

Purpose of the Project

Each year 4 million workers throughout the country lose their jobs. Most of these have a partner and children, bringing the total number of people affected by job loss even higher. In Hawaii, employment in sugar production decreased 20% between 1990 - 1993 and by an additional 50% in 1994 - 1995, affecting thousands of local families.

This project was conducted to find out:

- What changes occur in families when a breadwinner loses his or her job
- What strengths families bring to the crisis
- What we can do as *individuals*, as *families*, and as *communities* to support each other through hard times and return to financial and emotional security and self-sufficiency

Who We Talked To

One hundred twenty-six (126) families from Hamakua, Hilo Coast, and Ka'u were interviewed between September 1995 - March 1996. Most had a worker who had lost a job with the sugar plantation companies. A few were awaiting lay-offs due to company closures.

Stresses & Changes In The Face Of Job Loss

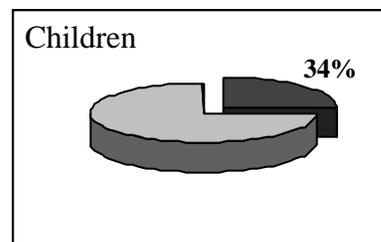
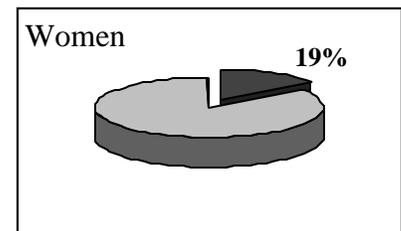
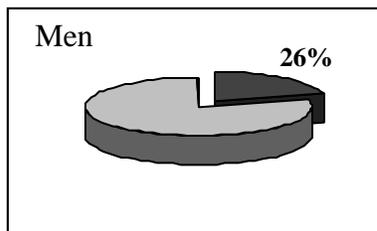
- **Financial Problems.** Finding a new job is a difficult task. Four out of ten workers interviewed were still unemployed a year after the layoffs and one in ten had retired or left the job market.

The majority of families interviewed had problems paying bills and covering necessities like food and clothing. Many used up their savings.

Families found creative ways of getting by. Four out of ten families used emergency programs like food bank services. Many traded with neighbors, sold personal belongings, or went hunting and fishing for food.

- **Health Risks.** Families interviewed show high levels of emotional distress, including depression, fears, anxiety, and difficulty controlling anger.

% of Family Members Showing Severe Levels of Emotional Distress



Job loss took its toll on women's physical health. Their trips to the doctor's office increased by 27% in the lay-off year.

For children, school absences increased by 56%.

Family Strengths

- The family can be the most important source of strength. **40% of project families said they appreciated each other more now than they did before the lay-offs began.**
- There are actions family members can take to keep each other healthy and together during this crisis. See the **4 Ps** of coping.

Community Strengths

- The strength and safety of the community was also important in helping families feel better about themselves. Families reported a desire to preserve the sense of 'ohana that exists in plantation communities and to foster community involvement that creates a healthy and productive environment for their keiki.
- Families that used and were happy with available community services appear to be coping well. **7 in 10 used employment services and 4 in 10 used family services.**

The 4 Ps of Coping

Things families did that helped them cope with the crisis included:

- **Problem-solving.** Families that worked together to find solutions to problems reduced family tensions and conflicts. Showing a real interest in working as a team to deal with issues, setting up meeting times to deal with family problems, listening to each other without criticism and deciding as a group how to solve problems helped families become closer and better cope with the job loss.
- **Positive Vibes.** Families where members expressed emotional support, showed warmth and communicated positive messages fostered a sense of security that allowed them to deal with the hardships of unemployment.
- **Parenting.** Children react mainly to the parents' reactions during such a crisis. Parents who controlled their temper, showed affection, stayed involved in their children's daily lives, and maintained household rules and rituals did a lot to keep their children healthy during this difficult period.
- **Planning.** Families that worked *together* on a financial plan or household budget reduced the stress that can lead to other family conflicts. Families where the displaced worker developed a plan of action for new employment and started job hunting before the plantation closed were more successful in finding new work.