

## **Including the military and the incarcerated in surveys**

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## ***Introduction***

Since National fertility surveys began in the United States in 1955, they were limited to women in the civilian non-institutional population. This limitation was sensible and cost-effective, given that the proportion of women of childbearing age who are in institutions or in the military is very small.

But two things have changed. First, the 2002 National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG), and other surveys of families and fertility, also include men, and over-sample black and Hispanic men. Second, the number of men in prisons and jails has increased in the last 2 decades.

On the other hand, the environment for conducting surveys in the United States today (2003) is generally acknowledged to be difficult: most surveys are suffering rising costs and declining response rates. Krosnick (2003: 1) observed recently that

“A series of factors have made it more difficult to contact potential respondents, driving up costs. During the same time period, respondents’ willingness to participate in surveys has declined slightly. Taken together these shifts have led to lower response rates than those of 20 years ago.”

De Leeuw and de Heer (2002) have also shown, using multi-level logistic models applied to data on government surveys in 16 developed countries, that non-contact rates are increasing in all those countries regardless of type of survey. Refusal rates are also increasing in some surveys and some countries.

In this very difficult survey environment, adding yet another difficult task to surveys that are already straining to complete their missions may not be feasible or affordable. Survey management is a process of balancing infinite wants for data against limited---often severely limited---resources. At the same time, there are good reasons to consider including men and women in prisons, jails, and the military in surveys.

This paper will:

1. Give some reasons for including the incarcerated and the military in surveys.
2. Show the size and composition of these populations using available data.
3. Give some recommendations on how to collect data on these populations.
4. Discuss how the NSFG staff weighed these factors in Cycle 6 of the NSFG, and how those judgments might vary in other surveys.

### ***Why include them?***

Why would we want to include members of the military, and those currently in jail or prison, in surveys of the family?

First, these populations separate men from their wives, partners, and children, though for different reasons.

Second, these populations are not static; some leave jail or the military each year and return to life in the civilian non-institutional population. This may be a particular problem in longitudinal surveys.

Third, many men in the military and in prisons and jails are fathers. How and whether these men maintain contact with their children may affect both their own lives and their children's outcomes. Recent DOD data show that about 49% of active duty military personnel have 1 or more children. (July 2002 Status of Forces Survey report, table 1, accessed at DMDC website.)

Fourth, some of them may be at risk of HIV or other Sexually Transmitted Diseases, and may carry these diseases back with them to their households. (Maruschak, 1999).

### ***How many of them are there?***

Here we will show some data on the size of the total population, and the population in the military, and in prisons and jails in the United States. There are about 285 million people in the US today. Of those, about 178 million are 15-59; about 120 million are 15-44 years of age. (Statistical Abstract of the US, 2002, table 14).

Prisons and Jails: the Incarcerated Population---As you can see in the following table, nearly all of the institutionalized population below the age of 65 is in jails or prisons. This means that most surveys of the general population of the US will not need to include institutions other than jails or prisons.

Table 1: Institutionalized Population 18-64 years of age: US, 2000 (In thousands)

	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Total</u>
Total	1,968	292	2,260
Jails, prisons	1,773	166	1,939
Nursing homes	88	75	163
Mental hospitals	37	18	55

Source: Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2002, table 61.

Bureau of Justice Statistics data show that there were about 2 million people in prisons and jails in 2002---double the number in 1990 and quadruple the number in 1980. But 88 percent of jail inmates are male, and two-thirds are black or Hispanic.

It is now worth considering including prison and jail inmates in surveys that sample large numbers of black and Hispanic males.

Table 2: Jail and Prison inmates in the United States, 1980-2002

	<u>Jail</u>	<u>Prison</u>	<u>Total</u>
1980	184	320	504
1990	405	743	1,148
2000	621	1,316	1,937
2002	665	1,368	2,033

Source: [www.ojp.usdoj/bjs/glance/tables](http://www.ojp.usdoj/bjs/glance/tables)

88 percent of jail inmates, and 93% of prison inmates are male. About 87% of state prisoners are under age 45, and their median age was 32 in 1997.

The racial/ethnic distributions are:

jail inmates: 41 % non-Hispanic white, 42% black and 16% Hispanic.

Prisoners: 33% non-Hispanic white, 47% black and 17% Hispanic.

(Source: Prison and Jail Inmates at Mid-year 1997, table 7; and

[www.albany.edu/sourcebook](http://www.albany.edu/sourcebook), table 6.29).

