an effective method for dealing with conflict situations in the course of their work. The other 2 respondents felt they did not (see Figure 10, p. 61).

Asked about the frequency of their professional involvement with the court system (Question 6), all 10 members of the survey group chose the "other" response. This was

because as Resource Social Workers they have little involvement with the courts. Nonetheless, 9 respondents felt the courts were ineffective in dealing with conflict situations, while 1 group member said the issue was not applicable to their group (Question 7). With regards to the suggestion that ADR might serve as an adjunct to the court system (Question 8), again 9 of the 10 respondents answered “yes.” The remaining respondent answered that given the infrequency of Resource Workers’ involvement with the courts, the question was irrelevant.

**e. Team Leaders/Managers**

In assessing the responses for these two groups, the researcher combined the responses of the Team Leaders with those of the Managers in order to preserve individuals’ anonymity, as only two Managers were interviewed for this study.

The group’s responses to the Survey of Conflict Resolution (Appendix D) indicate they see a need for training in Conflict Resolution and ADR both as part of their work, and in other occupations within the Ministry for Children and Families. The Team Leaders and Managers felt that any knowledge or understanding of the processes involved in Conflict Resolution and ADR could only benefit those workers involved with clientele to do a better job.

When asked about their knowledge of Conflict Resolution (Question 1), 71.4% of the Team Leaders/Managers said they had “some knowledge” of the issue, while 28.6%

claimed to be “knowledgeable.” Team Leaders/Managers have had more exposure to Conflict Resolution than other ministry workers because they are part of the management team. Although the MCF has sent Team Leaders/Managers on courses about delivering Conflict Resolution workshops to Ministry staff, their knowledge has yet to “trickle down” to the line workers.

In response to Question 2 regarding their training in Conflict Resolution, 71.4% of this survey group said they had received training. For the 28.6% who stated they had not taken any of the workshops offered yet, time restraints and funding cutbacks were cited as the reason for their lack of participation to date. However, all 7 Team Leaders/Managers wanted training in Conflict Resolution. Like those in the other occupational categories surveyed, these participants felt that Conflict Resolution could only be beneficial to the ministry because conflict is “part and parcel” of their work.

As Figure 5 (p. 56) reveals, only 30% of the Team Leaders/Managers experience conflict with clients (Question 3). The reason this percentage is lower than it is with the other survey groups is that Team Leaders/Managers have less direct contact with the ministry’s clients than front line workers unless there are mitigating circumstances in a given case, and a need for more support or input such as media involvement. The source of conflict that ranked highest among this survey group was “the system,” at 39.5%. This may be attributed, in part, to the fact these participants are responsible for budgetary administration. Team Leaders manage their own district office’s budget, while the Regional Executive Director or RED allocates through the managers to each district

office with a fair share of the regional budget. Among the respondents in this group, 16.4% of their work involved conflict with peers. This is partly due to the fact that one aspect of the Team Leader's mandate is to ensure the various workers are performing their jobs properly; thus, like any boss, s/he must address matters of misconduct or other similar issues in the office.

In addressing their emotional reactions to conflict situations (Question 4), 2 participants stated that conflict made them "nervous," whereas 6 out of 7 respondents felt "uncomfortable" in conflict situations (see Figure 7, p. 58). Most members of the Team Leader/Manager group (71.4%) indicated that conflict on the job was a daily occurrence (Question 5). The other 28.6% claimed they did not experience conflict on a daily basis. In this instance, the Managers felt that they did not have the same degree of contact with clients and Peers as Team Leaders do. Thus, their exposure to conflict was less frequent.

As Figure 11 (p. 62) indicates, 57.1% of the Team Leaders/Managers found conflict to be "physically tiring." The entire group – 100% - said conflict was "emotionally draining," while 71.4% felt that it was both "frustrating" and "exhilarating." However, they qualified this latter response by explaining that conflict situations were only "exhilarating" when a resolution was achieved.

The group's responses to Question 7 regarding their comfort levels in managing conflict were varied. Two participants said they felt "uncomfortable" with conflict, two answered they were "comfortable" handling it, and three stated they were neither "uncomfortable"

nor “comfortable” in conflict situations. Asked whether they dealt with conflict differently with clients, Peers, or Other: 71.4% said yes (Question 8).

The Team Leaders/Managers’ responses to the Alternative Dispute Resolution Questionnaire (Appendix E) show that a knowledge and understanding of ADR would be useful to this group. Although 85.7% of the participants indicated they had “some knowledge” of ADR, 14.3% claimed to have “no knowledge” of the process (Question 1). Even those with experience in this field still felt that it would help to have more training.

In response to Question 2 regarding previous training in Alternative Dispute Resolution, only 14.3% or 1 out of 7 respondents had received some form of ADR training. The remaining 85.7% have had no training of any kind in ADR. However, all 7 respondents indicated that they would like to receive ADR instruction. Like the other survey groups, the Team Leaders/Managers felt that any knowledge or understanding they could acquire of ADR would help them to perform their jobs better.

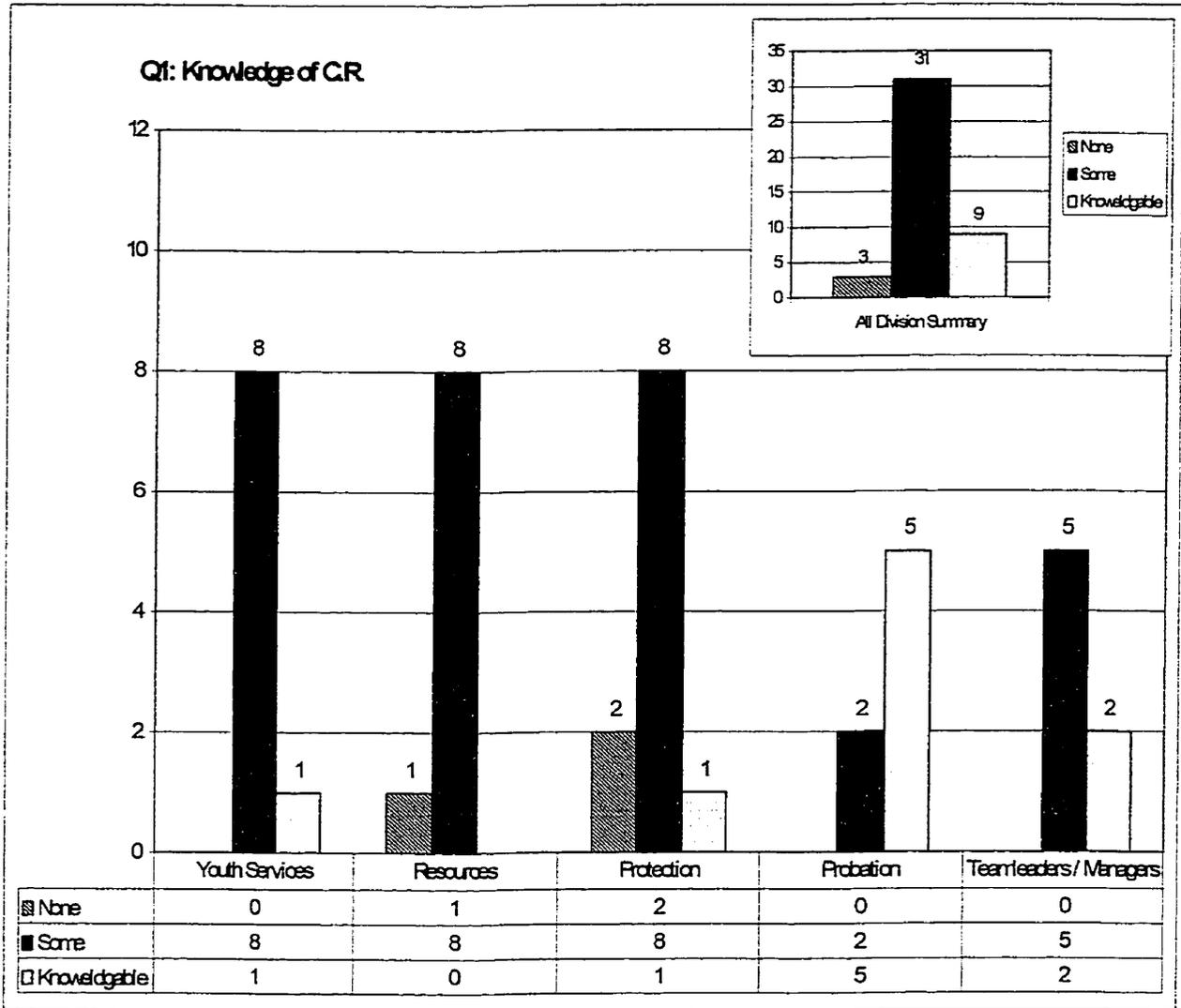
Assessing the usefulness of ADR in their line of work, 42.8% of Team Leaders/Managers said that ADR would be very useful (Question 3). Another 28.6% felt that it would be “somewhat useful.” The remaining two respondents (28.6%) did not know enough about ADR to answer the question.

As Figure 8 (p. 59) shows, all of the Team Leaders/Managers survey group have used mediation and negotiation to resolve conflict (Question 4). Four out of seven have also employed arbitration as an ADR strategy. Most group members, 71.4%, felt they had an effective method for handling conflict situations, while only two, 28.6%, said they did not (Question 5). In these latter two instances, both individuals stated that conflict made them feel uncomfortable, and they indicated a need for greater awareness and understanding of Conflict Resolution/ADR techniques.

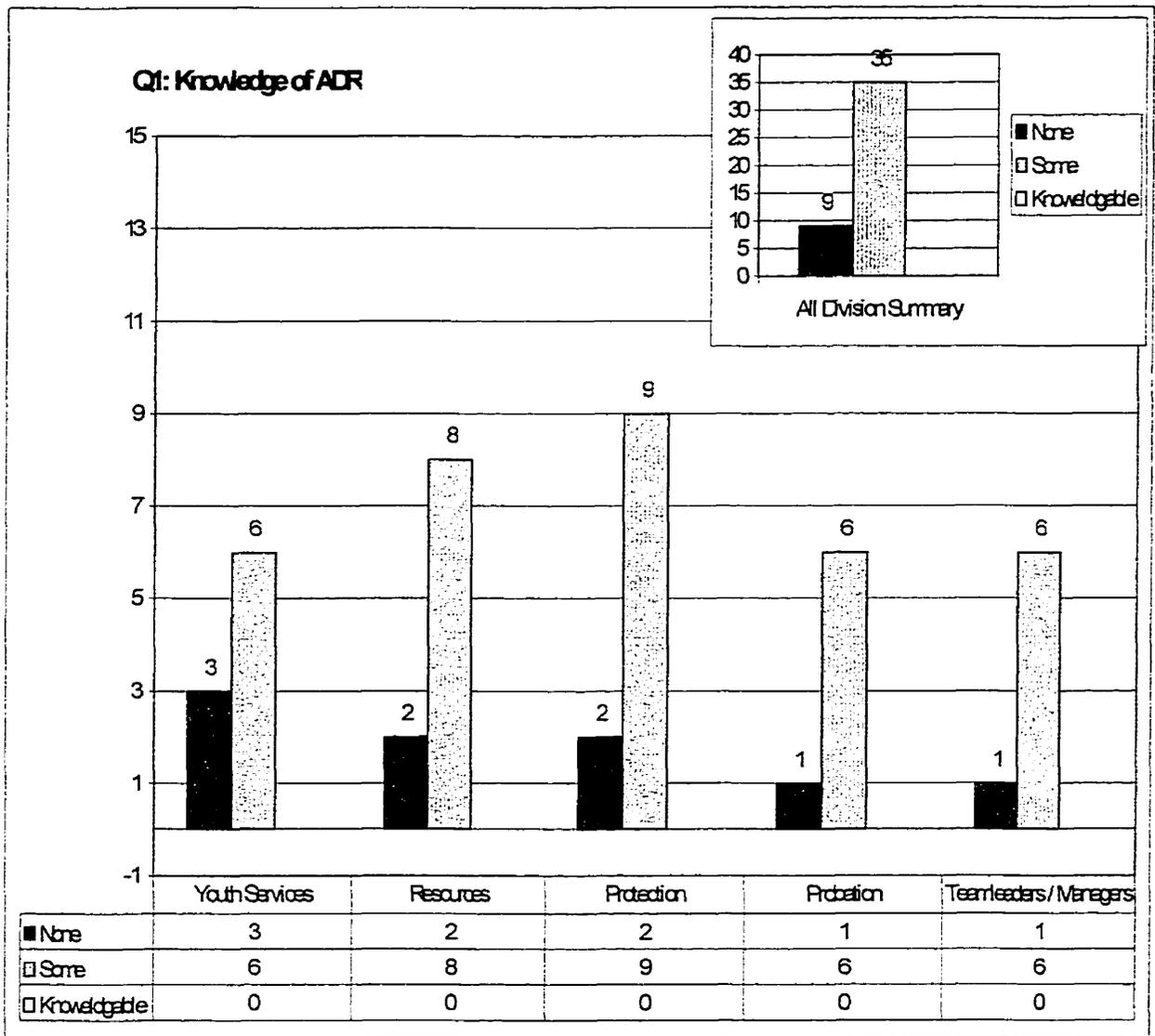
In terms of the frequency of Team Leaders/Managers' involvement with the court system (Question 6), 28.6% stated that they were involved with the courts on a daily basis. However, they clarified this response by explaining that while they were not in court themselves, they held daily discussions about court-related matters with the social workers under their aegis. Another two participants, 28.6%, indicated they dealt with legal matters at least once a week, but as in the former instance, this occurred through discussions with workers of cases before the court rather than through actual attendance in court.

