Rebuilding Professional Lives: Immigrant Professionals Working In The Ontario Settlement Sector

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Research Question

- News: Immigrants and refugees lack access to professions and trades in Canada!
- What do internationally trained professionals (ITPs) do when they do not get to practise their professions in Canada?
- Three options await this group of ITPs: exit, de-professionalization, and re-professionalization.

Research Question

- **Exit:** They may return to their countries of origin or move to a third country for professional pursuit.
- **De-professionalization:** Many ITPs experience de-professionalization through unemployment or work which does not require any professional skills set.
- **Re-professionalization:** They may acquire a new profession which may or may not be related to their primary profession. This option is the “next best thing” to practice in the primary profession.

Research Question

- Settlement work is a second profession for many ITPs in Canada.
- Immigrant and refugee professionals practising settlement work are an under-researched population.
- What are the individual motives and “systemic” forces underlying the employment of ITPs in the immigrant- and refugee-serving settlement sector?

Research Design

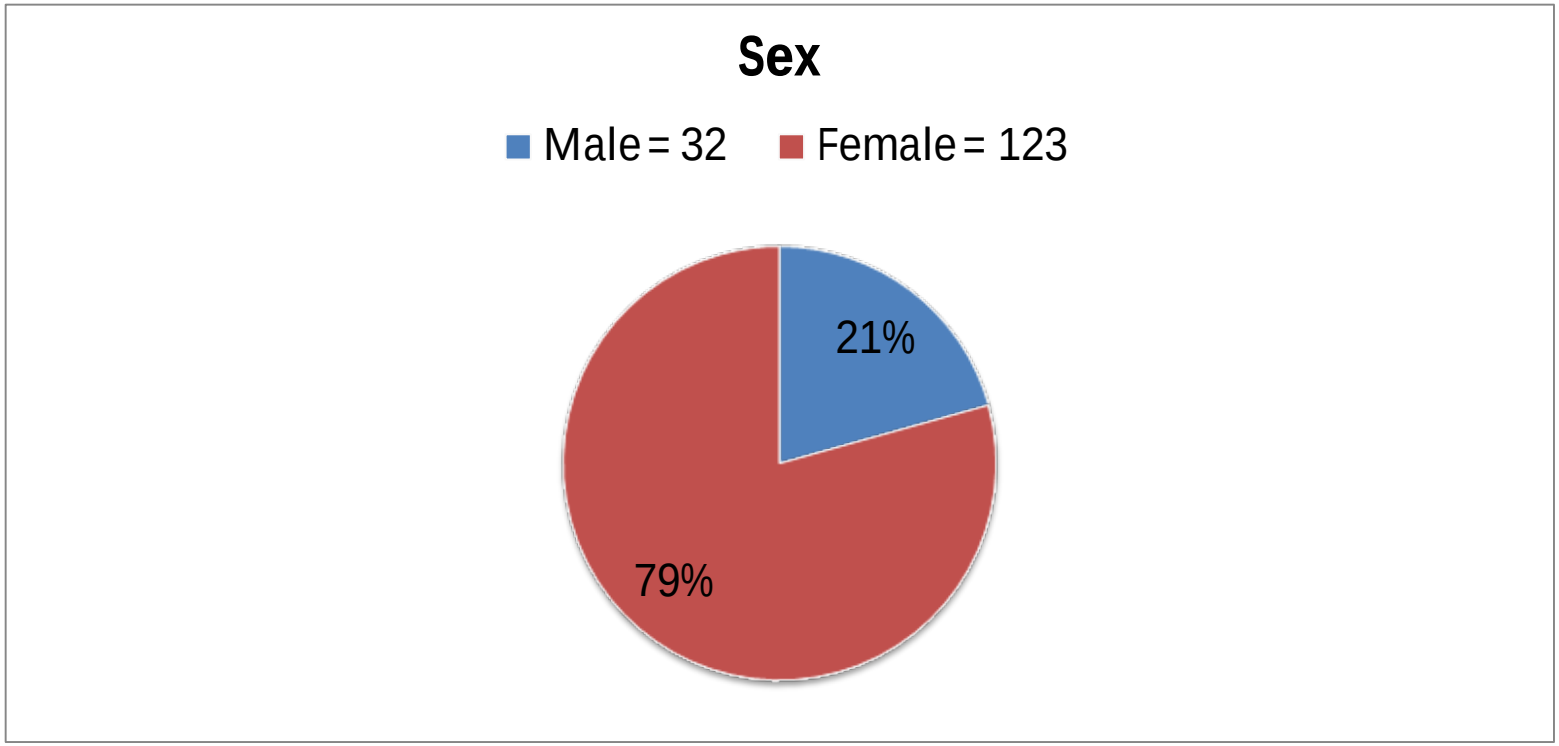
- A study of Ontario settlement workers who are trained abroad in areas other than settlement work.
- In collaboration with the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI) and with funding from CERIS – The Ontario Metropolis Centre.
- An online survey (August-November 2009) targeting the employees of OCASI member agencies.
  - Of the 228 responses to the online survey, 155 were included in the analysis and the rest were excluded for various reasons.

