

## A Survey of Moral Concerns and Job-Related Stress Among Academic Advisors of College Athletes

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### Introduction

This survey of academic advisors and counselors of athletes was motivated by the desire to investigate the manner in which and the extent to which moral considerations and moral dilemmas contribute to the stressfulness of the profession. The investigation grew out of my own perception that there is an inherent friction in the jobs of academic advisors and counselors of college athletes: the friction between student-athlete as student, and student-athlete as athlete. This friction arises from many sources: from the student-athlete's own perception of himself or herself as more qualified to fill one role than the other; from competition between athletics and academics for a rather limited amount of the student's time and energy; and from a demand by two different groups of people (coaches, athletic department staff, teammates, sports boosters, and other students on the one hand; faculty, academic administrators, counselors, and tutors, on the other hand) for successful performances in two very different areas.

Since it is often the academic/athletic advisor who is called upon to mediate conflicting demands on the student-athlete, it is perfectly predictable that the academic/athletic advisor will experience and deal with the frictions created by those conflicting demands. The conflicts faced by student-athletes and those faced by the academic/athletic advisors of student-athletes can easily create moral dilemmas—dilemmas involving considerations of moral rightness or wrongness—for the advisors. When this happens, academic/athletic advisors may be conscious of the moral considerations involved, or they may not be fully aware of these considerations. In either event, the presence of dilemmas is likely to produce job-related stress for academic/athletic advisors.

This survey is an initial attempt at investigating academic/athletic advisors' own perceptions of several matters: the stressfulness of their profession; the extent to which moral dilemmas contribute to that stressfulness; the types of moral dilemmas that they face (including the sources of those dilemmas); and the advisors' responses to those dilemmas.

My **expectations** regarding the response to the survey were few and rather

general. I expected that a fairly large percentage of the respondents would perceive their job as stressful. I expected that a significant number of them would perceive moral considerations to be involved in their jobs, and I expected that many of those would view moral considerations as contributing significantly to their job-related stress. Finally, I expected that a fair number of the respondents would trace some of their moral concerns to the behavior of others in their athletic departments, and I included some questions which would either confirm or disclaim this expectation.

My hopes regarding the response to the survey were better defined than my expectations. Chief among them were these:

1. That a large percentage of the respondents would be aware of the moral implications of many of their decisions.
2. That relatively few professionals would frequently perceive themselves as being under an uncomfortable amount of stress.
3. That those who do perceive stress have adequate procedures for coping with it and for dealing with the moral dilemmas that confront them.
4. That relatively few of the respondents would perceive their moral dilemmas as resulting from either their own wrongdoing or that of their associates.

In addition to generating data on these materials, the aim of this survey is to make an issue of moral concerns in the profession of academic/athletic advising. By so doing, I hope to raise the consciousness of professionals regarding the moral considerations of the profession, and to begin to enable them to eliminate, solve, or cope with the moral dilemmas they face.

### The Survey

The survey instrument is a questionnaire (see Appendix A) which consists of 17 forced response questions, for each of which respondents have three response choices: "frequently," "occasionally," and "never." Questions on the questionnaire were intended to elicit responses on the following topics:

Topics	Question(s)
Respondents' perceptions of the stressfulness of their job in academic/athletic advising	6 and 16
Respondents' perceptions of moral considerations and moral decisions as part of their job	1, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10
Respondents' perceptions of the extent to which moral concerns contribute to the stress of their job	17
Respondents' perceptions of the sources of the moral dilemmas which they face	2-6 and 11-15
Respondents' perceptions of responding to the moral dilemmas which they face	5-11, 14, and 15

The questionnaire was mailed with a cover letter to 308 persons included on one or the other of two mailing lists: the list of participants in 1986 Springfield College Conference on Counseling Athletes, and the 1986 NAAAA membership list. Any name which appeared on both lists was mailed only one questionnaire. In addition, not all of the names included on those two lists were mailed the questionnaire, since I omitted the names of those persons who were apparently not college-affiliated (i.e., those with high school titles or business addresses, those who I knew were not employed in academic/athletic advising, etc.).

The cover letter did the following:

- made it clear that I only wanted "professionals in the field of Athletic Advising" to respond to the questionnaire,
- assured the recipient that the questionnaires were intended to be completely anonymous,
- requested the recipient's cooperation in completing the questionnaire,
- requested that the recipient supply return postage for his or her completed questionnaire, and
- requested that the recipient make copies of the questionnaire for any colleagues on his or her athletic advising staff who did not receive one in the mail but who would like to participate in the survey.

