7

SURVEY RESEARCH AND INTERVIEWS

SELF-REPORT SURVEY RESEARCH

Survey research is one of the most common ways to solicit information about attitudes and behaviors from subjects of interest. Surveys involve collecting information from persons via questionnaires, telephone interviews, face-to-face interviews, and more recently Internet and e-mail–based instruments. The researcher can record information solicited from individuals, or respondents themselves can complete the surveys. The US Census is a large-scale example of self-report survey research; individuals receive questionnaires via mail and are asked to fill them out and send them back. The NCVS (National Crime Victimization Survey) is another example of a large-scale survey research design where data is collected via telephone interviews. Although survey research is a common way to solicit information from a wide variety of individuals, it is not without its limitations.

One of the major problems in survey research is getting the respondents a researcher wants to study to fill out the survey. Response rate in survey research refers to the number of persons who respond to the survey (fill it out

and, in the case of a mail survey, send it back) in relation to the overall number of persons the researcher wanted to respond. Often, persons do not want to provide answers to questionnaires either because they do not have time, they do not think the survey is important, they are not sure how their answers are going to be used, or if a mail survey, they do not want to pay the postage to mail it back. If a researcher does not get back all of the surveys he or she sends out, it can have implications for the results of the research. Recall the discussion of sampling error in the previous chapter. If only half of the sample a researcher wanted to obtain information from fills out the surveys, the researcher has to be concerned about his or her ability to generalize the results of the survey. For purposive samples, this is not as much of a problem. For instance, maybe you have filled out a survey as part of one of your college courses. Most students in the class will provide responses on these surveys, especially if the professor is offering extra credit for doing so.

If a researcher has randomly selected a sample, however, and sent out the surveys to the sample via mail, it is very likely that not

all of the surveys will be returned; this research, therefore, will contain some degree of sampling error. The individuals a researcher has selected to study are collectively referred to as the chosen sample. The individuals who actually agree to participate in the study are called the obtained sample. The difference between the two is called attrition (Ellis, Hartley, & Walsh, 2010). Attrition is one of the most problematic issues surrounding survey research. The amount of attrition in a survey may depend on its method of administration as well as its length. Figure 7.1 displays some of the different types of surveys and the ways in which they are administered as well as the typical structure and cost associated with their administration.

Response rates in survey research vary considerably depending on a number of factors. If a researcher obtains a response rate in the neighborhood of 60% to 70%, this is considered good (an attrition rate of 30% to 40%). If response rates are much lower, researchers need to be concerned about the representativeness of the sample. There are a number of techniques utilized by researchers to attempt to minimize the amount of attrition they experience. Some of the techniques include: having a credible sponsor (such as a university), including a personalized cover letter explaining the importance of the research, constructing clear and easy to understand questions, using short surveys, including a self-addressed stamped envelope for the respondent to return the survey, and even including compensation of some sort such as coupons or even a small amount of cash (Bachman & Schutt, 2008). Any methods used to increase response rates, no matter how small, will pay off in lowering attrition rates and will increase the researchers' abilities to generalize their results.

Telephone surveys have unique issues regarding response rates. Survey interviews via telephone have become an increasingly common way to collect data because of innovations such as random digit dialing and computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI). Researchers can now use a computer program to randomly dial the phone numbers of respondents in a quick and easy way. Problems, however, still persist even with CATI, such as persons not being home or persons hanging up because of a lack of interest. Similarly e-mail and web-based surveys are becoming increasingly popular because they can enable the selection of a large number of widely dispersed subjects in a cost-effective and time-efficient manner. Computer programs will also

Figure 7.1   Typical Features of the Five Survey Designs

Design	Manner of Administration	Setting	Questionnaire Structure	Cost
Mailed survey	Self	Individual	Mostly structured	Low
Group survey	Self	Group	Mostly structured	Very low
Phone survey	Professional	Individual	Structured	Moderate
In-person interview	Professional	Individual	Structured or unstructured	High
Electronic survey	Self	Individual	Mostly structured	Very low

automatically code and enter subject responses into a preconstructed database, saving the researcher valuable time and effort.

Nonetheless, limitations are also inherent in survey administration via this method. For example, not all households currently have access to the Internet or e-mail, or respondents can easily delete the e-mail containing the survey. Respondents may also be hesitant to respond to survey questions via the World Wide Web, especially if the questions are of a personal nature, due to fear that they are not sure who will see their responses. Despite these limitations, advances in both telephone- and computer-based survey administration have helped researchers solicit information from those they have had trouble reaching in the past and in an easy and time-efficient manner.

Veracity of Self-Report Surveys

Another issue with self-reports has to do with their veracity; do respondents provide truthful answers? Survey research could produce unreliable or invalid information if the respondent does not understand the question, the respondent cannot remember certain information, or the respondent is dishonest (Ellis et al., 2010). Pilot testing survey instruments can help reduce problems with invalid answers due to lack of understanding of questions. Clear, straightforward, and simple questions that ask respondents about recent events are the most likely to elicit true and valid responses.

Dishonest responses, on the other hand, are more difficult to detect. There are some ways, however, for researchers to check the honesty of subjects' responses. At the very least, researchers should inform respondents that their responses will remain anonymous. Anonymously collecting information via surveys, especially if it is of a sensitive or criminal nature, is one of the best ways to ensure

honest and open responses from subjects (Hill, Dill, & Davenport, 1988).

Ellis and colleagues (2010) recommend other practices beyond affording anonymity that may also help to minimize dishonesty. They suggest avoiding asking respondents embarrassing questions that may make them uneasy. If questions of a sensitive nature have to be asked, researchers should try to ensure that these questions are asked in a nonjudgmental way. Another technique they recommend is to simply ask respondents at the end of the survey to rate their level of truthfulness. The problem then is what to do with surveys in which respondents report a high level of dishonesty. Ultimately, these surveys should not be included in the study. Finally, researchers can use one of the internal reliability checks discussed in Chapter 4, such as the split-half technique. Asking the same or similar questions in different sections of a survey can help researchers detect whether or not respondents were truthful in their responses. Again, those surveys in which answers are shown to be contradictory should be discarded.

Overall, survey research has proven to be a useful source of information on countless topics that would not otherwise be available if individuals did not agree to respond to surveys. Accuracy of responses will also depend somewhat on whether the survey is completed by the respondents themselves or if the researcher records the respondents' answers to the questions. Interviewing respondents in person or via telephone usually solicits more accurate responses, depending on the research topic. Regardless of method, survey research has provided social scientists with invaluable information about the nature of human interactions and behaviors.

Interviews

As stated above, although more costly and time-consuming, face-to-face interviewing is

probably the best survey method at soliciting accurate responses. Bachman and Schutt (2008) report several advantages to in-person interviews: response rates are higher, researchers can seek more in-depth information, difficult questions can be clarified by the interviewer, researchers can ask follow-up questions, and finally, nonverbal behaviors can also be recorded. Face-to-face interviews can be structured, unstructured, or in-depth (Hagan, 2005). Structured interviews mainly consist of asking respondents questions with a minimal amount of response options. Generally, these interviews consist of the interviewer checking off the respondents' answers to the questions. Unstructured interviews, on the other hand, ask open-ended questions where the subjects can respond in any way they want. These types of interviews seek information that is more personal, such as a person's attitudes or opinions of various subjects. Finally, in-depth interviews are the most intensive, and the researcher and interviewee may even meet on several occasions. These types of interviews have been used extensively in research of little-known or difficult to obtain subjects. In-depth interviews, for instance, have been used to study prostitution, narcotics trafficking, residential burglary, and robbery, to name a few. Obviously, without in-depth interviews, we would know little about these behaviors other than that they exist.

Ethical issues can arise in survey research, especially regarding survey methods involving interviews of subjects and, more specifically, in-depth interviews of past and active criminal offenders. Researchers who conduct this type of research have to always be conscious about the ethical guidelines regarding the subjects of their research (protect confidentiality), as well as to the fact that their own safety could potentially be compromised. Researchers who conduct this type of research may find that there is a delicate balance between the quest for scientific knowledge and the moral and safety implications of these pursuits.

RESEARCH READING

Ruddell and colleagues use a survey research methodology to examine the perceptions that jail administrators in 39 states have about special needs populations in jail facilities. These problem populations include inmates who have mental illnesses, who are repeat offenders, who are serving long sentences, and especially those who are involved with gangs. The researchers solicited information regarding a number of issues with these populations, including the problems that they cause for correctional facilities. They also solicited information on what administrators in these facilities believe are the best institutional responses to these problems. Findings show that just over 10% of jails have gang problems, and that smaller jails report having less gang problems. Ruddell and colleagues also report that gang problems do not vary by region, and that gathering information about gangs in facilities (gang intelligence) is the best intervention for dealing with gang problems.

GANG INTERVENTIONS IN JAILS

A National Analysis

Rick Ruddell, Scott H. Decker, and Arlen Egley, Jr.

Abstract: This national-level study surveys the perceptions of 134 jail administrators in 39 states about the prevalence of gang members in their facilities. Consistent with previous empirical work, approximately 13% of jail populations are thought to be gang involved, and although there are no regional differences in these estimates, small jails report having fewer gang-involved inmates. When asked about the problems that these inmates cause in their facilities, respondents report that gang members are less disruptive than inmates with severe mental illnesses but are more likely to assault other inmates. The use and efficacy of 10 programmatic responses to gangs are evaluated, with respondents rating the gathering and dissemination of gang intelligence as the most effective intervention. Implications for practitioners and gang research are outlined.

INTRODUCTION

Most of our knowledge about gangs in correctional facilities is based on research conducted in state or federal prison systems (Camp & Camp, 1985; Gaes, Wallace, Gilman, Klein-Saffran, & Suppa, 2002; Ralph & Marquart, 1991; Stastny & Tymauer, 1983). Typically, these studies have found that the proliferation of gangs and the number of gang members in prison settings have increased substantially since the 1980s (Decker, 2003). Understanding the extent of the gang problem is an important issue for prison administrators because gang-involved inmates contribute to higher rates of prison violence (Camp & Camp, 1985), increase racial tensions within prisons (Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, 2002; Ross & Richards, 2002), challenge rehabilitative programming by supporting criminogenic values (Decker, 2003; Fortune, 2003), engage in criminal enterprises within prisons (Ingraham & Wellford, 1987), and contribute to failure in community reintegration if these parolees return to gang activities on release (Adams & Olson, 2002; Fleisher & Decker, 2001b; Olson, Dooley, & Kane, 2004).

Fischer's (2001) study of Arizona prisons, for instance, reported that "members of certified prison gangs (security threat groups [STGs]), uncertified prison gangs, and street gangs commit serious disciplinary violations at rates two to three times higher than do non-gang inmates housed in units of the same security level" (p. ii). Thus, by better understanding the scope of the problem and the efficacy of different types of interventions, jail professionals can work to reduce the influence that gangs have in their facilities. In addition, other stakeholders also need to better understand the extent of this social problem. Esbensen, Winfree, He, and Taylor (2001) observe that research about gangs is also important for researchers and theorists:

> For researchers, it is important to refine measurement: to assess the validity and reliability of the measures being used. For theorists, it is important to better understand factors associated with gang membership and associated behaviors, whether testing or constructing theory. (p. 122)

These scholars also acknowledge the importance of information sharing and collaboration between academics and policy makers, although we also suggest that jail practitioners ought to be involved in the research process as they have intimate knowledge of the success and failure of different interventions within their institutions.

Comparatively little is known about the extent of adult gangs in jails. Increasing our knowledge about gangs and tactics designed to respond specifically to these groups is an important issue given the size of the jail population—approximately 714,000 inmates are housed in local correctional facilities (Harrison & Beck, 2005b). Unlike prisons, jails are intended primarily for inmates awaiting court processes and incarceration for periods of less than 1 year. Operated by counties and local governments, there are more than 3,300 American jails that range in size from four or five beds to the Los Angeles County jail system, which held an average of 18,629 inmates in the third quarter of 2005 (Corrections Standards Authority, 2005). Parallel with federal and state prison systems, however, local jails have also experienced dramatic growth during the past two decades (Cunniff, 2002; Harrison & Beck, 2005b; Stephan, 2001). This growth has stretched county budgets (Davis, Applegate, Otto, Surette, & McCarthy, 2004), increased staff turnover (Kerle, 1998), and may contribute to higher rates of inmate violence (Tartaro, 2002). Altogether, these changes produce less predictable conditions within America's jails (Mays & Ruddell, 2004).

