



Treasury Board of Canada
Secrétariat

Secrétariat du Conseil du Trésor
du Canada

Canada

Strengthening Whistleblower Protection: The Report of the Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act Review Task Force

Presentation for EPAC, June 23, 2026



Task Force Established

Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates (OGGO) reviewed the Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act (PSDPA) in 2017, concluded significant legislative changes were needed. Some recommendations led to adoption of administrative measures, but no legislative changes were made at that time.

Bill C-290 (2021-2025), at 2nd reading in Senate when election was called.

In late 2022, the President of the Treasury Board established an external task force to review the Act, mandated to:

- Examine opportunities to strengthen disclosure processes
- Enhance protections and supports for whistleblowers, and
- Recommend improvements or possible legislative changes

The task force published a [Report](#) and an accompanying [Survey Results](#) report in April 2026.

Research and Consultations

The task force drew on previous analyses, research, and stakeholder perspectives, including:

- the 2017 report of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates
- proposals from the Office of the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner (PSIC)
- Bill C-290
- international studies
- consultation process
 - consultations with stakeholders and experts
 - 57 written submissions (internal and external stakeholders)

Topics Considered

The task force review covered numerous topics, including:

- definitions of wrongdoing, protected disclosure
- importance of addressing matters that don't meet the threshold of wrongdoing
- vexatious complaints, the “good faith” requirement
- complexity of the recourse mechanism ecosystem
- anonymous disclosures
- confusion and inconsistencies re: disclosure processes

The task force was split on whether to keep two systems for reporting wrongdoing; the majority opted to keep both options available – Public Sector Integrity Commissioner (PSIC) and internal disclosure programs.

National Survey

The task force also conducted a survey (of public servants, former public servants, contractors, and members of the public) that focused on three topics:

- the process for reporting wrongdoing
- protection against retaliation and support measures
- organizational culture and administration

Around 5,300 responses were received; questionnaires submitted or at least 40% completed were included (3,574 in total). 3,501 responses (nearly 98%) were submitted by current public servants.

The survey was voluntary, anonymous, and available in both official languages.

Survey Results

Perceptions of workplace psychological health and safety:

- 59% of respondents reported experiencing a psychologically safe and healthy work environment
- **37% reported working in a psychologically unsafe and unhealthy work environment**

The survey included four workplace behaviour scenarios with questions on what participants thought **should** be done versus what **would** likely be done in the four misconduct scenarios.

Results revealed a **significant gap** between what respondents thought **should** happen and what they thought **would** happen.

Led to recommendations: hold Chief Executives accountable for PSDPA implementation, assessment of organizational culture in senior executive performance assessment, add questions to Public Service Employee Survey.

