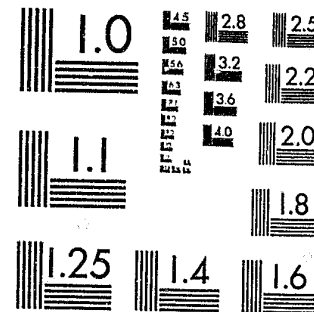## National Criminal Justice Reference Service

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The Organization and Management of Jails:
An Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

The Organization and Management of Jails

Research Objectives

Background

The jail is a unique institution in the United States. Usually located in the sheriff's department, it is used by the community as a basic catch-all for society's problems ranging from drunks, mentally ill, misdemeanants, felons, juvenile runaways, and other minor offenders. Numerous national commissions have at one time or another studied the jail as an American institution or as a component of the criminal justice system, and have come away with suggestions and recommendations to reduce its population, to improve its program effectiveness, and to generally improve its administration.1 In the course of time, some improvements have occurred. More jails are now under state inspection systems, some are involved in the serious implementation of national and/or state standards, and some jails are being improved as a result of court order.

Although much has been said about the problems of the jail and the difficulty of dealing with a diverse population with serious and diverse needs, little systematic attention has been paid to how elements of the organization and the administration of the jail are interrelated and what effects these elements may have on the day-to-day operations. Traditionally the jail has been a major responsiblity of the county sheriff. As usually organized, the sheriff's department has three functions: providing services to the court; providing law enforcement for the county; and providing the wide variety of detention services noted above. The latter two functions are related but not always compatible.

In increasing numbers over the past 20 years, sheriffs in both larger jails and some smaller jails have appointed jail managers to run the jail. This has left the sheriff free to pursue what is usually his first priority -- law enforcement. It has also reduced to some extent the conflict in objectives and competing needs. The sheriff is thus free of a function which he may often feel takes him away from his primary responsibilities. A jail manager focusing on the problems and needs of the jail, provides a manager whose top priority is the effective operation of the jail.

Hypothesis

A previous study of implementation of jail standards indicated that jails with jail managers were more often at a higher level of compliance with state ordered jail standards.2 The current hypothesis grew out of that observation:

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the more independent the jail is from law enforcement and other court services, the more likely the jail manager will be able to compete for and utilize resources to effectively operate the jail. The more successful competition for resources is a result of the greater priority given jail when there is someone who has the singular function of operating it.

Almost by definition, the jail is not a popular institution either in the minds of those who are incarcerated in it or in the minds of those who must pay for it. Nevertheless, the jail is a critically important institution in the criminal justice system. The contrasting issue in the hypothesis is found in the question of how professional leadership may be exercised to obtain the necessary resources for the jail and how to obtain the employment of effective and necessary administrative practices for internal jail operations.

Some argue that the sheriff has significant local political power and influence arising from the fact that the office is a constitutionally defined elected one. The sheriff has a set of resources with which to effect proper jail management. No appointive administrator in an independent jail could ever hope to match the relative resource position of the sheriff. The counter argument does not question the power and influence of the sheriff, but rather stresses that the low priority of the jail among the three major sheriff functions results in the total absence of any exercise of influence for the benefit of solving jail problems. The manager of an independent jail may have less influence than the sheriff, but the total weight of that influence will be used on behalf of improving the management and operation of the jail.

The hypothesis that the more independent jail is more effective than the traditional sheriff-run jail was tested by whether the former had better control over resources for the jail. A second test was whether it employed more of the modern management techniques available to jail management. The final and ultimate test for the hypothesis was the degree to which jail incidents were more effectively reduced by jail managers.

Methodology

A telephone survey was conducted in order to test the hypothesis. The questionnaire was designed to solicit information on organizational and administrative structure, management of resources, use of management techniques in the jail, and the occurence of violent incidents.

Research Design

The framework of the research was based on three critical functions an organization must meet: the technical function--security, control, safekeeping, and programs; the institutional function--access to community resources; and the managerial function--control of the in and out flow of resources.

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The critical design issue was that of capturing the differences in jail organization and management which would indicate the degree to which the jail manager (the responsible party whether sheriff or some other person) places a high priority on the resource and management needs of the jail. Based upon the initial argument that the sheriff has three functions of which the jail has the lowest priority, jail organization structures were categorized in terms of the degree to which jail operations were removed from the sheriff's direct operational management. Under this initial rationale, jails fell into five categories.

