

U.S. Department of Justice  
Federal Bureau of Prisons  
Office of Research & Evaluation

---

---

# Research FORUM

---

Vol. 1, No. 2

June 1991

---

## Summary of Results from the 1990 Prison Social Climate Survey

*By Tim Brooks, Peter Brustman, Evan Gilman,  
Roxie Schoppet, and Scott Styles*

**F**or three years in a row — since the first official administration of the Prison Social Climate Survey (PSCS) — the percentage of staff responding to the questionnaire has increased. In 1988, 38.8 percent of staff randomly selected to be surveyed completed and returned the PSCS. In 1989, the response rate was 72.2 percent and in 1990, the most recent administration, the response rate was 80.9 percent. The survey, which is administered to a representative sample of staff throughout the Bureau of Prisons, covers four main areas: safety and security, work environment, quality of life, and personal well-being. Another section asks for the sociodemographic characteristics of those responding to the survey.

This report highlights some of the more notable findings for the Bureau overall.

### **Sociodemographic Data**

Based on the information provided in the sociodemographic section, we can assess the degree to which PSCS respondents are representative of BOP staff overall. A comparison of background characteristics of social climate respondents with those of all BOP staff reveals very little difference between the two groups. In other words, staff who responded to the social climate survey in 1990 appear to be representative of staff in the BOP. As a result, it would appear that the

---

### **Also In This Issue**

---

Staff Assaults . . . . . page 7

KI/SSS Administrative Remedy Info. page 8

133764

**U.S. Department of Justice  
National Institute of Justice**

This document has been reproduced exactly as received from the person or organization originating it. Points of view or opinions stated in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the National Institute of Justice.

Permission to reproduce this ~~copyrighted~~ material has been granted by

Public Domain/Federal Bureau  
of Prisons/US Dept. of Justice

to the National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS).

Further reproduction outside of the NCJRS system requires permission of the ~~copyright~~ owner.

survey findings can be generalized to BOP staff overall.

### Tenure of Respondents

The length of employment of PSCS respondents, as expressed by the median number of months employed by the BOP and at their current institution, has progressively declined since 1988 (see Table 1). The table also indicates that the trend for PSCS respondents is reflective of the trend for all BOP staff for the last 3 years. The trend is due to the influx of new staff and the relative decline of more experienced staff.

	<i>Tenure at current institution (figures from PSCS)</i>	<i>Tenure in the BOP (from PSCS)</i>	<i>BOP tenure of all institution staff (from JUNIPER for October)</i>
1988	43	77	58
1989	30	52	52
1990	25	45	44

The percentages of all BOP staff with *less than 3 years* service are, by year: 1990, 44 percent; 1989, 40 percent; 1988, 36 percent. The percentages of staff with between 3 and 19 years service declined from 61 percent in 1988 to 58 percent in 1989 to 55 percent in 1990.<sup>1</sup>

### Personal Safety and Security

The Personal Safety and Security section of the PSCS asks staff to give their impression of the overall safety of the living/working conditions in their institution over the 6 months prior to responding to the survey.

**Inmate safety issues:** In 1988, 1989, and 1990 the average number of confrontational incidents among inmates perceived to have occurred in the past 6 months remained the same. In all 3 years, respondents reported an average of 14 heated arguments, 5 unarmed assaults, 2 armed assaults, and 1 sexual assault during the 6 months prior to the survey. The consistency in the numbers of incidents reported in 1988, 1989, and 1990 is especially noteworthy given the concurrent increase in the inmate population. It is interesting to note that, while staff perceptions of the

number of incidents occurring over these 3 years stayed the same, their evaluation of the likelihood of an inmate being assaulted in his or her living unit fluctuated. In 1990, 43 percent responded that it was "likely" or "very likely" that an inmate would

be assaulted in his or her living unit, up from 35.9 percent in 1989 and 38 percent in 1988.

**HIV-related issues:** For all 3 years, the majority of staff reported that they had some contact with inmates they knew or suspected were HIV-infected. The percentage declined, however, in 1990 (55%), compared to both 1989 (75%) and 1988 (61%). In 1990, 17 percent reported contact "now and then," another 23 percent "often" or "very often," and 14 percent "all the time."