In assessing the legal system's efficiency in dealing with conflict situations, the Team Leaders/Managers' responses were similar to those of other survey group members (Question 7). Six out of seven or 85.7% felt the courts were inefficient in this regard. The reasons for this assessment were that the legal system is too impersonal, the legal process takes too much time, and the courts are adversarial and costly (see Figure 14, p. 65).

As to whether Alternative Dispute Resolution should be an adjunct to the court system (Question 8), 6 out of 7 respondents answered “yes.” They felt that the use of ADR as a legal alternative would be less time-consuming, less expensive, more client-friendly, and more personable. The remaining participant claimed insufficient knowledge of ADR to respond to the question.



**Figure 1: Group Responses to Question 1, Survey of CR (Appendix D)**



**Figure 2: Group Responses to Question 1, ADR Questionnaire (Appendix E)**

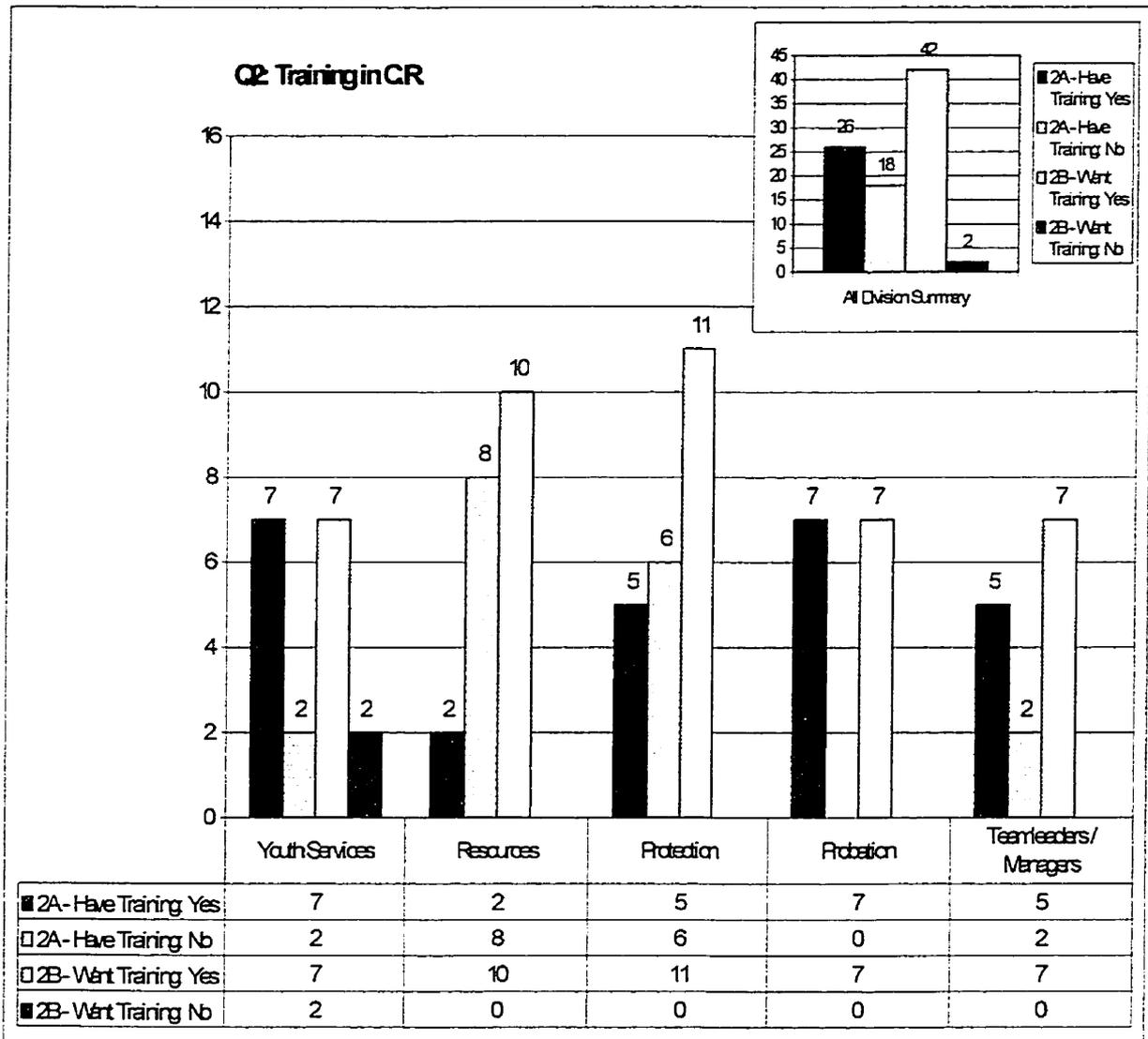
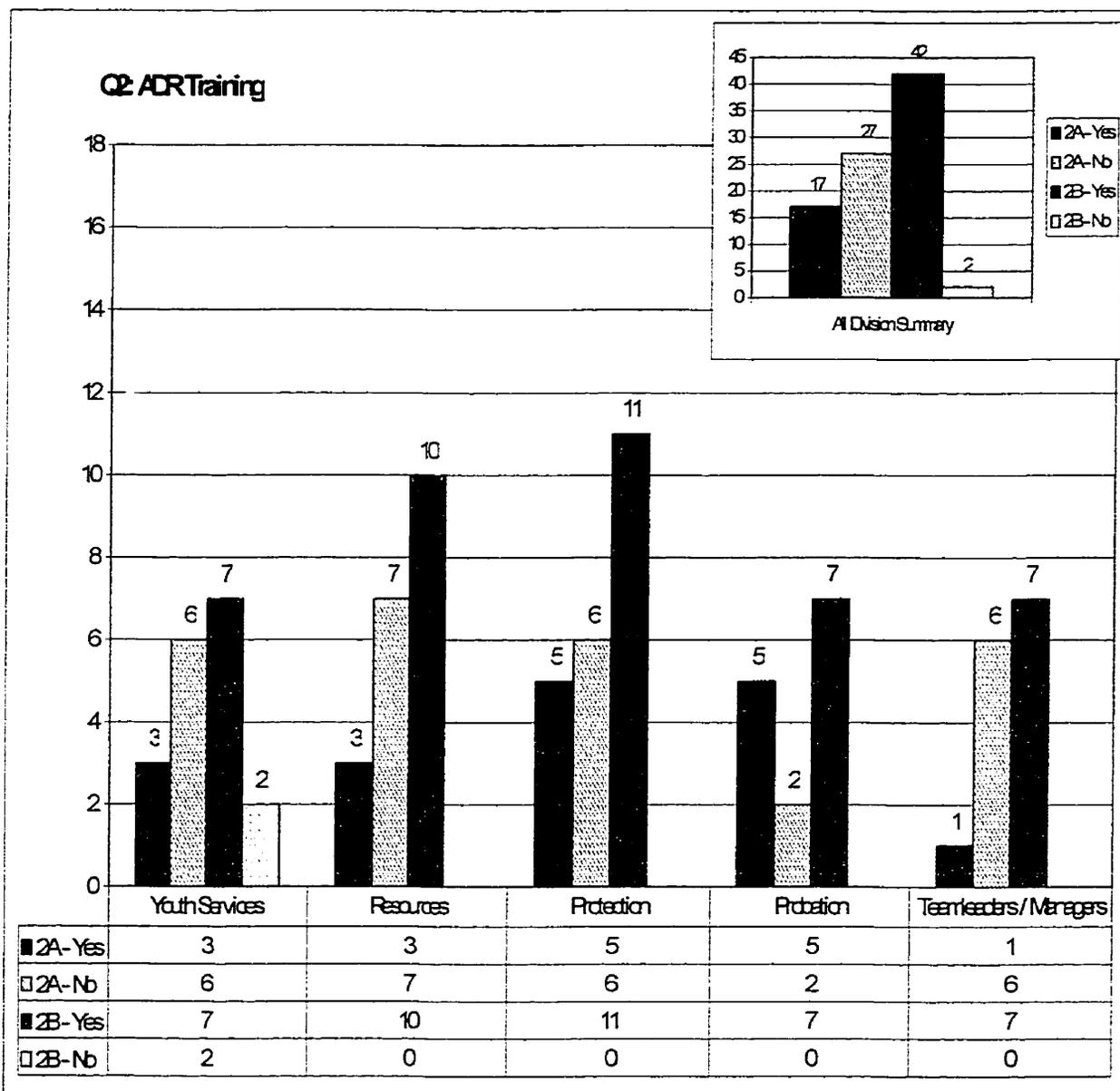
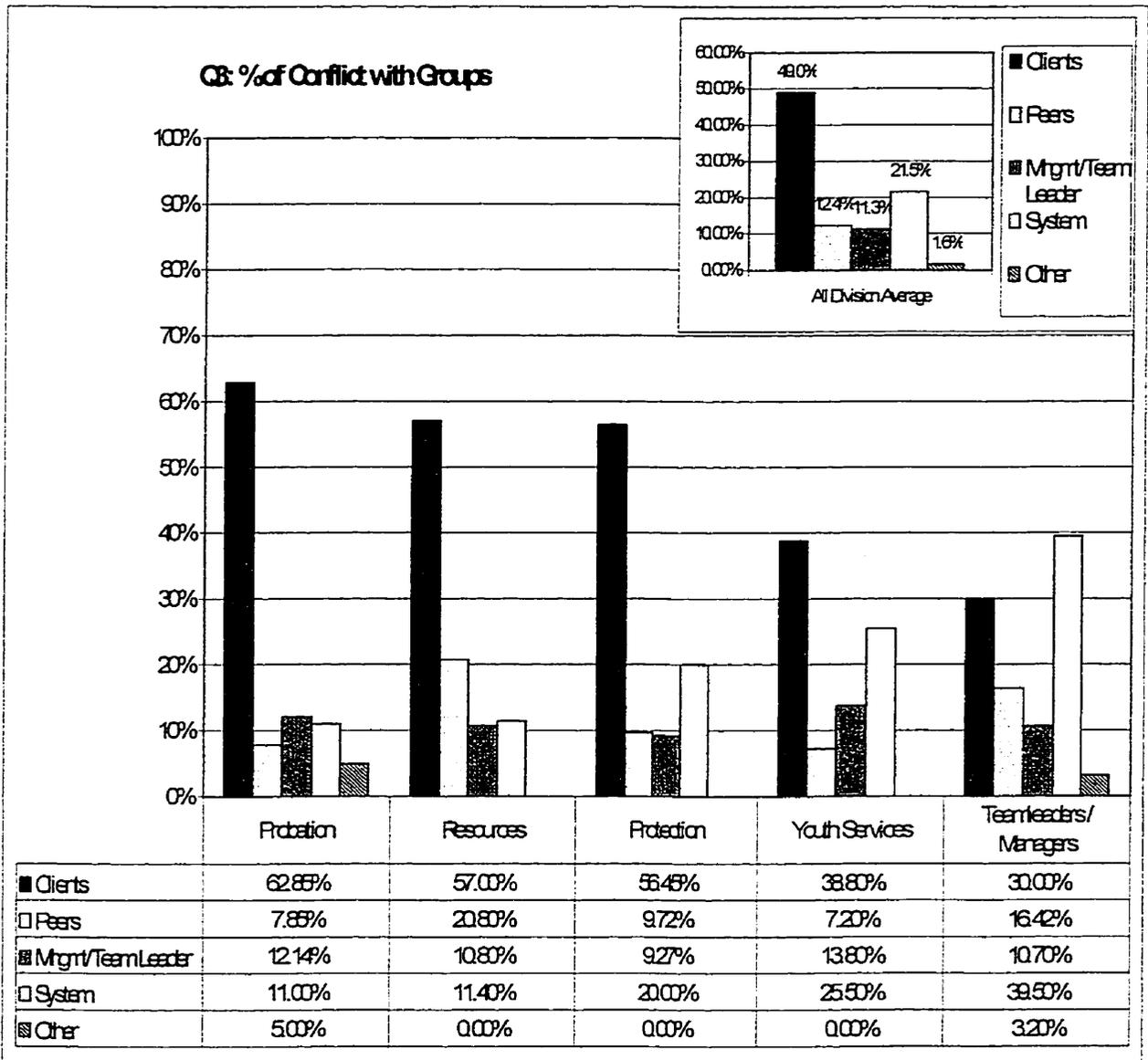


