



# National Institute of Justice *Update*

Jeremy Travis, Director

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## NIJ Survey of Probation and Parole Agency Directors

### 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; judges, trial court administrators, and State court administrators; wardens and State commissioners of corrections; and jail administrators.

"With resources remaining at a constant level and caseloads increasing, the issue becomes one of prioritizing limited resources and developing new case management strategies." The difficulty of balancing needs and resources was noted in the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) 1994 National Assessment Program (NAP) survey of probation and parole agency directors. A total of 368 directors of local agencies (67 percent of the 546 surveyed) and 54 directors of State agencies (87 percent of the 62 surveyed) responded. Caseload management led the list of workload problems that the agency directors said they faced.

### Workload problems

**Caseload management.** About 92 percent of the responding probation and parole directors indicated that they needed more field officers to handle the increased caseloads. The primary reason cited for the heavier caseloads was the increase in substance abuse cases.

**Drug treatment programs.** The directors were especially concerned about the adequacy of substance abuse treatment programs in their jurisdictions. A large proportion (87 percent) reported having such programs, but 81 percent indicated they needed improvement. Drug testing was found to be almost universal (93 percent of the directors said their jurisdiction had a drug testing program), but the directors were divided in their assessment of the value of these programs. Whereas most considered drug testing an effective tool in discouraging substance abuse, some said it was too time-consuming or was relied on too heavily to substantiate lawful behavior.

### Agency initiatives

**Alternative sanctions.** More probation and parole agency directors expressed concern about boot camps

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than about other alternative sanctions. Although 43 percent said their jurisdiction had boot camp programs, 45 percent of those who had them said they needed improvement. Probation and parole agency directors were much more likely than other groups surveyed to say they did not want or need them (42 percent, compared to an average of 7 percent of other respondents). They expressed concern about the additional staff time required to supervise boot camps when their effectiveness has not been proven conclusively.

Probation and parole agency directors also had mixed opinions about work release centers. Compared to other respondent groups, a much lower percentage of directors had work release centers in their jurisdictions (54 percent, in contrast to more than 90 percent reported by other respondents). And a much higher percentage of probation and parole agency directors than other respondents (32 percent, in contrast to less than 2 percent of other respondents) said they did not want or need this option.

Electronic monitoring, although widely available in their jurisdictions (63 percent said this option was currently available), was also felt (by almost half the agency directors) to need improvement. Of those who did not have this option, a relatively small proportion (21 percent)

rejected it, saying they did not want or need it, whereas 17 percent indicated they would welcome electronic monitoring in their jurisdiction.

## Special issues

**People with mental illness.** Many probation and parole agency directors said they felt responsible for providing mental health services to probationers and parolees who needed them. Because many people who are mentally ill require more intensive monitoring than most agencies are able to provide, a large proportion of the directors (82 percent) cited the need for better access to mental health professionals. Of particular concern were mental health services for sex offenders. Of the directors who said they currently offered treatment to sex offenders, 76 percent stated they would like to see these services improved.

## Research and evaluation priorities

Directors of probation and parole agencies recommended alternative sanctions and dealing with sex offenders as key topics for further NIJ research and evaluation. Specifically, they said they want to know the extent to which boot camps, electronic monitoring, and day reporting are effective. They also wanted to know how to effectively treat and monitor sex offenders.

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