
Survey Report



Analysis of 2022 MQPL Survey Comments

**Top issues reported by
respondents at Big Muddy
Correctional Center**

Big Muddy Correctional Center

Big Muddy River Correctional Center (Big Muddy) is a medium-security male prison within the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) that housed 1,175 people on January 3, 2023. Big Muddy housed approximately 144 people who are civilly committed as [Sexually Dangerous Persons](#) (SDPs) and offers a voluntary sex offender treatment program (VSOTP), which had 44 participants as of October 2023, when JHA visited Big Muddy. Approximately 50% of the Big Muddy population were serving sentences for sex offenses, compared to 17% of the total IDOC population. The John Howard Association of Illinois (JHA) conducted a modified short [Measuring the Quality of Prison Life](#) (MQPL) survey by providing enough survey packets (consisting of the [MQPL survey](#), an informed consent notice/instruction sheet, and a privileged mail prepaid business reply envelope addressed to JHA) so that every person incarcerated at Big Muddy had an opportunity to participate in the voluntary and anonymous survey if they chose to do so. JHA received 493 responses to the MQPL survey from people at Big Muddy through July 19, 2023, representing approximately 42% of the static population.

This report highlights some of the most common issues raised in response to our MQPL survey question **"What are the most negative things about life in this prison?"** We selected this question to analyze because it is where most survey respondents chose to report the issues that they were experiencing while incarcerated. All survey comments for Big Muddy can be found in our [2022 MQPL Survey Comments](#) report. Quantitative survey results for Big Muddy can be found in our [2022 MQPL Survey Results](#) report.

Methodology

To identify the most common issues, we identified the most common words people used in response to the question "What are the most negative things about life in this prison?" For the Top Ten Words, all instances of each word and its plural form were counted (e.g., "program" and "programs.") Hyphenated words were counted as one word. Words like "the" and "not" were filtered from the analysis. Then, indicator words were counted under seven issue categories to determine top issues in each facility's survey responses. When an indicator word appeared within a longer word, the longer word was included. For example: the indicator word, "medic," picked up both "medical" and "medication." Prior to the issue analysis, the language in each report was standardized so that indicator words consistently appeared in a form that would be picked up by our software (e.g. "CO" was changed to "C/O," "good time" was changed to "good-time"). The indicator words by issue can be found [here](#).

To avoid double-counting issues, issue categories were only counted once per response. This means that the response "the cells are cold and dirty" would count as raising only one issue related to conditions, even though two indicator words ("cold" and "dirty") are used in the response.

There are limitations with this method, such as sentiment analysis. For example we are unable to distinguish statements such as "The doctor is good" and "I haven't seen a doctor." However, it is reasonable to conclude that instances of "doctor" are in a negative context in response to the question. Additionally, some indicator words that were frequently applied to multiple issue categories were removed. For example, we did not include "job" under productive activity because we could not distinguish statements relevant to the issue area, like "I can't get a job," from statements relevant to other issue areas, like "Staff don't do their jobs." Nor did we include "cell" under movement, e.g. "I am in my cell 24/7," because we could not distinguish from "School is always cancelled" or "The cells are too small" under this method of counting.

This report includes quotes from survey responses that we found to be either representative of the diversity of issues raised for each category or particularly insightful. Some quotes have been abbreviated to highlight the relevant issue.