It is plausible that some of the problems in the day-to-day operations that jails confront are a result of expanding gang populations. As a result, an important first step is to examine the extent of the problem. Wells, Minor, Angel, Carter, and Cox (2002) surveyed jail administrators and found that approximately 16% of all jail inmates were members of STGs, whereas 13% of prison inmates were STG members. There are a number of reasons why jail populations have rates of gang involvement that closely correspond with prison systems. First, although jail populations tend to be more heterogeneous than prisons (a wide variety of persons from different demographic and socioeconomic backgrounds are admitted), this diversity is a function of the short-term nature of jail incarceration. Most inmates are held for a day or

two until they make bail, but serious or persistent offenders, such as gang members, may have more difficulty securing release and may wait months or even years for the conclusion of their trials. James (2004, p. 4) found that 11.3% of jail inmates were held more than 6 months and that an additional 6.5% were held more than 1 year.

A second reason why rates of gang membership in jails parallel prison rates is that jails act as an entry point for prisons. Virtually everyone who is admitted to prison will first spend time in jails, either awaiting court dates or pending their transfer to prison. Approximately 10% of all jail inmates have already been sentenced to a term within the state prison system, but overcrowding keeps these inmates in city or county facilities awaiting transfer (Harrison & Beck, 2005b). Finally, jails hold persons sentenced to periods of incarceration up to 1 year, and some may serve much longer periods of time in a local jail (James, 2004). Although early scholarly work reported that jail inmates were primarily members of the underclass held on relatively minor offenses (Goldfarb, 1975; Irwin, 1985), current research indicates that offenders in many urban jails are held on more serious crimes. In fact, Rainville and Reaves (2003, p. 33) found that nearly 75% of all persons sentenced to jail incarceration were felony offenders.

Organizational characteristics of jails might also contribute to gang membership. Jails hold a diverse mix of short- and long-term inmates, which can contribute to unpredictability. Although prison populations are fairly stable through periods of years, the population in a jail unit may change completely in a single week. Jails with high levels of population turnover are less predictable for jail officers and inmates alike (Richards, 2003). The short-term nature of jail confinement relative to prisons also makes classification and programming more challenging. Wright and Goring (1989) observed that "prisoners come in directly from the street as unknown quantities,

often with alcohol, drug or psychiatric problems" (p. ii). A combination of this instability and high populations of gang-involved inmates recently led to riots involving thousands of inmates at a Southern California jail (Cable News Network, 2006).

Although the unpredictability of jail incarceration is bearable for a few days, it may contribute to gang affiliation as months stretch into a year. As Ross and Richards (2002) remark, "in some prisons you absolutely need to affiliate with a group that will protect you. The loners, the people without social skills or friends, are vulnerable to being physically attacked or preyed upon" (p. 133). Lhotsky (2000) describes the pressures to join a gang in a large urban jail: "Everything here is gang politics and you have to be involved, one way or another . . . and you better participate or you're gonna get beat bloody" (p. 213). Consequently, the characteristics of an individual jail or the types of inmates incarcerated within a facility (both the demographic and offense-related characteristics) may also contribute to gang membership (Santos, 2004).

Despite the problems that gang-affiliated inmates cause, there is some evidence to suggest that jails have been slow to adopt gang intervention programs, especially compared with state prison systems (see Wells et al., 2002). Moreover, there has been very little empirical attention devoted to the issue. This national-level study examines the prevalence of gang members in jails, based on information about the methods that jails use to classify gang involvement; perceptions about the types of problems that gang-affiliated inmates cause; and the efficacy of strategies intended to reduce the harm that gangs create in jails.

DATA AND METHOD

In June 2004, 418 surveys were sent to jails throughout the nation soliciting information from jail administrators about their experiences with "special needs" jail populations, including persons with mental illness, gang members, repeat offenders, and long-term inmates. With the exception of six states that had integrated state jail systems, all states were included in the sample. A random sample of jails was completed, choosing facilities listed in the American Jail Association's (2003) *Who's Who in Jail Management*. The exception to the random selection was an oversampling of large jails. Harrison and Beck (2005a) found that the largest 50 jails (mostly located in urban areas) held approximately 30% of all jail inmates, so all jails with a rated capacity of more than 1,500 inmates were surveyed.

To enhance the response rate, each facility was contacted by phone, and survey team members spoke with administrators and encouraged their participation. Survey instruments were either mailed or faxed to the administrators, although in some cases, the surveys were directed to mental health professionals or classification officers at the request of the official who was contacted. Responses to faxed surveys were somewhat better than those that were mailed and tended to be promptly returned. The survey instrument solicited responses from jail administrators about their experiences with gang members, including asking how gang affiliation or membership was defined, estimating the prevalence of these populations within their jail, and analyzing strategies that worked or that were not effective in responding to gangs. Although most respondents returned the survey within 2 or 3 weeks, we continued to receive responses to the survey for several months afterward. Altogether, 134 surveys from 39 states were returned, a response rate of approximately 32%.

There were several limitations with the survey results. Jails in the northeastern states, for example, were underrepresented in the surveys that were returned, as were returns from small jails. This underrepresentation rests on the sampling strategy used in this study. Integrated jail-prison systems in Alaska, Connecticut,

Delaware, Hawaii, Rhode Island, and Vermont were not sent surveys. Fewer surveys were also sent to smaller institutions, and the smallest jail that returned a survey had 28 beds. More than 10% of the sample were smaller jails, but the responses from these facilities were disappointing. Of one group of 25 facilities of 35 beds or less, for instance, only 1 was returned. It is plausible that larger jails are more likely to have classification experts, administrators, and mental health specialists who have more time to respond to such requests for information. Thus, the generalizability of the findings in this study is limited somewhat by the facilities that did not respond to the survey or were not included in the sampling strategy. Although the response rate was somewhat less than the Wells et al. (2002) study, the estimates in this research are based on a sample more than 3 times as large.

Table 7.1 reveals the organizational characteristics of the facilities that were represented in this study. With an average rated capacity of 941.8 inmates ($mdn = 512$ inmates), jails from large urban areas were overrepresented. The standard deviation of 1,279.37 inmates, however, indicates considerable skewness. Altogether, the facilities represented in the survey had a total rated capacity of 125,259 beds, or 19% of all jail inmates nationwide. The jails examined in this study were also smaller than those in the research reported by Wells et al., as the mean size of their sample was 5,638 beds.

Respondents reported that their facilities operated near capacity: The average jail operated at 94% of its rated capacity ($mdn = 91\%$, $SD = 26\%$). Based on the average daily population and admissions data, we extrapolated several statistics, including an average inmate turnover of approximately 31 inmates per year and an average stay of approximately 12 days. As most jail inmates only remain in custody for a day or two, this finding suggests that there are a large number of inmates who serve lengthy periods in county jails, either awaiting

Table 7.1 Jail Characteristics: National Jail Sample

Participating jails	134
States	39
Rated capacity (beds)	941.8 ($SD = 1,279.4$)
Average daily population	898.7 ($SD = 1,261.2$)
Percentage rated capacity	93.8 ($SD = 26.2$)
Daily cost	55.4 ($SD = 19.1$)
Turnover (annual admits/ average daily population)	30.8 ($SD = 64.4$)
Total rated capacity (beds)	125,259
Region	
Northeast	7
Midwest	36
South	45
West	4

their court dates, serving a sentence of less than 1 year, or some combination of these two factors. Consequently, one question on the survey asked respondents to estimate the percentage of inmates that had been in the jail for periods in excess of 1 year, and the mean was 12.7% *(mdn* = 5.0%, *SD* - 16.8%).

RESULTS

Jail administrators were asked to select methods of classifying gang affiliation in their facilities. Table 7.2 outlines the five different options for classifying or defining gang membership that

were provided. Respondents overwhelmingly reported that they defined gang membership on the basis of tattoos, clothing (gang colors), or hand signs, although designation of gang membership by another law enforcement agency was commonly used to define gang membership. Eighty-one percent of respondents reported that an individual's self-declaration as a gang member was used as a method of classification. Correspondingly, law enforcement agencies report frequent use of this technique as well (Egley & Major, 2004). It is important to report that there is considerable research that supports the validity of this measurement approach (see Esbensen et al., 2001). Furthermore, almost three quarters of respondents based definitions

Table 7.2   Jail Administrator Definitions of Gang Membership

	%	*SD*	*Range*
Inmate has been designated a gang member by another law enforcement agency	83.3		
Inmate has been identified as a gang member by a reliable informant	65.3		
Inmate claims to be a gang member	81.7		
Inmate displays symbols of membership: clothing, "colors," hand signs, or tattoos	86.8		
The inmate is known to associate with and/or has been arrested with known gang members	71.4		
Average reported gang membership (84 jails reporting estimates)	13.2	15.5	0 to 70
Jails reporting no gang membership (11 jails)[a]	131.1		
Jails reporting 1% to 10% gang membership (42 jails)	50.0		
Jails reporting 11% to 25% gang membership (19 jails)	21.4		
Jails reporting more the 25% gang membership (12 jails)	14.3		
Admissions of gang members have increased during past 5 years	45.0		
Gang members younger than other jail inmates	55.0		

Note: All figures are percentages.

a. Totals may not add up to 100% because of rounding.

of membership on the basis of the inmate's associates. Respondents were least likely, however, to base definitions of gang membership on claims by informants. These results indicate that self-report remains a viable and frequent method of identification among criminal justice practitioners. In addition, there is considerable overlap between police and jail methods of classification, extending the validity of the measurement approach to yet another group.

Using the methods of designating gang affiliation reported above, respondents were asked to estimate the prevalence of gang members in their jail. Fong and Buentello (1991) outline how correctional administrators have historically been reluctant to provide information to researchers about internal problems, such as gangs or gang violence. Anecdotal information from administrators suggests that gang members may not be forthcoming about their gang affiliation with classification or intake officers. As a result, the true rate of gang membership is likely to be undercounted in many places, especially if jails do not collect such data on admission or do not have gang intelligence officers that track these populations.

The mean (unweighted) estimate of gang membership among jail inmates was 13.2%, which closely approximates the national-level estimate of 16% reported by Wells et al.

(2002). Estimates varied greatly, from 11 respondents who reported having no gang members in their facilities to 1 California jail administrator who reported that 70% of inmates in their facility were gang involved. In fact, by subtracting the facilities that reported having no gang members in their facility, the mean increased to 15.2%. Overall, half of the respondents estimated that the prevalence of gang members in their facilities ranged from 1% to 10%.

Table 7.3 presents the perceptions of jail administrators regarding the likelihood of problem behaviors in special needs populations. These problem behaviors included suicide, incidents of self-harm, victimization, assault (either inmates or staff), disruptive behavior within the facility, escapes (or attempts), or other criminal conduct. Gang members were compared to three other special needs populations: inmates with severe mental illness, "frequent flyers" (repeat offenders with more than 20 admissions), and long-term inmates (prisoners who had served more than 1 year of jail incarceration). A disruption index was calculated where 1 point was counted each time a respondent checked that a special needs group was likely to be involved in one of the disruptive behaviors listed above. Of a possible total value of 1,072 (if inmates were coded as being disruptive in all categories by all respondents),

Table 7.3 Perceptions of Jail Administrators on the Involvement of Special Needs Populations in Problem Behaviors

Population	Disruption[a]	Assault Inmates	Assault Staff
Gang members	367	44	65
Frequent flyers	233	78	81
Inmates with mental illness	610	78	81
Long-term inmates	201	35	21

a. Disruption Index = sum of the following categories; likelihood of suicide, self-harm, victimization, assault (other inmates of staff), disruptive behavior, escapes (or attempts), and other criminal conduct (highest possible value = 1,072).

inmates with mental illness had the highest disruption score of 610.4. Gang members followed with a value of 367, whereas the remaining groups had much lower scores. This finding reinforces the findings of previous research that found gang members represent a significant challenge to correctional operations (Fischer, 2001).

In addition to estimating the overall potential for disruption, perceptions of involvement in violent behavior were also collected. Jail administrators reported that gang members were more likely to assault other inmates than any other group of special needs inmates. Fischer's (2001) surveys of 463 Arizona prisoners found that inmates believe that inmates

who are not members of a gang are safer than those who are: 69% said that inmates who are not members of a gang are very safe, safe, or somewhat safe, while only 57% said inmates who were members of *a* gang were very safe, safe, or somewhat safe (p. 172).

