

Summary Report

Results of a National Membership Survey
on Women's Participation in the Union



Women in CUPE
Strengthening our union

CUPE National Women's Task Force
September 2007

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INTRODUCTION

The National Women's Task Force was mandated by the 2005 CUPE National Convention to consult broadly with CUPE members on the issues of women's equality and participation in the union.

In addition to meeting with members in face-to-face consultations, the Task Force conducted a membership survey on the status of women in the union. The survey asked a number of questions about barriers to participation in the union, women's leadership in the union and how the union could address women's equality in the workplace.

Methodology

The survey instrument (questionnaire) was developed by the National Women's Task Force in consultation with the Survey Research Unit at the University of Regina. The survey was available in English and French.

Because CUPE does not have a centralized membership list, it was not possible to distribute the survey through a random selection of members. The survey was available online to CUPE members through the national union's website, and distributed directly to members in each region and division by members of the National Women's Task Force.

The distribution of the written survey varied by region and division. Most of the surveys were handed out at major CUPE conferences and meetings. In Alberta, national staff representatives provided the surveys directly to the locals in their servicing assignment. The broader distribution of the survey in Alberta resulted in that province having the highest response rate of any province (28.8%), even though their membership is about five percent of the total CUPE national membership.

There were 4,788 surveys included in the analysis. The Survey Research Unit at the University of Regina provided the data input and analysis for the Task Force. This report is a summary of those survey results.

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

There were 4,788 CUPE members who responded to the membership survey.

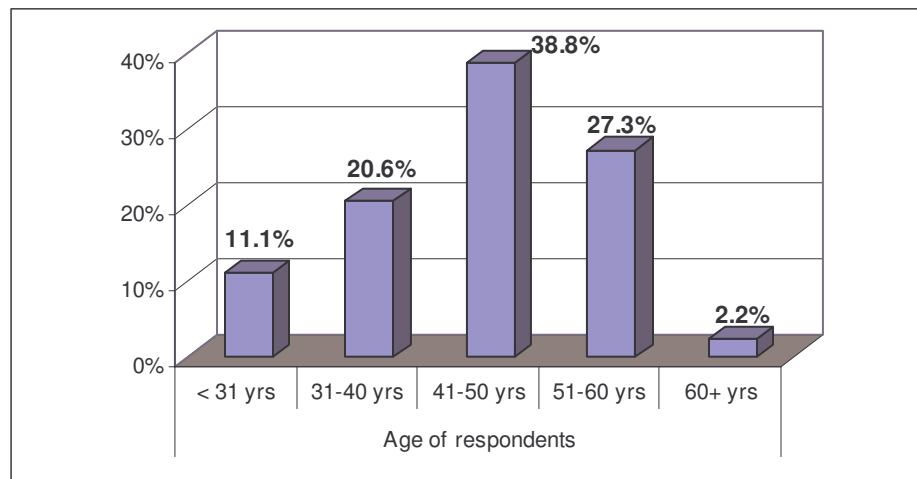
Gender Breakdown

The majority of CUPE members who responded to the NWTF survey were women: 89.9% female and 10.1% male.

Age

Respondents to the survey fell into two main age groups: 41 to 50 years of age (38.8%) and 51 to 60 years of age (27.3%). Only 11% were under the age of 31.