Research Design

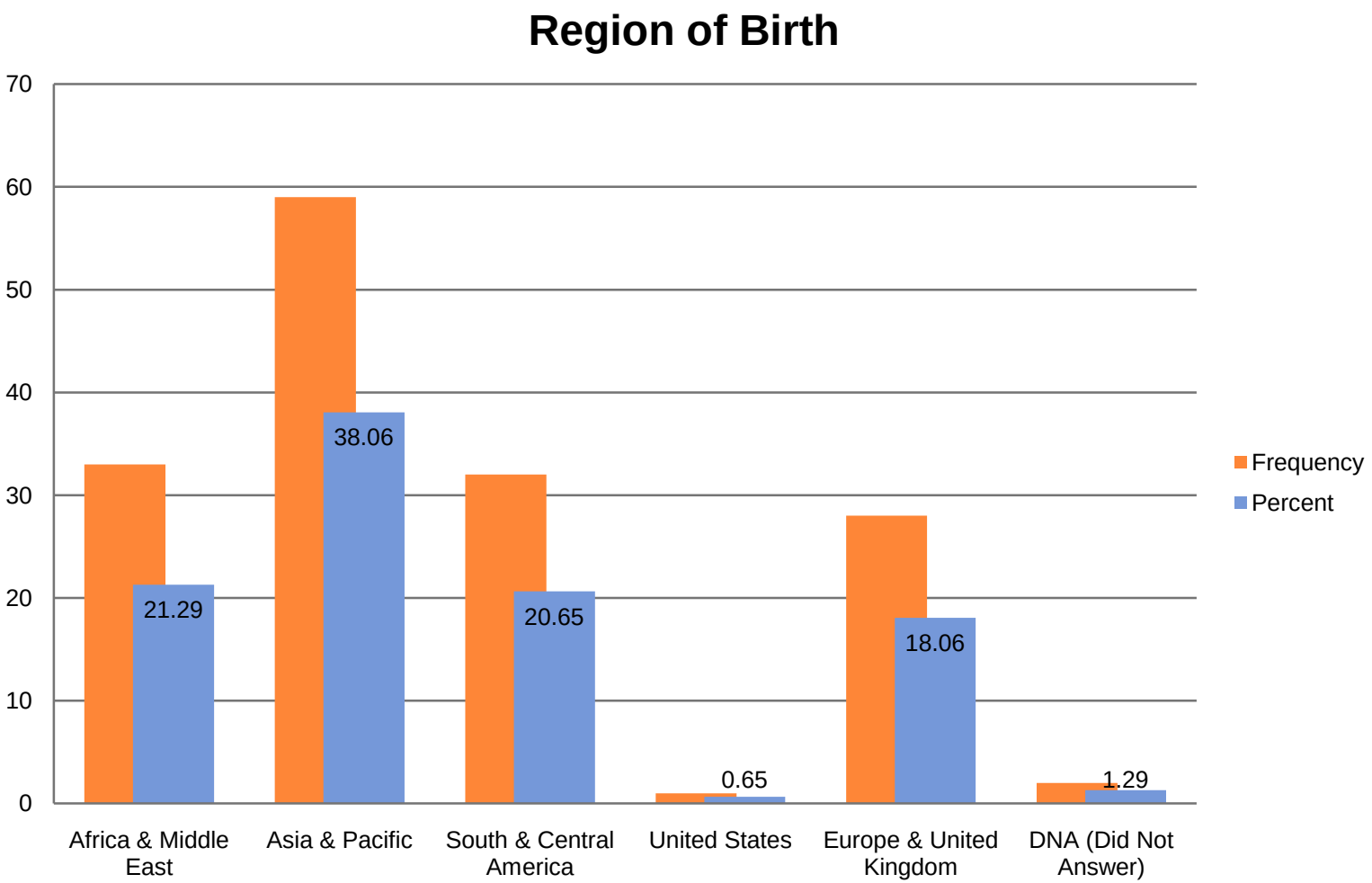
- A caveat: Our online survey is not based on a representative sample of the internationally trained labour force in the Ontario settlement sector.

- In-depth interviews with employees holding a variety of positions, including those who make hiring decisions, at these agencies (November 2009-March 2010).
  - Nineteen in-depth interviews were conducted among those who responded to the online survey and six, with agency staff in a managing/directing position.