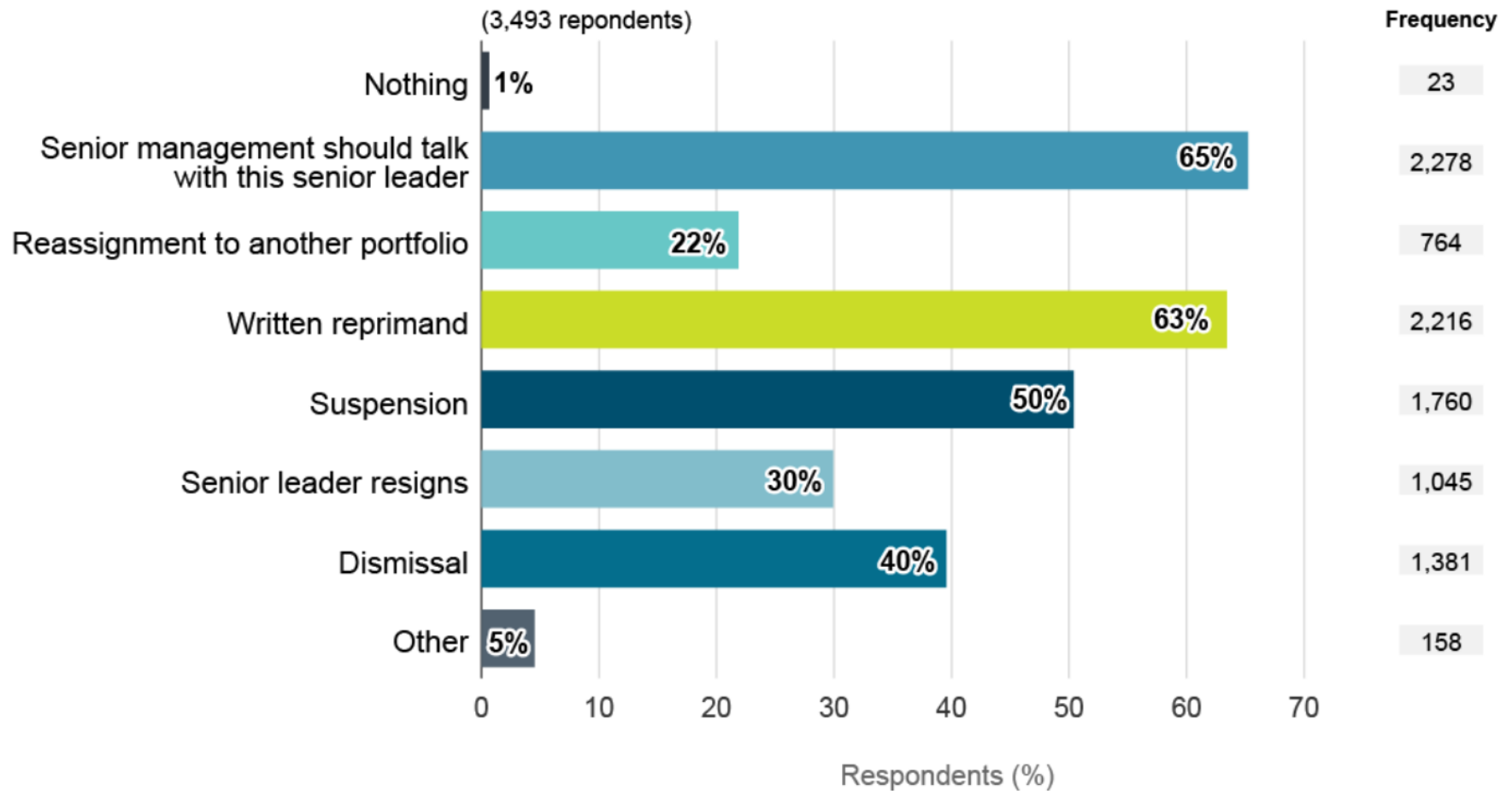
Scenario 4

A senior leader in your organization yells at people, belittles them, ostracizes people who complain, and is known for giving contracts to friends and inappropriately expensing extravagant lunches.

- 69% of respondents would discuss this situation with their supervisor
- 68% - their colleagues
- 46% - their organizational Ethics office/Ombuds Office
- 34% - their union
- 34% - their Senior Officer for Disclosure
- 29% - a higher official
- 26% - the Office of the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner
- 24% - their Informal Conflict Management Services office