Table 3: Percent of all adult (18 and older) residents who were currently being held in jail or prison, by gender and race: US, 1985-1997

	<u>1985</u>	<u>1990</u>	<u>1997</u>
White Male	0.5%	0.7	1.0 %
Black Male	3.5%	5.2	6.8 %
White Female	0.0	0.0	0.0 %
Black Female	0.2	0.3	0.5 %

Number in Jail or Prison, in thousands

White Male	382	546	806
Black Male	310	509	754
White Female	21	39	65
Black Female	19	38	63

Source: [www.albany.edu/sourcebook](http://www.albany.edu/sourcebook), table 6.13.

The table in the original source unfortunately does not contain data for Hispanics, but it does show that:

- a) Less than 1% of white and black females were currently in jail or prison in 1997.
- b) About 1 percent of white males were in jail or prison in 1997.
- c) Almost 7% of black males were in jail or prison in 1997, up from 3.5% in 1985.

Military.---In addition to the 2 million people—most of whom are black and Hispanic men—who were in jail or prison in 2002, there were about 1.4 million men and women on active duty in the US Armed Forces. Of these, on October 31, 2002, 1.28 million were in the US—1.2 million men and about 200,000 women. Of the approximately 60 million men and 60 million women 15-44 years of age in the US, the 1.2 million men in the Armed Forces are about 2.0 percent of men, and the 200,000 women are less than one-tenth of one percent of women.

Table 4: Number of active-duty members of the US Armed Services (in thousands) 15-44 years of age in the United States, by gender and whether they live on a military base or elsewhere: October 31, 2002

	Total	Men	Women
On a military base	725	622	103
Elsewhere	558	558	112
TOTAL	1,283	1,180	215

The half of those on active duty in the US military who do not live on military bases can be interviewed as part of conventional household surveys. In fact, the CPS already does interview this population. The 2002 National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) also interviewed men in the household population. Tabulations from the March 2002 CPS Public Use Files, as well as Tables provided by the Defense Manpower Data Center, help to measure the size of this population, so that they can be included in weighted national estimates. Given how rare this population is (around 600,000), sample size may prevent detailed study unless samples for adjacent years are combined.

***Sources of information on interviewing these populations***

On February 27, 1998, I gave a presentation to the Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, on how the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) was expanding to include men as well as women. The Forum members requested that I meet with appropriate staff of the Department of Defense and the Department of Justice to determine what would be required to expand the NSFG sample to include men in prisons and jails and men in the military. The representative of DOD at that meeting was the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Personnel Support, Families, and

Education (Carolyn Becraft). The representative of DOJ was from the Office of Juvenile Justice (Barbara Allen-Hagen).

The following month, I met with Cynthia Mamalian of the National Institute of Justice, and Anita Lancaster of the Defense Manpower Data Center. We developed a list of questions that needed to be answered, and on April 9, we discussed how to answer those questions with:

Caroline Harlow and Tracy Snell of the Bureau of Justice Statistics;  
Cyndy Mamalian of the National Institute of Justice, Dept of Justice;  
Anita Lancaster, Assistant Director for Program Management, Defense Manpower Data Center, Dept of Defense;  
Janet Hassan, of the Tri-Care Management Activity, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health Affairs, Dept of Defense.

I drafted a report, and the members of the group made comments and corrections on several drafts. I thank each of them for sharing their knowledge with us.

Since the NSFG is based on in-person interviews, the primary focus of this discussion is on in-person surveys. However, many of the factors considered here would have to be taken into account if a significant number of respondents were drawn from these populations.

## **The Military Population**

### **1. Who does these surveys? Who would do the interviewing?**

The Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) has a master file of all active-duty members and they routinely draw samples for use in survey research. DMDC can draw a sample of active-duty personnel who live on military bases (or those who live on-base and off-base). DMDC primarily conducts large-scale, paper-and-pencil mail surveys---and in recent years, some internet surveys---on behalf of the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness. For example, in recent years DMDC conducted a survey of 90,000 active-duty military members on sexual harassment; a survey of 76,000 members on equal opportunity topics; and a survey of 41,500 members and civilians to obtain feedback on current financial services provided by DOD on military bases.

Separate health-related surveys are sponsored by the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs and its TRICARE Management Activity (TMA). These are primarily self-administered surveys--often filled out in a room on a military base, with a civilian contractor collecting the completed survey forms. The TMA recently conducted a [Survey of Health Related Behaviors Among Military Personnel](#),<sup>6</sup> with a sample of 18,000 active duty personnel. The purpose was to collect data on 45 of the Healthy People 2000 Objectives. The prime contractor was the Research Triangle Institute, or

RTI.

