

**SPECIAL REPORT:
SELECTED FINDINGS FROM THE
NATIONAL JAIL WORKFORCE SURVEY-
EMPLOYEE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION**

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By mid-2009, the nation's economic downturn appeared to have slowed the steady pace of employee turnover that challenged America's jails—along with many other employers—throughout much of the previous decade. With media attention more recently focused on long lines of applicants anxiously competing for scarce openings, enthusiasm for job-hopping has diminished, especially among those holding more secure government positions that provide reasonable compensation and benefits. But since the economy moves in cycles, it is eventually destined to recover. When conditions improve and the job market expands, greater career opportunities may again be expected to encourage greater employee mobility.

Retirements that were postponed during bleak fiscal years cannot be delayed indefinitely. In more than one-third of America's jails, 30% or greater of the leadership/management team is eligible for retirement by 2013; (and in one-quarter of jails, this figure is 50% or higher).¹ As these long-term career employees begin to depart, jails can anticipate experiencing the ripple effects of personnel vacancies throughout all ranks.

In times of fiscal strain within local government, basic survival takes priority. Under such conditions, it is easy for workforce-related issues to assume diminished importance on the jail's list of organizational priorities. But the best time to plan ahead is not in the midst of a crisis. As a result, this current period of relative workforce stability is the most opportune time to engage in the proactive planning designed to more effectively meet the future recruitment and retention needs of local jails.

Stakeholders

Potential stakeholders for the findings presented in this research report include sheriffs and jail administrators, correctional planners, researchers, elected and appointed government officials, policy-makers, academicians, fiscal managers, and human resource professionals. Essentially, anyone interested in expanding quantitative, jail-based data or engaging in evidence-based workforce practices will find this information beneficial to their efforts.

The National Jail Workforce Survey

To measure the full extent of workforce challenges facing the nation's jails, as well as gain insights from those working in the field for improving recruitment, retention, and succession

Administering the Survey

All line-level employees who work in jails across the nation were invited to complete the National Jail Workforce Survey online. Letters informing staff about the survey were sent to:

- 3,162 jails included on a national list provided by American Jail Association (AJA);
- 80 additional tribal jails from a list provided by National Institute of Corrections (NIC).

Additionally, using AJA email addresses, 1500 letters and flyers were sent electronically to jails throughout the nation. The National Jail Workforce Advisory Panel members, affiliated partners, state sheriffs' associations, and national professional associations also included information about the survey in their publications, membership circulation information, and list-serves.

planning, the National Jail Workforce Survey was conducted in 2008, with funding from the Bureau of Justice Assistance. Capturing the opinions of 2,106 staff members from 46 states, it addressed a wide variety of issues--from what first attracted employees to work in a jail, how they were successfully recruited, why they remain on the job, how satisfied and committed they are, and how often they think about leaving. A separate instrument, (completed by 569 sheriffs and jail administrators from 48 states), addressed similar issues from an administrative perspective, including such information as turnover statistics, retirement projections, succession planning efforts, and similar organizational insights.

Descriptive findings from the National Jail Workforce Survey are presented in the project's final report, *The Future is Now: Recruiting, Retaining, and Developing the 21st Century Jail Workforce* (Stinchcomb, McCampbell, and Leip, March 2009, available at <http://cipp.org/futureisnow.html>). Given the length and complexity of the survey findings, a separate monograph was warranted in order to discuss more in-depth analyses by generations and jail sizes.

Categorizing Respondents

All respondents who answered the questions about their age (N=1894) or their jail's average daily inmate population (N=1907) were included in this report. They were categorized by:

Ages of Respondents - Generations

- Baby Boomers (age 44-65)
- Generation Xers (age 29-43)
- Millennials (age 28 or younger)

Average Daily Population - Jail Size

- Small (ADP less than 500)
- Medium (ADP 500 – 1999)
- Large (ADP 2000 or more)

(The gender of respondents was not included in this analysis, as the total number of female staff who responded to the survey was not large enough for bivariate analysis).

This follow-up *Special Report* is therefore designed to provide an expanded presentation of relevant recruitment and retention staff survey items, looking more closely at the extent to

Analyzing the Data

The analyses focused on examining differences between how survey items were answered by:

- Those from different generations;
- Those from different jail sizes.

In order to determine whether any of these differences were significant, Chi square tests were conducted. Any survey item that produced a significant difference is noted by an asterisk (*) next to that item in the tables and figures. While other findings may have occurred by chance, that is extremely unlikely for those that are statistically significant.

which findings may vary according to either the respondent’s age or jail size. The first section focuses on recruitment related results, followed by retention findings. Within each of these two sections, analyses by generations are presented first, followed by analyses by jail size.

Recruitment Results by Generation

More closely examining National Jail Workforce Survey results by the age of respondents provides insights into how to specifically develop and implement recruitment strategies that appeal to different generations. For example, employees were asked to rank the importance of various factors that influenced them when they first considered working for their current agency. Table 1 lists these factors in order of importance (#1 through #10) according to the generation represented by respondents. The differences between the generations for items #6 through #9 were statistically significant.

Table 1. Recruitment Factors by Generations. Thinking back to when you first considered working for this agency, how important was each of the following:	Generations		
	Millennials (28 or younger)	Gen Xers (29-43)	Baby Boomers (44-65)
(In order of importance for total respondents; asterisks note statistical significance)	(Percent of staff that responded Important/Very important)		
1. (99%) Stable employment	98%	99%	99%
2. (96%) The benefits package	97%	96%	95%
3. (95%) The salary offered	95%	95%	94%
4. (93%) The retirement program	90%	94%	94%
5. (85%) The agency’s reputation as a good place to work	85%	86%	84%
6. (76%) The job matched my career goals*	83%	77%	70%
7. (76%) Making a difference in my community*	84%	75%	70%
8. (62%) Hoping to find friendly co-workers*	70%	60%	60%
9. (53%) Agency would pay for my college/graduate education*	62%	55%	43%
10. (52%) Being referred or recruited by someone who worked here	50%	53%	53%

However, it is also important to note the factors that were rated equally high across all generations (#1 through #5), which provide key insights that can help guide efforts toward improving jail recruitment. For instance, virtually all respondents said that stable employment prospects, along with salary and benefits, were essential factors when they first considered working for their current agency.² Since there are no differences between generations in terms of the importance of these factors, jails may want to emphasize these features of the job, especially in times when widespread layoffs in the private sector create concerns for job stability.

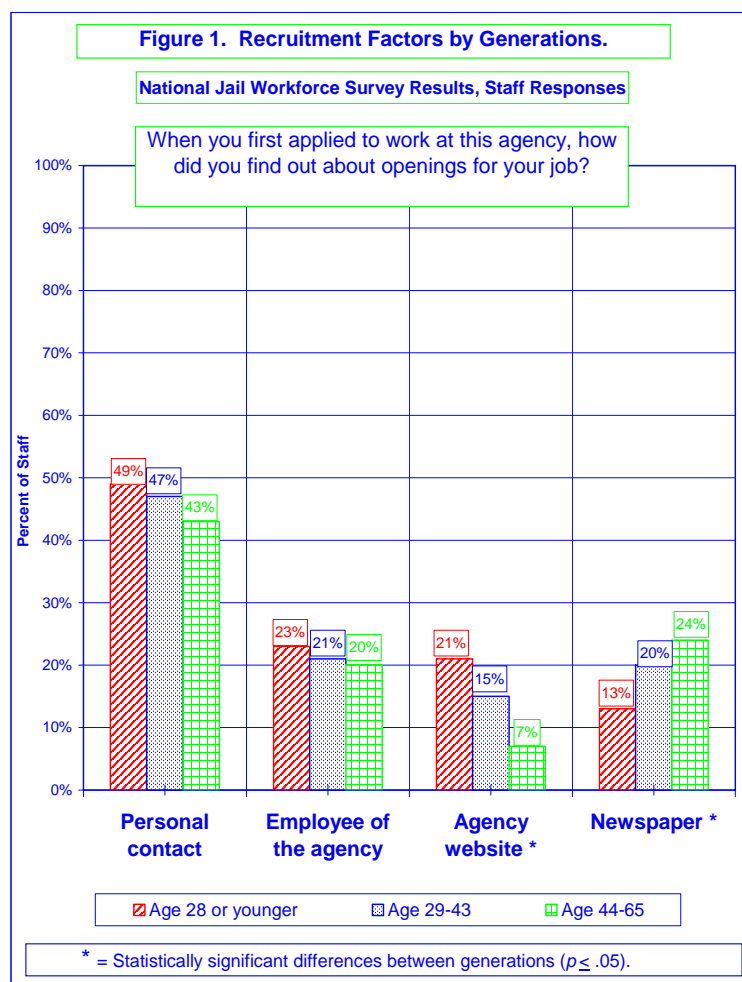
This analysis also shows that all jail staff, regardless of their age, rated “the agency’s reputation as a good place to work” among the top five factors that they considered before applying for the job. In light of these results, jails would be well-advised to pay attention to the agency’s image and reputation in the community. Moreover, the majority of all age groups consistently indicated that being referred or recruited by someone who was already employed at the jail was an important factor when they first considered working there. Thus, agencies may want to capitalize on this information by structuring a formal approach for encouraging all staff to be part of their recruitment team.