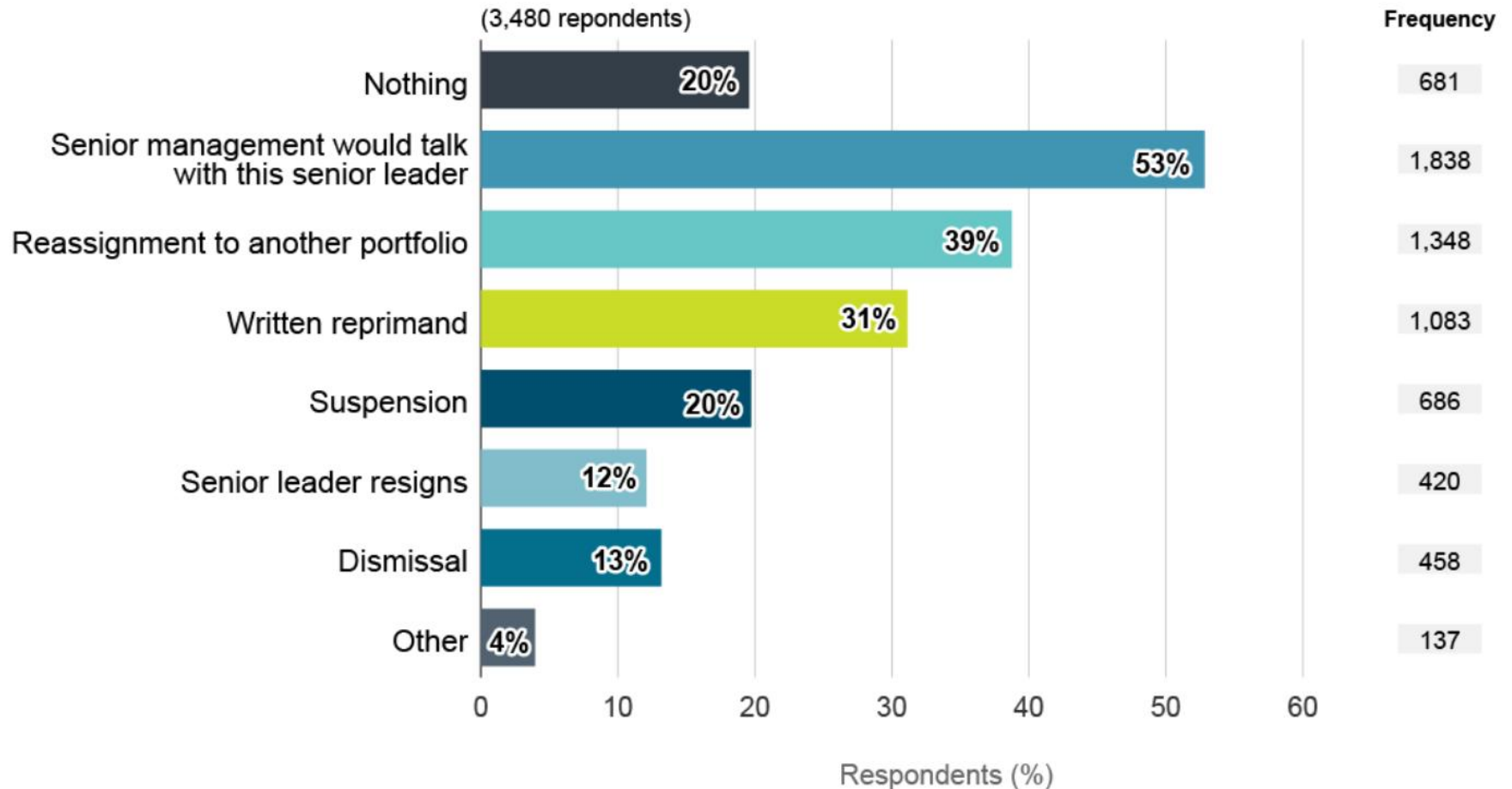
What *Should* Happen

Figure 20: what respondents thought should happen for Scenario 4



What *Would* Happen

Figure 21: what respondents thought would happen for Scenario 4



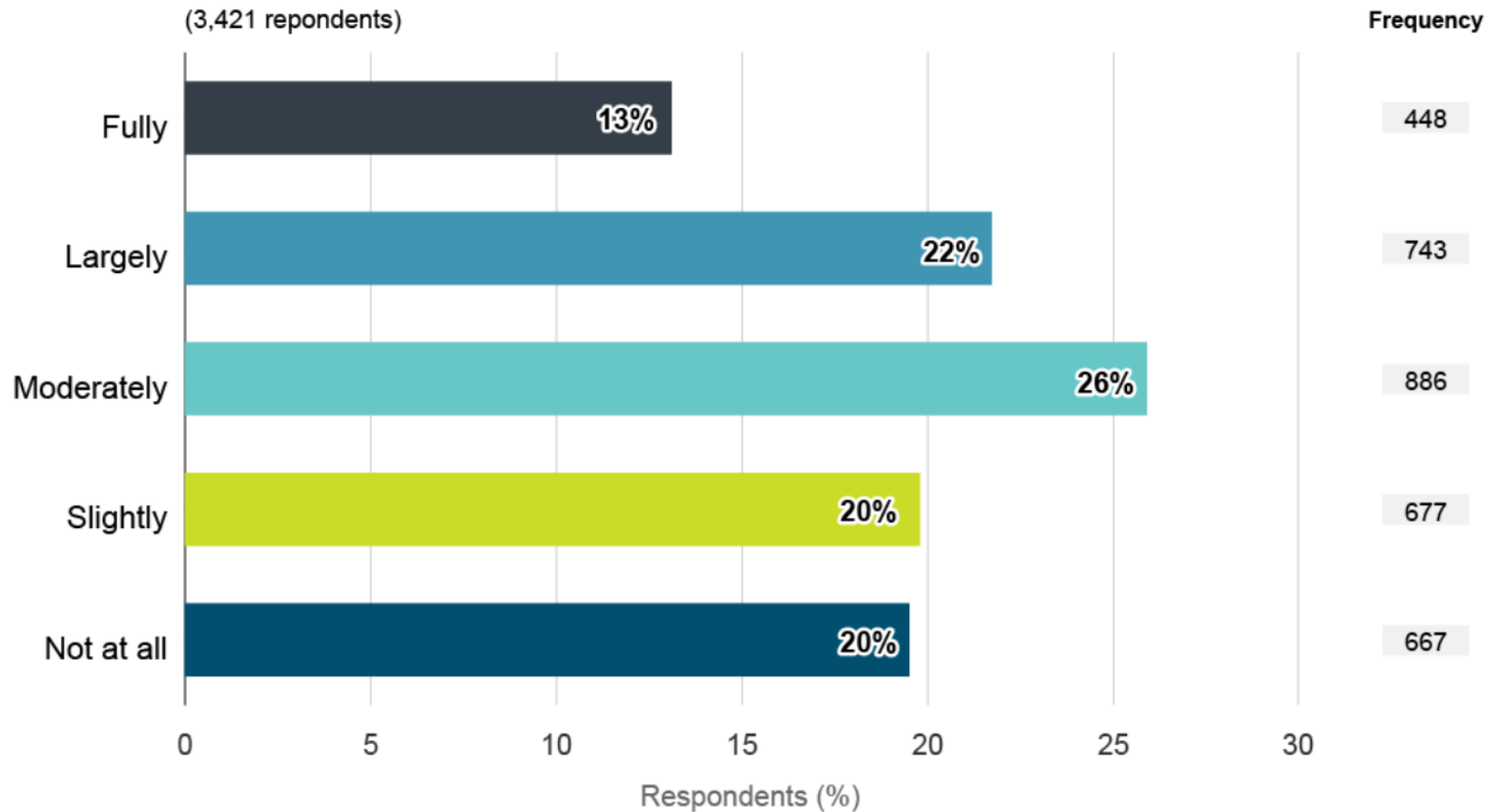
The Most Important Factors for Disclosing

Respondents were asked to rank up to five factors

- **75% of respondents** indicated that *“feeling that my confidentiality will be respected to the extent possible”* was one of the most important factors in encouraging and supporting employees to disclose serious misconduct
- second most important factor, chosen by **68% of respondents**, was *“understanding my options for disclosure and reprisal protections”*
- *“knowing that consequences or corrective actions are taken if serious misconduct is found”* was the third most important factor, selected by **66% of respondents**
- the 4th most important factor, *“managers and supervisors are knowledgeable about disclosure processes and reprisal protections”* was chosen by **54% of respondents**

35% Have a Culture that Supports Disclosure

Figure 23: extent to which respondents' workplace cultures support reporting serious misconduct

