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Document title: Survey of Inmates in Local Jails Redesign and Pretest

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Abstract: Jail populations vary in their demographic makeup, reasons for incarceration, and needs. They are frequently in transition, with some inmates serving sentences while others are awaiting sentencing or are unconvicted pending court action on a current charge. The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) developed the Survey of Inmates in Local Jails (SILJ) to better understand the characteristics and needs of jail populations across the United States. The SILJ is the only nationally representative survey that collects self-reported, individual-level information on hard-to-reach jail populations, making it an important resource for policymakers, facilities, government agencies, and researchers. Since the survey was last administered in 2002, characteristics of jail populations have changed, and new policies and policing reforms have been enacted that impact the relevance of some questions and topics for policymakers. In 2015, Abt Global entered into a cooperative agreement with BJS to update and address gaps in the 2002 version of the instrument with the goals of producing reliable national estimates of local jail populations, tracking trends in population characteristics over time, developing subpopulation estimates, and crosswalking questions to those used in general population surveys. To accomplish these goals, Abt and BJS reviewed and recommended revisions to the existing instrument and conducted cognitive testing of new questions in 2019. Abt trained interviewers who completed a total of 169 interviews with inmates in five U.S. jails between April 2023 and June 2023 as part of the pretest phase of the project. Abt and BJS used pretest findings to reduce the survey length without compromising the information collected and modify questions to align with general population surveys. Lessons learned include the need to reduce the number of questions and the time it takes to complete the survey, the importance of accurate rosters for sampling respondents, the importance of training to prepare interviewers for jail settings, and the need for flexibility to accommodate different facility procedures and protocols. Findings and recommendations from this study support national implementation of the SILJ.

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1. Introduction

Jail populations are diverse, are frequently in transition, and have a variety of complex needs. At midyear 2022, local jails in the United States held more than 660,000 individuals, a 4% increase compared to midyear the previous year. Approximately 30% of individuals incarcerated in jails have been convicted, are serving a sentence, or are awaiting sentencing, and 70% are unconvicted and awaiting court action on a current charge or being held for other reasons, such as inability to make bail while awaiting trial (Zeng, 2023).

To better understand the characteristics and needs of jail populations, the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) developed the Survey of Inmates in Local Jails (SILJ) to collect national-level data from adults in the custody of local jails across the United States. The SILJ data include self-reported information from jail inmates about their characteristics (i.e., demographics, socioeconomic status), background, criminal justice status and experiences, and physical and mental health status prior to and during incarceration. The SILJ is the only nationally representative source of this type of information, making it an important resource for policymakers, facilities, government agencies, and researchers.

1.1 Study Background

BJS has sponsored the SILJ since 1972, with the U.S. Census Bureau as the data collection agent; the survey

was last administered in 2002. Since then, characteristics of jail populations have changed, and new policies and policing reforms have been enacted that impact the relevance of some questions and topics for policymakers. The percentage of women incarcerated in jails has increased from 11.6% in 2002 to 14% at midyear 2022 (James, 2004; Zeng, 2023). Furthermore, the female population has outpaced the male population in growth from midyear 2021 to midyear 2022 (Zeng, 2023).

Another area of interest is the current prevalence of mental health problems and substance use disorders (SUDs) among people in jail and how these rates have changed over time. Some reports suggest there is a growing number of incarcerated individuals with indicators of a mental health problem and SUD and that a critical challenge facing corrections professionals is understanding how to manage this ever-growing population and its needs (Garcia & Haskins, 2020). For example, approximately 26% of inmates in jails report serious psychological distress in the past 30 days, compared to 5% of the standardized general population (Bronson & Berzofsky, 2017). Data on mental health conditions and SUDs among incarcerated individuals can inform the need for jail diversion programs and/or crisis intervention training for law enforcement to decrease arrests (Lattimore, 2022).