While the above findings did not reveal inter-generational variations, some age-based differences did surface. For example, when they first thought about working at the jail, younger employees were more likely to be interested in planning their career and obtaining an education. In that regard, 83% of the Millennials said that having a job that matched their career goals was an important factor, along with 77% of the Generation Xers, but only 70% of the Baby Boomers. In addition, the youngest employees were more concerned about having their college tuition paid for by the agency (62%) than the oldest workers (43%). For the Millennials now entering the workplace, these findings indicate the importance of a holistic career approach that incorporates agency-supported, employee-centered personal development and educational incentives to meet the professional goals of new workers.

In deciding to pursue jail employment, “making a difference in the community” was likewise a higher priority for younger employees (84%) than their older counterparts (70%). However, both of these percentages are greater than those of public servants in general. Overall, only 40% of public service employees indicate that making a difference was their major motivator for committing to careers in government³. Again, these findings provide valuable insights, indicating that agencies which reinforce how jails make a difference in their communities can add

another positive perspective to their recruitment arsenal. Since younger people also rated “hoping to find friendly co-workers” as more important than older generations, strategies that bring new hires into a workplace with a genuine employee-centered environment are likely to appeal to Millennials.

Staff were additionally asked to identify how they learned about the opening for their current job. As Figure 1 illustrates, most found out about the opening through a personal contact or a jail employee. Differences in ages were not statistically significant in this regard. More of the younger employees found out about their job from the agency’s website, but that stands to reason, since they were hired in more recent years, when websites have become more widely used as recruitment tools. As would be expected, older employees (who were hired some time ago) primarily learned about jail jobs via the newspaper, although personal contact was still an important ingredient for generating their interest.



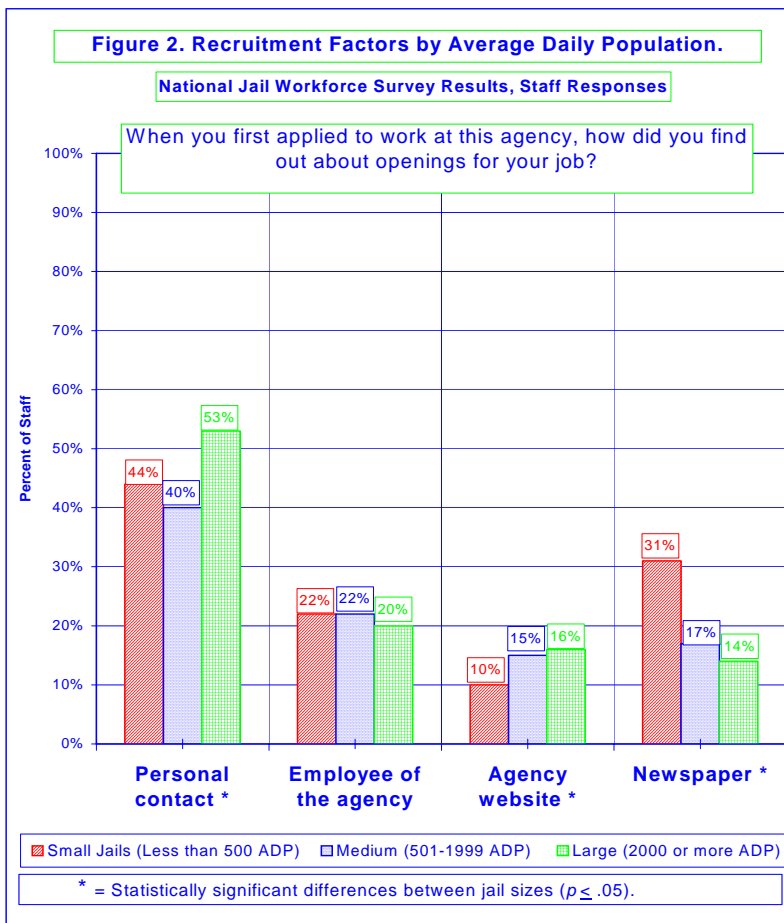
Recruitment Results by Jail Size

In addition to age, responses to the National Jail Workforce Survey were also analyzed to identify any differences between staff who work in small, medium or large jails. The factors that were important to employees when they first considered working for their current agency are displayed by jail size in Table 2. As these figures indicate, jail size has very little impact on staff responses. More employees in large jails (60%) rated this as important when they first considered working for their current agency than did those in medium (55%) or small (35%) facilities. Since

larger jails may have more resources than their smaller counterparts, tuition reimbursement may be an expected agency-offered benefit for those who work where the average daily inmate population is 2000 or more.

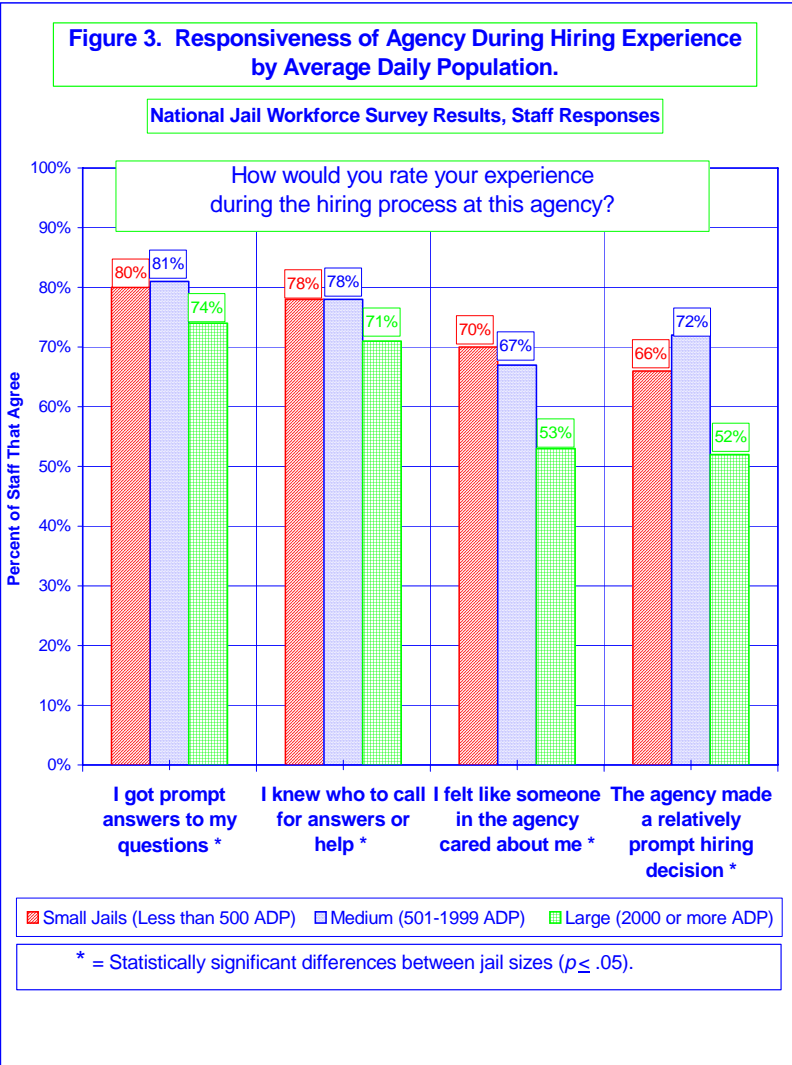
Thinking back to when you first considered working for this agency, how important was each of the following:	Average Daily Population – Size of Jail		
	Small (500 or less)	Medium (501-1999)	Large (2000 or more)
(In order of importance for total respondents; asterisks note statistical significance)	(Percent of staff who responded Important/Very important)		
1. (99%) Stable employment	98%	99%	99%
2. (96%) The benefits package*	94%	96%	98%
3. (95%) The salary offered*	91%	95%	98%
4. (93%) The retirement program*	88%	93%	97%
5. (85%) The agency’s reputation as a good place to work*	82%	86%	87%
6. (76%) The job matched my career goals	75%	76%	77%
7. (76%) Making a difference in my community	75%	78%	73%
8. (62%) Hoping to find friendly co-workers*	66%	63%	59%
9. (53%) Agency would pay for my college/graduate education*	35%	55%	60%
10. (52%) Being referred or recruited by someone who worked here	54%	50%	52%