Word Cloud

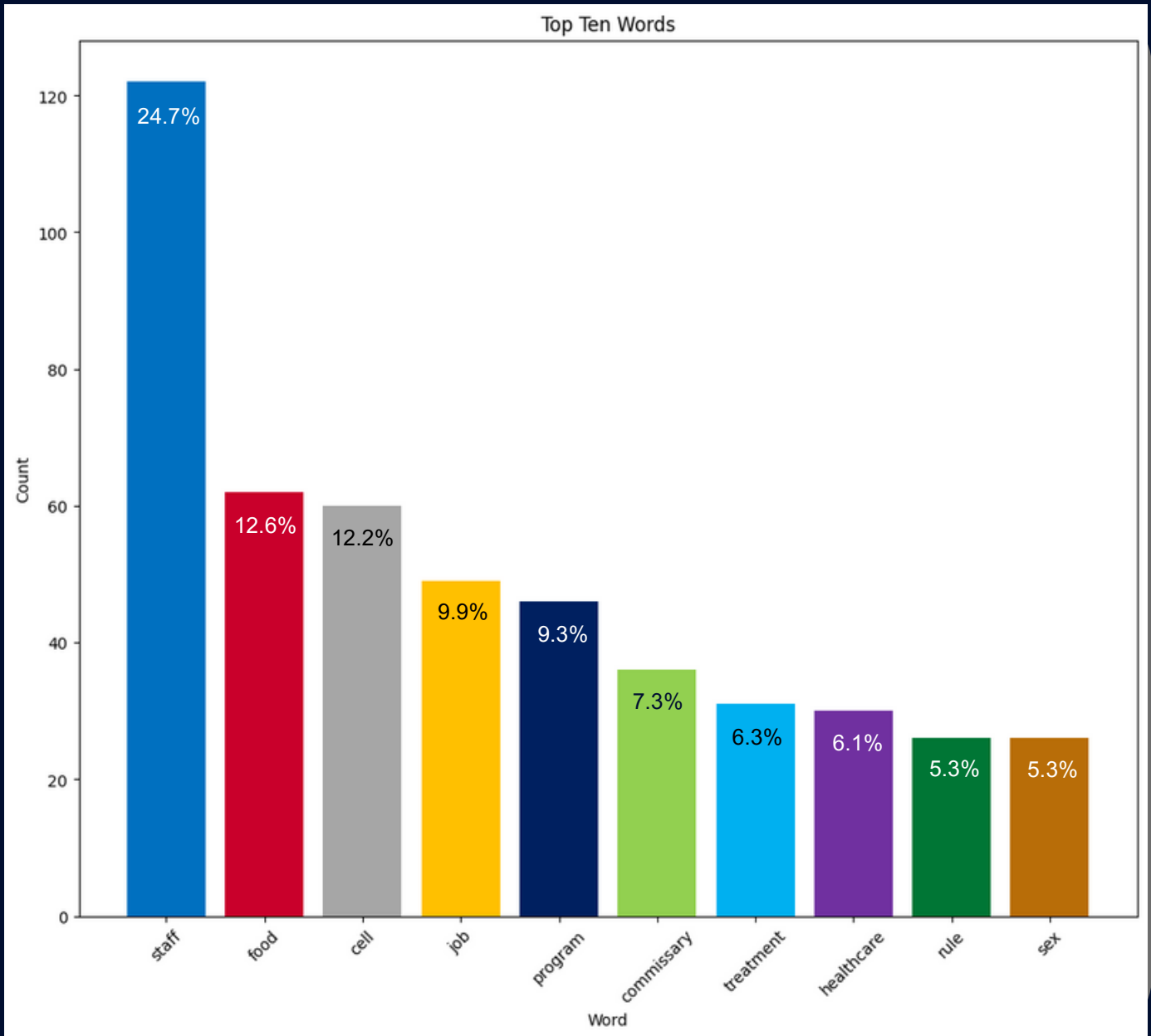


Word cloud generated using the most common words used
in Big Muddy survey responses to the question
"What are the most negative things about life in this prison?"