To prepare for the next iteration, in 2015 BJS awarded Abt Global a cooperative agreement to initiate a redesign of the SILJ, under the direction of BJS, with the aim of developing a study protocol with the following objectives:

- Produce reliable national estimates of characteristics of local jail populations
- Track trends in those characteristics over time
- Develop specific subarea and/or subpopulation estimates
- Crosswalk questions, wherever possible, to those used in general population surveys.

To accomplish these goals, the SILJ redesign project was divided into three phases:

1. **Design.** In the design phase, Abt thoroughly reviewed the existing SILJ instrument and sampling protocol. After the review, the Abt project team recommended revisions to

the survey instrument and proposed a sampling plan to BJS in 2018. The Abt team then conducted cognitive testing of the new questions in 2019.

2. **Pretest.** In the pretest phase, Abt administered the revised SILJ instrument and inmate selection protocol in the field. Although the COVID-19 pandemic delayed the administration of the pretest for more than 2 years, Abt interviewers successfully administered the pretest to inmates in five U.S. jails from April 2023 through June 2023.
3. **Final report and recommended revisions to survey instrument.** Using the findings from the pretest, the Abt project team developed a final report and recommended revisions to the SILJ instrument to support national implementation of the SILJ. The Census Bureau is fielding the full-scale national study.



2. Design Phase

The SILJ pretest survey instrument was designed to be a 60-minute, interviewer-administered survey that collected information on respondents' demographic characteristics, current charges, criminal history, socioeconomic characteristics, alcohol and drug use, physical health, mental health, and activities and programs used while incarcerated.

2.1 Questionnaire Design

The SILJ pretest survey instrument was based on the 2002 SILJ survey but underwent revisions to meet the redesign goal of maintaining survey items that are useful for the field and policymakers. This redesign included better aligning the SILJ with current measurement best practice for similar populations, such as the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's National Survey on Drug Use and Health and the BJS Survey of Prison Inmates (SPI). Considering the diverse experiences and backgrounds of jail inmates, and that they are often only incarcerated for a short period of time prior to arraignment, developing wording comparable to the aforementioned surveys is a challenge. As a result, the SILJ survey instrument included a large amount of tailored wording depending on respondent characteristics such as criminal justice status. Additionally, the SILJ survey instrument contained extensive skip logic to avoid asking questions that are not applicable to particular respondents and to reduce response burden. Under the direction of BJS, the Abt

team conducted cognitive testing of the new questions in 2019 at two jails located in the northeastern United States. The Abt team conducted nine cognitive testing interviews, lasting about 60 to 75 minutes each. The goal was to make sure the questions were clearly worded, understandable, and answerable. Cognitive testing largely focused on questions not previously administered in a correctional setting.

2.2 Instrument Finalized

Abt submitted a final paper version of the SILJ instrument to BJS in October 2022 to be used in pretesting. The final paper version included revisions based on recommendations agreed upon during the redesign phase, recommended revisions based on the cognitive testing of the SILJ instrument, and some additional recommended revisions to better align some questions with the 2016 SPI. The Abt team then programmed and tested the revised instrument in November 2022 and completed programming of the computer-assisted personal interviews (CAPI) instrument in both English and Spanish for the pretest. CAPI is a face-to-face data collection method in which the interviewer uses a tablet, mobile phone, or a computer to record answers given during the interview.

2.3 Questionnaire Sections

The final SILJ pretest survey instrument contained a total of 737 questions. The questionnaire was grouped into 10 sections, each focusing on a different topic. **Table 1** shows the section topics and question counts.

Table 1. SILJ Questionnaire Sections and Number of Questions

Questionnaire Section	Question Count
Section 1: Individual Characteristics	37
Section 2: Current Offenses and Detention Status	97
Section 3: Pretrial Release and Trial	22
Section 4: Current Sentence	66
Section 5: Incident Characteristics	120
Section 6: Criminal History	67
Section 7: Socioeconomic Characteristics	86
Section 8: Alcohol and Drug Use and Treatment	65
Section 9: Medical Conditions, Mental Health, and Disabilities	112
Section 10: Jail Programs and Activities	65

