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# Introduction to the Survey of Youth in Residential Placement

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*The Survey of Youth in Residential Placement (SYRP) is the third component in the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's constellation of surveys providing updated statistics on youth in custody in the juvenile justice system. It joins the Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement and the Juvenile Residential Facility Census, which are biennial mail surveys of residential facility administrators conducted in alternating years. SYRP is a unique addition, gathering information directly from youth through anonymous interviews. This bulletin series reports on the first national SYRP, covering its development and design and providing detailed information on the youth's characteristics, backgrounds, and expectations; the conditions of their confinement; their needs and the services they received; and their experiences of victimization in placement.*

This bulletin, the first in the series, introduces the Survey of Youth in Residential Placement, reviews its background, describes its design and methodology, discusses its strengths and limitations, and summarizes the questions it answers about the population of youth in custody. Subsequent bulletins, described below, report the survey findings; further details also will be available in The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's (OJJDP's) *Survey of Youth in Residential Placement: Technical Report* (Sedlak et al., forthcoming).

## Surveying the Youth

SYRP is unique in being the only current national survey to obtain information about youth in custody by asking the

youth themselves. By directly questioning youth, SYRP can address issues that no other information source covers. Moreover, it conveys the special perspectives of the youth about their offenses and offense histories and their experiences in placement.

SYRP is the latest addition to the two data collections that OJJDP designed and implemented in the 1990s to provide enhanced juvenile custody statistics. As outlined in table 1 (p. 2), SYRP joins two ongoing surveys that OJJDP conducts—the Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement (CJRP) and the Juvenile Residential Facility Census (JRFC), both of which collect information from administrators of facilities that hold offenders younger than 21.

## A Message From OJJDP

For decades OJJDP has collected data on juvenile offenders in custody and on the facilities in which they are confined to better understand the nature of these facilities and to enhance the effectiveness of the services that they provide to youth.

Two surveys designed and implemented by OJJDP in the 1990s, the Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement (CJRP) and the Juvenile Residential Facility Census (JRFC), solicit information from facility administrators.

This bulletin introduces the Survey of Youth in Residential Placement (SYRP), which complements CJRP and JRFC by gathering information directly from youth in custody. It is the only current national survey to do so.

The bulletin describes the survey's design and methodology. It also provides an overview of the remaining bulletins in the series, which draw on the findings of the first national SYRP to report on the characteristics, backgrounds, and expectations of youth in residential placement; the conditions of their confinement; their needs and the services they receive in custody to address them; and their risk of victimization during confinement.

It is OJJDP's hope that SYRP's findings, like those of its companions, CJRP and JRFC, will increase awareness of the challenges that we face in addressing the needs of juveniles in custody and inform policy and practice to meet them more effectively.

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**Table 1: OJJDP Data Systems on Youth in Residential Placement**

Survey	Respondents	Content
Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement	Residential facility administrators	Facility program(s) and size and basic youth characteristics
Juvenile Residential Facility Census	Residential facility administrators	Facility characteristics and services
Survey of Youth in Residential Placement	Youth in residential placement	Youth's needs, services received, offenses, and placement environments

CJRP and JRFC target all such facilities nationwide, excluding only federal facilities and those that solely provide mental health or substance abuse treatment. CJRP, first conducted in 1997, is administered in odd-numbered years to all juvenile facilities. It gathers information about some basic characteristics of the facility and obtains individual-level administrative data on each youth assigned a facility bed on the reference day (Sickmund, 2002a). JRFC, first conducted in 2000, obtains detailed information about facility operations and programs in even-numbered years (Sickmund, 2002b).<sup>1</sup>

SYRP is a unique addition to these surveys in that it gathers data directly from youth in residence through anonymous interviews. SYRP asks the youth about their backgrounds, offense histories, and problems; the facility environment; their experiences in the facility; and their expectations for the future. Although SYRP covers the same universe of facilities as the two census surveys, it does so through a sample methodology. Thus, based on interviews with a large, nationally representative sample of offender youth in residential placement, SYRP can generate reliable estimates about the characteristics of the full population of youth in custody.

## Background

OJJDP began designing the new array of juvenile justice surveys following the 1993 Juvenile Custody Statistics Symposium, dedicating a great deal of attention to the surveys' substantive focus and workability and to ensuring their sound methodology and defensible measurement properties. Like the earlier census surveys, OJJDP developed SYRP through a 2-year planning process.<sup>2</sup> Guided by recommendations from an advisory board of nationally recognized juvenile justice

experts, the planning team articulated the core research questions for the national SYRP, drafted the instrument, developed the national sample plan, and designed implementation procedures adaptable to the full range of facility environments the national SYRP would include. The team assessed and refined the draft instrument through cognitive interviews with youth in custody and then programmed it into an audio computer-assisted self-interview (ACASI) format to support SYRP's anonymous self-interview procedures (detailed below). Finally, the team assessed the feasibility of the overall plan through a large field test in which 811 youth in 34 facilities in several eastern states completed interviews (Westat, 2000). The field test results guided several modifications of the national plan, the most important being strategies for improving youth participation rates and revisions of specific interview items to simplify wording, improve clarity, and enhance the quality of the resulting information (Westat, 2001).

## Methodology

### Sample

The targeted universe for SYRP is the population of offender youth ages 10–20 in all facilities surveyed for The CJRP and the JRFC from the listing that the U.S. Census Bureau maintains for OJJDP, excluding only extremely small facilities (those with fewer than three offender youth in residence). SYRP draws a nationally representative sample from this population through a two-stage, probability-proportional-to-size sample design, with facilities sampled at the first stage and youth within the selected facilities sampled at the second stage. Both pre- and postadjudication youth and facilities are part of SYRP.

SYRP statisticians stratify the targeted universe by a number of characteristics to reduce sampling error<sup>3</sup> and undersample small facilities to improve cost efficiency. To improve the precision of estimates for females and Hispanic males, the statisticians also oversampled these subgroups at both the facility level and youth level. The resulting sample included 290 facilities, selected from a total of 3,893 facilities on the census listings in August 2001 and/or September 2002.

Within participating facilities, the sample frame comprises all offender youth with assigned beds at the time of data collection. Facilities provide a roster of these youth, indicating whether each is female or Hispanic to permit the oversampling of these subgroups. More complex facilities subdivide their rosters into units that differ in primary program or function to distinguish them during analyses. Facilities further subdivide their program rosters into their separate living units (e.g., wings and cottages). Drawing the youth sample from each living unit separately allows survey staff to complete most interviews soon after youth are sampled and to process the facility residents according to a preplanned sequence. This minimizes disruption to normal facility operations, permits administrators to plan and provide the support needed to escort and monitor youth in different units, and maintains separation of important subgroups (e.g., males/females, different gangs) when convening youth for interviews.

