



VETERINARY SOCIAL WORK SERVICES

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What is Veterinary Social Work?

VSW is the provision of services at the intersection of veterinary medicine and social work practice

Four focus areas:

- Grief & Loss
- Compassion Fatigue
- The LINK
- Animal Assisted Interactions

Veterinary Social Work Study

Primary Goal

To discover the current use of social work as a human support service within the context of human-animal relationships.

Secondary Goal

To raise awareness of the inter-professional work of veterinary medicine and social work practice.

Methodology

Design and Measurement

- Survey
- Likert rating scale of 1-5 measuring frequency of services
- Descriptive/exploratory
- Cross sectional survey

Participants

- Animal services professionals
- Human services professionals (social workers, therapists)
- Respondents were asked to forward the survey via email or reposting on social media
- Anticipated that the survey would reach 1,500 people
- Anticipated response rate was 20%

Analysis

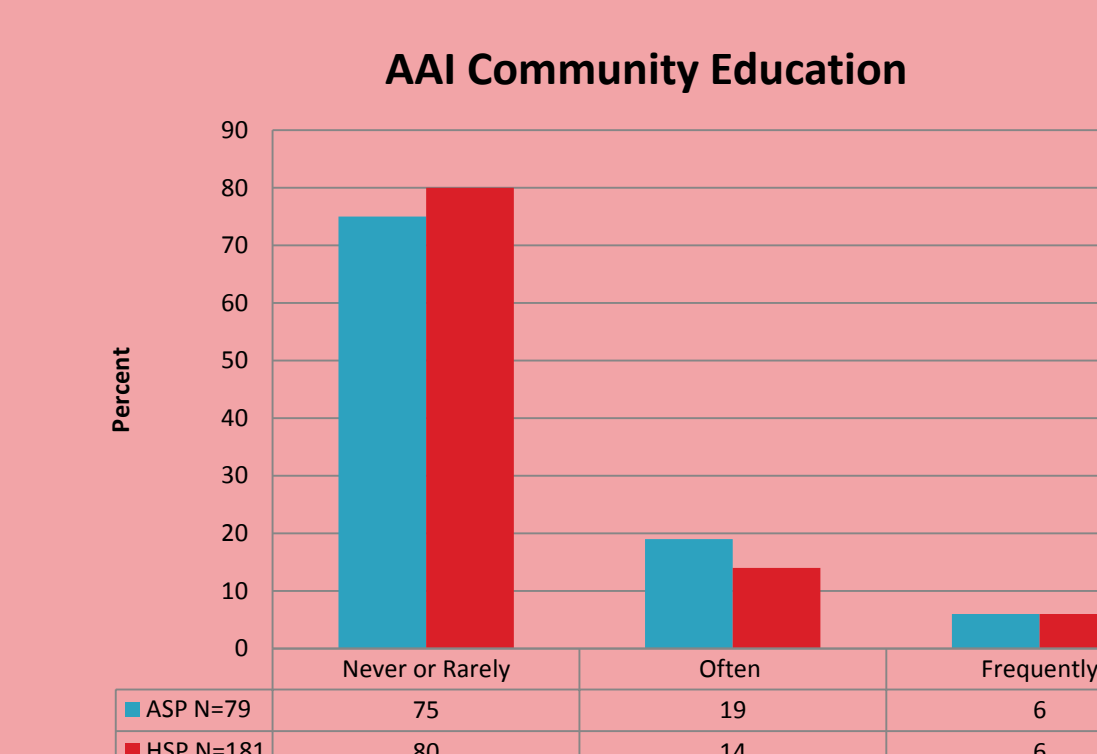
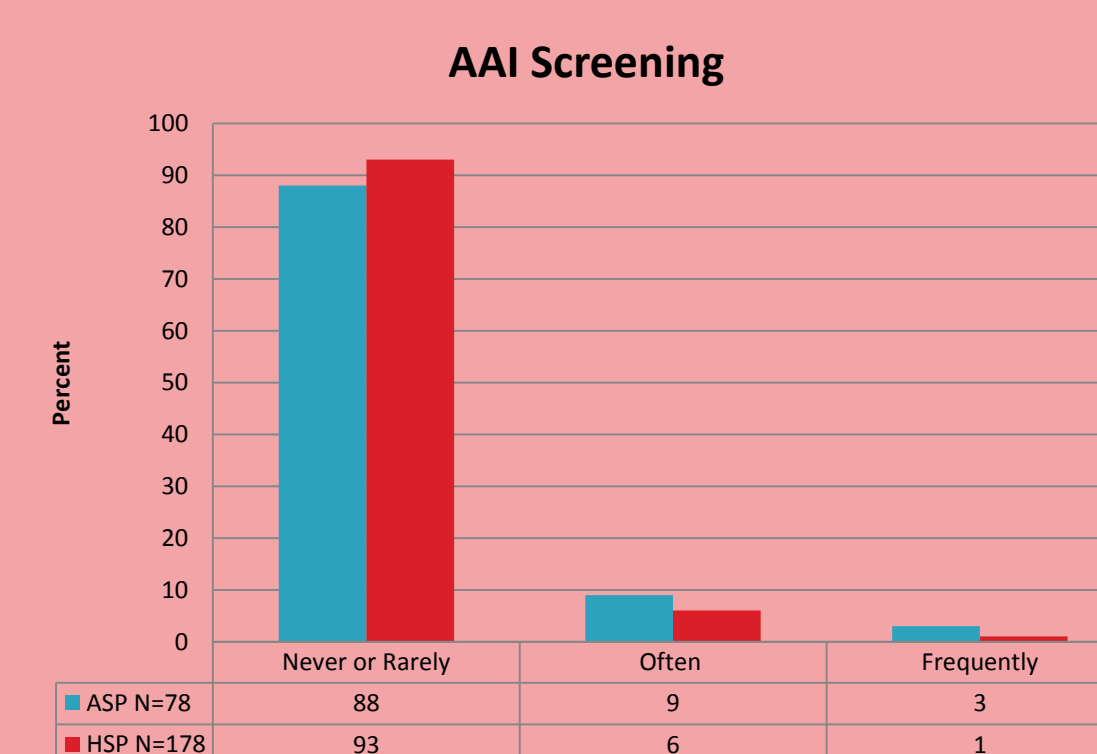