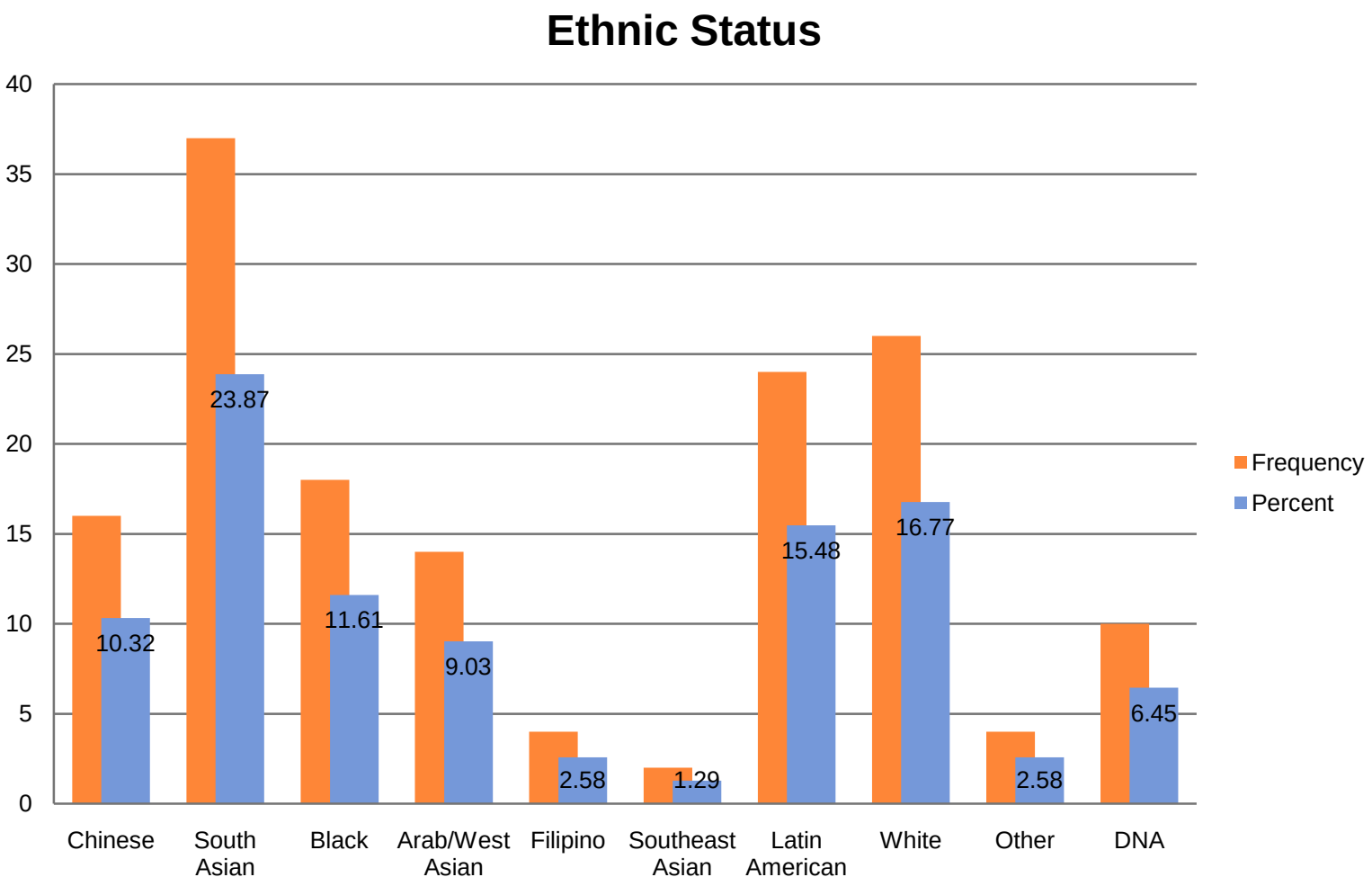
Findings



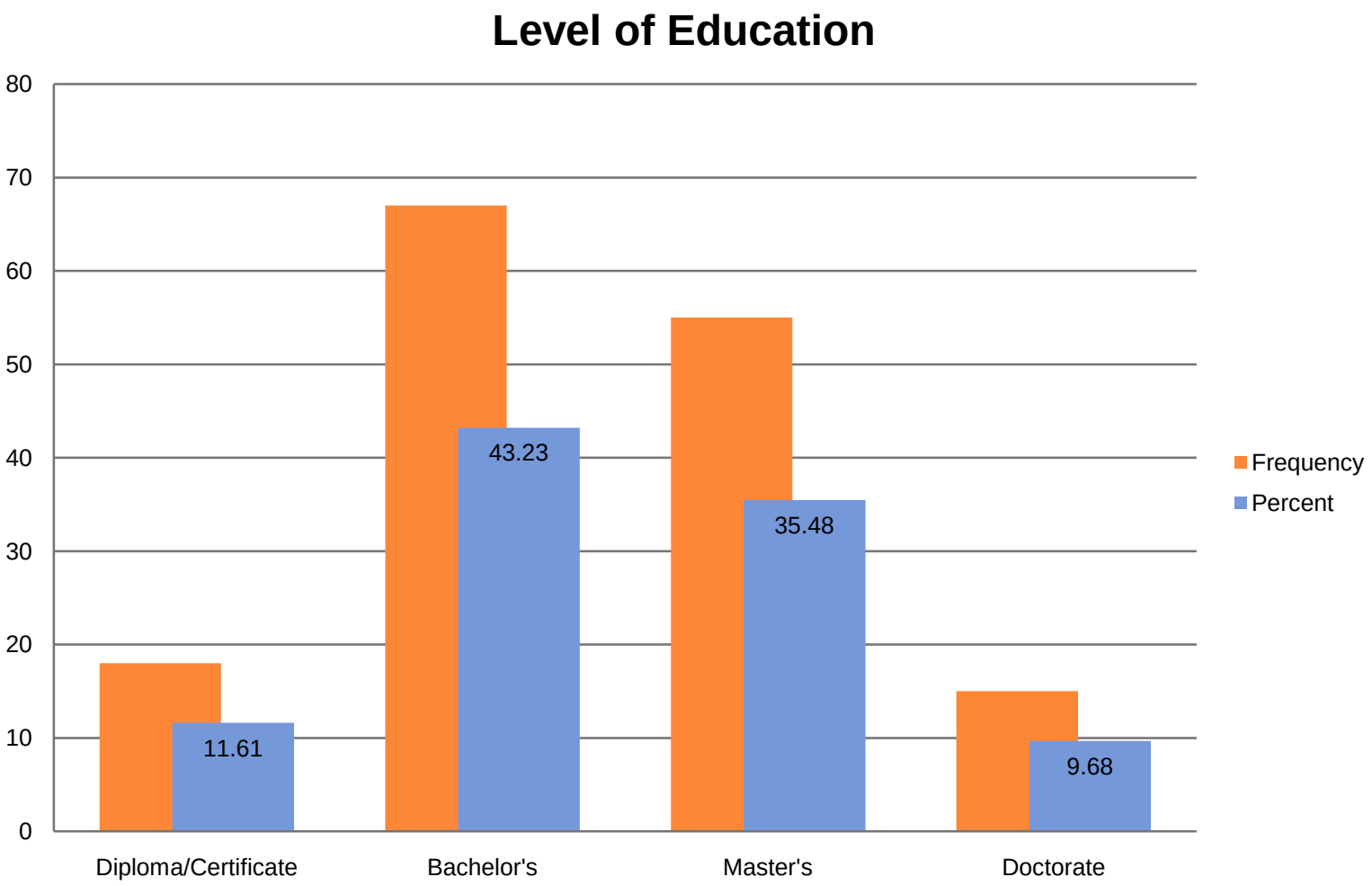
Findings


Region of Birth
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
21.29
38.06
20.65
0.65
18.06
1.29
Africa & Middle East
Asia & Pacific
South & Central America
United States
Europe & United Kingdom
DNA (Did Not Answer)
Frequency
Percent

FINDINGS


Ethnic Status
40
35
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