Chart 1



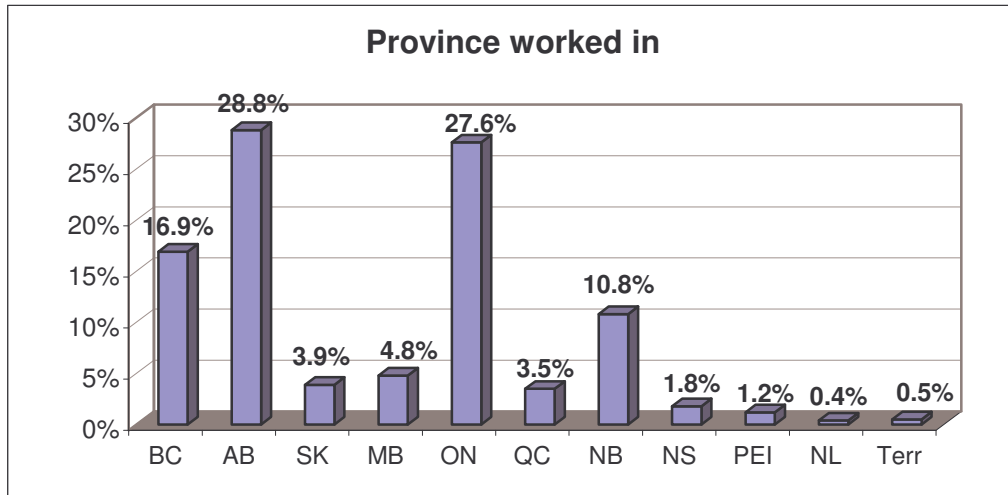
Diversity

Slightly more than 10% of respondents indicated they came from an equality-seeking group. Of those, 38.8% were workers of colour, 27.4% were Aboriginal, 18.4% were persons with a disability and 16% were Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Transgender.

Provincial Breakdown

The provinces with the highest response rate to the membership survey were: Alberta (28.8%), Ontario (27.6%) and British Columbia (16.9%). The actual number of CUPE members in Alberta represents just over 5% of the total CUPE membership and therefore Alberta responses are over represented in this sample. There was a very high return rate from Alberta because the survey was distributed more widely in that province than in other provinces.

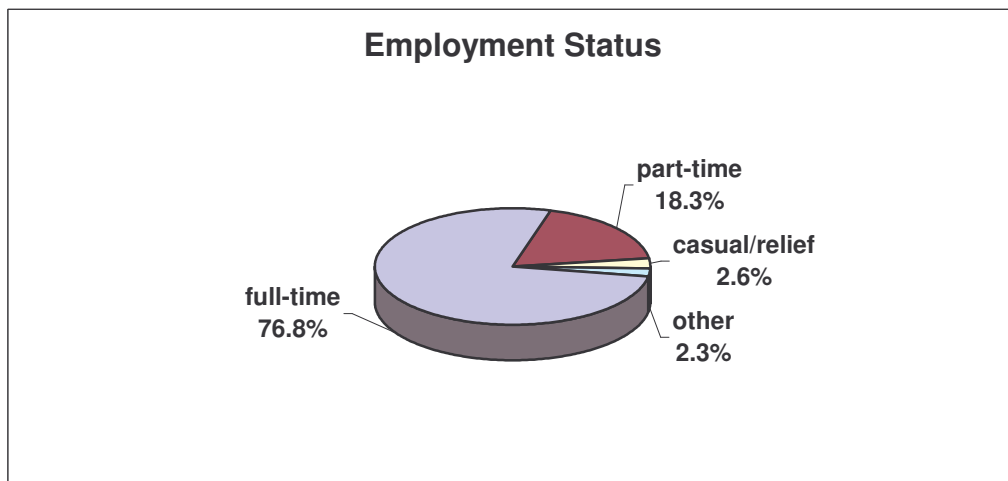
Chart 2



Employment Status

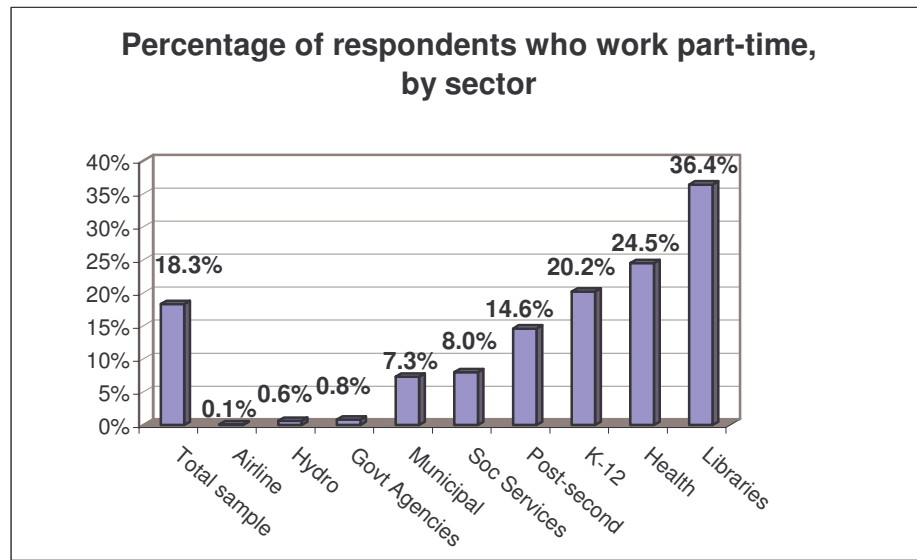
Over three-quarters of CUPE members who responded to the survey said they are employed full-time. Only 18.3% said they work part-time while 2.6% hold a casual or relief position.

