



National Institute of Justice *Update*

Jeremy Travis, Director

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NIJ Survey of Police Chiefs and Sheriffs

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. Ask for NCJ 150856. Also available from NCJRS are individual summaries of responses from the other following groups: prosecutors, probation and parole agency directors; judges, trial court administrators, and State court administrators; wardens and State commissioners of corrections; and jail administrators.

"Our society is becoming more and more violent, and there seems to be a total disregard for the sanctity of human life." This comment from a sheriff who participated in the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) 1994 National Assessment Program (NAP) survey of State and local criminal justice professionals embodies one of the major concerns revealed by the findings. A total of 337 police chiefs (82 percent of the 410 surveyed) and 265 sheriffs (76 percent of the 347 surveyed) responded. Violent crime headed the list of workload problems that police chiefs and sheriffs said they faced. Most indicated their departments' response took the form of community policing.

Workload problems

Violent crime. When police chiefs and sheriffs were asked which violent crimes—assault, homicide, rape, domestic violence, and child abuse—contributed to workload problems in their departments, domestic violence was cited by the largest proportion, more than 95 percent. More than 90 percent of both groups also cited assault and child abuse as significant factors. To explain why the numbers were so high, the law enforcement officials noted that arrest policies for domestic violence have changed and now mandate increased police action. Higher rates of reporting have increased workloads because both domestic violence and child abuse cases require considerable time for investigation.

Drugs. Almost all police chiefs and sheriffs (95 percent) also said that drug possession and sales were creating workload problems, primarily because of the increased number of cases to handle. The drug problem has dominated law enforcement operations to such an extent that more than 75 percent of police departments have instituted special community programs and crime units focused exclusively on combating it.

Firearms. Eighty-three percent of police chiefs and sheriffs stated that crimes committed with firearms contributed to workload problems. They cited the availability of firearms to juveniles as a particular concern. In an effort to get firearms off the streets, some police chiefs (37 percent) said their departments had participated in gun turn-ins or buy-backs. Of the others, 37 percent reported they would like to see such a program in their jurisdictions. Gun turn-in programs, however, received mixed reviews. In general, the survey indicated that police chiefs and sheriffs in urban areas were getting better results than those in suburban and rural communities.

Gangs. Seventy-three percent of police chiefs in large jurisdictions cited gang-related crimes among their workload problems. Lower percentages in medium and small jurisdictions (55 and 45 percent, respectively) said gang crimes were a current problem but indicated this was an area of growing concern. Although most said they had developed special strategies to combat gang-related crimes, about 80 percent said their approaches needed improvements.

Agency initiatives

Community policing. A total of 278 police chiefs (82 percent) and 175 sheriffs (65 percent) said they were establishing community policing initiatives, and virtually all of the others indicated they wanted to adopt them. Improving the quality of life in neighborhoods and involving citizens in fighting crime (especially to combat drug

problems) were the primary reasons cited for implementing community policing.

Comments from police chiefs and sheriffs indicated that most community policing efforts were just beginning to be developed and were confined to a few designated neighborhoods. They also indicated that foot beats, special units, and neighborhood substations were the principal activities in their community policing programs. They noted that lack of training and personnel prevented community policing from expanding in their jurisdictions.

Prevention programs for youth. Police chiefs and sheriffs showed strong interest in wanting to develop or improve their strategies for working with at-risk youth. For example, although 74 percent of police chiefs and 53 percent of sheriffs said their departments had such programs, about 75 percent of both groups said their efforts needed improvement. In their comments, the two groups most frequently mentioned the D.A.R.E.[®] (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) and G.R.E.A.T. (Gang Resistance Education and Training) programs as promising prevention strategies.

Research and evaluation priorities

Police chiefs and sheriffs emphasized community policing and juvenile crime as key areas for future NIJ research and evaluation. Specifically, police chiefs and sheriffs said they wanted to know how effective community-based policing programs have been. They also wanted to know the long-term effects of programs such as D.A.R.E.[®]

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