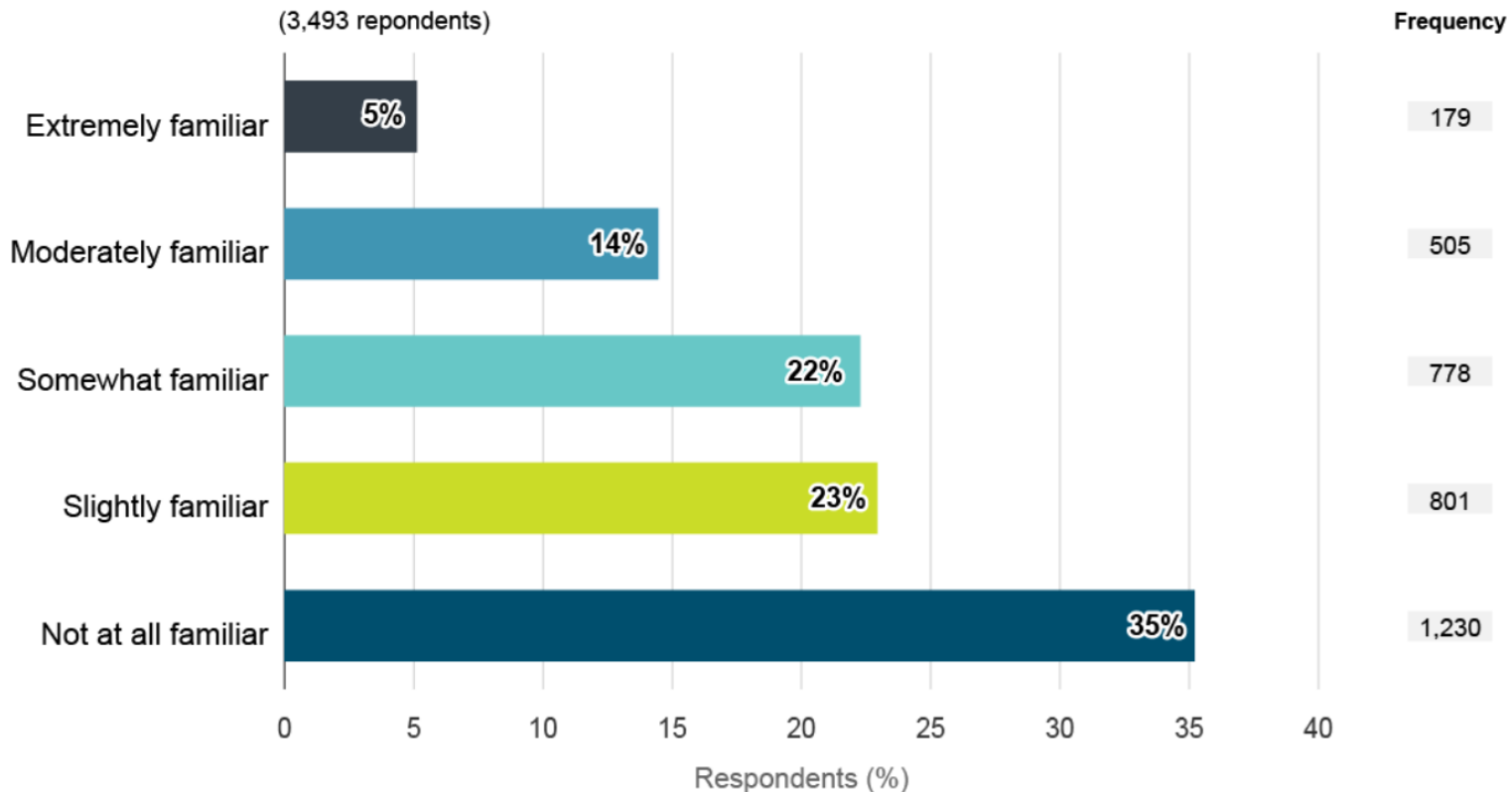


Familiarity with PSDPA Disclosure Processes

Results show that awareness is **very low** among public servants:

- close to 60% were not at all familiar or only slightly familiar with the processes
- fewer than 20% were moderately or extremely familiar with them

Figure 24: respondents' familiarity with PSDPA disclosure processes



Respondents who Witnessed Serious Misconduct

Almost half (44%) expressed that they had witnessed serious misconduct. Of those, 66% described the experience as traumatic; 58% reported it.