## Facility Recruitment and Participation

Although the SYRP sample is drawn from all eligible facilities throughout the United States, the facilities randomly sampled happened to be located in just 36 states. Recruitment began with contacts to state authorities more than a year in advance of the data-collection period, identifying the sampled facilities under state jurisdiction, and initiating the clearances needed to conduct the study in those institutions. Seven states required a full application to their Institutional Review Board (IRB) or review by their state attorneys general or administrative legal counsel. Following 15 months of recruitment, 35 of the 36 states granted clearance to conduct the study in facilities under their authority.<sup>4</sup> The survey team began recruiting facilities under state authority immediately after the state granted approval and approached other facilities as soon as it was clear they were



independent of state authority. Some facilities required a local authority (e.g., juvenile court) or a parent agency (e.g., private corporate administrative office) to grant clearance.

The 290 sampled facilities included 240 that were eligible for data collection.<sup>5</sup> Of these eligible facilities, 204 participated, yielding a facility-level response rate of 85 percent. The nonparticipating 15 percent included those where state or local authorities refused clearance for the study (13 facilities, or 5 percent of those eligible) and those where the individual facility administrator refused (23 facilities, or 10 percent of those eligible). When facilities provided reasons for refusing, they predominantly cited budget, staffing, or scheduling constraints. Of the 240 eligible facilities, 175 were public and 65 were private. Public facilities participated at a significantly higher rate (89 percent versus 74 percent private facility participation).

### Facility Characteristics and Logistics

Once a facility agreed to participate, study staff obtained or updated information about its program(s) and learned about its different living units—their size, composition, and security. All but the smallest facilities had multiple living units. Because important features that vary across living units often shape implementation strategies, SYRP treats different living units as discrete operational units. In collaboration with the facility administrators, the study team developed plans for the following activities:

- ◆ Obtaining the required permissions (facility/parental) to allow individual youth to participate.
- ◆ Obtaining rosters of residents for youth-level sampling.
- ◆ Reserving the room space to administer the survey to small groups.
- ◆ Scheduling the survey team's visit during days when the necessary facility staff could be available to support the survey activities.
- ◆ Scheduling the interview sessions during times when the youth could be available.

The plans also identified a facility liaison to coordinate the visit and clarified any special procedural constraints or precautions.

### Parental Permission

SYRP targeted youth ages 10–20, with minors comprising most of this population. Because of differences in youth's custody status (detained, adjudicated) and variations in state and local requirements regarding parental permission (i.e., age of self-consent or *in loco parentis* authority [which means the facility can provide consent in the place of a parent]), study staff developed specific consent arrangements in consultation with state and local authorities and facility administrators. Nearly one-half (48 percent) of the 204 participating facilities provided *in loco parentis* consent for all juveniles in their custody; the remainder required a form of parental consent for some or all of their juvenile residents: 38 percent required written parental consent, 1 percent verbal consent, 9 percent passive consent (i.e., parental notification only, with a response only needed to deny permission), and 4

percent required a mixture of consent procedures with different approaches for different subgroups of residents. To ensure the anonymity of youth, SYRP staff did not directly obtain parental consent. Instead, the facility sought whatever parental consent was required and SYRP staff supported these efforts with any needed materials or resources (e.g., letters, brochures, and/or postage). Facilities began efforts to obtain any required parental consents in advance of the data collection visit.

### Youth Sampling and Participation

Facilities provided rosters of their offender residents. Larger facilities provided an earlier roster in advance of the data collection visit. This allowed survey staff to key the roster into the sample management system and draw a preliminary sample of youth,<sup>6</sup> thus minimizing the number of parental consents the facility had to pursue in 39 large facilities that required parental consent. Youth sampling activities at the time of the data visit varied, depending on the details of earlier preparations. In small facilities that did not provide a preliminary roster, the survey team simply entered all offender residents assigned a bed at the time of their data collection visit (using facility code numbers to identify the residents) and drew the youth sample. In large facilities without a preliminary sample, the survey team updated the earlier roster to accurately reflect all offender residents who were assigned a bed at the time and drew the final youth sample. Finally, in facilities with a preliminary sample already drawn from the preliminary roster, the survey team listed all the offender youth currently assigned a bed who had entered since the preliminary roster was prepared and drew a supplementary youth sample from these new entrants.

Taken together, youth rosters in all participating facilities listed 25,429 offender youth; 9,850 of these were sampled. Among sampled youth, 9,495 were eligible because they had an assigned bed when the sample was drawn. (The remainder were selected in preliminary samples but left their facilities before the data visit.) A total of 7,073 youth completed SYRP interviews, comprising 74.5 percent of the eligible youth sample. The remaining sampled youth did not participate because their parents did not consent (15.1 percent of eligible youth),<sup>7</sup> the youth refused (3.3 percent), the youth were unavailable during the interview visit (3.0 percent),

the facility refused to allow certain youth to participate (2.7 percent),<sup>8</sup> or the youth answered only part of the interview and could not continue (1.4 percent). The lowest rate of youth participation occurred when written parental consent was required (53 percent), and the highest rate was obtained when facility administrators were able to grant *in loco parentis* consent for their committed youth (88 percent).

## Interviews

The survey team conducted interviews between the beginning of March and mid-June 2003, with 96 percent completed in the first 10 weeks (i.e., by mid-May). In preparation, field staff underwent a 6-day training at the end of February 2003. Twenty-four three-person teams traveled to the facilities to conduct the interviews. Each team brought 12 laptops and a portable printer. Two laptops were servers that held the sample management system and all survey response data. The remaining 10 were “client” laptops that held the interview program and the teams used them to administer the interviews to youth.

On arrival at a facility, the field team arranged the client laptops so youth seated before them could not see others’ computer screens. (A critical point of discussion

during the logistical planning for the visit was the need to identify a location in the facility where youth could be situated at sufficient distances and physically oriented to ensure the privacy of their laptop screens.)

Facility staff provided the final youth roster in a coded format (i.e., without names). The field team entered this final roster into the sample management system (or updated an earlier roster so that it correctly listed all current offender residents) and then drew a random sample of these youth. The field team printed the list of sampled youth (using the facility codes) and gave this to the facility staff. Facility staff identified and located the sampled youth and escorted them to the survey room in groups of up to 10. The field team seated each youth at a client laptop and started the interview program.

The interview uses an ACASI methodology. Youth put on headphones and listen as a prerecorded interviewer’s voice “reads” the words displayed on the screen. The ACASI system first presents the assent statement; youth touch a “button” on the laptop touch-screen to indicate whether they agree to participate.