**2. The NSFG does its interviewing face to face. How do we get a private setting for an interview that could last as much as 90 minutes?**

In our advance letter to respondents in the military, we should indicate that we need a private setting to conduct the interviews. The respondent should be able to identify a place to do the interview. Non-response among military personnel increases when they are rotating between assignments. For this reason, summer is a bad time to do interviews with military personnel, because people are moving to new duty stations. So surveys should be done during the school year. Typically, surveys in the military only last about 45 minutes, so an interview of more than an hour would be unexpected, and thus a potential problem.

**3. The NSFG contains many questions that most people would consider asensitive.@ Do you see any problems with this content?**

DOD would review the questionnaire. They are concerned about over-surveying their population, but our content is not necessarily a problem.

**4. Will illiteracy be a problem in the military population?**

There is an enlistment test to get into the armed forces, so literacy in English is very high. Literacy should not be a problem. In 2002, an estimated 20% of the active-duty military population had at least a college degree. Only 23% had no college training. (2002 Status of Forces Survey of Active-Duty Members, table 1.)

**6. The NSFG uses incentives. Would we be allowed to use incentives in the military population?**

DOD does not currently use incentives with any surveys of active duty members of the military. However, given that the NSFG is longer than most DOD surveys, has sensitive content, and is not sponsored by DOD, if we proposed using incentives, DOD might approve their use.

## **The Incarcerated Population--Prisons and Jails**

There are systematic differences between prisons and jails that must be acknowledged in the design of a survey. Jails are usually locally-run, and their inmates are typically held for one year or less. They might be first priority for some surveys because their inmates will be back out in the non-institutional population sooner than those in prisons.

State prisons typically hold inmates for a year or longer. They may be important for some surveys to include because they have about 1 million people in them. Federal prisons only hold about 100,000 of the most serious criminals, and thus might be excluded if resources are limited.

### **1. Who does these surveys? Who would do the interviewing?**

The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) usually does its inmate surveys using face to face interviewing. The Census Bureau does the interviewing for all of the BJS surveys of inmates. BJS uses stratified samples of jails, state prisons, and federal prisons. For state prisons, permission is needed from every state's Department of Corrections. For jails, which are locally administered, permission is needed from the administrator of each jail sampled (460 were sampled in their last survey; 431 participated.) Then, arrangements for access, security clearances, and space have to be made with the administrator of the jail or prison. The interviews are arranged in advance.

### **2. The NSFG does its interviewing face to face. How do we get a private setting for an interview that could last as much as 90 minutes?**

Interviews with prison or jail inmates would be conducted in an office or other room provided by the prison or jail administrator. Prisoners are usually quite willing to be interviewed; the response rate in the last national survey of jail inmates was 86%; for prisons, it was 92%. Getting a private setting can be a problem. Ensuring the safety of the interviewer is also an important issue in interviewing inmates. A 90-minute interview is also likely to be too long. The NSFG interview for men in 2002 was 60 minutes on average and this might be an appropriate length for jail and prison interviews.

### **3. The NSFG contains many questions that most people would consider sensitive. Do you see any problems with this content?**

It's very likely that the NSFG questionnaire would have to be re-written completely for the incarcerated population--to make it relevant to incarcerated people, to reduce its sensitivity, and to adjust to the lower level of literacy of the incarcerated population.

Most incarcerated people have little or no opportunity for heterosexual intercourse, so in jails and prisons, most recent sexual behavior, if it occurs, would be same-sex contact. Questions about it are likely to be very sensitive. In addition, the most important determinant of an inmates' sexual behavior is the length of his imprisonment, so questions on "recent" sexual or contraceptive behavior may have to be revised or eliminated.

### **4. When are these surveys done?**

The Bureau of Justice Statistics does a survey of state and federal prison inmates periodically; the last ones were in 1997 and 2002. They also do a survey of jail inmates, which was last done in 1996 and 2001.

### **5. Will illiteracy be a problem in this population?**

40% of prisoners have not completed high school or a GED. Two-thirds are members of minority groups. (Harlow, 2003) Literacy may be a significant problem, but more importantly, the grade level of some questionnaires may be too high for this population. Some questionnaires may have to use a simpler vocabulary.