Chart 3



Who is most likely to work part-time? The survey revealed that library workers were the most likely to work part-time (36.4% – almost double the total sample), followed by 24.5% of health care workers. It is important to note that the three sectors with the highest rate of part-time workers are predominantly female sectors.

Chart 4



Of those who said they work part-time or casual, 55.1% said they would prefer a full-time position.

Multiple Jobs

More than one-quarter of respondents (26.4%) said they work at more than one job. Respondents from the school board K-12 sector were most likely to have multiple jobs (30.9%) followed by respondents from the social services sector (28.8%) and health care (26.6%).

Pension Plan

Almost three-quarters (74.5%) of respondents have a workplace pension plan. About 10.6% have RSP contributions through work, another 9.7% indicated they had no pension plan and 5.2% did not know if they had a pension plan. Although a high percentage of respondents have a workplace pension plan, the data does not tell us if the plan provides a healthy retirement income.

Respondents who have been CUPE members for five years or less were the least likely to have a workplace pension plan. Only 55% of new CUPE members had a workplace pension plan compared to 75% in the total sample.

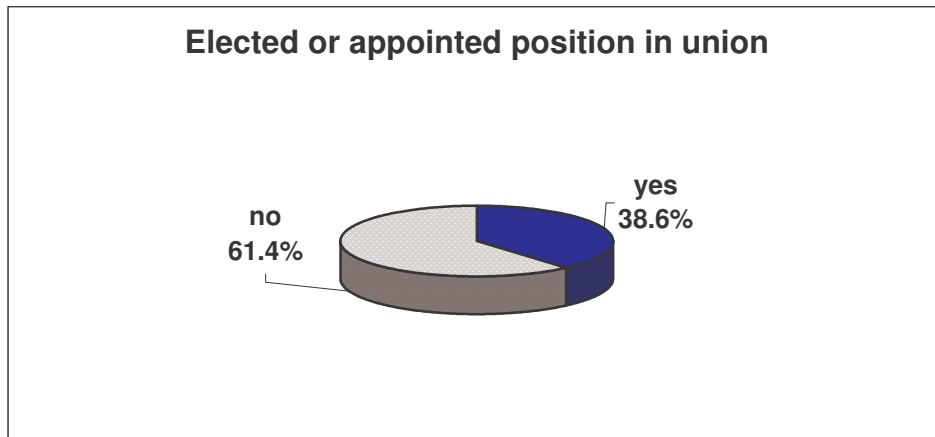
UNION ACTIVITY

The Task Force wanted to know how active respondents were in the union. The survey asked members a number of questions such as: did they hold a position in the union, how active in the union they considered themselves, and how often they attended union membership meetings. Here are the results.

Position in the Union

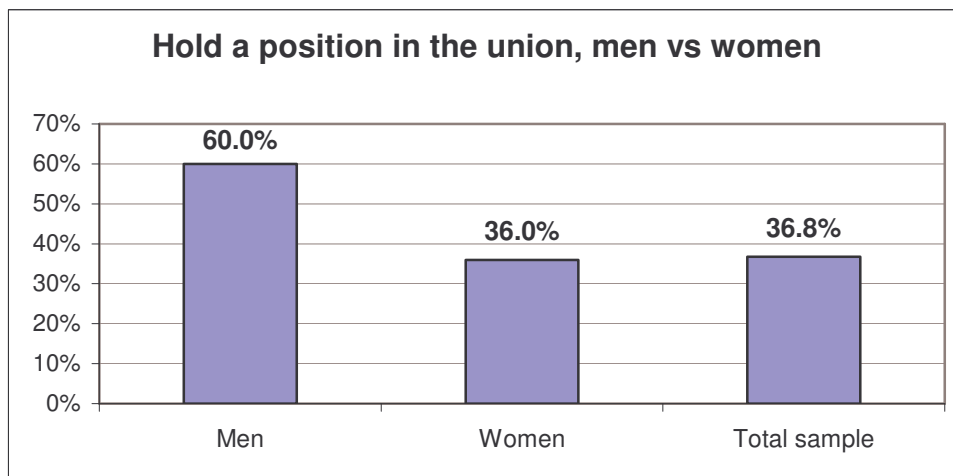
The majority of respondents do not hold a position in the union. About 38.6% of respondents said they currently hold an elected or appointed position in the union, while 61.4% do not hold any elected or appointed position.

