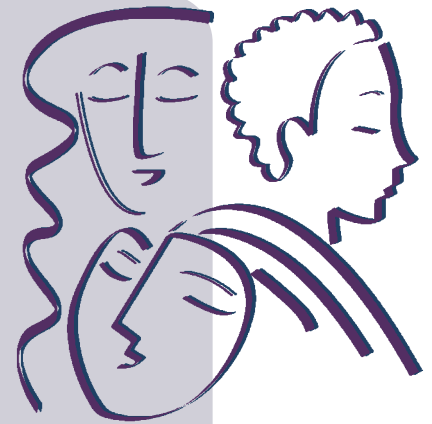




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GENDER-RESPONSIVE STRATEGIES

FOR WOMEN OFFENDERS



Using Jail Exit Surveys To Improve Community Responses to Women Offenders

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Introduction

The number of women entering the criminal justice system has increased in recent years. A Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) publication highlights the dimensions of that growth: Between 1990 and 1998, the per capita number of women under probation supervision climbed 40 percent, the number in jail and prison increased 60 and 88 percent, respectively, and the number under parole supervision grew 80 percent.¹ The FBI's *Crime in the United States* reports an estimated 2.2 million arrests of women in 2003, accounting for 23 percent of all arrests that year; arrests of women increased 12.3 percent from 1994, compared with an increase of 6.7 percent for men.²

A BJS profile of jail inmates in 2002 showed that the total inmate population of local jails grew 22 percent between 1996 and 2002, while the proportion of women in that population rose from 10 percent to nearly 12 percent. Approximately 30 percent of the women in jails in 2002 were arrested for drug offenses, and another 25 percent were arrested for larceny, theft, or fraud offenses.³

FROM THE DIRECTOR

Women have entered the criminal justice system in unprecedented numbers during the past decade. To improve criminal justice decision-making and responses to women offenders, jurisdictions need an accurate picture of how they currently assess, serve, and supervise women offenders.

This bulletin describes the use of jail exit surveys as an effective data collection tool for creating that picture of the characteristics of women in contact with the local jail. Armed with a better understanding of their systems, policy officials are able to modify assessment protocols, decision criteria, and/or jails programs to achieve their goals more cost effectively. The experiences of four jurisdictions—Davidson County (Nashville), Tennessee; Maui County, Hawaii; Tulsa County, Oklahoma; and Hamilton County, Ohio—described in this bulletin serve as examples of how jail exit surveys can inform policy changes to achieve better outcomes for the women and the system.

—Morris L. Thigpen, Sr.

Many of the women involved in the criminal justice system suffer from serious traumas resulting from past physical or sexual abuse, and many have co-occurring disorders involving both substance abuse and mental illness. More than half (55 percent) of women in jail in 2002 reported that they had been physically or sexually abused in the past, compared to just 13 percent of male inmates.

Women's involvement in the criminal justice system also affects children and families. Nationwide, more than 2 million children have a parent in a state or federal prison or local jail.⁴ Approximately 75 percent of incarcerated women are mothers, and two-thirds have children under age 18.⁵

For more than a decade, the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) has supported technical assistance and training initiatives to help state and local jurisdictions improve their responses to women offenders.⁶ The goals of NIC's Improving Community Responses to Women Offenders Initiative have been to work collaboratively with participating jurisdictions to:

- Develop sound information on current arrest, pretrial detention, and sentencing practices as they affect women offenders and relate to the risk, needs, and life circumstances of these women.
- Use the knowledge and experience of policy team members to develop policies and concrete action steps for implementing

changes that would improve outcomes for women offenders.

NIC worked with 16 jurisdictions to accomplish these goals by helping to establish a team of policy-makers and supporting the team's strategic planning process. This process focused first on collecting information and data that policy-makers could use to learn more about women offenders in their jurisdictions and then on determining what could be done to reduce the reoffending of women offenders and help them become more successful members of their communities. Many of the participating jurisdictions conducted jail exit surveys and found them to be an effective data collection tool for learning more about the characteristics of women coming in contact with the local jail. The surveys helped jurisdictions understand more about their current detention and arrest practices and identify factors that affected criminal justice system decisions about women. The surveys also helped jurisdictions create an accurate picture of who these women were, what system decisions contributed to their incarceration, and what community partners might be best equipped to help the criminal justice system prevent the "recycling" of women through the jail.

In many of the participating jurisdictions, data from a jail exit survey were used to inform significant changes in policies and practices for screening and assessment, supervision, and treatment of women

offenders involved in the criminal justice system. Jurisdictions found that some of their assumptions about women offenders were confirmed, but they also learned many new things about these women. With this new knowledge, the jurisdictions were better able to develop screening protocols and strategies to target interventions that resulted in more successful outcomes both for individual women and for the criminal justice system.

This bulletin is about the what, why, and how of jail exit surveys. It provides guidance and practical information for jurisdictions interested in learning more about how to conduct jail exit surveys. It discusses the benefits and challenges of conducting these surveys and provides step-by-step instructions for implementing a survey, analyzing survey data, and applying the results to implement policy and practice changes. The bulletin draws on lessons learned from analyzing the results of many exit surveys in diverse local jurisdictions that are working on a wide variety of policy issues affecting women offenders. The experiences of three jurisdictions that participated in the most recent round of NIC's Improving Community Responses to Women Offenders Initiative—Davidson County (Nashville), Tennessee; Maui County, Hawaii; and Tulsa County, Oklahoma—are described as examples of how jail exit surveys can inform policy change initiatives. (Experiences in Hamilton County, Ohio, are also highlighted.)