1. Traditional Sheriff: sheriff runs the jail with no internal bureaucratic distinctions

2. Sheriff/Line Officer: sheriff appoints an officer to run the jail

3. Sheriff/Jail Administrator: sheriff appoints an administrator to run the jail

4. Elected Jail Manager/Sheriff (no law enforcement responsibility: Kentucky's elected jail managers and a variety of sheriffs who do not have responsibility for patrol and other direct law enforcement activities.

5. Independent County Jail: professional manager appointed by the county board

The second and fourth categories represented a high degree of uncertainty for the research. The second category relieves the sheriff of day-to-day responsibility for the jail and potentially provides a manager whose first priority is the jail. On the other hand, it is not clear that there is any influence to be associated with the jail manager position.

The fourth category was problematic for two reasons. First, the preliminary evidence on Kentucky's elected jail manager was that they have not been historically known for their training or expertise on jails. On the other hand, it would seem that the prioritization is clear. The sheriffs in this category do not exercise primary law enforcement activities, but they do retain their responsibilities to the court. It appeared that the relative priority of the jail should be higher, but there was no preceding evidence to that effect.

Sample Selection

The basic source for drawing the sample of jails was the Census of Jails, 1978 (BJS, 1981). The universe of jails was reduced by using several criteria. First, only county jails were included in the sample. This criteria eliminated all jails in state-run systems, short-term lockups, and all of the city jails. Second, all county facilities which hold only sentenced prisoners were eliminated. The essential rationale here was that whatever the multiplicty of roles of the jail, one of the longest standing is clearly the pretrial function. The major impact of this reduction was to eliminate county work farms and prisons of several of the southern states. Third, county jails greater than 250 in average daily population as reported in the 1978 Census were eliminated. It was decided early in the study that large jails have a different organizational structure and identity due to the necessity of bureaucracy in a very large sheriff's office. The question of singularity in the jail manager's attention to the jail is resolved no matter what the manager's title may be. Hence, large jails were considered outside the parameters of the research. With all of these reductions the universe for our sample still constituted over 80 percent of the jails in the 1978 census.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data was collected by telephone survey, using a pretested survey questionnaire which yielded over 200 variables. The sample drawn contained 269 jails. There were 207 interviews of jail respondents completed as designed. Respondents from 17 communities drawn in the sample reported that their jails had either been closed altogether or reduced to lockups. Of these 16 agreed to special interviews on management of pre trial defendants in the absence of a jail.

The analysis centered on the examination of three sets of data. The first set of indicators was composed of a basic organizational classification, jail manager characteristics, jail staff characteristics, and budget influence. The second set of indicators was based on a number of management practices which included policy statements, programs used, orientation procedures, classification procedures, and the use of volunteers. The third set of indictors was based upon the incidence of problems in the jail; these included the number of fires, escapes, assaults, deaths, and incidents involving property damage.

A separate analysis was conducted on the interviews of sheriffs whose jails had been closed or reduced. This analysis centered on how arrangements were made for detention of pre trial defendants and whether there had been changes in the numbers being detained under the new arrangements.

The Jails in the Sample

Preliminary questions in the survey solicited information on the character of the jails and the jail populations. The responses provided an up-to-date view of the small jails of the country.

Facility Characteristics

There is a fairly wide variation in the ages of the nation's jails. Seventeen percent of the jails were constructed before the turn of the century and another 17 percent between 1900 and 1929. On the other hand, 45 percent were built since 1960 and most of that group were built since 1970. (Table 1)

Table 1

Date of Facility Construction

Date	Number of Jails	Percent
Prior to 1900	33	17.0
1900 - 1929	33	17.1
1930 - 1949	21	10.8
1950 - 1959	19	9.7
1960 - 1969	22	11.3
1970 - 1979	58	30.0
1980 - Present	8	4.1
	194	100

(13 respondents failed to answer the question)

Whatever the age distribution, the jails lacked equipment and program space useful for inmate management. Only 53 percent have some type of electronic monitoring (audio or visual). Only 30.6 percent report indoor recreation facilities and only 40 percent report outdoor recreation areas.