Chart 5



Male respondents were *more likely* to hold a position in the union than were women (60% of men vs. only 36% of women).

Chart 6

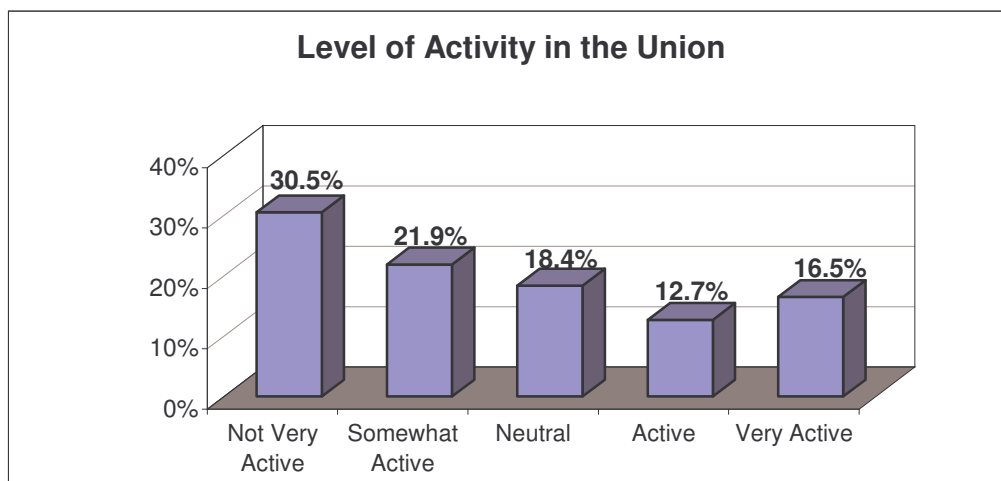


Young workers were the *least likely* to hold a position in the union: only 2.3% of respondents under the age of 31 said they held a position compared to 16.3% of those aged 41 to 50 years.

Level of activity

A small percentage of respondents considered themselves “very active” in the union (only 16.5%), compared to 30.5% who said they were “not very active.” It is interesting to point out that the percentage of respondents who see themselves as “active” and “very active” (over 29%) is less than the percentage of members who hold a position in the union (38.6%).

Chart 7



Who is most likely to be “very active” in the union among the respondents? Respondents from the health sector were the *most likely* to say they were “very active” (24.1% vs. 16.5% total sample) as well as respondents from Ontario (26.9% vs. 16.5% for the total sample).

Those from the airlines sector were the *least likely* to say they were “very active” (4.7% vs. 16.5%) and respondents from Alberta were the *least likely* of provinces to say they were “very active” (5% vs. 16.5% for the total sample).

Men were almost twice as likely to say they were “very active” than women – (29.1% of men vs. only 14.9% of women).

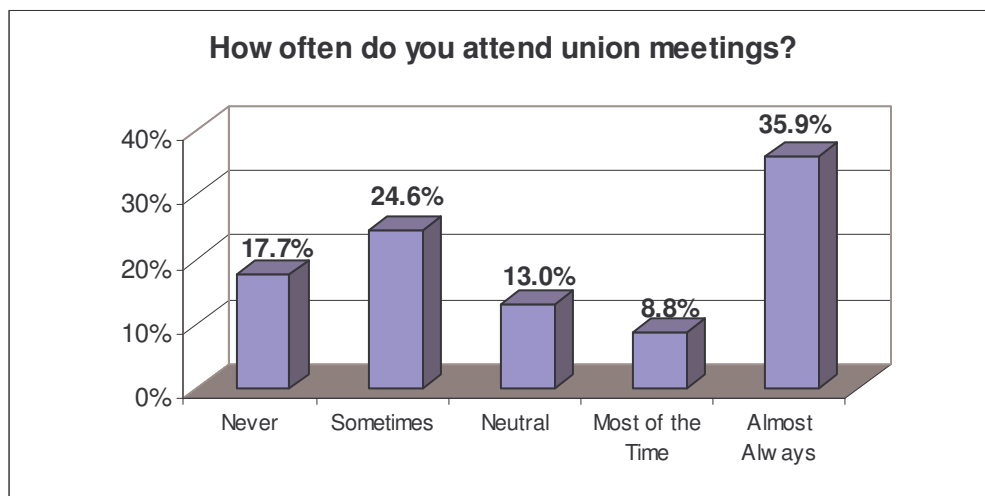
Very active members also tended to be older: 21% of respondents aged 51 to 60 said they were “very active” compared to only 5.2% of members under the age of 31. Not surprisingly, those who have been CUPE members for a long period of time are more likely to be “very active”. Almost 29% of those who have been members for 18 years or more considered themselves “very active,” compared to 16.5% of the total sample and 5.6% of those with less than five years as a CUPE member.