Furthermore, although inmates with mental illness were perceived as the most likely special needs group to assault officers and staff, gang members were also considered to pose a physical threat to jail staff.

Administrators were also asked about the efficacy of 10 different jail-based interventions to respond to gangs. Of the tactics presented in Table 7.4, the three that were considered most effective were segregation or

Table 7.4   Perceptions of Jail Administrators About the Efficacy of Gang Interventions (Percentage of Respondents)

Programs or Responses	Very Effective	Somewhat Effective	Not Effective	Not Applicable
Segregation or separation	36.2	30.8	1.5	31.5
Restrict outside visitors	10.9	15.5	5.4	68.2
Transfer (e.g., other jail)	5.5	20.5	4.7	69.3
Facility sanctions for gang behavior	27.5	36.6	6.1	29.8
Legal sanctions for gang behavior	11.6	20.9	9.3	58.1
Loss of "good time" credits	19.8	22.9	9.2	481
Information sharing (other agencies)	36.6	35.1	3.8	24.4
Intelligence gathering	33.1	39.2	3.1	24.6
Written policies or procedures	26.8	40.9	2.4	29.9
Limit program participation	15.4	26.9	11.5	46.2

Jails that report using none of these tactics = 15; jails that report using two or fewer of these tactics = 34.

separation of gang members, intelligence gathering, and sharing this information with other agencies. Thus, these results are consistent with the findings reported in the earlier national study of jail interventions (Wells et al., 2002) as well as Decker's (2003) research. It is interesting to note that for every category, the "not effective" category was the lowest for every intervention strategy. Stated differently, jail administrators were highly inclined to view any intervention strategy as effective.

The strategies perceived as least successful in reducing the influence of jail gangs were placing restrictions on outside visitors, transfers of gang members to other facilities, or legal sanctions for criminal behavior. Few administrators reported that they used these tactics, and those facilities that used these approaches did not deem them very effective. Transferring gang members is not, for example, a feasible approach in most local jails. Respondents also indicated that some approaches were ineffective, including the loss of "good time" credits and limiting program participation for gang-involved jail inmates.

The finding that 15 jail administrators reported their facilities used none of the interventions outlined above was surprising. Chi-square analyses were used to evaluate the relationships between the number of gang interventions used by a given jail (split at the median) and the following variables split at their median values: the daily cost to house an inmate, the estimated gang membership, and the rated capacity of the facility. Consistent with expectations, the only variable that had a significant association with high levels of gang interventions was the size of facility; larger facilities used a greater variety of interventions.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This research examined the perceptions of jail administrators about the problems that gang members cause in their facilities, the prevalence of these populations, methods of classifying gang membership, and approaches that may reduce the disruption or violence associated with these groups. The findings reported above suggest that the estimate of gang populations vary greatly by location, and although there were no statistically significant regional differences, smaller jails were less likely to report the presence of gangs. Although 11 facilities reported that they had no gang members in their populations, a number of jails reported that more than half of their populations were gang involved.

Estimating the true population of gang members is problematic, especially considering that there are different degrees of membership. Silverman (2001, p. 284) outlined seven different classifications of membership from hard core members to "sympathizers and wanna-be's." The United States Department of Justice (1992) estimated that hard core members represent only 15% to 20% of the total gang membership. It is important to distinguish between these different categories of gang membership, although there is little evidence to suggest this is regularly performed within prisons and jails. There is an intuitive conceptual appeal to the notion that strategies for long-term hard core members need to be fundamentally different than those who have less commitment to the gang.

Depending on the categories and methods of classifying gang members, estimates of the prevalence of gang members within jails are likely to vary greatly. The definition of gang membership used in this study was broadly inclusive in that it asked respondents to base their estimates on the five categories outlined in the survey and did not distinguish between "street-gangs," "prison-gangs" "unaffiliated gangs," and "STGs." Still, the finding that 13.2% of all jail inmates in this national sample were gang involved suggests that accurately estimating the gang populations is an important step for jail administrators. Extrapolating this estimate to the 2003 national jail population, for example, would result in 90,000 gang members held in American jails on any given day.

A second relevant research question is to evaluate the commitment to the gang of these 90,000 inmates: Are the estimates of 15% to 20% of hard core members accurate today? Is gang membership, for instance, a situational or temporary condition for most inmates? Furthermore, at what point of a person's incarceration does that person become gang affiliated? Knowing the answers to such questions may enable us to prevent gang affiliation in the first place or create more effective interventions to discourage jail inmates from joining such groups. Such questions can only be answered through further empirical work, including interviews with gang members.

Eleven jails reported having no gang members. Of these facilities, the mean rated capacity was 271 inmates *(mdn = 119 beds)*, which is approximately one third the size of the average jail in this study. Yet one of the jails that reported having no gang members had a capacity of nearly 1,500 inmates, which does not seem plausible. Although rural communities are less likely than other localities to develop gang problems, a number of scholars have found that these areas are not immune to gangs (Egley & Major, 2004; Weisheit & Wells, 2004). It is likely that some administrators are not aware of the scope of the problem, are in denial, deliberately underreport the percentages of gang-involved inmates, or do not regard gangs as problematic (Fong & Buentello, 1991), concerns that apply elsewhere to law enforcement officials (Huff, 1990).

Most administrators reported that gang members challenged the operations of their facilities through illegal or disruptive behaviors and a greater involvement in violence. In response to these problems, jails have adopted a number of strategies to reduce the prevalence or harm that these special needs inmates pose. The foremost of these strategies was gathering intelligence and disseminating this information within the facility and to other law enforcement agencies. Also effective was the segregation or separation of gang-involved jail inmates, although this strategy may not be feasible in all locations or in some jails. An examination of the American Jail Association's (2003) national inventory of jails reveals that there are some 650 facilities of 25 beds or less, and these institutions are unlikely to have the ability to separate or segregate any inmate.

Despite the fact that most inmates serve short terms of temporary incarceration, there are long-term jail populations that may be vulnerable to gang recruitment. In some cases, inmates may serve years in local jails (James, 2004) and serve part (or all) of their state prison sentence there (see Ruddell, 2005). Moreover, of the estimated 13% of gang members in this sample, some may have weak ties with the gang. If jail-based interventions can prevent gang recruitment or prevent those "wannabes" from becoming full-fledged gang members, the benefits may be felt throughout justice systems. First, by reducing gang populations, jails will be safer. Safe jails are important not only from a human rights perspective, but high levels of violence might also contribute to increased membership as inmates affiliate themselves with gangs in search of safety (Lhotsky, 2000; Ross & Richards, 2002).

The second advantage of jail-based gang interventions is that jails serve as the entry point for prison populations. Reducing gang membership in local facilities and information sharing with state correctional systems may enhance the effectiveness of prison-based gang interventions. Furthermore, high-visibility interventions may deter nonaffiliated inmates from joining gangs by increasing the "costs" of membership. Some correctional systems, for instance, provide inmates with "guidelines" of the lost opportunities that occur when they affiliate with a gang (see Connecticut Department of Corrections, 1995).

One issue that requires careful consideration is whether society can provide realistic alternatives to the safety and status that gangs offer. Returning vulnerable young people from jails to the community with little hope of meaningful opportunities makes joining a

gang more likely. Fleisher and Decker (2001a, pp. 69-70) outline the many barriers to successful reintegration of gang members into the community. Thus, although correctional interventions can attempt to reduce the prevalence of gangs and control their criminal behaviors within these institutions, these jail or prison-based programs need to be supplemented with a corresponding increase in community-based gang-intervention programs to support prisoner reentry.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do Ruddell and colleagues study jails specifically?

2. How did these researchers go about studying jails throughout the country? Did they use random sampling techniques to obtain their sample?

3. What would be the units of analysis in this study?

4. What techniques did these researchers use to try to increase response rates? What was their final response rate? What are some of the limitations of their obtained sample?

5. According to the results from their survey data (Table 7.1), what are the various ways in which jail administrators define gang activity?

6. According to Table 7.3, which special needs populations are the most problematic for jails?

7. According to jail administrators (Table 7.4), what are the most effective responses to problematic gang behavior? What are the least effective responses?

8. According to these researchers' results, if they generalized their findings, how many jail inmates nationwide would be gang involved?

9. What are some of the implications from this research for administrators of jails?

RESEARCH READING

Tewksbury and Mustaine use survey research to study the perceptions of prison staff regarding appropriate programs and services for inmates. Most research on prison amenities focuses on what the public thinks prisoners should and should not be provided in a correctional setting. These researchers decided it may be more appropriate to ask those closest to the inmates, the correctional staff, about services and resources for inmates. The subjects of their research are prison staff from six institutions in Kentucky. These institutions were chosen because of the different types of inmates they house. The results are from 554 surveys returned to the researchers and generally show that correctional staff believes that prisoners should be afforded amenities; however, these views are dependent on the education, experience, and position held by the staff member.

————— **INSIDERS' VIEWS OF PRISON AMENITIES** —————

Beliefs and Perceptions of Correctional Staff Members

Richard Tewksbury and Elizabeth Ehrhardt Mustaine

Abstract: Existing research on views of prison amenities has largely focused on the general public. This research assesses the perceptions and views of correctional staff regarding what should be provided. Based on data from 554 Kentucky Department of Corrections staff members, results show that correctional staffers tend to have favorable views regarding the presence of prison amenities. Furthermore, analyses of patterns and trends across types of jobs, experience, and educational attainment show that prison staffers are accepting of most particular amenities. Finally, views on prison amenities are related to one's position and length of experience in the prison, as well as one's educational level. Policy and practical implications are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

As American correctional institutions continue to expand in number and population (Harrison & Beck, 2005), they increasingly become points of political and community attention (see No Frills Prison Act of 1996; Hensley, Miller, Tewksbury, & Koscheski, 2003). Much discourse in this arena focuses on issues of the consequences of incarceration (for society in general and offenders in particular) and what (if anything) should be done with, for, and to inmates. Should correctional administrators attempt to rehabilitate offenders, or should prisons simply warehouse offenders in stark and sparse conditions? Should inmates be provided with access to products, services, and opportunities that those at the bottom of society's economic structure are unable to access? Where is the line regarding what should and should not be available for prison inmates? These questions form the basis of the present study. What products, services, and programmatic opportunities do correctional staff persons believe are appropriate and inappropriate for incarcerated offenders? And how do variations in staff members' characteristics influence these beliefs?

Both the debate about and research assessing the beliefs of individuals (and categories of individuals) regarding the appropriateness of providing various amenities to inmates are fairly recent developments (e.g., No Frills Prison Act of 1996; Applegate, 2001; Hensley et al., 2003; Johnson, Bennett, & Flanagan, 1997; Lenz, 2002). Only during the past two decades has a discussion of whether inmates should have access to a variety of products, services, and programs been popularly debated. And research about attitudes and beliefs concerning inmates' access to amenities is a recently emerging and underdeveloped field (Applegate, 2001; Bryant & Morris, 1998; Hensley et al., 2003; Johnson et al., 1997; Lenz, 2002).

This study endeavors to add to this underdeveloped field by considering the views of correctional staff about a variety of prison amenities as well as assess any relationship between these views and correctional staff characteristics. In short, the present study goes beyond the limited available literature and assesses the perceptions of a wide range of correctional staff regarding the provision of a large number of potential prison amenities. Without consideration of how those charged with carrying out the day-to-day tasks and functions of corrections, even the best intended policies and directives may go unheeded or be implemented in ways contrary to what may be intended. To

disregard the perceptions, values, beliefs, and attitudes of frontline correctional staff is to ignore the most important population regarding correctional practices.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The Public Debate Regarding Prison Amenities

At the core of the debate about what prison inmates should and should not be allowed to have or have access to is the concept of least eligibility. In short, the principle of least eligibility is the idea that "prisoners should not be given programs and services or live under conditions that are better than those of the lowest classes of the noncriminal population in society" (Champion, 2005, p. 200). According to this way of thinking, convicted and incarcerated offenders should not be provided with anything better than that provided or accessible to anyone in the general population. This is contrasted with those who take the position that by incarcerating an individual, the state assumes responsibility for providing for that individual's needs because the inmate is unable to do so oneself (the principle of *parens patriae).*

Since the mid-1990s. there has been a sharp shift toward limiting prison inmates' access to amenities and to removing extras and luxuries from inside prisons. The most important stimulus in this movement was the passage of the 1996 federal legislation known as the No Frills Prison Act. This law prohibits in-cell televisions (except for inmates in segregation); coffee pots; hot plates; movies rated R, X, or NC-17; boxing, wrestling, or any martial art, bodybuilding, and weightlifting equipment; and possession of any personal electronics or musical instruments in federal prisons. This development also spurred state Departments of Corrections (DOCs) to pass similar state-level legislation or to remove many inmate amenities by administrative action (see Corrections Compendium, 2002).