Figure 3: Group Responses to Question 2, Survey of CR (Appendix D)



**Figure 4: Group Responses to Question 2, ADR Questionnaire (Appendix E)**



**Figure 5: Group Responses to Question 3, Survey of CR (Appendix D)**

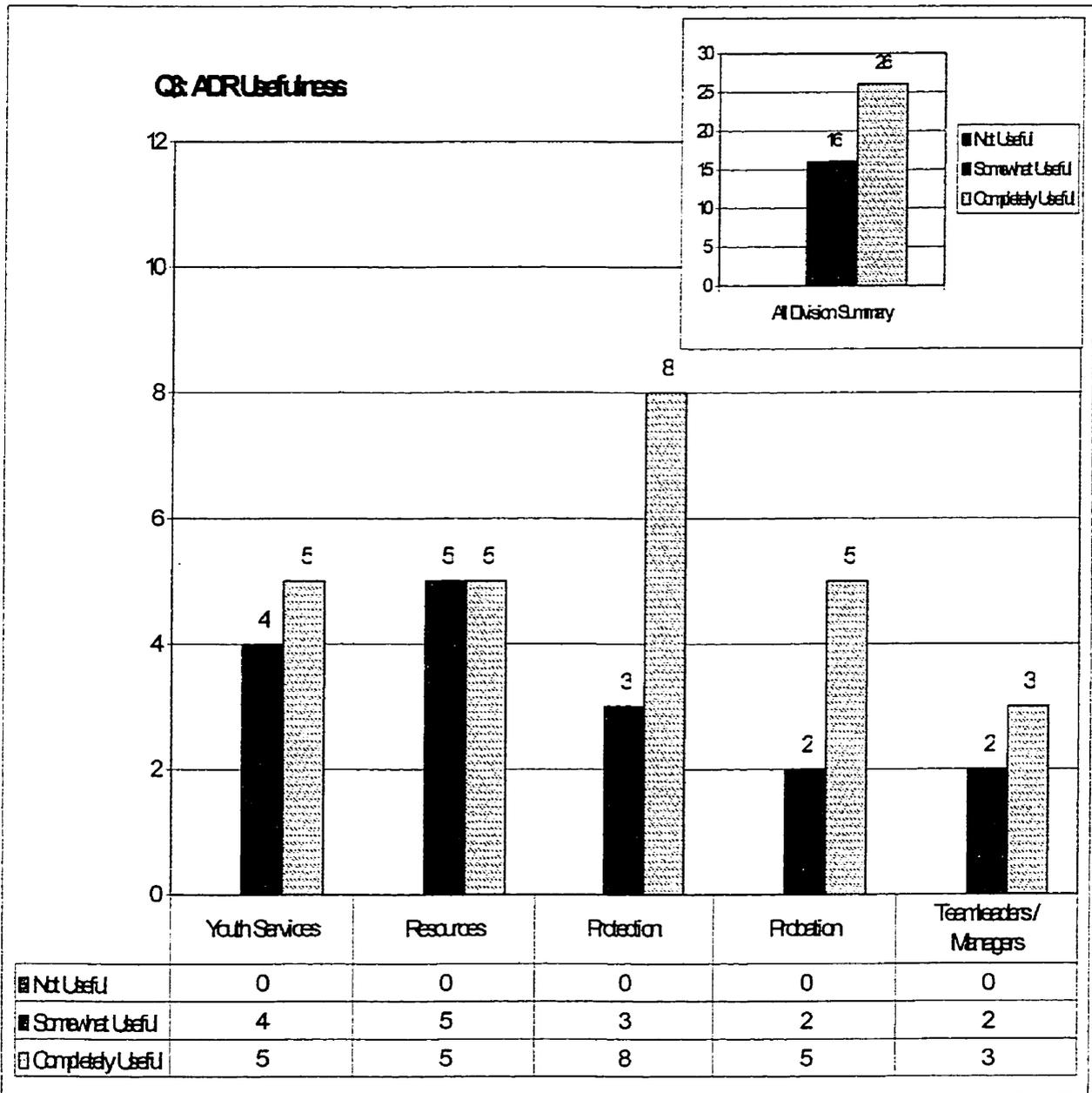


Figure 6: Group Responses to Question 6, ADR Questionnaire (Appendix E)

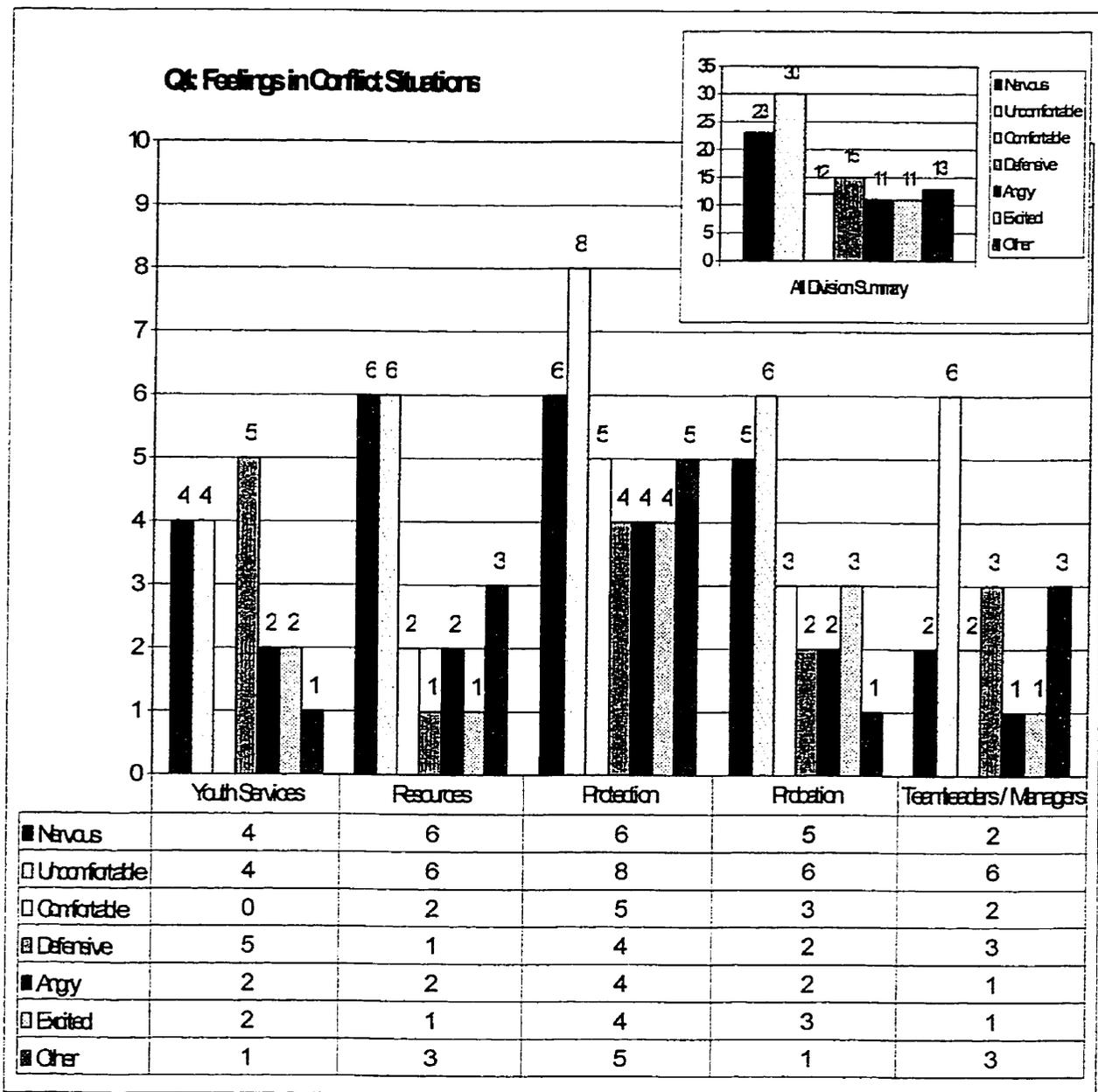
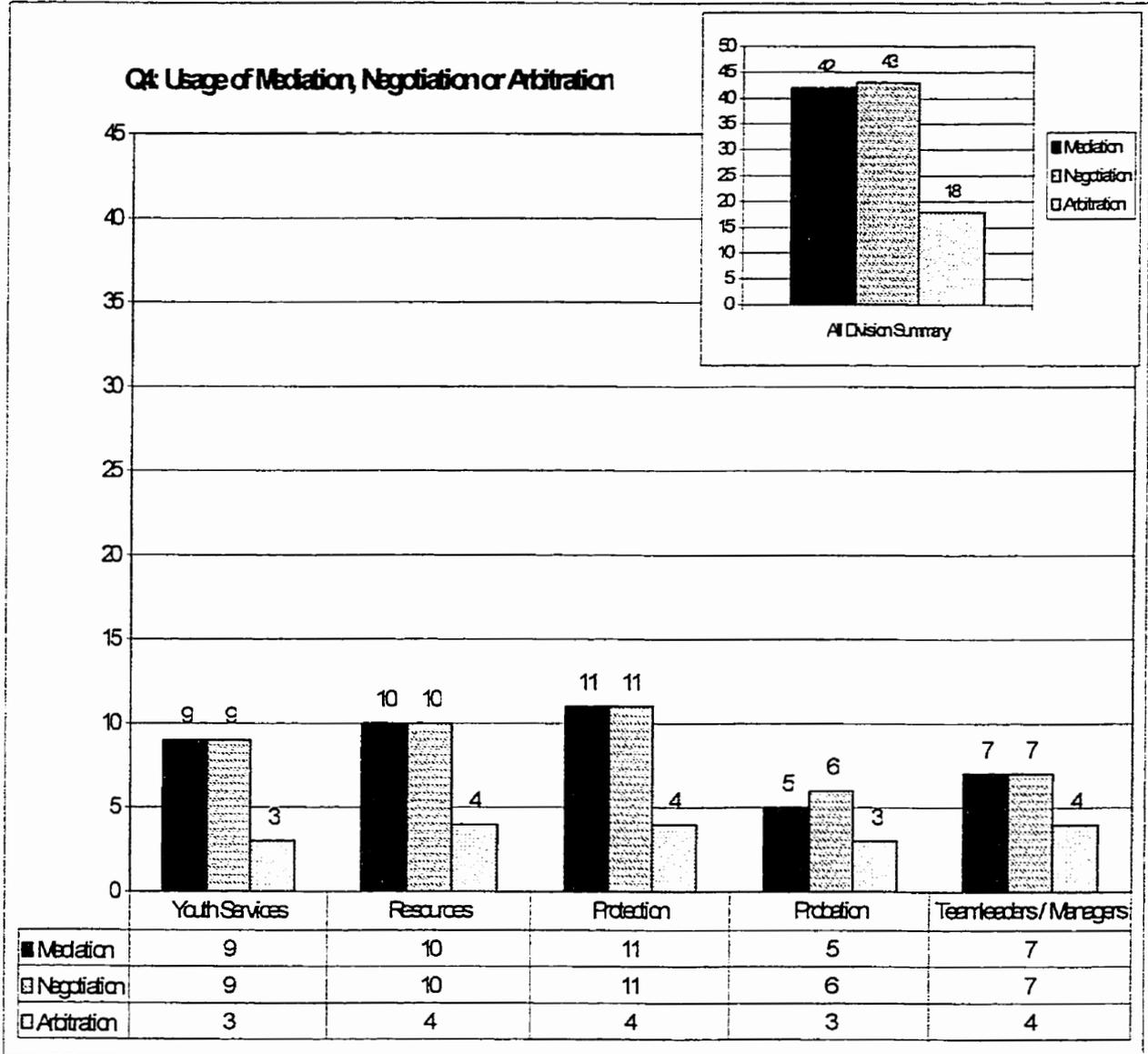