Over the 3 years, concern among staff, including staff who never or rarely have contact with these inmates, has remained stable. In 1990, 49 percent reported being bothered "a little" and 36 percent reported being bothered "a great deal" by the number of inmates infected with HIV. For each of the 3 years, roughly 14 percent considered leaving because of the threat of contracting AIDS. In 1990, 17 percent of staff said they believed the disease had interfered with the performance of their duties; 20 percent said it had a negative effect on their working relationship with inmates; and 6 percent said it negatively affected their working relationship with other staff.

Restricting the focus to the responses of correctional officers reveals a strong shift from 1989 to 1990 on the issue of HIV-infected inmates and how they influence the performance of correctional officer duties. In 1990, 59 percent of correctional staff indicated that HIV-infected inmates did not interfere with the performance of their duties, up from 49 percent in 1989.

In both 1989 and 1990, staff were split on their views as to whether the BOP administration was telling them all it knew about the HIV's threat to staff members. In both years, 42 percent agreed that the BOP administration "is [not] telling us all it knows about any threat the HIV virus poses to staff members," and in both years, staff were split, with 41 percent disagreeing with that statement. Correctional officers were the most skeptical with regard to this issue. In 1990 and 1989, 51 percent and 54 percent, respectively, felt that the BOP had not completely informed staff about the threat of HIV infection, and only 32

percent and 31 percent, respectively, felt that it had.

Eighty-nine percent of all respondents in both 1989 and 1990 felt that all inmates should be tested for AIDS, with 93 percent of correctional officers feeling this way. In 1990, almost 50 percent of staff felt that the odds of acquiring an HIV infection from an inmate were either negligible or low; 28 percent said there was a moderate chance; and 20 percent said chances were high. The response was similar in 1989.

More than any other group, correctional officers (26%) felt chances of acquiring an HIV infection from an inmate were "high," and 31 percent felt chances were "moderate." The figures are similar for 1989.

### Quality of Life and Work

In this section of the PSCS, staff were asked to give their impressions of the overall quality of living and working conditions at their institutions during the past 6 months.

In both 1989 and 1990, staff believed that there were more inmates housed in their institutions than could be effectively managed. In 1990, staff felt there were, on average, 18 percent more inmates housed at their institution than could be effectively managed, a slight decrease from the 1989 average of 20 percent. Staff also believed that crowding in the inmate housing units had declined. In 1990, 61 percent of staff felt that the housing units were 'moderately' to 'very' crowded — down from 66 percent in 1989.

Staff perceptions of inmate privacy, as well, shifted slightly from 1989 to 1990. Consistent with their view that crowding levels had decreased slightly, staff were less likely to report in 1990 that inmates had 'very little' or 'no' privacy in their housing units and more likely to say that inmates had a "moderate amount" of privacy.

Most Bureau staff surveyed in 1990 (93.8%) had never filed a grievance against management. Of the 170 who had, 52 (30.6%) did so in the past 6 months. Of those 52, almost all (92.5%) were 'not at all' or only 'partially' satisfied with the responses to their grievances, compared to 90 percent who felt this way in 1989. The most common reason for *not* filing a grievance was that staff had no complaints against management (59.5%), although 13.4 percent said fear of management reacting adversely was their reason for not filing a grievance.

In 1990, almost one-fourth of staff surveyed (23.2%) believed that the costs of the inmate administrative remedy procedure outweighed the benefits, up 3.1 percent points from 1989. Correspondingly, only 37.1 percent in 1990 believed that the benefits of the administrative remedies procedure outweighed the costs, down from 41.1 percent in 1989.

### **Personal Well-Being**

Staff were asked to give their impressions of their psychological and physical well-being and of the Bureau's Wellness Program.

In response to the 1990 PSCS, Bureau staff reported they were psychologically and physically healthy. Fifteen percent of the respondents reported worrying about

personal concerns (e.g., financial, family, individual) "once a week or more," while only 8 percent reported psychological problems and 7 percent, physical problems on at least a weekly basis. These figures are similar for 1988 and 1989.