- **Section 1** collected basic demographic information, such as age, race, sex, marriage status, and any military experience.
- **Section 2** collected information about why respondents were being held in the jail.
- **Section 3** collected information about the respondent's pretrial and trial experiences. These questions covered topics regarding the respondent's charges, any bail or bond, and legal representation. This set of questions referenced the respondent's current arrest offenses.
- **Section 4** collected information on the respondent's current or prior sentenced offenses.
- **Section 5** collected information from convicted respondents about any victims/property/drugs/weapons involved in the crime, time and location of the crime, and any experience with police officers during their arrest.
- **Section 6** gathered information on the respondent's criminal history, including any prior arrests, convictions, incarcerations, parole, restraining orders, and financial obligations associated with a criminal offense.
- **Section 7** collected information on all respondents' education, employment, housing, income, and family composition.
- **Section 8** collected information about different experiences respondents might have had if they used alcohol or drugs. Respondents were asked questions about any substance use and treatment programs in which they were involved.
- **Section 9** collected information about different physical or medical conditions, state of current mental health and access to treatment, self-reported disabilities, and physical or sexual assaults.
- **Section 10** asked respondents about their experiences and activities while at the jail.



3. Pretest Phase

The pretest of the redesigned SILJ instrument occurred during site visits to five jails between April 2023 and June 2023. Objectives of pretesting included identifying problems respondents were likely to have with any part of the survey process and determining the average response time to complete the survey. Before the pretest could occur, Abt worked in collaboration with BJS to sample and recruit jails. Abt also recruited field interviewers and prepared for and conducted a week-long, in-person interviewer training in March 2023.

3.1 Jail Selection

The Abt team worked with BJS to select jails for recruitment. In the initial sampling plan, jails were first organized into geographic clusters by metropolitan statistical area and then sorted by average daily population (ADP) of the jail based on the 2019 Census of Jails. We excluded jails with ADPs below 200 inmates, which are too small to support the target number of pretest interviews (N=36), and jails with ADPs above 1,500 inmates because these jails are automatically selected to participate in the full administration of SILJ. Data on the percentage of female inmates, Hispanic inmates, and those awaiting trial/arraignment status within jails that met the above size criteria were then used to identify geographic clusters of jails that would allow the team to sample

and interview a diverse group of inmates: male and female, English- and Spanish-speaking, and pre- or post-arraignment across a range of medium- to larger-sized jails.

However, unanticipated challenges necessitated changes to the initial sampling plan. First, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in delays to the administration of the SILJ pretest, and consequent resource limitations restricted data collection to no more than two different regions of the country. To ensure participation of jails with adequate numbers of Spanish-speaking inmates, we selected Texas and Florida as the two pretest states. The Abt team then reviewed characteristics of jails in those states meeting the jail size criteria (ADPs between 200 and 1,500 inmates) and excluded from consideration those that did not house both males and females and those that did not house inmates that were both pre- and post-arraignment.

A second challenge was that because the pretest was significantly delayed due to COVID-19, the new timing coincided with fielding of the BJS National Inmate Survey 4 (NIS-4). The team also excluded from consideration those jails that were included in the NIS-4 sample. This left a total of 10 potential pretest jails that were not participating in NIS-4 and that met the SILJ pretest inclusion criteria.

3.2 Jail Recruitment

Jail recruitment for the SILJ pretest began by reaching out to the 10 selected jails to identify their capabilities, the operational feasibility to conduct CAPI, and their willingness to participate. The BJS Acting Director initially sent a letter to the sheriff or administrator of each selected jail that provided an overview of the project, described data collection procedures, and asked permission to conduct the pretest at the jail. BJS

staff followed up with nonresponsive jails, and then Abt directly emailed seven jails that had agreed to schedule a recruitment call. During these recruitment calls, the Abt team gathered more information about each jail regarding background check procedures for visitors, internet access in the jail, COVID-19 policies, and additional contact information. Based on the seven calls, the Abt team selected five jails that met all pretest criteria (**table 2**).