How One Jurisdiction Used Data To Inform Responses to Women Offenders

In Hamilton County (Cincinnati), Ohio, jail exit survey data showed that a significant proportion of women were exiting the jail with mental illness and co-occurring disorders that had not been addressed. Acting on this finding, the county pretrial services staff screened the nearly 5,000 women who passed through the office's assessment process during a 6-month period and referred nearly 10 percent for more in-depth assessments. These assessments revealed that a substantial majority of women referred (67 percent) had both mental health and substance abuse disorders, another 25 percent had mental health issues only, and 2 percent had substance abuse issues only. This referral process has since been institutionalized, and women offenders screened by pretrial release and referred for mental health/substance abuse assessments are now placed in a range of appropriate residential and nonresidential treatment options. Although the program is relatively new, the county is seeing some promising results: 94 percent of participants showed improvement in symptom distress and level of substance abuse, only 13 percent (2 out of 16) had a new criminal conviction, and only 6 percent (1 out of 16) had a probation violation that resulted in jail time.

For additional information on Hamilton County, see *Systemic Criminal Justice Planning: Improving Responses to Women Offenders in Hamilton County, Ohio* (J. Berman, 2005), another bulletin in NIC's series on Gender-Responsive Strategies for Women Offenders.

Why a Jail Exit Survey?

In the past decade, most counties and states have been challenged to assess, serve, and supervise an increasing number of women offenders who have both complex needs and untapped strengths. In the current fiscal climate, agencies are called on to accomplish this daunting task with shrinking resources. Finding the most cost-effective ways of meeting this growing need requires that jurisdictions learn all they can about the status of women offenders

under their supervision. By taking stock of current realities, criminal justice system agencies can develop a clear understanding of the obstacles they face and the opportunities they can leverage to reach their public safety goals.

Surveys of the characteristics of women offenders usually produce some findings that confirm the experiences and observations of practitioners and policymakers. Surveys also frequently generate information that calls these decisionmakers' assumptions into question. Most jurisdictions that

have conducted surveys to profile women offenders report that some results surprised agency leaders and staff, but these jurisdictions also were able to use this new information to develop and implement constructive changes in policies, procedures, or programs affecting women offenders.

In a jail exit survey, information is collected on inmates as of the date and time they leave jail, which produces a profile of those released from jail between the beginning and ending dates of the chosen survey period. Another method sometimes used to profile jail inmates is to take a "snapshot" of those in a jail, collecting information on all inmates present on a selected date and time. Although the snapshot approach may be somewhat easier, the authors strongly recommend the exit survey approach because it helps jurisdictions examine their decisionmaking about women by looking at how inmate characteristics (including current charge and prior record) relate to length of stay and means of release.

Depending on the kinds of information collected in an exit survey, jurisdictions can explore questions such as:

- How are women being released from jail? What proportions are getting out on bail, on release on recognizance, at the end of their sentence or sanction, or through transfer to other jurisdictions?

- How many days do women spend in jail awaiting trial? Serving sentence? As a sanction for a probation/parole violation?
- How long do women with different backgrounds, current charges, or offense histories stay in jail?
- What characteristics of the women currently moving through the jail are most relevant to their probability of release, means of release, and/or length of stay?
- What is the pattern of sentences or sanctions women offenders receive?
- How many times have these women been incarcerated in this jail in the past? What is the profile of the group of women who have been incarcerated most frequently?
- Are custody/security classifications of jailed women consistent with risk factors they exhibit?
- How many women who enter and exit the jail have minor children? What happened to these children while the women were in jail?
- Do the services and support offered to women in the jail match their identified gender-specific needs for treatment or training?
- What are the behaviors that result in women on community supervision being found in violation of their probation or

parole agreements and being sanctioned or having their probation/parole revoked?

- How long do women serving jail time as a sanction spend in jail?

Answers to these questions can help local decisionmakers discern how their decisions are affecting the size and characteristics of the population of women in jail. Analysis of jail exit survey data can provide policymakers with a better understanding of the effects of pretrial release, sentencing, custody classification, and probation revocation policies on the jail population. Using this knowledge, policymakers may choose to modify assessment protocols, decision criteria, and/or jail programs and services to achieve public safety goals more cost effectively.

What Is a Jail Exit Survey?

A survey can be generally defined as an inspection or observation of a situation, process, or group of people. Conducting a survey of women offenders involves collecting information about individual women's characteristics to compile a description or "profile" of the group to which they belong. Among the many different ways of collecting and analyzing information about incarcerated women, compiling data valid at the point of their exit from jail or prison yields the most useful descriptions, not only of the women, their histories, and current

situations, but also of the justice system decisionmaking processes that determine their current and future legal status.

Designing a jail exit survey requires careful attention to how the information will be collected (including sampling and data sources) and to the types of information wanted. This section of the bulletin provides an overview of factors to consider in establishing a jail exit survey plan. Sampling and survey design decisions always involve tradeoffs between the resources (primarily staff and consultant time) required to collect data and the relative importance of the data for addressing policymakers' questions. If possible, engaging the services of a researcher or policy analyst with experience in survey design and sampling will likely make the exit survey process more cost effective and its results more reliable and useful. A local agency may already employ such individuals, or researchers at local colleges or universities may be willing to assist in return for the privilege of using the data in their own research projects. Jurisdictions may also be able to obtain federal, state, or private foundation grants to hire consultants.

Sampling Considerations

To ensure that jail exit survey data are valid and useful, the survey process must be designed to collect data representative of women flowing through the local jail

system. The decision-mapping process discussed under “Tips for Getting Started” can be especially helpful in determining both the sampling approach and the questions the jail exit survey should address.

Sample Size and Composition

If a jurisdiction is interested in looking at particular subgroups of women, e.g., women exiting jail in pretrial status versus those exiting posttrial, it must collect information on an adequate number of women in each group or category of interest. Ideally, the sampling plan should aim to collect information on a *minimum* of 100 exiting women in every group that will be examined separately. Collecting data on even more women in each group will increase the credibility of the results.