Sixty percent of staff reported that they were non-smokers, and 37 percent, that they did not drink alcoholic beverages. Sixteen percent of staff, however, said they smoked "once a week" or more, and 4 percent of staff reported drinking to excess "once a week" or more. The figures for 1988 and 1989 are similar.

Most staff report that a variety of Bureau-sponsored Wellness Programs were available at their institutions. From 1989 to 1990, participation in two of the more popular wellness programs (staff physical fitness activities and the fitness center) improved. In 1990, 14 percent of staff reported participating in staff physical fitness activities at least once a week, up from 10 percent in 1989. Staff reporting use of the physical fitness center at least once a week grew to 21 percent in 1990 from 14 percent in 1989.

### **Work Environment**

This section of the PSCS asks staff to assess certain aspects of the work environment at their institutions and in the BOP overall.

In 1990, most respondents reported being satisfied with the BOP (74.5%) and their respective institutions (73.5%). Seventy-five percent believed that their own institution was well run, and 71 percent believed that their own department was well-run. Each of

these results represents a slight increase over 1989.

Most 1990 respondents (72.2%) felt that their supervisors supported participation in the Bureau's training programs; 65.4 percent felt that the training programs helped improve their job performance. The increases in each category from 1989 were 6.9 and 4.1 percent, respectively.

In 1990, responses were more favorable than in 1989 for each item dealing with staff performance and the recognition staff receive for their performance. Most staff continued to believe that their hard work will be recognized (64.8%) and that their performance ratings represent a fair and accurate picture of the quality of their work (64.9%). In addition, most staff (53.4%) said they believed that they receive information about their performance in a timely fashion.

It is interesting to note, however, that only 34.3 percent of staff surveyed in 1990 believed that promotions are related to performance on the job and only 40 percent believed that their good performance would lead to a cash award. Reconciling these less favorable staff perceptions with their belief that their hard work will be recognized is difficult. One possible interpretation is while staff believe that in the long run their hard work will be recognized, they are more skeptical about whether promotions and/or cash awards are always the result of hard work on the part of the recipients.

In 1990, approximately 46 percent of staff believed that there were job advancement opportunities for them at their institution — compared to 44 percent in 1989. When

minority staff responses are contrasted with non-minority staff responses, however, a difference of opinion over the existence of job advancement opportunities for minorities at their institution is readily apparent.

When considering job advancement opportunities for minorities at their institution and in the BOP generally, non-minority staff views remained virtually unchanged since 1989. They believed that opportunities for minorities were favorable at their institution (82.0%) and in the BOP generally (88.6%). Opportunities for everyone on the whole have not changed much either, according to non-minority respondents; favorable views of opportunities "at the institution" increased from 44.5 percent in 1989 to 45.8 percent in 1990. As regards opportunities "in the BOP overall," the favorable response increased from 79.5 percent in 1989 to 81.4 percent in 1990.

When considering job advancement opportunities for minorities at their institution and in the BOP generally, minority staff optimism has been enhanced since 1989. They said that opportunities for minorities were favorable at their institution (59.0%) and in the BOP generally (78.5%), up 4.6 and 5.8 percentage points, respectively, since 1989. Fifty-seven percent of minorities believed that opportunities for everyone on the whole were favorable at their institutions, up 6.8 percent since 1989. And for "everyone in the BOP," 81.2 percent of minorities believed that job advancement opportunities are favorable, a 5.8 percent increase since 1989.

## Summary

The survey results discussed in this paper show that BOP employees view the agency, their institutions, and their departments favorably. In 1990, only 6.2 percent of respondents reported ever having filed a grievance against management — most reported they have not had a complaint significant enough to prompt them to file a grievance.

Although the inmate population has continued to rise, staff reported that crowding has decreased and that inmate privacy has improved. In addition, staff estimates of the number of heated arguments and various types of assaults among inmates has remained steady since 1988 despite the increased inmate population.

With respect to the HIV-related items on the survey, staff in 1990 reported less frequent contact with inmates they knew or suspected were HIV-infected than in either 1988 or 1989. Over these 3 years, staff concern over the number of inmates who are HIV-infected has remained stable, with about half (49%) of the 1990 respondents reporting being bothered "a little" and 36 percent bothered "a great deal."

