

National Survey of Youth in Custody

Report on the Development and Testing of the
Study Design

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NATIONAL SURVEY OF YOUTH IN CUSTODY REPORT ON THE DEVELOPMENT AND TESTING OF THE STUDY DESIGN

1. Introduction

On September 4, 2003, President George W. Bush signed into law the Prison Rape Elimination Act of 2003 (PREA) (Public Law 108-79). The law was passed, in part, to overcome a shortage of available research on the incidence and prevalence of sexual violence within correctional facilities.

Due to the sensitive nature of violent victimization and potential reluctance to report sexual assault, the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) will collect multiple measures on the incidence and prevalence of sexual assault. To implement the Act developed the National Prison Rape Statistics Program, which includes five separate data collection efforts: the National Survey of Youth in Custody (NSYC), the Survey on Sexual Violence, the National Inmate Survey, the Former Prisoner Survey, and a medical surveillance project to track medical and behavioral indicators of sexual violence.

Through a cooperative agreement with BJS, Westat designed the survey methodology that will be used to collect data for the NSYC. The NSYC will collect self-reports of sexual assault by youth in juvenile facilities. The surveys will be administered using Audio Computer-Assisted Self-Interview (ACASI) methodology. This involves youth responding to a computer questionnaire using a touch-screen, following audio instructions delivered via headphones.

To develop the methodology for the study, BJS and Westat completed a pilot project which assessed the feasibility of conducting the study of this complexity and sensitivity. This involved two activities. The first was to develop the survey design and procedures. This activity had to meet a number of challenges, including: 1) designing a sample to provide facility-level estimates, 2) obtaining parental consent for underage youth, 3) protecting the emotional well-being and physical safety of youth, 4) fully informing youth about the conditions and consequences of participation and 5) collecting quality information at the level of detail required under PREA. The second set of activities was working with administrators of juvenile facilities to develop procedures to address concerns with collecting data on such a sensitive topic. These two activities were interrelated. Many of the challenges listed above (e.g., protecting the youth from harm, obtaining consent, collecting quality data) were naturally concerns for

administrators as well. Consequently, many of the survey design decisions were influenced by feedback received from the administrators during the development process.

This report summarizes the activities associated with the development process. Section 2 focuses on the development of the basic survey methodology. Section 3 summarizes the results of the two pilot tests that were used to test and refine the methodology. Conclusions are discussed in Section 4. An appendix of the PowerPoint presentation delivered at the PREA Workshop for Juveniles (Washington, DC, August 28, 2007) is attached.

2. Development of the Survey Methodology

The survey methodology includes all aspects of the procedures used to collect the data, including the sample design, addressing human subject concerns and development of the questionnaire. This section summarizes the design process for each of these design components.

2.1 Sample Design

An initial decision on the sample design was to restrict the population to youth who were adjudicated. This excluded youth who were in a facility because they were awaiting a court hearing or determination of placement. This restriction was made for practical reasons related to obtaining parental consent for youth under 18 years old. Most of the youth in custody are under 18 years old. It was expected that for the large majority of the youth, there would be a requirement to obtain consent from parents or a guardian. Youth in residence, because they were waiting to be adjudicated (i.e., in detention), would likely be out of the facility before consent could be obtained. Different methods to obtain consent were considered before making this decision. The possibility of obtaining consent when the youth entered the facility was considered. However, experience from other surveys (e.g., Survey of Youth in Residential Placement) found that this was not an effective methodology. Parents are not typically with the youth at the time they are admitted. Other arrangements were considered, including the use of an advocate who could act in lieu of a parent or guardian. However, this was not seen as practical given the large number of facilities that had to be sampled, as well as other human subject requirements that could not be immediately addressed.

As will be discussed below, the study faced a number of human subject challenges, many of which had never been carried out on a national survey with incarcerated youth on such a sensitive topic. Given this, it was decided to restrict the study to adjudicated youth. If the study succeeded for this group, and there was a desire to conduct a second survey, procedures to include non-adjudicated youth could be considered by adding to the methods developed as part of the current effort.

2.1.1 Defining the sample frame

The PREA required the sample meet two basic requirements¹:

1. Generate reliable facility-level estimates. This is related to the objective of ranking facilities according to their reported rates of sexual assault. Those facilities with the highest and lowest rates would be identified from the ranking.
2. Draw at least one facility from each of the 50 states and the District of Columbia.

With these two goals in mind, two additional requirements were added to the decision process:

3. Oversample females. This was considered because of the relatively small number of girls in juvenile facilities and the desire to collect information on their exposure and risks. Oversampling would allow generation of national estimates for this group.
4. Generate national estimates. While the primary goal of PREA was to generate facility-level estimates, the survey would be collecting data in all parts of the country. It was important to take advantage of this by designing the sample so an estimate for the entire nation would be produced from the survey.

The requirement to generate facility-level estimates poses two problems. Both relate to the relatively small sizes of most juvenile facilities. Compared to adult correctional institutions, youth facilities are relatively small. Many are less than 100 youth, with a large proportion being less than 50. One issue related to size was setting a minimum sample size to produce estimates that are statistically reliable. With the expectation that rates of reporting would be less than 10%, perhaps even less than 5%, small samples would produce highly unreliable estimates unless the number of interviews was sufficiently large. With response rates expected to be around 50%, primarily because of the requirement to obtain

¹ The PREA had a number of other requirements (e.g., sample at least 10% of facilities). In this section we discuss those that were the most important when developing the final sample design.

parental consent, sample sizes were an issue. It was therefore important to maximize the number of large facilities to meet the first objective of PREA. A second issue was that small sample sizes could jeopardize the confidentiality of the information. For example, with a rate of 5% in a facility and a sample size of 60 respondents, there would be 3 respondents who would have reported a positive incident.

To maximize the number of facilities for which it would be possible to generate facility-level estimates, the final sample plan included large facilities with certainty and smaller facilities were sampled with probability proportional to size.

A further restriction was made to restrict the universe to state facilities. In order to collect data on other types of institutions, the frame also included large non-state facilities (e.g., county, municipal, and other) that housed adjudicated youth. The restriction to state-facilities was made to minimize the number of entities that would have to be part of the negotiation process. It was anticipated that each facility would require extensive discussions and negotiations on the type of parental consent that would be obtained, as well as how the interviewing would be supported (e.g., provision of counselors; procedures to make mandatory reports). State facilities have a centralized point of contact to make many of these arrangements. This limited the amount of effort to carry out this part of the survey, although discussions would still have to be conducted with at least the 51 governmental units in the survey. Including all state-run facilities also allowed the study to generate national estimates for a logical universe. A large proportion of large facilities with adjudicated youth are state-run. As a practical matter, therefore, a national sample of state facilities was not overly restrictive for a population of adjudicated youth who reside in large facilities. The addition of the other large facilities to the frame provided a way to cover other facilities that could be reported and meet the PREA mandate of generating facility-level estimates.

The sample frame for the survey would be the 2005 Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement (CJRP) conducted by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. This is the most complete frame that has the requisite information on individual youth within correctional facilities. Table 1 provides the distribution of facilities on the sample frame by size and type of facility.

Table 1. Proposed Sample Frame for the National Survey of Youth in Custody

Size	Facilities			Total	Adjudicated Youth			Total
	State	County	Other		State	County	Other	
less than 20	111			111	1,626			1,626
21 - 50	183			183	5,671			5,671
51 - 89	69			69	4,773			4,773
90 - 120	29			29	2,943			2,943
121 - 150	15	10	8	33	1,987	1,349	1,103	4,439
151 - 250	35	10	11	56	6,869	1,823	2,157	10,849
251 - 350	27	2	1	30	8,083	644	263	8,990
350+	13	0	6	19	5,975	0	3,433	9,408
Total	482	22	26	530	38,272	3,816	6,956	48,699

2.1.2 Selecting Facilities

The final sample design included all State facilities with 90 or more adjudicated youth with certainty. This ensured that the largest facilities would be included and a significant proportion of youth who reside in these correctional facilities were covered.

For the states without a certainty facility, one facility would be selected. These would be selected with probability proportional to the number of adjudicated youth in the facility.

All remaining facilities would consist of those in states with relatively few adjudicated youth and from other states which were not eligible for selection in prior steps. These remaining facilities would be grouped into strata without regard to state. The variables used to form the strata would be percent female, percent Hispanic, type of facility (i.e., state or non-state), region, and facility size. Strata may vary in size. For strata with relatively smaller numbers of adjudicated youth, one facility would be selected with probability proportional to the number of adjudicated youth. For larger strata, more than one facility would be selected, also with probability proportional to number of adjudicated youth.