10.32
23.87
11.61
9.03
2.58
1.29
15.48
16.77
2.58
6.45
Chinese
South Asian
Black
Arab/West Asian
Filipino
Southeast Asian
Latin American
White
Other
DNA
Frequency
Percent

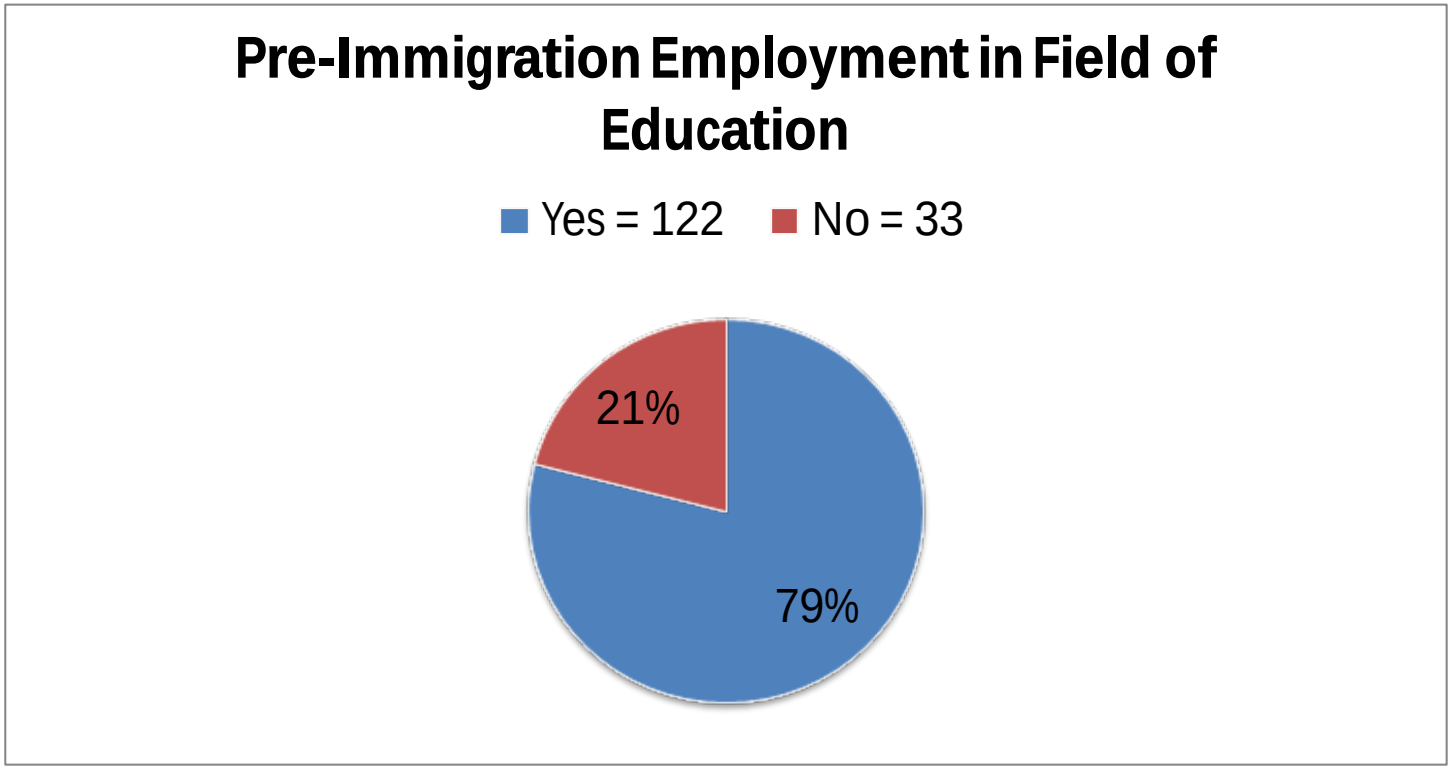
Findings


Level of Education
80
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
11.61
43.23
35.48
9.68
Diploma/Certificate
Bachelor's
Master's
Doctorate
Frequency
Percent