Some of the survey findings were less positive. For example, although staff believe that their hardwork will be recognized, they

are less convinced that good performance on their part will lead to a cash award or that promotions are related to job performance. Also, although both minority and non-minority staff reported similar views on job advancement opportunities throughout the BOP, their views differ markedly when considering opportunities for minorities and non-minorities at the institutional level. Staff views on these subjects (rewards for job performance and advancement opportunities for minorities) will be the subject of further research.

Finally, respondents reported that they are physically and psychologically healthy. The Bureau's provision of and employees' participation in the various Wellness Program components will also be the subject of further research.

Most of the information in this report is available on the Key Indicators/Strategic Support System (KI/SSS). The results can be looked at for an institution, region, security level, or the BOP overall. In addition, survey results can be broken down by the race, ethnicity, gender, job classification, supervisory status, and experience of the respondents. For further information, contact the Office of Research and Evaluation at 202/724-3121.

---

<sup>1</sup> It is possible that the higher median tenure for 1988 respondents, relative to 1989 and 1990, is due to the sampling procedure for the survey for that year, which eliminated staff with less than 6 months tenure at their current institution and to the overall lower response rate of 38.8 percent for that year.

## Assaults on Staff Reported to Correctional Services Show High Proportion with Injury

Incident Report forms on assaults to staff reported to Correctional Services in 1990 were analyzed by the Office of Research to retrieve information on injuries to staff, type of weapon, and activity or assignment of assaulted staff<sup>1</sup>. Of the 185 victims in 1990, 74 percent received an injury. In 80 percent of the cases, no weapon was involved, in 14 percent, a blunt object was used, and in 6 percent, a sharp object was used. Three-fourths of the victims were either supervising inmates or had custody of prisoners at the time of the assaults.

### Assaults on Staff, Calendar Year 1990

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Knife or Sharp Object</i>	<i>Blunt Object</i>	<i>Without Weapon (hands, fists, feet)</i>
Killed	0	0	0	0
Injured	136 (74%)	11	16	109
No injury	49 (26%)	0	10	39
Total Victims <sup>2</sup>	185 (100%)	11 (6%)	26 (14%)	148 (80%)

### Activity or Assignment of Staff when Assault Occurred

<i>Total</i>	<i>Custody of Prisoner</i>	<i>Invest./ Searches</i>	<i>Office Duty</i>	<i>Inmate Supervision</i>	<i>Other</i>
185 (100%)	60 (32%)	22 (12%)	15 (8%)	82 (44%)	6 (3%)

<sup>1</sup>These statistics will appear in a forthcoming FBI publication entitled, "Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted, 1990."

<sup>2</sup>Number of staff assaulted with a weapon and without a weapon is also available in Key Indicators.



---

---

# New KI/SSS Features

## Administrative Remedies

Information on administrative remedies is now available in a one-page format that includes the number of remedies submitted, rejected, filed, answered, and granted within 25 main subject areas. In addition, a graphic display of total filings over time is now available by facility and region, and for the BOP overall.

## Updates Menu

Another new feature, an "updates menu," allows users to identify display programs that have either been added or modified since the last release of Key Indicators. This menu is accessible only from the scrolling menu mode. (NOTE: Select menu item 6 - B, "Enable New Style Scrolling Display," from within KI/SSS Utilities. Next, press F4, "Pick Menus/Job Lists." Then

select F6 to load alternative menu. Finally, place highlight bar on "updates" with the arrow key and press [Enter].

## KI/SSS Development Requests

"KI/SSS Development Requests," has been added to the KI/SSS Utilities menu, under option 6-3. This display lists all the requests the Office of Research has received concerning changes or enhancements to Key Indicators and the status of any action taken on these requests.

## Listing of Current CEO Assignments

"Listing of Current CEO Assignments," displays the current Chief Executive Officer at all BOP locations and the date he/she began at that location.

**Distribution:** Director, Assistant Directors, Regional Directors, Wardens, Associate Wardens, Executive Assistants, Department Heads, Union Representatives, Executive Staff Members, Central Office Branch Chiefs.