



# National Institute of Justice *Update*

Jeremy Travis, Director

May 1995

## NIJ Survey of Jail 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; judges, trial court administrators, and State court administrators; and wardens and State commissioners of corrections.

"Our county has developed extensive and comprehensive alternatives to incarceration in an effort to relieve jail crowding. However, continued increases in arrest activities, especially for drug-related offenses...have outpaced our efforts..." So commented one jail administrator in responding to the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) 1994 National Assessment Program (NAP) survey. A total of 315 jail administrators (77 percent of the 409 surveyed) responded. Although many jails have become less crowded during the past several years, overtaxed facilities were still a problem for a number of jail administrators.

### Workload problems

**Jail crowding.** In the 1994 survey, 35 percent of jail administrators reported crowded conditions—jails operating at more than 110 percent of capacity. By contrast, in the previous survey, conducted in 1990, 52 percent said their jails were crowded. This reduction was due to the more than doubling of the budgets for jail construction between the periods 1987-89 and 1990-92. As a result, jails added an average of 220 new beds. Crowding also eased in some jails because the courts imposed maximum cell capacities or implemented alternative sanctions.

Crowded conditions still existed, however, in many jails. Jail administrators reported that the primary factors contributing to crowding were the large number of arrests for drug offenses and violent crime, longer jail sentences, and a large number of probation violations. Another contributing factor was the number of convicted felons serving their entire sentence in jail instead of in prison, where they would normally have been confined.

As a result of crowded conditions, some jail administrators were concerned that they would need to prematurely release inmates into the community. One jail administrator noted that in the past 3 years, 3,500 inmates had

---

been released without serving their sentences. Another concern of many jail administrators was that crowding made it difficult to classify inmates properly.

**Gangs.** Jail administrators commented that effective classification required identifying gang members, but doing so was sometimes difficult. Of the 235 jail administrators who had classification procedures to identify gang-affiliated inmates, 54 percent indicated that their procedures needed improvement. Jail administrators also saw a need to better train their staffs to control gang activity within their facilities. Of the 224 jail administrators who had staff training programs on gang control, almost two-thirds (65 percent) reported that these programs needed improvement.

## Agency initiatives

**Alternative sanctions.** Because of jail crowding, many States have developed a range of sentencing options—electronic monitoring, day reporting centers—as alternatives to incarceration for less serious offenders. These options, which enable an offender to be closely supervised, were designed to fill the gap between the probation and prison options available in most jurisdictions.

About 70 percent of jail administrators had an electronic monitoring program, which tracks an offender's where-

abouts by means of an electronic bracelet. Jail administrators supported this alternative sanction, but 62 percent of those who had electronic monitoring reported that their programs needed improvement. One jail administrator believed that although the program was good, it often lacked suitable candidates.

Day reporting, another alternative sanction, was used by 40 percent of jail administrators. This option requires that offenders report in person for several hours each day or evening to participate in such activities as mental health and substance abuse treatment and literacy and vocational training. Just over half the jail administrators who had this program indicated that their centers needed improvement. About 43 percent expressed interest in developing such a program.

## Research and evaluation priorities

Jail administrators recommended alternative sanctions and inmate classification as key topics for further NIJ research and evaluation. Specifically, they would like to know how effective juvenile boot camps are and would like to see the development of objective classification systems.

---

### U.S. Department of Justice

Office of Justice Programs

*National Institute of Justice*

*Washington, D.C. 20531*

Official Business

Penalty for Private Use \$300

BULK RATE POSTAGE & FEES PAID DOJ/NIJ Permit No. G-91
--