Figure 2 shows how employees from jails of varying size learned about their current job. More staff from large jails (53%) found out about their position from a personal contact than those in small (44%) or medium (40%) facilities, but there are minimal differences in terms of actual staff referrals or recruitment. These results reaffirm the key role of agency employees in the recruitment process, (regardless of jail size), which points toward the potential for incentive-based recruitment initiatives for current employees. It is also clear from this analysis that many small agencies still do not



use the Internet or agency websites to advertise positions, but rather, turn to newspapers with much greater frequency than medium or large jails.

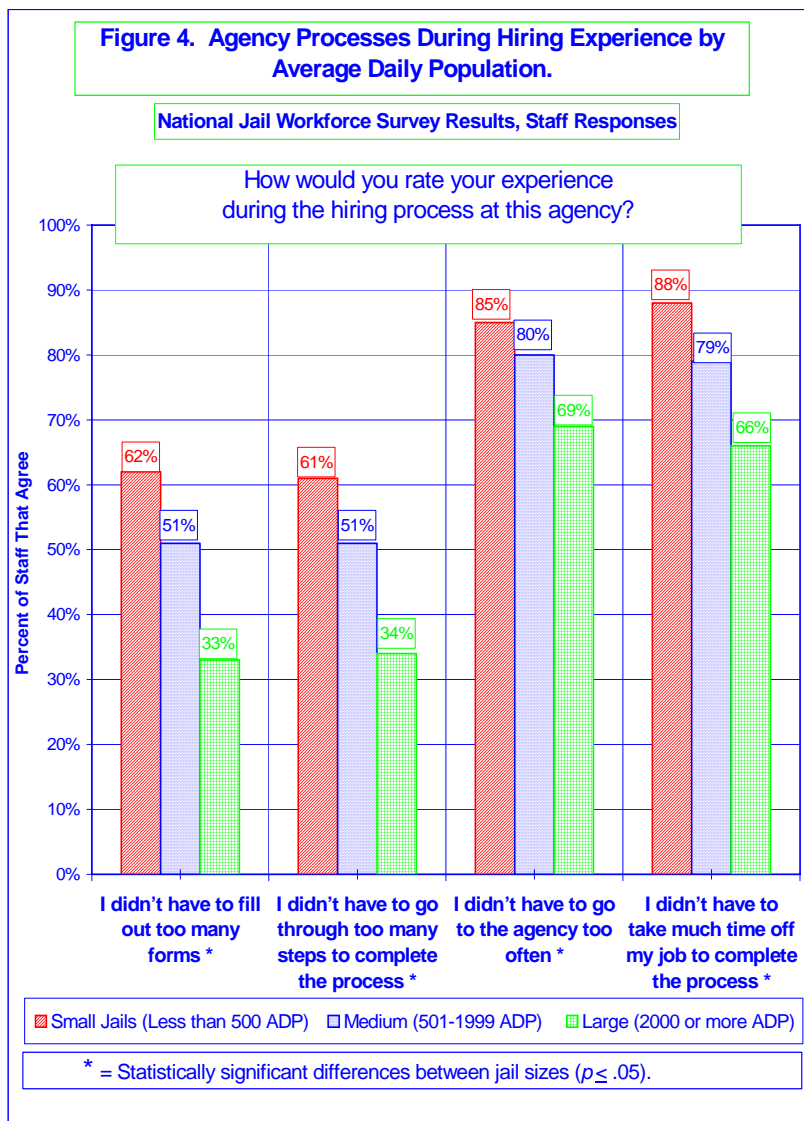
Another component of the National Jail Workforce Survey focused on how line staff rated their experience during the hiring process. Results for these ratings by facility size are illustrated in Figures 3 and 4. In contrast to large jails, more staff working in small and medium jails



indicated that they got prompt answers to their questions and knew whom to call if they needed other information. Likewise, more of those working in small (70%) and medium (67%) jails said they felt as though someone cared about them during the hiring process than their large jail counterparts (53%). These findings might be expected because people may more easily “get lost” in big organizations, but it nevertheless clearly reinforces the need for a commitment to keeping potential employees informed about their progress in the hiring process through relevant

generational techniques such as regular emails.

When asked more specifically about selection procedures, nearly two out of three of those applying to large jails felt they had to fill out too many forms or go through too many steps. That is almost twice as many as those applying to work in smaller jails. Streamlining the hiring



process may be a challenge for larger agencies, but nevertheless, it is an important consideration, especially if redundant or cumbersome procedures are so frustrating that applications are abandoned in favor of accepting employment elsewhere.

Retention Results by Generation

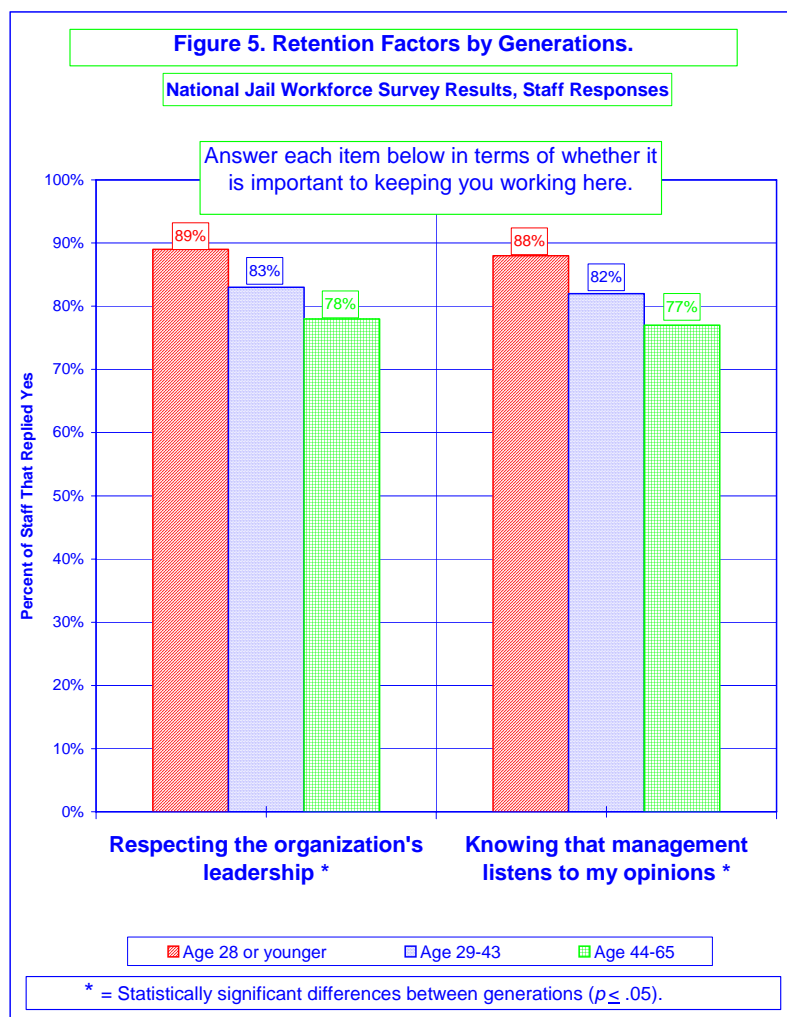
When employees from different generations come together in the same workplace, they are not likely to be “motivated by the same ambitions, rewarded by the same incentives, or responsive to the same supervisory

techniques” (Stinchcomb, McCampbell, and Leip, 2009: 8).⁴ It therefore seems logical to hypothesize that employees might also differ on such dimensions as what factors are important to keeping them working in their current jobs. However, responses to this question reveal very little generational variations among jail staff. Of the forty-three (43) items listed in the survey, only seventeen (17) generated responses that differed by 10% or more (and were statistically significant) when viewed by age.