Jurisdictions that want to compare the characteristics of male and female inmates may choose to collect jail exit survey information on both. However, because women still comprise a relatively small proportion of jail populations (usually 10 to 15 percent), including male inmates in the survey can considerably increase the resources required to complete the survey process, depending on the sources from which profile information must be drawn. This investment is most likely justified if the primary policy questions concern differences that may exist between how men and women are

being treated by the local justice system. The guidelines that follow apply to an exit survey of women only or to a survey of all inmates.

Large jails in which many women are booked and released after a stay of only a few hours must grapple with the challenge of collecting information from these short-stay inmates without impeding the release process or unduly burdening intake/release staff. Some large jails have elected to survey a representative, randomly selected sample (e.g., every third woman exiting the jail) of women staying 8 hours or less,⁷ while obtaining information on all women released after staying more than 8 hours (see “Understanding Jail Exit Survey Information” on page 9 for suggestions on analyzing data obtained via random sampling). In very large jails with a high daily volume of women being released (e.g., 50 or more), the random sampling approach may be used for all releases to ensure that staff members can keep up with the demands of data collection for the entire exit survey period.

Length of the Survey Period

In choosing the length of the exit survey period, it is best to make it somewhat longer than the average length of stay of women offenders in the jurisdiction, to ensure that the survey gathers data on an adequate number of women who stay longer than that average. For example, a jurisdiction where women

offenders stay in jail an average of 30 days should plan to conduct its exit survey for at least 6 weeks and optimally for 2 months or longer. No matter how long the survey period, jurisdictions should select a time of year in which seasonal or other predictable shifts in arrest, sentencing, or release rates (e.g., planned “sweeps” of drug houses or high-crime neighborhoods) are unlikely to occur.

Data Sources and Confidentiality

Computerized Records Systems

If a jurisdiction has a computerized records system that maintains data about all individuals booked into and released from jail, then it is likely that at least some of the items of information wanted about women being released can be found in that system. The challenge is to extract the information in a format that can be combined with data from other sources (see below) to yield a comprehensive spreadsheet-type data record for every woman in the exit survey sample.

Most jail information systems are structured to help staff track the custody and legal status of individual inmates and to generate summary statistical reports at regular intervals. Because most systems have not been designed to facilitate the customized extraction of data required to develop a profile of women inmates,

Getting Started

Tips for Getting Started

- Consider **mapping** the flow of women offenders through the criminal justice system as a first step. Mapping often generates a lively team discussion about what happens to women at many key decision points in the criminal justice system—arrest, booking, jail detention, classification, pretrial screening and release, prosecution and diversion, arraignment and sentencing—and helps the policy team identify where it may have questions or want to focus some attention.
- **Actively engage the policy team in shaping a plan** and in developing an exit survey (or any other type of survey). Lead team members in a discussion of their questions about women offenders. Consider how a jail exit survey can be designed to address these questions. Does the information exist in automated information systems? Will interviews with offenders be needed? Are other local, state, or federal sources of historic trend or offender profile information available?
- **Educate the team** about national best practices and gender responsiveness. Consider inviting a national expert to speak to the team. Conduct a literature review. Consider holding informal “brown bag” lunches for team members to discuss ideas and topics. The NIC Web site (www.nicic.org) and the National Criminal Justice Reference Service Web site (www.ncjrs.org) are two excellent sources of information, literature, research, and training resources.

What the Sites Did

The policy teams in Davidson, Maui, and Tulsa Counties were all actively engaged in the design of data collection efforts. Davidson and Tulsa Counties conducted jail exit surveys. Maui County instead conducted interviews with sentenced women to gather data needed to develop a valid gender-responsive assessment tool. Maui County also surveyed bookings to gain a better understanding of what happens to women at arrest and booking. All teams devoted initial meeting time to:

- Discussing and agreeing on the goals and objectives for the survey(s).
- Affirming (or reaffirming) how the survey information would address larger project goals and objectives.
- Educating team members about national best practices and gender responsiveness.
- Mapping the flow of women offenders through the criminal justice system to identify key decision points the team should focus on and to gain a better understanding of where some of the gaps in the system may be.
- Reviewing existing data on women offenders in the jurisdiction.
- Generating a list of questions the survey should answer.
- Agreeing on the specific data elements that would help answer those questions.
- Agreeing on an overall plan about how the data would be collected and over what time period.
- Reviewing and finalizing a draft of the survey(s).

staff members who maintain the computerized records system may need time to learn how best to accomplish this task.

In addition to gathering valuable information on women offenders, examining the jail information system may point to ways in which the computerized information system can be improved. Such initiatives might include streamlining recordkeeping formats and procedures, adding or redefining the definitions of important data elements, or providing additional staff training in entering and retrieving information from the system.

Paper Case Files

Another important source of information about women in jail is the paper case files that are often kept by intake/booking, program, and/or security staff. Each of these functional units may retain different types of information, but if an agency assigns a unique identifier number to individual arrestees that follows them across multiple bookings into the jail, that number can be used to combine current and historic information from all sources into a single data record for each woman in the survey sample. Collecting information from paper records can be time consuming, but it is well worth the investment if it yields data that cannot be obtained in any other way.

Many jurisdictions have found another significant benefit of working with their paper records:

uncovering inefficiencies (e.g., the same information is being collected more than once) or inconsistencies (e.g., various parts of the organization have different understandings of the meaning of important data categories) that limit the reliability or usefulness of the information being collected. Such information can help jurisdictions design more efficient and useful recordkeeping processes, procedures, and formats.