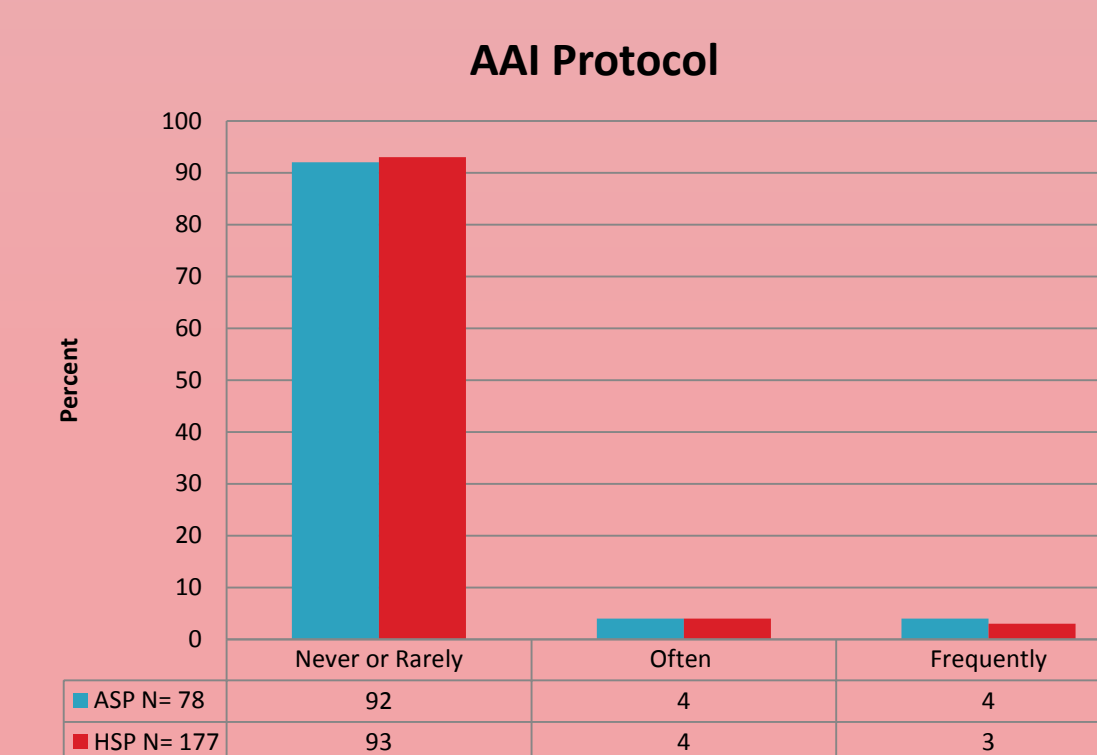
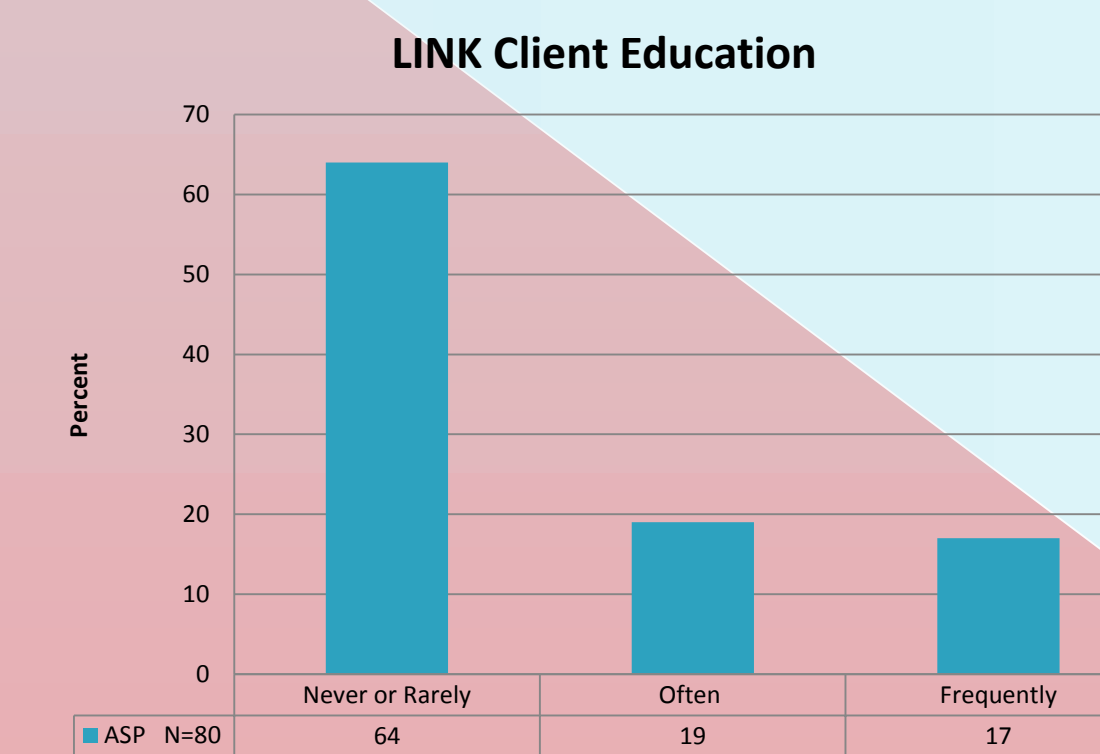
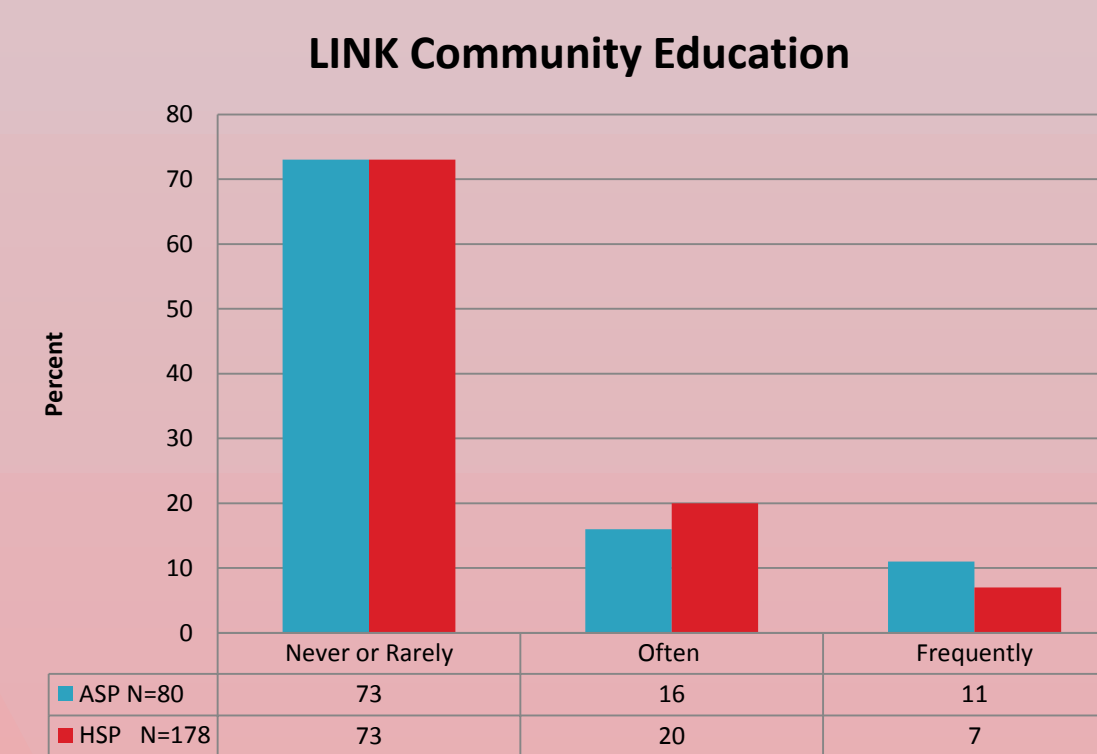
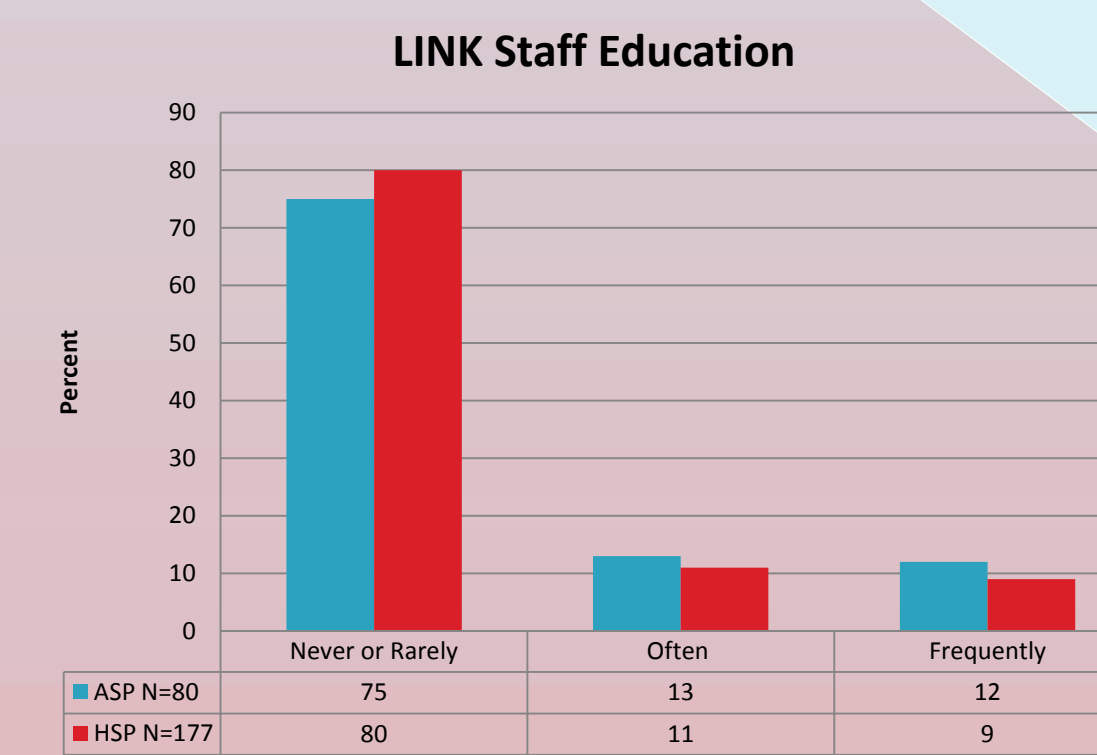
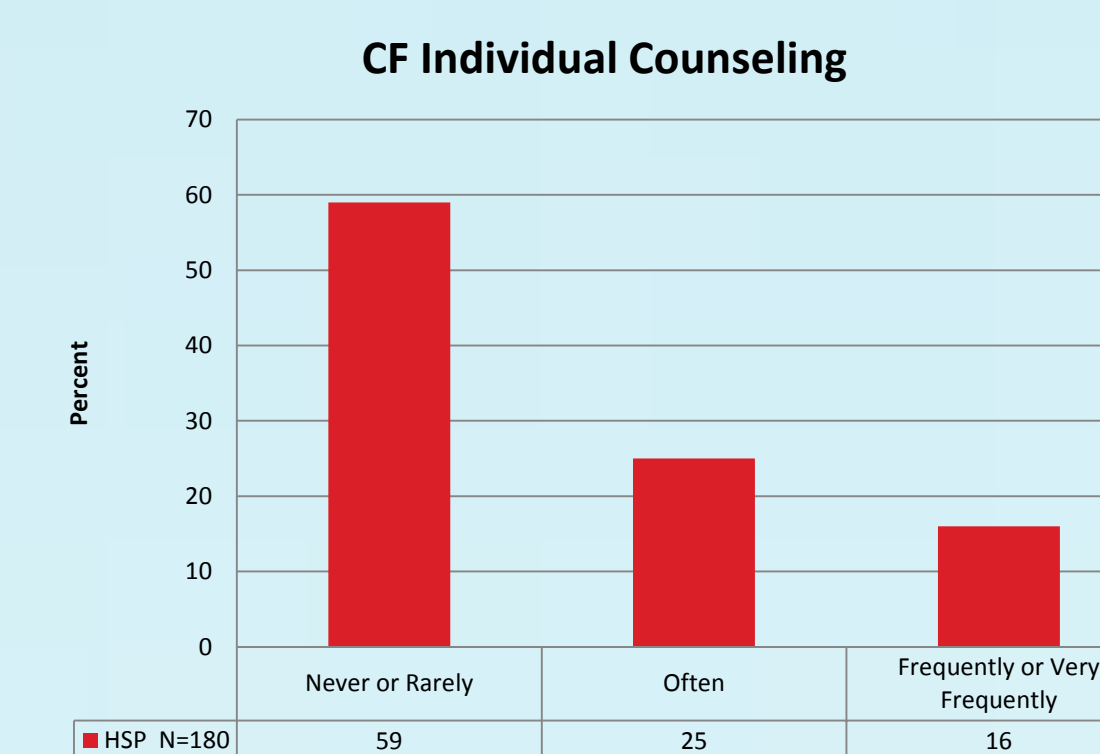
