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Chair

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin

Standing Committee on the Status of Women

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• (0850)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Ms. Marie-Claude Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP)): Please take your seats. We are going to begin the meeting. I apologize for the five-minute delay.

Good morning, and welcome to the 47th meeting of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

The meeting will last only an hour. We will attend to committee business at the end. If you wouldn't mind staying an extra five minutes or so, it would be appreciated.

Today, we have Geoff Bowlby from Statistics Canada with us.

Welcome and thank you for contributing to our study on sexual harassment in the federal workplace. Without further ado, I'll hand the floor over to you.

Mr. Geoff Bowlby (Director, Special Surveys, Statistics Canada): Thank you very much.

[*English*]

Thank you to the committee for having me here today. My name is Geoff Bowlby. I'm the director of special surveys at Statistics Canada. I was the director responsible for the public service employee survey, and that's what we'll be talking about today.

The focus of my opening comments will be on the nature of the survey itself. There are a few numbers thrown in there, but the main purpose is to show you how we collected the information on harassment. I'll also show you a little information, that I'm not sure you were aware we had, on a similar concept of discrimination.

My opening statements come in the form of a presentation. I see you have copies of it. That's great. I have extra copies if some are needed.

What is the public service employee survey, or PSES? The PSES is a survey that provides the opportunity to give feedback on matters that directly affect employees. I'll talk a little bit later about the sorts of questions that were asked on the survey. It was conducted on behalf of the Office of Chief Human Resource Officer about a year ago, between August 29 and September 30.

The date of our release to departments was on January 26, 2012, so it was not that long ago that the information was made available to all departments. The results of the survey are used to measure employees' perception of the state of people management in their organization, to identify strengths and opportunities to guide

organizational planning and learning, and to contribute to the assessment of the organization's performance.

Who was surveyed? A lot of people. It was a very large survey, one of the largest that StatsCan undertakes. All employees working in 90 federal departments and agencies were surveyed. It was a census of all of those employees. That means that every single employee in those 90 organizations and agencies were surveyed. The organizations were the ones for which the Treasury Board is the employer, or organizations where the Treasury Board is not the employer but the organization wished to participate anyway. I'll give you an example of one of those organizations in which the Treasury Board is not the employer but wished to participate in any case. Canadian Revenue Agency is a good example of that. Statistics Canada's statistical operations arm is also another example of that. Those are two large parts of the federal public service for which the Treasury Board is not the employer but where the PSES was administered.

It was broadly administered. It's easier to talk about who was excluded from the survey than it is to talk about who was included. Excluded were ministers' exempt staff, employees on leave without pay, and employees on maternity, paternity, or parental leave, because we were targeting people who were at work at the time of the survey. As well, employees from one department who were on secondment to another were not included.

What types of questions were asked? There were a lot of questions asked. There were 98 questions on the current version of the survey. The survey is repeated every three years, by the way. It started back in 1999, so this iteration had some content that was on previous versions of the survey. Of the 98 questions, 79 were the same as in the previous cycles. That's important because if we want to compare over time, it's really only those questions that were consistent from one survey to the next that we can accurately compare over time.

Before the survey was conducted, StatsCan in its role as administrator of the survey took the questions from OCHRO, the Office of Chief Human Resource Officer, and tested those questions in focus groups. We ran a number of focus groups all across the national capital region in both English and in French to ensure that the questions were understandable by the employees we were targeting.

This is a paper version of the questionnaire, but it was rarely administered as a paper questionnaire.

●(0855)

Actually, 95% of the roughly 300,000 people we sent the questionnaire to received it and responded to us by electronic means, so we had e-mail addresses of every employee in the participating departments and we invited employees to respond to an electronic questionnaire by asking them through their e-mail address.

As I said earlier, it's a census of all employees. This is important because in a census there's no such thing as sample error. You are used to hearing poll results, no doubt, where there is a plus or minus 1% 19 times out of 20. That's the sample error. In this case, because it's a census and not a poll or a sample, there is no such thing as sample error.

There are other forms of error that can be introduced. We call that non-sample error. These are the errors that respondents themselves might make. Or Statistics Canada, in the processing of the information, might make a mistake. But those non-response or non-sample errors were kept to a minimum by using that focus group testing process that I described earlier to make sure that there weren't many errors, that respondents understood the questions and could answer them. As well, Statistics Canada was using a tried and proven type of processing of the information to create the database from all these various questionnaires.