Findings

Top 10 Fields of Education	Number (%)
Business Administration and Management	21 (13.55)
Education	18 (11.61)
Arts, Language, and Literature	17 (10.97)
Science	14 (09.03)
Law	11 (07.10)
Engineering	9 (05.81)
Social Science	8 (05.16)
Social Work	8 (05.16)
Journalism and Communication	7 (04.52)
Medicine, Dentistry, and Veterinary Medicine	6 (03.87)

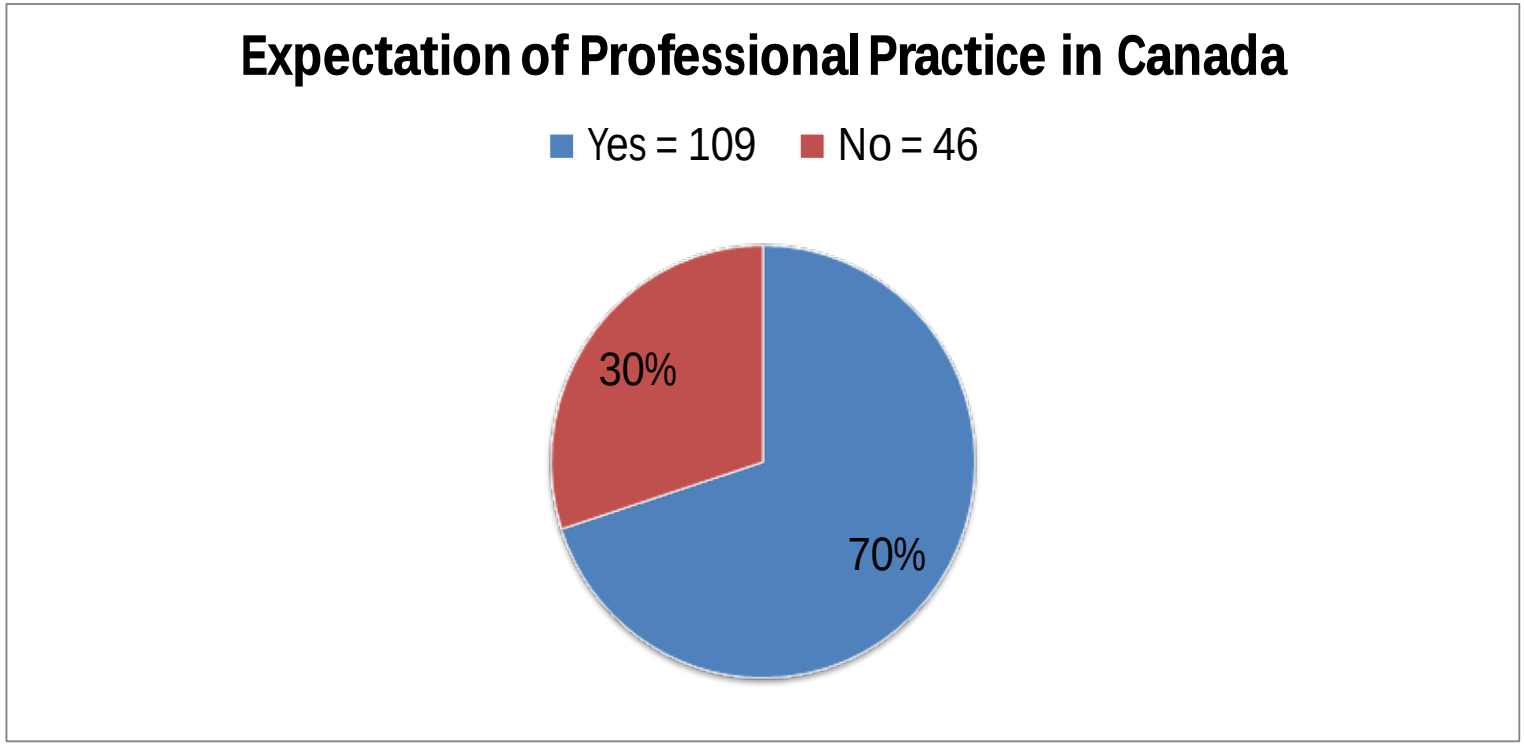
Findings


Pre-Immigration Employment in Field of Education
Yes = 122
No = 33
21%
79%

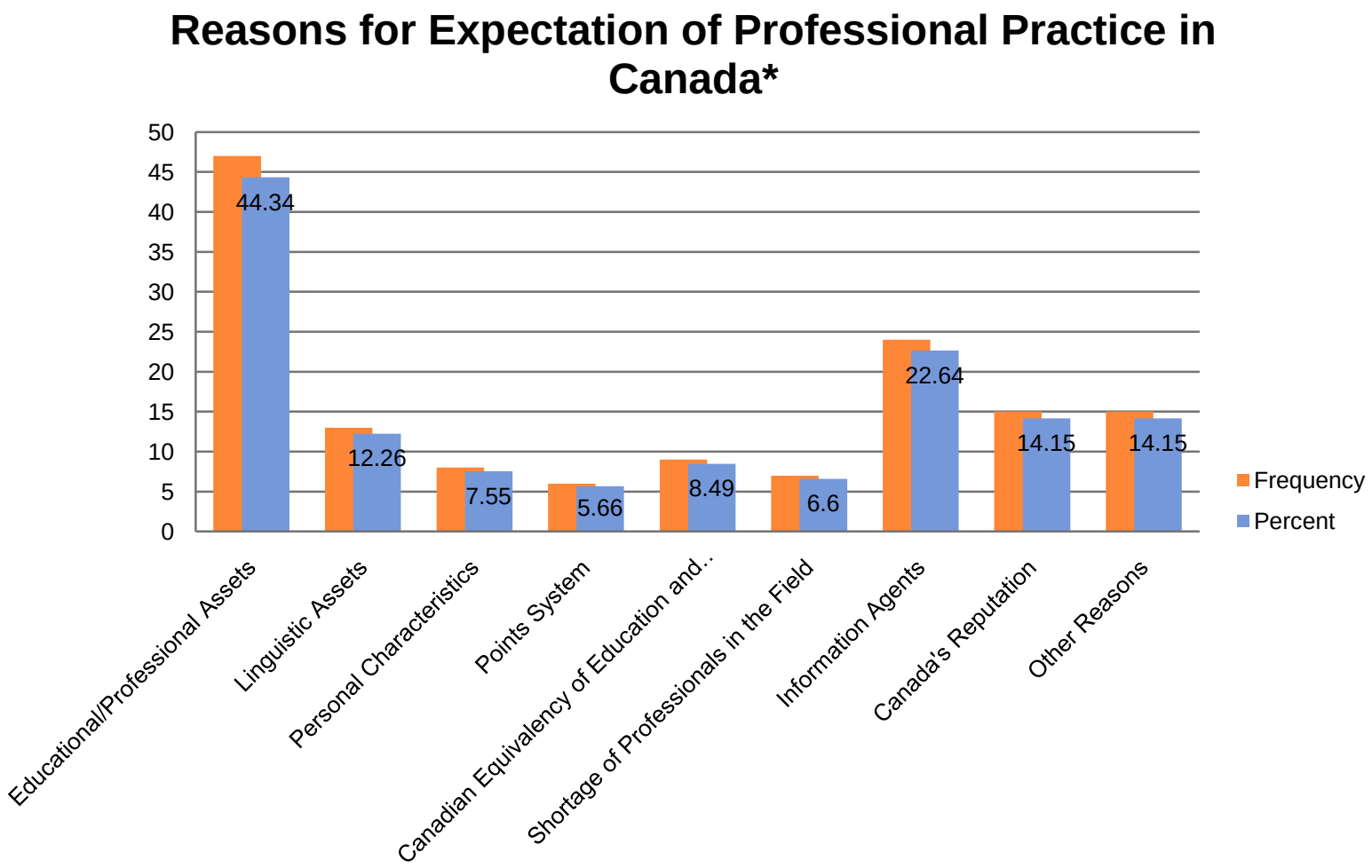
Findings

Top 10 Pre-Immigration Job Titles in Field of Education	Number (%)
School Teacher	16 (13.11)
Manager	14 (11.48)
University Professor	8 (06.56)
Lawyer	6 (04.92)
Director	6 (04.92)
Coordinator	6 (04.92)
Engineer	5 (04.10)
ESL Teacher	5 (04.10)
HR Officer	5 (04.10)
Other Health Professional*	4 (03.28)