Where access to amenities has been maintained, access has been restricted (or curtailed) through the imposition of fees for services. According to a survey of state DOCs in 2002, the legal developments of the mid- to late 1990s did create a "trend for decreased privileges . . . and will likely continue in the future" (Corrections Compendium, 2002, pp. 8-9). The restrictions on luxuries has led to the prohibition of smoking in 53% of American prisons. R-rated movies are not allowed in 58% of prisons, and many institutions and systems have strict restrictions on books and magazines (e.g., no magazines more than 3 months old, only one book to be in an inmate's possession at a time; Corrections Compendium, 2002).

The movement toward no frills prisons appears to be in response to a perceived political belief that the public wants prisons to be austere environments. However, the veracity of this assumption has not been supported by the research literature (Applegate, 2001; Bryant & Morris, 1998; Hensley et al., 2003; Lenz, 2002). Correctional administrators largely believe that removing all amenities may pose safety risks and seriously restrict their abilities to manage inmate behavior through the availability of incentives and rewards (see below).

THE PRESENT STUDY

The present study seeks to fill the gap in our knowledge regarding how criminal justice staff—and prison staff specifically and most interestingly—perceive what are and are not appropriate programs, services, and resources for inmates. This represents a first step in assessing how those most closely associated with prison life perceive the value of amenities for institutional operations.

The existing public opinion data focus only on residents of Florida. Instead, we

focus on a broad cross section of correctional staff in a medium-sized prison population (approximately 16,000) in the state of Kentucky. Our goal is to identify the views of prison staff regarding what programs, services, and resources should and should not be provided inmates. Additionally, to inform policies and policy makers, we examine patterns across job categories, demographics and levels of institutional experience, and educational attainment.

Method

Data for the present study were gathered via surveys administered to all staff working at 6 (of the 14) prisons in the Commonwealth of Kentucky during spring 2003. The institutions studied were chosen to provide diversity in the sample: one maximum security prison (average daily population [ADP] = 807), a special needs prison (ADP = 1,852), a reception and assessment center (ADP = 960), a medium security prison (ADP = 1,075), a minimum security institution (ADP = 552), and a women's institution (ADP = 697). All staff members, both those employed by the DOCs and those employed by other agencies, with their primary work assignment at one of the 6 selected prisons were provided an explanatory cover letter and copy of the research instrument with paychecks. Wardens of each institution also provided either written or e-mail encouragement and reminders to their institution's staff members to complete the survey.

The data collection instrument is a five-page, 68-item questionnaire. Staff members receiving the instrument were informed of the voluntary and anonymous nature of the project as well as the identity and both the university and DOC affiliation of the researcher. Instructions were provided both in the cover letter and at the end of the survey for returning the instrument. Locked survey collection boxes were provided to each institution and located either immediately inside the main entrance or in a high-traffic staff area (i.e., break room) for depositing completed surveys.

Survey collection boxes were kept in place for 2 weeks. After that time, all surveys were collected, coded, and evaluated.

Description of Sample

A total of 554 usable surveys were returned. Approximately 1,590 surveys were distributed; thus, the response rate is 34.9%. Although this is not a large response rate, it is adequate and the sample does fairly accurately reflect the sex and race characteristics of Kentucky correctional staff in general. Kentucky correctional staff members are 64.8% men and 35.2% women. Ninety-three percent of the staff members are White, with 7% all other races (L. Gillis, personal communication, October 24, 2003).

For this sample (see Table 7.5), in terms of demographics, respondents are 61.7% male and 38.3% female, and the mean age is 42.9 years. More than one quarter of individuals (28.4%) hold a 4-year college degree (with 11.6% of the sample also having a graduate degree). A near equal percentage (27.1%) reports a high school diploma or GED with no college courses completed. Of the sample, 43.7% report having attended college but not completing a 4-year bachelor's degree. It is important to note that the vast majority of respondents self-report their race as White (92.5%); therefore, it is not possible to assess differences and similarities in perspectives and views of Kentucky DOC staff by race.

Finally, one half (49.7%) of the sample reports working in security. An additional quarter (23.7%) of the sample works in programs. One in 6 respondents (16.6%) is from administration, and 1 in 10 (9.9%) is in a support services job. Respondents report a mean of 9 years and 8 months of experience working in corrections, with one half of the sample having at least 7 years and 2 months of experience.

Table 7.5   Description of Sample

	n	*%*
Sex		
Male	333	61.7
Female	207	38.3
Race		
White	493	92.5
Non-white	40	7.5
Education		
Less than high school/GED	4	0.7
High school graduate/GED	147	27.1
Attended college, did not graduate	175	32.3
2-year college degree	62	11.4
4-year college degree	91	16.8
Graduate degree	63	11.6
Type of job		
Administration	89	16.6
Security	266	49.7
Programs	127	23.7
Support services (clerical, food service, physical, plant, etc.)	53	9.9

Note: Age (years), $M = 42.9$, Mdn = 43.0; time working in corrections, $M = 9$ years, 8 months, Mdn = 7 years, 2 months.

Description of Variables

The dependent variables, or variables of primary interest in this study, are the set of 26 prison amenities commonly used in this developing line of research. The list, originally proposed by Applegate (2001), asks respondents to "indicate whether you believe each item/ activity should be eliminated for prison inmates or should be kept for inmates (in prisons where these are provided)" The 26 amenities are shown in the tables that follow.

Independent variables, or the variables used for comparison, are the respondents' types of jobs (administration; program staff-unit management, education, medical, mental health, industries, or library; security-correctional officer or supervisors; or other), educational attainments (less than a college graduate and graduated from college or more education), and lengths of experience working in corrections (short job tenure is 0 to 4 years on the job, mid-level job tenure is 5 to 12 years on

the job, and longer job tenure is 13 or more years on the job).

The analysis of the data proceeds in two stages. First, we report correctional staff members' views on keeping or eliminating correctional amenities in general (as highlighted in Table 7.6). Next, we create cross-tabulation tables for these amenities by correctional staff members' types of jobs (Table 7.7) and compute Pearson's chi-square statistic to assess any differences in the relationship between these groups and their views on particular correctional amenities.

Findings: Staff Members'
Views of Prison Amenities

The focus of the present research concerns the views of correctional staff members regarding whether any of the available programs, services, and resources (commonly referred to as amenities) should be retained or eliminated in prisons. We assess this in general as well as consider whether any of three correctional staff characteristics (type of job, length of tenure, and educational attainment) are related to their views on these amenities.

Specifically, Table 7.6 reports the percentages of staff members who report that they believe each of the assessed amenities should be kept in prisons where they are available. The table also provides a rank ordering of the amenities, starting with the amenity that received the most support for retention and ending with the amenity that received the least support for retention (or the most support for elimination). This analysis of frequency can highlight the views of staff about particular amenities as well as give some information about the types of amenities that are seen as the most and least worthy.

To elaborate, as can be seen, there are 12 amenities that at least 90% of staff believe should be retained in prisons; these include items that represent such areas as basic prison conditions (psychological counseling, books, supervised visits with family, telephone calls, and air conditioning), educational programming (job training, GEO classes, and basic literacy programs), and

some forms of mild entertainment (radios and tape players, basic television, and newspapers and magazines). Additionally, there are six amenities (boxing and martial arts, conjugal visits, pornography, condoms, R-rated movies, and cable TV) that a majority of staff persons believe should be eliminated from prison.

The remaining amenities (HIV/AIDS treatment, arts and crafts, legal assistance, law books and legal libraries, weightlifting equipment, college education programs, cigarettes and tobacco, and tennis) are items believed by at least two thirds of staff members to be appropriate for prison. These items do not receive the same resounding support as the top amenities listed (all with more than 90% support for retention) but are still viewed as being valuable for a successful prison experience for inmates and/or successful maintenance of prison security and safety of those there (inmates and staff). As a whole, then, it is interesting to note that with the exception of six amenities, the majority of the Kentucky prison staff members felt that most of the amenities available in prisons should be kept. It is also interesting to note that several amenities that did not receive more than 90% support are amenities that have legal mandates for prisons to offer (HIV treatment and law libraries).

This is similar to Applegate's (2001) findings that the Florida public was more supportive of prison amenities than perhaps previously assumed. Fully 19 of the 26 amenities assessed were supported by the majority of those persons interviewed. Additionally, as a point of interest, the amenities supported for retention as well as those supported for elimination are very similar for those reported as such by Applegate's Florida citizens and the correctional staff in the present study. (Amenities marked for elimination in Applegate's study were identical to those in the present study, with the exceptions that the majority of the Florida public felt that tennis and cigarettes and other tobacco should be eliminated and conjugal visits should be kept.)

Of course, correctional staff members' views on amenities may be influenced by their personal attributes. As such, we turn to the cross-tabulation analysis to assess any differences in

Table 7.6   Percentage of Correctional Staff Members Believing Amenities Should Be Kept

Amenity	% Staff Advocating to Keep Amenity
Books	98.3
Psychological counseling	96.8
Basic literacy programs	96.4
Supervised family visits	96.2
GED classes	95.1
Basketball	94.8
Newspapers and magazines	93.9
Basic TV (no cable)	93.8
Telephone calls	92.2
Radios and tape players	92.0
Job training programs	91.4
Air conditioning	91.2
HIV/AIDS treatment	87.4
Art and crafts	86.8
Legal assistance	81.3
Law books and legal library	77.7
Weightlifting equipment	64.6
College education programs	62.8
Cigarettes and other tobacco	62.3
Tennis	56.2
Cable TV	47.1
R-rated movies	35.5
Condoms	19.9
Pornography	17.6
Conjugal visiting	12.5
Boxing and martial arts	12.3

Table 7.7   Results of Cross-Tabulations on Attitudes About Keeping Prison Amenities by Correctional Staff Position

Amenity	% Administrators	% Security Staff	% Program Staff	Pearson ^{2}
Books	98.8	98.0	99.2	0.784
Psychological counseling	97.6	96.1	98.3	1.618
Basic literacy programs	98.8	95.2	98.3	3.945
Supervised family visits	97.6	95.3	98.3	2.688
GED classes	98.8	91.8	100	15.211*
Basketball	97.6	93.7	95.7	2.176
Newspapers and magazines	97.6	91.7	983	8.897*
Basic TV (no cable)	95.2	93.9	95.0	0.294
Telephone calls	88.2	92.5	95.9	4.243
Radios and tape players	92.9	90.2	95.8	3.630
Job training programs	96.4	86.6	97.5	15.773*
Air conditioning	92.9	92.0	94.2	0.556
HIV/AIDS treatment	97.6	82.0	90.0	15.772*
Arts and crafts	91.7	82.8	91.7	7.807*
Legal assistance	90.6	78.6	893	10.511*
Law books and legal library	88.7	72.1	91.7	20.797*
Weightlifting equipment	66.7	58.7	74.2	8.694*
College education programs	75.0	53.5	74.8	22.035*
Cigarettes and other tobacco	61.2	59.7	65.3	1.089
Tennis	59.8	53.5	59.8	1.788
Cable TV	49.4	44.3	52.9	2.590
R-rated movies	31.0	32.0	45.4	7.173*
Condoms	16.5	12.7	41.4	40.439*
Pornography	7.1	20.6	16.8	8.087*
Conjugal visiting	11.8	11.1	14.5	0.845
Boxing and martial arts	12.2	10.0	20.0	7.209*

* $t < .05$.

views on prison amenities by several correctional staff member characteristics (type of job, job tenure, and educational attainment). For this part of the analysis, we create cross-tabulation tables and use Pearson's chi-square statistic. We test the significance of the statistic (that assesses whether there is any relationship between the two variables in the table) with a two-tailed t test. Using cross-tabulation tables and the chi-square statistic is the appropriate mode of analysis for this type of comparison between groups because data for all variables are nominal (as such, ANOVA, paired t tests, and other such similar procedures are inappropriate, as they require at least one variable to be numeric; Hopkins, 2000).