Figure 7: Group Responses to Question 4, Survey of CR (Appendix D)



**Figure 8: Group Responses to Question 4, ADR Questionnaire (Appendix E)**

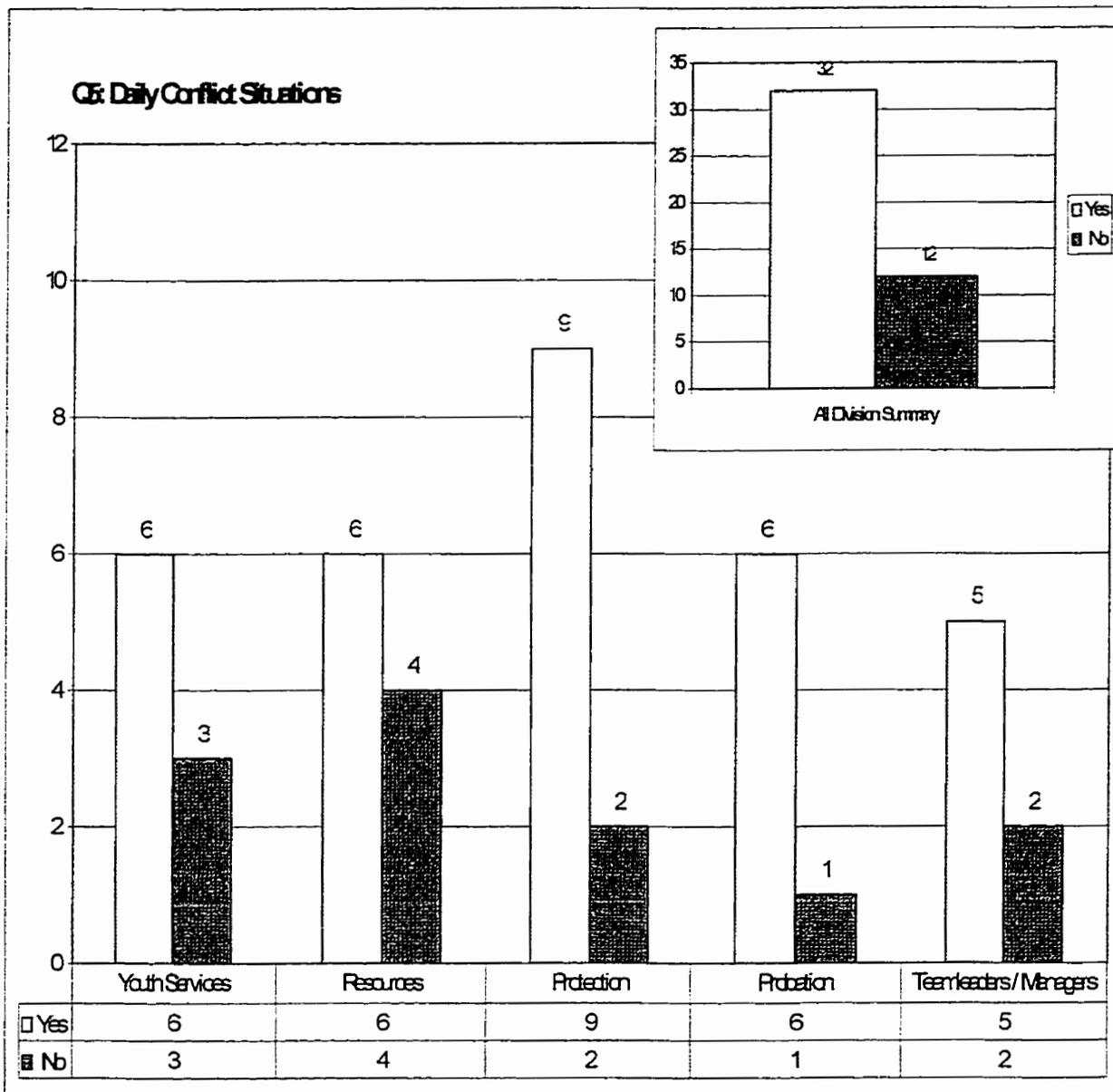
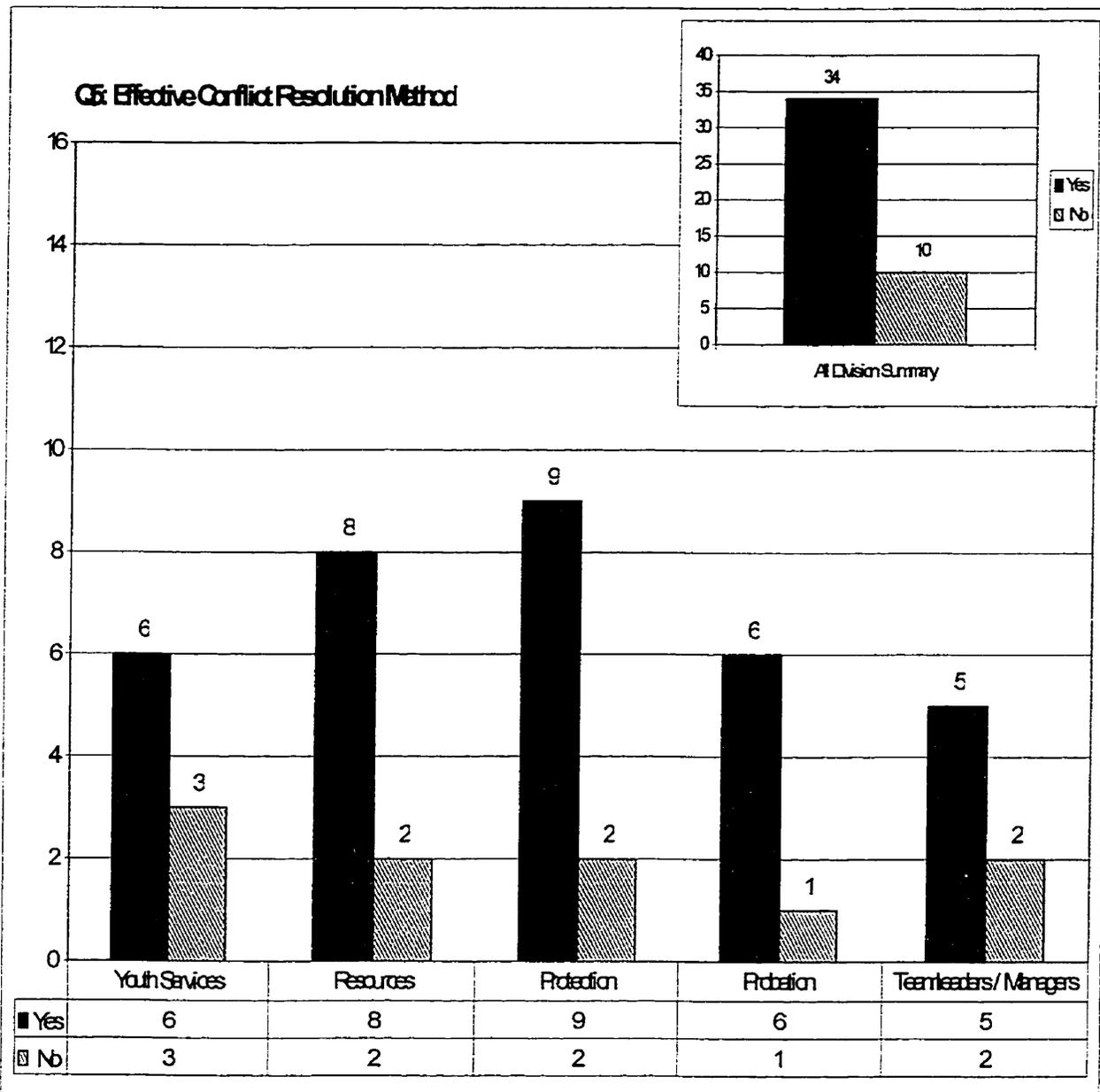


Figure 9: Group Responses to Question 5, Survey of CR (Appendix D)



**Figure 10: Group Responses to Question 5, ADR Questionnaire (Appendix E)**

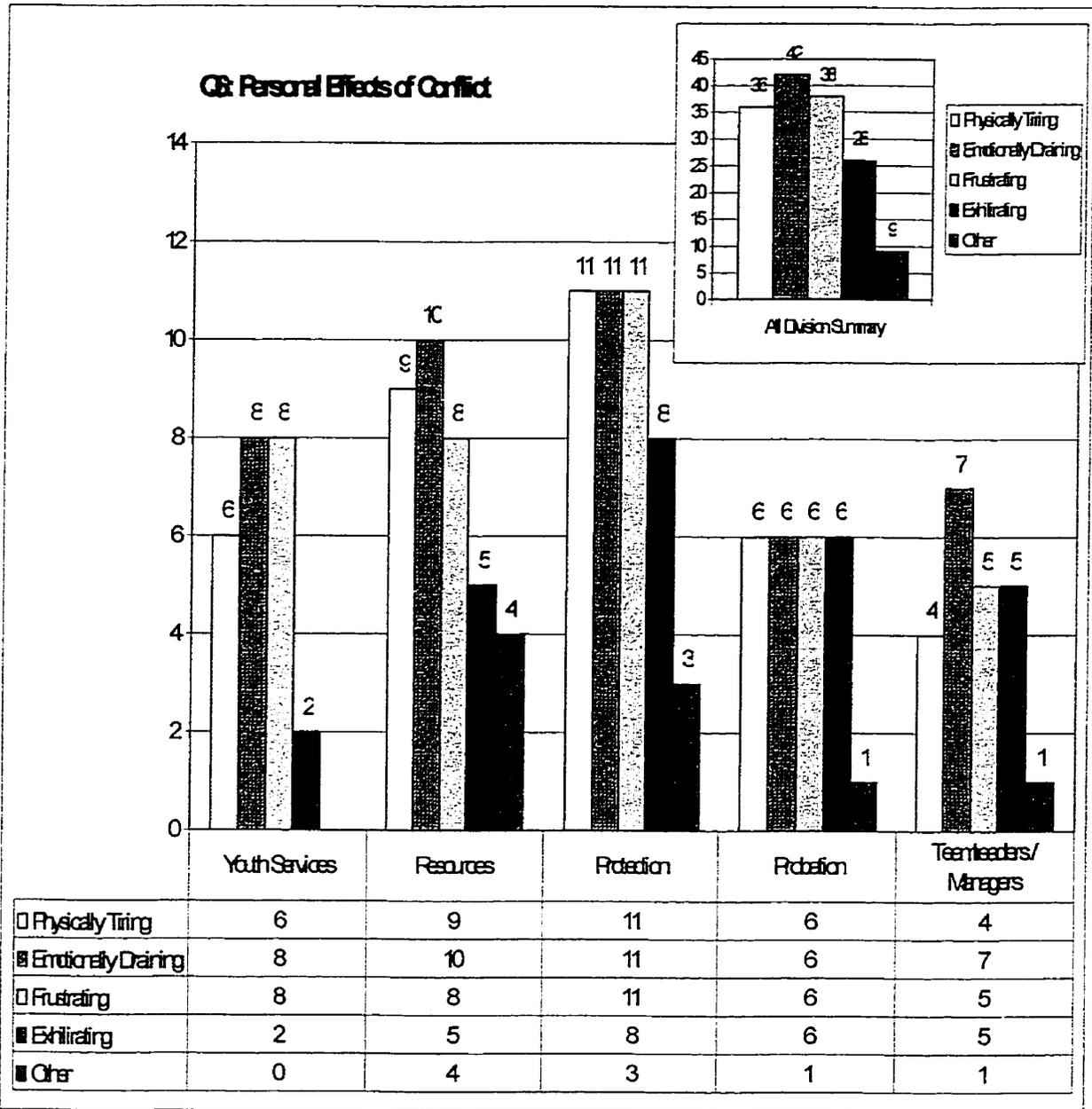


Figure 11: Group Responses to Question 6, Survey of CR (Appendix D)

