BALANCING CAREGIVING AND WORK
A COSWL Survey of Librarians and Library Support Staff

Women comprise 46% of the total U.S. workforce but 61% of caregivers. More than half of working caregivers say they have to go into work late and leave early or take time off during the day to provide care for children, parents, spouses, other relatives, or non-family members.

COSWL – the ALA Committee on the Status of Women in Librarianship – is launching a campaign at the 2008 ALA Annual Conference in Anaheim to raise awareness of caregiving issues and the effect of caregiving responsibilities on the lives, work, family, and health of many librarians and library support staff. As part of this campaign, COSWL created a brief survey about caregiving in order to identify issues that COSWL will be working on the next few years.

The Balancing Caregiving and Work Survey is designed to elicit descriptive information about library employees' experiences of providing care as they relate to their work life. It consists of ten multiple-choice and open-ended questions about caregiving responsibilities and eight demographic questions. The open-ended questions ask respondents to describe briefly their caregiving experiences, challenges encountered both personally and professionally, the most difficult issues faced at work, kinds of assistance provided by their employers, additional assistance that could be provided but is not available, and “anything else” they would like to describe about their experience as a caregiver.

The survey was distributed to the ALA membership through ALA unit email lists and announced on the COSWL Cause blog on Monday, June 2, 2008. Both male and female caregivers were invited to complete the survey. Within a week over 1,000 people had responded. By June 20, 1,451 persons started the survey and 1,045 had completed it. Of these, 397 respondents (38%) provided contact information for follow up. This immediate response to the survey suggests that caregiving is a critical issue of concern for ALA members.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Preliminary findings as of June 20, 2008, of the multiple-choice questions are presented below. The COSWL team has not yet reviewed the survey's open-ended responses. Because respondents are self selected, the survey does not measure incidence of caregiving responsibilities, and findings cannot be generalized to all library employees or ALA members.

Respondents' caregiving experiences centered on caring for their child/children under 18 years (57%) or caring for an elderly parent/other elderly relative (56%). Other responses included caring for other relatives (12%); child/children with a disability, serious illness, or injury (8%); adult with a disability (8%); or friend or neighbor (4%).

Demographics show that the majority of respondents (60%) work in academic libraries, are librarians (79%) rather than support staff (14%), work full time (91%), are non-Hispanic (96%), and white (88%). Not surprisingly, 96% are women, much higher than the percentage of librarians in the workforce.

YOU CAN PARTICIPATE IN THE COSWL SURVEY

The COSWL Balancing Caregiving and Work survey is still open. If you are currently a caregiver, have been a caregiver within the past ten years, or anticipate caregiving responsibilities in the future, please complete the COSWL survey.

http://snipurl.com/coswlsurvey

For more information about the COSWL survey, contact COSWL member Sharyn Ladner, sladner@miami.edu.