Turning to Table 7.7, when examining differences across staff members based on type of job, some variation comes forth. As noted above, for this comparison, we use three broad categories of jobs (administration, security, and programs). Specifically, for 13 of the amenities, there is a significant relationship between the three types of correctional staff positions and their views on the particular amenity. First, for several of the amenities, it appears that it is security staff members who have a distinctive view from both administrators and program staff members. These seven amenities are GED classes, newspapers and magazines, job training programs, arts and crafts, legal assistance, law books and legal library, and college education programs. In all cases, security staff members have a lower level of support for retention of these amenities than do administrators and program staff members. For example, although 98.8% and 100% of administrators and program staff members are in support of the retention of GED classes for inmates in prisons, only 91.8% of security officers feel these classes should be retained. Certainly, it is the case that, overall, the vast majority of correctional staffers in general are supportive of this program. Nonetheless, a noticeably higher proportion of security officers do not support inmates taking classes to get their GEDs. Other examples are that fewer security staff members support job training programs, arts and crafts, college

education programs, newspapers and magazines, law library and legal books, and legal assistance (even though they are, for the most part, supportive of these programs) than administrators and program staff.

For three of the amenities, where there is a significant relationship between the type of job held and views on prison amenities, it appears that it is program staffers that have the distinct view. In all cases, they are significantly more likely to favor retaining the amenity than are administrators and security staff members. To elaborate, 45.4%, 41.4%, and 20% of program staff members are in favor of retaining R-rated movies, condoms, and boxing and martial arts programs, respectively. Fewer administrators (31%, 16.5%, and 12.2%, respectively) and security staff (32%, 12.7%, and 10%, respectively) support retaining these amenities.

Views on pornography are significantly related to type of job held, and in this case, it appears that administrators have the most distinctive view. Security and program staff members have similar amounts of support for the retention of pornography in prisons (20.6% and 16.8%, respectively), whereas very few administrators support retaining pornography (7.1%).

Finally, three amenity views that are significantly related to type of job held seem to have distinct views across all job categories. To specify, administrators are the most likely to support the retention of HIV/AIDS treatment (97.6%), fewer program staffers favor HIV/AIDS treatment (90.9%), and still fewer security staff want to keep HIV/AIDS treatment (82%). In this case, it may be that administrators are the most in favor of this amenity because they know it is legally mandated (but we did not directly test this assertion). Weightlifting equipment seems to be another amenity that has distinctive views across all types of jobs. Specifically, security staff have the least amount of support for it (58.7%), administrators are next with 66.7% being in support of retaining it, and the highest proportion of program staff members support keeping weightlifting equipment (74.2%). Obviously, staff members' types of jobs in prison have significant influences over their

views on the retention or elimination of various prison amenities.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The present study has endeavored to provide a first look at the views of correctional staff members regarding the retention or elimination of various prison amenities. Previous research has examined the attitudes of citizens as well as prison wardens, but we know very little about the views of other correctional staff members, especially those with frequent and intense inmate contact. Additionally, the present study has examined the relationship between these views and several correctional staff member characteristics.

The current study has illustrated that correctional staff members generally support the retention of most assessed amenities. There are only four amenities that received less than 20% support for retention (boxing and martial arts, conjugal visiting, pornography, and condoms), and only two additional amenities that received more than one third but less than one half support for retention (cable TV and R-rated movies). For the remaining amenities, at least a majority of the correctional staff members surveyed supported their retention in prison. Additionally, nearly half (12) of the amenities assessed received support for retention by at least 90% of the sample. This is an instructive finding. Those who actually work in the prison setting, as administrators, security staff members, or program staff members, are generally supportive of most of the prison services, programs, and activities that are currently offered (at least in some facilities) to inmates. Obviously, the belief is that there is at least some tangible benefit to having these amenities available to inmates.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are some of the differing views about the level of amenities that prisoners should be afforded? What are correctional staff members worried about that the general population probably does not think about?

2. Why did Tewksbury and Mustaine choose these six prisons?

3. Describe the general methods used by these researchers to administer the survey.

4. What was the response rate in this study? What do the authors say about response rate and the characteristics of their sample versus the population of correctional staff in Kentucky? According to Table 7.5, what do typical correctional officers look like? Are they well educated, in your opinion?

5. According to Table 7.6, which amenities receive the most support from correctional staff? The least?

6. How do the responses vary by the type of position a staff member has? Which position gives the most support for the least supported amenities? Do the authors discuss why the position one has might affect their views?

7. What is the reason given by these researchers for the generally high level of support for amenities for inmates?

RESEARCH READING

Decker and colleagues use interviews of two samples of juveniles housed at detention facilities in Arizona to examine the organization and structure of gangs and how the level of organization of a gang affects the amount of crime it is involved in. These researchers build off the framework of previous research, which has revealed that (1) gangs are not well organized, and (2) that a gang's organizational structure has no affect on the gang's behavior. They hypothesize that gangs that are better organized will be more involved in crime. They conduct their analysis of ADAM (Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring) data, which uses face-to-face interviews of arrestees to gather information about gang affiliation and criminal behavior. The findings from these interviews with juveniles suggest that gang organizational structure is related to the level of involvement in crime of its members.

Source: Decker, S., Katz, C., & Webb, V. (2008). Understanding the black box of gang organization: Implications for involvement in violent crime, drug sales, and violent victimization. *Crime & Delinquency*, *54*, 153–172. Copyright © 1992 Sage Publications.

UNDERSTANDING THE BLACK BOX OF GANG ORGANIZATION

Implications for Involvement in Violent Crime, Drug Sales, and Violent Victimization

Scott H. Decker, Charles M. Katz, and Vincent J. Webb

Abstract: This article examines the influence of gang organization on several behavioral measures. Using interview data from juvenile detention facilities in three Arizona sites, this article examines the relationship between gang organizational structure and involvement in violent crime, drug sales, victimization, and arrest. The gang literature suggests that gangs are not very well organized. However, the findings from the current research suggest that even low levels of gang organization are important for their influence on behavior. Indeed, even incremental increases in gang organization are related to increased involvement in offending and victimization.

INTRODUCTION

The role of gangs in crime has been examined in a large body of research (Esbensen & Huizinga, 1993; Thornberry, Krohn, Lizotte, & Chard-Weirschem, 1993). At the individual level, a growing body of research has documented that gang membership has a disproportionate impact on crime. Individuals commit more crimes while in a gang, and those crimes tend to be more serious than when individuals are not gang members. On the intervention side, there is ample evidence that dealing with gang members is more difficult than dealing with nongang offenders (Klein, 1995). Gang members who end up in prison also have longer and more serious involvement in crime than comparable nongang individuals (Fleisher & Decker, 2001).

Research on the aggregate impact of gangs in many large cities has been equally consistent. This research finds that cities with more gangs have more crimes of violence concentrated in those neighborhoods with high levels of gang presence (Klein, 1995). In addition, this research finds that the longer cities have gangs, the more difficult it is to eradicate those gangs (Spergel, 1995). Gangs also provide impediments to prevention, intervention, and suppression efforts.

These consistent findings about the salience of the relationship between gang membership and crime raise an important issue about the nature of the gang itself. Despite the considerable knowledge that has accumulated regarding the impact of gangs on crime, there is considerably less knowledge about the organizational and structural characteristics of gangs themselves. In a sense, gangs largely have been a "black box"; that is, little is known about the nature of the gang with regard to its structure and organization. Given the current dearth of knowledge of these characteristics, it comes as little surprise that there is a lack of knowledge of the relationship between such characteristics and the behavior of members. The current study attempts to fill these gaps, focusing on the structural and organizational features of gangs and the influence of these characteristics on the behavior of gang members. In this sense, we seek to better understand the role of structural and organizational aspects of the gang on gang member behavior.

THE PRESENT STUDY

Despite these advances in our understanding of the structural and organizational features of

gangs, there is not enough information to specify how the organizational and structural characteristics of gangs affect criminal behavior and victimization. Stated differently, we know a fair amount about gang structures but very little about their relationship to behavior. This is a crucial omission from our understanding of gangs. After all, understanding gang structures and gang behavior without knowing their influence on behavior and victimization falls short of providing an explanation of the influence of such characteristics. Although this may seem obvious, gang research has provided more descriptive literature than analyses of relationships between gang characteristics and behavior, a notable omission. This article provides evidence about and examines in greater detail the relationship between gang structure and the behavior of gang members.

We hypothesize that members of gangs with stronger organizational structures will have higher levels of involvement in crime, commit more serious offenses, be arrested more often, and be victims of violent crime more often. These hypotheses are consistent with the enhancement approaches outlined by Thornberry, Krohn, Lizotte, Smith, and Tobin (2003), who suggest that group norms and group processes work together to increase involvement in offending while individuals are in a gang (p. 99). Group norms and group processes have a locus, which we suggest can be found in the organizational structure of the gang. We propose a similar link between gang membership and victimization. One of the most important findings in criminology in the past decade is the link between victimization and offending. Using multiple waves from the National Youth Survey, Lauritsen, Sampson, and Laub (1991) note a strong relationship between involvement in a delinquent lifestyle and victimization, particularly for males. We hypothesize that membership in a gang is a suitable proxy for involvement in a delinquent lifestyle, particularly as gang membership enhances involvement in offending.

It is important to point out from the start that this is not a test of gang member versus nongang member behavior, as much of the empirical work on gangs tends to be. Rather, this is a test of the influence of gang organization on several relevant behaviors as reported by individual gang members. The data used for the current study are particularly appropriate for this task in several ways. First, because the interviews were collected from arrestees, they represent more seriously involved juvenile offenders than school- or community-based samples. This may truncate the lower end of the distribution of gang involvement compared to at-large gang members, but is more likely to include more serious gang members. Second, the interviews were collected in three different sites in Arizona (Mesa, Phoenix, and Tucson), so the interview participants reflect more than just local enforcement practice. Finally, the demographic characteristics of gang members in this sample (race and ethnicity, gender, violent offending, drug sales, gang organization, victimization) are consistent with national trends reported by the National Youth Gang Center (Egley, 2002). The Arizona sites have a historic presence of gangs (Zatz, 1987; Zatz & Portillos, 2000), yet are not dominated by Los Angeles gangs. Finally, to provide the strongest test of these concepts, we examine the responses of current and former gang members separately. If there is consistency in the responses of these two groups, we can more strongly conclude that the findings accurately depict the relationship between organizational structure and behavior. Because there is some evidence that current and former gang members differ in their assessment of the gang (Curry, Decker, & Egley, 2002; Thornberry, Krohn, Lizotte, Smith, & Tobin, 2003), this is an important addition to any analysis of gang structure and gang behavior.

Method

The present study uses data collected as part of the Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring

(ADAM) program. The ADAM program, originally established in 1987 by the National Institute of Justice, was created to monitor drug use trends, treatment needs, and at-risk behavior among recently booked arrestees. The ADAM program collected data from recently booked arrestees in 35 sites across the United States. The data used here are from two sites. Maricopa and Pima County, Arizona (aka Arizona ADAM), that sample male and female juveniles. For 14 days each quarter, trained local staff at each site conducted voluntary and anonymous interviews with juveniles who had been arrested within the last 48 hrs. At both the Maricopa and Pima County sites the catchment area for the sample encompasses the entire county. However, only those juveniles who have been detained and booked by the police are available for the study. Just over 96% of approached juvenile arrestees agreed to participate in the study.

The core ADAM juvenile data collection instrument generates self-report data on a variety of sociodemographic and behavior variables. In this article, we focus on three demographic variables (gender, ethnicity, and age), exposure to gang activity and membership, gang crime (violent offending, drug sales), violent victimization, and gang organizational measures measured by the instrument. Gang membership was determined through self-nomination, a technique that has received strong support in the research literature (Curry, 2000; Curry, Decker, & Egley, 2002; Esbensen & Huizinga, 1993; Esbensen, Winfree, He, & Taylor, 2001; Klein, 1995). We further validated our definition of gang membership by asking respondents to name the gang they belonged to. This procedure helped distinguish between those who were members of informal peer groups and those who were members of actual gangs. Only respondents who provided the name of a gang were considered gang members for this study. As such, our final sample of gang members consisted of those who self-reported association with a gang and who could name the gang.