As illustrated in Figures 5 through 10, these seventeen items fall into the following categories:

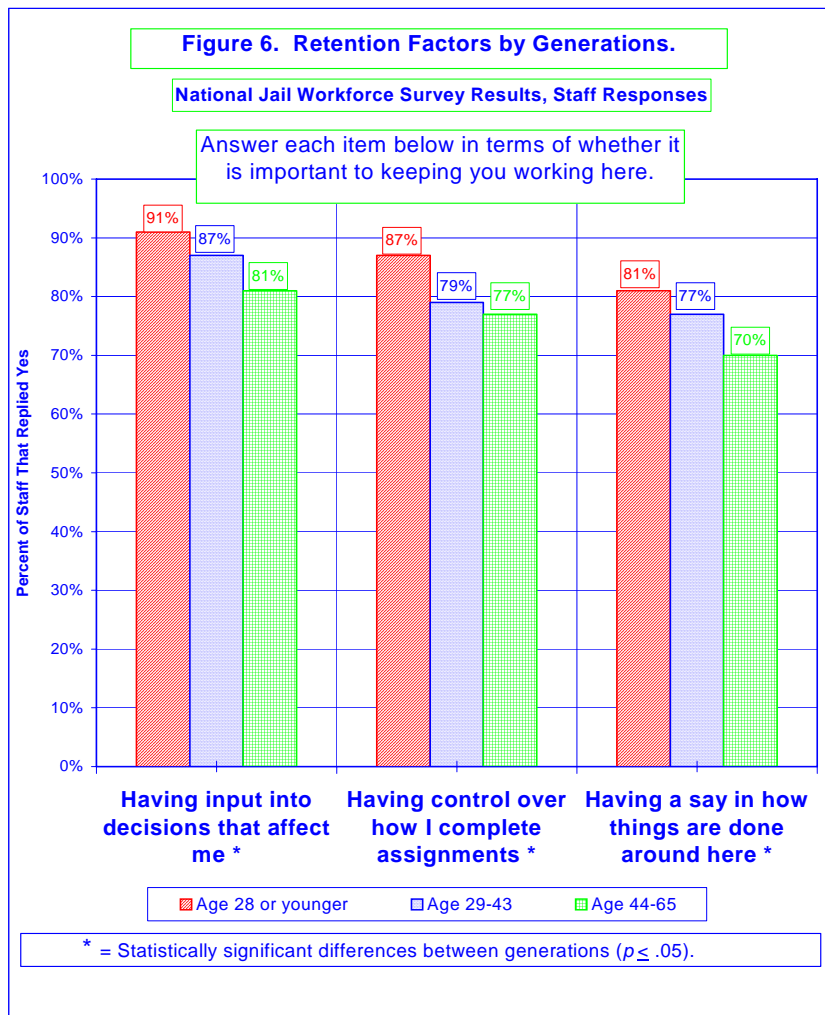
- Expectations of current management and leadership;
- Control over individual work;
- Fair personnel processes;
- Feeling appreciated and recognized;
- Agency-offered employee benefits; and
- Opportunities for promotion, training, and leadership development.

Some of these issues are implicitly age-specific. For example, younger people are inherently more likely to value such things as college tuition assistance, agency-sponsored child care, a fitness center, and opportunities for training, promotion, and leadership development. By the time an employee advances both in age and job tenure, these issues are not likely to be as important. But some of the other variables on the list might be expected to be equally important to all age groups--such as fair and consistent employee discipline, having input into decisions, respecting the organization's



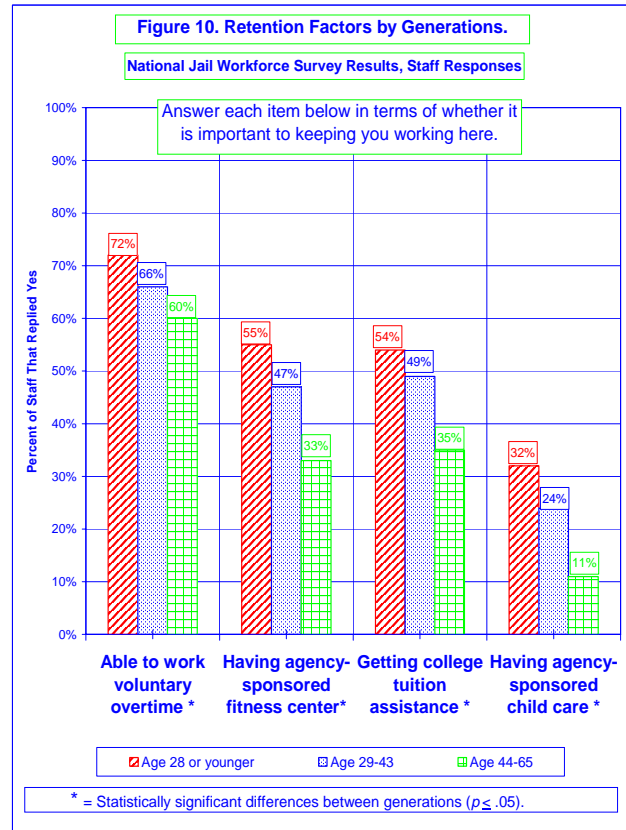
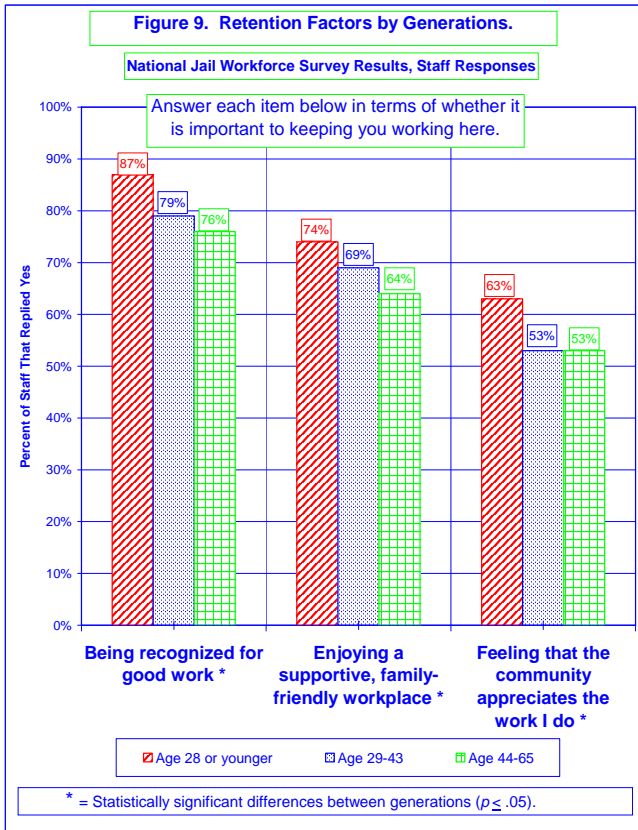
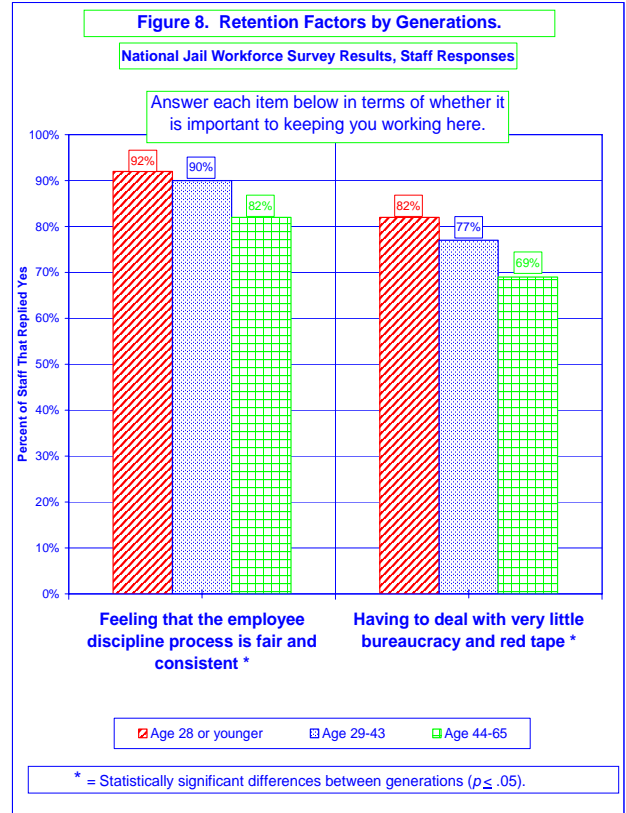
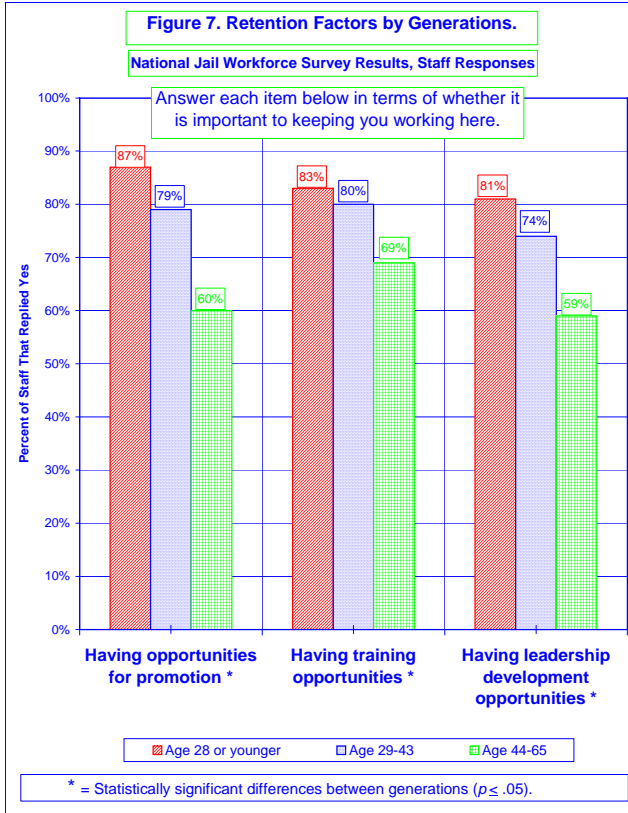
leadership, being listened to by management, being recognized for good work, having control over how assignments are completed, and feeling appreciated by the community. Yet each of these was more important to the younger generations.

