



**FINDINGS FROM LEGAL AID ALBERTA'S CLIENT
SATISFACTION SURVEY: A COMPARISON OF
CLIENTS WITH AND WITHOUT
FAMILY LAW ISSUES**

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Legal Aid Alberta

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The views expressed in this report are those of the author
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

In the summer of 2012, the Canadian Research Institute for Law and the Family (the Institute) and Legal Aid Alberta (LAA) commenced discussions regarding a program of research in the family law area that would be beneficial to LAA in its ongoing efforts to provide legal assistance to vulnerable, lower income Albertans while also fulfilling the Institute's mandate of contributing to a better understanding of how legal systems and laws deal with the family. The first project conducted under this collaboration involved creating a profile of family law legal aid matters in Alberta during a one-year period from September 1, 2011 to August 31, 2012 using data derived from LAA's Client Relationship Management (CRM) system.¹ The present report provides the findings of the second project which involved re-analyzing data from LAA's client satisfaction interviews to compare clients who were dealing with a family law issue with clients dealing with other legal issues.

In its efforts to improve the experiences of LAA clients, in 2004 LAA contracted Prairie Research Associates Inc. (PRA) to conduct quarterly satisfaction interviews with clients who consented to participate in the research and who had received services from LAA in the previous three months. The questionnaire used for the interviews collected information on a broad range of topics including: (1) case type; (2) client demographics; (3) background information; (4) service plans; and (5) client satisfaction. The interview was conducted with clients who received assistance from the following LAA services:

- Legal information and referrals;
- Legal advice;
- Criminal Resolution Unit;
- Family Settlement Services;
- Limited Scope Representation – Staff lawyer;
- Limited Scope Representation – Roster lawyer;
- Full Representation – Staff lawyer; and
- Full Representation – Roster lawyer.

Historically, relatively little information had been collected regarding whether LAA clients were seeking help with a family law issue and, if so, the nature of their case and the assistance they received from LAA. Since it was anticipated that a substantial proportion of LAA's clients were likely to be dealing with a family law issue, it was decided that gathering more detailed data on clients with family law issues would be beneficial and allow a comparison of clients with and without family law issues in terms of client and case characteristics, use of LAA and non-LAA services, and client satisfaction with their experiences with LAA. This report presents a comparative analysis of these two groups of clients on a number of dimensions.

¹ Bertrand, L.D., & Hornick, J.P. (2013). *A profile of family law legal aid matters in Alberta: September 1, 2011 – August 31, 2012*. Calgary, AB: Canadian Research Institute for Law and the Family.

The objectives of the research project were to:

- (1) determine which family law issues prompted clients to contact LAA;
- (2) determine whether clients' family law issues were resolved;
- (3) determine the extent to which clients received information and referrals to other resources by LAA and, if so, whether they used these resources;
- (4) determine whether family law clients accessed any other family law resources on their own; and
- (5) examine whether clients were satisfied with the services they received from LAA.

1.2 Methodology

In order to gather data allowing comparison of LAA clients with and without family law issues in their case, in the fall of 2012 the Institute was invited by LAA to add additional items to PRA's quarterly client interviews. Clients were asked: (1) whether they were seeking help from LAA for a family law issue and, if so, what specific family law issues they were dealing with; (2) for clients who received a service plan from LAA, whether they had used any of the information or referrals in the plan; (3) whether clients accessed other legal services for their legal issue after contacting LAA; and (4) whether the legal issue that prompted clients to contact LAA was resolved. These additional questions were asked in quarterly interviews conducted in the fall of 2012 and winter of 2013, and these clients form the sample analyzed for this report (N=220).

1.3 Limitations

Certain limitations to the data presented in this report should be noted. First, since clients had to consent to being contacted for research purposes and all clients who provided consent could not be contacted, it cannot be assumed that the data collected for this project are representative of all LAA clients. Second, due to the small number of interviews conducted with clients who received assistance from some of LAA's services, it was not possible to analyze the data separately for each service. Instead, data were collapsed across services and analyzed by whether the clients were seeking help with a family law issue. Finally, in some cases different questions were asked of clients who received assistance from different LAA services. Again due to small sample sizes, data were only analyzed for questions that were asked of all respondents.

2.0 INTERVIEW FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings from a re-analysis of interview data collected for Legal Aid Alberta's (LAA) Client Satisfaction Survey by Prairie Research Associates Inc. (PRA). Additional questions regarding clients' involvement in family law issues were added to interviews conducted in the fall of 2012 and winter of 2013 (Waves 2 and 3) and data from these interviews (N=220) were examined for this report. The findings are presented in the following areas: (1) Case Type; (2) Client Demographics; (3) Background Information; (4) Service Plans; (5) Use of Other Services; and (6) Client Satisfaction.

2.1 Case Type

Respondents to LAA's Client Satisfaction Survey are classified according to the type of legal aid service they received. These services are as follows:

- Information and Referrals;
- Legal Advice;
- Criminal Resolution Unit;
- Family Settlement Services;
- Limited Scope Representation by a Staff Lawyer;
- Limited Scope Representation by a Roster Lawyer;
- Full Representation by a Staff Lawyer; and
- Full Representation by a Roster Lawyer.

Respondents were asked to identify whether they were seeking help with one or more of the following family law issues: separation; divorce; custody and access; child support; spousal support; maintenance enforcement; emergency protection order; property settlement; child welfare; or another type of family issue. Table 2.1 presents the type of legal aid service received by clients by whether they were seeking help for at least one family issue. Across all legal aid services, 61.8% of clients reported that they were seeking help for at least one family law issue.

Not surprisingly, all clients in Family Settlement Services were seeking help with a family issue. In addition, since the Limited Scope Representation services are a pilot project of LAA's Family Law Offices, all clients receiving these services from either a staff lawyer or a roster lawyer were dealing with a family issue. A substantial portion of clients who were seeking legal advice (79.1%), receiving full representation by a staff lawyer (76.9%), and seeking information and referrals (67.5%) were dealing with a family issue. Clients who were receiving full representation by a roster lawyer (46.9%) and who were receiving service from the Criminal Resolution Unit (27.3%) were least likely to report seeking assistance for a family issue.