Attendance at Union Meetings

Another indicator of activism in the union is how often members attend union membership meetings. Almost 36% (35.9%) said they “almost always” attend membership meetings. This is more than double the percentage of respondents who consider themselves “very active” (16.5%) but slightly less than the percentage of respondents who said they hold a position in the union (38.6%).

17.7% of respondents said they never attend meetings and 24.6% said they sometimes attend union meetings.

Chart 8



Respondents from the healthcare sector were the most likely to “almost always” attend union meetings (46.6%) followed by those from the municipal sector (43.2%) and post-secondary (40.6%). Only 7.1% of those from the airlines sector said they “almost always” attend meetings.

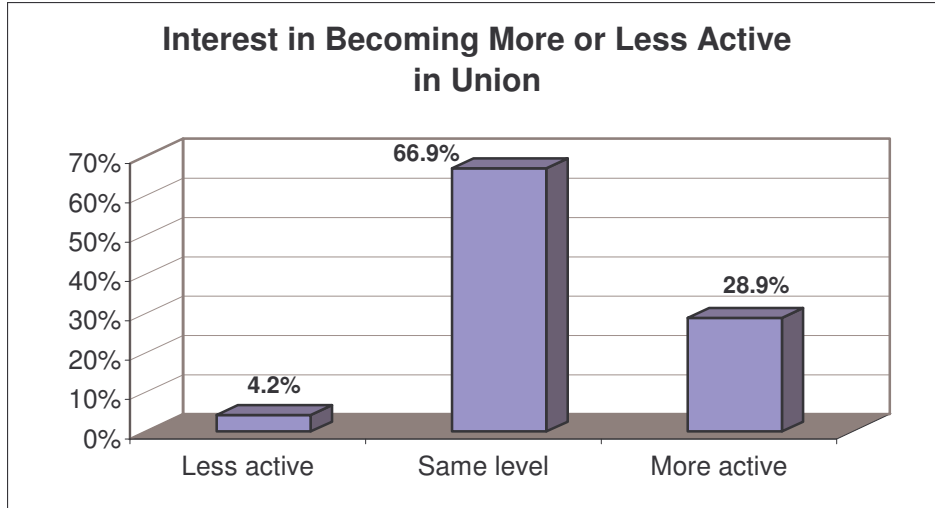
Desire to be More Active in the Union

Almost 29% of respondents said they would like to be more active in the union. Two-thirds of respondents (66.9%) said they wanted to keep the same level of activity in the union. A small number – 4.2% – want to reduce their union activity.

Respondents from the social services sector were the *most likely* to want to become more active (39%) followed by those from the airlines sector (34.3%). Ontario respondents had the highest interest in becoming more active (36.9%) while Alberta respondents were *least likely* to want to be more active (20.2%).

Women were slightly more likely than men to say they would like to be more active in CUPE (29.5% of women vs. 24.3% of men).

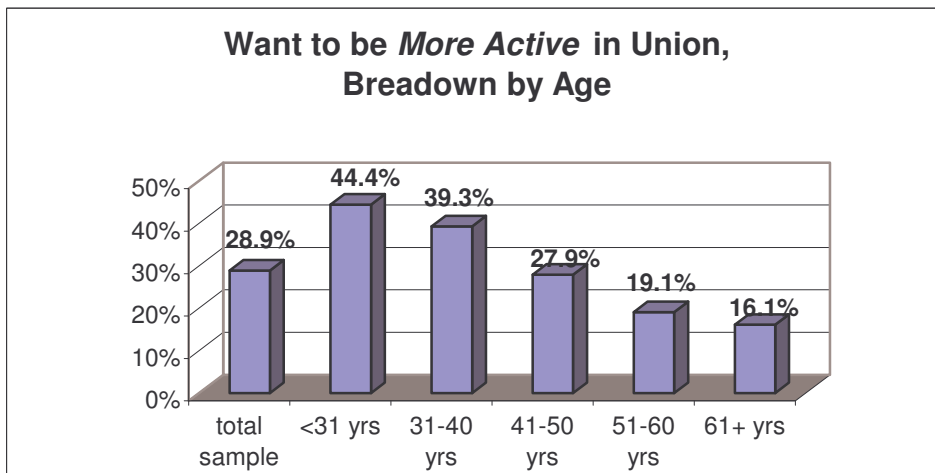
Chart 9



Part-time and casual workers were somewhat more likely than full-time workers to say they want to be more active. Only 27.9% of full-time workers want to get more involved in the union compared to 31.7% of part-timers and 32.8% of casual workers.