The Arizona Sample

Juvenile data in Arizona were collected between 1999 and 2003 in three different booking facilities located in Phoenix, Tucson, and Mesa. We combine data over multiple quarters of data collection and multiple catchment areas because of the need for large samples. However, there are considerable similarities across the three catchment areas, justifying the aggregation of data across multiple years and sites. The descriptive characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 7.8. Table 7.8 presents a format followed in subsequent tables in that data from current gang members are contrasted to results from individuals who report ever being a member, though not currently. With regard to gender, both current and former members are overwhelmingly male, with 87% of current members and 74% of former members being males. There is consistency between current and former gang members with regard to ethnic composition. The modal category for each group is Hispanic, with roughly 60% of each group falling into this category. Whites are the next largest group, 21% of current and 31% of former members. African Americans comprised 15% of current gang members and 8% of former members. With regard to age, roughly equal percentages of 15-(23%), 16-(27%), and 17-year-olds (24%) were found among current gang members. Former gang members were a little older with 17-year-olds (37%) and 16-year-olds (24%) being the two largest categories. Every individual who self-reported gang membership identified the name of their gang, adding additional validity to the self-nomination procedure.

For the majority of individuals in the sample, a misdemeanor was the most serious offense that led to their referral to the detention facility where they were interviewed. That said, 24% of current members and 31% of

Table 7.8 Characteristics of the Arizona ADAM Gang Samples

	Current Gang Member (N = 156; percentage)	Ever a Gang Member (N = 85; percentage)
Gender		
Male	87	74
Female	13	26
Ethnicity		
Hispanic	60	57
African American	15	8
White	21	31
American Indian	3	4
Other	1	
Age		
13	9	8
14	17	13
15	23	19
16	27	24
17	24	37
Most serious charge		
Felony	24	31
Misdemeanor	43	56
Status	7	13
Other	26	
Is there gang activity in your neighborhood? (percentage responding yes)	81	65
Are people who live on your street members of a gang? (percentage responding yes)	76	51
Are there rival gangs in your neighborhood? (percentage responding yes)	55	50
In your neighborhood, is there pressure to join a gang? (percentage responding yes)	26	14
Are there problems in your neighborhood because of gangs? (percentage responding yes)	55	37
During the past 12 months, have you been arrested and booked for breaking a law whether or not you were guilty? (percentage responding yes)		75

former gang members were referred for a felony. In addition, three quarters of each group reported that they had been arrested and booked for breaking the law at some time in the prior 12 months. Individuals in this sample were very familiar with gang activity. The majority of each group reported that there was gang activity in their neighborhood (81% of current, and 65% of former members), that people who lived on their street were members of a gang (76% and 51%, respectively), and that there were rival gangs in their neighborhood (55% and 50%). Though relatively small percentages of respondents indicated that there was pressure to join a gang in their neighborhood (26% and 14%), higher proportions reported that there were problems in their neighborhood because of gangs (55% and 37%). In sum, these two samples of youth were heavily involved in offending, and found themselves surrounded and influenced by gangs and gang activities. As such, these are appropriate samples with which to begin to understand the role of internal gang structure for gang behavior.

FINDINGS

In Table 7.9, we examine the four indices described above. The first index includes the measure of Gang Organization. Drawing from the earlier work of Decker, Bynum, and Weisel (1998) and Peterson, Miller, and Esbensen (2001), seven measures of gang organization were used to form an index of the level of gang organization. These measures include the presence of leaders, whether the gang had regular meetings, rules, punishment for breaking the rules, symbols of membership, responsibilities to the gang, and whether or not the members give money to the gang. These seven measures tap both the structure of the gang (leaders, rules, meetings, symbols) as well as behavior (punishment, responsibilities, and giving money) and represent important dimensions of how well organized a gang

is. For both current and former members, symbols drew the largest percentage of positive responses (89% and 84%), with giving money to the gang drawing the lowest percentage of positive responses (33% and 30%). Interestingly, the next smallest categories were for leaders (33% and 40%) and responsibilities to the gang (37% and 36%). A count index was constructed for these seven measures in which a "yes" response to each question about the organizational complexity of the gang was scored a "1" and summed across the seven measures. The mean for current members was 3.2 and for former members it was 4.5. This indicates a somewhat higher level of organizational complexity among gangs that former members were a part of, but in general a rather low level of organizational complexity. This is consistent with earlier work (Decker et al., 1998; Klein, 1995; Peterson et al., 2001; Zatz & Portillos, 2000), particularly because the individuals in this sample are juveniles.

The second index presented in Table 7.9 is Violent Victimization. We include seven variables: being threatened with a gun, being shot at, being shot, being threatened with another weapon, being injured with another weapon, being jumped or beaten up, and being robbed. These seven indicators tap into the major risks for violent victimization faced by gang members (Decker, 1996; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Sanders, 1994) and provide a measure of the extent to which gang members are at risk for being victims of violence. This is an important variable to examine in the context of the current analysis given our interest in the role of gang organization for involvement in criminal activities, and the link between violent offending and violent victimization (Lauritsen, Sampson, & Laub, 1991). Overall, these two samples were exposed to high levels of violent victimization. Seventy-five percent of current gang members and 62% of former gang members report being threatened with a gun. Being jumped or beaten up represented the modal category for each group with 82% of current members and 71% of former gang

Table 7.9 Organization, Violent Victimization, Drug Sale, and Violent Offending Index Measures

	Current Member	*Ever Member*
Gang organization index measures		
Does the gang have a leader?	33%	40%
Does the gang have regular meetings?	36%	46%
Does the gang have rules?	54%	46%
Is there punishment if rules are broken?	86%	79%
Does the gang have colors, symbols, signs, or clothes?	89%	84%
Do members have responsibilities to the gang?	37%	36%
Do members give money to the gang?	33%	30%
Range	0–7	0–7
Mean	3.2	4.5
Median	3.0	5.0
SD	1.9	1.9
Violent victimization index measures		
Have you ever been threatened with a gun?	75%	62%
Have you ever been shot at?	74%	57%
Have you ever been shot?	14%	11%
Have you ever been threatened with another weapon?	67%	59%
Have you ever been injured with some other weapon?	48%	31%
Have you ever been robbed?	28%	32%
Range	0–7	0–7
Mean	3.9	3.2
Median	4.0	3.0
SD	1.8	1.8
Drug sale index measures		
Does the gang sell marijuana?	80%	81%
Does the gang sell crack cocaine?	51%	50%
Does the gang sell powder cocaine?	53%	44%

	Current Member	Ever Member
Does the gang sell heroin?	17%	18%
Does the gang sell methamphetamine?	31%	30%
Does the gang sell drugs to other dealers?	56%	42%
Range	0–6	0–6
Mean	2.8	2.6
Median	3.0	3.0
SD	1.9	1.8
Violent crime index measures		
Does the gang intimidate or threaten others?	75%	80%
Does the gang rob people?	72%	57%
Does the gang jump or attack people?	80%	81%
Does the gang do drive-by shootings?	61%	50%
Does the gang kill people?	51%	37%
Range	0-5	0-5
Mean	2.8	3.0
Median	3.0	3.0
SD	1.9	1.5

members reporting that they had experienced this form of victimization. These results provide continued support for the observation that gang members are involved in a substantial amount of violence, certainly in this case as victims. The level of victimization as measured by this seven-item index is modestly higher for current gang members (3.9) than former members (3.2).

The third index provides a measure of involvement in drug sales. The involvement of gangs and gang members in drug sales has been a consistent theme in the research about gangs (Decker & Van Winkle, 1995; Fagan, 1989; Hagedorn, 1988, 1994a, 1994b, Maxson, Klein, & Cunningham, 1992; Skolnick, 1990). We employ six indicators of involvement in drug sales to measure this dimension of gang behavior. Five of them ask specifically whether or not the gang sells a specific drug, including marijuana, powder cocaine, crack cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamines. The sixth measure asks whether the gang sells drugs to other drug dealers. It is important to note that in each case the question is whether the *gang* sells a particular type of drug rather than individual gang members. Not surprisingly, marijuana was the drug most

likely to be sold by gangs (80%, 81%), followed by crack cocaine (51%, 50%) and powder cocaine (53%, 44%). The mean number of drugs sold was 2.8 for current gang members and 2.6 for former gang members. It is interesting to note that a majority of current gang members, 56%, report that their gang was involved in the sale of drugs to other dealers.

The fourth and final index that was developed for this analysis was an indicator of involvement in violent offending. Again, there is strong evidence in the literature that gangs are heavily involved in the commission of acts of violence (Decker, 2000; Maxson & Klein, 1990; Thornberry, Krohn, Lizotte, Smith, & Tobin, 2003; Tita & Abrahamse, 2004). Five specific offenses were used in constructing this scale. Gang members were asked whether the gang intimidated or threatened others, robbed people, jumped or attacked people, did drive-by shootings, or killed people. The majority of current gang members reported that their gang engaged in these activities, ranging from 80% of gang members who agreed with the statement that their gang jumped or attacked people, to a low of 51% who acknowledged that their gang killed people. For former gang members, the figures were generally lower, particularly for the fraction of former members who acknowledged that their gang killed people (37%). The mean score for current gang members on this five-point index was 2.8, and for former gang members it was 3.0.

We next examine the correlations between these four indices and one additional interval measure, the number of self-reported arrests in the past 12 months. We consider the correlations for each subgroup (current members and former members) separately in Table 7.10. We interpret these results as largely descriptive in nature, given the cross-sectional design of the data.

Table 7.10 Correlation Between Organization, Violent Victimization, Drug Sale, and Violent Offending Index Measures

	Organization	*Violent Victimization*	*Drug Sale*	*Violent Offending*	*Arrests*
Current gang member					
Organization		.32**	.27**	.26**	.11
Violent victimization			.41**	.32**	.25**
Drug sale				.41**	.20*
Violent offending					.12
Ever a gang member					
Organization		.47	.35*	.56**	−.25
Violent victimization			.44**	.66**	−.09
Drug sale				.56**	−.27*
Violent offending					−.14

*p = .05. ** p = .01.

Correlations between the gang organization index and three of the other scales are significant at the .01 level. Individuals who were members of more organized gangs report higher victimization counts, more gang sales of different kinds of drugs, and more violent offending by the gang than do members of less organized gangs. This can be seen in the significant and positive correlations between the gang organization index and each of these indices. The correlation between the gang organization index and violent victimizations is the strongest of the three, .32. But it is also important to note from the top panel of Table 7.10 that the level of gang organization is significantly and positively related to the number of different violent and drug crimes that a gang engages in. These results run contrary to the findings from earlier work that the level of gang organization is not sufficiently complex to have implications for how gangs behave particularly in offending patterns largely described as "cafeteria style" (Decker, Bynum, & Weisel, 1998; Klein, 1995; McGloin, 2004; Peterson, Miller, & Esbensen, 2001).

The violent victimization index is positively related to gang drug sales, gang violent offending, and being arrested. Each of these correlations is strong for individual level data (.41, .32, and .25, respectively) and significant at the .01 level. These results are consistent with a growing body of research (Lauritsen, Sampson, & Laub, 1991; Loeber, Kalb, & Huizinga, 2001; Peterson, Taylor, & Esbensen, 2004) that documents the role of involvement in crime as an offender for victimization among adolescents. Although these are cross-sectional interview data and the time order of this relationship can not be established, it is nonetheless important to point out the role of offending for victimization for current gang members, particularly in light of the consistent finding in gang ethnographies that gang members often join the gang for "protection" (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Hagedorn, 1988).