Table 2.1

Type of Legal Aid Service Received by Whether There Was a Family Law Issue in the Case

Type of Legal Aid Service	Family Law Issue in Case					
	Yes		No		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Information and Referrals	27	67.5	13	32.5	40	100.0
Legal Advice	34	79.1	9	20.9	43	100.0
Criminal Resolution Unit	3	27.3	8	72.7	11	100.0
Family Settlement Services	14	100.0	0	0.0	14	100.0
Limited Scope Representation by Staff Lawyer	2	100.0	0	0.0	2	100.0
Limited Scope Representation by Roster Lawyer	1	100.0	0	0.0	1	100.0
Full Representation by Staff Lawyer	10	76.9	3	23.1	13	100.0
Full Representation by Roster Lawyer	45	46.9	51	53.1	96	100.0
Total	136	61.8	84	38.2	220	100.0

Source of Data: PRA Client Interviews
Total N=220

Respondents could report that they were seeking help with more than one family law issue. The 136 clients who indicated that they were seeking help with at least one family law issue reported dealing with a total of 353 family law issues, for an average of 2.6 family law issues per client. Table 2.2 presents the specific issues that clients reported seeking help for. The most common family issues were: custody and access/parenting orders (20.4% of all family law issues identified by the respondents (i.e., 353); 52.9% of all clients who were dealing with family issues (i.e., 136)); child support (16.1% of all family issues; 41.9% of all clients who were dealing with family issues); divorce (12.5% of all family issues; 32.4% of all clients who were dealing with family issues); and separation (11.3% of all family issues; 29.4% of all clients who were dealing with family issues). Relatively few clients reported dealing with emergency protection orders, property settlement, child welfare, domestic assault, wills/estates, and guardianship of seniors.

As mentioned above, clients could be seeking help with more than one family issue. Figure 2.1 presents the number of family law issues that clients indicated that they needed assistance with. The majority reported that they were dealing with one family issue (43.4%), with 18.4% dealing with two issues, 10.3% dealing with three issues and 11.8% dealing with four issues. Over one-tenth (11.8%) of respondents stated that they were seeking help with six or more family issues.

Table 2.2

Types of Family Law Issues Included in Cases with Family Issues¹

Type of Family Law Issue	n	%
Custody and Access/Parenting Order	72	20.4
Child Support	57	16.1
Divorce	44	12.5
Separation	40	11.3
Spousal Support	32	9.1
Maintenance Enforcement	32	9.1
Emergency Protection Order	20	5.7
Property Settlement	19	5.4
Child Welfare	18	5.1
Domestic Assault (includes breach)	4	1.1
Wills/Estates	4	1.1
Guardianship of Seniors	1	0.3
Other	10	2.8
Total	353	100.0

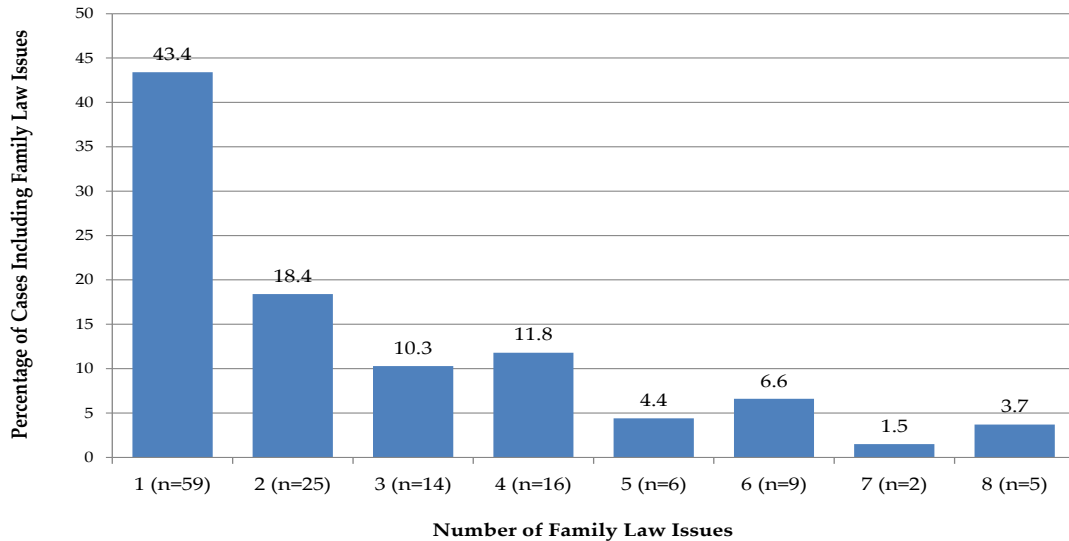
¹Multiple response data (i.e., clients could choose more than one response)

