

Working Effectively with Asylum Seekers on a Negative Pathway: Towards a Best Practice Model

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Background

The number of asylum seekers undergoing refugee status determination in Australia has increased under the Fast Track process. Instances of applicants receiving negative outcomes with limited appeal options have also increased.

The already vulnerable emotional wellbeing of individuals seeking asylum may be further impacted by visa restrictions associated with multiple rejections on their application (no work rights, Medicare and/or financial support as well as ineligibility for casework services).

Anecdotal reports from staff in the sector (caseworkers, counsellors, lawyers etc.) indicate this to be a particularly challenging area of work, with limited positive outcomes.

Objectives

1. To gain insight into the specific knowledge, skills and understanding required by staff (caseworkers, counsellors, lawyers) working with negative pathway clients.
2. To draw on the knowledge/experience of staff to begin to develop a best practice approach to working with negative pathway clients.
3. To identify the needs of staff to continue to work sustainably with increasing numbers of negative pathway clients.

Methodology

Eighty members of staff from across the asylum seeker sector completed an online survey about their experiences working with clients on a negative pathway.

Respondents completed a series of Likert scale and open ended qualitative response questions. The questions included the following topics: Discussing ways for clients to prepare for a negative outcome (practically and emotionally) – Prioritisation of welfare/ psycho-social/legal tasks for clients who have received a negative outcome - Respondent's confidence in ability to work with negative pathway clients - Specific challenges to providing assistance to negative pathway clients – Approaches that staff have found helpful and/or things to avoid in working with negative pathway clients – the importance of collaboration – training required.

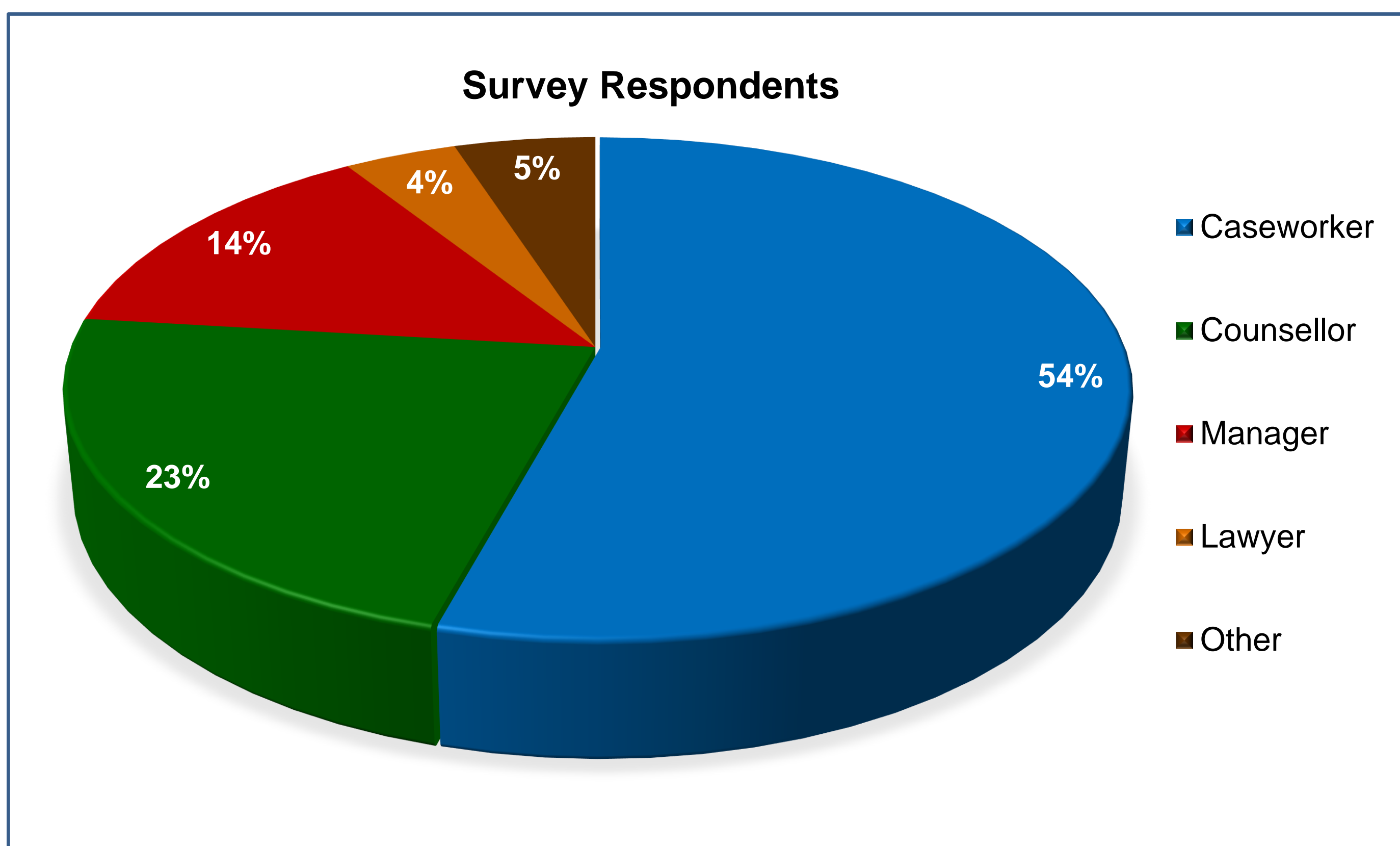


Fig. 1 Distribution of roles of survey respondents.