2.1.3 Number of Youth Sampled Per Facility and Estimated Precision

Sampling youth within facilities would be with equal probability, except that most if not all females would be included in sample. Based on the calculations described below, the design specifies that all youth would be selected who are in facilities with populations under 165. In larger facilities, 165 youth would be selected within each facility. The number of youth sampled in each facility is designed to maximize the number of facilities for which estimates can be published. In deciding how many youth would be sampled within a particular facility, it is assumed that the standard error for a facility estimate is approximately:

$$SEE = \sqrt{\text{Deff} * p * (1-p) / n}$$

Where: SEE is the standard error of the estimate for the facility

p is the proportion of youth reporting nonconsensual contact

Deff is the design effect

The sample of youth would be a simple random sample and would generally not result in a large design effect. However, it is anticipated that nonresponse adjustment factors would not generally be the same for all youth in a facility. This would increase the design effect.

In deciding on the sampling rate, consideration was given to drawing a large enough number of youth to maximize the chances that the survey estimate would have a 95% confidence interval that does not cover 0. Table 2 illustrates one set of calculations used in this design decision. This table shows which combinations of sample size and rates of nonconsensual sexual contact for which the confidence interval would not cover zero. These calculations assume a design effect of 1.5, a response rate of 60 percent, and 90 percent of the interviews would be used to generate estimates of nonconsensual contacts.² Using these assumptions, samples of 111 would be adequately large if the estimated rate of nonconsensual sexual contact is at least 10 percent. For a sample size of 56, the rate is 20 percent or greater. For the largest sample size of 165, a rate of 7 percent or more would have a confidence interval that does not cover 0.

² For reasons discussed below, 10% of the sample was not administered the questions on sexual assault.

**Table 2. Whether or Not Estimate Will Be Statistically Different From 0
By Size of Estimate and Sample Size+**

Sample Size	Rate = 5%	Rate = 7%	Rate = 10%	Rate = 15%	Rate = 20%
56	No	No	No	No	Yes
111	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
165	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

+ Assumes: 1) 95% confidence interval, 2) design effect of 1.5, 3) 60% response rate and 4) 90% of the interviews will ask about sexual assault

Using the design described above, Table 3 provides estimates of designated sample sizes by facility size. The additional sample of female youth, resulting from selecting all females is not included in the table.

**Table 3. Sample Frame and Proposed Sample Sizes
by Facility Size**

Facility Size	Sample Frame		Proposed Sample	
	Facilities	Youth	Facilities	Youth
10 - 20	111	1,626	13	190
21 - 50	183	5,671	40	1,141
51 - 89	69	4,773	35	2,546
90 - 120	29	2,943	29	2,943
121 - 150	33	4,439	33	4,439
151 - 164	11	1,712	11	1,712
165 - 250	45	9,137	45	7,425
251 - 350	30	8,990	30	4,950
350 or more	19	9,408	19	3,135
Total	530	48,699	256	28,481

2.1.4 Minimum Sample Sizes to Publish Estimates

NSYC would make public estimates for individual facilities, except where confidentiality may be breached. To protect confidentiality and to obscure the goal of collecting data on nonconsensual

contacts, a random 10 percent of the sample would be assigned a questionnaire on drug and alcohol use rather than on sexual contact. Thus, no one other than the youth answering the questions would know whether a given youth was asked to complete the questionnaire on sexual contact.

Although it would be impossible to determine individual survey responses, publication of rates based on a small number of reports of nonconsensual sexual contact could significantly increase the risk of identifying a respondent. For this reason, the sample is designed to be able to obtain estimates for larger facilities, where there would be more youth interviewed and a greater chance of meeting the criteria for publishing a facility-level estimate. For planning purposes, we have used a rule that there has to be at least 3 respondents that report nonconsensual contact to publish an estimate. A rule on the absolute minimum number of interviews required to publish an estimate would be developed at a later time.

2.2 Addressing Human Subject Issues

Conducting a survey on sexual assault with incarcerated youth poses numerous issues related to human subject concerns. One issue is providing informed consent. For youth under 18, this involves getting consent from the youth's guardian and getting the youth's assent at the time of the interview. To obtain consent, the Westat IRB approved three different methods:

- The state or facility consents *in loco parentis*;
- A parent or guardian consents in writing or verbally; or
- A youth is considered an adult and self-consents.

The first method involves the state and facility acting as the youth's guardian and providing consent on an individual basis. This procedure does not require any additional effort by the administrator or the project team. For the second method parents or guardians consent in writing or verbally. The process of getting the consent could be carried out by either (or both) the facility and the survey team at Westat. This method begins by mailing out the consent form to the guardians and following up by telephone those that do not return the form. The Westat IRB approved a procedure that waived the requirement to get consent of both parents because it was impractical, given that many youth do not live with both parents. The Westat IRB also waived the requirement to get written documentation of consent. This waiver was provided because the study was considered as minimal risk. As a precaution, if consent was verbally provided over the telephone, the conversation would be recorded whenever possible. These recordings were reviewed to ensure that the consent was properly administered.

The third option was used for youth who were 18 years and older, as these individuals could self-consent.

Given the time required to get consent from parents or guardians, it would be necessary to draw the sample several weeks prior to arriving at the facility. Enough time would have to be allocated to carry out the activities associated with getting consent (i.e., mailing to guardians and following up by telephone) to insure an adequate number of youth could be approached to participate in the survey. An important question addressed on the pilot was whether it would be possible to contact enough guardians and get enough consents to maintain a minimum response rate for the facility.

A second human subject challenge was protecting the youth from emotional harm due to participation in the survey. The interview included a number of questions about victimization which might traumatize the youth. The PREA legislation has a very explicit definition of sexual assault. This led to designing questionnaire items that used specific, graphic, language. In the preliminary pre-testing of the questionnaire, youth indicated that it was better to use explicit language when referencing different sexual activities. General language (e.g., “having sex”; “anal sex”) was not commonly understood by young people. Feedback from youth indicated they were not overly sensitive to the explicit language. In fact, youth thought the survey would not be taken seriously if the language was not direct and to the point. Using euphemisms and/or vague language would send a message to youth that they were not being treated with respect. This sentiment was echoed by several counselors and sexual abuse investigators who reviewed the questionnaire.

In contrast to the youth, the counselors and sexual abuse investigators, administrators were very concerned with exposing youth to the language. Their primary concern was youth would be traumatized. This feedback was obtained through several different channels. One was through informal conversations through outreach activities with selected states (e.g., when asking for participation on the pilot study). Formal meetings were also held with groups of administrators. One was at a meeting of administrators held in December of 2005 which asked for feedback on the initial design of the study. A series of follow-up meetings with selected administrators underscored this point. One of these meetings was at the American Correctional Association meetings in May, 2006. Two other meetings were held in New Jersey with representatives of the Council of Juvenile Correctional Administrators.

Based on this feedback, the questionnaire was redesigned to minimize exposure to the most explicit cues, especially for the youngest children participating on the survey. This was done in several different ways:

1. The initial screening items were consolidated. The initial draft of the questionnaire exposed youth to two sets of screening items -- one for victimization by youth and one for victimization by staff. The revision consolidated these items so youth would only be asked these initial screening items once, covering both youth and staff.
2. A less explicit version of the questionnaire was developed for youth less than 15 years old. This version did not refer to specific body parts in the screening items or explicit acts involving sexual activity. If a youth answered affirmatively to a screening item, they were followed up with more explicit questions if the incident was considered a sexual assault.³ Since it was expected that the vast majority of youth would not report a sexual assault, very few of the youngest respondents would be exposed to the explicit language.
3. The interview was structured to minimize the number of times youth were asked about different types of sexual activities. Once a youth reported a particular type of activity, follow-up questions (e.g., if it was done as a result of force) asked about all activities in a single question, rather than asking follow-ups for each of the activities. This greatly reduced the number of follow-up questions while maintaining the desired level of detail.

A third human subject challenge concerned adhering to state laws requiring survey interviewers to report child abuse and neglect. This requirement directly conflicted with the goals of keeping the interview anonymous. Without a promise of anonymity, it was generally believed that youth would not be candid in their reporting of victimization. A second, unrelated concern was that reporting child abuse and neglect was in direct conflict with federal statutes under BJS authorizing legislation which prohibited revealing the identity of survey respondents.