The cover letter and the questionnaire were accompanied by a self-addressed envelope for people's convenience in returning the questionnaire.

Response to the mailing was mixed, but gratifying on the whole. Reactions to the survey ranged from suspicious phone calls (demanding to know who was funding the survey and what was I intending to do with the results) to enthusiastic anonymous comments written on or attached to the survey (e.g., "A very interesting survey. Good luck!" and "It's about time these items are addressed.").

Of the 308 questionnaires mailed, four were returned uncompleted, with attached notes explaining that the recipient was not an academic/athletic advisor. Another seven were returned (unopened) by the post office, stamped "undeliverable." My invitation to make copies of the questionnaire for colleagues who did not receive it generated 11 such copies. The total of completed questionnaires returned to me numbered 186. Subtracting from these the 11 copies which were made, completed and returned, the rate of return on the mailing of 308 was a very strong 57 percent.

Completed questionnaires came from 43 different states and from 119 different cities (as indicated by postmark). No forms were returned from the states of Alaska, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, North Dakota, Rhode Island, or Utah. Both Illinois and Massachusetts produced 14 responses and tied for the most from a single state. Twelve came from California, and nine were received from both Texas and Ohio.

A few of the respondents responded to fewer than all 17 of the questions

on the questionnaire. Some of the respondents felt the need to add a fourth category of response for some of the questions: "seldom" or "almost never." Since I suspect that many more of the respondents checked "occasionally" rather than write in a new response category in instances in which they very infrequently (though occasionally) did what the question was investigating, I scored all write-in responses between "frequently" and "never" as "occasionally."

I tallied the results twice by hand and then used Apple's "Crunch" software to figure percentages and produce pie charts for each of the 17 questions. The summarized raw data appears in Appendix A.

### The Responses

1) **Perceptions of stressfulness:** Of the 179 people who responded to question 16 ("How often in the course of your duties in the field of athletic advising do you find yourself under an uncomfortable amount of stress?"), 147 (82.1 percent) checked either "occasionally" or "frequently." That is underscored further by the fact that 39 of the respondents (21.8 percent) checked "frequently." Fortunately, nearly as many (32 of the 179, or 17.9 percent) said that they never find themselves under an uncomfortable amount of job-related stress.

2) **Perceptions of moral considerations as inherent in the job:** An overwhelming 180 (97.3 percent) of the 185 who responded to question 1 ("How often in the course of your duties in the field of athletic advising do you perceive yourself as making decisions which involve ethical or moral consideration?") answered with either "frequently" or "occasionally." Of those, 81 (43.8 percent) frequently perceive themselves as doing so, and 99 (53.5 percent) occasionally perceive themselves as doing so. These responses are consistent with the responses to questions 7, 8, and 9: that 155 (84.8 percent) occasionally or frequently "discuss with colleagues the moral rightness or wrongness" of their decisions; that 152 (82.2 percent) occasionally or frequently "discuss with a supervisor the moral rightness or wrongness of a decision or policy"; and that 145 (78.4 percent) occasionally or frequently "discuss with a spouse or close friend the moral rightness or wrongness" of their decisions.

3) **Perception of moral considerations as contributing significantly to job-related stress:** Almost two-thirds (119 of 186, 64 percent) of those who responded to question 17 said that they occasionally or frequently "perceive concerns of moral rightness or wrongness as contributing significantly to (their) job-related stress." Of the 147 respondents to question 16 who occasionally or frequently find themselves under an *uncomfortable* amount of job-related stress, 110 (74.8 percent) perceived moral concerns as occasionally or frequently contributing to that stress.

4) **Sources of moral dilemmas:** One of the sources of moral dilemmas

which I wanted to investigate involves requests by "interested others" that the academic/athletic advisor act unethically. Questions 2, 3, 4, and 12 inquire about pressures from athletes, coaches, school administrators, and the media to "bend or break" rules or—in the case of the media—"to divulge confidential information." It was school administrators who received the only really encouraging response, as only 22 (11.9 percent) of the 186 respondents to question 4 said that they feel frequent or occasional pressure from a school administrator to bend or break school, conference, or association rules. (And of those 22, only four responded with "frequently.")

