



U.S. Department of Justice

Office of Justice Programs
Bureau of Justice Statistics
Washington, D.C. 20531

MEMORANDUM

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Through: Melody Braswell
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From: Lynn Langton
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Re: BJS Request for OMB Clearance for Cognitive Testing of the Victim-Offender Overlap Study (VOOS) under the NCVS Generic Clearance Agreement (OMB Number 1121-0325)

The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) requests clearance for cognitive interviewing tasks under the OMB generic clearance agreement (OMB Number 1121-0325) for activities related to the National Crime Victimization Survey Redesign Research (NCVS-RR) program. The requested set of cognitive interviewing efforts will focus on finalizing the questionnaire that will be used in the Victim-Offender Overlap Study (VOOS). The VOOS is a collaborative effort between BJS and the Office for Victims of Crimes (OVC) to assess the feasibility of collecting data on victimization and offending from a sample of jail inmates. The primary purpose of the VOOS is to better understand the intersection of victimization and offending. A secondary purpose is to better understand the extent of NCVS undercoverage due to persons not captured in a household survey because of periods of short-term incarceration and highly transient lifestyles. Once the instrumentation has been finalized through cognitive testing, it will be pilot tested with a sample of jailed persons age 18 or older. OMB approval for the VOOS pilot test will be sought through a separate clearance request.

Under this clearance, the VOOS instrument will be tested using face-to-face cognitive interviewing techniques. Face-to-face cognitive testing will be conducted iteratively with up to 50 persons over multiple rounds of testing. The purpose of this face-to-face cognitive testing is to ensure that the questions are accurately identifying victimization experiences and the response to victimization among the interviewed jailed population. The testing will also focus on the ability of this population to recall events occurring prior to incarceration and will ensure that the questions are understood and are appropriate for jail populations that can differ by demographic characteristics.

Background on the Project and Instrument Development

Although research has consistently shown that criminal victimization and offending are strongly correlated, victimization and offending are often studied independently, and there has not been sufficient coordinated effort to understand the association between these two experiences. The NCVS is a key source of data on victimization, yet it does not include any questions pertaining to offending and by design, the sample excludes those who are incarcerated. There are good reasons for these exclusions; for instance, research suggests that a victimization survey might not be an appropriate vehicle for collecting information on self-reported offending. However, this leads to gaps in understanding the extent to which victims are also offenders, and vice versa. To address this gap, BJS initiated the VOOS project to better understand the intersection of victimization and offending.

The goal of the VOOS project is to develop, pilot test, and implement a survey instrument and data collection methodology that will capture information from jail inmates about their pre-incarceration victimization experiences and criminal behavior; the association between victimization and offending; and the unmet service or resource needs of incarcerated populations. The key objectives of the current component of the project are to develop, refine, and pilot test a VOOS instrument with a sample of approximately 2,000 jail inmates to better understand the relationship between victimization and offending, and to assess the cost, resources, and challenges associated with implementing the VOOS with a national sample. Jail inmates offer an important opportunity to examine the relationships between victimization and offending because such persons are at high risk for both types of events but are incarcerated for shorter periods than prison inmates. The shorter period of incarceration is beneficial because it alleviates potential recall problems for persons who are interviewed about a reference period prior to incarceration.

The VOOS will enhance understanding of the relationship between victimization and offending by measuring the correlation between these two concepts, as well as the social contexts, demographic characteristics, and life circumstances that mediate this relationship. Prior research has established a strong relationship between victimization and offending across persons, but much of this research is primarily derived from samples of adolescents and young adults with relatively low levels of involvement in serious crime, as either victims or offenders. Using a high-risk sample of adult jail inmates, the VOOS will measure a number of key concepts including—

- Incidence and prevalence of victimization among a population of known offenders;
- Demographic characteristics of inmates and the association between various characteristics and the victim-offender overlap;
- Victim help-seeking behaviors (reporting to police, seeking medical attention, receiving victim services);

- Other covariates of victim-offender relationship, including drug/alcohol use, neighborhood characteristics, employment status, marital status, and living conditions;
- Living arrangements of offenders prior to incarceration and their eligibility for participation in a household survey like the NCVS; and
- Offense and incarceration history.

In addition to providing information on the nature of the relationship between victimization and offending, the VOOS will address several important methodological questions related to the NCVS. These include—

- The impact of NCVS coverage error due to exclusion of incarcerated population on victimization estimates;
- Understanding potential NCVS coverage error caused by the exclusion of highly transient populations; and

With the above objectives in mind, BJS, in collaboration with Dr. Janet Lauritsen, on an Intergovernmental Personnel Agreement, from the University of Missouri, St. Louis, and grantees at RTI International through the National Victimization Statistical Support Program, developed an instrument to be cognitively tested that encompasses the following topical sections:

- Basic demographic and incarceration characteristics;
- Pre-incarceration housing, family, and employment characteristics;
- Prevalence and incidence of violent crimes experienced;
- Prevalence and incidence of property crimes experienced;
- Resource utilization, availability, and neighborhood characteristics before incarceration;
- Criminal history and system contact before incarceration;
- Gun use and victimization before incarceration; and
- General responses to victimization.

Current Request for Cognitive Testing

In the current request, we are asking for clearance to conduct face-to-face cognitive interviewing with up to 50 respondents. The cognitive testing will be used to test the full VOOS instrument and will be conducted August through October 2017. The interview protocol is included as Appendix A.

