

Research Snapshot



UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN

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CREATE Justice

Centre for Research, Evaluation,
and Action Towards Equal Justice

Access to Legal Services - Dispute Resolution - Systemic Justice

How does the public access legal help and what are some of the barriers to taking legal action?

What is the research about?

The goal of the **Architects of Justice Survey** was to provide justice stakeholders with meaningful input from the public in order to improve the justice system. The Architects of Justice project emerged from the College of Law Dean's Forum theme of "putting the public first." Architects of Justice is an initiative that aims to increase public participation in developing access to justice solutions.

What you need to know:

According to this survey, **cost is the most common barrier to taking action through the legal system**, followed by fear or intimidation of the legal process, and a feeling of confusion when it comes to the legal process. Lawyers and paralegals, family and friends, and the internet were the top three places respondents go when facing a legal issue.

What did the researchers do?

A survey was developed and included the following three questions:

- Where do the public choose to go for help when facing a legal issue?
- What are the reasons people might not take action through the legal system?
- How can the justice system make it easier for people to deal with their legal problems?

Adults from the general population of Saskatchewan were invited to participate in the online survey which volunteers from the Just Rights law student group distributed through email and social media. The survey was also available on the Law Society of Saskatchewan's Blog and the University of Saskatchewan's College of Law Access to Justice Week website.

Four hundred people participated in the survey including 113 from Regina and 75 from Saskatoon.

BE WHAT THE WORLD NEEDS

What did the researchers find?

When asked where they go to access legal help, 43.8 per cent of respondents said their own lawyer or paralegal, 43.8 per cent said family and friends, and 39.5 per cent said the internet. Respondents were also asked to identify the potential reasons that people may choose to not take action through the legal system when facing a legal problem. Cost, or the system being too expensive, was cited by the most respondents (77.3 per cent). Approximately 59 per cent of respondents cited fear or intimidation of the process, and 43.3 per cent of respondents selected that the process is too confusing.

Over a third of respondents suggested they do not trust the legal process, and nearly a quarter selected that the legal system would ultimately not resolve the issue. Other reasons cited for choosing not to take action through the legal system included previous bad experience, inaccessibility, time required, legal aid unable to provide assistance, issue is too small to justify effort, perception that lawyers purposefully delay process in order to charge more, and because the system re-victimizes the victim.

Approximately half of survey respondents believed more could be done to build awareness of the legal system and to spread understanding of the services available, their related costs, how to access them, and when.

How can you use this?

This research helps justice stakeholders identify where the public may choose to go for help when facing legal issues, reasons people may not take action through the legal system, and what can be done to make it easier for people to deal with their legal problems. This survey has inspired steps to further involve and survey legal consumers and the public in developing access to justice solutions.

About the researchers

This Saskatchewan survey replicates the Ontario survey by the Action Group on Access to Justice. The Architects of Justice Survey Report (2017) was compiled by **CREATE Justice**, a centre for research, evaluation and action on the topic of access to justice in the areas of access to legal services, dispute resolution, and systemic justice. CREATE Justice was established at the College of Law at the University of Saskatchewan in 2016.

Citation

A full copy of the report can be found on the Centre for Research, Evaluation, and Action Towards Equal Justice (CREATE Justice) website at:

https://law.usask.ca/createjustice/documents/ArchitectsofJusticeSurveyReport_FINAL.pdf

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