Figure 28: number of respondents who witnessed serious misconduct

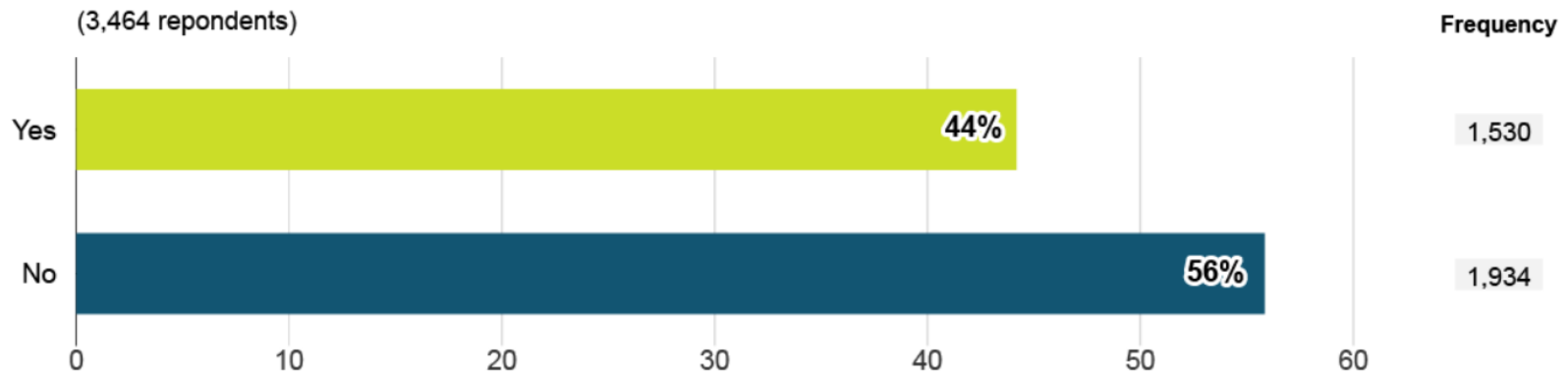
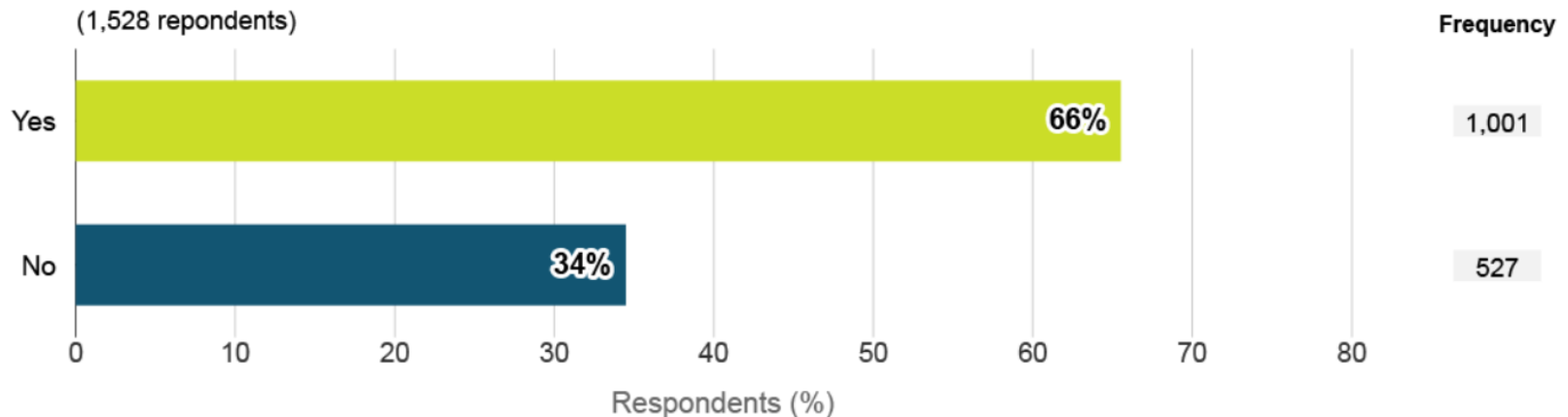


