



National Institute of Justice *Update*

Jeremy Travis, Director

May 1995

NIJ Survey of Wardens and State Commissioners of Corrections

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 other individual summaries of responses from the following groups: police chiefs and sheriffs; prosecutors; probation and parole agency directors; judges, trial court administrators, and State court administrators; and jail administrators.

"Lines for everything are longer: inmate canteen, inmate meals.... Sentence length and distant parole eligibility (if at all) build a central core population. This core population has probably quadrupled in the last several years." This comment from a warden who participated in the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) 1994 National Assessment Program (NAP) survey aptly summarizes one of the key issues the survey brought to light. A total of 361 wardens (77 percent of the 470 surveyed) and 43 State commissioners of corrections (84 percent of the 51 surveyed) responded. Prison crowding led the list of workload problems that wardens and State commissioners of corrections said they faced.

Workload problems

Prison crowding. Wardens were asked to indicate the extent to which crowding was a problem in their facilities. About 54 percent reported their facilities were full; that is, at 101 to 110 percent of the rated capacity of the inmate population. A substantial, though lower proportion (37 percent) said their facilities were crowded; that is, greater than 110 percent of rated capacity. Wardens who oversee crowded prisons cited several reasons for this condition. A large proportion (88 percent) cited the increased number of drug offenders as the primary reason; one warden commented that drug offenders serving heavy sentences filled about 75 percent of the available cells. The second most frequently noted cause (cited by 80 percent of the wardens) was the growth in number of violent crime offenders. Other causes of crowded conditions included longer sentences and insufficient alternatives to prison (mentioned by 78 percent and 71 percent, respectively).

Gangs. Identifying gang members and controlling gang activity within their facilities were other problems identified by wardens. Although a large proportion of the

wardens (83 percent) had classification procedures to identify gang-affiliated inmates, fully 71 percent indicated that these procedures needed improvement. One warden, who was satisfied with his classification procedures, indicated nevertheless that the real need was to develop effective programs to discourage gang activities in prison. Here too, the need for improvement was felt to be great. Of the 300 wardens who reported having staff training programs to control gang activity, a large proportion (71 percent) said these programs needed improvement.

Other staffing and program needs. Seventy-four percent of the wardens indicated a need for more program staff, especially to deal with alcohol and substance abuse, mental health, parenting, and vocational education. Wardens were especially concerned about treatment programs for sex offenders; one warden noted that only 10 to 15 percent of classified sex offenders were in treatment at any given time, because the facility he supervised did not have enough mental health professionals to oversee the complex treatment required.

Agency initiatives

Alleviating prison crowding. Because overcrowding adversely affected the classification of inmates for program needs, wardens were especially eager to alleviate these conditions. One warden noted that as the number of inmates increased, the emphasis shifted from

treatment and programming to containment and that resources normally allocated to programs were diverted to security.

In an effort to alleviate overcrowding, some State commissioners of corrections embarked upon prison expansion programs. The survey revealed that prisons reporting crowded conditions had built an average of 107 new cells during the previous 3-year period, in contrast to the average of 69 new cells built by jurisdictions with uncrowded prisons. Construction alone has not solved the problem. Recognizing this, the States have also launched other initiatives, such as revising sentencing guidelines to assign offenders to the least restrictive confinement option and streamlining the release process for nonviolent offenders to ensure that cell spaces are available for the most serious offenders.

Research and evaluation priorities

Wardens and State commissioners of corrections considered the effect of various programs on recidivism as a key topic for further NIJ research and evaluation. They wanted specifically to know the extent to which boot camp programs, gang intervention, and sex offender programs are effective. In addition, wardens of prisons for women wanted research targeted to identifying successful programs for these offenders.

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
--