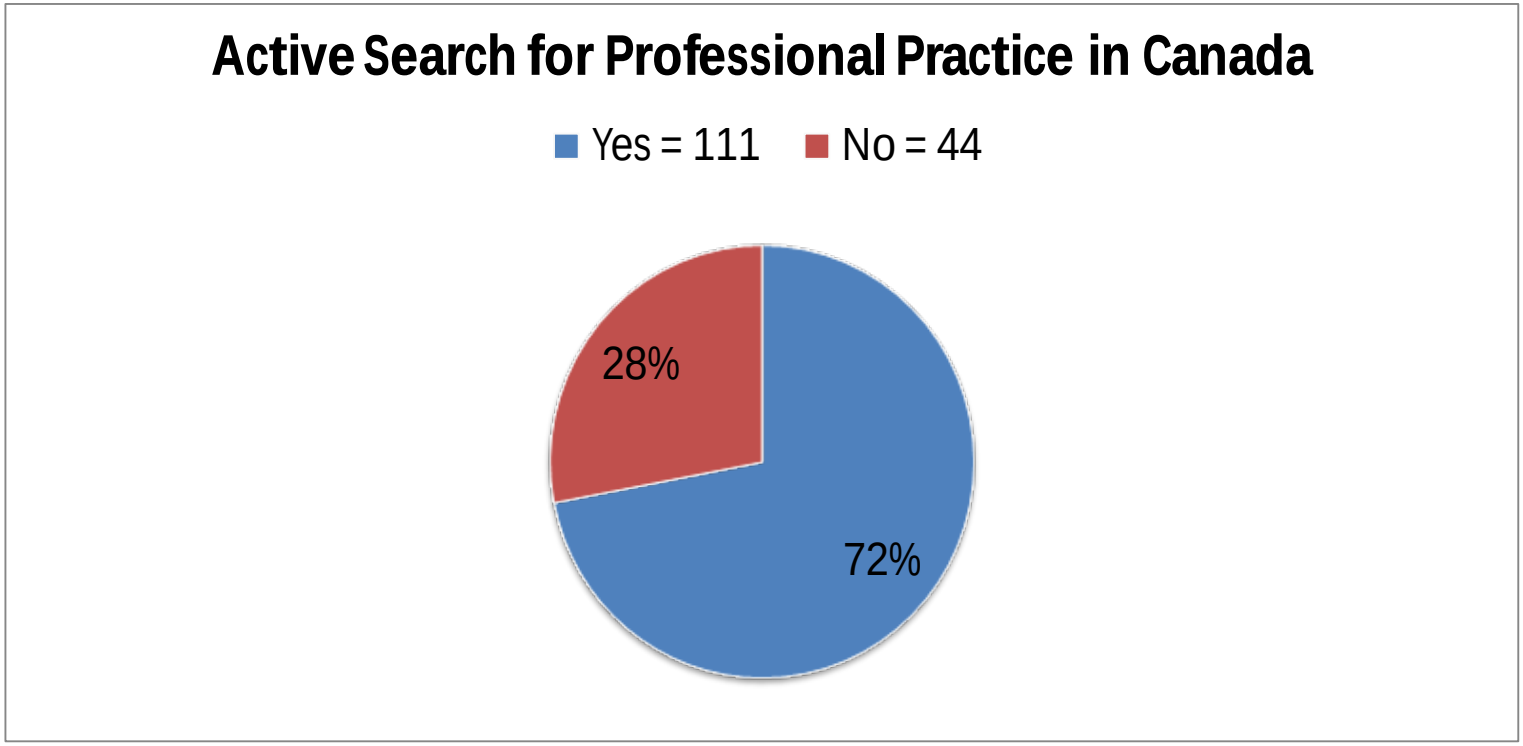
Findings


Expectation of Professional Practice in Canada
Yes = 109
No = 46
30%
70%

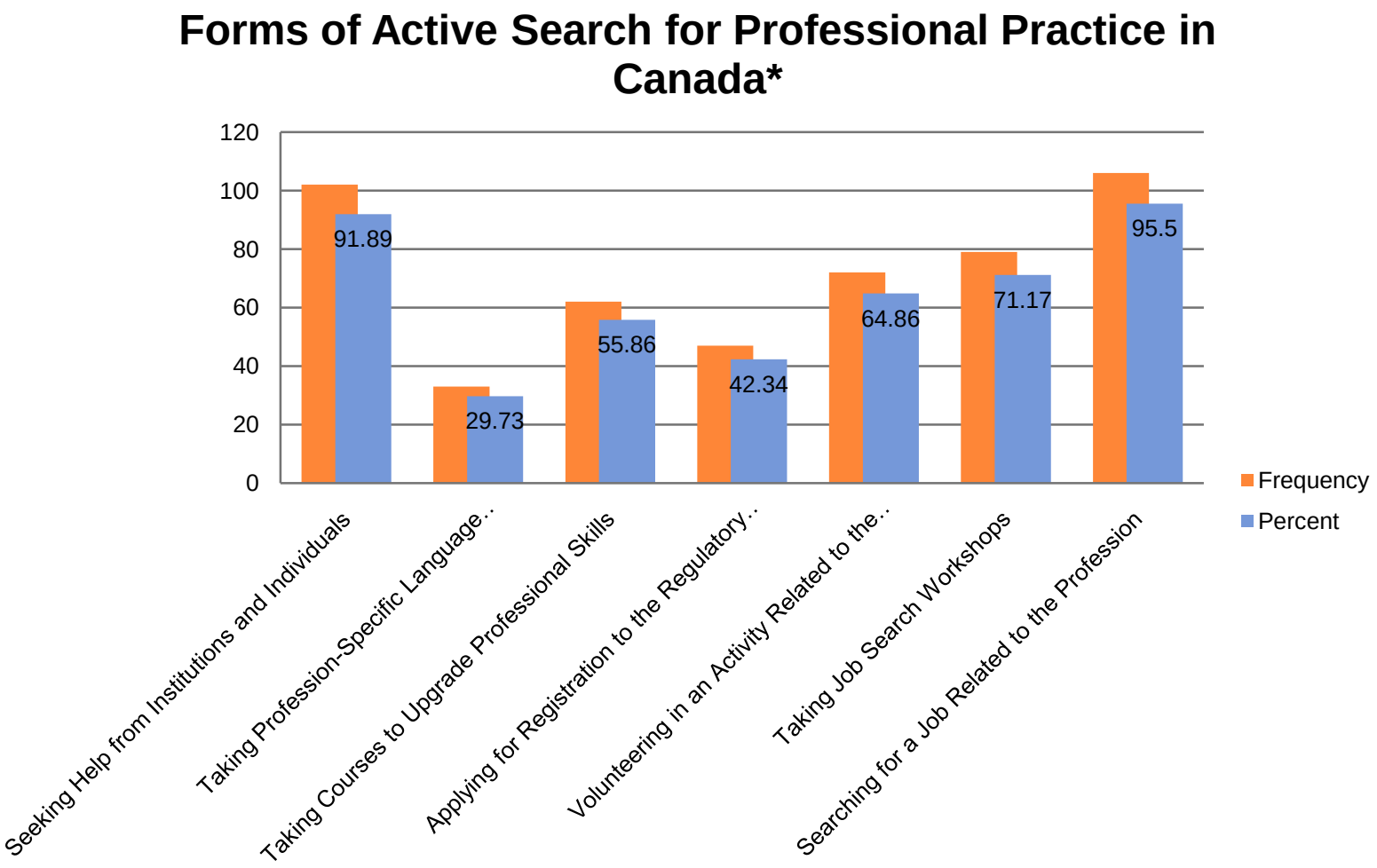
Findings


Reasons for Expectation of Professional Practice in Canada*
50
45
40
35
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
44.34
12.26
7.55
5.66
8.49
6.6
22.64
14.15
14.15
Educational/Professional Assets
Linguistic Assets
Personal Characteristics
Points System
Canadian Equivalency of Education and...
Shortage of Professionals in the Field
Information Agents
Canada's Reputation
Other Reasons
Frequency
Percent