The response rate was also very high. Of the roughly 300,000 employees who received the questionnaire, 72%, or 211,000 employees, returned the questionnaire. A 72% response rate on a survey of this type is a very high response rate. It exceeded our target. It was higher than we've ever had in a public service employee survey in the past. It's a higher response rate than any other known government employee survey. The U.K. runs a survey; the United States government runs a survey, and neither of those come anywhere close to a response rate of 72%. So employees were very engaged in the process and responded at a very high rate.

That's an overview of the survey itself. I want to talk to you now about what were the questions related to harassment, what were the questions related to harassment, and I want to talk to you as well about the questions related to discrimination, which I thought might be of use to the committee, given the similarity in concepts between harassment and discrimination.

I should have said earlier that the harassment and discrimination questions were part of a suite of questions, and if you have the presentation, I would go back to slide 4, where you can see the sorts of questions that were asked. The harassment and discrimination questions were near the end of the survey.

There were four questions related to harassment. Actually, the first is a statement. Because we are asking employees whether or not they perceived harassment, we needed to first define what harassment was for the employee.

The public service employee used the following definition of harassment. This is a definition that was provided to us by the client, by Treasury Board Secretariat: Harassment is any improper conduct by an individual, that is directed at and offensive to another person or persons in the workplace, and that the individual knew or ought reasonably to have known would cause offence or harm. It comprises any objectionable act, comment or display that demeans, belittles, or

causes personal humiliation or embarrassment, and any act of intimidation or threat. It includes harassment within the meaning of the Canadian Human Rights Act.

We asked the employees to read that definition before they answered any other questions. It would appear in an electronic questionnaire as a screen of its own. Then, after reading it, the employee would click a button that says "Next" to take them to the first question, which is the broadest question on the concept of harassment, and that is the employee's perception of harassment over the two previous years.

That is our step two. We ask employees to answer if they think they've been harassed: "After having read the definition of harassment, in the past two years, have you been the victim of harassment on the job?"

That is the question that's asked, and there are answer categories of never, once or twice, or more than twice. If you sum once or twice and more than twice, 29% of employees perceived harassment in the two previous years.

That's similar to what we recorded back in 2008 with the public service employee survey. It is the exact same number, in fact, 29%.

●(0900)

By the way, this is the first presentation of any data. You may know that if you go to the Treasury Board Secretariat website, you can see all this information. StatsCan administered the survey, gave the results over to the Treasury Board Secretariat, and they have posted it on their website.

[Translation]

The Chair: Sorry, I have to cut you off there. Your time is up. Thank you.

We will now move on to questions.

Ms. Truppe, you have seven minutes.

[English]

Mrs. Susan Truppe (London North Centre, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

That was a fast ten minutes. Thank you for coming today. We were looking forward to an opportunity to hear what you had to say about the survey. I'm glad you sent it ahead of time so we had a chance to look it over, since you didn't have an opportunity to finish it.

What was your involvement in the preparation of the *Women in Canada* report? Are you involved in identifying the issues and questions to ask, or is it limited to methodology and the conduct of the study?

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: The *Women in Canada* publication?

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Yes.

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: That's not under my responsibility. It's StatsCan's. So I'm not prepared to comment on that.

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Okay.

You said that you had a 72% response rate, which was very high. If that's the highest, higher even than in some other countries, what does that tell you about those who are responding? Does it tell you that they are really engaged, or does it tell you that they really want to provide feedback because there are a lot of problems with certain issues?

From your experience, what do you think about the 72%, besides the fact that they're engaged?

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: My interpretation is that it's probably a little bit of both. They are engaged. We had a strong communications program to make sure that all employees were aware that this questionnaire was in their inbox, so there was a lot of work from the deputy minister level down, in all the organizations, to make sure that employees responded, and as completely as possible.

The closer you get to 100%, the higher the quality of the estimates. There probably are some respondents who were more engaged as a result of the fact that they might have felt discouraged in the workplace. On the other hand, there might have been as many people who were excited to brag about their organization, which could counteract that effect.

So we don't know, but to sum up, I think certainly the engagement strategy we had was an effective one, and then employees themselves might feel some natural engagement as a result of different factors.

Mrs. Susan Truppe: It is a good stat, 72%, for sure.

One of the other stats I read in there was that of the 29% who had harassment issues, 70%, I think it said, felt that it was done by people in authority. What does the survey tell you about the fear of reprisal and the opinions on how these issues are addressed by management?