Table 2. Selected Characteristics of the Five SILJ Pretest Jails

Site	State	% Hispanic	Unconvicted Rate (Avg)	% Female (Avg)	Visit Schedule
Jail A	Texas	100%	85%	6%	April 10–14, 2023
Jail B	Texas	86%	81%	27%	April 24–28, 2023
Jail C	Florida	12%	36%	24%	May 8–12, 2023
Jail D	Florida	6%	82%	4%	May 22–26, 2023
Jail E	Florida	4%	21%	16%	June 5–9, 2023

3.3 Jail Scheduling

Once the jail had confirmed its willingness and ability to participate in the SILJ pretest, the Abt team coordinated with the jail’s staff to schedule the 5-day field visit for data collection. Visits were scheduled based on the jail’s availability and staffing. The team scheduled a follow-up call approximately 2 weeks before the field visit to discuss

logistics: protocol details including where the interviewers would be working, any prohibited items, the availability of Wi-Fi and outlets, and the shift hours that worked best for the jails. The Abt team also reiterated the importance of receiving a roster of inmates housed at the jail on the first day of data collection. After the call, the Abt team followed up with the jail contact via email to provide the specifics of what and whom the roster should include.

3.4 Field Staff and Training

In addition to standard in-person interviewing skills, data collection in a jail setting requires specialized competencies such as maintaining composure in stressful environments. Abt carefully screened and hired six field interviewers (FIs) and conducted an in-person SILJ Pretest Interviewer Training Conference in March 2023. The training included information about the project, data collection procedures and goals, an overview of the criminal justice system, and guidelines for interviewing in jail settings, including obtaining consent and respondent cooperation.

Abt also hired one lead interviewer (LI), who attended the training and traveled with the FIs to serve as the on-site supervisor and main point of contact for the



“ In addition to standard in-person interviewing skills, data collection in a jail setting requires specialized competencies such as maintaining composure in stressful environments. ”

jails throughout data collection. The LI managed the on-site sampling procedures and was responsible for technical support for field staff within the jail, where needed. In addition, Abt hired and trained a Field Manager who oversaw the field team and worked with the project team to review and adhere to all facility and study protocols and procedures.

3.4.1 Working in Jails and Adverse Events

Interviewing in correctional facilities required advance planning and strict adherence to and compliance with all conditions and requirements that had been established by administrative staff at each jail. Jail-specific protocols pertained to dress codes, COVID-19 policies, searching field staff belongings, when and where food was allowed, Wi-Fi access, and use of cell phones. Adherence to jail and study protocols was important for the success of the project and for the safety of interviewers. If for any reason interviewers felt threatened or concerned for their safety, they were advised to terminate the interview.

All interviewers were provided with approved masks for use during in-person visits. Before visiting jails, interviewers received a Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) toolkit, which included masks, hand sanitizer, and disinfecting wipes. They were expected to maintain exceptional personal and professional hygiene practices, specifically with regard to handwashing, regardless of the COVID-19 risk in the area. The project team continuously monitored COVID-19 rates throughout the data collection effort.

The protocols used for data collection activities were designed to minimize the likelihood that adverse events would occur during the interview. However, there was a risk that respondents would become distressed or upset by some of the personal questions asked during the SILJ pretest interviews. To address

this risk, the project team worked closely with the jail administrators to confirm that appropriate counseling services would be made available to inmates should they experience discomfort or stress during the interview. In addition, Abt worked with our Institutional Review Board to develop a comprehensive adverse event protocol. Any unintended event experienced by a study participant that was observed by or communicated to interviewers during survey interviews and that made it impossible to complete the interview was considered an unanticipated or adverse event. FIs were required to report all concerning incidents to the LI, who then reported to or consulted with the Field Manager, the Abt project team, and/or BJS, as appropriate.

3.5 Data Collection

Four FIs successfully completed the training, all of whom were bilingual. The survey data collection period for the pretest spanned 2 months, from April 10, 2023 to June 9, 2023. Traveling field teams consisted of one LI and two to three FIs, depending on the capacity of the jail. Field staff were assigned to jail sites based on individual availability.