Source of Data: PRA Client Interviews

Total cases including family law issues=136

Figure 2.1

Number of Family Law Issues Included in Cases with Family Issues

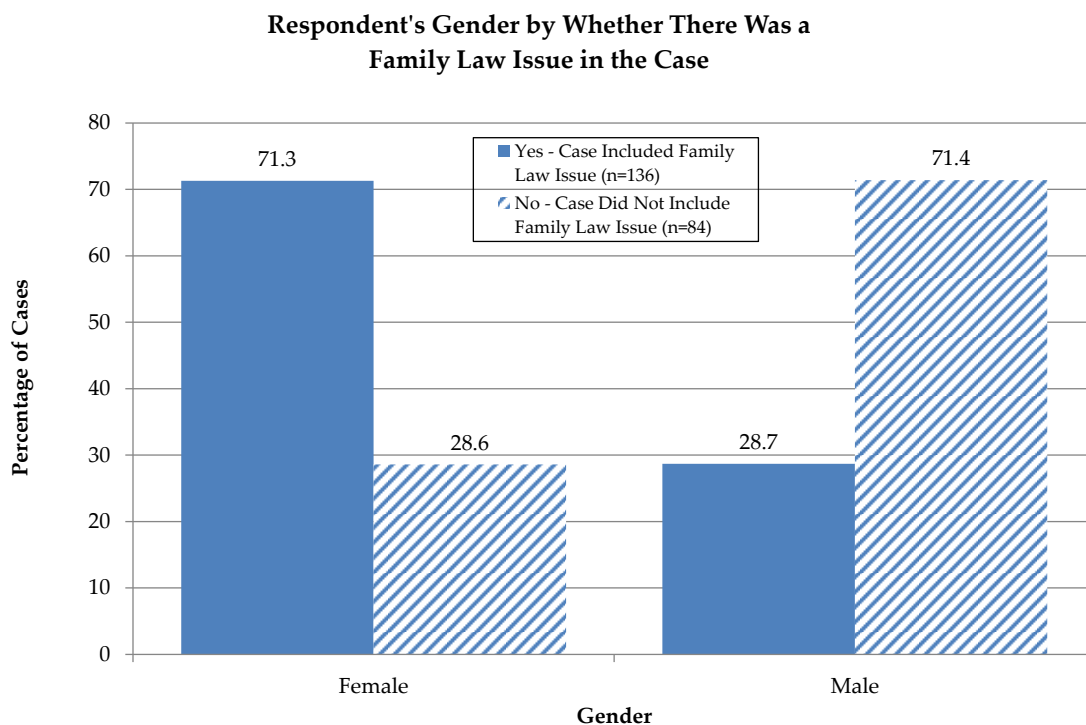


Source of data: PRA Client Interviews
Total cases including family law issues=136

2.2 Client Demographics

The Client Satisfaction Survey contains several questions pertaining to clients' demographic characteristics which are summarized in this section. With regard to clients' gender, the sample contained 121 females (55%) and 99 males (45%). Figure 2.2 presents clients' gender by whether they were seeking help with one or more family issues. There was a substantial gender difference, with 71.3% of clients who needed help with a family issue being female compared to only 28.7% male. This pattern was reversed for clients who were not dealing with a family issue, with 71.4% of these respondents being male, compared to 28.6% female.

Figure 2.2

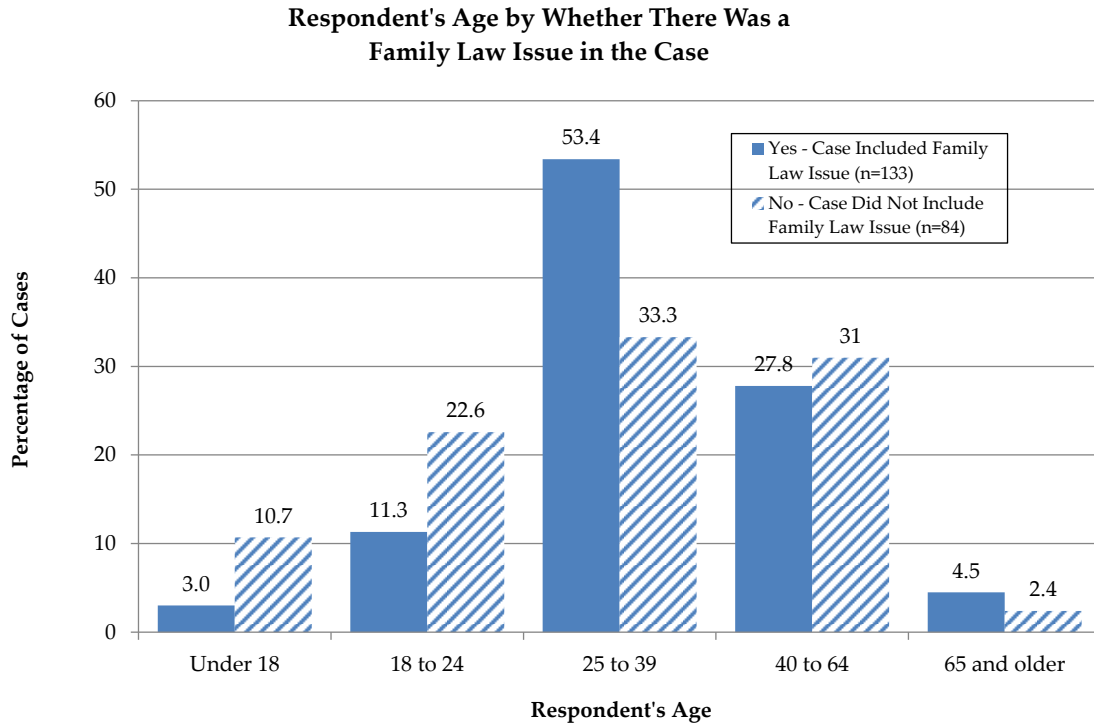


Source of Data: PRA Client Interviews
Total N=220

On average, clients were aged 35.2 years (range=14-94). Clients who were seeking help with a family law issue were slightly older (mean=36.4 years) than were those who were not dealing with a family issue (mean=33.2 years). The majority of clients fell into the 25 to 39 years of age group (45.6%) followed by ages 40 to 64 (29%). When age was examined by whether there was a family law issue in the case (see Figure 2.3), clients seeking help with family issues were considerably more likely to fall into the 25 to 39 age group (53.4%) than were clients with other legal issues (33.3%). Perhaps not surprisingly, a higher proportion of clients who were not dealing with a family issue were under 18 years of age (10.7%) than were those seeking help with a family issue (3%). Similarly, a higher proportion of clients who were not dealing with a family

issue were in the 18 to 24 years of age group (22.6%) than were those who were dealing with a family issue (11.3%).