Questionnaires and Interviews

Most jurisdictions find that certain kinds of information they would like to know about women inmates are not routinely collected or maintained in either computerized or paper records. For example, many localities do not collect information about an inmate's children, family/marital status, current living arrangements, substance abuse history, employment, or income. In addition, Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) rules can make it difficult to obtain data from the jail's health records system. To gather such data, jurisdictions usually must explore ways to obtain information directly from the women.

The two most frequently used methods for gathering survey information are self-report questionnaires that women complete themselves and structured interviews conducted by staff members (usually intake/booking or program staff who already obtain other types of information from inmates). The

interview approach is clearly more labor intensive, although with the questionnaire method, some women probably will require staff assistance to read or interpret the questions. The timing and duration of these data collection efforts can be a challenge with short-stay women, so collecting only those items of information that are of the highest priority to local policymakers is important.

Confidentiality

No matter what sources of information about women being released from jail are used, the exit survey process should be designed to ensure that the confidentiality of this information is respected. This is particularly important in collecting information about mental or physical health and in asking women to provide information that is not routinely obtained as part of the jail's booking, assessment, or release processes. Assuring women that the information they provide will remain confidential makes them more likely to supply accurate and complete answers to questions.

Even if confidentiality can be ensured, survey planners should also carefully consider the negative effects women may experience when asked to reveal vulnerabilities (e.g., a history of sexual abuse) to an interviewer if the agency is not prepared to help them overcome the obstacles such vulnerabilities may present in their lives.

Designing a Jail Exit Survey

Tips for Designing a Jail Exit Survey

- **Consider several factors when designing the survey**, including sample size, type of information, data sources, and confidentiality. How difficult or costly will it be to collect this information relative to the importance of the questions to be answered? Consider a “dry run” to ensure that information can be collected in the way envisioned.
- **Develop a plan for how to deal with confidential and potentially sensitive information** if conducting interviews with offenders.
- **Develop a plan for collecting and analyzing the survey data.** Who will collect the data? What role will consultants and staff play in collecting and analyzing the data?

What the Sites Did

The policy teams in Davidson and Tulsa Counties oversaw each step in the development of the jail exit surveys. The teams agreed on the following:

Sample Size

How many releasees should be surveyed, and over what timeframe should data be collected, to ensure a representative sample?

- In Tulsa County, the sample size was 517 women who exited the Tulsa County Jail during the 30 days beginning February 1, 2003, representing about 10 percent of all bookings into the jail over 12 months.
- In Davidson County, the sample size was 743 women who exited the Davidson County Jail from December 1, 2002, to January 31, 2003, also a 10-percent sample of annual bookings into the jail.

Data Sources and Confidentiality

How easy or difficult would it be to retrieve and analyze automated data on offenders? Would some data need to be collected manually from inmate records and files or from the women themselves?

- The Tulsa County team used a combination of data sources: demographic and jail-flow information

retrieved from the jail’s management information system (MIS); criminal history and court appearance data retrieved from the court’s MIS and state and federal law enforcement MISs; and interviews with about half of the women in the sample, conducted to gather information about their needs.

- The Davidson County team retrieved and analyzed automated data from the sheriff’s department MIS and also conducted lengthy interviews with 19 women who had each been booked 10 or more times in 1 year.

Types of Information

What specific data did the team want to collect to address the goals and questions identified?

The policy teams in each jurisdiction reviewed a list of data elements from the comprehensive list of data elements (presented in this bulletin), adding or deleting items based on criteria important to them. They also drafted offender questionnaires to collect information that could not be gathered in any other way.

Final Jail Exit Survey and Data Collection Plan

Does the survey reflect all of the team’s discussions? Is there a clear data collection plan?

- Once the policy teams were satisfied that all their questions and issues had been addressed, they reviewed a final draft of the survey.
- In Tulsa County, the sheriff’s department and pretrial services agreed to collect all of the jail exit survey data; the team contracted with the Oklahoma Criminal Justice Research Center to enter all the data and provide a summary analysis.
- In Davidson County, the sheriff’s department research staff volunteered to collect and analyze the jail exit survey data for the team.

Questions about current substance abuse problems may also raise the anxieties of women inmates, particularly if they are being interviewed by criminal justice system staff; as a result, the accuracy of their self-reporting on these issues may be questionable. Because of such considerations, some jurisdictions have chosen not to question women about their sexual or physical abuse histories or current substance abuse issues, even though these factors are common in the lives of many women offenders. To assess the prevalence of these issues among women inmates, some jurisdictions have used self-report surveys that cannot be combined with other data they collect on individual releasees (for an example, see the questionnaire designed by the Tulsa County Women Offender Policy Group, page 10).

Types of Information

To finalize the exit survey design, it is necessary to decide what types of information will be obtained for women leaving the jail. In making that decision, survey planners should keep in mind that they will have only the time between booking and release to collect information directly from the women. (Other data that are routinely recorded in computerized or paper records can be compiled at a more

leisurely pace.) Confidentiality and ethical concerns may also constrain the scope of the data collection effort.

The major data elements in the comprehensive listing on pages 11–12 will provide a descriptive profile of the women in a local jail. Compiling such a profile can help a jurisdiction better understand the impact of its policies and decisions on individual women and the jail population. From this lengthy list, jurisdictions should select the types of information that:

- Can be easily compiled from existing records and/or gathered directly from the women.
- Will be useful in identifying problems worth solving.
- Are particularly relevant to the policy questions the jurisdiction has already decided to address.
- Will not violate confidentiality or other ethical guidelines.

In selecting the types of information to be collected, survey planners should note the likely source of each item, i.e., computerized or paper records, or direct questionnaires or interviews of the women. This sorting can make it easier to pare the list to the most essential items. It will also help records management staff structure their data compilation efforts and will

serve as the basis for designing the questionnaire or interview format to be used in obtaining information directly from the women.