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: There is a separate question that I didn't present here. I didn't actually prepare any data. I can provide it to the committee later, but in one of the other sections of the survey, we asked whether employees feel that they can comment without fear of reprisal. Let me give you the exact wording, because the wording is important: "I feel I can initiate a formal recourse process (grievance, complaint, appeal, etc.) without fear of reprisal." That's question 43 on the survey. Employees were asked to rank that from one to five, one being strongly agree and five being strongly disagree.

So we have that sort of information from the public service employee survey.

• (0905)

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Is there an answer with that one? Do you have that with you?

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: I don't have it with me, I'm sorry.

Mrs. Susan Truppe: And I'm sure you don't remember.

But that's good to know. At least that was on there too.

Are you aware of comparable surveys done in the private sector? Is there anything else that is as extensive as what you do at Stats Canada?

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: No, I don't know. There probably are. I don't know what they might be, what content they might have.

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Your letter to the clerk states that Stats Canada does not have statistical information on sexual harassment in the workplace, but we know from the 1993 Stats Canada study of violence against women that young women, 18 to 24 years old, were more likely to have experienced sexual harassment in the workplace. These statistics are not specific to the federal workplace but they're still important.

I understand that the 1993 survey of violence against women was a one-time-only survey. How does Stats Canada determine that they're going to do a survey like that, and is there a possibility of doing another survey?

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: There absolutely is a possibility that we could do another survey. The role of my part of StatsCan is to respond to the demands for statistics within federal government departments. We have a core program of statistics that's funded through our base funding for StatsCan. That would be things like the census and the national accounts, and various other surveys.

But then there is a need for ad hoc, one-time, occasional surveys that are funded from either federal, usually, or sometimes provincial or territorial governments. They'll fund us to do a survey on their behalf. The PSES is an example of that, actually, where it's cost-recovered. They pay StatsCan to provide the services of the survey.

So if any department needs any information on violence against women, we have the capacity to develop and administer a survey on that topic.

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Within those departments?

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: No, it could be within the general population. It could be within the federal government workplace.

Mrs. Susan Truppe: It could be any department. Okay.

In the other questions on the survey, that we don't have here, is there anything that says an age group? Is there an age group like 18 to 24, or over 50, or under 50, of the ones who felt harassed?

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: I don't have the stats before me, but there's that website I was referring to earlier. The easiest way to find it is to google "PSES results 2011". The top link will take you to it.

You can see the PSES results for the public service, but you can also see them by organization, as long as the organization's large enough, and by demographic group. So you can see a break by gender, by age group, by occupational group within the organization.

Mrs. Susan Truppe: I was just wondering if there was an age group on there.

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: There is, yes.

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Great. Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

We now move to the official opposition.

Ms. Hassainia, you may go ahead for seven minutes.

Mrs. Sana Hassainia (Verchères—Les Patriotes, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair. I will be sharing my time with my colleague.

Good morning. We noticed that the survey questions did not provide any details on the type of harassment public servants encountered.

So I would like to know how the survey questions were selected, and how we can obtain more detailed information on the type of harassment public servants are subjected to.

[English]

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: It's a very good question, and thank you for asking it. It's one of the things I wanted to address during the presentation.

The type of harassment is not asked in the 2011 PSES. It has not been asked in previous versions of the survey as well, although it was tested as possible content when we were preparing for the 2008 survey. This focus group testing that I described earlier is a process that we engage in at any time we run a survey.

That focus group testing showed that we could actually measure type of harassment. We proved then that we could do it.

The concern at the time was that any addition of any new questions could affect the time series, the comparability of the data from one year to the next. So the client at that time decided that they didn't want to risk that break in the series, in the history, with the addition of the type of harassment questions.

So the short answer is, yes, it could be done, and we would do it if it was asked of us by the client. But it hasn't been done for that reason: because we were concerned that the introduction of any questions could affect the other questions in that suite of questions on harassment.

There are two caveats to the fact that we did not ask it in the 2011 survey. We, in fact, did for one department, and that was the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, ACOA. We had a capacity to add up to five questions for any department that had department-specific concerns they wanted us to ask on the survey, and 13 departments said they were interested in such services. ACOA focused their five questions on the issue of harassment and discrimination within that organization.

A similar approach was taken in 2005 when the Public Service Commission had its supplementary questions for their organizations that were tagged with the public service employees union.

● (0910)

[Translation]

Mrs. Sana Hassainia: Thank you.

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: My pleasure.

[English]

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Thank you very much.