Figure 2.3

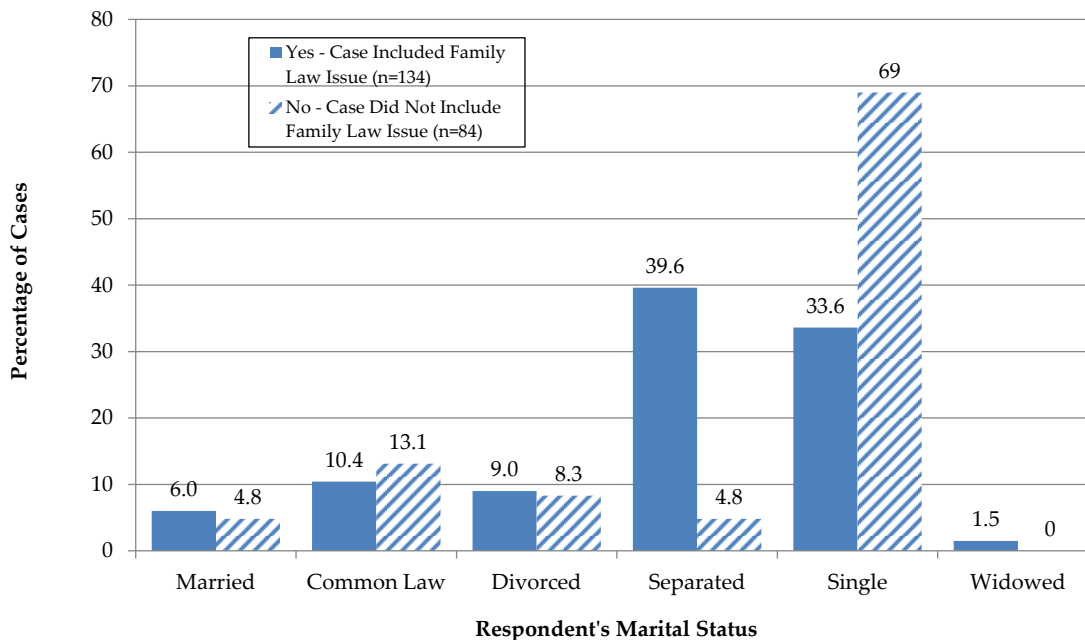


Source of Data: PRA Client Interviews
 Total N=220; Missing cases (i.e., the number of clients who did not respond to this question)=3

Figure 2.4 provides clients' marital status by whether they were seeking help for a family law issue. Not surprisingly, respondents who had a family issue were most likely to be separated (39.6%) compared to only 4.8% of clients who did not report a family issue. Clients who were not dealing with a family issue were most likely to be single (69%) in comparison to 33.6% of respondents who were looking for assistance for a family issue. Proportions of clients who were married, living in a common law relationship, divorced, or widowed were similar in cases where there were and were not family law issues.

Figure 2.4

Respondent's Marital Status by Whether There Was a Family Law Issue in the Case



Source of Data: PRA Client Interviews
 Total N=220; Missing cases=2

2.3 Background Information

Clients were asked a few questions about their initial contact with LAA and their responses are summarized in this section. When asked how they found out about LAA, clients provided 247 responses which are presented in Table 2.3 by whether they were seeking help with a family law issue. The most common response both for clients with family law issues and those without was through a friend/by word of mouth (44.4% and 35.4% of responses, respectively). The second most common response for both groups was through courthouse staff (14.6% of clients with family law issues and 27.1% of clients without family issues). The other possible ways of hearing about LAA were mentioned by relatively few respondents in each group.

Clients were also asked how they first contacted LAA and their responses by whether there was a family issue in the case are presented in Figure 2.5. Clients who were seeking help with a family issue were more likely to initiate contact with LAA by telephone (66.4%) than were clients without a family issue (55.7%), while clients without a family issue were more likely to contact legal aid at the courthouse (15.2%) than were clients who were seeking help with a family issue (7.5%).

Table 2.3

How Respondent Found Out about Legal Aid Alberta by Whether There Was a Family Law Issue in the Case¹

How Found Out	Family Law Issue in Case			
	Yes		No	
	n	%	n	%
Always known about it/Everyone knows/Common knowledge	1	0.7	0	0.0
Friend/Word of mouth	67	44.4	34	35.4
Courthouse staff	22	14.6	26	27.1
Lawyer	9	6.0	7	7.3
Family Justice Services/Family Law Information Centre	9	6.0	3	3.1
Internet	9	6.0	5	5.2
Phone book/Yellow Pages	7	4.6	4	4.2
Previously received services from LAA	4	2.6	7	7.3
Police/RCMP	4	2.6	8	8.3
Relative/Family	4	2.6	0	0.0
Social worker/Social services	3	2.0	0	0.0
Law Information Centres (LInC)	1	0.7	0	0.0
Duty Counsel	1	0.7	2	2.1
Other	10	6.6	0	0.0
Total	151	100.0	96	100.0

¹Multiple response data

Source of Data: PRA Client Interviews

Total N=220

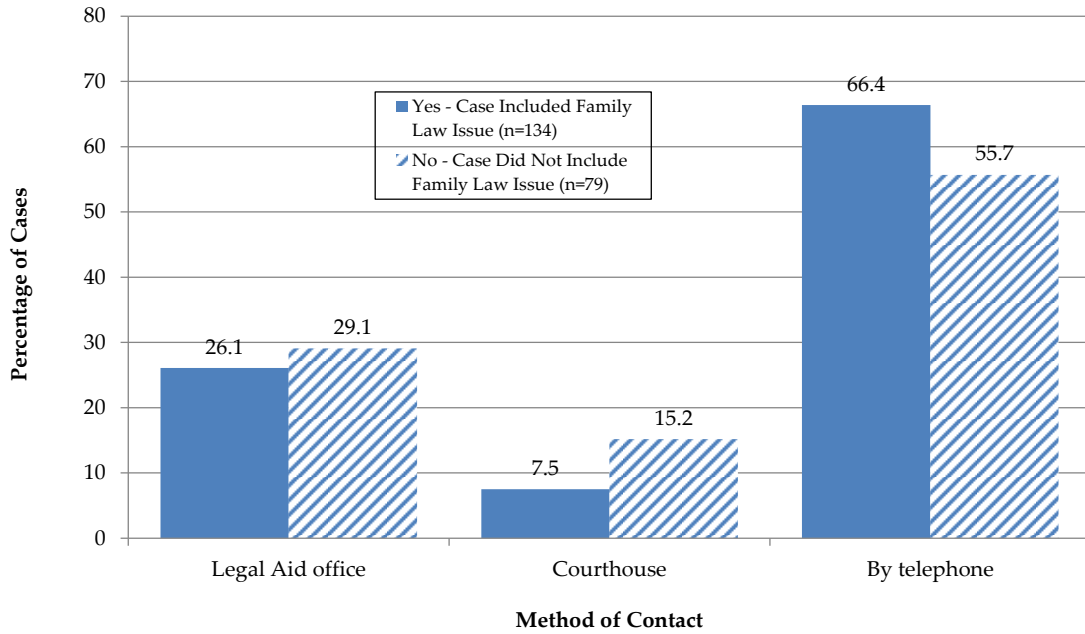
Figure 2.6 presents clients' responses when asked whether the issue that prompted them to contact LAA has been resolved. Respondents who were seeking help with a family issue were considerably less likely to report that their legal issue has been resolved (43.4%) than were clients who were not dealing with a family issue (66.7%).

