

Minority Groups 4.1 Per Cent of N. S. Borough Population

Almost 9,000 persons in the Fairbanks North Star Borough are living in poverty, according to a survey recently published by the University of Alaska's Institute of Social, Economic and Government Research.

The report, entitled, "Fairbanks Community Survey: A Profile of Poverty" was sponsored by the area Community Action Agency with the support of the city and borough government to help establish priorities for youth and adult programs in the borough.

Dr. Frank Sessions, former head of the Psychology and Sociology Department of the university, designed and supervised the survey. John Rosen, of the university, constructed the 76-item questionnaire and directed actual data gathering.

The questionnaire was distributed to 322 household heads on a scientific random basis and 296 questionnaires were returned completed. Dr. Sessions said that poverty in Fairbanks was "defined as an annual gross income level of \$4,500 or below for a family of four."

"This figure was based upon the national poverty level standard of \$3,000 per year, but took into consideration the higher cost of living in Fairbanks compared to the rest of the nation and of tax increases and inflation since 1962," Dr. Sessions explained.

The survey showed that the "average" Fairbanks North Star Borough household is composed of a family of four. The household head is 33.6 years of age, is male, has an annual income of \$7,800, holds a blue collar job and has better than a high school education. His racial background is Caucasian and he is Protestant.

"Minority racial groups comprise 4.1 per cent of the total borough household heads," Dr. Sessions said. "Indians, mainly Athabascans, account for almost 20 per cent, Negroes 15 per cent and Eskimos 5 per cent."

"According to the survey, a very high proportion of Indians and elderly persons in the Fairbanks area are among the abject poor. Eskimos tend to be less poor and Negroes are found in the lower middle class with incomes between \$7,500 and \$10,000 annually. Most of the poor are uneducated,

unskilled and semi-skilled laborers who work on a part time, part year basis or who are unemployed. Many are illiterate or functionally illiterate."

The survey indicated that over one fourth of the borough's population can be classified as being among the poor and that approximately 12 per cent of the people of the borough live in abject poverty.

"The poor category includes 2,149 families with annual incomes of less than \$7,500," Dr. Sessions said. "There are 3,739 children under 17 in this category with annual incomes of less than \$4,500 including 1,727 children under 17 and 606 children under 7."

The sociologist indicated that there was reason to be optimistic about improving the situation of the poverty-stricken in the borough.

"The survey shows that even though there are some sharp differences between the poor and the affluent, the poor in the Fairbanks area appear not to have many of the characteristics attributed to the poor in other regions," Sessions said.

"The data developed during the survey suggests that most poor people in the borough subscribe to cultural norms which would allow them to rise above the poverty level if given the opportunity. They do not view society and authority as an enemy; there is no widespread social disorganization; they recognize their deficient education and training and they aspire to a better life for their children."

Dr. Sessions pointed out that the results of the survey indicate that the adult poor in the borough are prepared to accept some responsibility to help themselves and that there is a need to establish several programs which would deal directly with the adult and youth population of the area.

Among the programs recommended in the report are: regular counseling sessions with professionally trained leaders; youth recreation programs; expanded child development programs; improvement of the borough transportation system; home economics training in basic nutrition, child care, home maintenance, etc., and adult classes in reading, writing, and basic communication.