3.5.1 Inmate Selection

On the first day of data collection at each site, the LI obtained from the facility a list of adult (male and female) inmates who had a bed assigned to them the previous night (e.g., slept at the jail the previous night or arrived that morning). The facility provided the roster in paper form, and the LI used it to confirm the list of eligible inmates. The list included inmate name, facility ID number, and sex. The LI reviewed the list with jail staff to ensure the following inmates were not included:

- Inmates under age 18
- Inmates released from facility the prior night
- Inmates scheduled to be admitted but not officially at the facility
- Inmates under the jail's jurisdiction but housed in another jail
- Inmates who had escaped or were absent without leave
- Inmates under jail supervision but not confined.

The goal at each jail site was to conduct interviews with approximately 36 adult (male and female, pre- and post-conviction) inmates. The LI initially randomly selected 50 inmates, where every Nth ($N = \frac{\text{total roster number}}{50}$) the number of inmates to

be selected) inmate was selected for an interview. If the initial 50 selected inmates were not sufficient to obtain the target number of interviews, the LI worked with the project team to determine how many additional inmates to randomly select from the roster.

3.5.2 Interviewing Selected Inmates

Once ready to begin interviewing, the LI provided jail staff with the names of selected inmates on an as-needed basis. The LI took information from the roster and entered it into a tracking worksheet form on the LI's tablet computer (e.g., sex and race/ethnicity, when available). If an inmate was not available, the LI noted the reason for not being interviewed. If the reason was temporary and the inmate was likely to be available at a later time, the case was left open.

For each available inmate, the LI asked the correctional officer to bring the single selected inmate to the

interviewing location. Each interview took place in a room that allowed private conversation while also allowing both the interviewers and respondent to be visually observed by the assigned correctional officer. Using the CAPI software on the project tablet computer, the FI started the interview with informed consent. The consent form assures confidentiality to all respondents and explains that their information is protected by a Privacy Certificate, that their participation is completely voluntary, that no identifying information will be released, and that information they provide during the interview is prohibited from use in any legal action. All interviews were conducted in a space that is configured to ensure respondent privacy and maximize confidentiality. If a respondent refused, the FI coded the case as such. If the respondent agreed to the interview, the FI proceeded with the interview.



4. Results

The Abt team analyzed findings from the pretest with the objective of determining which questions should be recommended for revision or removal for the national data collection. We looked at the average time to complete the survey and average time to complete each section of the survey to understand which sections required the most time. For each question, we also examined the number of respondents who answered “don’t know” or who refused to answer to identify questions that may be hard for respondents to answer or questions that respondents are not comfortable answering.

This section presents results from the SILJ pretest, including the final dispositions of cases worked at the five jails and reasons for respondent refusals. It also includes reasons respondents were not available and interview length, which explores timing overall and by subsection.

4.1 Final Dispositions

The pretest goal was to complete a total of 180 interviews (36 per jail site). A total of 274 inmates were selected to complete the survey. By the end of data collection, FIs had completed 169 interviews at the five jails (**table 3**). Interviewers completed fewer than

36 interviews at three of the jails, and more than 36 at two. There were 73 refusals. Eight inmates consented to participate and started the survey but did not complete it (hereafter referred to as breakoffs). Twenty-four inmates were not available for the survey, with the most common reason (38%) being that they had already been released from the jail.

4.1.1 Reasons for Refusals

Of the 73 total refusals, 46 (63%) occurred post consent, meaning the FI read the SILJ consent form and then the inmate refused. The remaining 27 inmate refusals (37%) took place before consent was read (**table 4**). The most common reason given by inmates for refusal (both pre-consent and post-consent) was they were not interested. Additionally, 23 pre-consent and post-consent refusals did not provide a reason for refusing. Eight inmates refused post consent because they did not want to discuss their case or personal information. Inmates also mentioned that they would rather do other things, that they were uncomfortable doing the survey, and that the survey was too long. Eight breakoffs also occurred while the survey was being administered, between Section 1 and Section 6. Breakoff reasons included not being interested, not wanting to talk about their case, and feeling uncomfortable with the survey questions.