Figure 29: number of respondents for whom witnessing serious misconduct was traumatic



Respondents who witnessed reprisals

Figure 32: number of respondents who witnessed reprisal in their workplace

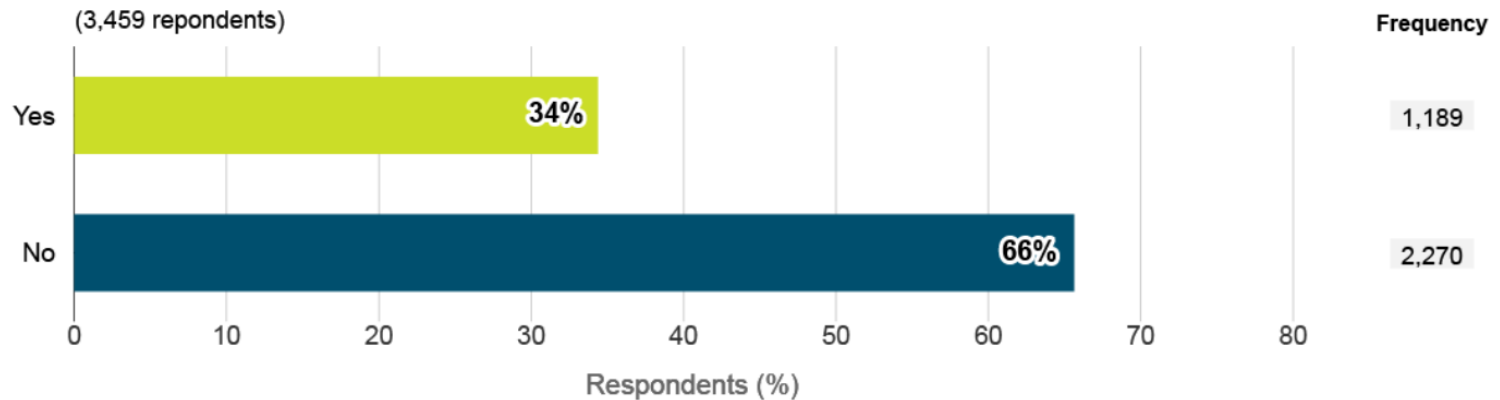
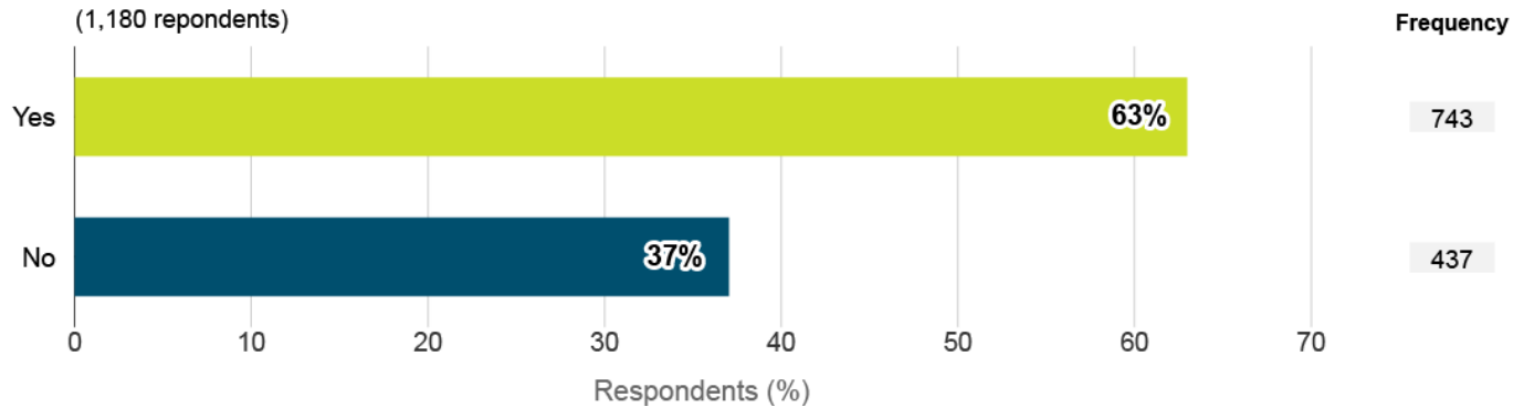