It was interesting to note that some departments have seen this as an important area to focus on. Certainly in this committee there is no doubt that we view sexual harassment as a very serious issue. We're very challenged by the fact that there is no documentation of how much sexual harassment takes place.

One of the things we've heard from other witnesses is that looking at the question of culture and looking at hiring practices, the more

hierarchical the organization, the more chances there are for harassment. It really brings us to the point of asking why this information isn't there, as well as information to assess the kind of culture that exists. We often talk about it being intangible, but with the consideration of how many women exist in decision-making positions or what takes place during hiring to enforce these kinds of messages, these are things that can be measured. When they're not, it becomes a challenge to be able to find a solution to a problem that obviously does exist.

Mr. Bowlby, I want to thank you very much for sharing this. One of the areas that interest me is also the question of, in times of workplace adjustment, the kinds of stresses that are put on employees, managers, offices, and departments and whether that creates more friction in the workplace. It's a question that is very critical, I think, to a lot of people. Also, is that a factor in people refraining from coming forward with allegations of harassment for fear of perhaps losing their job even faster or being marginalized at a very difficult time?

We're keen to see particular attention to the current situation where we have seen some real cuts to the public service and how that might affect women, women dealing with harassment.

If I can turn to the committee, I think that's a very important part of where we need to be going. I think we need a serious understanding of what is before us in terms of the cuts to the public service particularly, but also more generally, the impact of current budget decisions on the status of women in Canada.

With 48 hours' notice, I would like to verbally propose a motion:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Committee invite the Minister for Status of Women Canada to appear, no later than Thursday, November 22, 2012, to discuss the 2012 Budget and the 2012-2013 Report on Plans and Priorities for Status of Women Canada; that the Minister's opening statement not exceed ten (10) minutes; and that the Minister's appearance be televised.

In presenting this, I would also like to present this on the record. My colleague Mme Francoise Boivan, on March 14, 2012, asked the minister, "Can we expect to see you back soon, after the budget is tabled, at least for one session, in order to see what is in store for the Status of Women Canada's budget 2012-2013?", to which the honourable minister responded, "Sure, I would be happy to come back. Of course the votes are not in any of our control. I wish we had more time today. I would be happy to come back."

I believe we would be remiss to not have the minister speak to not just one omnibus bill budget bill but two, and the impact on the status of women in Canada. After all, what is this committee actually doing? Many of our committees do hear from ministers, and unfortunately ours has been one that has not heard from a minister in a very long time.

Thank you.

● (0915)

[Translation]

The Chair: I am going to have to stop you there. Your time is up, Ms. Ashton.

Ms. Truppe, your turn.

[English]

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Sorry, was that a motion or a...?

A voice: A statement.

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Was that a motion or a statement?

Sorry: what was that?

[Translation]

The Chair: Was that a motion, Ms. Ashton?

[English]

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Is it just notice, or is it a motion?

Ms. Niki Ashton: I used the word “motion”—

Mrs. Susan Truppe: It is a motion?

A voice: Yes.

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Then we'd better go in camera.

We'll have to go in camera and excuse the witness again.

[Translation]

The Chair: Yes. Ms. Ashton has confirmed it was a motion.

[English]

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Why would you go in camera?

Mrs. Susan Truppe: It's committee business.

Ms. Niki Ashton: It's a notice of 48 hours, a verbal notice of motion.

Mrs. Susan Truppe: Okay, so it's a notice.

That's what I was asking, if it was a notice or a motion.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Well, it's a notice of motion.

I was asked if it was a statement. It was not a statement.

Mrs. Susan Truppe: So it's a notice.

Okay.

[Translation]

The Chair: So it was a notice of motion. We'll deal with it at another meeting during committee business.

It is now over to Ms. O'Neill Gordon. You have seven minutes.

[English]

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon (Miramichi, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to welcome the witness. Thank you for taking time to be with us. Your presentation gave us lots of important facts, and it's great to hear that the employees are given the opportunity to express their concerns. That's a key concern of ours as well.

I know you have a lot to do with all of this taking place. Have you been involved in the preparation of the PSE survey? What would be your involvement with the questions and things like that?

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: Was Statistics Canada involved in the preparation of the questions for the 2011 version?

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon: Yes.

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: Yes, we were. The way it works is that the client provides us with the draft questions. The client in this case was the Office of the Chief Human Resource Officer. So they're really driving the content. That's their job. Our job is to make sure that the questions are clear and that the respondents to the survey can answer those questions.