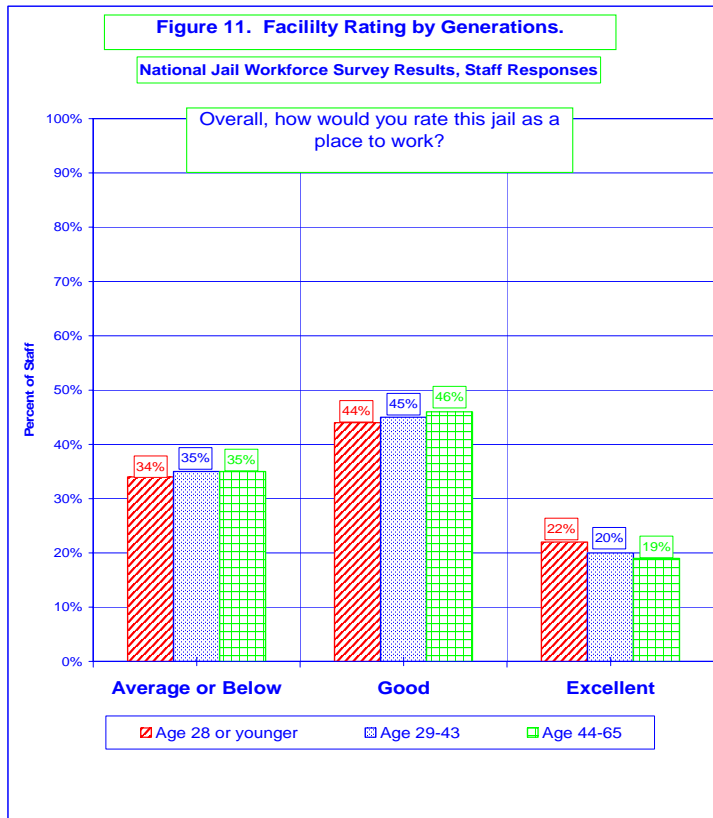
A possible explanation for this finding may be that younger workers expect and demand more of their employer. Perhaps older employees have reduced their expectations based on



personal work experience, have settled into a satisfying career, or are simply waiting for retirement. No matter the reasons, the challenge for jail leaders is to develop strategies for keeping experienced employees motivated and committed to their work in the critical years after their rank and responsibilities have reached a plateau, but before they are eligible or able to retire. One option for doing so might be matching qualified senior employees with their younger counterparts in a mentoring relationship. Such

an initiative also has the added benefit of helping to assure that all of the organizational history and experiential insights of seasoned workers are not lost to the agency when they do depart.⁵

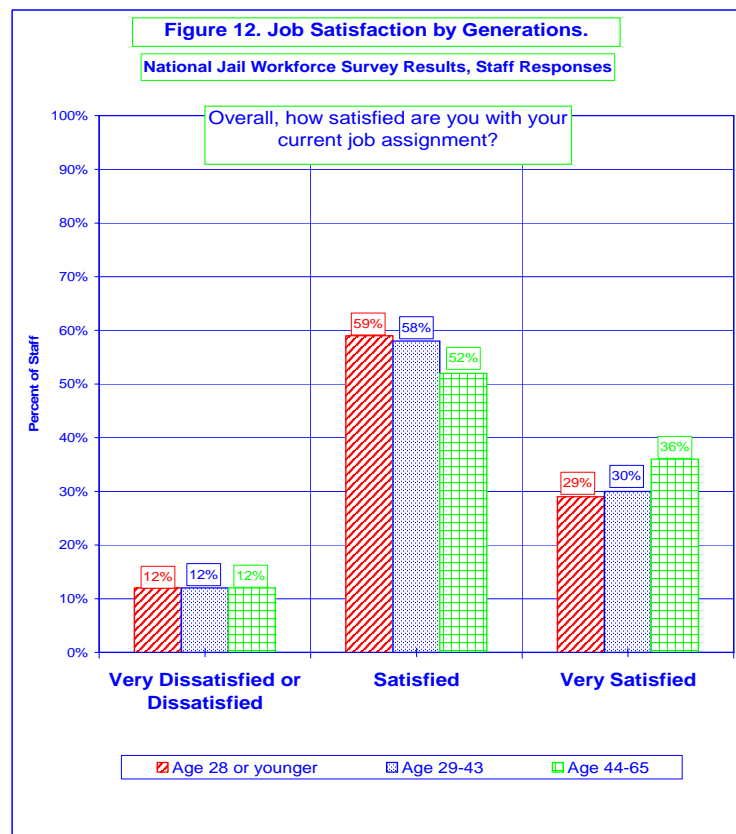




Although occasional differences appear in some specific measures of organizational characteristics, when asked to rate their jail as a place to work, there was no generational diversity. As Figure 11 shows, regardless of age, jail employees are generally positive in their overall assessment of the workplace, with two out of three rating it as a “good” or “excellent” place to work. This is a significant finding, as it helps debunk the image that the jail is an undesirable place to work.

Nor did job satisfaction vary by age. If, indeed, older employees are perceived as being burned-out, disillusioned, or unenthusiastic, it is *not* reflected in their job satisfaction ratings (see Figure 12). In fact, 88% of all age categories were “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with their current job assignment. At least according to self-reports in the National Jail Workforce Survey, these findings seem to counter the stereotypical myths that jails are unpleasant places to work where the employees are equally discontent. As such, they should encourage jails to more positively portray both the workplace and the job.