The media, athletes, and coaches seem to be a much more significant source of moral dilemmas, however. Forty-four point six percent of the respondents (83 of 186) occasionally or frequently feel pressure from the media to divulge confidential information regarding an athlete's academic records. Moreover, 80 of 186 (43 percent) occasionally or frequently (although only two responded "frequently") feel pressure from an athlete to bend or break school, conference, or association rules. And—perhaps most unsettling—87 out of 185 (47 percent) responding to question 3 said they occasionally (79 responses) or frequently (eight responses) feel such pressure from coaches.

In response to question 5, a startlingly large number of respondents (127 of 186, or 68.3 percent) said that they occasionally (109) responses or frequently (18 responses) worry that their advising decisions are "based more on concern for keeping an athlete eligible to compete than on concern for the athlete's long-term well-being." If nothing else, this response confirms the "eligibility vs. education" decision as a widespread source of (moral) concern.

Over 42 percent of the 184 who responded to question 11 said that they occasionally or frequently worry about the propriety of certain requests that they make of faculty regarding their athlete advisees.

The environment of the athletic department in which they work can also be a source of moral dilemmas for academic/athletic advisors. Well over half (109 of 185, 58.9 percent) of those responding to question 13 occasionally or frequently learn of irregularities or improprieties in their athletic department that they wish that they hadn't learned of; fortunately, only 31 (16.8 percent) of 185 who responded to question 14 occasionally or frequently feel that their continued employment depends upon "keeping quiet" about wrongdoing in their athletic department. Finally, a significant—although not overwhelming—number (60 of 183, 32.8 percent) occasionally or frequently ignore, rather than investigate, events or occurrences which they aren't sure involve wrongdoing, but which they think are likely to.

### Comment on the Responses

Very briefly, I see the most encouraging results of the survey as being these:

- The response to question 1 indicates that those responding to the survey have an impressive awareness of the moral implications and moral concerns which are inherent in their jobs. Ignorance of the moral implications of one's decisions and actions is perhaps the most serious threat to moral behavior, so it is gratifying to see that professionals in athletic advising are aware of these implications.
- The response to question 4 reflects very favorably on the integrity of school administrators and their requests of academic/athletic advisors.
- The responses to questions 7, 8, and 9 demonstrate a real willingness to discuss the moral implications of decisions and policies with colleagues, supervisors, and others.  
Again, very briefly, I see the least encouraging results as being these:
- The response to question 5 probably indicates that a great deal of pressure on professionals in the field to place excessive emphasis on maintain athletic eligibility.
- The response to question 6 raises concerns that a significant number of professionals in the field *are at least occasionally* making job-related decisions or performing job-related actions which cause them feelings of guilt.
- Despite the encouraging responses to questions 7, 8, and 9, the response to question 10 indicates that over half of the respondents could at least occasionally wish that they had someone with whom they could honestly confer about the moral implications of job-related decisions.
- The response to question 13 indicates that well over half of the respondents learn of (and so must somehow deal with) irregularities or improprieties in their athletic departments that they wish they hadn't learned of.
- The response to question 16 indicates that job-related stress is *at least occasionally* uncomfortably high for 82.1 percent of those responding. This response strongly recommends further investigations into the causes of this stress, possible ways of eliminating it, and ways of managing it.
- The responses to questions 16 and 17 reveal that virtually three-fourths of those who (at least) occasionally feel an uncomfortably high amount of job-related stress regard moral concerns as contributing significantly to that stress. This also strongly recommends investigation into the morality-related sources of stress and into ways of relieving it.

### Conclusions

This survey was intended to explore collegiate academic/athletic advisors' own perceptions of the moral concerns and the stress that they face in their profession. Given the size and the geographic spread of the response to the questionnaire, these responses can be taken as fairly representative of the profession as a whole, nationwide. The predominance of NCAA Division I

schools represented on the NAAAA membership list gives this response a distinct Division I flavor, but I think that is consistent with the percentage of academic/athletic advisors and counselors who are employed by NCAA Division I schools.

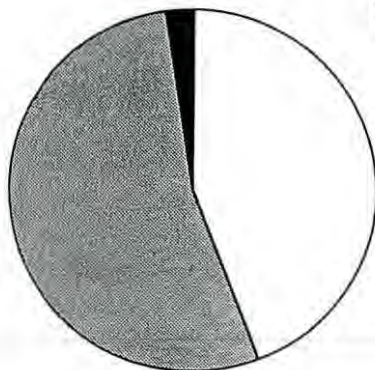
Certainly there is more that can be done in this area. There are other potential sources for moral dilemmas which might be investigated (e.g., pressure from parents or boosters to break rules). A more detailed examination of the "occasionally" response (e.g., as two choices of response: "occasionally" and "seldom") would be interesting. It would be interesting to conduct the survey repeatedly at five-year intervals to note changes in professional's perceptions of these matters. And it would be enlightening to add a few open response items to the questionnaire, requesting a more detailed response than this. Finally, it might be interesting to include a few demographic items, thereby allowing items to be tallied by geographic area, NCAA classification, size of athletic department budget, size of athletic advising/counseling staff, and so forth.