2.4 Service Plans

For some clients seen by LAA, a service plan is generated that provides an outline of the services that the client may receive or be referred to. Interview respondents were asked several questions regarding their receipt and use of service plans, and their views are shown in Table 2.4.

Figure 2.5

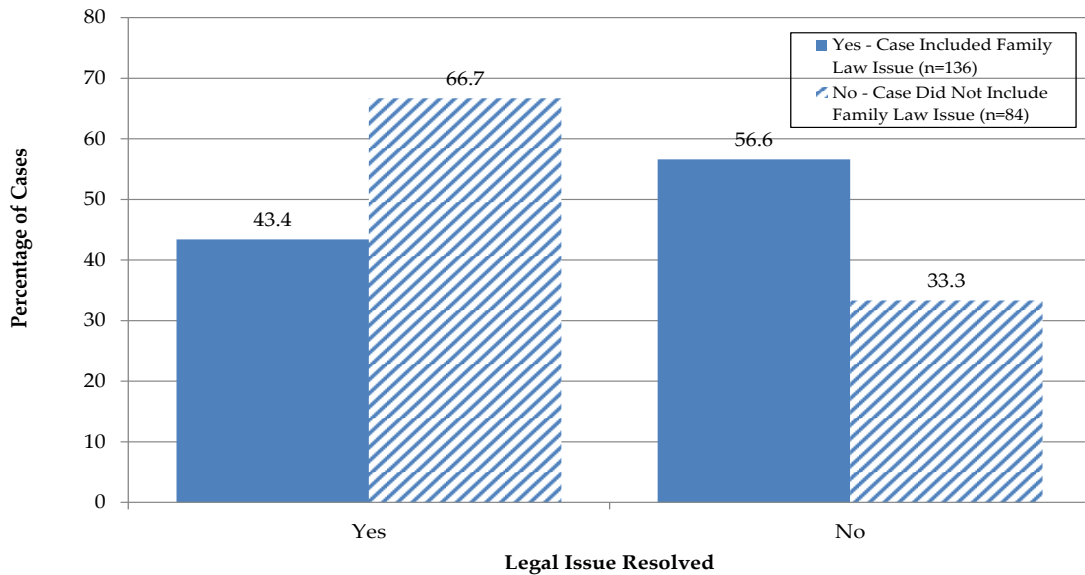
How Respondents First Contacted Legal Aid Alberta by Whether There Was a Family Law Issue in the Case



Source of Data: PRA Client Interviews
Total N=220; Missing cases=7

Figure 2.6

Whether the Legal Issue that Prompted Client to Contact Legal Aid Alberta Has Been Resolved by Whether There Was a Family Law Issue in the Case



Source of Data: PRA Client Interviews
Total N=220

When asked if they had received a service plan, 32.4% of all clients who responded to this question (n=216) indicated that they had. When this was examined by the type of issue involved in the case, a greater proportion of clients who were seeking help with a family issue stated that they had received a service plan (35.8%) than did clients who were not dealing with a family issue (26.8%).

Clients who had received a service plan (n=70) were asked if the plan was useful; overall, 82.1% indicated that they did find the service plan useful. When analyzed by the type of issue involved in the case, fewer clients who were seeking help with a family issue said that they found the plan useful (78.3%) compared to clients who were not dealing with a family issue (90.5%).

Respondents were further asked if the service plan helped them to better understand their legal problem and their options. Overall, clients were quite positive and 81.2% said that their service plan helped their understanding. When examined by type of issue they were seeking help with, clients dealing with family law issues were less likely to say that their service plan helped their understanding (72.3%) than were clients who were not dealing with a family issue (100%).

Finally, clients were asked if they used any of the information and referrals that were provided to them in their service plan. Overall, just under one-half of respondents (49.2%) said that they used their service plan; clients dealing with family law issues were somewhat less likely to report that they used the service plan (48.8%) than clients who were not dealing with a family issue (55%).

2.5 Use of Other Services

All clients were asked if they accessed any other services for their legal issue and 16.1% (n=35) stated that they had. Clients who were seeking assistance with a family law issue were considerably more likely to say that they had accessed other services (21.6%) than were clients who were not dealing with a family issue (7.2%) (see Figure 2.7).

Clients who had accessed other services were asked to specify which ones they had used. The most common response was that they had accessed a private lawyer (40% of clients who had accessed other services), followed by a legal clinic (8.6%). Other types of services such as mediation, courthouse legal advice, volunteer lawyer, family court counsellor, duty counsel, and police were each mentioned by only one respondent.

Table 2.4
Receipt and Use of Legal Aid Service Plans by Whether There
Was a Family Law Issue in the Case

Service Plan	Family Law Issue in Case			
	Yes		No	
	n	%	n	%
Did you receive a Service Plan? ¹				
Yes	48	35.8	22	26.8
No	86	64.2	60	73.2
Total	134	100.0	82	100.0
Was the Service Plan useful? ²				
Yes	36	78.3	19	90.5
No	10	21.7	2	9.5
Total	46	100.0	21	100.0
Did the Service Plan help you to better understand your legal problem and your options? ³				
Yes	34	72.3	22	100.0
No	13	27.7	0	0.0
Total	47	100.0	22	100.0
Did you use any of the information and referrals in the service plan? ⁴				
Yes	20	48.8	11	55.0
No	21	51.2	9	45.0
Total	41	100.0	20	100.0

¹Missing cases=4

²This question was only asked of respondents who received a Service Plan (n=70). Missing cases=3

³This question was only asked of respondents who received a Service Plan (n=70). Missing cases=1