Results

59.5% of respondents reported feeling confident in working with negative pathway clients. 88.6% of respondents reported that it is important to have discussions with clients to prepare them for possible negative outcomes. 96.2% of respondents expressed interest in receiving specific training related to working with negative pathway clients.

96.25% of respondents believed it was important for counsellors, caseworkers and lawyers to collaborate when working with negative pathway clients as reflected in the response below:

“As legal service providers, we do not provide welfare or counselling support however we do address these issues and refer people to agencies who can assist. We are currently working in a Hub model where those services are all able to be provided in the one location so the referral and access to information and support is immediately available.”

Qualitative responses regarding the prioritisation of tasks to best support clients after a double negative outcome identified 3 key areas of importance.

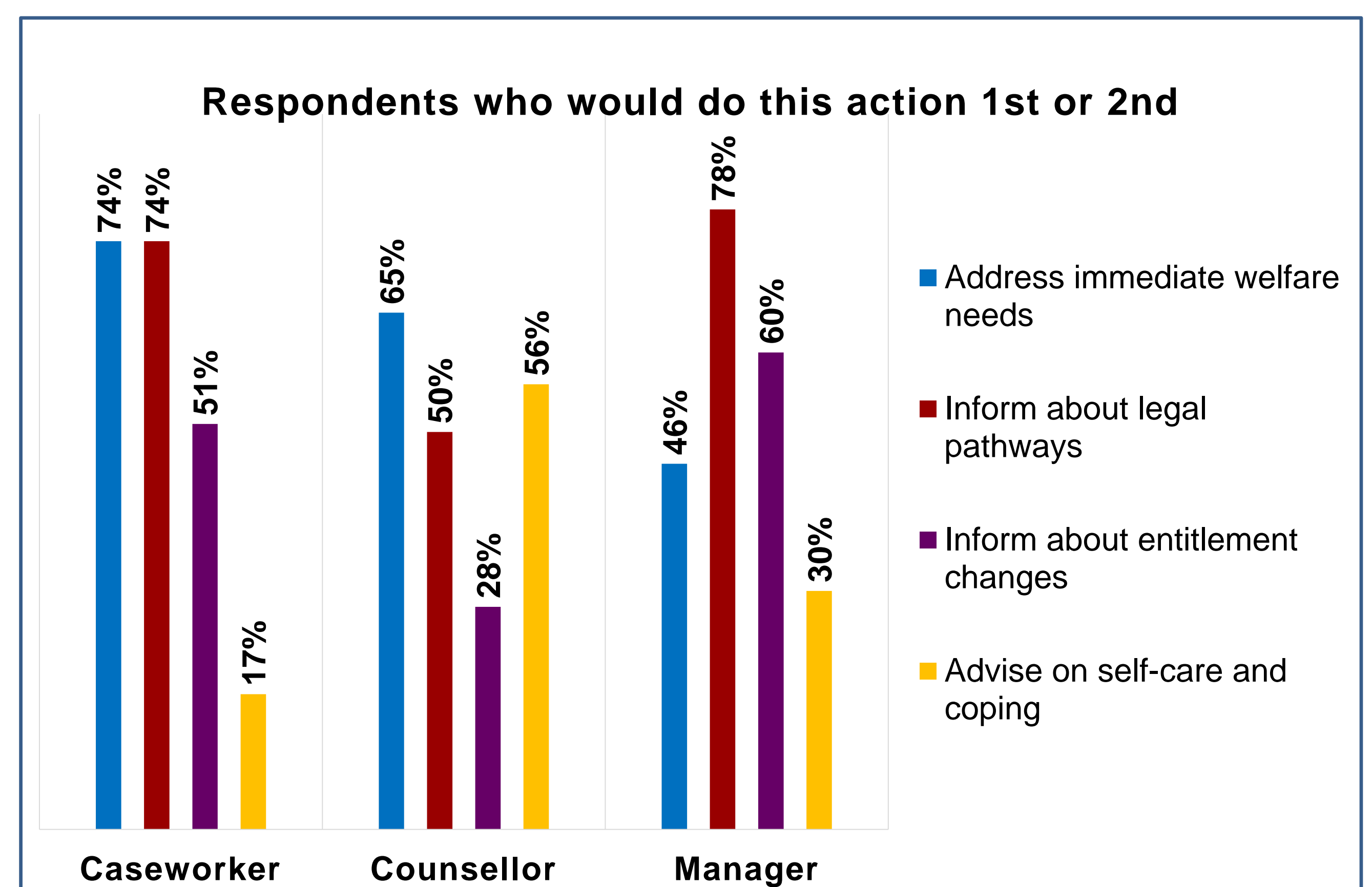


Fig. 2 Tasks indicated by respondents as 1st or 2nd priority for follow up after double negative outcome

Conclusion

The exploratory survey was well responded to by a diverse range of staff across the asylum seeker sector. However lawyers were under-represented. This resulted in the collection of a large amount of qualitative and quantitative data pertaining to how staff are currently working with negative pathway clients, not all of which could be displayed here.

Interestingly over half of the respondents reported feeling confident in working with negative pathway clients but also a majority indicated interest in further training in the area. A majority also agreed that it is important to prepare clients for a negative outcome but qualitative responses identified the potential challenges and/or disadvantages of such conversations.

The researchers will continue to analyse the data and plan to produce a written summary of the results to disseminate throughout the sector. It is hoped the data will inform future developments of a best practice approach to working with negative pathway clients as well as the provision of training and consultation for staff working with this cohort.