Nor did job satisfaction vary

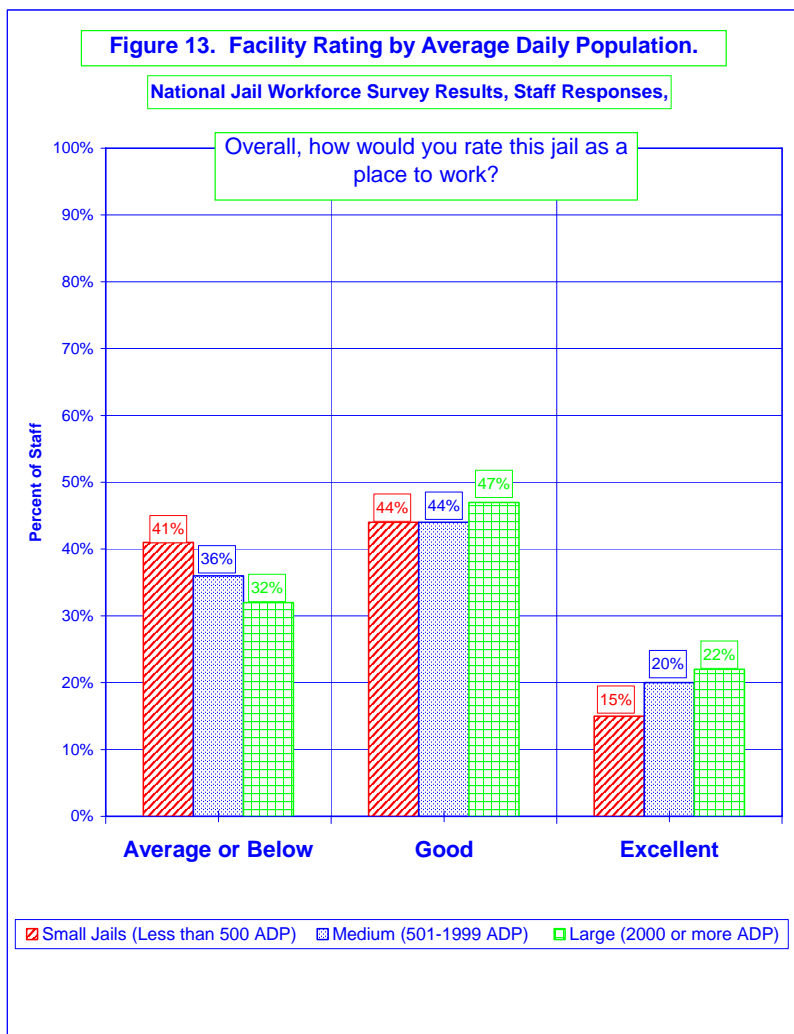


While these results reflect good news for jails seeking to retain more of their best staff, they are also valuable insights in terms of recruitment strategies. For example, it could be a powerful recruitment incentive if potential applicants knew that, nationwide:

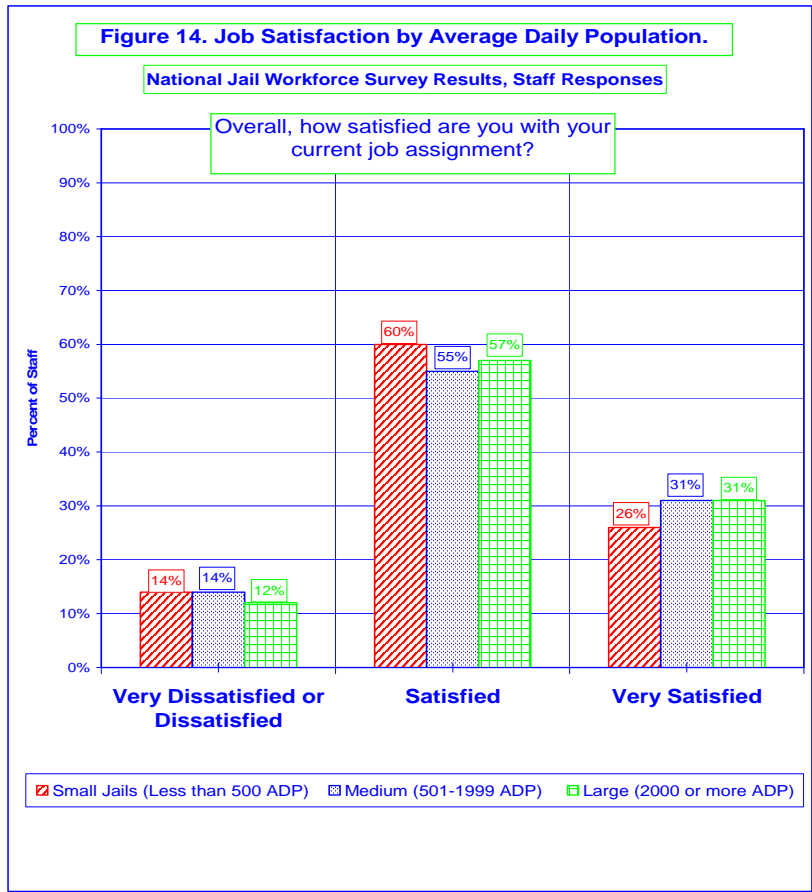
- Nearly two out of three (65%) current employees rate their jail as a “good” or “excellent” place to work;
- Almost nine out of ten (88%) of jail staff are “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with their present job assignment; and
- These figures are consistent across all employee age and facility size categories (as discussed below).

Retention Results by Jail Size

Beyond the potential for generational diversity, jail size might also be expected to be a



factor in shaping employee responses. Do employees in small jails, for instance, assess their workplace more positively or negatively than those working in larger facilities? Are they more or less satisfied in comparison to their large jail counterparts? According to the National Jail Workforce Survey, the answer in both cases is “no.” As Figure 13 indicates, the 65% of employees rating their jail as a “good” or an excellent” place to work are relatively evenly divided by jail size.



Likewise, Figure 14 reveals that jail size is also a non-issue when staff rate satisfaction with their current job assignment. Thus, the size of the facility where they are employed appears to affect neither workplace assessment nor job satisfaction among jail staff.

Nevertheless, it is feasible to hypothesize that employees in different-sized facilities might differ in terms of the specific factors that are important to retaining them in their current jobs, (and

therefore, presumably contributing to their work satisfaction ratings at a deeper level of analysis). In this respect, however, there was even less variance than when data were analyzed by age.

Among the forty-three (43) survey items listed as potentially important to “keeping you working here,” only eleven (11) generated responses that differed by 10% or more (and were statistically significant) when viewed by jail size. As illustrated in Figures 15 through 19, these eleven items fall into the following categories:

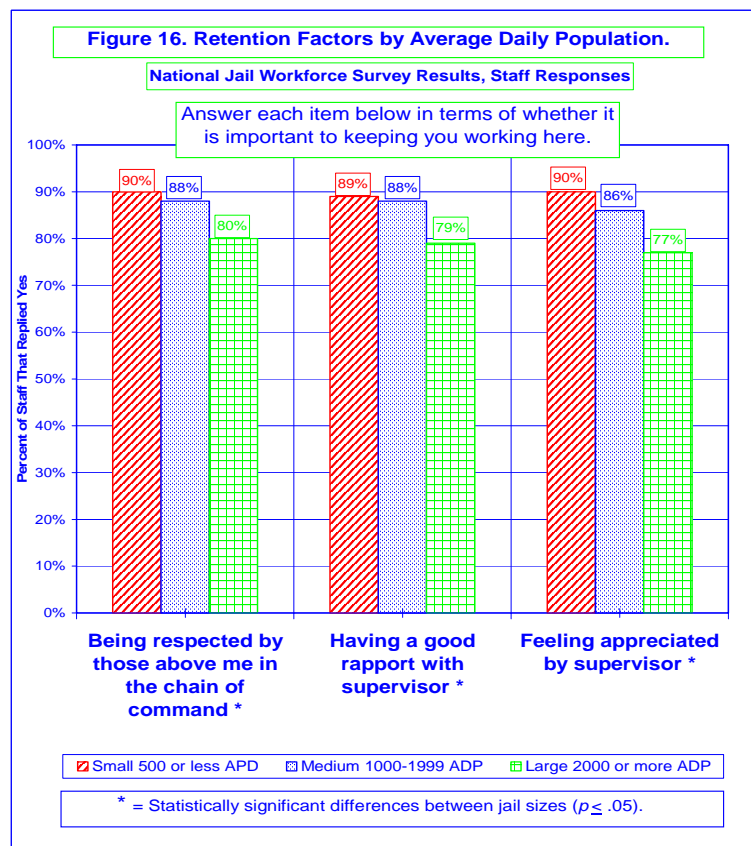
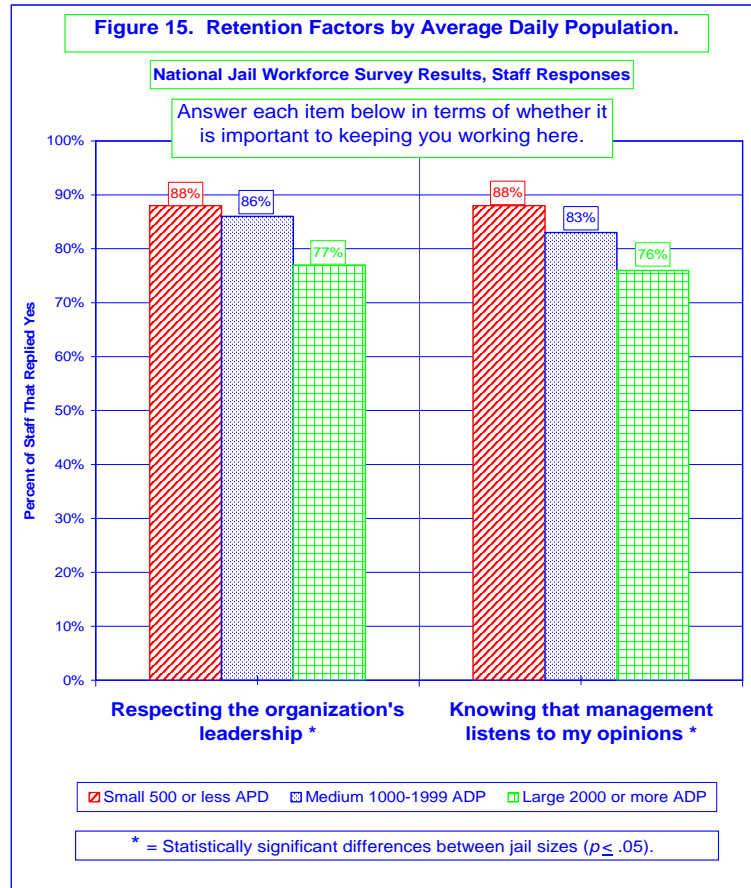
- Organizational leadership;
- Supervisory relationships;
- Coworker relationships;
- Recognition for good work; and
- Agency-offered employee benefits.