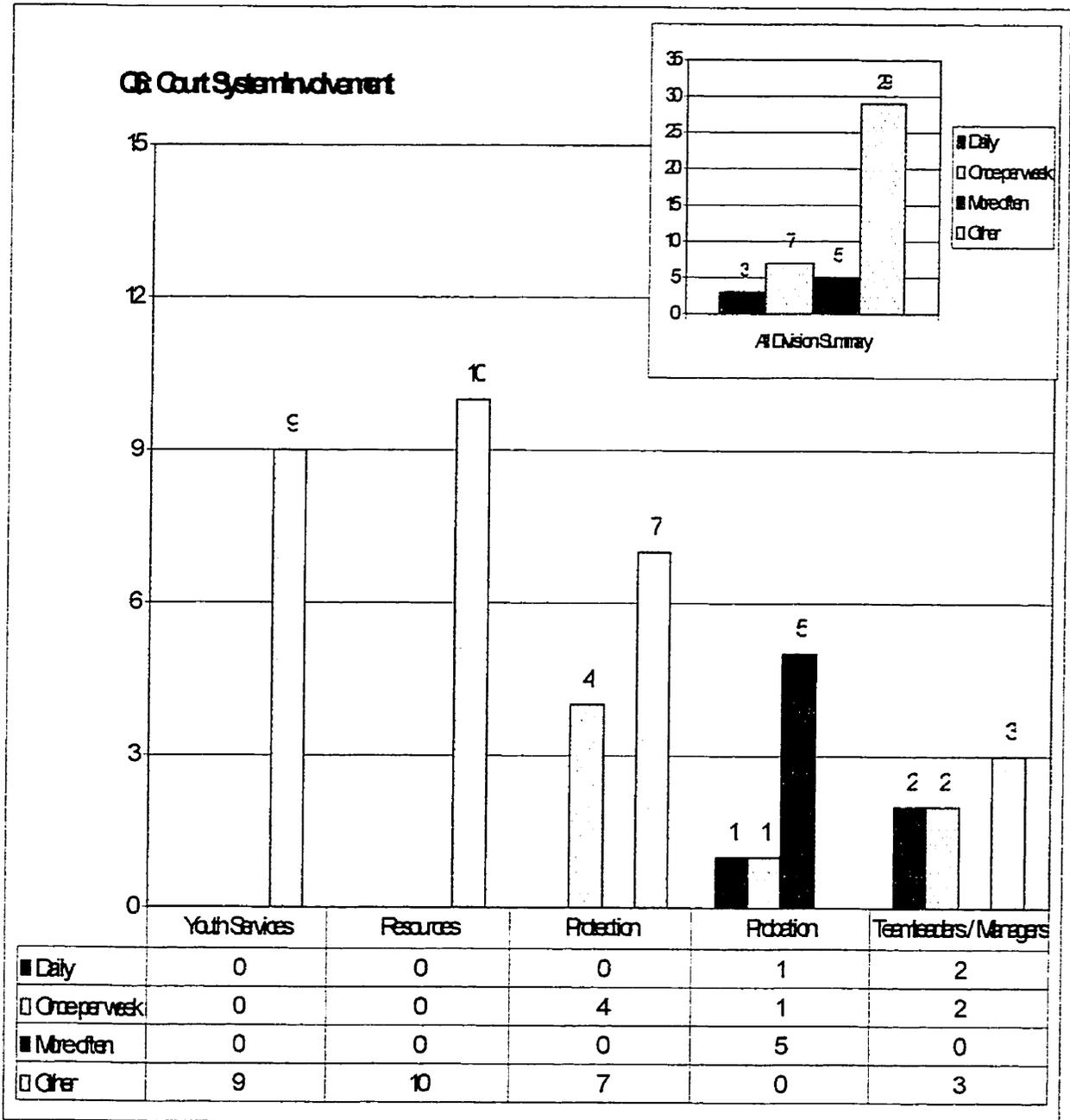


Figure 12: Group Responses to Question 6, ADR Questionnaire (Appendix E)

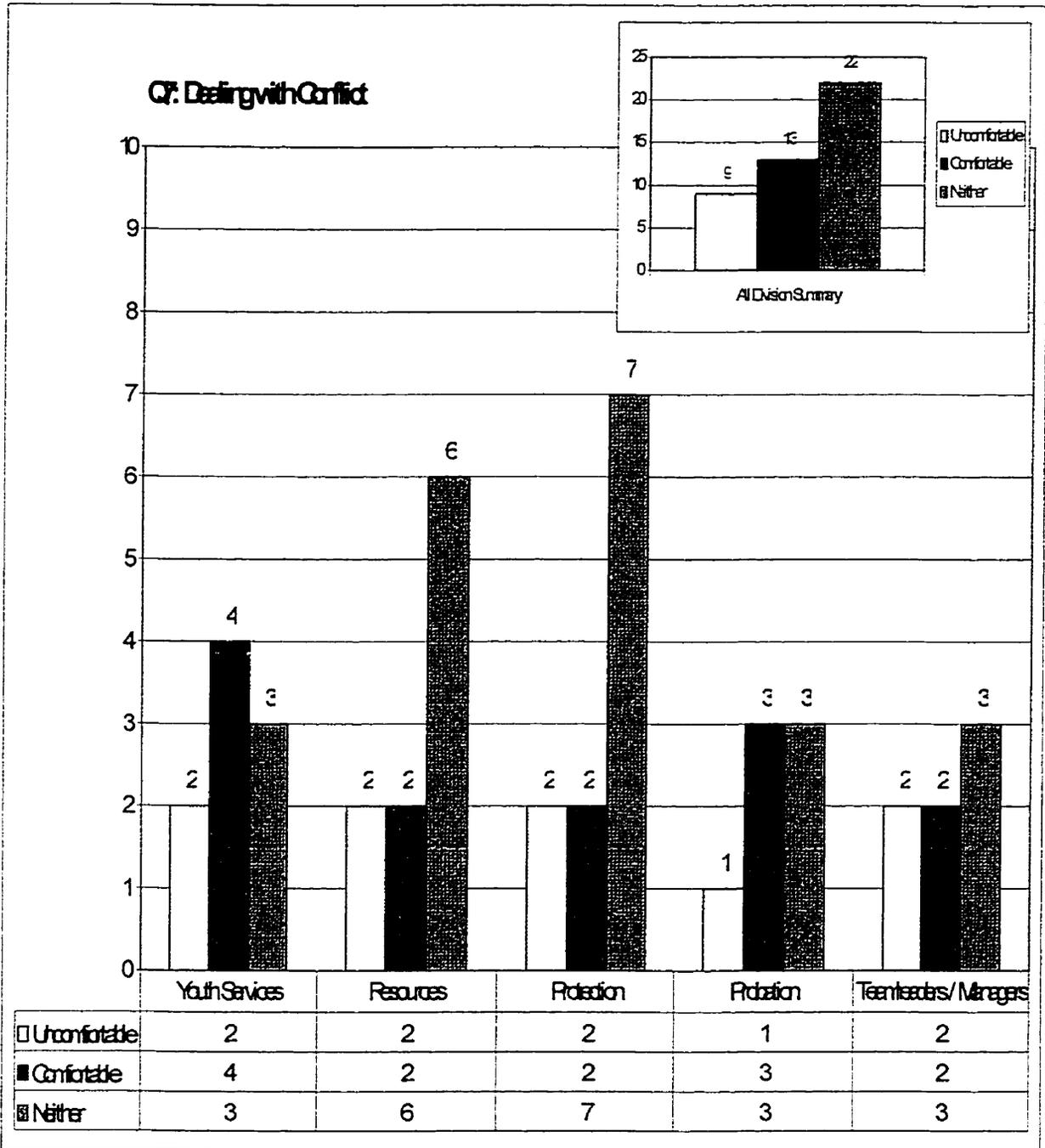


Figure 13: Group Responses to Question 7, Survey of CR (Appendix D)

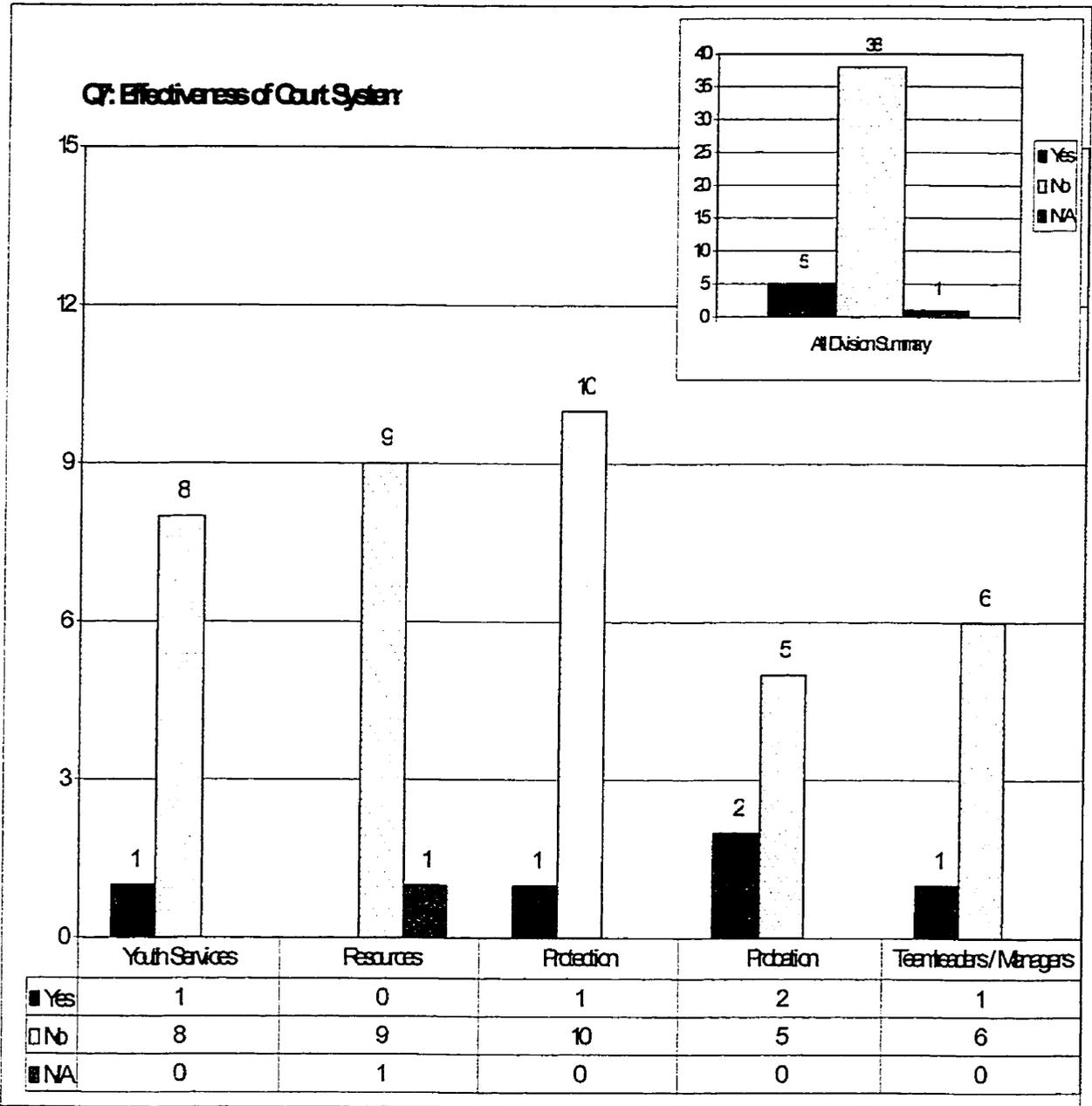


Figure 14: Group Responses to Question 7, ADR Questionnaire (Appendix E)