Youth who agree to participate then enter a brief tutorial about how to use the ACASI system. The interview program highlights

each question and answer alternative on the screen as it is read. Youth indicate their response choice by touching it on the screen, at which point it is again highlighted and the prerecorded voice again reads it aloud. If satisfied with the answer, the youth touches the “Next” arrow when ready and proceeds to the next question. Figure 1 below shows an ACASI screen from the SYRP interview.

In this example, the phrase “*this facility*” is given in yellow font. Throughout the interview, certain words and phrases are printed in yellow to indicate that they are “hot words.” When the youth touches a hot word, the program displays its definition on the bottom of the screen and plays an audio file that reads this definition. Any youth who has a question can raise a hand to summon a member of the SYRP field team monitoring the session. Also, any youth who takes longer than 30 seconds to respond to the question on four different screens in a given interview section receives a screen that stops the interview and instructs the youth to raise a hand and summon the survey monitor for assistance. The ACASI program also presents a similar screen when a youth cannot find the offense(s) that led to his or her custody in the lists provided. The monitor answers questions, ensures the youth is comfortable continuing with the interview, and assists in locating an appropriate answer from the offenses listed. Intervention by the survey monitor lengthens the time it takes the youth to complete the interview.

The SYRP interview is designed to take an average of 35–40 minutes, although youth with particularly complex offense histories or who report extensive problems can take as long as an hour. Excluding those interviews that were interrupted in midsession and had to continue at a later time,<sup>9</sup> the SYRP interview took youth an average of 39 minutes (median 38 minutes) to complete. The majority of interviews took between 25 minutes and an hour (5th percentile: 24 minutes, 95th percentile: 59 minutes).

## Sensitive Questions, Privacy, Anonymity, and Human Subjects Protections

SYRP’s designers faced a challenging dilemma. Because of the importance of learning about youth’s experiences in placement, the interview contains a number of sensitive questions, including several about experiences of violent

**Figure 1: Sample ACASI Interview Screen From the Survey of Youth in Residential Placement**

Which of the following are true about this facility? You may choose more than one answer.

- It's clean
- The food's good
- They have a good school program
- They have a good recreational program
- None of the above

Erase

BACK NEXT



victimization (e.g., forced sex, robbery, and physical assault) within the facility. Obtaining candid answers to such questions is difficult in any circumstance but is especially problematic in the context of state mandates to report child abuse to appropriate authorities. When youth answer that they have been victimized, researchers must report the abuse to the authorities who receive child abuse reports.<sup>10</sup> Yet in that situation, informed consent requirements also dictate that the researchers must forewarn youth (and their parents or other consenting authorities) prior to beginning the survey that they will formally report any disclosed abuse to the appropriate authority (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2005). Obviously, such forewarning could substantially decrease participation and candor, thereby compromising the original purpose of the survey. At the same time, the confidentiality statutes and regulations that apply to the U.S. Department of Justice generally prohibit the release of individually identifiable private information without the consent of the person providing the information (U.S. Department of Justice, 2005).

To resolve this dilemma, SYRP uses ACASI and follows “strict anonymity” procedures. These procedures encompass more than the privacy that ACASI itself affords and go further than the anonymity of youth within a facility through the use of code numbers (i.e., survey staff never know youth’s

names—all rosters and sample lists refer to the residents solely by codes that their facility assigns). Specifically, SYRP’s strict anonymity procedures ensure that the youth’s answers cannot be linked to their facilities. Answers are stored separately from sample management information in an electronic file that is indecipherable without a data model. All data are delinked from any facility identifiers before the interview answers are deciphered for analysis by the data model. This strong shielding means that when the answers are finally analyzed, survey staff cannot provide actionable reports to child protection authorities because they do not know which individual youth or even which facilities are involved in any incidents disclosed during the interviews.

Although the ACASI method and strict anonymity procedures encourage candor and resolve the conflict between states’ mandatory reporting laws and federal privacy regulations, they do not address the needs of vulnerable youth who require support and access to intervention. To address this ethical responsibility, SYRP provides toll-free access to a licensed independent counselor. As a condition of participation,<sup>11</sup> facilities agree to allow sampled youth to contact the counselor for an unmonitored phone conversation at their request.

SYRP’s assent statement informs youth participating in the survey that they can call a toll-free number if they have questions about the survey after the field team leaves their facility or if they are upset or need help. All youth who start the survey receive a paper copy of the assent statement, which provides the counselor’s toll-free phone number. The counselor’s role is to provide screening and referral services to youth who are distressed about the interview topics or concerned about abusive experiences and need to talk about these matters. The counselor assists these youth in identifying and accessing facility counselors or other resources. If youth disclose abuse in this conversation, the counselor encourages them to report it themselves or provide information so the counselor can report for them.

The counselor received four calls during this first implementation of SYRP. Only one of these calls pertained to maltreatment—from a youth who reported that the survey had triggered memories of earlier abuse. He was receptive to following up with the counseling staff at his own facility.

## Administrative CJRP and JRFC Data

SYRP forges explicit links between the youth’s interview answers and the information gathered in the normal cycles of the two census surveys by adapting and updating the latest CJRP and JRFC information for the SYRP sample. At the time of the 2003 SYRP, the latest facility surveys were the 2001 CJRP and 2002 JRFC. In planning facilities’ participation, SYRP recruiters asked the facility-level CJRP questions (i.e., the first section of CJRP) for separate living units, clarifying the primary program and size of each. After drawing the youth sample, the field team asked facility staff to complete the youth-level CJRP items, providing key administrative data items for sampled youth. The field team also brought a copy of the facility’s completed 2002 JRFC survey and asked staff to verify that the information was accurate as of the date of the SYRP interviews and to update it as necessary. SYRP programmers linked the adapted CJRP data and updated JRFC information to the sample management system record for participating youth before they removed the links to facility identifiers.

## Data Processing, Analysis, and Dissemination

SYRP field staff electronically transmitted interview response data from the field to the home office. Throughout these activities, ACASI data remained encoded (i.e., undeciphered). The survey statisticians assigned weights to the sample management system records for participating youth. These weights reflect the sampling probabilities of both the facility and youth and adjust for nonresponse at both levels. Programmers joined the encoded ACASI files, which were linked to the sample management records, with the appropriate JRFC and CJRP data to compile a unified record for each youth. After this, they randomly assigned identification numbers, delinking the data records from facility identifiers. Analysts then applied the data model to open and decipher the interview answers for analysis. After modifications to reduce disclosure risk, the survey team will provide a public use data file through the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research at the University of Michigan ([www.icpsr.umich.edu](http://www.icpsr.umich.edu)). Because of the complex sample design, analysts used WesVar to develop all findings reported in the SYRP bulletin series. WesVar is a software package that

## WesDax: Providing Survey of Youth in Residential Placement Data Online

WesDax is an online query and analysis system that allows users to construct their own results from the Survey of Youth in Residential Placement. The system is designed for audiences without technical or statistical expertise, including policy-makers, service providers, and the general public.