We worked with OCHRO to focus-group the questions and make sure they were put into this e-questionnaire or the paper questionnaire that we administer. We're involved to that degree. We're not the ultimate determiner of the questions. We will tell a client if one of the questions is not going to work. As we field it, we will tell the client that we don't think we should be putting it on the questionnaire. It's OCHRO who is the owner of these questions and the one who supplied the questions to us initially.

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon: Do you ever see a need to change the questions? What would make you or them think that a question is not really good, or that it should be changed to another way of asking it?

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: Actually, if it's a question that is proposed on a previous survey, we might look at the response to that question on previous surveys. If there was a high number of blank responses to the question, it's an indicator that the employees didn't understand that question enough to answer it. If they checked off “not applicable”, when the question could have been applicable to them, that's the first clue.

Then, too, we would engage in a focus group. It'd be in a room with about as many people as there are here today, and we would propose different versions of the question on a screen. This is one technique. The focus group might say, “I think I understand this question better than question two, so I suggest you go with that first question”. That's a brief description of how the focus-group process works and how we would help determine what is a good or bad question.

● (0920)

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon: So a lot of thought is put into the questions of the survey, I would say.

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: Absolutely.

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon: It gives the employees a chance to express themselves and show their need and how they feel. I'm glad to hear you say that.

Has the public service employee survey ever covered crown corporations or any other federally regulated workplaces?

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: That's a very good question, and I don't have a good answer for it. Has it “ever”?

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon: Yes.

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: I don't know. I'm not an expert in the status of the organizations, whether or not they're a crown corporation. We surveyed some agencies and parts of the federal workplace that are not part of the core federal public service. I gave you the example of CRA, StatsCan's statistical operations. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, for example, was not a part of this survey. The postal service was not a part of this survey. So those crown corporations were not in the scope of the survey.

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon: We see that much of the report deals with women and their work. Have you ever looked at sexual harassment in the workplace and not just the work itself? I mean the surroundings, things like that.

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: The public service employee survey focuses strictly on the experiences of employees in the workplace. It doesn't ask about anything else. It doesn't have any specific questions on sexual harassment. The harassment information that we collect is a broader concept of harassment than sexual harassment, and it's only for the federal public workplace. Any harassment experience that an employee might have at a restaurant or at home is not collected in this. It's only what they would experience in the workplace.

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon: What do the survey results tell us about fear of being punished or chastised, and opinions on how these issues are addressed by management?

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: On the first part about fear of reprisal, there is a question related to that. It's not specific to harassment, but it is more generally about the recourse process.

I'm sorry, what was the second part?

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon: How they're addressed by management.

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: There is a question on satisfaction—i.e., does the employee feel satisfied with the way that management is handling harassment? There is also a question on satisfaction about discrimination.

In both of those situations, 72% of employees felt strongly or somewhat agreed that their agency works hard to create a workplace that prevents harassment.

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon: That's good to hear—really good.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Ms. Bennett, it is your turn.

You have seven minutes. Go ahead.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Thank you.

[*English*]

Just to be clear, the military personnel from the Canadian Forces were included?

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: No, they weren't. The civil service within DND was.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: What about the non-civilian personnel within the RCMP?

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: Yes, both the civil service of the RCMP and the other part of the RCMP were surveyed. That's because they decided that they wanted to do that.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Of the 28% who didn't respond, were they evenly divided across all departments or were there certain departments that were less likely to respond?

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: It certainly wasn't perfectly even. We were happier with some response rates in some departments than we were with others. We were trying to get everybody up to that 70%-plus mark. I don't have them in front of me.

We were tracking it as we were going through the survey and putting extra effort in the collection of this information, where we thought there might be an issue with low response.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Could you provide this committee with the disaggregated data for which departments? It could be that some responded at 99% and some at 50%. I think that would be of great interest to this committee.

• (0925)

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: Absolutely.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Can you just tell us offhand which seemed to be the departments with a lower response rate?

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: It wasn't StatsCan.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: We were quite worried that we would—

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: You should be proud about that.

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: Yes. We had to make sure that we were the leader in the response rate, as did Treasury Board Secretariat.

Other than that anecdote, I can't remember.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: That was the only harassment that happened in your department, to fill out the friggling survey.

In more modern workplace lingo, people are avoiding the words “harassment” and “discrimination” because people find it quite a serious accusation. I think people such as Nora Spinks, and the Vanier Institute of the Family, are much more comfortable asking people to describe a respectful workplace, or whether they think their workplace is respectful, or is, as you've said in your other questions, moving to try to remedy these things in terms of “respectful” or “non-respectful”.