These two concerns were addressed separately. First, a procedure was developed that had interviewers reporting any abuse or neglect that youth verbally expressed to them. While youth were not directly asked by interviewers about sexual abuse or neglect, youth might self-disclose during the assent process or at any other time the youth had an opportunity to speak with the interviewer. If this occurred, interviewers were instructed to report the incident to the State authorities. On the other hand, once a report of sexual abuse or neglect was entered into the computer, it was anonymous and could not be linked to the respondent's name. The survey was set up so interviewers were not privy to the individual

³ If the incident was with a youth, it was considered an assault if it was reported as occurring by force. All incidents reported as occurring with staff were considered an assault, regardless of whether force was reported.

responses. Interviewers were trained to avoid being in a position to see what the youth was reporting. The youth was informed at the time of the assent that anything they report directly to the interviewer would be reported. However, anything that was entered into the computer would remain anonymous.

With respect to the conflict with the BJS authority, the PREA legislation was amended to include a clause that allowed interviewers to report child abuse and neglect, as required by the individual state statutes.

One other precaution was taken to preserve the confidentiality of the interview. Youth were randomly assigned to one of two questionnaire treatment groups: NSYC or NSYC-A. The NSYC contains questions on sexual assault, while the NSYC-A substituted questions on alcohol and drug use. The random assignment to questionnaire treatment group serves to "mask" which questions an individual are asked, thereby helping to protect the confidentiality of the interview. All youth are asked questions on their background and perceptions of life in the facility. Youth assigned to the NSYC questionnaire group are asked questions on sexual activity within the facility. Those assigned to the NSYC-A questionnaire group are not asked about sexual activity; they are presented questions on drug and alcohol use prior to admission, treatment received before and since admission, and family and peer background (Table 4).

Table 4. Questionnaire Content by Treatment Group

Survey content	NSYC	NSYC-A
Background (e.g., reason for admission, education, race/ethnicity, orientation)	YES	YES
Facility perceptions (e.g., perceptions of staff, environment safety)	YES	YES
Sexual activity within facility (e.g., with other youth, with staff, coercion)	YES	NO
Detail on sexual assault by other youth (e.g., type of coercion, location and time of assault, reports of incidents)	YES	NO
Detail on sexual assault by staff (e.g., type of coercion, location and time of assault, reports of incidents)	YES	NO
Drug use prior to admission (e.g., lifetime and 30 day use by type of drug, abuse, dependency)	If needed	YES
Alcohol use prior to admission (e.g., lifetime and 30 day use, abuse, dependency)	If needed	YES
Treatment (e.g., before and during admission)	If needed	YES
Family and peer background (e.g., household composition, familial drug/alcohol abuse)	If needed	YES

In conjunction with the NSYC_A, an additional precaution was instituted for youth who completed the interview very quickly (by responding “No” to all of the sexual activity screener questions). This used the NSYC-A questions to standardize the time each respondent spends answering the survey. No matter how a youth assigned to the NSYC group answers the screening questions, the computer application was programmed to continue to present questions until a 30-minute threshold was reached. This was achieved by “shifting” from the NSYC questionnaire to portions of the NSYC-A questionnaire. Therefore, the scope of the questions posed to youth assigned to the NSYC group was time-dependent and unknown to anyone but the respondents.

A fourth challenge confronting the study was providing support to youth who became upset from the interview. This was done by arranging for youth to have access to either a counselor within the facility or to someone who worked outside the facility. Youth were informed of the availability of counselors at the beginning and during the interview (through computer screens that reminded them of this opportunity). Youth were offered the opportunity to speak with counselors inside the facility if they were more comfortable talking with someone with whom they had developed a relationship. If, however, they felt uncomfortable talking to someone inside the facility, the youth was offered the option of talking to someone who did not work in the facility. Interviewers were trained to look for any signs that youth may need someone to talk to and to offer these options whenever they felt the youth needed assistance.

As described above, there were a number of steps taken to protect the youth. These different measures created their own challenges to fully inform the youth at the time of getting assent to conduct the interview. Critical elements of the assent included:

- Name of the project sponsor and project goals;
- Voluntary nature of participation, and the options to skip any questions or stop the interview at any time without repercussions;
- Random assignment to one of two survey instruments;
- Explanation of the ACASI survey administration methodology;
- Confidentiality of survey responses and mandatory reporting of any verbal indications of abuse/neglect; and
- Availability of counseling services.

The number and complexity of these conditions (e.g., when reports would be filed with the state; what questions would be administered) made it difficult to effectively inform youth about the conditions for participating on the survey.

To develop an assent that communicated these conditions, several rounds of pre-testing were completed with the assent form to simplify the language. To make sure youth understood the conditions, the interviewer used a scripted version of the assent form that had questions to assess the youth's comprehension of the information. If a youth answered any of the questions incorrectly, the monitor read

the relevant text again and paraphrased the information to help the youth understand. A youth who failed to understand a question a second time was not asked to complete the survey.

2.3 Development of the Questionnaire

In the first section, the rationale for the design of the questionnaire is briefly described. The second section reviews the testing activities that were used to refine the instrument prior to the pilot tests.

2.3.1 Rationale for the Questionnaire Design

The content and structure of the questionnaire reflects several different requirements. One requirement was to use direct and explicit language when asking about sexual assault. The sexual assault portion of the questionnaire begins with a series of “screener” items that describe particular activities. If the respondent reports engaging in any of these activities, follow-up questions are asked about relevant details, including whom it occurred with and whether force was involved. This strategy was based on the desire to provide respondents with a concrete definition of the target activities. It was partly modeled from recent victimization surveys, including the National Crime Victimization Survey⁴ and the National Violence Against Women Survey⁵, which have found this strategy to produce better measures.

A related requirement was to collect information that identified acts defined as an assault under the PREA. The act was quite explicit in terms of what qualified as a sexual assault (see section 10 of PREA). This requirement provided the types of acts that were ultimately included on the questionnaire.

A competing requirement was the need to avoid language that may be too harsh or graphic for young children. As noted in the discussion above (see section 2.2), administrators contacted during

⁴ Kindermann, C., Lynch, J.P. and D. Cantor (1997). The effects of the redesign on victimization estimates. NCJ 164381. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics.

⁵ Tjaden, P. and N. Thoennes (1998) Stalking in America: Findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey. Research in Brief, NCJ 169592. Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

the development process were concerned that the use of graphic language would trigger emotional reactions by the youth. The actions taken to respond to these requirements are described in Section 2.2 above. They included the development of a separate instrument for youth under 15 years old and combining questions to reduce the number questions to which respondents would be exposed.

A final requirement of the design was to collect details about sexual assaults that would provide information on the circumstances related to its occurrence. To meet this requirement, separate sections on the details related to the events were included on the questionnaire. In addition, a series of questions about the climate related to the facility were placed at the beginning of the questionnaire.

2.3.2 Cognitive testing

Cognitive testing was conducted to refine the survey assent process and survey questionnaire. Testing of the assent process assessed the youths' ability to comprehend the study goals and procedures and their rights as research participants. Testing of the questionnaire gauged the reaction of the youth to the language of the questionnaire and identified survey terminology that might cause difficulty for respondents. Testing occurred in the fall of 2006. Youth in four juvenile correctional facilities participated in the interviews: 14 males from two all-male facilities and eight females from two all-female facilities. Table 5 provides information on the facilities and youth who participated in the testing.

Table 5. Characteristics of Facilities and Youth Participating in Cognitive Interview Activities

Facility	Size	Gender	Permission type	Number of eligible youth	Number of youth with permission	Number of completed interviews
1	Medium	Male	ILP	8	8	8
2	Small	Female	P/G	6	2	2
3	Small	Male	P/G	9	8	6
4	Small	Female	ILP	6	6	6
Total				29	24	22

Permission type: ILP=*in loco parentis*; P/G=parent/guardian consent

Staff from each facility identified eligible youth prior to the visit by Westat. Facility 1 and Facility 4 used *in loco parentis* to provide permission for the selected youth to participate; staff from the

other two facilities contacted parents/guardians to obtain permission for their children to be interviewed.⁶ These two facilities initially mailed permission forms to the parents/guardians and asked that they be returned to the facility. This strategy resulted in limited success and required substantial efforts by facility staff to follow-up to get written consent. Table 6 shows the final permission status at each facility.