Table 3. SILJ Pretest Final Dispositions

Dispositions	Jail A	Jail B	Jail C	Jail D	Jail E	Total
Completes	41	33	32	21	42	169
Breakoffs	1	3	0	0	4	8
Refusals	6	19	11	10	27	73
<i>Pre-consent</i>	3	13	2	0	9	27
<i>Post-consent</i>	3	6	9	10	18	46
Not available	3	7	1	3	10	24
<i>Released</i>	3	2	1	.0	3	9
<i>Medical unit</i>	0	0	0	1	3	4
<i>Transferred to another facility</i>	0	4	0	0	0	4
<i>Language barrier</i>	0	1	0	1	0	2
<i>Violent/uncontrolled behavior</i>	0	0	0	0	2	2
<i>Out to court</i>	0	0	0	1	0	1
<i>Physically unable</i>	0	0	0	0	1	1
<i>Temporarily absent (GED class)</i>	0	0	0	.0	1	1
Total	51	62	44	34	83	274

Table 4. Refusal Reasons, Summarized

Dispositions	Types of Refusal			Grand Total
	Pre-consent Refusal	Post-consent Refusal	Breakoff	
No specific reason/Not interested	16	23	3	42
Did not want to talk about their case/personal info (e.g., following direction of lawyer)	0	8	2	10
Would rather sleep/read/watch TV	2	3	1	6
Uncomfortable doing survey	0	2	2	4
Survey was too long	0	3	0	3
Had other things to do/Did not have time	1	2	0	3
Wanted to consult with lawyer first	2	1	0	3
Did not feel well	1	1	0	2
Refused the officer	2	0	0	2
Afraid of what other inmates may think	2	0	0	2
Did not want to revisit the past	1	0	0	1
Room was too cold	0	1	0	1
Upset because of recent sentencing	0	1	0	1
Wanted an incentive for completing survey	0	1	0	1
Total	27	46	8	81

4.1.2 Reasons Not Available

Field staff coded 24 inmates from the five jails as “Not available” for the SILJ pretest. The most common reason was that inmates had been released from jail. Only two inmates were unavailable due to violent/uncontrolled behavior, according to correctional staff.

At Jail B, most of the inmates were unavailable due to being transferred to another facility. Two inmates from Jail E were also unavailable due to being physically unable or temporarily absent due to a GED class. Other reasons for this disposition included medical reasons, language barrier, and being at court.

4.2 Interview Length

The Abt team conducted an analysis of the interview length (timings) to determine the average duration of the survey, overall and by section (including consent).

Of the 169 respondents who completed the pretest survey, two respondents were excluded from the calculation of the average completion time because their interviews were paused prior to completion and had to be continued at a later date or completed over more than one sitting. The average time of survey completion for the 167 respondents who completed the interview in one sitting was 98.6 minutes, including

an average of 7.2 minutes for the consent process, and an average of 91.4 minutes for the main interview (**table 5**). The median time for completing the survey was 94.0 minutes. The longest survey lasted 169.0 minutes, while the shortest survey took 57.5 minutes (**figure 1**). The average survey length was longer than the previously estimated length of 60 minutes stated in the survey consent form. Table 5 provides a breakdown of average completion times for the consent process and for each section. The average completion time is based on the total number of respondents who completed a given section.

Table 5. Average Completion Time for the SILJ Pretest, by Survey Section

Survey Section	Total Respondents	Average Completion Time
Consent	164/a	7.2 minutes
Section 1—Individual Characteristics	175	3.4 minutes
Section 2—Current Offense and Detention Status	173	10.6 minutes
Section 3—Pretrial Release and Trial	173	1.7 minutes/b
Section 4—Current Sentence	172	1.6 minutes/b
Section 5—Incident Characteristics	172	5.1 minutes
Section 6—Criminal History	169	11.1 minutes
Section 7—Socioeconomic Characteristics	167	18.3 minutes
Section 8—Alcohol and Drug Use and Treatment	167	11.2 minutes
Section 9—Medical Conditions, Mental Health, Disabilities	167	15.8 minutes
Section 10—Jail Programs and Activities	167	12.5 minutes
Survey total	167	98.6 minutes/c