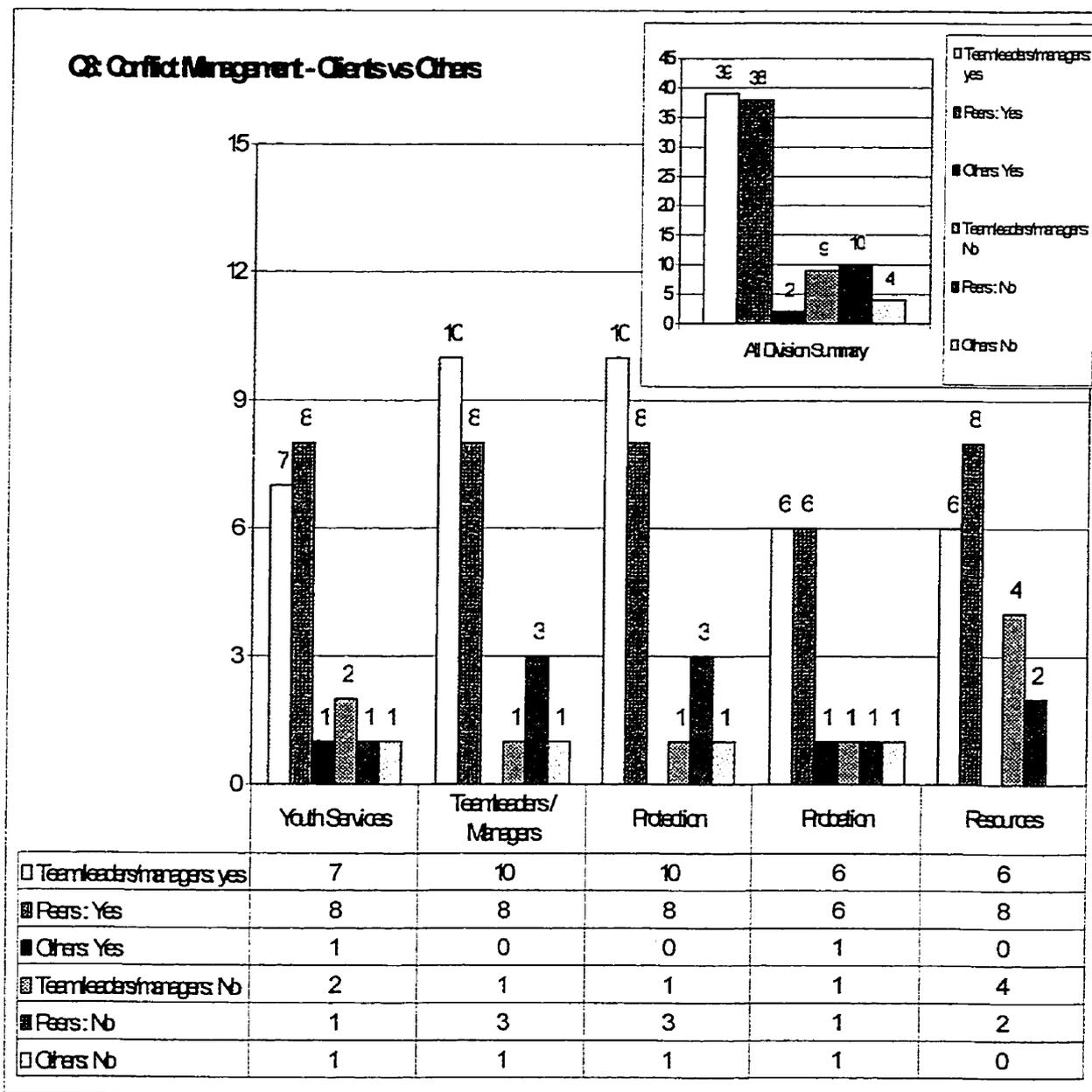
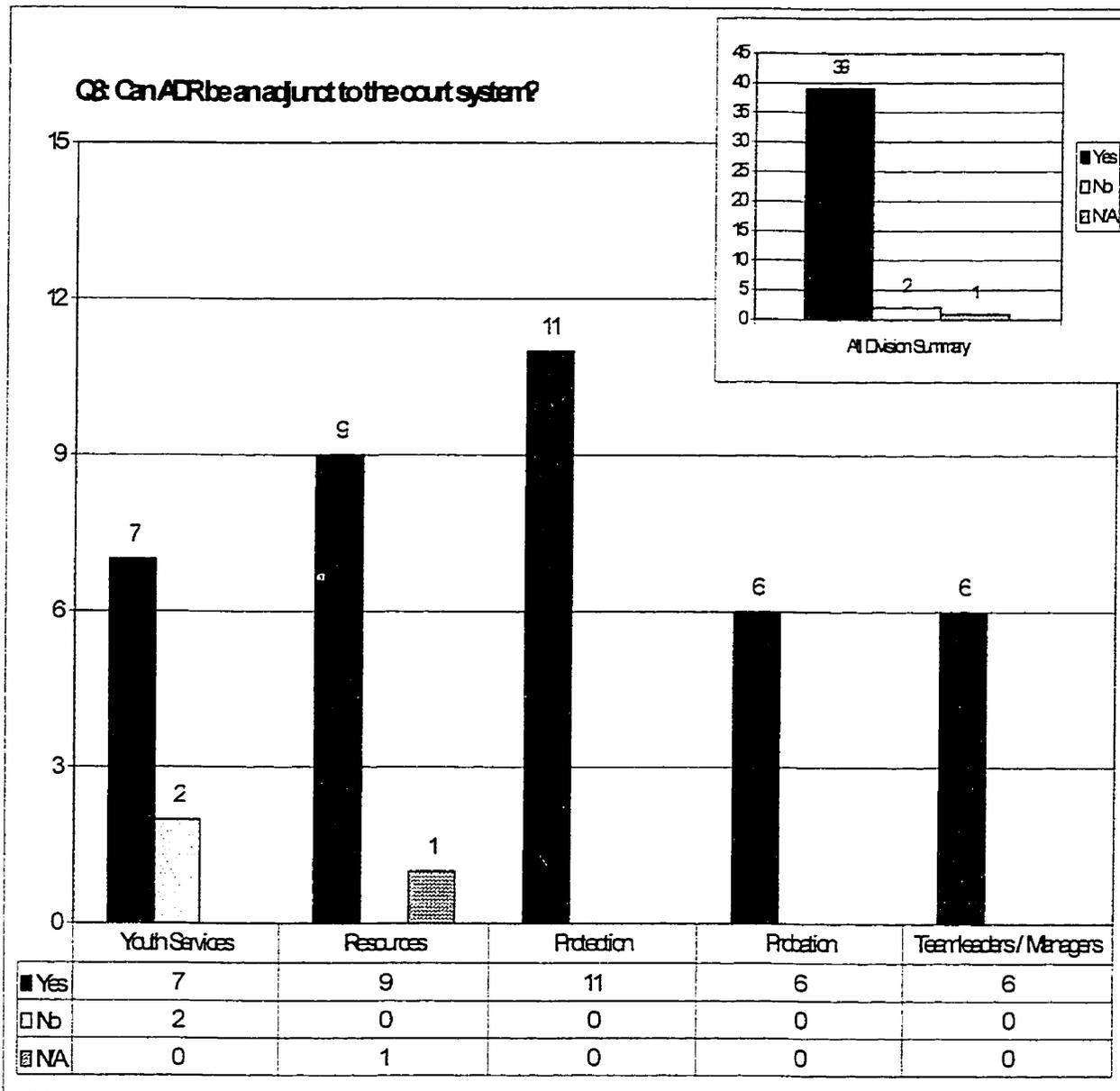


Figure 15: Group Responses to Question 8, Survey of CR (Appendix D)



**Figure 16: Group Responses to Question 8, ADR Questionnaire (Appendix E)**

Of the total survey group, 72.7% experience conflict on a daily basis. A continual barrage of conflict causes stress or feelings of being emotionally drained, frustrated, or physically tired, as indicated in the survey. Under these conditions, the workers' decision-making process can be negatively affected, resulting in inappropriate decisions (Bodenhausen, 1993; Folger, Poole, & Stutman, 1993). The participants in the survey group must deal with clients, the community, the courts, the police, and the Ministry itself. These are their main sources of conflict. Given that attitudes play a large part in coping with stress (Feldman, 1998), having knowledge of Conflict Resolution and ADR could help the survey group deal more effectively with their work situations.

The survey also indicated that conflict had an effect on the respondents' psychological and physical behavior. As seen in Question 6 of the Conflict Resolution survey and in the Figure 11 (p. 57), a number of responses indicated that conflict contributed to 95% of the respondents being emotionally drained, to 86% being frustrated, and to 72.7% being physically tired.

The participants' responses clearly demonstrated how their attitudes and feelings were affected by conflict. In any organization there is a "need" for the members to feel a sense of belonging (Maslow, 1968). Additionally, each individual's needs and interests must be fulfilled. Thus, (Maslow, 1968) suggests that people have a hierarchy of needs, progressing from the physiological through the social and psychological. In order for individuals to function effectively and happily, their needs must be met. Interestingly,

some members of the survey group commented that they did not feel valued by the MCF or by the community.

The survey also indicated a general lack of knowledge and understanding of what Conflict Resolution and ADR are and of what they accomplish. A total of 59% of respondents had little to no knowledge of Conflict Resolution, while 79.5% of those surveyed had some knowledge of Alternative Dispute Resolution. The group as a whole wanted to learn more about Conflict Resolution and ADR, as they felt they would be beneficial to them in carrying out their duties on the job. Of the people surveyed, 95.5% wanted training in Conflict Resolution and Alternative Dispute Resolution. Some respondents said that they did not think the Ministry would provide the requisite training in these areas due to the lack of resources and the inconvenience of having workers absent from their jobs. Nonetheless, the survey group felt that if they had more training in CR/ADR, they would feel happier and be more effective in handling conflict situations.

Those who answered that they already had some training in these areas also qualified their responses by saying this training had occurred a number of years ago. Furthermore, it consisted of only a one or two day general course on Conflict Resolution/ADR. The respondents who appear to have the most knowledge and understanding of these areas were those whose jobs were in probation and management (Probation Workers, Team Leaders, and Managers), as they had received training in Conflict Resolution/ADR.

Probation Workers are required to take 16 weeks of training at the Justice Institute in Vancouver. Therefore, 100% of those surveyed had training in Conflict Resolution, while 71% had knowledge of ADR. (By comparison, only 45% of Child Protection Workers had some training and knowledge of conflict resolution and ADR.) Nonetheless, although they had received this CR/ADR training, all the Probation Workers who participated in the survey wanted more training in these processes.

Overall, the survey indicated that there is a desire on the part of the workers at MCF to have Conflict Resolution and ADR training. Most respondents said that they would be interested as long as the Ministry paid for the courses or had someone come and deliver the training “in-house.”

The results of the survey illustrate the impact conflict has on Ministry workers within six different occupational groups. Likewise, through percentages and graphs, the strengths and weaknesses of these respondents’ knowledge of Conflict Resolution/ADR are well documented. Virtually all respondents expressed a great desire to learn more about Conflict Resolution/ADR. Thus, these findings may help upper management within the Ministry decide whether to mandate and implement training in these vital areas for all employees.

For those who are Team Leaders/Managers, this new Ministry has created organizational upheaval. Combining five Ministries into one has created conflict because of the massive changes in the relatively short period since the new MCF came into being. The Ministry

is still going through the growing pains of such an immense undertaking. The impact on Ministry staff has been stressful, to say the least. A restructuring process intended to make the organization operate more smoothly and become more client-friendly has backfired because of a lack of appropriate resources. Instead of providing the necessary resources, the Ministry has undergone a hiring freeze despite the growing number of clients requiring the services offered by the MCF. As a result, Ministry staff frequently find themselves in conflict with the organization, as their discontentment with the existing situation has affected their attitudes, behavior and beliefs towards their work. As Anderson, Forest-Kuehn and McKinney (1996) write, "Scarce resources are one of the most frequently mentioned reasons behind conflict behavior. The intensity of the conflict depends on the perceived incompatibilities between the parties involved" (p. 15). The researcher believes, as did the survey group, that CR/ADR training would only help to improve both their attitudes and their professional performance.

Attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge go hand-in-hand. In Attitude, structure and function (1989), Pratkanis points out that "organization of attitude-related knowledge can serve as a schematic function useful for understanding and interpreting complex information and for learning and recalling of a persuasive communication" (p. 91). The survey group deals with a population that, on the whole, are poor, uneducated, have substance abuse problems, are criminals, are child molesters, are mentally handicapped, or are involved in prostitution. Thus, the attitudes and beliefs of these Ministry employees are put to the test every day they go to work. All the participants have a university education, steady jobs and, on the whole, come from middle class backgrounds. This is a stark contrast to

the clientele they work with. Maintaining a healthy attitude or belief system under such conditions can be hard, as these social workers must conduct themselves professionally while dealing with people who shatter their sense of values. Continuous exposure to such challenges causes inner conflict that can lead to “burn out” and/or health problems.

### **Applications of ADR for the Ministry**

According to respondents, the use of Conflict Resolution and Alternative Dispute Resolution would definitely benefit staff, management, and all who work for the Ministry for Children and Families. As a government organization responsible for child rights and welfare, the Ministry is a ripe environment for all forms of conflict. For example, depending on their job requirements, workers may find themselves faced with such volatile scenarios as removing a child from its parents, dealing with drug and alcohol dependent people, and investigating physical and sexual abuse. Confronted with such stresses on a regular basis, arguably few other professions have a greater need for knowledge of and training in Conflict Resolution and ADR than those social workers employed by the MCF.

If Ministry workers were to receive in-depth training in these vital areas, there would likely be less attrition due to stress. Turnover rates, such as those currently recorded for Child Protection Workers, would be lowered. Hopefully, employees would then possess the skills to diminish, manage or prevent the negative impact of conflict on their job performance, and the result would be a more stable, well-maintained workforce.