Table 6. Final Status of Parent/Guardian Permission

Facility	Number of identified minors	Permission status		
		Granted	Refused	Nonresponse
1	8	8	0	n/a
2	6	2	1	3
3	9	8	1	0
4	6	6	0	0
Total		24	2	3

Note: Facility 1 provided consent *in loco parentis*, therefore there could be no nonresponse.

Cooperation among youth selected for cognitive interviews was very high; 22 of the 24 youth asked to participate agreed.

Assent Form

The assent form that was initially tested described the purpose of the study, the burden and activities required during participation, the topics that would be addressed, and the voluntary nature of participation. The text also described how the data would be used and that their responses would remain confidential. Due to state mandatory reporting requirements, the text also indicated that verbal statements to the study staff about abuse or neglect would have to be reported.

Key findings from the testing of the assent procedure indicated the following:

- All the participants understood that they would have the right to refuse to take part in the survey.
- Most youth understood that they would record their answers on a computer laptop and not to the interviewer.

⁶ One participant was 18 years old and therefore able to self-consent.

- Many participants did not understand the description of facility-level reports (that would be produced in the National Survey).
- Many participants did not understand that statements they made to the interviewer suggesting abuse or neglect would be reported to state or local authorities, while answers that they recorded on the laptop would be kept confidential.
- Most youth did not understand that respondents would be randomly assigned to answer questions either about sexual experiences or alcohol/drug use.
- Youth did not pay attention as the assent text was read. About half way through the delivery, many participants appeared to lose interest (e.g., staring out of the windows or at the floor).

These findings led to numerous changes of the form. Part of the reason why youth were not paying attention was because they were required to read along on the assent form. Interviewers noted that youth had a hard time following the text. As a result, the format of the text was switched from a series of relatively dense paragraphs to a series of bulleted statements which the interviewer read.

In terms of the actual text, the changes included the following.

- Facility-level reports: This text was significantly shortened in order to simplify the discussion. In the original version, nine sentences were used to describe how “all of the answers from this place will be combined into one report.” The text went on to explain that staff and residents would be able to read the report and might suspect they knew how individuals answered the survey questions.

In the revised version, this text was replaced by three sentences. The text still stated that a single report will be made about the facility. But there is no longer any discussion about potential readers of the reports or about the possibility that they might think they could identify respondents.

- Mandatory reporting: The original assent text indicated that information recorded on the computer would remain anonymous, but any verbal statement made to the study staff suggesting abuse or neglect would be reported. To highlight this difference in the final version, bulleted text formatting was used to draw attention to the different ways the information would be treated. In addition, a summary statement was added – again to highlight the distinction between information recorded on the computer and that conveyed to the study staff.
- Questionnaire topics: The original version explained that the computer would decide which questions would be asked, including whether respondents (“some people”) would be asked questions about sexual contact or drug and alcohol use. No other survey topics were mentioned.

In the final version, the text refers to “you” (instead of “some people”) and mentions other survey topics, including questions about the staff, other youth, and health services.

The result of these changes was a shortened assent form which provided the conditions in a series of bulleted statements. In addition, questions related to the assent were inserted after each section of the assent. The final design was to have the interviewer administer these items to the respondent. If the respondent did not get it correct, the interviewer would re-explain that portion of the assent. If, after the second explanation, the respondent did not understand that part of the assent, the interviewer would terminate the interview.

Questionnaire

For the testing of the survey questions, youth were instructed not to answer the questions, but only to comment on the meaning of the questions and to answer follow-up questions posed by the interviewer. This avoided situations where the interviewer would have to report an event to state authorities under the mandatory reporting laws. Given the personal nature of the questions, it was also felt that respondents may provide more instructive feedback if they were not concerned with revealing such information directly to the interviewer.

One finding from these interviews was that youth were very receptive to the study and the questionnaire. They did not think that youth would be upset by the language. They also thought that use of more direct, “clinical”, language was the best approach. Findings about specific questions or question terminology are described below.

- Definition of “resident.” Generally, youth interpreted “residents” as all youth who live at the facility. However, one youth was not familiar with the term and several also included staff that lived at the facility.
- Definition of “staff.”
 - Most youth understood that core members of the staff would be included: counselors, guards, etc. They seemed to consider those in positions of direct authority over youth when deciding whether or not to define individuals as “staff.”
 - Youth applied differing strategies when thinking of other types of staff (i.e., those not in positions of direct authority over youth), such as adults who provided services off-site (e.g., teachers at public schools and medical providers at area

clinics) and facility support staff (e.g., cafeteria staff, maintenance workers, and drivers).

- Definition of “private parts” and “sexual things/contact.” Definitions of “sexual things” (younger respondent version), “sexual contact” (older respondent version), and “private parts” were presented in each version of the questionnaire.
 - The definition of “private parts” (i.e., “areas covered by a bathing suit”) was useful. Several female participants said they would not have considered breasts as private parts without that definition.
 - Participants generally shared a common understanding of the term “sexual things/contact.” They said that the terms would include having vaginal intercourse with or touching other young men or young women at the facility, having oral sex, and making sexual comments, or looking at someone in a “sexual way.”
- Definition/Description of sexual activities. All versions of the questionnaire used similar terminology to define or describe specific sexual activities (e.g., “oral sex”). The version of the questionnaire for older respondents also used slang terms for some types of sexual contacts (e.g., blowjob; hand job). Generally, participants thought this took away from the seriousness of the questionnaire, in addition to using the words in different ways. Some of the males said that using terms such as “oral sex” and describing the contact (e.g., “rubbing another person’s penis with their hand”) would better convey the seriousness of the study.
- Questions on perceived sexual activities. Participants were presented three questions about whether they thought other youths had engaged in sexual activities with youth and with staff at the facility. Participants expressed doubt that youth would be able to answer this type of question.
- Wording of questions on coercion. Participants were shown three questions asking about various types of coercion: physical force or threat of physical force; in return for money, favors, protection, or other special treatment; and pressure “in another way...” Participants had a clear understanding of what should be considered physical force or threat of physical force, but they had difficulty distinguishing between “pressure” and the other types of coercion.

In response to these findings, changes were made to terms used throughout the questionnaire; examples were added to help define terms used less frequently in the questionnaire. Changes were also made to simplify the question wording. For example:

- The word “residents” was substituted with the word “youth”
- The reference period was revised from “Since you arrived at this place” to “Since you got here.”

- Several phrases were merged to simplify the coercion phrases. The question phrases “because of physical force or threat of physical force” and “because you were forced in some other way” into “because you were forced to do it.”
- Younger version --- sexual intercourse. The wording of the question on sexual intercourse was too vague (“...put any part of your body inside anyone else’s body”) to a phrase that more explicitly involved private parts (“have you put any part of your body inside someone else’s private parts”).

One change to the content resulting from the cognitive testing was the elimination of questions about youth perceptions of sexual activity among other residents at the facility. The original questionnaire included questions addressing youth perceptions of youth-with-youth and youth-with-staff contacts. The cognitive interview findings indicated that respondents could not provide useful information on these topics, therefore the questions were deleted.

3. Pilot testing

Pilot testing of the NSYC survey methodology occurred in two phases between fall 2006 and spring 2007. Twelve juvenile correctional facilities, located in five states, participated in the pilot tests. Overall, 741 youth completed interviews. Characteristics of the facilities and youth participating in the pilot test are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Characteristics of Facilities and Youth Participating in Pilot Test

Phase and facility	Size	Gender	% Female	Permission type	Number of eligible youth	Number of sampled youth	Number of youth with permission	Number of completed interviews
Phase 1								
1	Medium	Female	100%	ILP	123	65	65	39
2	Medium	Male	0%	PGC	127	127	48	37
3	Small	Male	0%	PGC	57	57	31	20
Phase 2								
1	Medium	Male	0%	PGC	145	145	101	83
2	Small	Female	100%	PGC	54	53	21	21
3	Small	Male	0%	PGC	78	78	41	39
4	Large	Male	0%	PGC	223	223	94	79
5	Medium	Male	0%	PGC	140	140	82	73
6	Small	Male	0%	PGC	91	91	52	48
7	Small	Female	100%	PGC	49	49	29	28
8	Large	Male	0%	ILP	488	165	165	158
9	Large	Co-Gender	17%	ILP	369	126	126	116
Total					1,944	1,319	855	741

Size: Small=50-99 youth; Medium=100-199 youth; Large=200 or more youth
 Permission type: ILP=*in loco parentis*; P/G=parent/guardian consent

The pilot test focused on three broad areas of methodology and addressed several research questions within each area.

