



National Institute of Justice *Update*

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NIJ Survey of Prosecutors

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: police chiefs and sheriffs; probation and parole agency directors; judges, trial court administrators, and State court administrators; wardens and State commissioners of corrections; and jail administrators.

"The prosecution of child molestation cases takes a tremendous amount of resources from my office. We can process 40 theft or drug cases in the time 1 child molestation case takes." So commented one prosecutor in the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) 1994 National Assessment Program (NAP) survey. A total of 271 prosecutors (66 percent of the 408 surveyed) responded. Violent crime, specifically child abuse and domestic violence, headed the list of workload problems that prosecutors said they faced.

Workload problems

Violent crime. When asked to rate the extent to which violent crime—assault, homicide, rape, domestic violence, and child abuse—contributed to workload problems in their offices, about 92 percent of prosecutors indicated that child abuse was the primary contributor because these difficult cases required more time to prosecute. Ranking a close second was domestic violence, with 91 percent of prosecutors citing this violent crime as a workload problem. In domestic violence cases, prosecutors said victims often lose interest in prosecuting the offender, and this resulted in a large number of dismissals.

Drugs. More than 90 percent of the prosecutors surveyed cited drug possession and drug sales as causes of workload problems primarily because of the increase in number of cases handled. Ninety-three percent said that to expedite case processing, their jurisdiction had instituted drug treatment programs as an alternative sanction. However, 82 percent indicated that these programs needed improvement, with almost half saying *major* improvements were necessary.

Gangs. Fifty-eight percent of prosecutors in large jurisdictions (over 250,000 in population) also claimed gang-related crimes as contributing to their workload problems.

This large percentage contrasts with the 33 percent in small jurisdictions who said they had a gang problem. To deal with this problem, some offices had gang prosecution units: 38 percent of the prosecutors in large counties, and 5 percent in smaller ones.

Agency initiatives

Alternative sanctions. Prosecutors gave mixed reviews to various initiatives developed as alternatives to incarceration. Prosecutors were most dissatisfied with boot camps; 71 percent said boot camps operated in their jurisdictions but 70 percent of them said they needed improvements. About 92 percent of prosecutors reported having work release centers in their jurisdictions, with 56 percent of them indicating their centers needed improvement. About 83 percent of prosecutors said electronic monitoring was used as an alternative sanction, but 64 percent noted improvements were needed. However, virtually all the additional, written comments from prosecutors supported electronic monitoring as a sentencing option for low-risk offenders.

Special issues

Information systems. Many prosecutors noted that the lack of information systems or inadequate information systems created problems in their offices. They were especially interested in systems to help alleviate attorney scheduling conflicts. Only 58 percent said they currently had information systems with this capability, and of those, 65 percent indicated that their systems needed improvement.

Research and evaluation priorities

Prosecutors cited alternative sanctions, juvenile crime, and violent crime as the three areas they recommended for future research and evaluation studies. Specifically, they wanted to know how effective boot camp programs were in modifying behavior. They also wanted to know about the increase in violent crime committed by subjects 18 years old and younger and the relationship between gangs and violent crime.

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