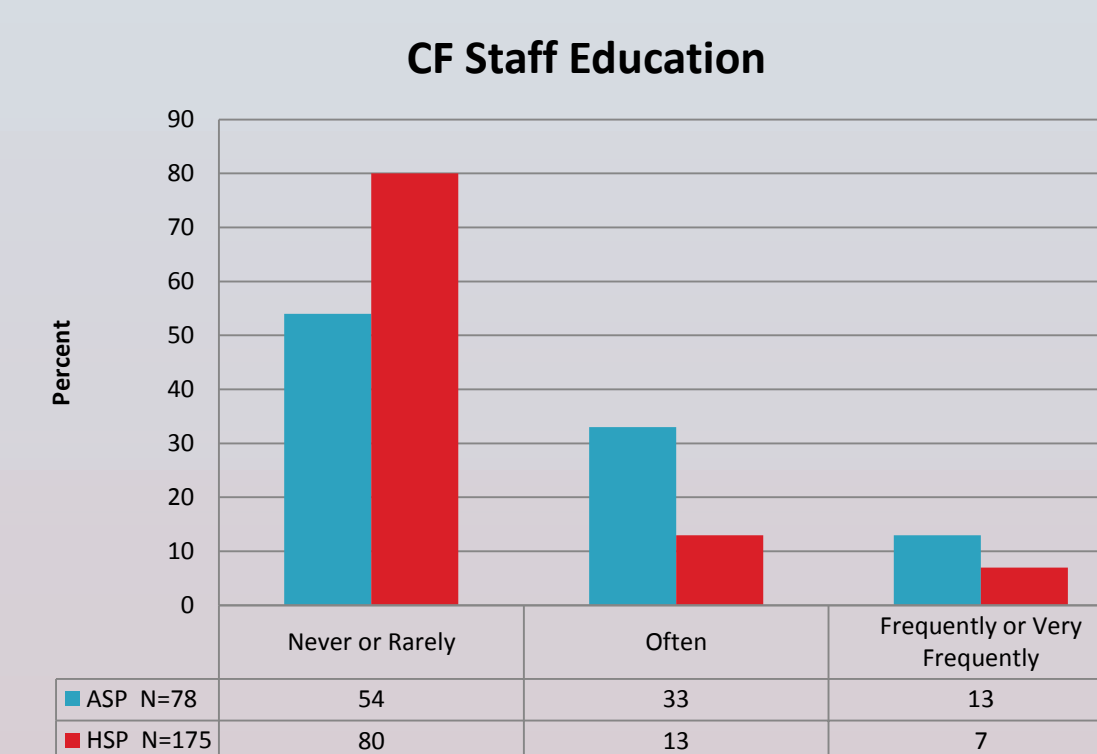
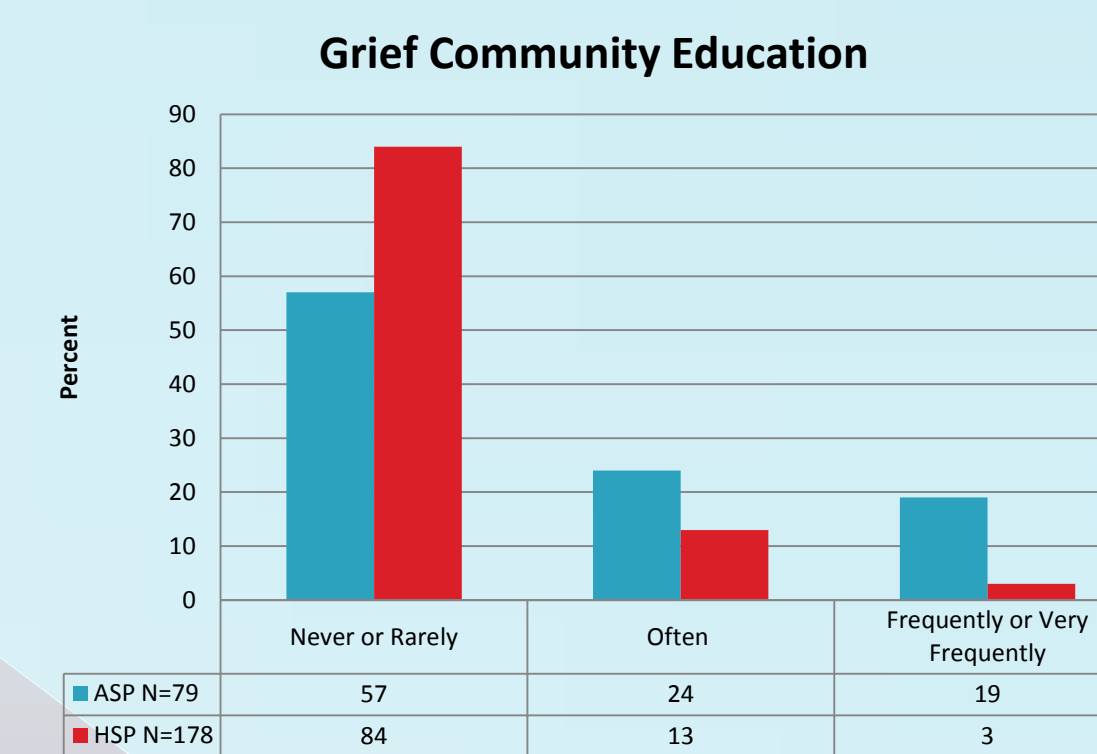
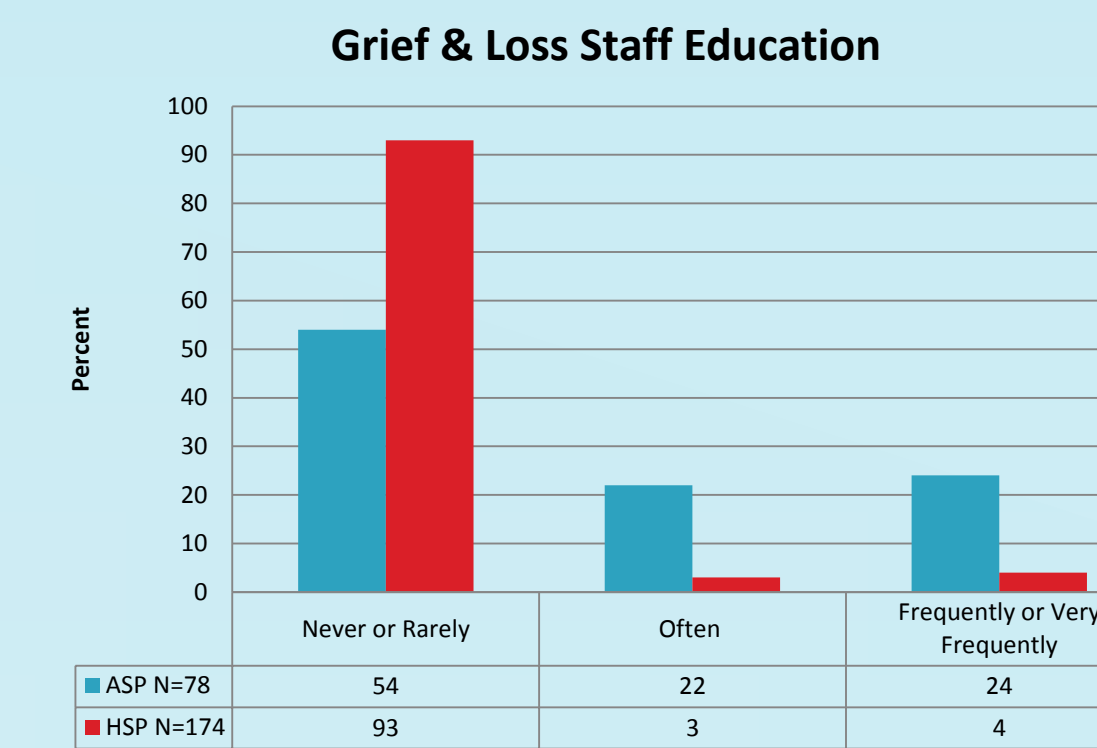
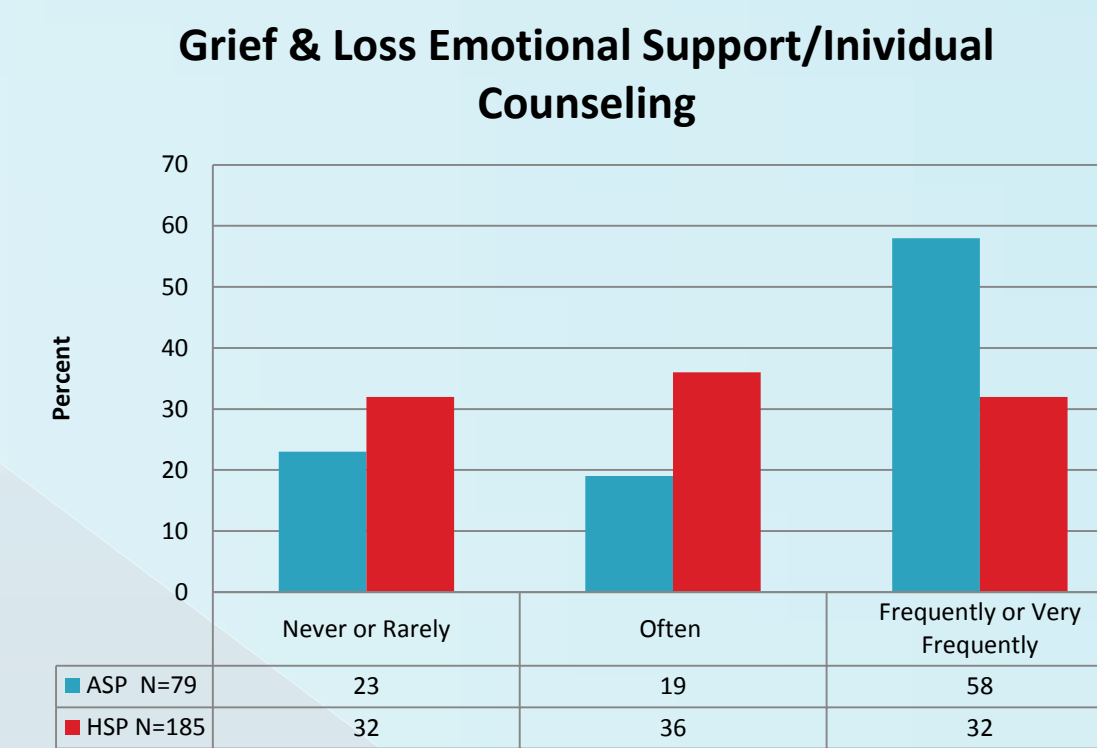
- SPSS
- Frequency of each provided service was measured and charted