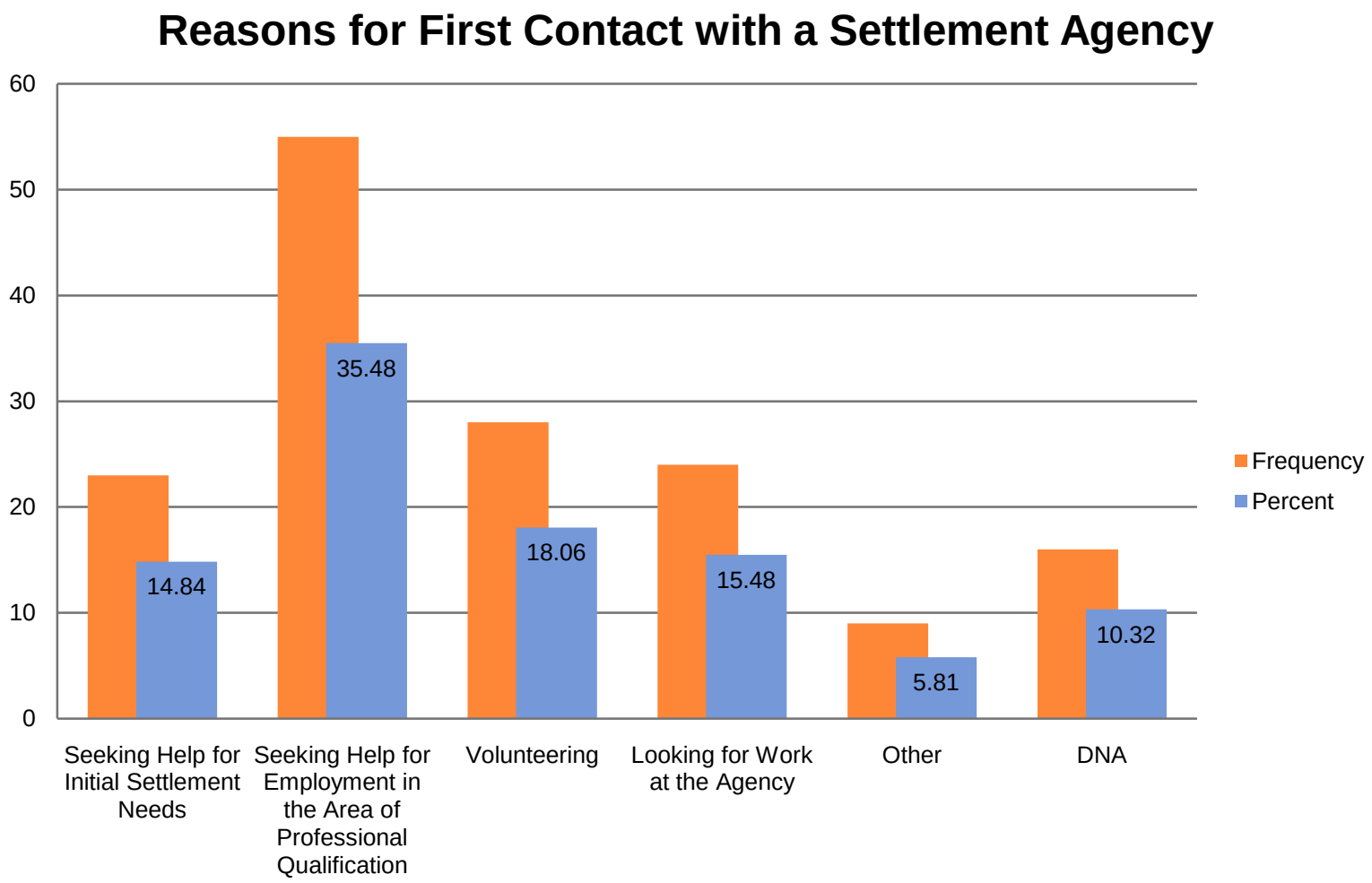
Findings


Active Search for Professional Practice in Canada
Yes = 111
No = 44
28%
72%

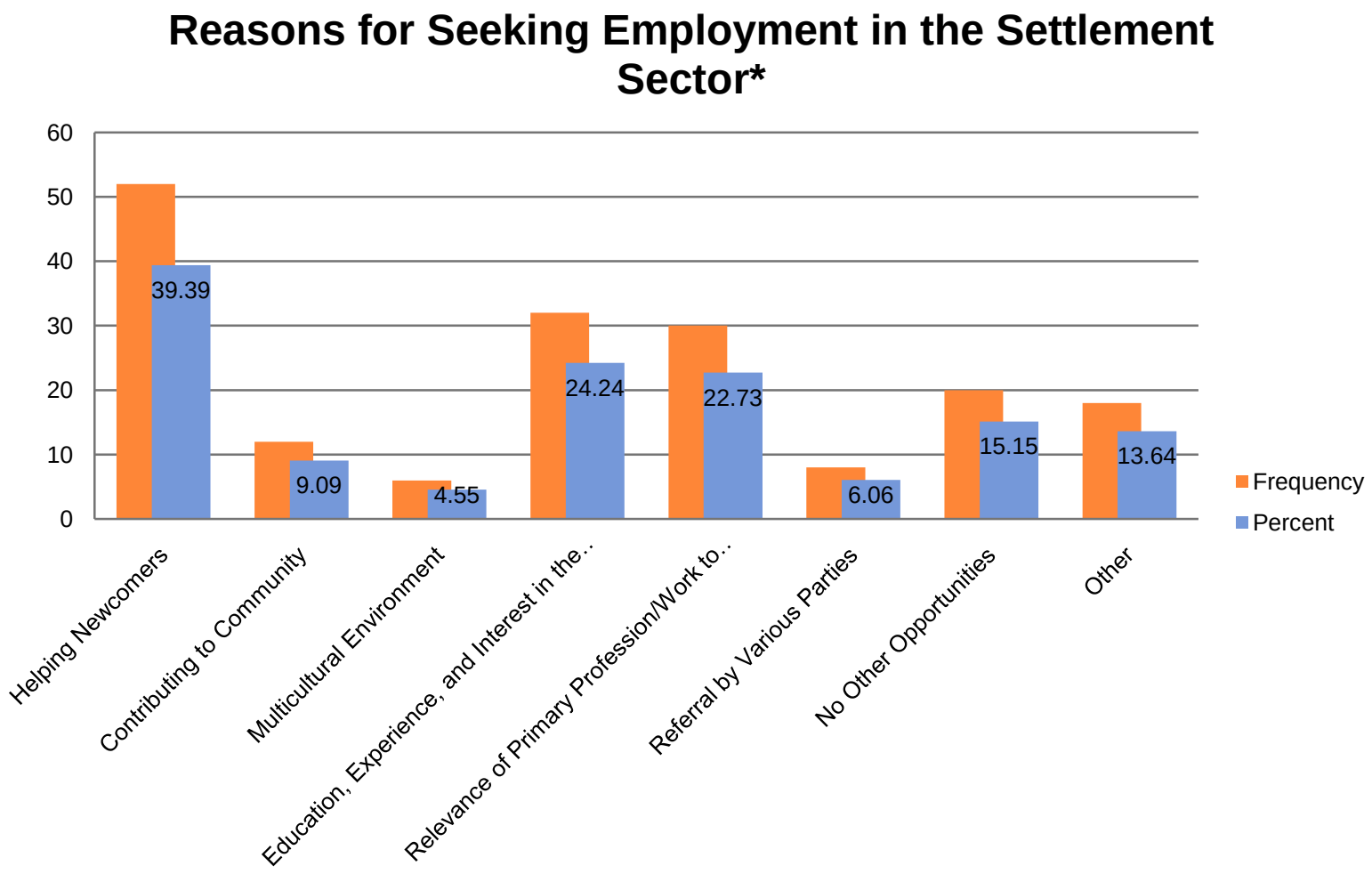
Findings


Forms of Active Search for Professional Practice in Canada*
120
100
80
60
40
20
0
91.89
29.73
55.86
42.34
64.86
71.17
95.5
Seeking Help from Institutions and Individuals
Taking Profession-Specific Language...
Taking Courses to Upgrade Professional Skills
Applying for Registration to the Regulatory...
Volunteering in an Activity Related to the...
Taking Job Search Workshops
Searching for a Job Related to the Profession
Frequency
Percent