The WesDax system:

- ◆ Operates in a standard Web browser and requires no special software.
- ◆ Offers a tutorial for new users, including a glossary of terms.
- ◆ Computes accurate totals and percentages.
- ◆ Can provide statistical measures of precision (in the form of standard errors or confidence intervals).

To use WesDax, see the "Online Analysis" link at [www.syrp.org](http://www.syrp.org).

computes accurate variances and significance tests for complex survey data using the replicate weight approach (Westat, 2002).<sup>12</sup> Westat has also created an online system for accessing SYRP, called WesDax. (See sidebar above.)

## Strengths and Limitations

Before SYRP, the only study to directly survey a national sample of youth residing in juvenile facilities was the 1987 Survey of Youth in Custody (Beck, Kline, and Greenfield, 1988). That earlier survey, a one-time effort, used a sample limited to youth in long-term, state-operated facilities. In contrast, SYRP is to be a periodic survey that represents offender youth placed in the full range of juvenile justice residential facilities, matching the coverage of OJJDP's census surveys. The majority of these are private facilities that hold about one-third of the juveniles in custody (Sickmund, 2002b). To cover this broad facility universe, the SYRP methodology adapts to widely varying logistical constraints, including the following:

- ◆ Facilities with very short lengths of stay.

- ◆ Narrow time windows when youth are accessible for interviews (taking into account school schedules, programmed hours, and other time away in low-security, open facilities).
- ◆ Diverse interviewing settings, from large cafeterias in training schools to living-room settings in small shelters and group homes.

SYRP attained a facility-level response rate of 85 percent, obtaining all the necessary authorizations and clearances for participating facilities. This entailed negotiating complex, multilayered organizational structures, applying for various states' IRB approvals, and working through legal concerns that various states' attorneys general and/or agency lawyers raised. Within sampled facilities, the study attained a 75-percent youth response rate, obtaining all consents for the youth required under state and local laws and practices. This achievement is particularly noteworthy in view of the fact that more than one-half of facility administrators required parental consent, primarily written.

Another strength of the study is its use of ACASI methodology. The privacy of self-administered questionnaires has been found to enhance reporting of sensitive behavior (Tourangeau and Smith, 1998). With ACASI, youth may be more willing to report behaviors or experiences they would not report to an interviewer (e.g., drug use, victimization). Also, because a prerecorded interviewer's voice "reads" the questions and the answer alternatives to the participant, ACASI avoids a key disadvantage typically associated with self-administration: comprehension problems in populations with poor literacy skills.

SYRP promises participants strict anonymity. Interview answers do not link either to identified youth (whose names were never revealed to the research staff) or to their specific facilities (ACASI answers remain encrypted until all links to specific facilities are eradicated). These protections were critical in achieving the high facility and youth participation rates, since the interviews ask youth about a number of sensitive topics, including their offenses and offense histories, their previous experiences of physical and sexual abuse, their experiences of violence in the facility, substance and alcohol abuse, and suicidality. The ACASI format also allows SYRP to ask questions about youth's experiences of abusive treatment that an interviewer could not ask directly without triggering legal reporting mandates.

SYRP interview data explicitly link to administrative data in three ways:

- ◆ Having participating facilities update their JRFC answers to reflect the facility circumstances near the time of the SYRP data collection.
- ◆ Asking detailed questions about the structure and characteristics of the facility's living units.
- ◆ Having facilities complete the youth-level CJRP questions concerning the specific youth sampled for SYRP.

To minimize sample loss due to turnover (i.e., to keep the sample "fresh"), the survey staff sample youth in different living units independently, ensuring that they can interview the number selected on a given day in light of the time and space available. This approach also makes it possible to associate youth's interview answers with administrative data concerning the facility environment at the level of their living units and to characterize the organizational complexity of the facility on the basis of the number of separate living units and their functional differences. As will be evident throughout the SYRP bulletin series, this additional information provides rich context that further informs the study findings and extends their implications for policy and practice.

As a self-report study, SYRP is vulnerable to the criticism that mischievous respondents, or other factors affecting youth's self-presentation strategies, may distort the findings. At the same time, one might expect the ACASI format and the strict and complete anonymity of the SYRP interviews to remove any obvious direct incentives for youth to attempt to "fool" the study: no interviewer will react to youth's self-descriptions, and their answers about the facility environment cannot be linked to their specific facility.

Even so, in light of the policy importance of many of the findings, the SYRP analysts undertook special efforts to identify suspicious answer patterns. Preliminary tabulations identified five youth who endorsed every offense listed as the reason for their current placement. Because this extreme distortion seriously undermined the credibility of all their answers, analysts classified them as refusing to participate and excluded all their data from analyses. Work concerning the credibility and quality of data from the remaining 7,073 participants<sup>13</sup> proceeded throughout the analyses and followed several different strategies: assessing extreme response

patterns, comparing youth's answers about their offenses to administrative information provided about them on the youth-level CJRP questions, and examining within-unit and within-facility consistency of youth's answers about their environment. The first and second of these efforts are summarized here and will be detailed in OJJDP's *Survey of Youth in Residential Placement: Technical Report* (Sedlak et al., forthcoming).

To gauge the potential influence of exaggerated extreme responses, SYRP analysts identified 18 different markers of suspicious answer patterns. These cover a range of topics throughout the interview and focus on areas where youth can potentially endorse a high number of available answer alternatives or give large numerical estimates in response to questions about frequency or quantity. These markers flag outliers on questions such as the following:

- ◆ The number of times youth say their property was taken by force or threat in the facility.
- ◆ The number of recent emotional and/or mental problems youth report.
- ◆ The number of people youth say they injured during the offenses that led to their current placement.
- ◆ The variety of weapons youth claim they used during their current offenses.
- ◆ The number of substances (alcohol, different drugs) youth say they used.
- ◆ The number of problems youth claim they experienced as a result of their alcohol and/or drug use.

OJJDP's *Survey of Youth in Residential Placement: Technical Report* (Sedlak et al., forthcoming) will define these markers and give their incidence in the respondent data records. Summing the number of markers in each interview constructed an "outlier index," where scores identify youth whose responses are exaggerated or extreme on multiple topics.