Note: Excludes two respondents who completed interviews over more than one sitting, which means they paused prior to completion and had to continue at a later date.

a/Eleven respondents who took less than 4 minutes or more than 20 minutes to complete the Consent section were removed from the average timing calculation for the section because timings could have been distorted or overwritten if the interviewer made multiple attempts to complete the section.

b/Sections 3 and 4 had many zero responses due to programming logic that skipped unconvicted respondents, as many questions did not apply to them.

c/Timing calculation for survey total excludes breakoff respondents, such that the sum of section completion times is not equal to the total.

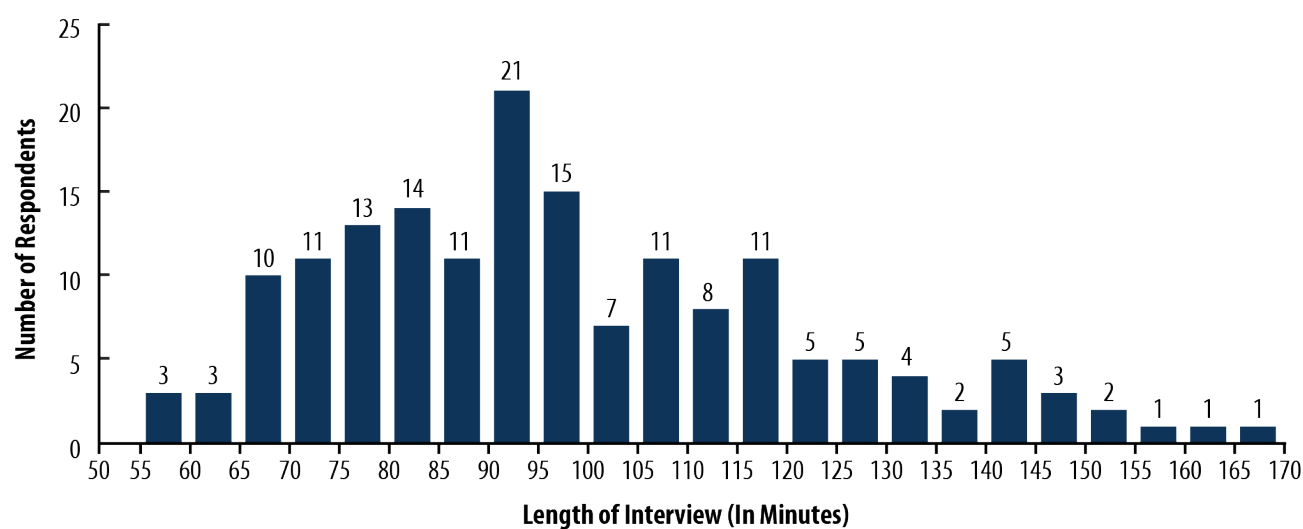


The average time spent in the survey for the eight breakoffs was 28.5 minutes. Breakoff timings were determined based on completed sections only. The median time for breakoffs was 27.1 minutes. None of the eight breakoffs completed any full sections past Section 6 of the survey.

The individual section timings ranged from zero minutes (i.e., unconvicted cases skipped certain sections) to a high of 56.6 minutes. Section 7—Socioeconomic Characteristics had the highest

average section timing. Section 3—Pretrial Release and Trial and Section 4—Current Sentence had the lowest average section timings; however, both of these sections had high numbers of zero times due to programming logic that skipped unconvicted respondents past these sections. Section 10—Jail Programs and Activities averaged 12.5 minutes but had the largest range, up to 52.7 minutes. The most common survey durations were between 90 and 95 minutes.