I do, however, regard all of the results of this survey as **good indications** of the current state of affairs of the profession of collegiate academic/athletic advising and counseling vis-a-vis stress and moral concerns. And if these indications warrant further investigations or actions aimed at reducing job-related stress, eliminating sources of moral concern, promoting strategies for evaluating the moral implications of decisions and policies, or coping with moral dilemmas in the profession, then this survey can be regarded as a call for such investigations and actions.

### APPENDIX A

	Freq'tly	Occas'lly	Never
1. Perceive yourself as making decisions which involve ethical or moral considerations? (185 responses)	43.8% 81	53.5% 99	2.7% 5
2. Feel pressure from an athlete to bend or break school, conference, or association rules? (186 responses)	1.1% 2	41.9% 78	57.0% 106
3. Feel pressure from a coach to bend or break school, conference, or association rules? (185 responses)	4.3% 8	42.7% 79	53.0% 98
4. Feel pressure from a school administrator to bend or break school, conference, or association rules? (186 responses)	2.2% 4	9.7% 18	88.2% 164
5. Worry that your advising decisions are based more on concern for keeping an athlete eligible to compete than on concern for the athlete's long-term well-being? (186 responses)	9.7% 18	58.6% 109	31.7% 59
6. Feel guilty about an action you take or a decision you make? (183 responses)	2.2% 4	54.1% 99	43.7% 80
7. Discuss with your colleagues the moral rightness or wrongness of a decision you have made or are about to make? (184 responses)	18.5% 34	66.3% 122	15.2% 28

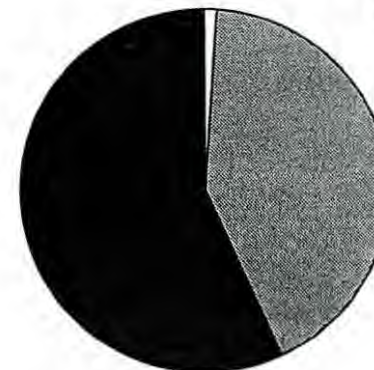
8. Discuss with a supervisor the moral rightness or wrongness of a decision or policy? (185 responses)	19.5%	62.7%	17.8%
	36	116	33
9. Discuss with a spouse or close friend the moral rightness or wrongness of a decision you have made or are about to make? (185 responses)	20.0%	58.4%	21.6%
	37	108	40
10. Wish that you had someone with whom you could honestly discuss the moral rightness or wrongness of decisions you have to make? (176 responses)	9.7%	43.2%	47.2%
	17	76	83
11. Worry about the propriety of certain requests which you make of faculty regarding the athletes whom you advise? (184 responses)	5.4%	37.5%	57.1%
	10	69	105
12. Feel pressure from the media to divulge confidential information regarding an athlete's academic records? (186 responses)	9.1%	35.5%	55.4%
	17	66	103
13. Learn of irregularities or improprieties in your athletic department that you wish you hadn't heard of? (185 responses)	7.6%	51.4%	41.1%
	14	95	76
14. Feel that your continued employment in your current position depends upon your "keeping quiet" about wrongdoing by an athlete, coach, administrator, or other academic advisor in your department? (185 responses)	4.9%	11.9%	83.2%
	9	22	154
15. Ignore, rather than investigate, events or occurrences which you aren't sure involve wrongdoing, but which you think are likely to? (183 responses)	4.4%	28.4%	67.2%
	8	52	123
16. Find yourself under an uncomfortable amount of stress? (179 responses)	21.8%	60.3%	17.9%
	39	108	32
17. Perceive concerns of moral rightness or wrongness as contributing significantly to your job-related stress? (186 responses)	12.4%	51.6%	36.0%
	23	96	67