- Survey operations:
 - Can an acceptable level of consent to ask youth to participate in the study be achieved?
 - Can the conditions of the study be explained to youth so they can give informed consent/assent?
 - Can the study simultaneously comply with state and local mandatory reporting requirements and protect youth confidentiality?
 - Can youth be provided adequate counseling services in the event they become upset as a result of participating in the survey?
 - How will the study affect facility staff and their operations?
- Questionnaire administration:
 - Can the ACASI methodology protect the confidentiality of youth as they complete the survey?
 - Can the ACASI methodology be used to tailor the questionnaire based on age and experience of the respondents?
 - Can the ACASI methodology successfully govern the time youth spend answering the survey questions?
 - How will youth react to the survey experience?
- Prevalence rates and data quality:
 - What rates of nonconsensual sexual contact will youth report?
 - How do the rates vary by facility?
 - What is the quality of the survey responses?

The remainder of this section focuses on the implementation of the pilot tests and findings related to each of the questions listed above.

3.1 Features of the two-phase implementation

The NSYC pilot testing was conducted in two phases. Phase 1 was designed as a small-scale evaluation of the survey procedures. The primary goal was to investigate youths' reactions to the survey – especially in terms of their experiences answering the sensitive questions and using the ACASI methodology. Phase 1 also provided an opportunity to consider alternative logistical procedures to obtain parent/guardian consent and conduct the interviews. Senior project staff from Westat's home office traveled to the sites to meet with facility staff and interview about 100 youth.

Phase 2 was designed as a more rigorous test of sampling and field data collection procedures. Youth rosters were provided and a random sample was selected from each facility. Nine professional interviewers participated in a 4-day training session. Data were collected from about 650 youth during this phase of the pilot test.

3.2 Survey operations

Project staff got approval from the Westat's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and from state-appointed liaisons for specific procedures to obtain consent to interview youth and assent from the youth themselves. Procedures were also developed to ensure the confidentiality of the survey data, and to comply with state and local mandates for reporting abuse and neglect. Arrangements were also made to provide youth with counseling services in the event they requested such support.

3.2.1 Consent

In accordance with federal regulations, permission to interview a sampled minor was required either from the parent/guardian, the state, or the facility. Project staff and staff from nine facilities worked together to obtain parent/guardian consent to interview youth. The state gave permission to interview youth (i.e., *in loco parentis*) at three sites participating in the pilot test.

Obtaining consent from the state or facility *in loco parentis* was approved by Westat's IRB based on the safeguards in place to protect the youth as research participants. These safeguards included measures such as the random assignment of youth to different questionnaires, using ACASI rather than

asking youth to report experiences to an interviewer, and ensuring that youth have access to counseling if they request or demonstrate the need for services (see section 2.2).

When parent/guardian consent was required, a packet of study materials was mailed to the household. The packet contained a cover letter highlighting the study goals and procedures, a study brochure describing this information in greater detail, a consent form, and a return envelope. At some facilities, telephone and face-to-face contacts were attempted when parents/guardians did not return a completed form.⁷

Westat conducted the consent operations if the state/facility provided contact information (i.e., the name, address, and telephone number of the parent/guardian, and the name of the youth). Otherwise, the facility was responsible for obtaining completed forms. Additional logistical arrangements, such as where completed form would be mailed (i.e., to the facility or to Westat) were negotiated with the states/facilities.

Full-scale efforts to obtain consent for each sampled youth were used only in Phase 2 of the pilot test. Table 8 shows the outcome of the efforts.

Table 8. Parent/Guardian Consent Rates (Phase 2)

Outcome	Percent of sampled youth		Percent of eligible youth	
Youth discharged during contact period	16.5		NA	
State ward (no contact attempted)	1.0		1.2	
Parent/Guardian consented	31.9		38.3	
Parent/Guardian refused	7.0		8.4	
Forthcoming consent indicated (not received)	1.6		1.9	
Other consent nonresponse	42.0		50.3	
Late roster entry/No time to contact		12.6		15.1
Undeliverable mail		3.9		4.6
No telephone number provided		4.2		5.0
Nonworking telephone number		6.7		8.1
Wrong telephone number		2.9		3.4
Answering machine		1.9		2.2
Repeated callbacks without reaching parent/guardian		3.4		4.1
Facility efforts, no details provided		4.2		5.0
Other		2.3		2.7
Total	100.0	42.0	100.0	50.3

NA = not applicable; efforts were not made or were discontinued once a youth was discharged from a facility.

⁷ The consent form included spaces for parents/guardians to indicate whether they consented or refused. Therefore, a completed form was expected from every household.

Key findings from these efforts include the following.

- A significant percentage of youth (16%) that were initially selected to participate were discharged by the time of the field visit. (These youth became ineligible.)
- It was difficult to obtain consent from parents/guardians. Overall, 38% of the parents/guardians of eligible youth agreed to allow contact with their children; 8 percent refused.
- Attempted contact with 50 percent of the parents/guardians of eligible youth resulted in consent nonresponse.
 - Fifteen percent of the nonresponse was due to the late arrival of the youth at the facility. With less than two weeks between arrival and the field visit, there was insufficient time to obtain completed forms for these youth.
 - Twenty-one percent of the nonresponse was due to the lack of a current address or telephone number for the parent/guardian.

There were a number of lessons related to gaining consent from both phases of the pilot tests. First, it was clear that some of the problems related to gaining consent were from difficulties working with the facility or state liaison. In some cases, the facility liaison was a relatively high-level administrator who did not have the time to conduct these activities. As a result, the consent process was not as successful as it could have been. For example, in several facilities, the facility liaison did not regularly update the roster information during the contacting period. As a result, there were a large number of youth who were added to the sample just prior to the facility visit. This partly explains the relatively large percentage of youth who did not have consent because they were a “late roster entry” (15% -- see Table 8 above). Many of these youth had entered the facility a number of weeks prior to the facility visit, but the roster had not been updated until it was too late to get consent. This lesson emphasized the importance of encouraging the state to appoint a facility liaison that had sufficient time to work with the study to draw the sample and support the consent operations.

A related lesson was to make sure the project staff asked about competing activities when scheduling visits with the facility. In one instance a visit was scheduled during a time when the facility was undergoing its annual audit. In another instance a facility was scheduled when many of the youth were to be temporarily placed in another facility. Given this experience, the procedure for scheduling

visits was revised to have project staff specifically probe the facility representative about possible activities that might interfere with the visit.

Finally, this experience led to a re-definition of the population universe. The universe for the pilot study was defined as youth who are resident at the facility at the time of the visit. This gives everyone at the facility at the time of the interviews a probability of selection. It can be managed by finalizing the sample at the time the interviewer visits the facility to conduct the interview. However, the results of the pilot study indicated that the ability to obtain consent for those individuals who are recent entrants (e.g., within last 4 weeks) to the institution was quite low. It took too long to obtain consent for a significant portion of these individuals. As a practical matter, therefore, the samples in facilities that required parent/guardian consent severely underrepresented youth who were new entrants to the facility.

Given this result, it was decided to define the population universe as all individuals who were in the facility as of four weeks prior to the time of the interview. This change had two advantages. The first was that it would allow time for the study to obtain an updated roster prior to the time the interviewers were to visit the facility. This simplified the task the interviewers had to carry out once they got to the facility. If there were any changes at the time of the visit, it would consist of persons leaving the facility. There wouldn't be a need to add anyone to the roster. The second advantage was that it reduced the burden on the facility by eliminating the need to obtain consent for the late entrants.

The disadvantage of this approach was that it missed a small portion of the population that was at risk of being sexually assaulted (i.e., those residents who entered within four weeks of the visit). However, the results of the pilot test indicated that this was a relatively small proportion of the population. The survey instrument included questions on when the first victimization occurred relative to entrance into the facility. Tabulation of these items would provide a method to investigate whether this was true.

3.2.2 Assent and Response Rates

Building on the lessons learned from the cognitive testing of the assent procedures, an interactive process was used to inform the youth about the study goals and procedures. Key elements needed to make an informed decision were conveyed in a script that field staff read to the youth: survey

topics, use of ACASI, voluntary participation, confidentiality (with the exception of verbal reports of abuse or harm), and the availability of counseling services.