There was a high interest among young workers to be more active in the union, with 44.4% of respondents under the age of 31 indicating they want to be more involved.

Chart 10



BARRIERS TO GETTING MORE INVOLVED IN THE UNION

The survey asked respondents what prevented them from getting more involved in the union. The main barriers selected by respondents, in order of most frequent response, are:

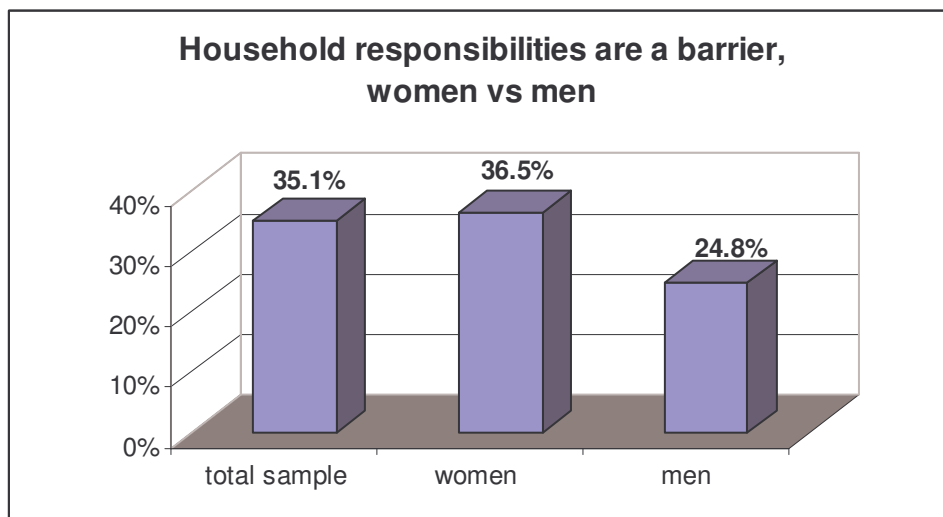
- Work commitments or demands (36.5%);
- Household responsibilities (35.1%);
- Family responsibilities, including elder care (34.6%);
- Childcare responsibilities (19.7%);
- Time union meetings held (19.3%);
- Workload in union positions (15.6%).

The percentages above do not add up to 100% because respondents could select more than one option.

Respondents who indicated that work commitments were a barrier were more likely to be from Saskatchewan/Manitoba (41.2%), under the age of 31 (40.9%) and women (37% vs. 33.4% of men).

Women were more likely than men to indicate that household responsibilities are a barrier (36.5% of women vs. 24.8% of men) and that family responsibilities posed a barrier to involvement (35.7% of women vs. 28.1% of men).

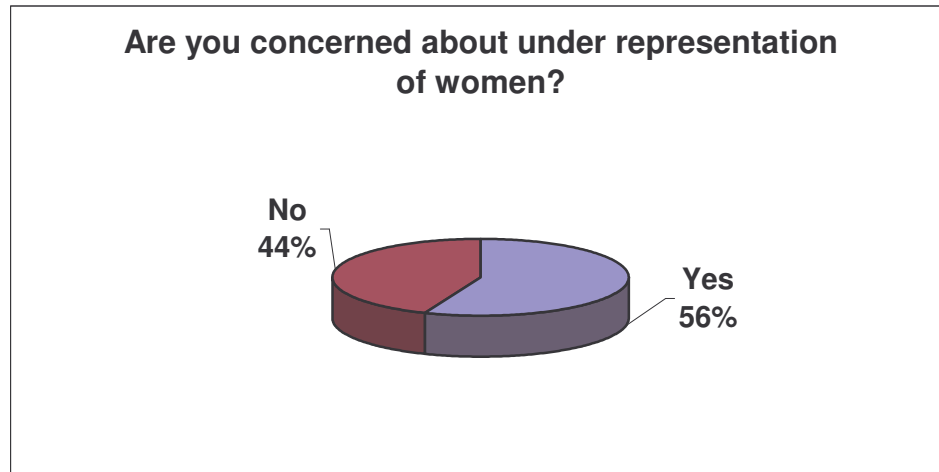
Chart 11



WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

The majority of respondents (56%) said they were concerned about the under representation of women in union leadership.