Figure 33: number of respondents for whom witnessing reprisal was traumatic



Only 28% reported the reprisal
(versus 58% who reported misconduct)

Other Survey Results

Overall, results indicate a **high degree of interpersonal respect** in the workplace, and 61% of respondents felt a sense of community at work, which is a strong indicator of mental health.

But three results relating to accountability were troubling:

- less than half of respondents **(47%) felt comfortable raising concerns** in their workplace
- only **32% believed** that difficult situations are **effectively addressed** in their workplace
- only **35%** believed that people are **held accountable** for their actions

NOTE: survey results cannot be applied to the entire public sector.

Results

One of the main findings: a lack of awareness and understanding of the law and reporting procedures. Many public servants reported not knowing how to report wrongdoing.

This includes managers; one of the three channels available to public servants for reporting irregularities, and the one most frequently used.

Trust and Fear of Retaliation

- Respondents expressed little confidence in the system: fear of retaliation remains a major obstacle, and many doubt the effectiveness of the protections.
- In addition, some respondents believe that reporting a problem will not lead to any concrete change.

..... Findings

- Workplace culture is a critical factor, including a perceived lack of support from management and a reluctance to “speak up” due to career risks.
- There is a need for a stronger culture of ethics and openness: the prevailing sentiment among respondents was one of skepticism about the effectiveness of existing processes.
- Survey responses highlighted the urgent need for systemic changes to foster a more accountable and transparent workplace.

Accessibility & the Complexity of the Disclosure Regime

- System is viewed as complex and difficult to navigate.
- There are multiple channels, confusion persists about roles and processes.

Other Recommendations

Improving the disclosure process

- simplify disclosure procedures (need clear guidelines)
- expand the application (include the Canadian Armed Forces, the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service, Communications Security Establishment Canada)
- improve guidance and clarify reporting channels
- enhance accessibility and transparency
- review the current mechanism for handling harassment complaints

Strengthening protective measures

- expand the list of protected individuals and the list of measures affecting employment and working conditions
- simplify the procedure for addressing reprisal, remove the Tribunal from the process, and reverse the burden of proof
- provide better legal (fees) and psychological support

Other Recommendations

Culture, administration and operations

Accountability is necessary at all levels to have a more open work culture, ensure misconduct is addressed appropriately, communicate consequences for wrongdoers (public reporting).

- implement audit and other mechanisms to ensure PSDPA requirements are met
- additional responsibilities for Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS): guidance, including on conduct of investigations
- increase awareness and training on rights, processes (TBS)
- give organizations duty to protect employees from reprisal
- strengthen accountability (hold chief executives accountable for proper implementation of PSDPA, performance assessments)
- PSES - include questions on psychological health and safety, ethical culture, ethical leadership

Conclusion

The key takeaways from the report are:

- insufficient awareness of the PSDPA, the mechanisms for disclosing, and protection against retaliation
- lack of trust, fear of retaliation
- need to strengthen protections
- need to change the organizational culture

The task force review confirmed a **gap between the intent** of the PSDPA **and lived experience**. Their recommendations aim to build trust, simplify processes, and strengthen protections and culture.

17 recommendations relate to disclosure, 10 to protections from reprisals and remedies, and 8 to organizational culture and PSDPA administration & operations (some have multiple elements).

Links to reports: Task Force [Report](#), [Survey Results](#) report.