Although theoretical scores on this index range from 0 to 18, actual scores range from 0 to 13. Despite the presence of some high-scoring youth, the results confirm that suspicious answer patterns are infrequent in SYRP. Answer patterns of a large majority of the 7,073 participants have no suspicious markers (6,640 youth, or 93.9 percent), and most of the rest fit just a single marker (321 youth, or 4.5 percent of participants). SYRP analysts recommend



against discounting an interview on the basis of a single outlier response because it could reflect a valid report about an extreme experience. Following this standard, which considers scores of either zero or one on the outlier index to be nonproblematic, the answers of 98.4 percent of the youth give no evidence of distortion or bias. The remaining 112 youth (1.6 percent of participants) have 2 or more markers, with only 56 of these (0.8 percent of participants) evidencing 3 or more markers. These youth are too few to measurably affect the study findings in most areas. On issues where small percentages have important policy implications (e.g., the percentage of youth sexually assaulted in placement and their characteristics and risk factors), SYRP analysts verified the findings by running the analyses with the outlier youth excluded. Subsequent SYRP bulletins note wherever staff took this precaution.

For some findings, particularly those on the incidence of victimization experiences in placement and the factors that predict risk of those events, SYRP analysts imposed a very conservative verification test. They compared the offenses the youth identify as the reason for their current stay against what the facility administrators report as their most serious offense. The most conservative standard excludes youth whose interview responses place them in a more serious offender category than administrative information indicated.

This is an exceptionally strict standard because, absent any intent to exaggerate, youth could indicate more serious offenses than administrators for several valid reasons, including the following:

- ◆ The interview questions are more comprehensive, affording youth more opportunities to consider and include a more serious offense.
- ◆ Most youth have convictions for past offenses and may have difficulty disentangling the offenses leading to their current placement from their prior offenses (especially if the court considered their prior convictions in deciding on their current placement).
- ◆ Systematic differences between the events that occurred and the charges that were pled could exacerbate discrepancies, with youth selecting the response that describes their actions, while administrative records indicate the lesser charge actually pled. For example, whereas a youth might describe an assault, the administrative record might show only a disorderly conduct charge.

Overall, neither measure is necessarily more valid—both the youth's and the administrators' reports provide important information about the types of offenders in placement. It seemed prudent, however, to probe the validity of the most important policy-relevant findings by considering the only available independent information on the youth. This imposed an extremely ruthless test, since excluding youth who were more serious offenders in their self-report than in administrative data omitted 39 percent of the 7,073 participants (44 percent of the weighted population in residential placement). Thus far, wherever SYRP analysts have applied this extreme test, the study conclusions have prevailed, despite the substantial amount of excluded data.



Thus, all validity tests to date confirm that the SYRP findings are not discernibly distorted by invalid self-reports. Only a small percentage of participants' answers in multiple interview sections raise suspicion, and critical findings prove robust even when the dataset is severely censored by excluding all youth who report more serious offenses than their facility administrators indicate.

## Research Questions Addressed

OJJDP, the SYRP advisory board, and the study team identified a set of research questions important to policymakers and practitioners, and these guided the interview design. Following the general strategy of that design, each bulletin in the forthcoming SYRP series focuses on a particular topical domain, answering questions about the youth in custody related to that subject.

Table 2 lists the questions addressed in the first topical bulletin in the series, *Youth's Characteristics and Backgrounds: Findings From the Survey of Youth in Residential Placement* (Sedlak and Bruce, forthcoming). Although some SYRP information overlaps with the basic population parameters that CJRP obtains (i.e., number and age, sex, race/ethnicity demographics, most serious current offense), SYRP findings go well beyond those rudimentary characteristics. SYRP youth give considerable details about their current offenses and also report about their prior involvement in the juvenile justice system, providing a more comprehensive picture of the kinds of offenders they are

and the direction of any recent changes in the severity of their offense categories.

Youth also answer a number of questions about their family backgrounds, indicating their principal caregiver(s) when they were growing up and who they lived with before their most recent entry into custody. They also answer questions about their childbearing patterns—whether they have children of their own and/or are expecting any. Because SYRP is nationally representative of all youth in juvenile justice custody, comparing their childbearing patterns with those of youth in the general population is meaningful.

The survey includes questions about the youth's educational status and experiences. Their responses reveal their achievements, whether they are on track (i.e., at an age-appropriate grade level), have special needs, or have received sanctions.

The survey also asks the youth a number of questions about their expectations for the future, including their time of release and plans for their immediate future, their thoughts and expectations concerning future offending and justice system sanctions, and their longer range hopes and expectations. The youth also identify the barriers they see standing in the way of their goals.

Table 3 (p. 10) presents the research questions addressed in the second topical bulletin, *Conditions of Confinement: Findings From the Survey of Youth in Residential Placement* (Sedlak and McPherson, forthcoming). As noted earlier, SYRP links the survey responses to characteristics about the facility indicated in JRFC and to CJRP-type questions about the particular living

unit and principal program. Consequently, SYRP can describe the distribution of youth in custody by various characteristics of their placement contexts, including the size, organizational complexity, and physical layout of their facility; the size of their program and living unit; and the security of their living unit. Considering youth characteristics in these contexts, SYRP indicates the categories of offenders who are placed in different types of programs.

Although no specific facility identifiers remain in the survey response data at the time of analysis (as described above), the data can indicate which youth were grouped together in a living unit, program, and facility. Consequently, SYRP shows the percentage of youth in coeducational facilities or programs and the extent to which youth are placed with others who differ in the severity of their offenses, age, and background experiences.

Youth describe physical features of their placement environments (number of others sleeping in the same room, good qualities, and problematic conditions); rate the quality of available programs; and report on their access to various social, emotional, and legal supports. They also detail features of the facility climate, conveying their perceptions of staff and of the quality of staff-resident relations and reporting on the presence of gangs and contraband in their facility. An additional series of survey questions asks about facility rules, methods of control, and discipline, providing rich information about facility practices.

Table 4 (p. 11) shows the research questions addressed in *Youth's Needs and Services: Findings From the Survey of Youth in Residential Placement* (Sedlak and McPherson, forthcoming). The SYRP interview includes a number of questions taken from the Massachusetts Youth Screening Instrument (MAYSI) (Grisso et al., 2001) concerning recent mental and emotional symptoms. Other questions pertain to youth's experiences indicative of, or associated with, emotional problems (e.g., suicide attempts, exposure to traumatic events). Youth also indicate whether they saw a counselor at their current facility and, if so, how frequently, when they last saw the counselor, the format of the counseling sessions (e.g., group, individual), and how helpful these were. Because SYRP imports updated information from the facilities' latest JRFC and associates these facility characteristics with the ACASI data records, it is possible to determine how

**Table 2: SYRP Research Questions Addressing the Characteristics, Backgrounds, and Expectations of Youth in Residential Placement**