Top 10 Indicator Words

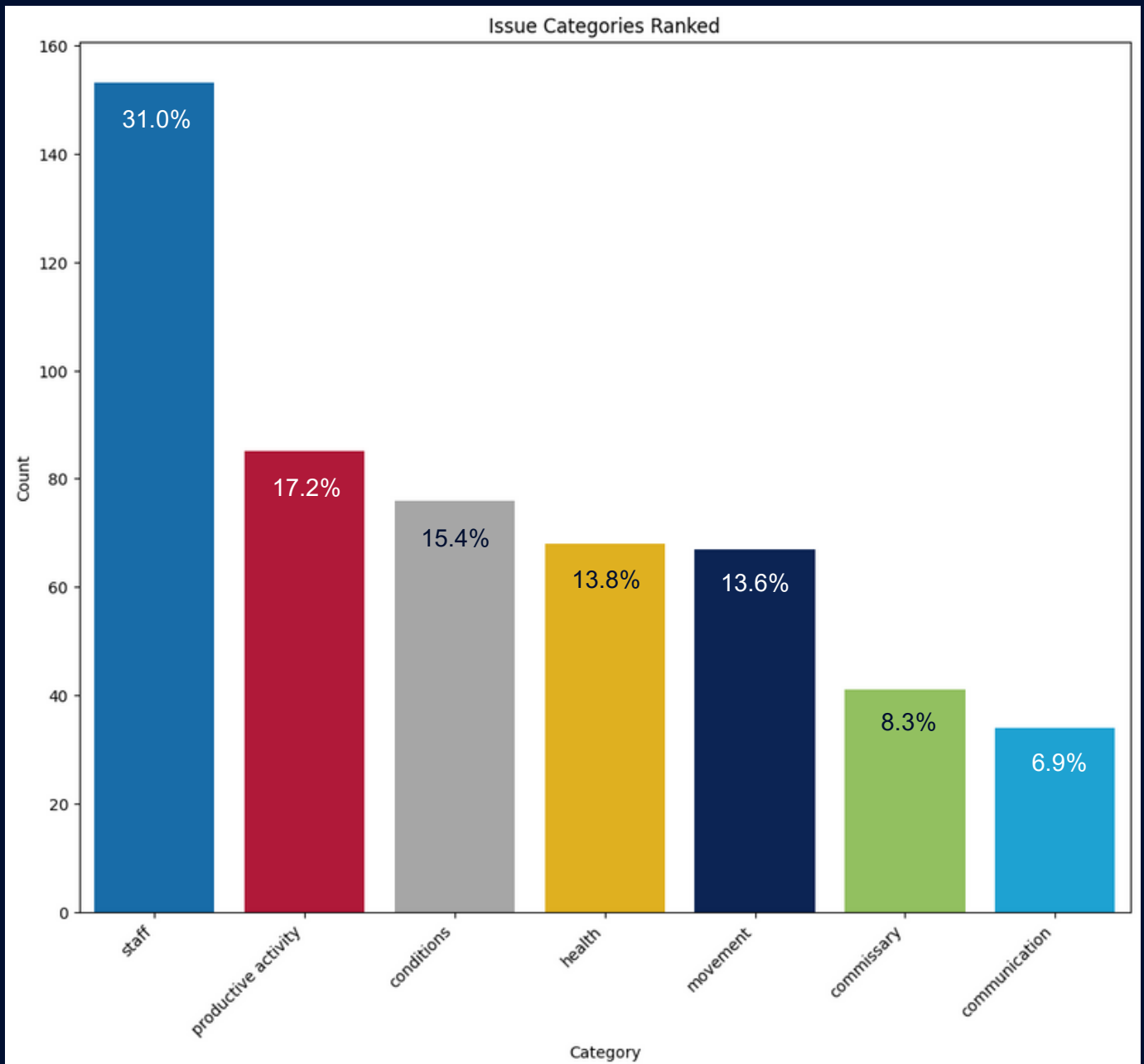
Used in responses to "What are the most negative things about life in this prison?"

Percentages are of the survey responses in which the word appeared.



Issue Categories Ranked by Prevalence

Issue rankings are determined by indicator word frequency. Common words used in survey responses have been sorted into seven issue categories. When a survey response uses one of a category's indicator words, it is tallied as raising an issue in that category. For example, a survey with the words "medical," "nurse," or "infection" is tallied as raising an issue related to health. Survey responses may include more than one issue. Percentages are of the survey responses in which an issue was raised.



Selected direct quotes from Big Muddy survey responses

1

STAFF

Encompasses issues related to prison staff, such as lack of staff or staff conduct.

How aggressive some of the staff talk to us. How often they change rules around here for reasons we're never told.

No straight answers. Help from counselors is pretty much nonexistent. Mass punishment.

There is no policy and new rules are made all the time and we are not informed properly. Staff play favoritism with jobs! Staff use personal feelings against you!

The officers bring in contraband and when inmates are caught with it they are penalized, yet staff are continually bringing it in.

Because of big muddy's reputation of being a "sex offender" prison the staff treat individuals with great disrespect, yelling + cursing when giving orders.

2

PRODUCTIVE ACTIVITY

Includes issues related to productive activities, such as work assignments, education, or programming.