Question 1

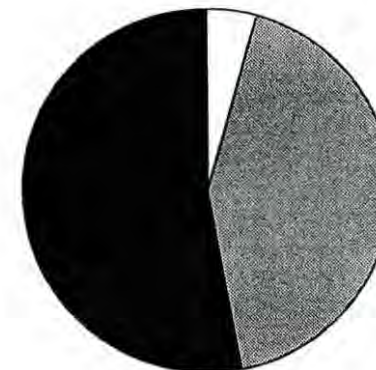
FREQU'NTLY 43.8%  
 OCCAS'LLY 53.5%  
 NEVER 2.7%

Question 2



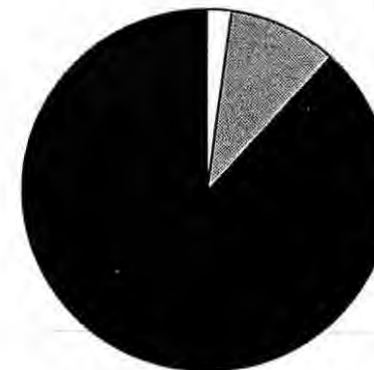
FREQU'NTLY 1.1%  
 OCCAS'LLY 41.9%  
 NEVER 57.0%

Question 3



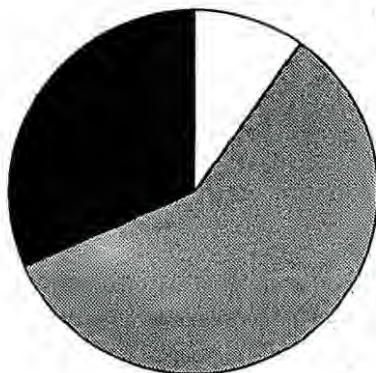
FREQU'NTLY 4.3%  
 OCCAS'LLY 42.7%  
 NEVER 53.0%

Question 4



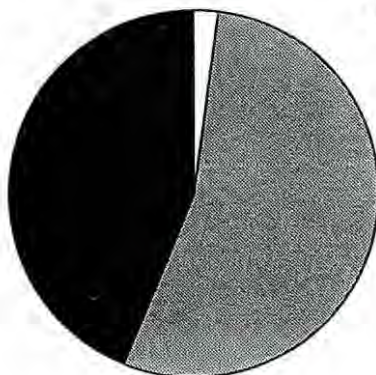
FREQU'NTLY 2.2%  
 OCCAS'LLY 9.7%  
 NEVER 88.2%

Question 5



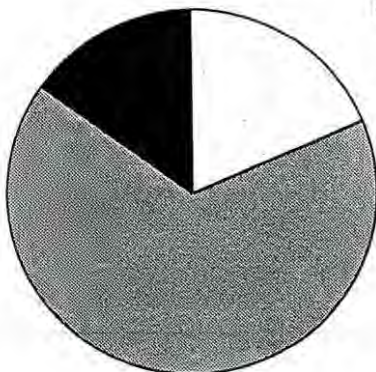
□ FREQ'NTLY 9.7%  
 ▨ OCCAS'LLY 58.6%  
 ■ NEVER 31.7%

Question 6



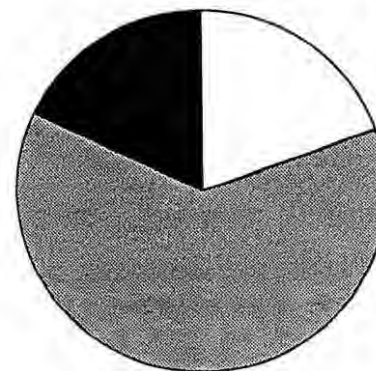
□ FREQ'NTLY 2.2%  
 ▨ OCCAS'LLY 54.1%  
 ■ NEVER 43.7%

Question 7



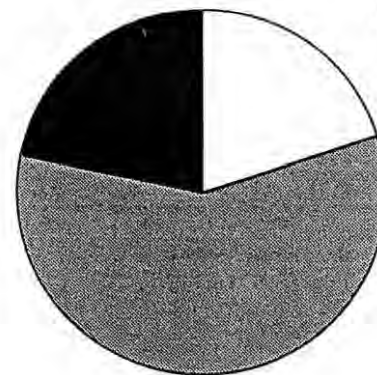
□ FREQ'NTLY 18.5%  
 ▨ OCCAS'LLY 66.3%  
 ■ NEVER 15.2%