The pattern of relationships for former gang members is found in the bottom panel of Table 7.10. These relationships follow the general pattern found for current gang members, though where they deviate from this pattern, the relationships are stronger. Perhaps some of these differences are attributable to the fact that the former gang members are somewhat older than the current members. Specifically, the gang organization index is strongly and positively related to violent victimizations, gang drug sales, and violent offending committed by the gang. Most notable is the strength of the relationship between the degree of gang organization and violent offending for this group of former gang members. This relationship is quite strong (.56) and significant at the .01 level. These results clearly suggest that despite the relatively low overall levels of gang organization observed for this sample, what organization does exist is related to increased involvement in drug sales, violent offending, and violent victimization. We are not able to identify the specific mechanisms through which the nature of gang organization is related to increases in these forms of offending and victimization. We believe that more organized groups are effective in pursuing individual and group goals, most often offending in the case of the gang. Organizational complexity can also increase the efficacy of the organization. In this context, organizational efficacy is the extent to which an organization can influence the behavior of its members and successfully compel them to pursue group goals. Prior research (Esbensen & Huizinga, 1993; Thornberry, Krohn, Lizotte, & Chard-Wierschem, 1993) has documented the extent to which offending increases during periods of gang membership compared to the time prior to becoming a member and the extent to which offending declines after individuals leave the gang. Our results suggest it is the organizational structure of the gang (weak as it may be) that accounts for changes in behavior. However, as our results are based on cross-sectional data, they are suggestive, offering hypotheses for future research.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the impetus for this research study? What do researchers currently know about the organizational structure of gangs?

2. What is these researchers' main hypothesis? Did they state it as a null or a research hypothesis?

3. What is their main independent variable? What are their dependent variables?

4. How did these researchers operationalize gang membership? How do they provide a reliability check on the subjects interview responses to being involved in a gang?

5. How do Decker and colleagues operationalize gang organization? Similarly, how do they operationalize violent victimization, violent offending, and narcotics trafficking?

6. In Table 7.10, what do the asterisked relationships mean?

7. According to the correlations in Table 7.10, is the organization of a gang significantly related to violent offending and victimization, drug sales, or arrest?

8. Overall, what do these researchers conclude about gang organization in general and the effect of the degree of organization on criminal offending?

RESEARCH READING

In this article, Jacques and Wright propose a theoretical framework with which to understand and develop methods of recruiting, paying, and interviewing active criminal offenders. Jacques and Wright reveal how the relational distance between the researchers, recruiters, and interviewees may affect research with active offenders. They use data from their own interviews with drug dealers in Atlanta and St. Louis in an effort to provide advice to future researchers in strengthening the validity of interview data.

INTIMACY WITH OUTLAWS

The Role of Relational Distance in Recruiting, Paying, and Interviewing Underworld Research Participants

Scott Jacques and Richard Wright

Abstract: The past quarter century has witnessed the emergence of a substantial literature devoted to the mechanics of recruiting, paying, and interviewing currently active offenders. Absent from that literature, however, is a theoretical framework within which to understand, test, modify, and further develop efforts to locate such offenders and gain their cooperation. This note, based on the authors' research with active drug sellers in Atlanta and St. Louis, explores the ways in which *relational distance,* that is, the nature and degree of intimacy between recruiter, interviewee, and researcher, affects the behavior of active offender research. The note concludes with theoretically situated, practical advice for (1) recruiting active criminals, (2) cost containment, and (3) maximizing the quantity and validity of data produced in interviews.

INTRODUCTION

Interview-based research with active underworld participants has a long history in criminology, but it has enjoyed something of a renaissance in recent years, with a new generation of criminologists coming to see the importance of studying crime in situ (see, e.g., Cromwell, Olson, and Avary 1991; Jacobs 1999, 2000; Jacobs, Topalli, and Wright 2003; Mullins, Wright, and Jacobs 2004; Topalli 2005; Wright and Decker 1994, 1997). The process of interviewing unincarcerated lawbreakers presents serious challenges because they have strong incentives not to identify themselves to researchers or to talk about their illegal activities (see, e.g., Jacobs 1998, 2006; Wright et al. 1992). Challenges notwithstanding, the value of field-based interviews with active criminals has been demonstrated repeatedly; among other things, such interviews are not subject to the influence of the prison, probation, or parole setting, and they are much more likely to reflect respondents' current cultural commitments and pursuits (for a comprehensive review, see Jacobs and Wright 2006:9-22).

Obtaining information from active offenders is a multistep process (see, e.g., Dunlap and Johnson 1999; Wright et al. 1992) that can be broken down into three basic parts: recruitment, payment, and interview. In any given population there are only so many active criminals and, as already noted, they have good reasons to remain hidden from view, so the first step is to find and inform them about the research (see, e.g., Jacobs 1998, 1999:12-14). Once that has been accomplished, the voluntary cooperation of the offenders still must be obtained, something that often requires the expenditure of resources (see, e.g., Dunlap and Johnson 1999). That is followed by perhaps the most important stage, namely, the interview itself, during which the offender communicates to the researcher what he or she knows about the subject in question.

The past quarter century has witnessed the emergence of a substantial literature devoted to the mechanics of recruiting, paying, and interviewing various types of unincarcerated criminals (see, among many others, Adler 1990; Dunlap and Johnson 1999; Glassner and Carpenter 1985; Jacobs 1998, 2006; Mieczkowski 1988; Williams et al. 1992; Wright et al. 1992). Taken as a whole, this literature has identified a wide range of strategies that have successfully been used to locate active criminals and convince them to cooperate with researchers. Absent from this literature, however, is any sort of *theoretical* lens through which the process of penetrating the underworld can be viewed. Without such a lens, this literature amounts to little more than an interesting collection of anecdotes in the sense that it is not amenable to scientific testing, falsification, and refutation (Popper 2002a, 2002b). This not only precludes the development of a theoretical understanding of criminological research; it also has practical implications for planning and implementing real-world studies of active criminals, especially when it comes to matters like efficient recruitment, cost containment, and ensuring data quality. To be sure, recruiting, paying,

and interviewing offenders is first and foremost a means of knowledge production, but it is also a social behavior that can be quantified and, thus, theoretically explained.

In this research note, we use pure sociology's concept of relational distance (see Black 1976, 1998), defined as the degree of intimacy between actors, to explain variation in subject recruitment, resource expenditure, and the quantity and validity of interview data. In doing so, we draw on our experiences in studying low- and middle-class drug sellers in St. Louis and suburban Atlanta, and from those of our longtime field recruiter in St. Louis, Smoke Dog. We supplement this information with studies of street-based drug dealers in various urban locales across the United States, including Detroit (Mieczkowski 1988), Denver (Hoffer 2006), and New York (Bourgois 2003). We conclude with theoretically situated, practical advice for recruiting, compensating, and interviewing underworld participants.

Pure Sociology

Pure sociology is a paradigm concerned with the science of social life, and the epistemology is unique in what it is *not* rather than what it is (Black 1995). Purely sociological explanations are formed without reference to three staples of contemporary mainstream sociological thinking (Black 1995): First, pure sociology is "pure" because its explanations do not rely on nonsociological concepts, such as emotions, motivations, or testosterone. Second, pure sociology is without teleology; it does not recognize a goal set of social life. Last but not least, pure sociology is not anthropocentric (i.e., focused on persons) but instead holds that "social life behaves and people are merely its carriers" (Cooney 2006:53; see also Black 2000a). The question is not, "How do people behave?" but instead, "How does social life behave?" The scientific

benefit of nonsubjective, nonteleological, and nonanthropocentric approaches is that they increase the value of theory by making it more testable and falsifiable, general, simple, and original, all of which are common and important measures of scientific value across fields (Black 1995; Kuhn 1977:320-39; Popper 2002b).

Theories of behavior cannot precede classifications of behavior (see Cooney and Phillips 2002), and perhaps the most fundamental aspect of pure sociology is the idea of *social space* (Black 1976, 1995, 1998). Social space divides social life into five broad dimensions: (1) *vertical space,* defined by wealth and rank; (2) *horizontal space,* defined by the nature and frequency of interaction; (3) *corporate space,* defined by the number of actors working together; (4) *symbolic space,* defined by what is considered "good, true, and beautiful"; and (5) *normative space,* or "respectability," defined by the application of social control. In any given social interaction, or case, every actor has a relative social status and social distance in social space. Actors gain social status as they elevate their wealth *(vertical status),* community involvement *(radial status),* organization *(corporate status),* and knowledge or conventionality *(symbolic status):* and actors lose status as more social control is applied to their behavior *(normative status).* Actors reduce social distance as they become more intimate *(relational distance)* and culturally similar *(cultural distance).* The social statuses and distances of every actor involved in a case define the *social structure.* Social structure is the explanatory factor in producing various forms, styles, and quantities of social behavior (Black 1995, 1998, 2000b). In short, as any aspect of social structure changes, such as wealth, integration, organization, culture, or respectability, so too should the form, style, and/or quantity of social life.

Past work in pure sociology has mostly been concerned with social control (see Black, 1998; Horwitz, 1990), that is, behavior that "defines and responds to deviant behavior" (Black 1976:105), such as law (Black 1976, 1980, 1989), self-help (Black 1983; Cooney 1998; Phillips 2003; Phillips and Cooney 2005), avoidance (Baumgartner 1988), lynching (Senechal de la Roche 1997), therapy (Horwitz 1982; Tucker 1999), and terrorism (Black 2004). Beyond social control, the paradigm has also been applied to economic behaviors such as welfare (Michalski 2003) and predation (Cooney 2006; Cooney and Phillips 2002), and to cultural behaviors such as ideas (Black 2000b), medicine (Black 1998:164-65), and art (Black 1998:168-69). Whatever the social behavior concerned, whether related to wealth, community, organization, culture, or social control, it may in some way or another change as a consequence of social structure. The task for pure sociologists is to find the connections between social structure and social behavior and state them as testable propositions that can be falsified or supported through testing.

Active Offender Research and Relational Distance

This research note applies pure sociology to a new arena of social life-criminological research on active offenders. We provide a series of principles that together form a social theory of active offender research that explains and predicts (1) recruitment, (2) recruiter and subject payments, and (3) data quantity and validity, or "quality." Although all aspects of social structure may have an effect on research, our theory is restricted to one form of social variation: *relational distance,* defined by the nature and degree of intimacy between actors and their associates (Black 1976:40). "It is possible to measure relational distance in many ways, including the scope, frequency, and length of interaction between people, the age of their relationship, and the nature and number of links between them in a social network" (p. 41). The relational distance between actors

decreases as the quantity of social interaction between (1) themselves and (2) those they are associated with increases.

All else equal, for example, two persons who have traded drugs are closer in relational distance than two people who have never traded, two persons who have produced marijuana together are closer in relational distance than two people who have never done so, two people who have formed a drug cartel together are closer in relational distance than two loners, and two persons who have talked together about drugs are closer in relational distance than two persons who have never communicated. Beyond direct interaction, the concept of relational distance also accounts for indirect relationships, such as "mutual friends" or "middlemen" in drug trades. The relational distance between "indirect ties" is a function of the relational distance between direct ties. All else equal, for instance, *strangers* who have bought drugs from the same dealer, or have manufactured drugs for the same cartel, or have spoken with each other's business associates are closer in relational distance than strangers who do not have those indirect social connections. In short, relational distance decreases as the quantity of social behavior in a social network increases.

The question to be addressed here is: How does relational distance between researchers, recruiters, and criminals affect subject recruitment, resource expenditure, and the quantity and validity of data produced during interviews?

RECRUITMENT

Recruitment is the process of locating criminals and convincing them to provide data. Most researchers rely on criteria-based sampling to locate active criminals, which involves recruiting only those individuals who possess the social, psychological, or biological characteristics relevant to their interests.

Although sometimes disparaged as sampling on the dependent variable, purposive sampling has the advantage of saving time and money while increasing the probability of successful recruitment (see Jacobs and Wright 2006).

To use purposive sampling successfully, of course, researchers must first be able to identify individuals with the relevant characteristics, which can be extremely difficult when those characteristics involve lawbreaking. To do so, many researchers have turned to snowball sampling, a subtype of purposive sampling whereby initial participants are called upon to identify others of the same ilk and close the relational gap with them. "Such a strategy begins with the recruitment of an initial subject who then is asked to recommend further participants" (Wright et al. 1992:150; also see Watters and Biernacki 1989; Wright and Stein 2005).

Atlanta and St. Louis Projects

For a study based in suburban Atlanta, Georgia, we sought to recruit and interview a sample of 25 unincarcerated middle-class drug sellers. The first 18 such sellers were recruited using a straightforward purposive sampling strategy; we approached and asked for the cooperation of drug sellers who the lead author already knew to be involved in this activity, largely as a result of interactions in social venues, such as sport and school. Then, knowing no further drug sellers who met the participation criteria, we turned to snowball sampling, using two prior interviewees to recruit 7 more middle-class drug sellers. Although we cannot precisely quantify our relational distance from each participant in this study, we can say that the first 18 participants were closer to us in relational distance than the last 7 were, because the former group had direct interaction with the lead author, whereas the latter group did not.