General Research Question	Specific Research Questions
Who are the youth in placement?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ How many youth are in placement?</li> <li>◆ What is their distribution by age, sex, race/ethnicity?</li> </ul>
What are their offenses?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ What offenses led to the youth’s current placement? Were they on probation at the time?</li> <li>◆ What percentages are adjudicated and committed?</li> <li>◆ How long have they been in their current facility?</li> <li>◆ What were the circumstances of the offenses that led to their current placement (weapons use, accomplices and gang involvement, victims, substance use)?</li> <li>◆ What percentage had prior contact with the juvenile justice system (convictions, custody, probation)?</li> <li>◆ Considering their overall offense history (current offenses and prior convictions), what kinds of offenders are they? How does their current offense compare to any prior conviction(s)? Are they repeat offenders in the same category or has the general category of their offense increased or decreased in severity?</li> <li>◆ How do females and males differ in their offense profiles?</li> </ul>
What are their family backgrounds?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Who took care of the youth most of the time while they were growing up?</li> <li>◆ Who were they living with when they were taken into custody for their current stay?</li> <li>◆ What caretaking responsibilities did they have when they entered custody?</li> <li>◆ Are the adults in their family primarily non-English speakers?</li> <li>◆ Do they have children of their own? Are they pregnant or is someone pregnant with their child? How do childbearing patterns differ for females and males in placement? How do these findings compare to childbearing in the general youth population?</li> </ul>
What is their educational background and status?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ What are the youth’s grade levels? Are they educationally on track for their age? How many had to repeat a grade? How do they compare to similar-age peers in the general youth population?</li> <li>◆ What percentage have a learning disability? How does this compare to youth in the general population?</li> <li>◆ What academic achievements and/or sanctions have they received? What percentage were suspended or expelled? How does this compare to general population youth?</li> <li>◆ Do males and females differ on educational status measures?</li> </ul>
What are their expectations for the future?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Have youth been told when they will be released?</li> <li>◆ Do they know where they will go after they leave their current facility?</li> <li>◆ Do they know what will be expected of them when they are released?</li> <li>◆ Do they think they will reoffend in the future? If so, do they think they would be arrested? If arrested, would they be placed again into custody? How do they think their future punishment would compare with their current punishment (less, the same, or more)?</li> <li>◆ Have they made any plans for finding a place to live, getting a job, going to school, receiving treatment?</li> <li>◆ What do they see as their personal strengths?</li> <li>◆ When they think of their future life, do they expect to be married, have children, have a steady job?</li> <li>◆ How much education would they like to attain? Do they think they will achieve that level? If not, why not?</li> <li>◆ Do females and males in custody have different expectations for their futures?</li> </ul>

Notes: SYRP = Survey of Youth in Residential Placement. Findings related to these questions are reported in *Youth’s Characteristics and Backgrounds: Findings From the Survey of Youth in Residential Placement* (Sedlak and Bruce, forthcoming).

**Table 3: SYRP Research Questions Addressing Conditions of Confinement for Youth in Residential Placement**

General Research Question	Specific Research Questions
Where are youth placed?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ How many youth are in the different types of residential programs (detention, corrections, residential treatment, etc.)?</li> <li>◆ What size are these facilities? What is their physical layout? Their organizational complexity (number of programs, living units, specialized subunits)? Their security provisions?</li> <li>◆ What types of offenders are placed in different types of programs?</li> </ul>
Which youth are placed together?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ What types of offenders share living units?</li> <li>◆ How broad is the age range in a living unit? How many youth are placed with much older youth?</li> <li>◆ What percentage of youth in placement are in coed programs or facilities?</li> <li>◆ What percentage of youth are racial/ethnic minorities in their living units or programs?</li> <li>◆ What types of offenders are placed together in living units or in programs?</li> <li>◆ What percentage of youth are in facilities that also house nonoffenders?</li> <li>◆ Do placements tend to group youth together who have similar backgrounds (childbearing, prior abuse)?</li> <li>◆ Do patterns of coplacement differ for males and females?</li> </ul>
What are the physical properties of the placement environment and the availability of activities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ How many youth share a room? What difficulties do they have sleeping?</li> <li>◆ What are the facility's good qualities? What problems do youth indicate?</li> <li>◆ How do youth feel about the quality of the recreational program(s)? The school program?</li> <li>◆ Can they watch TV? How much do they watch TV?</li> </ul>
How safe and secure is the environment?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Do youth know what to do if there is a fire?</li> <li>◆ Do they know how to find help if they are assaulted or threatened?</li> <li>◆ Have they ever left the facility without permission?</li> <li>◆ How afraid are they of being attacked in their facility?</li> </ul>
What social, emotional, and legal supports are accessible to youth?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Do youth have access to a telephone?</li> <li>◆ Have they been in touch with their family? How often? When was the last time?</li> <li>◆ Do youth know how to find a staff member to talk to if they are upset?</li> <li>◆ Do they have a lawyer? Have they had contact with a lawyer?</li> </ul>
What is the quality of the facility climate?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ How do youth perceive the staff? What percentages of youth say positive versus negative things about staff? What percentage see resident/staff relations as generally good versus poor?</li> <li>◆ What percentage of youth say there are gangs in their facility? Are there gang fights? What percentages of youth are gang members themselves?</li> <li>◆ How prevalent is contraband? What percentage of youth report having been offered different types of contraband in their current facility? Who offered it to them?</li> </ul>
How clear are facility rules and the commitment to justice and due process?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Do youth receive a written copy of the rules?</li> <li>◆ Do youth understand the rules? If not, why not?</li> <li>◆ Are the rules fair? Are they applied uniformly to all?</li> <li>◆ Is there a grievance process? Can youth use it without retribution?</li> </ul>
What control and discipline practices are used?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Do youth in placement see punishments as fair? What kinds of punishments are applied?</li> <li>◆ What percentage of youth have been locked up alone? For how long?</li> <li>◆ How many youth in placement have directly experienced more intrusive and coercive methods of control (e.g., strip search, restraint chair, or pepper spray)?</li> </ul>

Notes: SYRP = Survey of Youth in Residential Placement. Findings related to these questions are reported in *Conditions of Confinement: Findings From the Survey of Youth in Residential Placement* (Sedlak and McPherson, forthcoming).