The reported capacities of the jails in the sample were small as shown in Table 2. In part the apparent small sizes of the jails in the sample was planned by the exclusion of jails with reported populations of over 250. On the other hand, it is interesting to note that the distribution of jail size is not significantly different from the total universe of jails. The National Sheriff's Association reported a very similar distribution in their census survey of jails.3

Table 2

FACILITY CAPACITY

Capacity	Number	Percent
1 - 16	48	23.4
17 - 30	60	29.3
31 - 62	54	26.3
63 & Over	43	21.0
Totals	205	100.0

(2 respondents failed to answer the question.)

Contrary to the situation found in the large urban jails, the jails in our sample were not generally overcrowded. The populations of almost all of the jails were under their reported capacities. Analysis of the capacities did show that 26.1 percent (54) exceeded 80 percent of capacity with a few exceeding 100 percent. Still, as Table 3 shows, the average daily population of the bulk of the jails of the country is quite small.

Table 3

AVERAGE DAILY POPULATION

Population	Number	Percent
1 - 8	59	28.6
9 - 16	36	17.5
17 - 30	52	25.2
31 - 62	31	15.1
63 & Over	28	13.6
Totals	206	100.0

(1 respondent failed to answer the question)

Jail Population Characteristics

The empirical results of the survey with respect to the persons held by the jails confirm the repeated assertions of jail reformers for the past 100 years. The jail is a residual institution serving a wide variety of clients (Table 4). In spite of efforts to introduce detoxification centers, 90.6 percent of the jails still report holding inebriates. Almost as many (84.5%) report holding mentally disturbed persons. Despite the substantial efforts of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), 51.9 percent report holding juveniles. In part these characteristics reflect the fact that efforts at new programs and jail reform are focused upon the large jails and their large populations. These reforms are slow to develop in the smaller jails. As intended by the research design, virtually all of our sample held both pretrial and sentenced misdemeants.

Table 4

TYPE OF INMATES HELD

Jail Holds this Type of Inmate	Number of Jails	Percent of Sample
Females	173	84.0
Juveniles	107	51.9
Inebriates	183	90.6
Mentally Unstable	174	84.5
Weekenders	138	67.3

Overlapping these populations are several other groups of persons. Almost 30 percent house convicted felons under contract for the state. Holding for the federal government was reported by 34.8 percent of the jails.

Although holding inmates for the state and federal governments was not uncommon, the primary type of jurisdictional crossover that occurred was between county governments. Almost 50 percent of the jails reported holding inmates for neighboring counties on a regular basis. The reasons were security, crowding, lack of a facility, or the neighboring county's inability to provide for a special class of inmate (eg., females).

Basic Jail Organization

The sample distribution over organizational types is seen in Table 5. Although the traditional sheriff-run jail still constitutes the plurality of jails, the sheriff/jail administrator organization may be becoming far more common. Since we oversampled jails known to have jail managers and since we have no historical evidence, this statement must remain speculative.

Table 5

DISTRIBUTION OF JAILS BY ORGANIZATION

Type of Organization	Number	Percent
Traditional Sheriff	88	42.7
Sheriff/Line Officer	24	11.7
Sheriff/Jail Administrator	67	32.5
Elected Jail Manager*	14	6.8
Independent Jail	13	6.3
Totals	206	100.0

* Sheriff without a primary patrol and law enforcement responsibility and elected jail administrators were put in this category.

Jail Staffing

The bulk of the jails were understaffed. As Table 6 shows 40 percent (6.7% + 33.3%) of the jails had fewer staff than would be required for 24 hour coverage with only 1 staff member per shift. There was no clear indication that the lack of staff was made up with part-time employees. The use of part-time employees was spread throughout the jails with no ascertainable pattern or relation to the full-time staff needs. Nor were all of those jails with less than 4 full time-staff members all small jails. One jail with an average population over 60 had only 4 staff. There were 34 jails with populations in the 11-60 range with less than 4 full-time staff. While few if any were really adequately staffed, the jails which were close to effective staff levels were spread throughout the size categories.

Table 6

FULL-TIME STAFF IN THE JAILS

Number of Staff	Number of Jails	Percent of Sample
None	14	6.7
1 - 4	69	33.3
5 - 9	60	29.0
10 - 19	38	18.4
20 or more	26	12.6
Totals	207	100.0

Summary

The jails in our sample show wide variation in organizational and physical characteristics. We suspect that the diversity of the sample is the result of many changes over the past 30 years. Had such a sample been drawn in the early 1950's, we believe there would have been fewer new jails, fewer full-time staff, and little use of jail administrators or line officers to operate the jails. We believe that our sample represents a snapshot of a nation of general purpose jails in transition.