Understanding Jail Exit Survey Information

Once all of the information has been obtained, the next challenge is to discern what it means. A good approach is to enter the data into a spreadsheet format that will make it possible to compute descriptive statistics such as percentages (of women in categories of interest, such as race, marital status, or means of release) and averages or ranges (for numeric information, such as age, years of school completed, annual income, and bail amount).

One of the most useful pieces of information the survey will generate is length of stay in jail—the difference (in hours or days) between the time/date of a woman’s admission and the time/date of her release. The *average length of stay* can be computed for all women releasees and for subgroups of interest to policymakers.

A formula can be used to calculate the number of jail beds occupied by women in various categories of interest, including those released through various means or those with different types of current

TULSA COUNTY JAIL EXIT RELEASE SURVEY—WOMEN OFFENDER QUESTIONNAIRE

DLM# _____ SSN _____ Date of Birth ____/____/____
mo day year

Inmate Initials _____ Date Completed ____/____/____
mo day year Date of Exit From Jail ____/____/____
mo day year

Years of school completed (GED = 12) _____

Do you speak English? Yes No

Do you speak another language? Yes _____ (specify) No

Marital Status Never married Married Common law relationship Separated Divorced Widowed

Children Total number of children _____
 Number under age 18 _____
 Number in your custody _____

You live with: (check all that apply) Children Spouse/partner Other family Friend(s) Alone

You live in: (check one) Privately owned house/condo Rented house/apartment Public housing Shelter Other _____ Homeless

Your primary means of transportation: (check one) Personal vehicle Public (bus, taxi) Rides from family/friends Walking/bicycling

Do you have a valid driver's license? Yes No, suspended No, revoked No, never had one

Legal employment at arrest (check one) Full-time Part-time Disabled None

Type of job at arrest (check one) Professional (white-collar) Skilled labor (e.g., manufacturing, construction) Unskilled labor Retail (e.g., sales clerk) Service (e.g., restaurant, janitorial) Not employed at arrest

What is your personal income, from all legal sources, in a year? \$0 (none) \$10,000 or less \$10,001 to \$20,000 \$20,001 to \$30,000 \$30,001 to \$40,000 \$40,001 to \$50,000 More than \$50,000

Sources of your personal income at arrest: (check all that apply) Employment Public assistance Alimony Child support Other _____ None

Are you or your children currently involved with other public agencies/programs? DHS DVIS WIC Tulsa County Social Services Parent/Child Center Other _____ Women & Children's Center None Family & Child Services

How old were you when you were first arrested? _____

Do you have a history of alcohol or drug abuse? Yes No

What is the drug you used most frequently? (check one) Alcohol Cocaine Marijuana Cocaine Ecstasy Other _____ Heroin None Methamphetamine

Have you ever been in an alcohol/drug treatment program? Yes No

Have you ever been seen by a mental health service provider? Yes No

What were you being treated for? (check all that apply) Depression Bipolar (manic-depressive) Schizophrenia Anxiety Other _____ Not applicable

Where will you go when you are released from jail? (check one) Home Residential treatment program Family Other _____ Friends Don't know Shelter

Comprehensive Listing of Major Data Elements To Include in the Jail Exit Survey

Demographics

Gender (necessary only if men are to be included in exit sample).

Date of birth (mm, dd, yy).

Race/ethnicity (use local categories).

Religious affiliation (use local categories; or Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, other, none).

Education level (either grade or years completed, or simple categories such as less than high school grad/GED, high school grad/GED, more than high school).

Marital status (use local categories; or never married, married, divorced, common law relationship).

Children (total number, total number under 18, total under 18 in defendant's custody—all would be of interest; the last would be the most helpful measure of a woman's current parental responsibilities).

Living with (children, spouse/partner, other family, friend, alone—a "check all that apply" item).

Housing (categories such as house, apartment, public housing; or own, rent).

Employment (currently part- or full-time, or none; also, type of work, such as unskilled labor, "pink collar," "white collar," professional—or any other categories already used in the jurisdiction, e.g., by the employment office).

Income (current level, monthly?; also, source, including employment, public assistance, alimony, child support, other, none—a "check all that apply" item).

Means of transportation available (public, personal vehicle, rides from family/friends, other categories of interest—a "check all that apply" item).

Admission/Release Information

Date and time of booking/admission to jail (mm,dd,yy,hr,mn, using 24-hour clock; some dates in this field might be before the exit survey period).

Date of sentencing (if it occurs between admission and release) (mm,dd,yy; some dates in this field might be before the exit survey period).

Date and time of release from jail (mm,dd,yy,hr,mn, using 24-hour clock; all dates in this field should be during the exit survey period).

Fines or fees outstanding at admission (yes/no; also could ask total dollar amount if deemed important).

Legal status at admission (new to justice system, awaiting trial/sentencing on previous charge, on probation/parole supervision, day reporting client, drug court client, other status items relevant in the jurisdiction—a "check all that apply" item).

Means of release from jail (bail, release on recognizance, other pretrial release, completed sentence, transfer to other local corrections facility, transfer to state corrections facility, transfer to federal corrections facility, transfer to hospital, transfer to mental health or substance abuse treatment facility, other; could use local categories if this information is in the jail records system).

Current charges/reason for admission to jail (if new charges, single most serious—may have to develop ranking system; also could be probation/parole violation, violation of pretrial release conditions, violation of day-reporting conditions, admitted to serve jail sentence—a "check all that apply" item; if primary charge is a drug offense, what is/are the specific drug(s) involved?).

Amount of bail set (total dollar amount for all current charges).

Comprehensive Listing of Major Data Elements To Include in the Jail Exit Survey (continued)

Prior Criminal History

Age at first arrest (or conviction, depending on group preferences and ease of data collection; could also use date of first arrest—mm/dd/yy—and compute age; need to determine whether juvenile record will be considered, or only adult charges/convictions).