### **Where ADR Would Be Most Beneficial to the Ministry**

As conflict is an integral part of working with the Ministry for Children and Families, Conflict Resolution/ADR training would be useful in all areas of the organization. Throughout the Ministry, employees' ability to cope with the stresses of their jobs would likely be enhanced if they knew more about Conflict Resolution.

The results of the survey indicate a need for more knowledge of Conflict Resolution and ADR on the part of Ministry employees. Such an increased awareness would help workers to respond better to the emotional impact of conflict. The Ministry would probably save money by providing in-house training in Conflict Resolution/ADR. As the court is no longer perceived by many workers to be an effective vehicle for dealing with family conflicts, Conflict Resolution and ADR training accompanied by an established dispute resolution system would provide them with an alternate tool, one which would also result in their increased sense of empowerment in responding to conflict situations.

## 4.4 Survey Recommendations

The results of the survey have produced the following recommendations:

- a) The MCF should provide Conflict Resolution/ADR training to all workers in the field.

Since this Ministry deals with a client base whose needs encompass a broad range of issues including social deviance, substance abuse, mental health concerns, child abuse, adolescent dysfunction, women in need, poverty, and single parenthood – all of which are potential areas of conflict, the skills associated with Conflict Resolution and Alternative Dispute Resolution would help the workers perform their jobs more effectively and productively. The current survey indicated that, on the whole, 72.7% of the respondents said conflict was a daily occurrence in their line of work. CR and ADR training would provide the workers with more knowledge and understanding of how to approach conflict differently through processes such as mediation and negotiation.

- b) The MCF could either have workers attend institutions which offer courses in Conflict Resolution/ADR, or hire someone to create a training manual and to train Ministry employees in-house.

Training in Conflict Resolution and Alternative Dispute Resolution certificate programs are available at many institutions throughout British Columbia. The Justice Institute delivers programs in Vancouver, Victoria, and Nanaimo. Royal Roads University also offers a certificate program and Masters degree in Conflict Analysis and Management. However, one drawback to the implementation of this recommendation in an already resource-stressed Ministry is the cost. The average certificate program with a

requirement of 224 hours' work averages out to cost approximately \$2,500 per person. Thus, the expense of training existing workers for the MCF would be astronomical.

As an alternative, the Ministry could have a consultant with the requisite skills, knowledge, and educational background create an in-house training program for the workers. Providing workshops on CR and ADR in this manner within each region would lower related training costs. Using an employee of the Ministry who already possessed skills in CR and ADR would further reduce expenses. This individual could also create a training manual in these areas for the Ministry. Finally, implementation of this proposal by training the employees already in the training sector would also cut the Ministry's costs substantially.

- c) The MCF should make it mandatory that all persons entering the Ministry have Conflict Resolution/ADR training, as is currently the case with Probation Workers.

The Ministry could make it mandatory that new employees have some skills, knowledge, and understanding of CR and ADR as part of the job requirements for entering this organization.

- d) The provision of Conflict Resolution/Alternative Dispute Resolution courses for Management and Upper Level Management would help them to understand the importance of this training for Ministry workers.

Workshops explaining what CR and ADR are could be given to upper management personnel. A better understanding of these practices would help this group of employees realize the importance of CR and ADR training for their field social workers. A clear majority, 95.5% of the survey group respondents to both the Survey on Conflict Resolution and the Alternative Dispute Questionnaire, indicated they want such training.

- e) The MCF should conduct a broader survey in other areas of the organization that were not involved in the current study in order to assess the importance of Conflict Resolution/ADR training on a Ministry-wide basis.

Considering this study only surveyed six occupational groups within the MCF's Victoria Region – only 12.6% of the total work force, more action research could be conducted to see how other areas of the Ministry would respond to such a survey. Social Workers in sectors such as Mental Health, Drug and Alcohol, Community Living, Protective Family Services, and Women's Equality could be studied to help shed light on these groups' knowledge and understanding of CR and ADR.

- f) The MCF should encourage BSW programs at universities to include Conflict Resolution/ADR courses in their curricula.

Since one of the requirements for working for the Ministry for Children and Families is having a BSW degree, the Ministry could lobby universities in this province to offer courses in CR and ADR training as part of their curricula. A majority of the Ministry's workers are hired through BSW programs in universities. If courses were set up in CR and ADR as a requisite part of undergraduate training, this organization's staff would

have a greater knowledge base in CR and ADR to carry out their work. This would also cut CR and ADR training costs for the Ministry, as people coming into the profession would already have some background in these areas. Whether people work for the MCF or do social work for other organizations, conflict is part of the job. Working with the public always involves a degree of conflict. Thus, those who serve the public require the knowledge and skills necessary to handle conflict effectively.

## **5. RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS**

### **5.1 Organization Implementation**

If the recommendations provided were to be implemented, they could have an impact on the way social workers carry out their work. The Ministry for Children and Families is an organization that deals with conflict not only through its client base, but also with the community, the media, and within the organization itself. However, the cost of providing training in Conflict Resolution/ADR could be expensive. Questions arise such as “Where will the resources come from for training?” “How do we deal with lost work hours for those taking training?” “Who will cover for those involved in training?” Such concerns must be addressed.

The ministry has been characterized by organizational change and is perceived as being in constant chaos. As previously mentioned, in 1996 the MCF went through yet another change. Prior to this, the twenty independent regions in the province had their own operating structures and managed the development of local services. After 1996, the government reduced the number of regions to eleven, and it stipulated the operational structure for each of them.

Since the restructuring of the Ministry, based largely on the Gove Inquiry, it has become a large organization. The aim of this restructuring was not only to enhance child protection, but also to provide a full range of services for families, youth and children.

While it would be beneficial if the MCF were more preventative in dealing with child welfare matters, despite increased pressure to change, the barriers of the old system seem to be insurmountable. As Savage states in the Building the Ministry for Children and Families: a report on the first six months and 1997/98 priorities,

One of the key lessons learned in the first year of developing the new Ministry has been, that while we have a strong capacity to develop the plans, policies and expectations for ourselves, our ability to implement those within existing resources is limited.

(Savage qtd. in Ministry for Children and Families, 1997, p.13)

In the new Child, Family and Community Services Act (1996) which replaced the old Family and Child Services Act (1980) Alternative Dispute Resolution, particularly mediation, is part of the Ministerial mandate. However, ADR has never been incorporated by the Ministry in the manner it was supposed to be. A lack of resources, individual workloads, and insufficient mediators are several reasons why the mediation component of the Child, Family and Community Services Act (1996) has not been implemented in this region.

The system theory in Barry Oshry's Seeing systems: unlocking the mysteries of organizational life (1995), is helpful in understanding the effects of change within an organization such as the MCF, as well as the expectations for change from outside the structure. At the time the Ministry underwent massive restructuring in 1996, the front line workers had very little say in the development of the new Ministry for Children and

Families. Oshry's theory suggests that the Ministry and its staff were caught in an ends-middle-ends relationship, as illustrated in the following chart:

<b>ENDS</b>	<b>MIDDLE</b>	<b>ENDS</b>
Regional Operating Agency and MC &F need to be effective and efficient	Local Ministry Office Staff	Clients need to be included and involved

**Figure 17: Illustration of Organizational Relationships within the MCF according to Oshry's System Theory**

The respondents to this survey felt that despite organizational restructuring within the Ministry, there was no real change in the way they managed their work. They said that their case loads were still too high, that they had lost some of their power (i.e. the new system for issuing resources was cumbersome), and that the new Ministry still did not address the needs of the clients, as evidenced by long waiting lists for appropriate counselling for drug and alcohol and mental health problems.

In order for this survey's recommendations to be put into effect, a strong middle team is essential. As workers feel the stress and strain of conflict with both the organization and with clients, support is necessary for them to do a better job. According to the survey participants, Conflict Resolution and Alternative Dispute Resolution training should be mandatory for anyone thinking of working for the MCF.

Although 72.7% of the respondents said conflict was a daily occurrence at work, only 59% had some training in Conflict Resolution, and 61.4% had no training in Alternative Dispute Resolution. This seems to indicate a definite need for more knowledge and understanding in the field of Conflict Resolution.

The major obstacle to the MCF's attempt to implement any form of Conflict Resolution/Alternative Dispute Resolution training is a lack of resources. In Sociology Macionis, Clarke and Gerber (1997) point out that such resources are essential to the workers, so that they may enhance their knowledge and understanding of the jobs they do.

Resource-Mobilization Theory adds an important dimension for our understanding of social movements. Drives for change are unlikely to succeed – or even get off the ground – without substantial resources, including money, human labor, office and communication facilities, contacts with the mass media and a positive public image. (p. 606)

The MCF does not have a good public image. The media usually only report on negative situations within the Ministry. Government cutbacks in terms of financial and human resources are also likely to prevent the new Ministry from achieving its objectives.

## **5.2 Future Research**

There are numerous areas within the MCF still to be studied. As action research is cyclical in nature, there will always be a process for study. The existing research into the

use of Conflict Resolution and Alternative Dispute Resolution within the Ministry has mainly addressed their relevance to issues of Child Protection. However, many non-governmental sources have discussed the potential use of CR/ADR by social workers. Similarly, Team Leaders and Managers may increase their awareness of the significance of CR and ADR by studying organizational structures and behaviors. However, there is no specific material pertaining to the importance of CR and ADR for such occupational groups as Youth Service Social Workers, Youth Probation Workers, or Resource Social Workers. Conflict Resolution and Alternative Dispute Resolution belong to a field that is just starting to attract the attention of social psychologists, sociologists and other professionals who recognize that conflict plays an integral part in understanding human behaviour and how it affects us.

As mentioned earlier, the members of the six occupational groups surveyed for this study account for 20.6% of the work force in the Victoria Region of the MC&F. Additionally, out of the six groups studied, the survey respondents comprised 61.1% of the workers in the areas surveyed for this action research project. Many other areas within the Ministry could also be studied. These include workers from such sectors as Drug and Alcohol, Mental Health, Women's Equality, Skills and Training and Education, Victoria Youth Custody, and the Eating Disorders Program, all of which became part of the new MCF in 1996. This Ministry also includes other areas of service that were part of its predecessor, the former Ministry of Social Services. Workers in areas such as Protective Family Services, and Finance and Administration would be valuable participants in a broader, Ministry-wide survey on CR and ADR too. All these groups have to deal with conflict

and need to be studied to gain a more comprehensive sense of how much knowledge and understanding they have of Conflict Resolution and Alternative Dispute Resolution. As the MCF is now a mega-Ministry with over 4,000 staff working in approximately 200 offices, it is a gold mine for action research study in the field of Conflict Analysis and Management. Such extensive research would provide an excellent focus for doctoral work in Conflict Resolution.

### **5.3 Research Project Lessons Learned**

The lessons I learned in the course of this project were sometimes unexpected and other times what I had anticipated. What surprised me were the cooperation and support the survey participants gave me. They were enthusiastic about doing the survey as they felt it was the first one they had participated in that was directly related to their needs. There was only one office in the Child Protection sector of the Ministry where I was unable to get past the “Gatekeeper,” who was a Team Leader. This person stated she was not willing to allow her staff to participate in the study because of time restraints and workload issues. This Team Leader said that the only way I could involve her staff in the survey was if the Regional Executive Director ordered her to cooperate with me. When I spoke with some of the workers in this office, they said they would have liked to participate, but they did not want to do the survey without the support of their Team Leader.

This action research project was frightening for me. Developing the survey questions took me a lot of time. I worried whether I was asking the right questions and how I could keep my personal biases out of the survey. Another concern was that I also wondered what to do after I had the results and how I should interpret them. As I progressed with the survey and began questioning the different groups, the process became less intimidating. Ultimately, the amount of information I received from the six groups overwhelmed me: I had over 924 responses to tabulate and interpret.

As I tabulated the results of the survey questions, my goal regarding the social workers' knowledge and understanding of CR and ADR determined through this survey became clearer. I conducted 44 surveys in three weeks, a time-consuming task for such a short period. In future, I would do this differently, as the time constraints upon the interview process put me under a great deal of pressure. I would like to have taken more time to conduct the survey.

Nonetheless, despite deadline constraints, this action research project took me longer to complete than I thought it would. I learned that I had to use a systematic way of presenting the information I had accumulated in a manner that readers could understand, so they could follow the flow of the survey data. I also learned that members of the MCF survey group want to learn more about CR and ADR. The Ministry has a reputation of being in conflict with clients, social workers, the community, and the media. Thus, I feel that the processes for managing conflict offered by CR and ADR would benefit not only the groups I studied, but also any group working for this Ministry. Clearly, a knowledge

and understanding of CR and ADR are an important component for doing social work, a profession that usually involves dealing with people who are adversarial. Confronting people about their behaviour as it pertains to the welfare of a child (i.e. sexual abuse, substance abuse, and poverty) is conflictual.