Findings

The hypothesis that the organizational design for jail management is related to the most effective management of the jail was not proven. However there was a positive correlation between effective jail management and correctional training. This was reflected in the existence of programs and the employment of other management techniques which resulted in a low level of incidents in the jails making use of them; all of these factors were positively related to correctional training of the sheriff and/or jail administrator.

Training Levels

In fact, the incidence of training is an interesting finding of the study. The independent jail had the highest rate of trained administrators, 92.3 percent. From the organizational point of view as represented by Table 5 above, the traditional sheriff organization shows a greater percentage of

sheriffs trained in corrections, 79.9 percent, than does the jail administrator serving under a sheriff, 62.7 percent. When the manager's title is considered independently of the organizational structure, the jail administrators show the highest rate of training (79.1%). The sheriffs follow with 64.8 percent, and line officers trail at 45.8 percent.

Two points emerge from the analysis of training. One, the title of jail administrator does reflect the training associated with the name. This point can be made stronger by noting that this group includes Kentucky's elected jail administrators who did not reflect the same level of training.

The second point of note is that those sheriffs who are running the jails themselves are apparently taking the role more seriously than previous literature would suggest. While the overall rate of correctional training for sheriffs is only 64.8 percent, the rate for those retaining responsibility for running the jail is 15 percentage points higher at 79.9 percent.

Managing Resources

The underlying theme of the study was that the jail's independence is measured by the ability of its administrator to control its boundaries; in other words the ability to exercise some control over the flow of resources needed to operate the jail, some ability to influence the in and out flow of its clientele for population control, and the ability to influence the activities (related to the jail) that take place within its jurisdiction. The issue of independence from law enforcement reflected in the organizational categories was based on the assumption that the priority of law enforcement for the sheriff results in little exercise of control or influence on behalf of the needs of the jail.

No clear pattern of this type emerged from the research. Rather, the jail manager, whether he be a sheriff or an administrator, exercised little observable control. Resources in the form of funds, programs, and services appear to remain beyond the jail manager's control. For example, where the jail had a separate budget (67% of the sample), only 14 percent had the jail administrator responsible for budget preparation. Nevertheless, those jail managers with correctional training appeared to employ management techniques which would suggest they were obtaining greater resources. Whether their apparent successes were related to resource issues the questionnaire did not elicit or whether the training allowed better use of the resources available remains an open question.

Program activities represent significant resource requirements for small jails. In the sample, jail managers with correctional training provided these programs in different ways. Some were able to provide them within the operational budgets. Others depend upon community resources. Often other public agencies in the community may be used for these purposes; and these agencies can and do set the criteria for program involvement (e.g., welfare,

mental health, vocational rehabilitation, drug and alcohol programs).
Nevertheless, the provision of the programs did have effect on the reduction
of jail incidents.

Internal Management of the Inmates

The jail manager does control the activities that take place within the
jails's confines, specifically security, safety of staff and inmates, level of
supervision, and the control of inmate behavior. Although the ability to
provide this control may be modified by the ability to provide personnel, the
study did find that training at all levels was positively correlated with
interior boundary control: the higher the level of training, the fewer the
incidents.

These internal management characteristics were manifest in the number of
actions taken with respect to inmates. The level of effort placed upon inmate
orientation and classification, the number of jail activities covered by
written policies, and the level of provision of inmate programs were all
related to the correctional training of the jail manager. These efforts, in
turn, were all associated with fewer disruptive incidents in the jail. The
provision of inmate programs (regardless of whether they were provided under
the jail budget or by cooperative agreement with other community agencies)
showed the strongest relation to reducing violent incidents.

It is important to note that these relations were observed while
controlling for population size. Some of the smallest jails in the sample had
extensive programs, orientation, and classification procedures. The key
controlling influence on the presence of these procedures was the training of
the manager.

Managing the Flow of Inmates

The ability to control the in and out flow of persons into the jail was
seen as the most serious problem. Jails cannot determine who can and cannot
be admitted. Nor do they have the authority to release. Other agencies in
the criminal justice system determine who enters the jail and who is released
under what conditions. Releases on recognizance are usually the function of
the police or courts, bail is determined by the courts, and diversion programs
are controlled by other community agencies. While there are clear traditional
reasons for most of these processes, it is surprising that the full-time
keepers of persons incarcerated are seldom consulted.