### **6. The NSFG uses incentives. Would we be allowed to use incentives in the incarcerated population?**

In most facilities, the prison and jail directors would not allow us to use incentives. Moreover, it is not likely that incentives would be necessary or cost-effective, given the already-high response rates in inmate surveys. However, prisons and Jails would incur extra costs by cooperating with a survey because they would need to require prison guards to work overtime to provide security for the interviewers. In-person surveys may need to allocate funds for these expenses.

## **Conclusion**

### **Should you include these populations in your survey?**

For some surveys—particularly longitudinal surveys and those focused on communities with many low-income black and Hispanic males—it may be important to include these populations, because they may have significant effects on estimates. Depending on the design and the budget of the survey, it may be necessary to include these populations in some way—perhaps with a short questionnaire administered by telephone for those in jail or prison, or living on a military base. The IRB that reviews the study will have to be informed if interviewing in prisons or jails is designed into the survey.

The survey sponsors need to weigh the substantive benefits of including these populations against the costs in money, calendar time, and labor—including the opportunity costs of pursuing these populations vs. other goals for the survey.

When we considered this issue for Cycle 6 of the NSFG, our judgment was that we would take some steps towards including these populations, but not interview full samples on military bases or in prisons and jails until we had successfully interviewed a national sample of men at least once. We were concerned that taking the steps to interview in prisons and jails and on military bases would have increased the cost of the

NSFG considerably, delayed the fieldwork, and increased the risk that the basic NSFG would not get the staff time, attention, and funding that it needs.

But we wanted to make it possible to include these populations in the future.

So, we included several features in Cycle 6:

First, we included in the NSFG contract an option giving NCHS the right to include first a pretest, and then a main study, of a military sample, an incarcerated sample, or both, in Cycle 7 or 8 of the NSFG.

Secondly, we included in Cycle 6 some questions for men on experience in the military.

### **Male Questionnaire:**

JC-1. "Have you ever been on active duty in the Armed Forces for a period of 6 months or more?"

JC-2. (If yes) In what month and year did that period of active duty begin?"

JC-3. "What was the month and year of your last separation from active duty?"

In the Audio CASI self-administered part of the survey, we asked:

KB-2: "In the last 12 months, have you spent any time in a jail, prison, or juvenile detention facility?"

KB-2: (If no) "Have you ever spent time in a jail, prison, or juvenile detention center?"

Women were not asked these questions because our sample size in Cycle 6 was not large enough to obtain statistically reliable estimates of these events from women.

### **Female Questionnaire**

Third, in the Female Questionnaire, married or cohabiting women whose husbands were not currently living in the household were asked,

AD-8: "Where is your (husband/partner) currently living?"

And the answer categories on the response card included

"Armed Forces," and

"Correctional Institution (jail, prison)"

The fourth step toward including these populations in Cycle 6 was to include, and interview, military personnel who lived off-base when our screening procedures found them. Whether the sample size of this group is large enough to generate statistically reliable estimates has not yet been determined.

The fifth step would be, in Cycle 7 or 8, to do the necessary background work to do a Pretest or Pilot study with one or both of these populations. That is,

- a) Consult with staff of the Dept of Justice and/or the Dept of Defense, and write a questionnaire for incarcerated (prison or jail) or military respondents, and decide whether that questionnaire should be administered in person or by telephone, and whether it should be administered only in English, or also in Spanish.
- b) submit the questionnaire for formal clearance to the Dept of Justice or Dept of Defense.
- c) Submit the questionnaire and survey plans to the appropriate Institutional Review Boards (IRB's), and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). Note that prisoners are a specially protected population in IRB rules and special justification has to be made to interview them. IRB approval may not be immediate.
- d) Conduct and evaluate a Pretest.

The sixth step would be to repeat steps (b) and (c) and conduct a Main Study.

For local, specialized samples, not all of these steps will be necessary in all cases, but some will be. And the issues discussed here will likely be applicable to many surveys on family-related topics. I would urge survey directors to consult the personnel at the Departments of Justice and Defense as you design your survey. Our experience is that they can help you understand the issues you have to face, and make sensible decisions about how to handle them.

Based on what we have learned so far, it appears that the procedures for interviewing the military population may be more similar to those for interviewing the civilian non-institutional population than for those in jails and prisons.

The prison/jail population would require more changes than the military population in the questionnaires---particularly on recent sexual and contraceptive behavior---as well as significant changes in survey procedures. So it appears that there is more work to do in adapting our procedures and questionnaires to interview prisoners, than to interview active-duty military personnel.

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