Figure 1. SILJ Pretest Overall Interview Timing Distribution (N=167)





5. Discussion

The SILJ pretest survey instrument was designed to be a 60-minute, interviewer-administered survey. The average time of the pretest survey was 98.6 minutes, including an average of 7.2 minutes for the consent process and an average of 91.4 minutes for the main survey interview. Although the survey completion time is longer than the initial target goal, only eight respondents broke off the interview. Based on these findings, Abt and BJS reviewed the survey for areas to reduce length without compromising the information collected. In total, BJS approved 247 questions for removal, 44 questions for revision, and 22 additional questions. Many of the items recommended for removal were also recommended for removal before the pretest but remained in the pretest for confirmation. The 22 additional questions were restricted to one section and were largely designed to align alcohol- and drug-related questions to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, which is considered the gold standard for measuring alcohol and drug use and treatment.

5.1 Lessons Learned

5.1.1 Sample

One of the biggest challenges to data collection was communicating to the jail contact the importance of the sampling roster format and its required content. For data security reasons, it was established that the jails should not send Abt any information about inmates prior to the interviewers' arrival at the facility.

Therefore, in an attempt to standardize the format, the Abt team emailed each jail facility contact a detailed list of what the roster should and should not include. However, each jail had its own unique system for tracking their inmates and providing the field team with a list of eligible inmates. Although roster information varied, it always included inmate names, facility IDs, and a way to determine sex. Most jails were not able or willing to provide additional demographics or background variables such as race or conviction status; only one participating jail had a roster that included inmate race.

Jails also organized rosters in a variety of ways. Some jail rosters were organized by inmates' cell locations, for example. One roster was separated by sex, but for others, sex had to be assumed based on cell location (e.g., females were only housed in certain locations). Another jail provided two versions of its roster: one organized in alphabetical order and the other by the inmate pods/cells. The LI sometimes discovered ineligible inmates on the roster after initial selection. For example, one jail's roster included more than 80 inmates who were ineligible due to their federal custody status.

Even if eligible, some of the inmates sampled were not available for interviewing when their name was called due to being away at court or in medical quarantine, for example. One jail was able to provide

“Continuity of staff was helpful for gaining efficiencies over time, especially with respect to interview length.”

the LI with a separate list of inmates who were quarantined or had appointments each day, which allowed us to plan around these absences. However, other jails did not have this information readily available, so the LI would note any absences as the information became available to them.

5.1.2 Staffing and Training

The SILJ pretest was limited to five jails where only two to three FIs could visit at a time. Therefore, the Abt team hired a smaller number of field staff who could travel rather than hiring and training a separate team for each locality. The Abt team found that continuity of staff was helpful for gaining efficiencies over time, especially with respect to interview length. To be a successful interviewer, SILJ FIs had to be comfortable collecting data in a very restricted environment and able to remain calm and neutral in a potentially stressful interviewing environment. Interviewers' comfort levels working in jails improved over time.

5.1.3 Data Collection Logistics

Each jail had different procedures to help execute SILJ data collection. However, each jail prioritized the security and safety of the interviewing staff, and correctional officers always monitored respondent behavior. Despite constant monitoring, the correctional officers were not allowed or able to hear the survey being administered. The LI tested each interview location for privacy to ensure that sound was restricted to the interviewing area.

The use of restraints varied among jails. Respondents were uncuffed at some jails, whereas other jails had respondents in wrist and ankle shackles.



The interview location varied depending on the jail facility. At some jails, interviews took place in attorney rooms with telephone booths and glass partitions. Interviews at other jails took place in interviewing rooms with the FI and respondent positioned around a table. In this case, the correctional officers waited outside the room but could see inside through a glass window to monitor the respondent.

5.2 Conclusion

The collective work by Abt Global to redesign and refine the SILJ survey instrument, hire and train interviewers, conduct a pretest in five jails with 169 respondents, and analyze the responses and survey timing provided critical support to BJS in preparation for the national SILJ implementation. Lessons learned include the need to reduce the number of questions and the time it takes to complete the survey, the importance of accurate rosters for sampling respondents, the importance of training to prepare interviewers for jail settings, and the need for flexibility to accommodate different facility procedures and protocols.



6. Reference List

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