Type of first charge (or conviction, depending on choices made above; this could be as simple as felony/misdemeanor, or categories such as violent, property, drugs, public order—the local jurisdiction or the state probably has its own broad offense categories).

Total number of juvenile arrests (or adjudications, if available and of interest; both of these totals could be broken into categories as determined above).

Total number of adult arrests (or convictions; both of these totals could be broken into categories as determined above—planners can choose to include or not to include the current arrest in this count, but should be consistent across cases).

Total number of times sentenced to:

- Jail—this jail only? (planners can choose to include or not to include the current offense in this count).
- Probation supervision.
- Day reporting.
- State prison.
- Federal prison.
- Other sanctions.

Criminogenic Factors and Other Needs

Physical health status

- Chronic disease? Y/N
- Communicable disease? Y/N
- Pregnant? Y/N; also might want to know what month?

- Insured? Y/N

- Taking prescribed medications? Y/N

Currently on caseload of other agencies (Child Welfare, Public Assistance, Mental Health, Alcohol and Drugs, others of interest—a “check all that apply” item).

Substance abuse history Y/N? If yes, then:

Primary drug of choice (includes alcohol, prescription and illegal drugs, categories from the local justice system or treatment provider).

- Age at first use (could ask date and compute age).
- Currently in recovery? Y/N

Mental health status

- Currently in treatment? Y/N
- Currently taking medications for mental health reasons? Y/N
- *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) diagnosis?* Y/N (If yes, then check one from a list of the broad categories obtained from mental health provider).

Victimization history (See “Data Sources and Confidentiality” section in this bulletin. If this is an important area, consider consulting domestic violence and/or sexual assault victim advocates about wording of these items—language chosen can affect responses dramatically).

- Sexually abused as a child? Y/N
- Physically abused as a child? Y/N
- Sexually abused as an adult? Y/N (because definition can be tricky, this item is often combined with the next one).
- Physically abused as an adult? Y/N (could be more narrowly defined as having been a victim of domestic violence).

TABLE 1: DAVIDSON COUNTY, TENNESSEE: ANALYSIS OF EXIT SURVEY DATA

Means of Release	Number of Women Exiting in 60 Days	Percent of Total Exits	Average Length of Stay (in days)	Average Daily Population (computed ADP)	Percent of Total ADP
Time served	317	41	41.4	219	58
Released to probation	55	7	68.7	63	17
Transferred to state prison	11	1	159.2	29	8
Released to parole	4	<1	354.8	24	6
Released to another agency	22	3	57.5	21	6
Released on recognizance	170	22	0.3	1	<1
Bond	153	20	3.7	9	2
Charges dismissed	20	3	14.1	5	1
Other	22	3	12.2	5	1
Totals	774	100	29.1	376	100

N=774 women who exited the Davidson County Jail from December 1, 2002, to February 1, 2003.

charges. In this formula, *ADP* is average daily jail population and *ALS* is average length of stay (in days).

$$ADP = \frac{\text{Exits in 60 days} \times ALS}{60}$$

Average daily population (i.e., the number of jail beds occupied) is simply the total number of inmates in the jail on a typical day. Unless the jail population is growing very rapidly, it is safe to assume that the number of releasees leaving the jail (exits) during a given time period (this example uses 60 days, the typical duration of most exit

surveys) equals the number of jail admissions during that period.

The table on this page illustrates one type of analysis that can be done with data from an exit survey. In this case, the survey team in Davidson County wanted to compare the average length of stay for women exiting the jail via nine different means of release. The team used the number of exits and average stay for each group to compute the groups' average daily population. Some of the most interesting findings from this analysis are highlighted below.

- Although more than one-fifth of women exiting during the survey period left via release on recognizance, these women occupied less than 1 percent of women's jail beds. In contrast, although a similar proportion of women were released by posting bail, these women occupied more than twice the proportion of beds because it took an average of nearly 4 days for them to post bond. Jurisdictions seeing similar results may wish to examine decisionmaking policies and procedures that contribute to such a variance.

However, in this example, even if women released on bail exited as quickly as those released on recognizance, only about eight beds of jail space would be “saved” on an average day.

- Because women released on “time served” comprised 41 percent of exits but nearly three-fifths (58 percent) of the total jail population, it is vital to examine the decisionmaking policies and practices affecting their length of stay. A 15-percent reduction in average stay for these women, from 41.4 to 35.2 days, would reduce the number of beds they occupy by 33, or 9 percent of the total jail population of women.
- Women released to probation who were admitted to jail to serve time for violating conditions of supervision comprised only 7 percent of admissions but occupied 17 percent of women’s jail beds, staying an average of more than 2 months. This finding suggests the importance of examining probation violation sanctioning policies and practices to determine their effect on the jail population.
- Finally, only 1 percent of exits were transferred to the state prison system, but women in this category occupied 8 percent of women’s jail beds, primarily because their average length of stay before transfer was more than 5 months. This

illustrates both the powerful effect a few admissions who stay a long time can have on the overall demand for jail beds and the challenge of reducing their length of stay enough to affect this demand significantly.

These types of findings can help a jurisdiction focus its examination of jail admission and release decisionmaking policies and practices on those that apparently have the greatest effect on current jail populations. This kind of analysis may also lead policy groups to assess whether the continuum of currently available pretrial and sentencing options allows sufficient flexibility to meet the needs of women offenders while ensuring that public safety concerns are addressed.

Davidson County’s method of analyzing means-of-release data can be used to examine several other factors that may affect women’s length of stay in jail, such as current charge or offense type, prior criminal history (which can be measured in a variety of ways), or prior number of incarcerations in the local jail. Depending on the data a jurisdiction is able to collect, it can examine patterns of length of stay and average daily populations in any category of interest to local policymakers.

