

Understanding the OJJDP Survey of Conditions of Confinement in Juvenile Facilities

In May 2010, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) published findings from the Survey of Youth in Residential Placement (SYRP) in a bulletin entitled *Conditions of Confinement*. OJJDP surveyed 7,073 youth in custody at 204 facilities during the spring of 2003 to assess conditions of confinement in detention centers, corrections facilities, camps, community based facilities, and residential treatment centers across the country. The study's key findings and methodology are outlined below.

Key Findings

- Facility Size
 - **42%** of youth are housed in facilities with more than 100 youth
 - **15%** of youth are housed in facilities with more than 300 youth
- Population Characteristics
 - **20%** of low-level offenders¹ live in units with youth who have killed someone
 - **25%** of low-level offenders live in units with felony sex offenders
 - **60%** of youth report the presence of gangs in their facility
- Use of Force and Due Process
 - More than **33%** of youth reported that staff used unnecessary force in interactions with residents
 - **50%** of youth reported that staff applied punishment without cause
- Use of Restraints²
 - **28%** of youth reported that staff used some method of restraint³ on them
 - **7%** of youth reported that staff used pepper spray on them
 - **4%** of youth reported being placed in a restraint chair
 - The use of restraints indirectly affects many youth
 - **29%** of youth live in units where staff placed 1 or more residents in a restraint chair
 - **16%** of youth live in units where staff placed more than **10%** of residents in a restraint chair
 - **30%** of youth live in units where staff used pepper spray on 1 or more youth
 - **21%** of youth live in units where staff used pepper spray on more than **10%** of residents

- Isolation⁴
 - **35%** of youth reported being placed in isolation
 - **87%** of isolated youth reported being isolated for longer than 2 hours
 - **55%** of isolated youth reported being isolated for longer than 24 hours
 - The majority of youth in isolation for 2 hours or longer indicated that they had not spoken with a counselor or mental health professional during their period of isolation⁵

- Grievances and Complaints
 - **19%** of youth reported not knowing how to file a complaint
 - **20%** of youth reported fearing retribution if they did file a complaint

- Access to Family Members
 - **59%** of youth reported that their families had to drive 1 hour or longer to visit them
 - **28%** of youth reported that their families had to travel 3 hours or longer to visit them
 - **33%** of youth who had not had in-person family visits reported that this was due to either distance or inconvenient visiting hours
 - **20%** of youth who had not had in-person visits or phone calls reported that the lack of contact was due to resource constraints (e.g., lack of a long distance calling plan, traveling costs, or a lack of transportation)

Methodology

The SYRP is the third survey conducted by OJJDP in an effort to provide statistics on youth detained in the juvenile justice system. The SYRP is the only national survey that has gathered data directly from youth in custody through the use of anonymous surveys. Researchers surveyed youth between the ages of 10 and 20 who were in custody at detention centers, corrections facilities, camps, community based facilities, and residential treatment centers. Researchers administered surveys electronically through an audio computer-assisted self-interview system, which asked questions and recorded answers.

The SYRP sample is drawn from all facilities surveyed for the two ongoing studies conducted by OJJDP: the Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement (CJRP) and the Juvenile Residential Facility Census (JRFC).⁶ Researchers narrowed the sample to youth between the ages of 10 and 20 who were housed at facilities that hold a minimum of three youth. SYRP drew a nationally representative sample of 240 facilities from a total of 3,893 juvenile facilities nationwide.⁷ Of the facilities in the sample, 204 participated, yielding an overall facility response rate of 85%. Public facilities participated at a significantly higher rate (89%) than private facilities (74%).

Statisticians weighted the responses to adjust for bias and non-response. Thus, the survey provides an estimate of the size and characteristics of the national population of youth in custody. In considering the current descriptive value of the data, the reader should keep in mind the date of collection (2003).

¹ Low-level offenders refers to status offenders, technical parole violators, and youth who report no offense.

² The study defined restraint as a method to control youth through the use of handcuffs, wristlets, a security belt, chains, restraint chairs, or pepper spray.

³ The study noted that some youth may have considered the times they were either handcuffed or restrained during transportation to and from the facility, a common practice within high security placements, as a restraint.

⁴ The study defined isolation as a practice in which youth are “locked up alone or confined to their room with no contact with other residents.”

⁵ Best practice guidelines recommend that youth held in isolation longer than two hours speak with a counselor or mental health professional.

⁶ Andrea J. Sedlak, *Introduction to the Survey of Youth in Residential Placement*, (Mar. 2010), available at <http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojdp/218390.pdf>.

⁷ SYRP statisticians stratified the targeted universe by a number of factors to reduce sampling error. These factors included security level, public versus private facility, size, proportion of females, proportion of adjudicated youth, average length of stay, facility type, proportion of Latinos and African Americans, and the four census regions.