**Table 4: SYRP Research Questions Addressing Youth’s Needs and Services They Receive in Custody**

General Research Question	Specific Research Questions
What are youth’s emotional and psychological problems and what counseling have they received?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ What is the incidence of youth’s recent problems with anger, isolation, anxiety/fearfulness, and other psychological difficulties?</li> <li>◆ What are their prior experiences of abuse? How do females and males differ in their prior abuse experiences? How does the prevalence of prior physical and sexual abuse among youth in placement compare with that in the general population?</li> <li>◆ What percentages report prior suicide attempts and/or recent suicidal thoughts or feelings? What are the differences between females and males in placement? How does this compare with their age peers in the general population of youth?</li> <li>◆ Have they received any counseling in their current facility? If so, what is its format, frequency, and when did they last see a counselor? How helpful do youth think their psychological counseling is?</li> <li>◆ What are their facility’s practices on screening and evaluating residents for suicide risk and other mental health needs?</li> </ul>
What are youth’s problems with drugs and/or alcohol?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ What is the youth’s history with drug and/or alcohol use? How does this compare with use in the general population?</li> <li>◆ How frequently were they using drugs and/or alcohol at the time they were taken into custody?</li> <li>◆ What problems did they experience from their substance use (e.g., blackouts, failure to meet responsibilities) before coming into custody?</li> <li>◆ Have they received any drug/alcohol counseling in their current facility? If so, what is its format, frequency, and when did they last see that counselor? How helpful do youth think their substance abuse counseling is?</li> <li>◆ What substance abuse services does their facility provide? Does their facility use substance abuse treatment professionals?</li> <li>◆ What are their facility’s practices on screening and evaluating residents for substance abuse problems?</li> </ul>
What are youth’s medical needs, and what services have they received in their current facility?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ What percentage of youth report needs for medical care due to illness, injury, or problems with eyes, teeth, hearing, or other physical conditions?</li> <li>◆ Did they receive the care they needed? If not, why not?</li> <li>◆ Are they on any regular medication? What is the medication for? Does the facility have outside medical professionals prescribe and/or monitor psychotropic medications for their residents?</li> </ul>
What educational services have youth received in their current facility?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ What percentage of youth are attending school in placement? How many hours do they attend? What kind of educational program(s) are they attending?</li> <li>◆ What percentage of those with a diagnosed learning disability are in a special education program?</li> <li>◆ What percentage of youth feel that their facility has a good school program?</li> </ul>

Notes: SYRP = Survey of Youth in Residential Placement. Findings related to these questions are reported in *Youth’s Needs and Services: Findings From the Survey of Youth in Residential Placement* (Sedlak and McPherson, forthcoming).

**Table 5: SYRP Research Questions Addressing the Nature and Risk of Victimization in Residential Placement**

General Research Question	Specific Research Questions
How prevalent are victimization experiences and what are their characteristics?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ What percentages of youth report that they were victims of theft, robbery, physical assault, or sexual assault? What percentages report having experienced any of these events? Any type of violence? Multiple forms of violence?</li> <li>◆ Who are the perpetrators? What weapons were involved? What injuries did the youth experience? Were these treated?</li> <li>◆ If youth were sexually assaulted, were any of the incidents reported? If so, was anything done to prevent a recurrence?</li> </ul>
How do youth’s individual characteristics relate to their risk of experiencing violence?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Do youth’s sex, age, race, gang membership, offense history, length of stay, or prior victimization relate to their likelihood of experiencing violence?</li> </ul>
Does a youth’s relative standing in the program or living unit relate to his/her risk of experiencing violence?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Does it matter if a youth is notably younger than others, a relative newcomer, or if the youth’s race/ethnicity is in the minority in the living unit or program?</li> <li>◆ Does the relative severity of a youth’s offense history relate to the risk of experiencing violence?</li> </ul>
Does the social context in the program or living unit predict the risk of violent victimization?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Does the risk of violent victimization vary with the proportion of serious offenders in the unit?</li> <li>◆ Does the proportion of gang members in the unit affect the risk of violence?</li> <li>◆ Does the proportion of residents who experienced prior abuse relate to the risk of violence for youth in the unit?</li> <li>◆ Are youth at greater (or lesser) risk in coeducational units?</li> </ul>
Is the risk of violent victimization associated with features of the facility or placement context?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Does risk vary with facility size or organizational complexity?</li> <li>◆ Does the nature of the program affect risk?</li> <li>◆ How does risk relate to turnover in the facility or program?</li> <li>◆ Does risk relate to the number of youth who sleep in the same room?</li> </ul>
How does the facility climate affect risk of violent victimization?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ What is the relationship between the risk of violent victimization and the presence of a contraband culture in the facility?</li> <li>◆ Does the risk of experiencing personal violence vary with the presence of active gangs (gang fights)?</li> <li>◆ Is risk of violence affected by the quality of the relations between staff and residents?</li> </ul>
Is the accessibility of support, protection, and/or due process related to the risk of experiencing violence?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Are youth who know how to find support or help less likely to be victimized?</li> <li>◆ Are youth who have more frequent contact with their family less likely to experience personal violence?</li> <li>◆ How does a functional grievance process affect youth’s risk of being victimized?</li> </ul>
How do quality of facility conditions and programs relate to risk of violence for residents?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Are poorer physical conditions related to higher risk?</li> <li>◆ Do the availability and quality of facility programs relate to risk of violence?</li> </ul>
How do facility practices concerning rules, punishments, and methods of control relate to youth’s risk of experiencing violence?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ How do the communication of facility rules and their fair application affect risk of violence?</li> <li>◆ How does use of harsh or unfair punishment relate to the likelihood of violent victimization?</li> <li>◆ Are methods of physical control associated with risk of violent victimization?</li> </ul>
How do the findings on factors that are individually related to the prevalence of violence translate into the real world, where many features are correlated with each other and where risk is affected simultaneously by multiple factors?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Which characteristics of youth and placement environments still predict risk of violence when the effects of other important risk factors are taken into account?</li> <li>◆ What are the implications of these findings for placement policy and facility practices?</li> </ul>

Notes: SYRP = Survey of Youth in Residential Placement. Findings related to these questions are reported in *Nature and Risk of Victimization: Findings From the Survey of Youth in Residential Placement* (Sedlak and McPherson, forthcoming).

## The Survey of Youth in Residential Placement

Further information about the Survey of Youth in Residential Placement can be found in the *Survey of Youth in Residential Placement: Technical Report* and other bulletins in this series, which include:

- ◆ *Youth's Characteristics and Backgrounds: Findings From the Survey of Youth in Residential Placement.*
- ◆ *Conditions of Confinement: Findings From the Survey of Youth in Residential Placement.*
- ◆ *Youth's Needs and Services: Findings From the Survey of Youth in Residential Placement.*
- ◆ *Nature and Risk of Victimization: Findings From the Survey of Youth in Residential Placement.*

For more complete results of the survey findings, see the "Reports" link at [www.syrp.org](http://www.syrp.org).

youth's emotional problems and reports about their counseling experiences relate to facilities' practices on screening or evaluating residents for suicide risk and mental health needs.

One section of the interview pertains to youth's experience with alcohol and drugs and their recent problems with substances prior to their last entry into custody. SYRP includes several MAYSI questions on this subject and asks youth whether they received counseling in the facility specifically to help them stop using drugs or alcohol. Youth who received substance abuse counseling answer followup questions about its frequency, format, and helpfulness. JRFC also provides information about whether youth with recent substance use problems are in facilities that evaluate entering youth, the type of screening provided, and the facility's substance abuse services.