One of the consequences is that many persons slip through the cracks of
other intended community alternatives and end up in the jail. The broad mix
of persons and their problems found in the jail are illustrative of this fact.
All too often, when questions are addressed concerning boundary control issues
(removing inebriates, juveniles, and mentally ill from the jail), the jail

manager is not even included in the discussion. In addition to these problems
of boundary control on the intake side, there are problems with the outtake
side. These are illustrated by the inability of jails to transfer convicted
felons to state prisons, resulting in jail overcrowding. In these instances,
although the state may be willing to pay per diem for the prisoners, they
refuse to accept transfer due to crowding problems of their own.

There were two results from the study showing some boundary control. The
first and most common was for sheriffs to seek cooperative agreements with
other nearby sheriffs. There was some (less than expected) willingness of the
jail manager to deal with some of the problems informally through meetings
with judges, county attorneys, and county commissioners. Most of those who
exercised some effort have modified the limitations of boundary control
through arrangements with other jails to accept persons not suited for their
jails (eg., women, juveniles.)

The second result arose from the special survey of the jails in the
sample which had been closed. Most of the respondents reported that they had
been able to use pre trial release to reduce the number of persons who had to
be incarcerated. One of the respondents had almost completely eliminated pre
trial incarceration. Of course, the counties represented here were small and
had limited pre trial needs. What is significant, is the fact that when
forced to, these jail managers (all were sheriffs) discovered that they could
influence the decision on who must be incarcerated. Moreover, almost all
reported that there were no additional community problems created by the pre
trial releases. In the cases where incarceration was required, the sheriffs
maintained cooperative agreements or formal contracts with nearby county
facilities.

Summary

The one factor that stands out in the study is that correctional and
management training make a difference in terms of internal jail management.
Regardless of organizational arrangement, jails had internal management
controls and fewer incidents where the administrator had correctional
training. Trained administrators were more likely to work toward modifying
the boundary controls through contacts and negotiations with outside agencies.

Policy Implications

The research findings in this study have been significant in reaffirming
several pre-existing beliefs about what is needed in jail management across
the country. The research failed to confirm the hypothesis that independence
of the jail from the law enforcement sheriff leads to a more effectively
managed jail. It nevertheless points to the significant issues of jail
management and operations which should be in place in jails regardless of the
whether the manager is a sheriff or a jail administrator. The following are
the more significant issues arising from the study.

Correctional training is the single most important contributing factor to effective jail management. This single element was correlated with every indicator of effective management as well as with the reduction of violent incidents.

The implementation of written policies and procedures, the use of definitive orientation procedures, and the use of formal classification procedures have direct impact upon the reduction of violent incidents.

The provision of jail programs whether provided within the jail's budget or through contractual arrangements with other agencies has direct impact upon the reduction of violent incidents.

The size of the jail is not a necessary constraint to having a professionally trained administrator, nor to the implementation of effective management techniques, nor the provision for programs.

While very few jail managers appear to make the attempt to influence policy decisions which affect the jail intake and outake, evidence from counties with closed jails suggests that they can and should make the attempt to influence these decisions.

The findings also suggest that the efforts to provide and encourage correctional training, written policies and procedures, program development, and effective pre trial release mechanisms by the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, the National Institute of Justice, and the National Institute of Corrections, are having their impacts on the small jails, albeit slower and less extensive than in the large jails. These previous efforts clearly need to be enhanced by more dissemination efforts with respect to the small jails.

The significance of programming in reducing jail incidents suggest that additional efforts are needed in this area. In particular, efforts are needed on alternatives for programs in the relative small jails in which there are limited community resources available.

Finally, more research is needed on minimum resources and their costs for effectively operating small jails. Such research needs to be supplemented with information on the techniques for managing criminal justice needs for counties without jails. These research components should provide decisionmakers in very small counties with the capacity to decide whether it is more effective for them to operate with only a lockup or for them to provide the resources for an effective jail.

ENDNOTES

1. These activities are documented in the major report for this study, The Organization and Management of County Jails. Alexandria, VA: Institute for Economic and Policy Studies, Inc., 1985.

2. Henderson, Thomas A., Randall Guynes, and Robert Grieser, Strategies for Implementing Jail Standards/Inspection Programs. Institute for Economic and Policy Studies, Inc., 1981.

3. The National Sheriffs' Association, The State of Our Nation's Jails -- 1982. Washington, DC: Author.

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