In terms of actually using the words “harassment” and “discrimination”, were there experts who advised you to continue on that way, or would there be an interest in maybe doing a second survey that prodded a little bit more gently the real existence or non-existence of a respectful workplace?

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: It's a very good question. You know, this is what statisticians do: we try to figure out what is the best way to measure a concept. Harassment is not an easy concept to try to measure.

Our focus-group testing suggested that the approach that we took was one that could be responded to by respondents. We would have shown them the description of harassment, the definition of harassment that I read to you, and asked them if they understood the definition. Then the following questions that related to that definition were responsible by the respondent.

Given that, I don't think we looked at the alternative measurement of the concept of harassment that you suggest. It's not something that we couldn't entertain in the future. We have to be careful, though. If we whole-scale replace the way that we've measured in the past with a new way of measuring, you aren't going to be able to compare the 29% that we got with this to the survey in the future.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: You would have to do both.

I guess there are interesting articles now, and poems and everything, around bullying in the workplace. Is there any data on whether if you use the word "bullying" you might get different numbers than if you use the word "harassment"?

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: You certainly would. I can't say to what degree you would get a different answer. Any time you change the wording in any way and move it from a question on bullying to a question on harassment, you would see some people who interpret bullying as something different from harassment. Therefore, they would respond to the question differently.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Were you able to find out whether it seemed to be about sex or race or religion in terms of the discrimination? Do you know whether it seemed to be gender-specific or religious or race-specific, in terms of discrimination?

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: No. Other than the information we collected at ACOA and what we did in the past, in 2005, at the Public Service Commission, we have no information on the type of harassment that has taken place, whether it be sexual harassment, age-related, or any other sort of harassment. We didn't collect that.

As I was saying earlier, it's not that we couldn't. We believe that we could, because we tested those sorts of questions back in 2005, and it showed that employees in the federal government could give us good answers.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: In previous surveys of the public service, people with disabilities, people whose first language is not the culture of that particular department, there have been many things identified as specific to certain departments.

Are you able to help departments in knowing which people feel particularly uncomfortable or feel that they are not in a respectful workplace?

• (0930)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: You have 30 seconds left.

[*English*]

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: Yes. If you go to the website, there is information that shows a breakout of all the information, within the departments that are large enough, by age, by sex, and by visible minority status. That is very helpful information for the department trying to understand the issue of harassment in that workplace and who is affected more than others.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now begin the second round of questions.

Ms. Young, you have five minutes.

[*English*]

Ms. Wai Young (Vancouver South, CPC): Thank you so much for being here today. Your study is extremely interesting to me. I have a couple of questions.

First, did you compare our results with other countries in terms of their public civil servants and such surveys? Are we sort of on par and within the parameters of normality, or are we on one scale or the other of extremes? That's my first question.

Second, I note here that respondents said that they felt that members of the public were harassing them 31% of the time. I found that very interesting, and wondered if there was any kind of follow-up discussion or something for next year's survey. What does one do with that? I mean, it's a work environment. If you are providing service to members of the public, then obviously that has an impact. But it's not your colleagues or the actual public service itself harassing you.

The other thing I wanted to ask was what the context of the survey was. You've taken the survey. You've captured your responses. Some of us have worked in various work situations, whether they be with the federal service or not. In my case, I worked for the federal government and provincial governments, etc., in my past life. Whenever you work in a bureaucracy, or anywhere else, for that matter, there are some employees who can be disgruntled employees or just unhappy people. How do you put that in the context of the respondents? Has that been looked at? Do you correlate your figures, your data, and your responses with there maybe being 10% of public civil servants who are vexatious complainants or whatever? I don't know. That's why I'm asking the question.

Thank you.

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: On your last question, I think what the PSES actually gives us is the context. Without the information from the public services employee survey, you really don't know how happy or unhappy employees are within any given department. So it sets the context.

Ms. Wai Young: Yes, but do you correlate that with another context? If those people are unhappy, they're going to be unhappy anywhere—or everywhere, if you know what I mean.

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: Some departments using this data might choose to do that. StatsCan doesn't.

Ms. Wai Young: Okay.

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: We just provide the results of the survey itself.

I guess that leads to your second question, the one about harassment that's perceived from the public, and what you do with that information.