In all cases except employee benefits, (i.e., college tuition assistance and child care), those in large jails were less concerned about these issues than their counterparts in small- or medium-sized facilities.

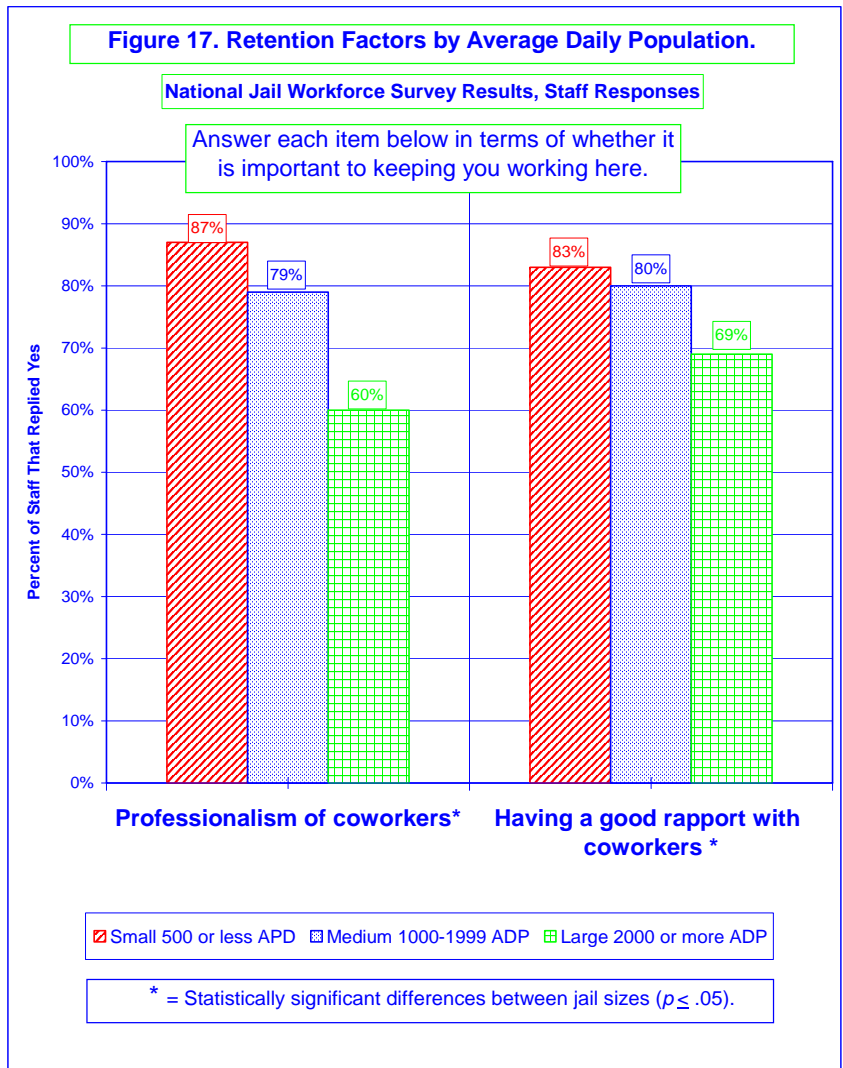
For example, respondents in small or medium jails were more likely to report that the following are important to keeping them working in their current jobs:

- Respect by those higher in the chain of command;
- One’s personal skills matching the job;
- Good rapport with (and appreciation by) one’s supervisor;
- Respecting the professionalism of coworkers;
- Being listened to by management;
- Being recognized for good work; and
- Having good rapport with coworkers.

Overall, it appears that personal relationships with coworkers, supervisors, and management are more important for those working in small and medium jails than for those in larger facilities. These findings might be explained in terms of employees in more sizeable jails having adjusted their expectations to the reality of a



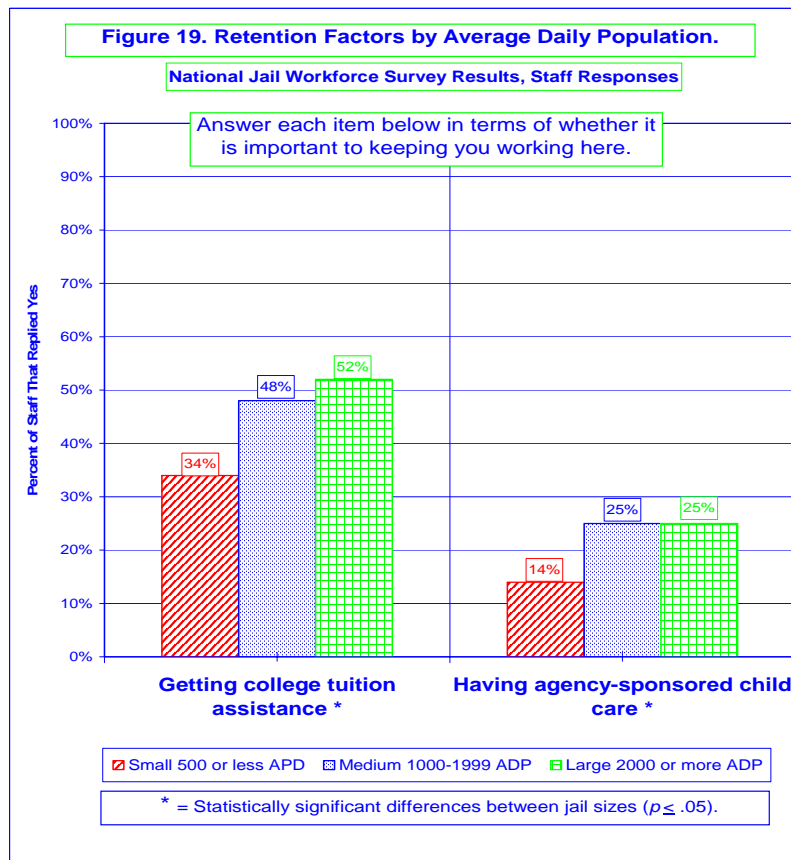
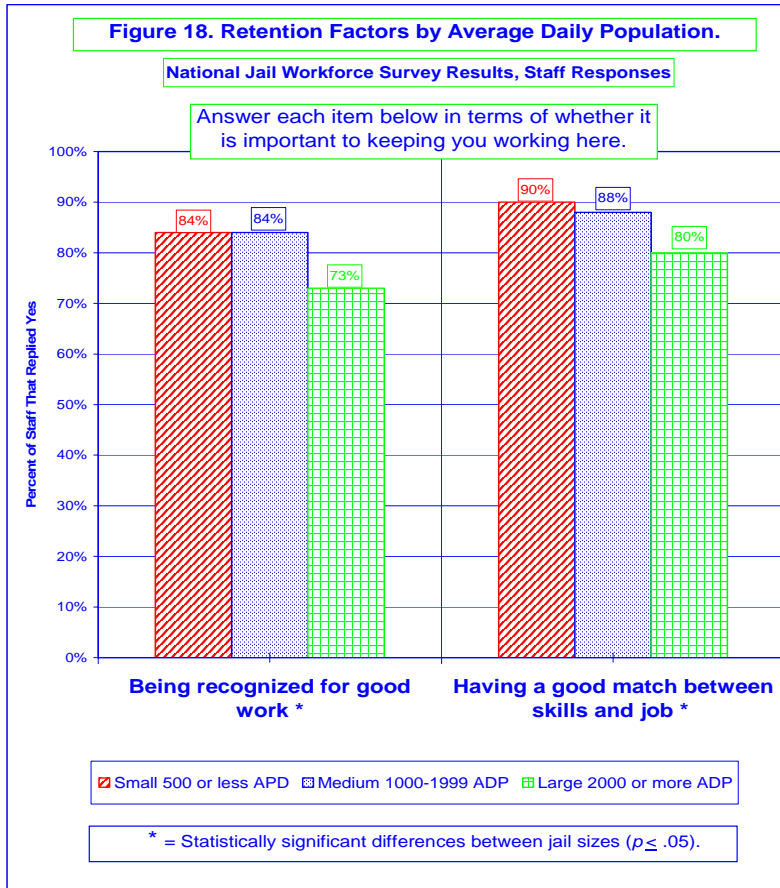
workplace where they are less likely to have the opportunity to develop and maintain personal relationships with those at the top of the hierarchy. Or perhaps employees in large organizations