For a separate but related project, we sought to locate and interview currently active drug sellers residing in poor, inner-city neighborhoods in

St. Louis, Missouri. The recruitment of such individuals was made possible through the second author's long-standing relationship with Smoke Dog, a former street criminal who, for a fee, has helped criminologists at our university find and interview various sorts of active offenders during the past decade (see, e.g., Jacobs and Wright 2006). In effect, Smoke Dog served as a relational tie to the dealers.

In an in-depth, semistructured interview with Smoke Dog, we asked him a series of questions about the process of recruiting criminals. The answers given by Smoke Dog revealed that relational distance plays a pivotal role in the selection process. For instance, most of the criminals recruited by Smoke Dog are friends, a few are acquaintances or "friends of friends," but strangers are nonexistent:

Interviewer: How often do you try to recruit strangers? People you don't know at all?

Smoke Dog: I don't recruit them.

Interviewer: Why not?

Smoke Dog: I don't know them, and I don't know how to come back to them about this shit, so no. I don't get strangers.

Interviewer: Do you ever try to recruit people that you just kind of know through someone?

Smoke Dog: Yeah, I've done that a couple times.

As an experiment of sorts, we asked Smoke Dog a hypothetical question that required him to list the 25 drug sellers he would be most likely lo try to recruit for one of our future studies. After he had done so, we asked him about his relationship with each individual on the list. Twenty-three of the drug sellers were defined as friends, and 1 he considered an acquaintance; the remaining person was Smoke Dog himself. We also asked Smoke Dog how long he had known each of the persons listed; the average was 17.13 years, with a range of six months to 27 years (Smoke

Dog's entire life). Also relevant is the fact that Smoke Dog shared a gang affiliation with all of the persons listed. When asked how often he interacts with each of the individuals, he reported hanging out with one dealer about once a month, with another once every two weeks, with another once a week, and with yet another "on weekends." He interacted with 10 of the remaining dealers every other day or so and saw the rest nearly every day. In broad terms, then, it appears that the likelihood of Smoke Dog attempting to recruit any given drug seller increases as his relational distance from the dealer decreases, and thus, our likelihood of interviewing a dealer increases as Smoke Dog's relational distance from that person decreases.

Although we were unaware of the theoretical implications at the time, our experience with recruiting drug sellers followed a clear pattern: the likelihood of an active offender being recruited for one of our studies increased as our relational distance from that person decreased. Stated in the form of a proposition:

> *Recruitment to a study increases as the relational distance between researchers, recruiters, and criminals decreases.*

Thus, as relational distance between the researcher, recruiter, and potential research participant decreases, the probability that the cooperation of the potential research participant will be sought increases.

RESOURCE EXPENDITURE

A taken-for-granted aspect of convincing active criminals to take part in a social science research project is the ability to provide remuneration for their participation. As experienced street ethnographers Dunlap and Johnson (1999) pointed out, "A key element [in research] . . . is the availability of funds to pay

respondents for interviews" (p. 130). Although the payments involved are often relatively modest, they are important to criminals, as the idea of doing something for nothing is anathema to many of them (see Wright and Decker 1994, 1997).

Atlanta and St. Louis Projects

Payment for participation may be ordinary in this type of research, but in our own studies of active drug sellers in Atlanta and St. Louis, the price per interview has ranged from zero to $125. The initial 18 recruits for our study of middle-class drug sellers in Atlanta—who had relatively close ties to the lead author—received no monetary compensation for talking to us. The seven middle-class sellers who were recruited with the help of prior interviewees—essentially friends of friends—were paid $20 each.

Compared to our relational distance from the middle-class friend-of-friend participants, the dealers recruited by Smoke Dog were relatively far from us. Although it is true that the second author has a long-standing relationship with Smoke Dog, the relationship between the lead author and the two middle-class recruiters is even closer in relational distance. Because we have closer relational distance with the middle-class recruiters than with Smoke Dog, we are closer in relational distance to the last 7 middle-class participants than we are to the 25 St. Louis participants.

The price expended per interview, including recruiter and interviewee payments, appears to be affected by relational distance. As already noted, the original 18 middle-class sellers were closest in relational distance and were not paid for participation; the seven middle-class dealers recruited through friends of the lead author were compensated $20 for cooperation; and the low-class sellers in St. Louis—who are strictly "business associates" known through another "business associate," that is, Smoke Dog—were paid

$50 per interview. Similar to the pattern for subject payments, we gave the two middle-class recruiters $20 for each successful referral, whereas Smoke Dog charged us $75 for exactly the same service.

As with the probability of recruiting one seller or another, price per interview appears not to behave randomly but instead varies as a function of relational distance. Our experience suggests the following proposition:

> *The price per interview decreases as the relational distance between researchers, recruiters, and criminals decreases.*

In other words, the further the relational distance between respondents, recruiters, and researchers, the more it costs to interact and obtain information.

DATA QUANTITY AND VALIDITY

While the successful recruitment of active criminals is a necessary first step in research of this type, the effort and expense required to do so is wasted if the data obtained in the resulting interview are sparse or false. The basic purpose of an interview is to obtain information about how people behave, and this is a quantitative variable measurable in two ways: data provided varies both in quantity and in its congruence with actual events, or validity. Consider, for example, the difference between a 10-page-long narrative and a one-sentence synopsis, and how either of those descriptions can be entirely accurate, partially so, or completely false. Moreover, the quantity and validity of data provided varies both between and within interviews; some interviews produce more valid information than others, as a whole or per topic, and, within interviews, various topics (e.g., murder versus supplier selection) can be discussed in lesser or greater detail and in a more or less honest manner.

St. Louis Project

Some of the active drug sellers interviewed at the state university where we work have been involved in past projects and others have not. Smoke Dog, our field recruiter, suggests that whether or not a criminal has been involved in past projects has an effect on the quality of information produced in interviews thereafter:

Smoke Dog: Nobody is going to tell you everything they do. Or what they did. They'll let you know most of it, something to make you feel good and put in your book. Like shit though, you can't ever expect them to tell you the whole truth. . . . They'll tell you some shit, and some of it might be mixed up or something. They ain't gonna tell you exactly how it happened, but they'll tell you. That's how it is.

Interviewer: And do you think people do that less the more often they come up here?

Smoke Dog: I say people who would do it would be people who I don't know better, but the people who have been up here [at the university to do interviews], then the shit they tell you real shit, for real. They been there. "Cause we've been doing this 10 years man, 96 or 97—it's 2006 now man.

Smoke Dog's experiences as a recruiter of unincarcerated offenders suggest that the more a researcher and criminal have interacted, and the more third-party ties they share, the greater the validity and quantity of data provided by that criminal. Thus, we propose the following:

Data quantity and validity increase as the relational distance between researchers, recruiters, and criminals decreases.

This proposition predicts that as relational distance decreases, the data provided by an active criminal will become more plentiful and more congruent with actual events. For instance, active criminals who have been interviewed before should produce higher quality information than criminals who have never been interviewed (between-person variation), and the more times any given criminal is interviewed, the more plentiful and truthful the data will be (within-person variation).

CONCLUSION

Taken together, the propositions outlined above suggest a preliminary theory of how research with active criminals "behaves": The more a criminological researcher has interacted with a criminal and his or her associates, the more likely a criminal is to be recruited for an interview, the less it will cost to do the interview, and the more valid and plentiful will be the data obtained. Each of these propositions is testable because it states empirical, quantifiable, directional relationships (see Black 1995:831-33), and each is general because it applies to criminology in various times, places, and social classes (Black 1995:833-37).

Because the role of research is to test—and thereby falsify or support—theory, we strongly encourage researchers to take up the challenge of determining the limits of our proposed theory and add to it as appropriate. Surely, there will be instances in which our propositions are not accurate, but it should be remembered that relational distance is but one part of social life. Other aspects of social structure may prove to have an effect on the behavior of research and serve to offset the effects of relational distance. For instance, the quantity and validity of data likely behave as a function of the quantity of law applied to the behavior in question; all else constant, an admittance and discussion of murder would seem less likely to occur during an interview than an admittance and discussion of assault.

The likelihood of studying a particular group of criminals may also depend on their social status (Black 2000b); it is perhaps more difficult and expensive, for instance, to recruit and interview criminals who are wealthy than those who are poor, and this could explain the almost complete absence of studies on "elite," or high-status, criminals (but see, e.g., Adler 1993). Culture may play a role in the "behavior of method" as well; as noted by Wright and Bennett (1990; also see Douglas 1972), a "key" element in active offender research "involves 'fitting in' by dressing appropriately and, more important, learning the distinctive terminology, phrasing, and so on used by the offenders. Several commentators have stressed that researchers should modify their dress and language to accommodate those they are studying" (p. 146). In short, all aspects of social structure must be examined to fully understand the effect of each aspect of social life on recruiting, paying, and interviewing active offenders (see Black 1995:851-52).

Beyond pure sociology, we fully support the use of other theories in explaining the behavior of recruiting, paying, and interviewing active criminals. For instance, Granovetter's (1973) notions of "weak" and "strong" ties likely have important implications for obtaining data; a researcher with a few strong ties—persons very close in relational distance—to criminals may enjoy a great amount of access to cheap and valid data, but without any weak ties, the "information trail" is relatively likely to end or become more expensive to travel. Other scientists could explore the role of motivation in interview-related behavior. What role, for example, does rational choice (Clarke and Cornish 1985) play in recruitment, subject payments, and data quality? Does self-control (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990) affect the knowledge production process? How do subcultural beliefs and norms, such as the "code of the street" (Anderson 1999), influence cooperation?

These are but a few of many conceivable theoretical questions and directions; we leave to other criminologists the task of exploring the potential of those and other theories for explaining and improving the process that produces much of the data used in criminological research.

Of course, the most valuable asset to the development of theory is data that can be used to test and reformulate explanations and predictions. For every study of active criminals attempted, the behavior "behind" the study could facilitate unique insights into the behavior of criminals and criminologists. But without a more conscious documentation of *our own* behavior and characteristics, these insights will remain hidden. In future research, we will make a more cognizant and systematic effort to record theoretically relevant factors surrounding the process (e.g., our own social status), and we urge that other criminologists do the same (also see Brenner and Roberts 2007). If this research note stimulates a series of studies that verifiably disprove our theory and demonstrate others to be more valuable to science, or vice versa, then criminology will benefit.

The theory we have proposed should be of more than theoretical interest to criminologists; it constitutes a beginning point for the development of a practical framework within which to plan and interpret research involving active criminals. Let us conclude, then, by noting that, at this early stage, the theory suggests at least three pieces of practical advice for criminologists who want to interview active underworld participants:

1. Success in recruitment will increase in tandem with the quantity of social interaction between researchers, recruiters, and criminals;

2. The price of interviews does not need to be held constant as criminals who are closer in relational distance to the researcher will do interviews for a smaller payment; and

3. The criminals who are closest in relational distance to the researcher, especially those who have done previous interviews, are the ones most likely to produce the greatest amount of valid data and thus are the most appropriate persons with whom to discuss the most serious crimes.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What do these authors cite as valuable about interviews with active criminals? What do they cite as problematic about interviewing active criminals? What are the main steps in soliciting information from active criminals?

2. Why do these authors state that without a theoretical framework the active criminal interview data is not scientific?

3. What is pure sociology, and what is included in the idea of social space? Further, what do these authors mean by relational distance?

4. What type of sampling technique did these researchers employ in Atlanta and St. Louis? What was a common theme surrounding the active criminals that the researchers were referred to by Smoke Dog? How does relational distance affect selection or recruitment of subjects for interview? How does relational distance affect payment of interview subjects?

5. How do these researchers argue that data quantity and validity are affected by relational distance? Who is most likely to give quality information, that which is truthful and complete?

6. Did these researchers discuss any ethical issues with interviewing active criminals?

7. What do these authors encourage future researchers to do with their theory?

8. How did the interview data these authors collected provide support for their theory?

9. List some specific things that Smoke Dog said that provided a clearer picture of the effect of relational distance on recruitment, payment, and interviewing of active criminals.