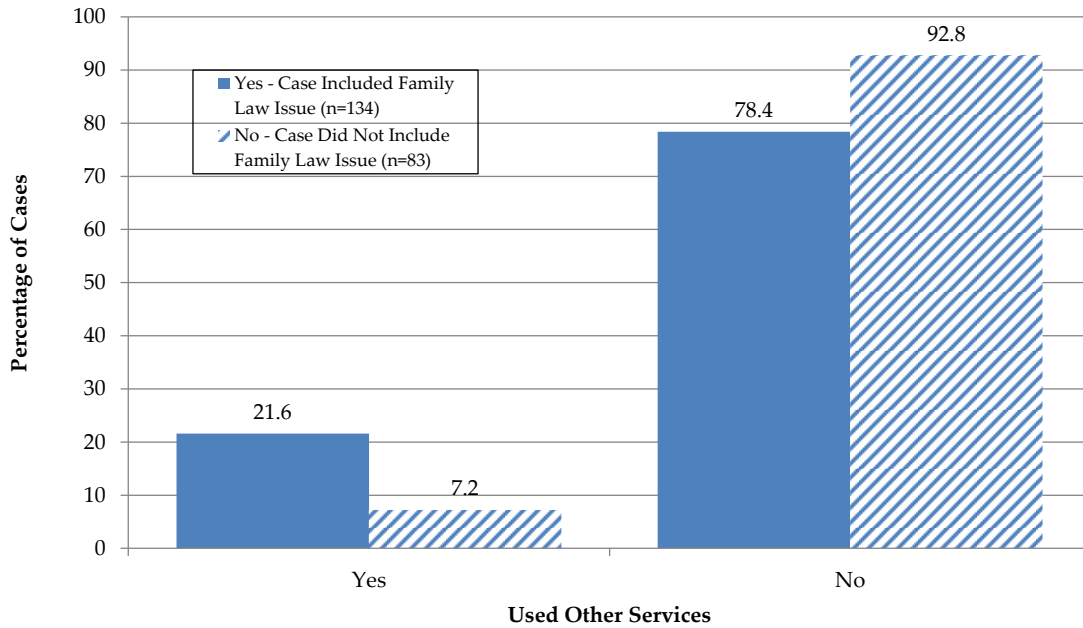
⁴This question was only asked of respondents who received a Service Plan (n=70). Missing cases=9

Source of Data: PRA Client Interviews

Total N=220

Figure 2.7

**Clients' Use of Legal Services Other than Legal Aid Alberta
by Whether There Was a Family Law Issue in the Case**



Source of Data: PRA Client Interviews
Total N=220; Missing cases=3

2.6 Client Satisfaction

Clients were asked several questions regarding their level of satisfaction with the services they received from LAA. Table 2.5 presents respondents' satisfaction ratings by whether they were seeking help with one or more family law issues. When asked how easy it was to reach someone at LAA by telephone or in person to access services, overall respondents were quite satisfied. However, clients who were dealing with a family issue were slightly less likely to report that they were satisfied than clients who were not dealing with a family issue: 61.8% of clients who were seeking help with a family issue reported that they were satisfied (rating of 4 or 5 on the 5-point satisfaction scale) compared to 65.4% of clients who were not dealing with a family issue. Conversely, clients who were seeking help with a family issue were more likely to say that they were dissatisfied with how easy it was to reach someone at LAA (16.2%; rating of 1 or 2 on the scale) than clients without a family issue (8.6%).

Table 2.5

Clients' Satisfaction Ratings of the Services They Received from Legal Aid Alberta
by Whether There Was a Family Law Issue in the Case

Satisfaction Rating	Family Issue in Case			
	Yes		No	
	n	%	n	%
Level of satisfaction with how easy it was to reach someone at Legal Aid Alberta by phone or in person to get services ¹				
1 – Very dissatisfied	9	6.6	4	4.9
2	13	9.6	3	3.7
3	30	22.1	21	25.9
4	34	25.0	18	22.2
5 – Very satisfied	50	36.8	35	43.2
Total	136	100.0	81	100.0
Level of satisfaction with the services received from Legal Aid staff and lawyers in helping clients deal with their legal problems ²				
1 – Very dissatisfied	17	12.7	4	4.8
2	9	6.7	6	7.2
3	23	17.2	14	16.9
4	33	24.6	15	18.1
5 – Very satisfied	52	38.8	44	53.0
Total	134	100.0	83	100.0
Overall level of satisfaction with Legal Aid services received ³				
1 – Very dissatisfied	14	10.4	4	4.8
2	10	7.4	8	9.5
3	32	23.7	15	17.9
4	29	21.5	12	14.3
5 – Very satisfied	50	37.0	45	53.6
Total	135	100.0	84	100.0

¹Missing cases=3

²Missing cases=3

³Missing cases=1

Source of Data: PRA Client Interviews

Total N=220

Clients were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with the services they received from LAA staff and lawyers to help them deal with their legal problems. Once again, overall clients were quite satisfied with the services they received; however, clients who were seeking help with a family law issue were somewhat less satisfied than clients who were not dealing with a family issue. Almost two-thirds of clients who were dealing with a family issue reported that they were satisfied (63.4%), compared to 71.1% of clients who did not have a family law issue. Clients seeking help with a family issue were also slightly more likely to report that they were dissatisfied with the services they received (19.4%) than were clients who were not dealing with a family issue (12%).

Clients were also asked about their overall level of satisfaction with the services they received from LAA. In line with previous responses, clients seeking help with one or more family issues were less likely to report being satisfied (58.5%) than clients who were not dealing with a family issue (67.9%). Clients dealing with family issues were also more likely to report overall dissatisfaction with the services they received (17.8%) than clients without family issues (14.3%).

Clients were asked about their levels of satisfaction with the LAA staff who provided them services, and responses are presented in Table 2.6. The questions were worded in a slightly different manner depending on the type of service they received. When asked if the staff member/lawyer/mediator listened to them carefully, respondents were most likely to agree that they had; however, clients who were seeking help with family issues were slightly less likely to agree with this statement (72%) than clients who were not dealing with a family issue (75.9%). Clients dealing with family issues were also more likely to disagree with this statement (16%) than clients who did not have a family law issue (9.6%).

When asked if the staff member/lawyer/mediator treated them fairly, overall the responses were quite positive. Once again, however, clients who were looking for help with a family law issue were slightly less likely to agree with this statement (76.8%) than were other clients (78.4%). Clients with family issues were also more likely to disagree with this statement (17.6%) than clients who were not seeking help with family issues (12%).