No one set of analyses is appropriate for every jurisdiction, and survey teams probably will want to go back to the data for another look,

and perhaps even another, after the first descriptive data analyses are completed. Policy teams should not take shortcuts at this stage of the work or assume that the first “answers” are the ones that will eventually lead to positive, lasting differences in outcomes for women offenders. Regardless of which approach is taken, changes in policies and practices informed by a careful review of data and information over time will yield the best results.

Lessons Learned

Lessons About Women Offenders

The jurisdictions participating in NIC’s Women Offender Projects have found the jail exit survey to be an effective tool for gathering information about the women offenders in the jurisdiction. They learned about the women’s risk factors and needs and used the survey information to make significant changes in current policies and practices. As a result, the jurisdictions are beginning to see more successful outcomes for women who become involved in the criminal justice system.

In general, the Davidson, Maui, and Tulsa County policy teams learned that:⁸

- Women get pulled into the criminal justice system for relatively

Tips for Understanding Jail Exit Survey Information

- **Consider electing a small group of policy team members and staff to review the preliminary results of the survey.** Their job is to summarize the data so survey results can be shared with the team productively and efficiently. The group's advance knowledge of the survey information may also facilitate discussions about surprising or challenging findings.
- **Devote at least one entire policy team meeting to reviewing the survey information.** Jail exit surveys typically produce a wealth of information and usually spark much discussion. Consider how the information should be organized to be most helpful to the team: What information most directly addresses the key questions the policy team has about women offenders? What is the general profile of women offenders who enter the local jail system? What are the implications of the information for current policies and practices?
- **Remember that survey information often generates more questions than it answers.** In addition to addressing the team's questions, survey information can also point to gaps in the criminal justice system or highlight specific issues the team may want to explore in more detail. The policy team probably will ask data analysts to address additional questions by exploring the exit survey data further.

minor, nonviolent offenses; once in, they find it difficult to extricate themselves.

- Women's pathways into crime are different from men's.
- Women offenders often have a significant history of trauma (physical and sexual abuse).
- In terms of interventions for women and men, "equal" does not mean "the same." Women need different strategies, including "relational" therapy, considerations for personal safety, community networks, and child-care and custody support.
- Women's involvement in the criminal justice system has an enormous impact on families and children.

Lessons About Conducting a Jail Exit Survey

The experiences of the policy teams at the three project sites prompt several recommendations for jurisdictions that are planning to conduct a jail exit survey.

- **Hone troubleshooting skills.** Data collection and entry can take longer than expected; unforeseen technical problems may make it necessary to

rethink the data collection strategy.

- **Maintain momentum.** Plan to engage policy team members in other essential work while they are waiting for data to be collected and analyzed.
- **Stay focused.** Avoid getting sidetracked by issues that do not seem central to the team's vision and goals. Use analyses of survey information to inform a broader vision of success, not as ends in themselves.
- **Prepare to do it all over again.** Using data to inform policy and practice should not be a one-time event. Consider how to gather data and information over time to monitor activities and identify trends in the offender population.

A Cautionary Note

A jurisdiction that is considering whether a jail exit survey is "right" for it should remember that these surveys focus on only one key component of the criminal justice system: the jail. If the jurisdiction wants a broader perspective of women offenders throughout the local and state criminal justice system, other kinds of data collection and analyses are warranted. Being clear about its broader vision of success and how survey information will be used to inform goals and objectives will help the jurisdiction use that information to best advantage.

Understanding Jail Exit Survey Information: What the Sites Did

The policy teams at each site devoted at least one full meeting and significant portions of other meetings to reviewing survey and trend information. At each site, initial descriptive survey data confirmed and expanded the team's understanding of women offenders in its jurisdiction and led to additional questions, which in turn led to further data inquiries that were reviewed and discussed at subsequent meetings.

The following sections summarize what the Tulsa County and Davidson County sites learned from their jail exit surveys and how they used the information.

Tulsa County

Tulsa County's jail exit survey included 517 women released from the jail during February 2003.

- The average age was 33; 69 percent were white, and 25 percent were black; 83 percent had children, and 89 percent were single parents (self-report); and 78 percent had an annual income of less than \$20,000 (self-report).
- For 58 percent of the women, the most serious offense was a municipal or misdemeanor offense; 36 percent were charged with a felony offense; and 54 percent had two or more charges. More than half (57 percent) had at least one prior arrest; 43 percent had no prior arrests.
- A bond of less than \$500 was paid by 41 percent of the women, and 61 percent were released within 24 hours. About 76 percent were released pretrial; of these, about 68 percent were released on bail.

From the survey results, the Tulsa County Women Offender Committee discovered that most women in jail had been arrested for traffic offenses but were posting bonds about 70 percent of the time. As a result, the Tulsa District Court held an "amnesty day" so that offenders could resolve outstanding warrants and traffic tickets and the courts could reduce their backlog. In many instances, the court forgave some portion of the fines owed.

Survey information also highlighted the costs (human and financial) incurred because of Tulsa County's long-standing rule requiring a 24-hour wait before offenders could be considered for pretrial release without posting bond. The County Commission and Chief Judge of the District Court rescinded the 24-hour rule, and pretrial screeners now assess defendants immediately upon booking into jail. Women also receive mental health assessments as appropriate, and they are screened for eligibility for diversion and other community release programs in a much more efficient and timely manner.

Davidson County

Davidson County's jail exit survey included 743 women released from the jail from December 1, 2002, to February 1, 2003.

- Most (92 percent) of the women were younger than 45; 60 percent were ages 18–34. Half (50 percent) were white, and 41 percent were black. More than three-fourths (79 percent) of the women were mothers; these women had a total of 1,374 children younger than 18 (self-report). Average annual income was less than \$20,000 (self-report).