are more focused on their direct supervisor and others in their immediate work setting rather than those farther up in the chain of command.

However, that is not to diminish the fact that considerable majorities of all staff in all sizes of jails reported that similar variables are important to retaining them-- ranging from having respect for organization's leadership to being respected by those in command, having a voice in the agency, feeling appreciated, receiving recognition, and having good

rapport with coworkers and supervisors. In that regard, jail staff do not differ from each other according to either age or facility size.



Summary and Conclusions

When jails are faced with more immediate priorities, recruitment and retention can easily become neglected, especially during times when their workforce is more stable because of limited employment opportunities elsewhere. Yet competition for qualified workers can be expected to re-intensify as economic conditions improve and deferred retirements create ripple effects throughout organizations. In fact, workforce stability during a stagnant economy presents ideal conditions for proactively developing recruitment initiatives without hiring pressure, as well as establishing, reviewing, and refining practices that will continue to retain employees when they have options for employment elsewhere.

The results of the National Jail Workforce Survey reported in *The Future is Now: Recruiting, Retaining, and Developing the 21st Century Jail Workforce*⁶ provided the first data-based insights into recruitment, retention, and succession planning from the perspective of both employees and jail administrators. Beyond the wide-ranging descriptive statistics contained in *The Future is Now*, this follow-up *Special Report* provides advanced analyses regarding the potential influence of age and facility size on the responses of operational staff.

Looking first at recruitment-related variables, it appears that regardless of either age or jail size, the majority of staff were motivated to consider working for their current agency because of its employment stability, salary and benefits package, retirement program, and reputation as “a good place to work.” Some age-related factors did, however, surface in a few other items. Younger employees placed higher priority on how well the position matched their career goals, whether college tuition was available, and whether the job enabled them to associate with “friendly co-workers” and to “make a difference in the community.” But again regardless of age or jail size, there was agreement that the most influential factors involved in accepting their current position were job security, salary and benefits, and the retirement plan.

Likewise, the majority of employees primarily learned about their position through personal contact or an agency employee, although those working in large jails were even more likely to have been alerted to this employment opportunity by a personal contact. While small agencies appear to use their own website less frequently to reach job seekers, more of those now working in such facilities felt as if someone cared about them during the hiring process. Large jails also fared less well than their smaller counterparts in terms of how the application paperwork

and hiring process were rated, with many of their employees maintaining that there were too many forms to fill out and too many steps to complete.

Overall, these findings indicate that jails may want to consider age-targeted recruitment techniques focused on career planning, educational opportunities, and the potential to “make a difference” for young people, along with emphasizing such universally-appealing attractions as job stability, benefits, retirement plans, and the agency’s reputation as a good place to work. Especially in light of how many staff from all generations first learned about job openings through personal contacts or agency employees, jail administrators might consider personalized strategies or organizational incentives that capitalize on using all employees as recruiters, (assuming that they want to attract applicants who are similar to the current workforce). In any case, it makes little sense to attract well-qualified candidates, only to frustrate and discourage them with a complex and cumbersome hiring process. Particularly in large jails, findings in this study point toward the importance of streamlining selection screening, as well as keeping in personal touch with promising applicants.

Once qualified employees have been successfully recruited, selected and hired, the challenge shifts to retaining them. When line-level employees were asked what keeps them working in their current jobs, there were only a few age-related differences. As might be expected, younger people placed higher value on college tuition assistance, child care, a fitness center, and opportunities for training, promotion, and leadership development. But in a perhaps surprising twist, those under the age of 44 were also somewhat more concerned about fair and consistent employee discipline, decision-making input, respecting agency leadership, being listened to by management, being recognized for good work, having control over their assignments, and being appreciated by the community. While exploring the many possible reasons for these findings is beyond the scope of this report, strategies for assuring long-term organizational commitment may prove to be a productive undertaking for jail leaders.

Two dimensions that reflected virtually no variation either by age or jail size were job satisfaction and workplace assessment ratings, both of which were uniformly high for all subgroups. These findings are good news for retention prospects, and are informative in terms of aspects of jail work that might be emphasized as positive features in recruitment-related outreach. Moreover, they should help to overcome the negative self-talk of some jail leaders who can now

focus on this uplifting news rather than continuing to bemoan the difficulties of jail recruitment and retention.

Further exploring what is important to retaining current employees, there was less variance by jail size than by age. Those working in small or medium jails were more likely to be concerned about being respected by command personnel, personal skills matching the job, good rapport with supervisors and coworkers, and being appreciated, recognized, and listened to by management. Overall, personal relationships with coworkers, supervisors, and management appear to be somewhat more important for those working in smaller jails.

Ultimately, however, it is essential to note that the majority of all staff in all sizes of jails placed considerable importance on such organizational values as:

- Mutual respect,
- Having a voice,
- Feeling appreciated, and
- Being recognized.

In that regard, jail employees appear to be no different from their counterparts in other public and private agencies. While such extrinsic attractions as job stability, benefits, retirement options and the like may bring good candidates in, the door can become a revolving one for agencies overlooking the value of intrinsic motivators that keep employees engaged, committed, enthused, and productive long after hire.

There is little doubt that this landmark research and the resulting data-based facts about what motivates people to consider jail employment, to accept jail positions, and to remain working in the nation's jails provide rich insights into how recruitment and retention efforts might be improved. In that regard, it has long been noted that "information is power." But that is only true to the extent that information is used as a basis for action—which is especially challenging during times when recruitment and retention initiatives may so deceptively appear to be unnecessary because of current economic conditions.

Nevertheless, proactive sheriffs and jail administrators will take advantage of the findings in this *Special Report*, along with recommendations in *The Future is Now*, to re-energize their commitment toward creating a positive, productive workplace—making their jail a place where people want to work. It is, after all, jail leaders who create the organizational environment that will either uplift and encourage staff or crush and discourage them. It is, in turn, jail staff who

will either fulfill the organizational vision or fall somewhere short. And ultimately, it is in the public safety interest of every community with a local jail to assure that its employees are uplifted and its leadership visions fulfilled.

Endnotes

¹ See Stinchcomb, McCampbell, and Leip (2009).

² When the survey probed further to determine what specifically influenced staff to accept their position once it was offered, responses did not vary by either age or jail size. The most influential factors were, again, job security (98%), salary and benefits (94%), and the retirement plan (93%).

³ See Princeton Survey Research Associates and Brookings Institution (2001).

⁴ See also Hicks and Hicks (1999); Karp, Fuller, and Sirias (2002); Lancaster and Stillman (2002); Raines and Hunt (2000); and Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak (2000).

⁵ See Thornburg (1995), Karp, Fuller, and Sirias (2002), and National Institute of Corrections (2002).

⁶ See Stinchcomb, McCampbell, and Leip (2009).

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