Clients were asked the extent to which they agreed that the staff member/lawyer/mediator was knowledgeable and competent. While, overall, responses were again quite positive, clients seeking assistance with a family issue were somewhat less likely to agree with this statement (69.6%) than were respondents without a family issue (79.3%). Similarly, clients dealing with family issues were slightly more likely to disagree with this statement (15.2%) than clients who were not dealing with a family issue (12.2%). Further, clients with family law issues were more likely to feel neutral about this statement (15.2%; scale value of 3) than clients without family issues (8.5%).

When asked the extent to which they agreed that the staff member/lawyer/mediator helped them better understand their case/legal problem/charges, clients who were seeking help with a family law issue were less likely to agree (62.4%) than clients who were not dealing with family issues (72.6%). Further, respondents with family issues were more likely to report that they disagreed with this statement (24.8%) than clients without family issues (17.9%).

Finally, respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed that the staff member/lawyer went the extra mile to make sure they got what they needed. Clients seeking help with family law issues were considerably less likely to agree with this statement (54.5%) than clients without family issues (68.3%). Respondents with family law issues were also somewhat more likely to disagree with this statement (27.6%) than respondents without family issues (20.7%).

Table 2.6

Clients' Satisfaction Ratings of Legal Aid Alberta Staff by Whether There Was a Family Law Issue in the Case

Satisfaction Rating	Family Issue in Case			
	Yes		No	
	n	%	n	%
Staff/Lawyer/Mediator listened to me carefully ¹				
1 – Strongly disagree	13	10.4	6	7.2
2	7	5.6	2	2.4
3	15	12.0	12	14.5
4	20	16.0	10	12.0
5 – Strongly agree	70	56.0	53	63.9
Total	125	100.0	83	100.0
Staff/Lawyer/Mediator treated me fairly ²				
1 – Strongly disagree	18	14.4	5	6.0
2	4	3.2	5	6.0
3	7	5.6	8	9.6
4	16	12.8	11	13.3
5 – Strongly agree	80	64.0	54	65.1
Total	125	100.0	83	100.0
Staff/Lawyer/Mediator was knowledgeable and competent ³				
1 – Strongly disagree	14	11.2	3	3.7
2	5	4.0	7	8.5
3	19	15.2	7	8.5
4	11	8.8	11	13.4
5 – Strongly agree	76	60.8	54	65.9
Total	125	100.0	82	100.0
Staff/Lawyer/Mediator helped me better understand my case/legal problem/charges ⁴				
1 – Strongly disagree	23	18.4	10	11.9
2	8	6.4	5	6.0
3	16	12.8	8	9.5
4	19	15.2	16	19.0
5 – Strongly agree	59	47.2	45	53.6
Total	125	100.0	84	100.0
Staff/Lawyer went the extra mile to make sure I got what I needed ⁵				
1 – Strongly disagree	23	20.5	15	18.3
2	8	7.1	2	2.4
3	20	17.9	9	11.0
4	13	11.6	9	11.0
5 – Strongly agree	48	42.9	47	57.3
Total	112	100.0	82	100.0

¹Missing cases=12²Missing cases=12 ³Missing cases=13 ⁴Missing cases=11

⁵This question was not asked of clients in Family Settlement Services (n=14). Missing cases=12

Source of Data: PRA Client Interviews

Total N=220

3.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This report examines characteristics of Legal Aid Alberta (LAA) clients who were seeking assistance with family law issues and compares them to clients who were not dealing with family law issues. Prairie Research Associates Inc. (PRA) conducts quarterly client satisfaction interviews with LAA clients who received service from LAA within the previous three-month period. Additional questions designed to explore the experiences of clients dealing with family law issues in greater detail were added to the quarterly interviews conducted in the fall of 2012 and winter of 2013 and these interviews form the sample analyzed for this report. This chapter presents a summary and discussion of the findings from these interviews.

3.1 Summary

3.1.1 Case Type

- Across all types of LAA services, 62% of clients indicated that they were seeking help with at least one family law issue.
- Clients with family law issues were seeking help for an average of 2.6 family law issues each.
- The most common family law issues that clients reported dealing with were custody and access/parenting orders, child support, divorce, and separation.

3.1.2 Client Demographics

- Almost three-quarters of clients who were seeking assistance with a family law issue were female; almost three-quarters of clients who were seeking help for issues other than family law were male.
- Clients who were dealing with family law issues were slightly older than other clients.

3.1.3 Background Information

- When asked how they first found out about LAA, the most common response for clients both with and without family law issues was through a friend/by word of mouth, followed by through courthouse staff.
- Clients who were dealing with a family issue were more likely to have initially contacted LAA by telephone than clients without family issues, while clients not seeking assistance with a family issue were more likely to have contacted LAA at a courthouse than clients with a family issue.

- Respondents who were seeking assistance with a family law issue were considerably less likely to report that their legal issue has been resolved than were clients without family law issues.

3.1.4 Service Plans

- Almost one-third of all clients reported that they had received a service plan from LAA. Clients who were seeking assistance with a family law issue were more likely to have received a service plan than clients without family law issues.
- Although, overall, clients found their service plan useful, respondents who were not dealing with family law issues were more likely to say that they found the plan useful than clients who were seeking help with family law issues.
- Clients with family law issues were less likely to say that their service plan helped them to better understand their legal problem and their options than were other clients.
- Just under one-half of respondents said that they had used information and referrals that were contained in their service plan; clients with family law issues were less likely to have used these materials than clients without family law issues.

3.1.5 Use of Other Services

- Clients who were seeking assistance with family law issues were considerably more likely to say that they had accessed other services for their legal issue than clients without family issues.
- The most common other services accessed by clients were private lawyers, followed by legal clinics.

3.1.6 Client Satisfaction

- Clients with family law issues were slightly less likely to report that they were satisfied with how easy it was to reach someone at LAA by telephone or in person than clients without family issues.
- When asked how satisfied they were with the services they received from LAA staff and lawyers to help them deal with their legal problems, clients who were seeking help with a family issue were somewhat less satisfied than those who had other legal issues.
- With regard to their overall level of satisfaction with the LAA services they received, a smaller proportion of clients with family issues reported being satisfied than clients who were not dealing with family law issues.