The script included five questions to assess youth comprehension of the key elements. For example, after the field staff read the text about the voluntary nature of participation, the youth were asked if they thought they “had to do the survey” or if it was their choice. If the youth erred in response to this (or any of the five questions), the field staff would review the text with the youth and paraphrase the text to convey its meaning. During both phases of the pilot test, one youth failed to comprehend a key element at the end of this procedure; he was not interviewed.

Because Phase 1 did not focus on sampling and recruitment procedures, special attention was paid to these aspects of the methodology during Phase 2. Table 9 shows the percentage of sampled youth that agreed to participate and the percentage of youth that refused or did not participate for some other reason.

Table 9. Response Rates (Phase 2)

Final outcome	Number	Percent		
		All youth	Minors	18 +
Completed Interviews	645	60.3	51.7	88.1
Nonresponse				
No parent/guardian consent	359	33.6	43.9	0
Facility refused access	4	0.4	0.5	0
Youth refused to come to survey	6	0.6	0.4	1.2
Youth refused before assent	9	0.9	0.5	2.4
Youth refused after assent	29	2.7	1.7	6.0
Youth failed assent screener	1	0.1	0	0.4
Youth unavailable	4	0.4	0.6	0.4
Youth discharged from facility	3	0.3	0.1	0.8
Youth did not complete survey	6	0.6	0.6	0.4
Other	3	0.3	0.2	0.4
Total Non-Respondents	425	39.7	48.3	11.9
Total Sample Size	1,070	0	818	252

Key findings related to youth response rates include the following.

- Of the 1,070 youth eligible to participate in Phase 2, 645 completed interviews (60%) and 44 refused (4%).

- The response rate was higher among those youth aged 18 or older than among minors (88% and 52%, respectively); this was due primarily to the lack of parent/guardian consent.
- Most of the youth who refused did so after the assent procedure had been completed. The refusal rate was higher among those youth aged 18 or older than among minors (10% and 3%, respectively).
- In facilities where *in loco parentis* consent procedures were used, response rates for both age groups were between 94 and 95 percent. In facilities where parent/guardian consent procedures were in place, the response rate for the older cohort was 86 percent, compared with 35 percent for the younger cohort.

There were some differences between the sampled and interviewed youth. Compared to the sample, the youth who were interviewed under-represented African Americans and those aged 15 to 17. Hispanics and those aged 18 or older were over-represented. Characteristics of the sampled and interviewed youth are presented in Table 10.

Table 10. Percentage Distribution of Sampled and Interviewed Youth, by Youth Characteristic (Phase 2)

Youth characteristic	Sampled	Interviewed
Race		
White	34.5	36.0
African American	48.6	40.9
Hispanic	13.9	20.6
Other	3.1	2.6
Age		
11-14	8.6	9.0
15-17	67.9	56.3
18+	23.5	34.6
Gender		
Male	88.6	89.8
Female	11.4	10.2
Type of offense		
Crime against person	55.0	57.5
Crime against property	21.9	19.7
Other	23.1	22.8

The pilots indicated that the assent process was working as intended. Respondents were generally attentive during the process and understood the essential components of the study. While only one youth failed to pass the assent, a number of respondents were provided some follow-up by the interviewers to make sure they understood the conditions for participating. Interviewers reported that this process went smoothly.

The main source of non-response was from failure to get consent from the parents/guardians of youth. As noted in Table 9, approximately 87% of the nonresponse was due to not getting consent from parents/guardians (33%/39% = 87%). Youth refusing to do the interview was relatively rare. Approximately half of the consent non-response was because the facility or project staff was not able to get in touch with parents/guardians (Table 8). This emphasized the importance for the study to work with the facility liaison to get timely updates on the roster information. In particular, the project will need to set up a process so that contact information that is found not to be accurate can get updated in a timely way. This would allow the project to use this new information when trying to get consent.

3.2.3 Mandatory reporting

An important requirement of the study was to protect youth who participated in the NSYC pilot test. One study procedure related to this requirement was adherence to state and local requirements for reporting cases of abuse and neglect. Westat staff discussed these requirements with state liaisons as plans were made to conduct the survey in the state. The Westat staff worked with state and facility administrators to set up a procedure to report incidents in a way that followed state law. Since the requirements for reporting incidents varies across states, especially on how to report incidents in a correctional facility, the procedure had to be tailored for each state that was in the pilot test.

A second requirement of the study was to keep the information youth reported on the survey confidential. This requirement conflicted, in some way, with the mandatory reporting requirement. Procedures were implemented that met both of these in way that youth understood and thought was meaningful (see Section 2.2).

In Section 3.3.4, youth reactions to the survey experience are described – including their thoughts about the confidentiality of their survey responses. These data suggest that most youth understood and trusted the confidential nature of their survey data. Overall, 90 percent of the Phase 2

participants agreed with the statement “No one here at this place will ever know my answers to the survey.” Nearly 80 percent agreed with the statement “No one else, outside of this place, will ever know my answers to this survey.”

At the same time, youth seemed willing to tell field staff about perceived experiences of abuse and neglect.

- Mandatory reports were made by youth at five of the nine facilities in Phase 2; the number of reports at these facilities ranged from one to 10.
- Twenty-five Phase 2 respondents made statements to the field staff that fell within the mandatory reporting requirements. Nineteen respondents alleged that they were personally harmed or threatened. Three of the 25 respondents alleged that others were harmed or threatened. Details on the other three reports were not available.
- Among the 19 allegations of personal harm or threat, eight involved facility staff behavior, 10 involved youth behavior, and one involved both staff and youth behavior. Allegations involving staff behavior focused on excessive force during or after an altercation; none involved sexual contact. Allegations involving youth behavior included three cases of sexual harm or threat and seven cases of physical assault or threat.

By all indications, the process for reporting mandatory incidents and preserving confidentiality worked. A valuable lesson learned from the pilot was a greater appreciation for the differences in the laws that govern mandatory reporting. As a result of this experience, it was planned for the national study to have a staff member whose job would be to review the state laws that govern sampled facilities and work out procedures with the facilities when discussions are held on the proper survey procedures. This should make the study less reliant on the facility liaison’s interpretation of the reporting requirements.

3.2.4 Counseling

States and facilities were asked to identify counselors that could be made available in the event a youth became upset as a result of participating in the survey. Youth were told during the assent process that they could talk with a counselor from the facility or from outside the facility if they wished. All the facilities that participated in the pilot test made these arrangements prior to the start of data

collection at the site. In most cases, the counselors from outside the facility were drawn from the state central office (i.e., Department of Juvenile Justice) or from a nearby facility.

During the visits to the facilities, 22 youth asked to speak to a counselor. Seventeen of these youth asked to speak to a counselor from outside the facility. Three of the youth asked to speak to a facility counselor and one youth asked to speak to both types of counselors. In order to protect the privacy of the youth, field staff did not ask them to describe the reason for the request; nor did the staff ask the facility for this information.

Since some youth might have become upset after the field staff left the site, the facilities were asked to keep the counseling staff available for a “reasonable time” after the visit. About two weeks after the field staff left each facility, project staff from Westat telephoned the facility to talk with the survey coordinator and other facility staff. One topic discussed in these calls was youth reactions after the visit. None of the facilities reported any additional request for counseling services during that time.

3.2.5 Facility effects and burden

During telephone followup with facility coordinators and other facility staff, Westat asked about the burden that study procedures placed on them and about how the survey procedures affected facility operations. The facilities offered several useful suggestions for the National Study. For example, some recommended providing facilities with additional written materials related to the responsibilities that their staff would have for study activities (e.g., escorting youth to the interview rooms).

Other comments that the staff made during the followup calls included the following.

- It was easy to work with the Westat project team, noting that the flexibility of the team was particularly important.
- The study procedures were clearly communicated by Westat staff, and easily integrated into the overall facility operations.
- Some special efforts were required, for example, to update parent/guardian contact information.

The primary recommendation that came out of these debriefings was to develop auxiliary material that could be provided to the facility liaison. These materials should provide a detailed picture of

the type of effort the project would entail. This comment pertained to all of the processes discussed to this point, including sampling, updating the rosters, the consent process and the final interview.

3.3 Questionnaire administration

The NSYC study design calls for the survey to be administered on a laptop computer, using ACASI methodology. This data collection technique was chosen because of the sensitive nature of many of the survey questions.