The target population for the face-to-face cognitive interviewing is persons 18 years of age or older incarcerated in jails in Raleigh/Durham, North Carolina; Charlotte, North Carolina; Washington, D.C; and Portland, Oregon. The eligibility criteria are that the participant be 18 or older and speak English. All in-person interviews will take place within a jail facility, and interviews will last approximately 1 hour to allow time for the administration of the questionnaire, as well as cognitive probing. The interviews will be conducted by a lead interviewer and a note taker will be in the room as well. If the jails permit it, participants will be given a bag of cookies to be eaten during the interview as an incentive for survey participation. This has proven to be an effective incentive on the BJS/RTI-run National Inmates Survey (NIS), which has interviewed hundreds of thousands of prison and jail inmates since data collection began in 2007.

The recruitment procedures for the face-to-face cognitive interviewing will be pseudo-random and are designed to ensure variation among respondents' demographic characteristics (e.g., race/ethnicity, age); however, the sample of cognitive interviewing respondents will be split evenly between women and men. In each jail, we will work with our primary jail contact to identify potential respondents who are eligible for cognitive interviewing. The day that the interviews are scheduled to start, the cognitive interviewer will ask our primary jail contact to produce lists of male and female inmates who are eligible, which includes inmates names and admission dates. The interviewer will then use the roster/lists to request to interview inmates on the list, one at a time, starting at the top, alternating between men and women so a roughly comparable number of male and female jail inmates get interviewed.

Language

The face-to-face cognitive interviews will be conducted in English.

Burden Hours for Cognitive Testing

The burden for this task consists of participants completing the VOOS instrument via face-to-face interview with an RTI International interviewer. The burden associated with these activities is presented in the following table. BJS is requesting a maximum of 100 burden hours with this clearance. Approximately 50 burden hours are needed for conducting the interview with the respondent, while the remaining 50 account for the burden on the facility to recruit and monitor participants during the interview.

Burden Associated with SFS Cognitive Testing Activities

	Number of Respondents	Administration Time (minutes)	Burden (hours)
Face-to-face Cognitive Interviewing	Up to 50	60	Up to 100

Cost to the Federal Government

Participants will be given an incentive for their participation in the VOOS interview (e.g., bag of cookies worth approximately \$1). The cost for RTI to assist in the development of the interview protocol, to oversee and conduct the interviews, and to analyze and report on findings from this cognitive testing will be approximately \$14,000. Thus, the total cost for this cognitive testing will be about \$14,050.

Reporting

Upon completion of all cognitive testing, a draft cognitive interviewing report will be delivered to BJS that will include recommendations for final revisions to the VOOS survey instrument. These recommendations will provide detailed information on the cognitive testing methodology, basic characteristics of the respondents, average time needed to complete the screener instrument and narratives, and any issues with question comprehension noted by respondents. The report will also document changes made to the initial draft survey prior to the cognitive testing and all changes made during the cognitive interviewing process, if any.

Protection of Human Subjects

There is a slight risk of emotional distress for the respondents given the somewhat sensitive nature of the topics, since the questions are of a somewhat personal nature; however, appropriate safeguards are in place and the planned cognitive testing has been reviewed and approved by RTI's Institutional Review Board (IRB), which has Federal-wide assurance.

During the consent process, subjects will be informed of the topic areas of the interview and that some of the questions may make them feel uncomfortable or distressed. They will also be told that they can refuse to answer any of the questions by asking the interviewer to skip an item or items. Throughout the interview, the interviewers will employ a graduated response to detect and respond to respondent distress. First, the interviewers will periodically check in on respondents' emotional state by asking if they are okay. Should a participant answer no or begin to show visible signs of emotional distress (e.g., shakiness in the voice, changes in volume, crying, etc.), the interviewers will ask if they would like to take a break. The interviewers will also be prepared to skip ahead to another topic if the current topic seems to be distressing. If the participant continues to show signs of distress, the interviewer will end the interview.

For incarcerated respondents who seem to be distressed, the interviewer will relay information about the days/hours in which the counselor or psychologist is available to inmates at the facility (as well as any referral process in place). All facilities will confirm that mental health services can be provided to inmates in need within 48 hours.

Informed Consent, Data Confidentiality, and Data Security

Informed Consent

At the beginning of the face-to-face cognitive interview appointment, the respondent will be handed a hard copy of the informed consent form and the interviewer will review the highlights of the informed consent form as the respondent follows along. If the respondent wants to proceed with the cognitive interview, they will "X" the appropriate lines to participate, allow for recording and, if applicable, allow for observers. If a participant does not want to consent to audio recording or observation, no recording device will be used and observers will be asked to leave. The interviewer will sign or initial the RTI copy of the consent form and leave a blank hard copy with the respondent. We are not asking respondents to sign the consent form as a measure to protect their confidentiality.

All cognitive interviews will be conducted in a private room located within the participating jails. The interviews will be conducted by RTI staff members who are highly experienced cognitive interviewers and well-versed in human subjects considerations for research with prisoners. If approved by the respondent, a note taker will accompany the interviewer during each interview. The interview team will make sure that they are out of earshot of other people including people who may be in an adjacent room or outside and that the respondent's answers could not be ascertained by someone looking through a window. If at any time, the privacy of the interview setting is compromised, the interviewer will pause the interview until privacy can be re-established, rescheduling as necessary.

Data Confidentiality and Security

BJS's pledge of confidentiality is based on its governing statutes Title 42 USC, Section 3735 and 3789g, which establish the allowable use of data collected by BJS. Under these sections, data collected by BJS shall be used only for statistical or research purposes and shall be gathered in a

manner that precludes their use for law enforcement or any purpose relating to a particular individual other than statistical or research purposes (Section 3735). BJS staff, other federal employees, and RTI International staff (the data collection agent) shall not use or reveal any research or statistical information identifiable to any specific private person for any purpose other than the research and statistical purposes for which it was obtained. Pursuant to 42 U.S.C. Sec. 3789g, BJS will not publish any data identifiable specific to a private person (including respondents and decedents). The cognitive interviewing methodology will not be collecting any personally identifying information from respondents.