Question 8



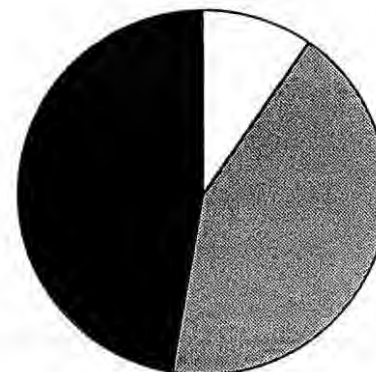
□ FREQ'NTLY 19.5%  
 ▨ OCCAS'LLY 62.7%  
 ■ NEVER 17.8%

Question 9



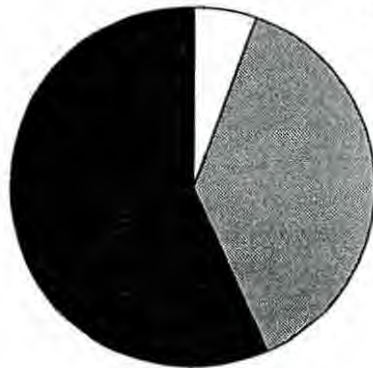
□ FREQ'NTLY 20.0%  
 ▨ OCCAS'LLY 58.4%  
 ■ NEVER 21.6%

Question 10



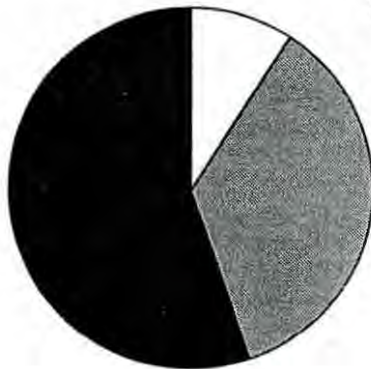
□ FREQ'NTLY 9.7%  
 ▨ OCCAS'LLY 43.2%  
 ■ NEVER 47.2%

Question 11



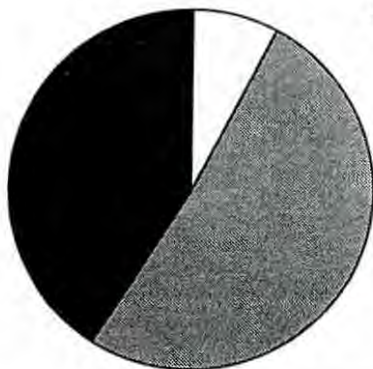
□ FREQ'NTLY 5.4%  
▒ OCCAS'LLY 37.5%  
■ NEVER 57.1%

Question 12



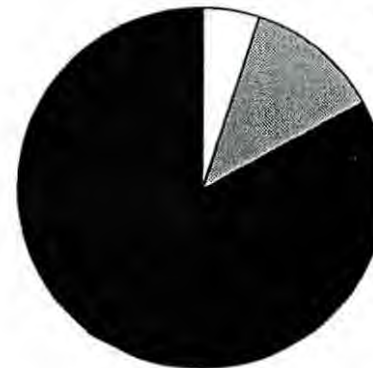
□ FREQ'NTLY 9.1%  
▒ OCCAS'LLY 35.5%  
■ NEVER 55.4%

Question 13



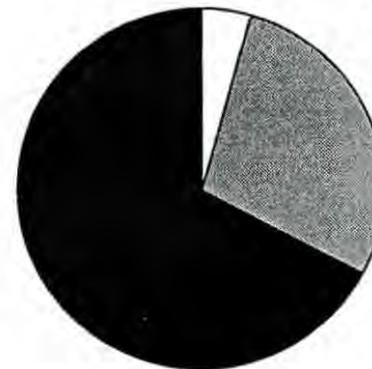
□ FREQ'NTLY 7.6%  
▒ OCCAS'LLY 51.4%  
■ NEVER 41.1%

Question 14



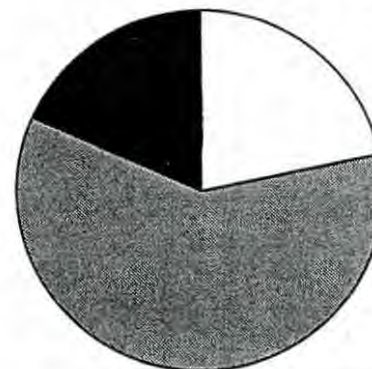
□ FREQ'NTLY 4.9%  
▒ OCCAS'LLY 11.9%  
■ NEVER 83.2%

Question 15



□ FREQ'NTLY 4.4%  
▒ OCCAS'LLY 28.4%  
■ NEVER 67.2%

Question 16



□ FREQ'NTLY 21.8%  
▒ OCCAS'LLY 60.3%  
■ NEVER 17.9%

### Question 17