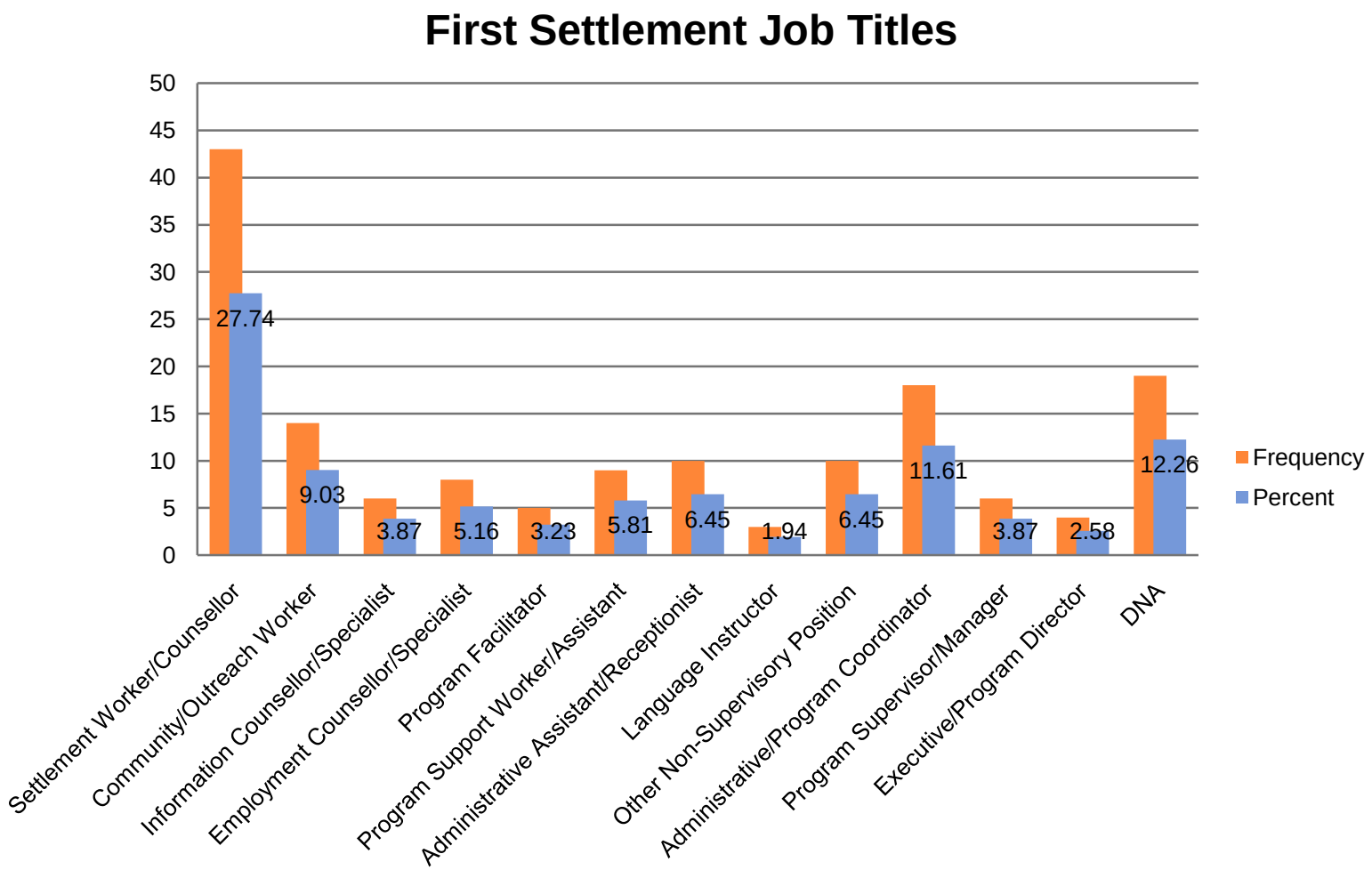
FINDINGS


Reasons for First Contact with a Settlement Agency
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
14.84
35.48
18.06
15.48
5.81
10.32
Seeking Help for Initial Settlement Needs
Seeking Help for Employment in the Area of Professional Qualification
Volunteering
Looking for Work at the Agency
Other
DNA
Frequency
Percent

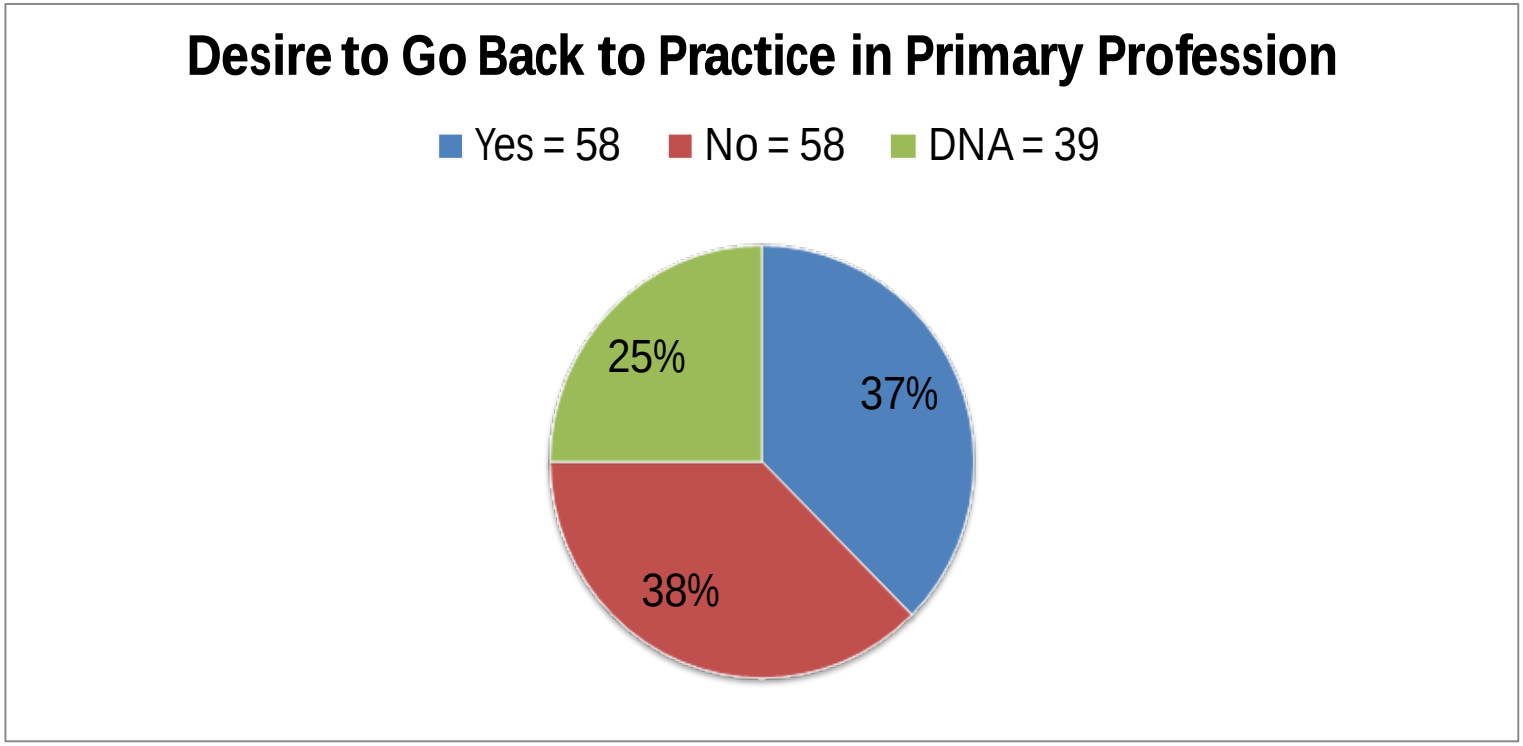
FINDINGS


Reasons for Seeking Employment in the Settlement Sector*
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
39.39
9.09
4.55
24.24
22.73
6.06
15.15
13.64
Helping Newcomers
Contributing to Community
Multicultural Environment
Education, Experience, and Interest in the..
Relevance of Primary Profession/Work to..
Referral by Various Parties
No Other Opportunities
Other
Frequency
Percent

FINDINGS


First Settlement Job Titles
50
45
40
35
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
27.74
9.03
3.87
5.16
3.23
5.81
6.45
1.94
6.45
11.61
3.87
2.58
12.26
Settlement Worker/Counsellor
Community/Outreach Worker
Information Counsellor/Specialist
Employment Counsellor/Specialist
Program Facilitator
Program Support Worker/Assistant
Administrative Assistant/Receptionist
Language Instructor
Other Non-Supervisory Position
Administrative/Program Coordinator
Program Supervisor/Manager
Executive/Program Director
DNA
Frequency
Percent

Findings


Desire to Go Back to Practice in Primary Profession
Yes = 58
No = 58
DNA = 39
25%
37%
38%

Concluding Observations

- In their work with and for newcomers, many respondents (including those whose primary professions are not related to settlement work) find a connection in different forms and varying degrees to their primary professions.
  - By establishing this connection, they make sense of the multitude of investments that they have made for and in their previous careers.
  - For professionals, occupational identity is one of the building blocks of self and losing that can thus be destructive of self.

Concluding Observations

- Even more respondents emphasize the personal, inner satisfaction they get from, and the social obligation they feel towards, settlement work.
  - For many, settlement work is a “calling.”
  - This bodes well for the professionalization of settlement work since vocational dedication is one of the hallmarks of any profession.

Concluding Observations

- Cross-tabulations show that pre-immigration work experience in the field of education is the single most significant factor in post-immigration pursuit and practice of the primary profession as well as in longing for it.
  - This has important implications for immigrant access to professions and for immigrant selection policy.

For more about this research

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Thank you!