What each department does with it is up to each department to respond to, but a not untypical process is to take these numbers and then to have sort of a shop floor discussion with your employees. And the manager of that area can say, this is what I found within our part of the organization and this is what the PSES tells us about our unit.

We provide the data within departments right down to the organizational unit within that department.

Ms. Wai Young: Maybe in the interest of time I can be a bit more specific with my question.

For example, if my job is a complaints clerk, a front-line complaints clerk at some government office, then obviously I'm going to be feeling probably fairly harassed at the end of the day, because that is my job. Do you see what I mean? Those figures, and those statistics, then, are going to show up in your survey of course because these people feel harassed—31%, it says here. Maybe that will spill over, because it's a difficult job; don't get me wrong, we know it's a difficult job. There's probably a high turnover rate or whatever.

My point around putting it into context is that these are various good figures to have. Yes, you're right, it's good to have the survey and get that information. But without putting it into that kind of context and say, okay, you know, we can see why you would feel harassed in this job....

I'm understanding what you're saying, that, yes, you can get down to the unit level, absolutely, but are you saying then that the managers do or do not wrap programs around it, or provide counselling or support, etc.? Maybe some of those jobs are just difficult jobs, and what does one do with that?

• (0935)

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: It's up to the manager. If in this example you've got someone who is in charge of a complaints department who sees that the results from the survey show that there's a high degree of harassment within that part of the organization, they might discount that and say that this is the way the employees feel as a result of the nature of their job. Or they may not. They may see this as a problem and—

[Translation]

The Chair: I apologize, but I must cut you off. Ms. Young's time is up. Thank you.

It is now Ms. Day's turn.

You have five minutes.

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Thank you.

Continuing along the same lines as Ms. Young, I would like to know, from your statistics, how many people handle complaints, and how many of those say they feel harassed?

[English]

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: No, we didn't ask that specifically on the survey. "Do you deal with complaints on a regular basis?": that could be an example of a question that we could ask, but we didn't.

You could get some clues from the survey, however. We did collect the information by department, by organizational unit, and by group and level of the employee. If you are in an organization that has a public face and you know what part of that organization has that public face, you could see, if you're responsible for that area—

[Translation]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: On the flip side, then, you can say how many people—it appears on the site—handle complaints within a department. Out of 72,000 people, there has to be some percentage.

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: There aren't exact figures on that, but the survey does have elements that can give us an idea of how many people are responsible for complaints of that nature.

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: Thank you.

The results are broken down by age and gender, and by other routine statistical categories. But was a gender-based analysis done?

[English]

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: Each department was provided with an analytical report. One was actually done by StatsCan but not as a part of my unit. I administer the survey. There is an analytical part of StatsCan that produced very nice reports for each department, and reports on each section of the survey. Each department would have received a report, for example, that showed their statistic on harassment.

I can't tell you exactly to what degree that information might have been cross-classified in the analysis with age or gender or any other factor that it could be, but it's certainly possible to produce those sorts of data.

[Translation]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: In response to a colleague's question, you said that military personnel were excluded from the survey.

Were other groups excluded as well, RCMP members, for example?

[English]

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: No, they were not excluded. The RCMP was included fully in the survey.

[Translation]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: Any other exclusions?

[English]

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: The sorts of exclusions were people who were not at work during the time the survey was being run, people who are ministers' exempt staff, contractors working on behalf of the department within a department's premises. Those are the sorts of exclusions from the survey. It was quite broad in its targeting of employees within the federal government.

As I mentioned earlier, our definition of what was a department or agency did not include some of the crown corporations, for example. Really, the main focus was on the organizations where Treasury Board is the employer, as defined in the Financial Administration Act, schedules 1 and 4.

• (0940)

[Translation]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: Thank you. We see that—

The Chair: One minute left, Ms. Day.

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: Thank you.

Since the short-form, not the long-form, census is now used, it calls into question Statistics Canada's figures. You said this was an internal survey. However, the budget cuts have become a real cause for concern among the public, especially when it comes to the quality of the data collected in order to fully understand the issues facing Canadians and as regards the advancement of knowledge.

Even though the internal survey of public servants doesn't fall within the scope of the census, I would like to know your opinion on the statistical risks associated with the significant decrease in funding for your activities and the risks directly tied to your activities.

[English]

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: On this particular survey there was no cut to funding from past cycles. It was sufficiently funded to run the census that I described. It will be up to the government to decide whether or not it wants to fund the next cycle in 2014, but the indication I have right now is that the client is very keen on running the survey once again in 2014.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now go to Ms. James.