The SYRP interview incorporates a brief series of questions on youth's medical needs and the services they received in their current facility. Because of the availability of JRFC information about the facility's services, SYRP findings can show whether youth who are taking psychotropic medication are in facilities where outside

medical professionals prescribe and/or monitor these medications.

The survey also reveals the percentages of youth attending school in their current placements, the nature of these educational program(s), and the amount of time youth spend in school. Analyses explore how these factors relate to whether youth think their facility has a good school program. The survey data also reveal whether youth who were told they have a learning disability are receiving special education and whether any of the older youth who were in placement for some time have earned a high school diploma or general equivalency diploma.

The last bulletin in the SYRP series is *Nature and Risk of Victimization: Findings From the Survey of Youth in Residential Placement* (Sedlak and McPherson, forthcoming). Table 5 lists the specific research questions this bulletin will address. The initial sections will present the percentages of youth who report different victimization experiences while in custody (theft, robbery, physical assault or threat, or sexual assault); describe these experiences (the perpetrators, any weapons, injuries); and identify whether youth reported any sexual assault and what was done to address the problem. The next eight sections of the bulletin will examine the relationship between the following factors and the youth's risk of experiencing violence (robbery, physical assault with injury, or sexual assault) while in placement:

- ◆ The youth's characteristics.
- ◆ Their relative standing among residents in their living unit or program.
- ◆ The social context, as reflected by the prevalence of various characteristics among coresidents.
- ◆ Structural features of the facility or unit.
- ◆ The facility climate.
- ◆ Access to support and due process.
- ◆ The quality of their facility's physical conditions and available activities.
- ◆ Their facility's practices relating to communicating and enforcing rules, physical control, and administering punishment or sanctions.

These sections will discuss each potential risk factor separately, indicating whether each is associated with a youth's risk of experiencing violence when all other features are ignored.

The last section will take a different approach, reporting multivariate analyses that consider the simultaneous effects of multiple characteristics on youth's risk of experiencing violence. These analyses recognize that many features are correlated and assess the effects of each feature by considering the effects of the others (i.e., not ignoring them). The results identify a set of factors, each of which predicts a youth's risk of violence in the context of the other factors, detailing a broad set of characteristics, circumstances, and conditions that operate independently to elevate the risk of violence. These findings offer valuable guidance to the field because policy and/or practices can modify many of the strong risk factors.

## Conclusion

As previewed here, the SYRP findings offer a unique and richly detailed view of the population of youth in residential placement. More information about all aspects of the SYRP methodology is available in the *Survey of Youth in Residential Placement: Technical Report* (Sedlak et al., forthcoming), and a public-use file of SYRP data will be available to researchers for further analysis.

## Endnotes

1. Besides these three surveys that gather data about youth in custody, OJJDP's redesign of the juvenile statistics systems also includes two new surveys about youth on probation, which George Mason University of Fairfax, VA, and the U.S. Census Bureau are conducting jointly: the Census of Juvenile Probation Supervision Offices and the Census of Juveniles on Probation.
2. Westat, Inc., conducted the SYRP planning project under cooperative agreement number 98-JB-VX-K002 from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.
3. Stratification factors in this implementation of SYRP included security level, administration (public versus private), facility size, proportion of females, proportion of adjudicated youth, average length of stay, facility type (detention center or not), proportion of Hispanics, proportion of African Americans, and the four census regions.
4. In the refusing state, only facilities that were not under state jurisdiction participated. A few other states excluded

approval for specific facilities or imposed special conditions for all facilities under their jurisdiction (e.g., disallowing the most sensitive survey questions, revising parent and youth consent statements and/or procedures, or requiring criminal background checks for survey data collectors).

5. Fifty facilities in the original sample were out of scope: 17 were too small, having fewer than 3 offender youth; 13 had closed; 12 had nonoffender residents only; 4 were adult-only facilities; 3 had merged with another facility; and 1 had no residents as it provided a day program only. (Note that the SYRP sample derives from the listing of all juvenile residential facilities that the census maintains for OJJDP. Facilities on this list are all able to hold juvenile offenders, but whether they actually do hold any can vary from one point in time to another. The facilities with only nonoffender residents and those with only adults just happened not to have any juvenile offenders in residence at the time of SYRP data collection.)

6. In addition to pursuing parental consent for youth in the preliminary sample, these facilities sought consent for all youth entering after they prepared the preliminary roster. That way, parental consent would be in place for any recent entrants selected for the final sample.

7. As noted, facility staff sought parental consent. They reported that nearly all failures of parental consent were nonresponse—very few parents actively refused to permit their child to participate.

8. These were youth in lockdown and those the facility deemed to be unsuitable for the interview because of their serious emotional or behavioral problems.

9. This circumstance occurred in approximately 200 interviews for various reasons. Sometimes the client laptop malfunctioned and the youth had to be moved to another client laptop to continue the interview. In other cases, the youth had to leave temporarily but later returned to complete the survey.

10. State laws on mandated reporting differ in their requirements. Mandatory reporters typically include healthcare workers, school personnel, childcare providers, social workers, law enforcement officers, and mental health professionals. However, as of June 2003, 18 states required all citizens to report suspected abuse or neglect regardless of their profession (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2003).

A national study that follows uniform procedures would treat the survey personnel as mandatory reporters.

11. OJJDP and Westat's Institutional Review Board granted an exception to one state that had equivalent procedures in place for its facilities.

12. In computing variances and assessing the significance of different tests, standard statistical packages assume that the data derive from a simple random sample (SRS), which is rarely used in survey research. When a study departs from the SRS design, as the SYRP design does, variance computations become complicated by the "design effect" (Kish, 1965), standard statistical packages lead to biased variance estimates (Brogan, 1998; Korn and Graubard, 1995), and users must take special measures to compute unbiased results (Lee, Forthofer, and Lorimor, 1989). The SYRP statisticians developed replicate weights (Brick and Morganstein, 1996; Rust and Rao, 1996), which enable analysts to compute accurate variances and significance tests using the software package WesVar (Westat, 2002). The SYRP analysis file includes the replicate weights required for this approach. The two advantages of the replicate weight method are that (1) the replicate weights also incorporate the variance associated with any adjustments, such as nonresponse and poststratification adjustments (Valliant, 1993), and (2) once replicate weights have been developed for a survey database, the repeated replication approach employs the same method for all statistics estimated from the database.

13. Thus, 7,078 youth actually completed the SYRP interview, but only 7,073 are classified as complete participants in the final computation of the youth response rate. As noted earlier, nonresponse adjustments in the weighting of the survey data compensate for the lost eligible sample, which included these five outlier youth.

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