- When asked if the staff member/lawyer/mediator listened to them carefully, overall, respondents were most likely to agree that they had; however, clients with family law issues were slightly less likely to agree with this statement than respondents without family issues.
- Overall, responses were similarly positive when clients were asked if the staff member/lawyer/mediator treated them fairly. Once again, however, clients with family law issues were slightly less likely to agree with this statement.
- Clients seeking help with family issues were somewhat less likely to agree that the staff member/lawyer/mediator was knowledgeable and competent than were other clients.
- Respondents with family law issues were considerably less likely to agree that the staff member/lawyer/mediator helped them to better understand their case/legal problem/charges than were clients dealing with other legal issues.
- When asked the extent to which they agreed that the staff member/lawyer went the extra mile to make sure they got what they needed, clients with family law issues were substantially less likely to agree than were clients dealing with other issues.

3.2 Conclusions

The Canadian Research Institute for Law and the Family (the Institute) conducted this study in order to compare the experiences and satisfaction of Legal Aid Alberta (LAA) clients who were seeking assistance with family law issues with individuals who required assistance with other issues. Data used for the analyses reported were provided by Prairie Research Associates Inc., which conducts quarterly interviews with legal aid clients regarding their level of satisfaction with the services they received and their perceived quality of those services. Supplemental questions were added by the Institute to the interviews conducted in the fall of 2012 and winter of 2013.

As was anticipated at the outset of the project, a substantial proportion of LAA clients who were interviewed reported that they were dealing with one or more family law issues: almost two-thirds of clients indicated that they were seeking help for legal issues falling within the family law area. These clients were distributed across all of LAA's service areas including information and referrals, legal advice, both limited scope representation and full representation by staff and roster lawyers and, of course, Family Settlement Services. As would be expected, the legal aid service that contained the smallest proportion of clients with family law issues was the Criminal Resolution Unit.

In line with previous Canadian research², the present study found that the majority of family law issues that LAA's clients were dealing with were related to family breakdown; specifically, clients with family law issues were most likely to report needing assistance with custody and access or parenting issues, child support, divorce, and separation. Findings from the present study also indicate that legal aid cases involving family law issues are likely to take longer to reach resolution than cases dealing with non-family issues. Clients who were seeking help with family law issues were considerably less likely to report that the legal issue that prompted them to contact LAA had been resolved at the time of the interview than were clients dealing with other legal issues.

LAA clients seeking assistance with family law issues were substantially more likely to be female, while clients dealing with non-family legal issues were much more likely to be male. Women dealing with family breakdown are more likely to be economically disadvantaged than men, and thus are more likely to seek out more affordable legal assistance such as that provided by legal aid.³

Approximately one-third of all interviewed clients reported that they had received a service plan from LAA, although clients with family law issues were somewhat more likely to have received a service plan than clients without family issues. While overall clients responded very positively when asked if their service plan was useful, those seeking assistance with family law issues were considerably less likely to say that the plan was useful than were clients dealing with non-family legal issues. Similarly, while clients were quite likely to say that their service plan helped them to better understand their legal problem and their options, family law clients were considerably less likely to report that this was the case than were non-family law clients. This finding may speak to the complexity and often protracted nature of family law cases and the importance of professionals who provide assistance to these clients to ensure that clients have a thorough understanding of their case and the legal options that are available to them.

It is interesting to note that, despite the fact that clients were likely to report that they found the service plan useful, only about one-half of clients both with and without family law issues stated that they had used any of the information and referrals in the service plan. This leads to the question of why more use is not being made of these elements of the service plan, and whether the information and referrals that are being made are appropriate for the clients. Further research exploring the use of various components of service plans would be beneficial in answering these questions.

Clients with family law issues were also considerably more likely to say that they had sought out other services in addition to legal aid for assistance with their legal issues than were clients dealing with other legal issues. Once again, this may be

² Kelly, M.B. (2011). Family court cases involving child custody, access and support arrangements, 2009/2010. *Juristat*, 85-002-X. Ottawa, ON: Statistics Canada.

³ Bertrand, L.D., Paetsch, J.J., Hornick, J.P, & Bala N.M.C. (2002). *A profile of legal aid services in family law matters in Canada*. Ottawa, ON: Department of Justice Canada.

reflective of the complexity of family law cases and the need to access services beyond what can be provided by a single agency such as LAA.

Interview respondents were asked several questions regarding their satisfaction with various aspects of their experience with legal aid, and the findings portrayed a consistent pattern. While overall levels of satisfaction with LAA services were quite high, clients seeking help with family law issues consistently reported lower levels of satisfaction than clients with non-family legal issues. Family law clients expressed lower levels of satisfaction with the ease of reaching someone at LAA for assistance, the services they received from LAA staff and lawyers, and their overall experiences with the LAA services they received.

When asked about their satisfaction with several aspects of the LAA staff, including lawyers and mediators, who provided them with assistance, overall levels of satisfaction were very high. However, clients with family law issues once again expressed somewhat lower levels of satisfaction than non-family law clients. Family law clients reported that they were less satisfied with the following aspects of their experiences with LAA staff: the staff member listened to them carefully; the staff member treated them fairly; the staff member was knowledgeable and competent; the staff member helped them better understand their case/legal problem/charges; and the staff member went the extra mile to make sure they got what they needed.

The consistent pattern observed with regard to client satisfaction with various aspects of their legal aid experience indicates that clients who were seeking assistance with family law issues were somewhat less satisfied with the services they received than clients with non-family legal issues, although their overall levels of satisfaction were still quite high and the differences were not large. This pattern of findings should not necessarily be viewed as an indication that LAA staff are not adequately meeting the needs of family law clients: family breakdown is an inherently stressful time for the vast majority of individuals and the emotional turmoil associated with family law issues could lead some people to have unrealistically high expectations of the services they receive from organizations such as LAA. Moreover, clients with family law issues were considerably less likely to report that their legal issues had been resolved than other clients, which would likely also have a negative impact on their satisfaction levels. However, the findings do suggest that it is important for staff dealing with clients who are experiencing family law problems to appreciate and acknowledge the stresses that these individuals are facing, and to deal with them with as much understanding and compassion as possible.