- ACASI provided higher level of privacy to respondents and helped to overcome literacy problems commonly associated with self-administration on paper questionnaires. Using ACASI, respondents were not asked to report answers to another person; rather, they were presented the survey questions aurally through headphones and indicated responses using a touch-screen feature on the laptop.
- ACASI also allowed for extensive programming of the questionnaire. The programming helped to control which youth were presented some of the most sensitive questions based on their age and on their responses to other questions.

Further detail on the features of the ACASI questionnaire, the time required by youth to complete the survey, and their reactions to the questions is provided in the remainder of this section.

3.3.1 Confidentiality

Three methods were used to help protect youth confidentiality during the survey administration. First, ACASI allowed the youth to answer the questions without the direct involvement of an interviewer. As noted above, by interacting with the laptop computer, no one other than the youth knew what questions were presented or how the youth answered.

The second method used to protect confidentiality during survey administration was the use of two study questionnaires (see also section 2.2).

- NSYC questionnaire – the primary study questionnaire that included questions on sexual contact and assaults

- NSYC-A questionnaire – an alternate questionnaire that focused on drug and alcohol use prior to admission and treatment since admission; no questions on assault were included.

Youth were randomly assigned to complete one of these two questionnaires. The assignment was made without the knowledge of the field staff member or anyone from the facility. Without knowledge of the questionnaire assignment, no one could know which youth might have reported an assault.

The third method used to protect confidentiality was to standardize the time each respondent spent answering questions. No matter how a respondent answered individual questions (e.g., reporting an assault or reporting drug use), the computer application continued to present questions until a 30-minute threshold was reached. The NSYC-A questionnaire included a sufficient number of questions to prevent a typical respondent from completing it in under 30 minutes. The NSYC questionnaire could be completed in less time if the respondent reported no sexual contacts. In such cases, at the conclusion of the NSYC questionnaire, the ACASI system automatically shifted the respondents to the NSYC-A questionnaire and presented questions until the 30-minute threshold was reached.

3.3.2 Question tailoring

ACASI methodology was used to tailor question content and wording. For example:

- Content varied by gender of the respondent.
- Wording varied by time since the youth was admitted to the facility.
- Content varied by the types of sexual activities respondent reported.
- In the NSYC-A, content varied by type of drugs used and by type of treatment received.

The ability to tailor content and wording was an especially important feature when asking questions about sexual contacts and drug and alcohol use. The use of two versions of the NSYC questionnaire was one of the most significant examples of tailoring. The first two sections of each version were identical; these sections asked questions on the youths' background (e.g., education) and perceptions of the facility (e.g., interactions between staff and youth). The third section of each version introduced the topics of sexual contact and sexual assault. This section was followed by the last two sections – one asking about sexual assault by other youth and one asking about sexual assault by staff.

These last two sections were only asked of youth that reported one or more assaults when completing the third section.

Tailoring in the third section was based on the age and experience of the respondent. In both versions of this section, youth were asked a short set of questions to determine if they had been assaulted. Examples of these “screener” questions for older respondents include:

- Since you got here, have you rubbed another person’s penis with your hand or has someone rubbed your penis with their hand?
- Since you got here, have you put your penis, finger, or something else inside someone else’s rear end or has someone put their penis, finger, or something else inside your rear end?

Respondents who were under 15 years old were asked screening questions that used less explicit terminology. Examples include the following two questions.

- Since you got here, have you touched anyone’s private parts with your hand or has anyone touched your private parts with their hand?
- Since you got here, have you put any part of your body inside anyone else’s private parts?

Respondents who answered any of these screening questions affirmatively were then asked follow-up questions that asked about more specific sexual activities.

Youth in both age groups who reported assault in either version of the NSYC questionnaire were then routed to the follow-up questions in the last two sections of the questionnaire. ACASI was used to tailor the content of the questionnaire based on the experiences of the respondents.

3.3.3 Administration time

As mentioned above, the ACASI system was programmed to control the time youth spent completing the questionnaire. The goal was to limit administration time to approximately 30 minutes. The ACASI system monitored the time from the start of the survey through the completion of each section of the questionnaire. When a section was finished, if the “clock” registered under 25 minutes (total administration time), the system would initiate another section. This process would continue until the 30 minute threshold was reached.

Among all Phase 2 pilot test respondents, both the mean and median administration times were 30 minutes. The time to complete the two different questionnaires was slightly different. For the NSYC, the mean and median time was 30 minutes. The median administration time among the youth assigned to the NSYC-A questionnaire was 32 minutes.

3.3.4 Youth reactions

Overall, respondents found participation to be a positive experience. This assessment is based on findings from a set of questions administered (via ACASI) at the conclusion of the survey instrument. Youth were asked specific questions about:

- the value of surveys like the NSYC and NSYC-A;
- the likelihood that they would have participated once they learned what it would be like;
- whether they found any of the survey questions upsetting or confusing; and
- whether they felt their answers would remain confidential.

In addition, interviewers were asked to observe whether the youth showed any kind of signs of being upset, either by saying something or through any non-verbal communication.

Youth were asked separate questions about the value of conducting surveys 1) “about the way things are in places like this;” 2) “about their sexual experiences in a survey like this;” and 3) “about their experiences with drugs in a survey like this.” Ninety-six percent expressed support for asking about “the way things are.” Large majorities also expressed support for the other two statements (80% and 82%, respectively).

Eighty-seven percent of the youth said they would have participated in the survey had they known beforehand what the experience would be like. This opinion was shared by most youth regardless of age or questionnaire assignment (i.e., NSYC or NSYC-A).

The survey did not overly upset youth. Seventy-five percent of the respondents disagreed with the statement “some of the survey questions made me upset”. Of the 25% of youth who agreed with this statement, 80% said that they would choose to participate in the study again. Similar observations

were made by the interviewers. Only 13 of the 645 Phase 2 respondents were observed by interviewers as showing any type of emotional upset.

Other findings related to youth opinions about the survey include the following.

- Fewer than ten percent of respondents found questions on any particular survey topic to be “hard to understand.”
- Twenty-two percent thought that the survey was “too long.”
- Eighty-four percent said that they would prefer using the ACASI methodology to complete the survey rather than to have been asked the questions by an interviewer.
- Youth felt that the survey data would remain confidential, with 90 percent agreeing that “no one here at this place will ever know my answers to this survey” and 79 percent agreeing that “no one else, outside of this place, will ever know my answers to this survey.”
- Thirty percent of respondents thought that young people would not tell the truth when answering the survey questions.

Overall these data indicated that procedures put in place for communicating the conditions of the study, for safeguarding the confidentiality of the respondents and for minimizing emotional trauma on the youth were working.

3.4 Data Analysis

The questions for the data analysis revolved around three issues:

- What rates of nonconsensual sexual contact will youth report?
- How do the rates vary by facility?
- What is the quality of the survey responses?

The analysis of the pilot data addressed these questions by analyzing both Phase 1 and Phase 2 data. In the first section below, the first two questions are addressed (rates that are reported and variation across facilities). The second section discusses the analysis of data quality.

Across both Phase 1 and Phase 2 facilities, 742 youth participated in the pilot test; approximately 669 completed the NSYC questionnaire and portions of the NSYC-A questionnaire (depending on total survey administration time) and approximately 73 completed only the NSYC-A questionnaire. In the analyses below, the survey data were not weighted or adjusted for non-response.⁸ Analyses that combine across facilities were not adjusted for size of facility or for clustering within facilities.

As mentioned earlier in this report, the facilities that participated in the pilot tests were chosen by the states that agreed to support the pilot test. As such, the facilities do not represent a sample of any particular universe. Respondents in the pilot are much more serious offenders when compared to the national population universe. Fifty-Five percent of the youth sampled for Phase 2 were adjudicated for crimes against persons, compared with 39 percent of adjudicated youth in the population universe. Perhaps most relevant is that approximately 26% of the sample were adjudicated for a sex offense compared to 9% for the national population universe.

3.4.1 Prevalence rates

For the purposes of this analysis, nonconsensual sexual contact included:

- Sexual contact with reported coercion. This is sexual contact with either another youth or a staff member where at least one of the following types of coercion were reported
 - Physical force or threat of physical force, or
 - Force or pressure in some other way, or
 - In return for money, favors, protection, or other special treatment.
- Sexual contact without reported coercion. This is any type of sexual contact with a staff member that did not involve one of the three types of coercion shown above.