You have five minutes.

[English]

Ms. Roxanne James (Scarborough Centre, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

May I ask how long I have?

The Chair: Five minutes.

Ms. Roxanne James: Thank you.

I have one particular question, and a number of my colleagues have touched on it. I've been trying to listen, but I'm not sure whether it was asked in its entirety. I know Ms. O'Neill Gordon asked whether there was a trend with areas that were left blank. You responded to that. My colleague across the way, the Honourable Madam Bennett, asked questions about departments, etc. But I am wondering if there was a trend with responses—so the numbers that were received or not received back—with regard to gender and also regions or areas within Canada.

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: Generally, no. We did look at the public service as a whole and how well distributed the responses were, and we saw no what would we call “risk of bias” in the data.

You would have a problem, to use an extreme example, where no women answered the survey and it was all done by men. You would only get the perceptions of men. You wouldn't get the perceptions of the whole of the public service.

We did not find that. We found our response to the survey to be proportional to what we knew were the characteristics of the public service.

Ms. Roxanne James: Of the 300,000 employees that you sent the survey to, 211,000 responded, and there was nothing that stood out as being an issue in one particular area or department or region.

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: Absolutely not.

Ms. Roxanne James: Okay. Thank you.

My next question has to do with regard to the statistical information you provided on.... I believe it's on page 8 of the handout. Here's the question: “My department or agency works hard to create a workplace that prevents harassment.” There was also a question similar to that on discrimination. The percentages returned were 72% strongly agreed that was the case, and 77% strongly agreed that was the case.

Has this question been asked in the most recent three-year cycles?

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: Yes. It was introduced in 2002, so we have information for 2002, 2005, 2008, and 2011, which is four cycles of the survey.

Ms. Roxanne James: I'm most interested in the one about preventing harassment, because hopefully sexual harassment would be included in those responses.

Could you tell me if there's been any trend with the percentages getting better, where employees feel that the departments support them and provide the proper mechanisms in place, or are the trends getting worse?

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: I don't have that in front of me. We could pull that information for you, and for the committee, and provide it to you very shortly.

Ms. Roxanne James: Thank you.

Could I ask the clerk to make sure that we do obtain that information? Thank you.

Another question I have is really a point of clarification. One of the answers that someone could tick off to a question was “Individuals for whom I have custodial responsibility”.

Could you explain what that actually means and what type of employee that would pertain to?

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: It doesn't apply to most employees of the federal public service, but if you worked, for example, at correctional services and you were the custodian for the prisoners within the facility, then you might experience some harassment from those for whom you are the custodian. That's the sort of employee who might be able to respond yes or no to that. Many people would say it's not applicable to them.

• (0945)

Ms. Roxanne James: I was curious to have an example of that, because I was trying to think of where that might apply. In the example you've given, you could see how there may be some sort of harassment in that particular situation, so that number does not surprise me at all.

I apologize if this next question has been asked—

[Translation]

The Chair: I just want to tell you that you have one minute left.

[English]

Ms. Roxanne James: One minute? Okay.

Very quickly, of the 29% who perceived that there was harassment—I think I heard you talk about this—did you say that there was no clear split between gender on that particular answer, or is that something, again, that you can tell us? For instance, in terms of those who responded, were 25% female, 14% male...?

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: I did bring that with me. I haven't stated it yet. The split was 31% for women and 25% for men.

Ms. Roxanne James: I'm actually surprised that the numbers are relatively even there. Thank you for that.

Very quickly, when we talk about harassment, I see your definition. I sometimes have difficulty with this, because one person may perceive harassment whereas another individual does not perceive it as harassment, and so forth. For me, I have very thick skin. Something that my colleague may perceive as being offensive would just roll off my back.

When we do statistical information and surveys like this, how do we determine whether it may be a real issue for someone but trivial to someone else?

[Translation]

The Chair: Ms. James, you are out of time.

[English]

Ms. Roxanne James: Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you. That brings our meeting today to a close.

A few members of the committee asked you for some information in writing. Madam Clerk will follow up with you on that.

Thank you kindly for joining us today, and enjoy the rest of your day.

Mr. Geoff Bowlby: Thank you.

The Chair: We will now proceed with committee business. So I will suspend the meeting for a few minutes.

Ms. James, did you have a question?

[English]

Ms. Roxanne James: I only wanted to make sure that we were going in camera for committee business.

[Translation]

The Chair: Yes, that is why I am suspending the meeting.

[The committee continued in camera]

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