



# National Institute of Justice *Update*

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## NIJ Survey of Judges, Trial Court Administrators, and State Court Administrators

### The National Assessment Program Survey

The National Institute of Justice (NIJ) conducts the National Assessment Program (NAP) survey approximately every 3 years to identify the needs and problems of State and local criminal justice agencies. The survey asks participants about their workload problems and initiatives to solve them as well as about special concerns and needs. NIJ uses the results to plan its research, evaluation, and demonstration programs.

For the 1994 survey, questionnaires were sent to more than 3,300 criminal justice professionals in 13 types of agencies in 411 counties nationwide. A total of 211 counties having populations greater than 250,000 were surveyed, along with a random sample of 200 counties having populations between 50,000 and 250,000. Responses were received between October 1993 and February 1994 from 2,585 people (for a response rate of 69 percent).

The complete report of the survey, *National Assessment Program: 1994 Survey Results*, by Tom McEwen, can be obtained free from the National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS), Box 6000, Rockville, MD 20849-6000. Call 800-851-3420 or e-mail [askncjrs@ncjrs.aspensys.com](mailto:askncjrs@ncjrs.aspensys.com). Ask for NCJ 150856. Also available from NCJRS are individual summaries of responses from the other following groups: police chiefs and sheriffs; prosecutors; probation and parole agency directors; wardens and State commissioners of corrections; and jail administrators.

"The nature of criminal complaints is becoming more aggravated. Most crime is related to drug use. If we don't do something about drug abuse at a very early age, our problems will be insurmountable." This comment, made by a judge in the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) 1994 National Assessment Program (NAP) survey, reflects the centrality of substance abuse as an issue for judges. A total of 163 judges (44 percent of the 367 surveyed), 150 trial court administrators (57 percent of the 264 surveyed), and 35 State court administrators (67 percent of the 51 surveyed) responded. Drug-related cases led the list of workload problems that judges, trial court administrators (TCA's), and State court administrators (SCA's) said they faced.

### Workload problems

**Violent crimes.** When judges were asked which crimes—homicide, rape, domestic violence, child abuse, and drug possession and sales—contributed to workload problems in their courts, about 84 percent cited domestic violence, homicide, and drug possession as principal contributors. Slightly more (86 percent) indicated that drug sales were the primary contributor to workload problems. As one judge put it, cases involving drugs and related crimes were a major factor in doubling the number of cases brought before the courts, with no increase in the number of judges. Another reason, cited by TCA's and SCA's, was that these cases typically required considerable resources.

### Agency initiatives

**Drug treatment.** Most judges and TCA's (92 and 90 percent, respectively) said their jurisdictions had drug treatment programs, although the vast majority (84 percent of judges and 85 percent of TCA's) felt the programs needed improvement. Comments from these

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groups emphasized the need for programs for indigents and increases in long-term treatment.

**Alternative sanctions.** Boot camps have been established in the jurisdictions of 82 percent of the judges and 63 percent of the TCA's. Of these respondents, about half in each group indicated the programs needed improvement. Their support for this option was evident, however. Less than 10 percent who did not have boot camps said they did not want them in their jurisdiction. Some judges believed that boot camps were best reserved for first-time offenders. Others noted the lack of followup skills training and supervision that resulted in some boot camp graduates recommitting crimes.

Judges and TCA's indicated stronger support for work release centers: More than 90 percent of each group said their jurisdictions currently had work release centers. Although more than half the respondents in the two groups indicated their centers needed improvement, only about 1 percent of those with no work release centers said they did not want or need this option. Electronic monitoring, available as an alternative sanction in the jurisdictions of about 90 percent of judges and 89 percent of TCA's, drew the most mixed reaction. Even though roughly two-thirds of these respondents indicated their programs needed improvement, they believed they showed signs of success and should be expanded; less than 3 percent said they did not want or need this option.

**Drug courts.** One way to alleviate the workload problems associated with drug-related cases is the use of drug courts. Of the TCA's, 13 percent indicated that they had special drug courts in their jurisdictions. Others reported that drug courts would soon be established or were under consideration. TCA's seemed convinced of the effectiveness of this initiative, one of them noting that a drug court handled many cases with only one full-time judge.

## Special issues

**Information systems.** The need for better information systems was of special concern to judges and TCA's. About 57 percent said they have systems to handle attorney scheduling conflicts, but a large proportion (70 percent) said their systems needed improvement. More than half (about 56 percent) of them have systems for identifying space availability in treatment centers, but again a large proportion (74 percent) felt improvement was needed.

## Research and evaluation priorities

Judges, TCA's, and SCA's recommended alternative sanctions and case management as key topics for further NIJ research and evaluation. Specifically, they said they wanted to know how effective boot camps were in producing long-term behavior modification. They were also interested in learning about effective case management strategies and various drug court models.

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