Survey Results

Sample

- Survey response- 306 individuals
- Highest response rates: California, New York, Texas, Florida, and Illinois
- Third highest response rate was from individuals that did not live in the United States
- 56% of respondents identified as social workers
- 18% identified as veterinarians
- Only 6 of 306 responded that they worked in both human and animal services fields.

Survey Results



Findings and Discussion

People consider pets as family, and the loss of a pet can have physical and emotional implications (Poe et al., 2011)

- This study found that few professionals provide community or staff education relating to pet loss and its potential ramifications

Animal Services Personnel who engage on an emotional level with clients can develop compassion fatigue, which can lead to depression, substance abuse, and suicidal ideation (Cohen, 2007; Figley & Roop, 2006)

- The survey results indicate that counseling, education, or mediation for staff are rarely, or never, provided

The existence of a link between animal and human violence is supported by research (Ascione et al., 1997; Gallager et al., 2008)

Concern for pet welfare may prevent or delay a victim's search for shelter or assistance (Faver & Strand, 2003)

- Study findings indicate that human and animal violence is rarely or never addressed by Animal or Human Services Professionals

Participation in Animal Assisted Interventions is supported by both professions (Beck et al., 2012; Parish-Plass, 2008)

- Respondents to the survey indicate that they never or rarely engage in providing education, screening, protocol development, or research data for AAI services

There is a disconnect between what we know and what we practice.

This study does not answer that question, but it should be explored in future research with questions such as:

- Is there a lack of understanding about compassion fatigue- protection factors and preventative measures?
- Could there be some sense of futility in trying to address concerns because "nothing changes"?
- Are animal services professionals reluctant to share their perceived weaknesses?
- Is everyone just "too busy" to educate and address protocol concerning compassion fatigue?
- So many domestic violence shelters do not have provisions for pets and protective orders often do not address what is considered "property"- Do social workers shy away from addressing pets because there are no known services available?
- Do Animal Services Personnel feel uncomfortable talking with clients about interpersonal violence due to lack of training and knowledge?
- Would more social workers incorporate AAI into their practice if animals were more accepted in businesses, clinics, and social services agencies?
- How could AAI registration entities, such as Pet Partners and Therapy Dog International partner with social workers and veterinary practices to ensure person, animal, and client success?

Where are the Veterinary Social Workers?

- Proximity may lead to the lack of social work contact with veterinary staff and clients
- Most partnerships (based on literature) seem to take place in colleges of veterinary medicine
- What steps can be taken to strengthen the working relationship between the two professions?
- If individuals had access to VSW, would they use the services?
- How can VSWs be financially viable?