Chart 12



Among the provinces, the highest level of concern came from respondents in British Columbia (66.6%) and Ontario (61.5%). Among the sectors, the highest concern was in the social services (71.7%), post-secondary (69.3%) and library (61%) sectors.

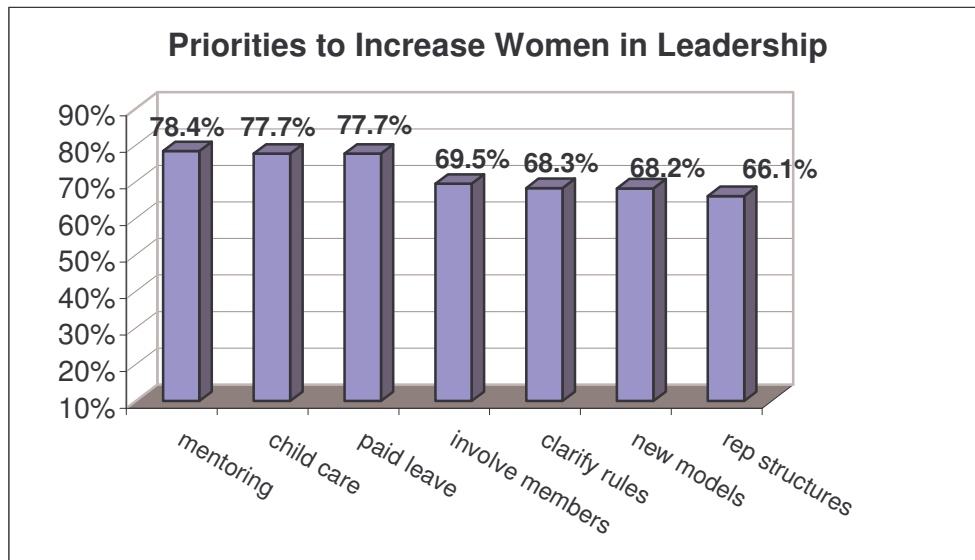
Alberta is the only province where the majority of respondents were not concerned about women's leadership (43% were concerned). The different profile of respondents from Alberta, as a result of the wider distribution of the survey, may account for some of the differences from other provinces. For example, Alberta had the lowest percentage of respondents who indicated they were "very active" in the union (only 5% of Albertan respondents said they were "very active" in the union compared to 26.9% of respondents from Ontario).

Alberta also had the highest rate of respondents with five years or less as a CUPE member (32.4% vs. 22.6% for the total sample).

Priorities for Change – Improving Women's Access to Leadership

CUPE members were asked to indicate how important they felt certain actions were to improve women's access to leadership. The responses ranged from "very important", "important", "somewhat important", or "not important". The order of priorities for change that were seen as "very important", are as follows:

Chart 13



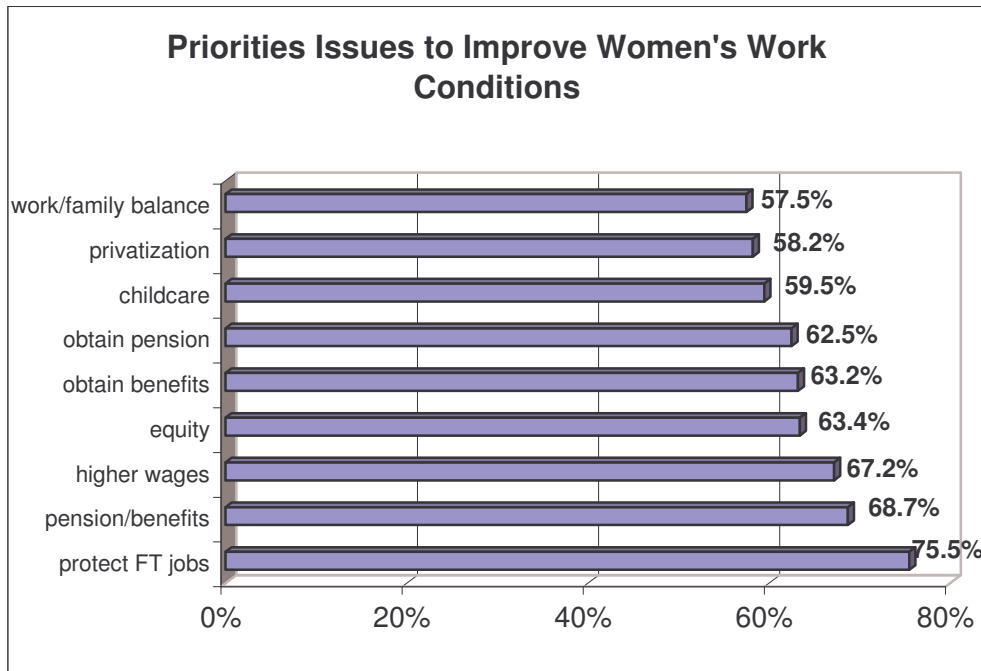
1. Mentoring. Mentoring women members was seen by 78.4% of respondents as the most important priority for increasing the number of women in leadership positions.
2. Childcare. Over three-quarters of respondents (77.7%) felt that addressing women's need for child care was very important or important.
3. Access to paid union leave. Another 77.7% of respondents felt that access to paid union leave was important to women.
4. Involve members in decision-making. 69.5% of respondents said that finding more ways to involve members in the decisions of the union was important to increase women in leadership positions.
5. Clarify unwritten rules and practices. 68.3% of respondents said it was important for CUPE to clarify unwritten rules and practices.
6. Develop new leadership models. Developing new models of leadership was identified as important by 68.2% of respondents.
7. Create representative union structures. 66.1% of respondents said that creating union structures that were more representative of the membership was important.

IMPROVING WOMEN'S WORKING CONDITIONS

The last section of the survey asked respondents about the key issues they think CUPE should take action on to improve women's conditions at work. The issues that were identified as being "very important" were ranked in the following order:

1. Protect full-time permanent jobs (75.5%);
2. Improvements to pensions and benefits (68.7%);
3. Bargain higher wages for women (67.2%);
4. Bargain employment equity plans (63.4%);
5. Obtain a benefit plan (63.2%);
6. Obtain a pension plan (62.5%);
7. Affordable and accessible child care (59.5%);
8. Fight privatization/contracting-out (58.2%);
9. Contract provisions to balance work and family (57.5%).

Chart 14



CONCLUSION

This membership survey provides valuable and insightful information about CUPE members and the barriers to getting more involved in the union. Although we cannot say that the sample is completely representative of our membership, the response rate has been tremendous: we received almost 5,000 responses from both activists and non-activists. This is more than double the number of CUPE delegates that attend our national convention and set policy for the union.

Approximately 700 members provided additional comments at the end of the survey on a variety of topics. Members used this space to discuss barriers that they face at work, at home and in the union. Some of the comments were very personal, and some members used the space to speak of their experiences of discrimination or how the union handled a particular issue.

The negative atmosphere at union meetings was seen as something that turned women away. Others expressed frustration about the time that meetings were held and the existence of cliques in the union that prevented new members from getting a leadership position.

Others spoke of the workplace issues that they wanted the union to address, such as better pension and benefits. One woman pointed out that secretaries in her school work 30 hours a week and need 31 hours to receive a full pension. Pay equity was also raised as an important issue for women, and many expressed frustration that it has not been achieved in their workplace.

Many spoke of the difficulties of balancing work and family and how they could not even consider giving any time to the union because of family commitments. Under additional comments, one woman said: “just the usual: single mom, working multiple jobs trying to make ends meet, not spending enough time with my children and still always struggling”.

In terms of things the union could do better, many felt the union should focus on child care issues if it wants more active involvement from women. Providing daycare at meetings and conventions was a popular suggestion.

There were a number of respondents who disagreed with the survey and felt that the Task Force was misguided. They did not believe that the union should focus on getting women in leadership and that leaders should be elected on the basis of merit, not on the basis of gender or diversity. This was a minority viewpoint among the respondents.

The majority of respondents, however, were thankful that the union established the Task Force and expressed hope for the future of the union. Many spoke of the importance of ongoing education and mentoring of women members and greater focus on women's issues. Many respondents took the time to thank the Task Force for giving them an opportunity to provide input and give women a voice. Others said that they would like to help the Task Force and do more at the local level to encourage women in leadership.