I can't get in any programs or get a job & I've been here for a year. They don't have a G.E.D teacher & I cant do any voc. classes without my G.E.D I cant get in school either so I'm just here doing time

The favoritism in job placing. People who have had the same job for years. Not allowing any other inmate to get a job as a cook or a librarian.

No schooling, groups or opportunities to help me come home a positive person.

No college courses or vocational courses for civilly committed SDPs, 1 hr of overall SDP treatment provided nothing more. SDPs spend decades in custody receiving subpar mental health treatment

All the jobs and programs are given to the 85% sentenced and lifers, they are not giving anybody 6 months good time and they really don't have any school going on or programs.

3

CONDITIONS

Encompasses issues related to living conditions, such as food, water, temperature, and sanitation.

The food is terrible and 90% of the time is undercooked. 90% of the meals are all breads/noodles/carbs.

Cold air during cold months comes through the windows

The Food from Dietary is not worth feeding a dog. But yet they have the things they need to make good meals.

Dietary food is freezer burned, spoiled, or overcooked to remove defects.

No attempts to help keep us cool in the hot summers.

4

HEALTH

Includes issues related to healthcare, mental health services, and COVID-19 concerns.

Some people can end up going several weeks without receiving their weekly or monthly medications on time.

Failure to provide medical treatment through nurse sick call, failure to refill medication blister packs when stickers are turned in, failure to be put in to have a prescription refilled/recorded by doctor.

We have to wait 3 weeks after kite to mental health to get a response or none at all. I have severe PTSD and tried to talk to them about it and they said it was fine and go back to the cell and do breathing exercises

The health care is god awful!!! they don't care. They truly have no idea what they're doing. They don't listen to patient complaints and people are getting terminal diseases and dying because of it.

I have been denied basic medical and dental care due to staff indifference. I have 10 teeth which need extraction. Grievances are ineffective.

5

MOVEMENT

Includes concerns about time spent out of the cell or sleeping area and yard/dayroom availability.

Classes are closed most of the time. We barely get 1 hour out of our cells daily and that includes feeding times. We are constantly on some sort of lockdown.

We dont get any dayroom time at all, we are only getting 30 mins every 48 hours, its overcrowded and not helping better relations with family members.

Staying In your cell 22 hours a day.

If you are housed in H.C.U you dont get gym or yard at any time and never leave your ward.

I'm On A Wing Where There Are Zero COVID Cases & Still Medical Quarantined. I Feel Like It's Just Another Way To Keep Prisoners Isolated (Locked Down)

6

COMMISSARY

Encompasses issues such as frequency of shopping opportunity and item availability.

Commissary. No new underwear in a year! no good coffee for 2 years. No legitimate earbuds/headphones for GTL tablet in a year. No consistency in stocking.

Poor commissary, how they don't have any underwear and socks. But can be selling all this food with these high prices.

Poor execution of commissary. "Shopping in the dark!" you have no idea what they have and expected to write what you want. We can do far better with the tech. we have.

Commissary is horrible. They run out of everything for long periods of time.

Commissary always empty and inconsistent

7

COMMUNICATION

Includes issues related to phone availability, visitation, mail, and other means of communication.

The mailroom person right now is denying things for no reason, no rule

Receive mail only 5 days a week

Not enough phones to ensure everybody gets a turn

People Hogging phones for there gang Buddys.

Being away from family, shortened visits, appointments needed to far in advance. Phones being tied up by certain people over & over again.



This report was compiled by JHA staff. Media inquiries should be directed to JHA's Executive Director Jennifer Vollen-Katz at jvollen@thejha.org or 312-291-9183.

Incarcerated individuals can send privileged mail to report concerns and issues to the John Howard Association, P.O. Box 10042, Chicago, IL 60610-0042. JHA staff read every letter and track this information to monitor what is occurring behind prison walls and to advocate for humane policies and practices. Family and friends can contact JHA via our website www.thejha.org or by leaving us a voicemail at (312) 291-9183.

Since 1901, JHA has provided public oversight of Illinois' juvenile and adult correctional facilities. Every year, JHA staff and trained volunteers inspect prisons, jails, and detention centers throughout the state. Based on these inspections, JHA regularly issues reports that are instrumental in improving prison conditions. JHA humbly thanks everyone who graciously shared their experiences and insights with us.



Defying Injustice. Defending Humanity.