Across all 12 facilities, 19 percent of interviewed youth reported some type of nonconsensual sexual contact.

⁸ Non-response adjusted prevalence rates were computed for each facility. However, the weights did not affect the relative rankings of facility estimates.

- Thirteen percent reported sexual contact with coercion. This included 7 percent reporting contact with another youth at the facility and 8 percent reporting contact with a staff member.
 - 6% indicated that they were physically forced to take part in the activity.
 - 9% percent indicated there was some other type of force or pressure.
 - 9% indicated that they participated in exchange for favors or protection.
- Eight percent alleged contact with a staff member without reported coercion.

Note that youth could have reported more than one type of contact and more than one type of coercion.

With respect to facility level rates, four of the 12 facilities had rates of nonconsensual contact which was not statistically different than 0. At the other eight facilities, rates ranged from about 15 percent to 28 percent. These results indicated that rates of alleged nonconsensual sexual contact do vary by facility. However, very few of the rates for facilities were statistically different from each other, primarily because of the small sample sizes for many of the facilities.

The type of coerced contact were much different for incidents involving other youth and staff. For incidents involving youth, the rate of incidents was uniformly distributed across the major categories included on the questionnaire (touching, mouth, anal, vaginal and other). For reports involving staff, the majority of the reports involved vaginal penetration.

3.4.2 Data quality analysis

One of the concerns related to collecting self-reports of sexual assault from incarcerated juveniles is the quality of the information. Given the sensitive and personal nature of the topic, one concern is that youth would not report incidents. On the other hand, a number of administrators were concerned that youth would over-report in order to put the facility in a bad light.

On the Pilot, data quality was assessed by examining the extent youth reported in a consistent and logical way. Two types of analyses were done with the Phase 2 data.

- Examination of “outliers” – Were there cases of logically inconsistent reports (e.g., males reporting vaginal contact with another youth in an all male facility)? Were there

cases of extreme reports (e.g., report a large number of forced sexual assaults since admission)?

- Examination of construct validity – Are the relationships between variables consistent with expectations (e.g., receiving medical care for an injury and seeing a doctor because of an injury)? Are youth consistent in reporting issues that should be correlated with whether or not they report being sexually assaulted (e.g., reported assault by facility staff and negative assessment of staff)?

Table 11 shows the results of the “outlier” analysis. Logical inconsistencies were detected in the responses from 101 youth. The majority of these inconsistencies (68) were based on answers to questions about receiving medical care. Two questions in the survey focused on care provided as a result of an injury: “...which, if any, of the following conditions have you received medical care for...an illness, an injury,” and “Did you see a doctor, nurse, or other health care person for any of these [reported] injuries?” Sixty-eight youth gave contradictory answers to these questions. These provided the largest number of inconsistencies examined.

The other 33 cases with logical inconsistencies contained answers to questions on sexual contacts that would be highly unlikely. Examples of such responses included 7 male respondents who reported vaginal contact with another youth in an all male facility, and 14 youth who reported not worrying about assaults by staff even though they reported being forced to have sexual contact with staff.

Thirty-three youth provided answers to survey questions that were defined as extreme: reporting forced sexual contact by both staff and youth; spending less than 20 minutes to complete the interview even though an assault was reported;⁹ and reporting a large number of forced sexual assaults since admission.¹⁰

⁹ When a respondent reported an assault, additional questions on the characteristics of the assault were presented. In this case, it is unlikely that a youth would be able to consider and answer the entire battery of questions in less than 30 minutes.

¹⁰ For this analysis, a “large” number was defined as a function of time since admission and number of assaults.

- If they reported 12 or more forced sexual assaults and were admitted within the last month
- If they reported 27 or more forced sexual assaults and were admitted within the last 2 months
- If they reported 56 or more forced sexual assaults and were admitted within the last 3 months
- If they reported 69 or more forced sexual assaults and were admitted within the last 6 months

Table 11. Number of Youth Providing Inconsistent or Extreme Reports, by Type of Report

	<u>Number of youth</u>
Inconsistent reporting	
Males reporting vaginal contact with another youth in an all male facility	7
Males reporting vaginal contact when perpetrator was identified as a male	3
Report positive assessment of environment <u>and</u> report forced sexual contact	5
Report not worrying about being assaulted by staff <u>and</u> report forced sexual contact with staff	14
Report not worrying about being assaulted by youth <u>and</u> report forced sexual contact with youth	4
Inconsistent reports about seeing a doctor	68
Extreme reporting	
Report having forced sexual contact by both staff and youth	10
Report an assault <u>and</u> spend less than 20 minutes completing the questionnaire	6
Report a large number of forced sexual assaults since admission	3
Report more than one physical assault per day by staff or youth since admission	14

Removing the “outlier” cases from the Phase 2 data set reduced the estimate of reported coerced sexual contact. Whereas the estimate based on the full set of Phase 2 respondents was about 12 percent, once the “outliers” are removed, the estimate dropped to about 7 percent.

To examine the construct validity of the survey data, comparisons were made between the responses to four sets of survey items provided by youth who reported coerced sexual contact at the facility and those that did not report such contact. Statistically significant differences were found for each comparison.

- Youth that reported coerced contact since admission were more likely to report being sexually assaulted prior to admission (27% and 8%, respectively)
- The more favorable a youth’s opinion of the facility environment, the less likely he/she was to report coerced sexual contact since admission. The percent reporting coerced

contacts ranged from 5 percent among those with the most favorable opinion to 29 percent among those with the least favorable opinion.¹¹

- Youth opinion of facility staff was negatively related to likelihood reporting coerced sexual contact since admission, ranging from 7 percent among youth reporting the most favorable opinion of the staff to 23 percent among those reporting the least favorable opinion.¹²
- There were positive relationships between reported fear of being assaulted in the facility by staff or by youth, and reports of being coerced to engage in sexual contacts with staff or with youth.¹³
 - Fifteen percent of youth reporting fear of assault by staff also reported coerced contact with staff since admission to the facility. Four percent of youth reporting no fear of assault reported coerced contact.
 - Eleven percent of youth reporting fear of assault by youth also reported coerced contact with youth, compared with 2 percent of youth that did not report fear of assault.

4. Conclusions

The efforts to design a methodology that can be used to capture data on the prevalence and characteristics of sexual assault in juvenile correctional facilities were successful. With the assistance of many state and local corrections agencies and with support from parents/guardians and the young respondents, questionnaires and data collection procedures were developed that protected the confidentiality of participants, abided by state and local mandatory reporting requirements, and resulted in meaningful data.

Facility staff helped identify important steps to take during the implementation of the NSYC. For example, it is critical that procedural requirements related to rostering youth and contacting parents/guardians be communicated to the facilities early in the process so that arrangements can be made to ensure accuracy and timeliness of the information provided. But overall, facilities that participated in the pilot test reported that NSYC procedures were flexible and minimized burden as much as possible.

¹¹ Examples of items used to assess opinion of facility environment include statements such as “youth are punished when they don’t do anything wrong,” and “facility staff use force when they don’t really need to.”

¹² Examples of items used to assess opinion of facility staff include statements such as “staff are good role models,” and “staff are mean.”

¹³ Survey questions used to assess fear of assault asked if the youth worried “about being hit, punched, or assaulted by staff/other youth here.”

Obtaining consent, either from parents/guardians or from states *in loco parentis*, will be key to the success of the study. Working closely with Institutional Review Boards and other state research committees is an important step in determining the best approach to achieve an adequate consent rate. Likewise, collaboration with the state liaisons and facility coordinators to contact parents/guardians and document consent will be essential. Pilot test findings suggest that successful strategies can be identified and implemented.

The clarity of the assent materials and the process used to communicate key elements of assent to youth will require an interactive approach between the youth and the study representative. Reliance on written materials will not be sufficient to convey to youth their rights as research participants. However, the findings from the cognitive testing identified methods that were successful in the pilot tests. Overall, the youth who participated in the tests were very positive about their experience and felt that the survey was important.

Finally, the data generated by the survey will produce meaningful estimates of alleged sexual assault. Although the prevalence rates were higher than expected, this might be partly explained by the nature of the facilities and youth that participated in the pilot tests. In addition, it appeared that some youth reported extreme response or inconsistent data; these “outliers” could be defined and removed from the data set. Similar procedures could be used in the national study, and in fact, additional methods to assess these conditions could be built into the questionnaire.