Another thing that surprised me in the course of this project was that the majority of respondents needed an explanation of what mediation, negotiation, and arbitration are. When asked if they had ever used these methods of ADR before, respondents answered “no” until I showed them the definitions I had chosen to describe mediation, negotiation, and arbitration (see Appendix B). After clarifying these terms, I learned that survey group members had used both mediation and negotiation when working with clients, foster parents, teachers, police, and other groups. Once they received an explanation of what ADR is, the group changed their responses. It was difficult not to coax the respondents for this question as I knew that they had likely used mediation and negotiation in working with their clients. Although I have worked for the Ministry for Children and Families for the past twenty years, I did not know that I had mediated or negotiated while performing my work until I became interested in CR and ADR. All the groups surveyed regularly mediate between parent(s)/teens, teachers/clients, management/clients, and foster parents and youth. Respondents use negotiation when handling youth and their needs, foster parents and their concerns about foster children, Team Leaders and social workers requiring resources, the police and others. Their ignorance regarding their approaches to conflict also supported my theory that there was a lack of knowledge and understanding of CR and ADR among the survey group. Many

of them were unfamiliar with the terms “mediation” and “negotiation,” and they were surprised to learn that their assumption that a third party had to direct the ADR process was a misconception. In conclusion, perhaps the most profound lesson derived from this Action Research Project was that I was, in fact, capable of completing it.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **DEFINITIONS OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION**

#### **CONFLICT RESOLUTION (CR)**

Conflict Resolution is the social-psychological assessment of conflict that affects individuals or organizations. Conflict Resolution assesses the attitudes, beliefs, attributes, and feelings of individuals or groups in conflict situations.

#### **ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION (ADR)**

Alternative Dispute Resolution refers to dispute resolution techniques for managing and resolving disputes outside the traditional and adversarial legal process. Negotiation, mediation, and conciliation are a few of these techniques. Thus, Alternative Dispute Resolution is a joint problem-solving process that seeks to find resolutions to conflicts, solutions that meet the needs and interests of the disputing parties as much as possible.

## **APPENDIX B**

The following definitions for the terms “mediation,” “negotiation,” and “arbitration” were taken from Joseph Ravick and Elinor Powell’s Introduction to interpersonal conflict management (1999).

### **Mediation:**

Mediation is a process by which a third party neutral intervener attempts to assist conflicting parties in reconciling their differences, in reaching a voluntary resolution of a dispute and/or a transformation of their relationship. The term mediation is often used interchangeably with conciliation or facilitation.

### **Negotiation:**

Negotiation is a process whereby parties attempt to work out mutually agreeable settlement without the assistance of a neutral third party.

### **Arbitration:**

Arbitration is a process by which disputing parties refer their disputes to a mutually acceptable authority to decide what should happen. Traditionally, the parties are bound by the Arbitrator’s decision. Under the Commercial Arbitration Act, such decisions cannot be appealed except on an issue of “law.”

**APPENDIX C**

**INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

**An Exploratory Survey of the Understanding of Conflict Resolution by Staff of the Ministry for Children and Families**

**Researcher:** Lawrence Back, Royal Roads University, Peace and Conflict Studies, (250) 382-0668

**Supervisor:** Ron Fisher, PhD, Royal Roads University, (250) 391-2509

This survey is being done as a Major Research Project for a Master of Arts in Conflict Resolution. The information will be used to ascertain attitudes, beliefs, knowledge and attributes of those participating in the survey around Conflict Resolution and Alternative Dispute Resolution and their possible use at the Ministry. At no time will any person's name be divulged or associated with the interview responses.

Although your participation in this SURVEY will be greatly valued, you are not required to participate. You can decide at any point while participating in the interview to stop, or to skip any particular questions. If at anytime you need some clarification or have a question, please feel free to ask during the survey. The survey should take approximately 45 minutes face-to-face with the researcher. Choosing to participate or not will have no effect upon your employment or advancement. Your involvement in this survey is voluntary and anonymity and confidentiality will be kept between you and myself.

I agree to participate in this project and do so of my own accord:

Participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Dated:

Participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Dated:

**APPENDIX F**

**LETTER OF AGREEMENT**

**Organization Participating in the Study**

Ministry for Children and Families  
2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, 712 Yates Street  
Victoria, B.C. V8W 1L4

**Contact Person/Major Project Sponsor**

Ms. Jane Cowell  
Regional Executive Director  
Capital Regional District  
Ministry for Children and Families  
Phone: (250) 387-2861  
e-mail: [jcowell@ssru.gov.bc.ca](mailto:jcowell@ssru.gov.bc.ca)

**Graduate Student**

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**Faculty Advisor**

Ronald J. Fisher, PhD  
Phone: (250) 391-2509  
Fax: (250) 391-2608  
e-mail: [ron.fisher@royalroads.ca](mailto:ron.fisher@royalroads.ca)

**Roles and Responsibilities**

The candidate, Major Project Sponsor and Major Project Supervisor agree to participate in the successful completion of the proposed project.

**Major Project Description, Action Steps and Milestones**

The Major Project Goal is to explore the attitudes, behavior, beliefs and attributes of selected Ministry for Children and Families staff, with respect to their understanding and knowledge of Conflict Resolution and the use of Alternative Dispute Resolution. A survey interview will be conducted face-to-face with the participants, to gather the data necessary for this project. Depending on the outcome of the study, possible use of the ADR process may be considered for the Capital Regional District of the MCF in Victoria, B.C.

**Confidentiality**

The RRU graduate student agrees to honor individual and corporate/government confidentiality and non-disclosure guidelines. The Ministry for Children and Families agrees to allow the researcher every opportunity to canvas and collect data from individuals and groups identified in the prospectus.

The Ministry for Children and Families participants will be asked to formally acknowledge through an Informed Consent form that the information they provide to the researcher will be handled in a confidential and privileged manner, as described in the Royal Roads University Research Ethics Policy. Individual and group identity will not be disclosed to the management or other employees of the Ministry for Children and Families.

**Intellectual Property**

The Ministry for Children and Families agrees that the final Major Project and supporting materials will remain the intellectual property of the author (graduate student). The commercial potential of all products will be assessed upon completion of the project and, if deemed necessary, mutually agreeable arrangements will be identified to exploit the product in the commercial marketplace.

**Deliverables**

The researcher will provide the Ministry for Children and Families with a copy of the final Major Project. In addition, the researcher will provide formal briefings to individuals or groups identified by the contact person/Major Project Sponsor. The researcher will provide a brief written summary to those who request it. A self-addressed envelope given to the researcher by the respondent will be used to send the information requested.

**Organization Commitment**

The Ministry for Children and Families agrees to provide the Major Project Leader with the following support: photocopying, fax, mail, phone, workspace, access to relevant records or data, access to individuals and groups essential to the completion of the project and other items identified throughout the Major Project.

**Endorsement**

We, the undersigned, agree to abide by the arrangements and statements contained in this Letter of Agreement.

**Major Project Sponsor Dated**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Graduate Student Dated**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Roles and Responsibilities:****Major Project Sponsor**

1. Assists learners in identifying and articulating the problems or issues to be examined.
2. Reviews and provides comments on the Major Project Prospectus for investigating the problem.
3. Where appropriate, provides the resources, facilities, funds and personnel needed to support the successful completion of the project as described in the Major Project Prospectus.
4. Where necessary, facilitates the timely collection of data.
5. Reviews the project findings, conclusions and recommendations with the learners.
6. As a member of the supervising committee, reviews the final Major Project to ensure that it meets or exceeds university and program academic requirements for theses.

**Graduate Student**

1. In conjunction with the Faculty Advisor, Major Project Sponsor and Supervisor, develops the problem or issue into a Project Prospectus.
2. Completes the project, in accordance with the Major Project Prospectus.
3. Regularly communicates project progress to the Major Project Sponsor and Supervisor.
4. Effectively leads the project and project team.
5. Produces a draft and final Major Project, which conforms to the university and program guidelines.

**Major Project Supervisor**

1. Undertakes regular consultations with the learner during the completion of the Major Project.
2. Approve the Major Project Prospectus.

3. Briefs the Major Project Sponsor on his/her role and responsibilities as a supervisory committee member.
4. Ensures that learners apply rigorous research methodologies throughout their project completion.
5. Reviews and provides comments on all drafts of the Major Project produced by the learner.
6. Circulates the approved draft of the Major Project to the other committee members for review and comments.
7. In consultation with other committee members, assesses the completion of the competencies described in the learner's Major Project Agreement.
8. Acts as the recording secretary for all supervisory committee meetings.
9. Communicates the success or failure of the learner's Major Project to the Director of the Program.

## **APPENDIX D**

### **SURVEY OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

1. How long have you been employed with The Ministry for Children and Families?  
(Youth Corrections/Probation Workers give total number of years before joining M&CF as part of the Ministry of the Attorney General)
  
2. What is your job classification?
  - a) Social Worker – Resources
  - b) Social Worker – Youth Services
  - c) Social Worker – Protection
  - d) Youth Probation Worker
  - e) Team Leader
  - f) Manager
  
3. What is your educational level?
  - a) BA/BSW
  - b) MA/MSW

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

1. What is your degree of knowledge of conflict resolution?  
(On a scale of 1-3, in which 1 is no knowledge; 2 are some knowledge;  
3 is knowledgeable)
  
2. Have you ever had any training in conflict resolution? Yes/No  
(If yes, where, when, & what did it entail? Would you be interested?  
In more training? If no, would you be interested?)
  
3. What percentage of your work that involves dealing with conflict is with these  
different parties? (Total of 100%)
  - a) With clients;  
(Includes foster parents, parents, wards, court, contract workers, etc.)
  - b) With peers (co-workers);
  - c) With Team Leaders/Management;
  - d) With the system (bureaucracy, policy, changes);
  - e) Other (explain).
  
4. Which of the feelings listed below would most apply to you in a typical conflict  
situation?
  - a) Nervous;
  - b) Uncomfortable;

- c) Comfortable;
- d) Defensive;
- e) Angry;
- f) Excited;
- g) Other (explain).

5. Are conflict situations a day-to-day occurrence with your work? Yes/No

6. How does dealing with conflict affect you?

- a) Physically tiring; Yes/No
- b) Emotionally draining; Yes/No
- c) Frustrating; Yes/No
- d) Exhilarating; Yes/No
- e) Other (explain).

7. How comfortable or uncomfortable are you in dealing with conflict?

(On a scale of 1-3, where 1 is uncomfortable; 2 is neither; 3 is comfortable)

8. Do you deal with conflict differently with clients as compared to the following individuals? (If so, how and why?)
- |    |                      |        |
|----|----------------------|--------|
| a) | Team Leader/Managers | Yes/No |
| b) | Peers                | Yes/No |
| c) | Other                | Yes/No |
9. How effective do you think you are in dealing with conflict?  
(On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being very ineffective and 5 being very effective)
10. At work do you think that conflict can be managed differently than it is?  
(If yes, please explain how. If no, why not?)
11. Are there any other comments or information you feel would be useful in this part of the survey on conflict and conflict resolution?

## **APPENDIX E**

### **ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION QUESTIONNAIRE**

1. What is your degree of knowledge of Alternative Dispute Resolution?  
(On a scale of 1-3, where 1 is no knowledge; 2 is some knowledge, 3 is knowledgeable)  
  
At this point the interviewer will hand out a definition of ADR.
  
2. Have you ever had any training in ADR?  
(If yes, where, when, and what did it entail? Would you be interested in more training? If no, would you be interested in training?)
  
3. Do you think that ADR would be useful in your line of work?  
(On a scale of 1-3, where 1 is no use; 2 is some use; 3 is lots of use)  
  
Please explain your rating.
  
4. Have you ever used any of the following to solve a conflict situation before?
  - a) Mediation;
  - b) Negotiations;
  - c) Arbitration to solve a conflict situation before?(Please check which ADR method/s you have used.)

5. Did you find any one method more effective/less effective in dealing with conflict situations?                      Yes/No                      (Please explain.)
  
6. How much are you involved with the court system through your work?
  - a) Daily;
  - b) At least one a week;
  - c) More than once a week;
  - d) Other. (Please explain.)
  
7. Do you think that the court system is efficient in dealing with conflict situations?  
Yes/No  
(If yes, why? If no, why not?)
  
8. With the knowledge you have of ADR, do you think ADR could be an adjunct to the court system?                      Yes/No
  
9. Are there any other comments or information you feel would be useful for this part of the survey about ADR?
  
10. Any comments on the interview or on the research project?