Understanding Jail Exit Survey Information: What the Sites Did (continued)

- More than three-fourths (77 percent) of the women were arrested for misdemeanors (property and drug possession). The most frequent charge for all the surveyed women was failure to be booked. (Police often use citations for minor crimes they feel do not require an immediate arrest and jail booking. Instead, defendants are required to appear at the jail to be booked within 10 days of being cited. If they don't appear, they can be cited for "failure to be booked.") Forty of the women had been arrested 10 or more times in the previous year. A followup survey conducted 1 year later found that 52 percent of the women had been rearrested.
- About two-fifths (41 percent) of the women were released via sentence completion, 22 percent were released pretrial, and one-fifth paid bond.

Interviews conducted with 19 of the 40 women who had been arrested 10 or more times in the previous year provided additional information about women who were chronically involved in the criminal justice system. Available data on bookings for 15 of these women showed that they had been booked into the jail a total of 704 times in their lifetime, an average of nearly 47 times for each woman. (The woman who had been booked most frequently had been in jail 143 times). The 10 most frequent charges were (in order of most to least frequent) failure to be booked, possession of drug paraphernalia, *capias* misdemeanor, trespass, prostitution, public intoxication, disorderly conduct, *capias* felony, contempt of court, and resisting arrest. None of these women had their children living with them or had valid driver's licenses.

Since it began its jail exit survey efforts, the Davidson County Women Offender Task Force has incorporated gender-responsive programming at the day reporting center and the county's new jail for women. The task force has become more aware of the needs of women offenders and has taken steps to focus on prostitution, mental illness, and family issues. Mental health screeners now conduct assessments in the jail, and steps have been taken to identify additional treatment resources in the community.

To reduce the frequency with which women are charged with failure to be booked (and failure to appear in court), the task force restructured the booking and court appearance process for citations. The sheriff's office, the clerk of court's office, and the general sessions court judges agreed to modify their current citation process to accommodate this new approach. Under the new process, which was implemented on May 23, 2005, the booking location is closer to the courthouse (previously it had been several miles away) and everyone who receives a citation is booked and goes to court on the same day. The task force hopes to see a significant reduction in the number of women who are arrested and jailed when their underlying offense was not serious enough to justify immediate arrest and booking.

Results from the first 4 months of the new process are promising. From May 23 through September 30, 2005, women's rate of failure to be booked was 19.4 percent, down from 20.8 percent for January 1 through May 22. From May 23 through September 30, only 13 women missed their first court appearance (a rate of 0.5 percent), compared with 237 women (15 percent) from January 1 through May 22—a significant reduction.

The new process is also being used for men; overall, the results for men are equally promising. For men and women combined, the rate for failure to be booked dropped from more than 25 percent to 23.5 percent, and the rate for failure to appear at the first court date dropped from 20 percent to less than 1 percent. An unanticipated effect of the new process has been an increase—from 16.8 percent to more than 30 percent—in the percent of citations that are resolved at the first court appearance.

Conclusion

Jail exit surveys can provide jurisdictions with invaluable information about populations flowing into and out of the local jail—information that can be used to craft more meaningful responses to offenders. Thoroughness and diligence in designing the exit survey process and collecting the targeted data will result in a rich source of information that can guide future information-gathering and policy development efforts, which in turn will help jurisdictions craft the most cost-effective strategies for responding to women offenders.

Endnotes

1. Greenfeld, Larry. *Women Offenders*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1999.

2. Federal Bureau of Investigation. *Crime in the United States, 2003*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, FBI, 2003.

3. James, Doris J. *Profile of Jail Inmates, 2002*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2004.

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Considering Other Kinds of Data Collection and Analyses

A jurisdiction may find that it needs information other than jail exit survey data to meet its needs. The Maui County policy team's experience is a case in point. In its initial discussions about data collection, the Maui County team agreed that its first priority was developing a gender-specific assessment tool. To develop the tool, the team needed more than jail exit survey data. It needed risk and needs information about issues that have special relevance to women: relationships, self-esteem, self-confidence, parenting, and experiences as a victim of domestic abuse. In addition, the Maui County team wanted to learn more about what happened to women at the arrest and booking decision point. From its study of bookings, the team learned the following:

- The number of women booked in Maui County increased 28 percent from 1998 to 2003, while total bookings for men and women increased only 4 percent.
- The average age of the women booked was 33; 69 percent were younger than 39.
- For about one-third of the women booked, contempt of court or failure to appear was their most serious charge. About one-fifth were charged with operating under the influence (OUI) or drug or paraphernalia possession. More than two-thirds (69 percent) were charged with only one offense.
- Two-thirds of the women booked were released on \$200–\$700 bail.

5. Snell, T. *Women in Prison*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1992.

6. The 16 jurisdictions that participated in NIC's Women Offender Projects from 1990 to 2004 included the states of Oregon and South Carolina, the city of San Francisco, California, and the following counties: Allen County, Indiana; Cook County, Illinois; Dakota County, Minnesota; Dallas County, Texas; Dauphin County,

Pennsylvania; Davidson County, Tennessee; Hamilton County, Ohio; Hampden County, Massachusetts; Johnson County, Kansas; Maui County, Hawaii; Racine County, Wisconsin; Tulsa County, Oklahoma; and York County, Pennsylvania. Participants included both urban and rural jurisdictions.

7. The definition of "short-stay" varies across jurisdictions and is usually determined by the jail's policies regarding the timing of booking events, particularly the

point at which those booked receive jail clothing and are assigned to housing units.

8. Bloom, Barbara, Barbara Owen, and Stephanie Covington. *Gender-Responsive Strategies: Research, Practice, and Guiding Principles for Women Offenders*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Corrections, 2003.

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