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Firearms Use in Violent Crime in Alaska and the U.S.

According to annual figures from the Uniform Crime Reporting program of the FBI for the years 1980 through 1997, firearms were used in a solid majority of the murders committed each year in the nation as a whole. Handguns were the type of firearm used most often in these crimes. For Alaska, figures fluctuate more, but in most of the years for which data are available, the majority of murders and non-negligent homicides involved firearms. Other violent crime categories for which the UCR assembles data reveal less frequent, although still substantial use of firearms, particularly in the category of robbery.

The data discussed in this article and presented in the accompanying tables and

Please see Firearms, page 6

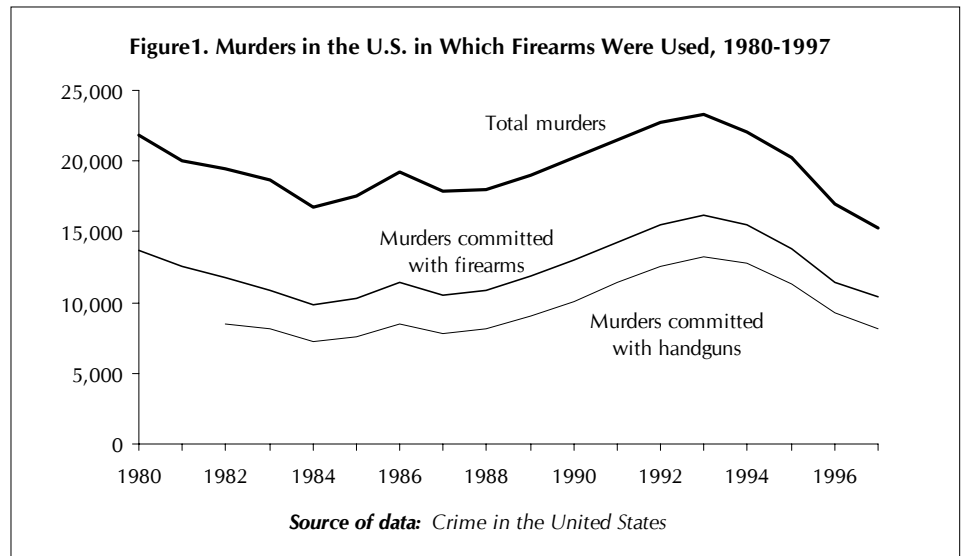


Table 1. Percentage of Murders in the U.S. in Which Firearms Were Used, 1980-1997

Row percentages.

| | Total number of murders | | Total with firearms | | Handguns | | Rifles | | Shotguns | | Other guns | | Not identified | |
|------|-------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|--------|----------|--------|--------|-------|----------|-------|------------|-------|----------------|-------|
| | Estimated totals | With supplemental data | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| 1980 | 23,044 | 21,860 | 13,650 | 62.4 % | - | 50.0 % | - | 5.0 % | - | 7.0 % | - | - | - | - |
| 1981 | 22,516 | 20,053 | 12,523 | 62.4 | - | 50.0 | - | 5.0 | - | 8.0 | - | - | - | - |
| 1982 | 21,012 | 19,485 | 11,721 | 60.2 | 8,474 | 43.5 | 1,017 | 5.2 | 1,377 | 7.1 | 38 | 0.2 % | 815 | 4.2 % |
| 1983 | 19,308 | 18,673 | 10,895 | 58.3 | 8,193 | 43.9 | 831 | 4.5 | 1,243 | 6.7 | 19 | 0.1 | 609 | 3.3 |
| 1984 | 18,692 | 16,689 | 9,819 | 58.8 | 7,277 | 43.6 | 763 | 4.6 | 1,154 | 6.9 | 18 | 0.1 | 607 | 3.6 |
| 1985 | 18,976 | 17,545 | 10,296 | 58.7 | 7,548 | 43.0 | 810 | 4.6 | 1,188 | 6.8 | 24 | 0.1 | 726 | 4.1 |
| 1986 | 20,613 | 19,257 | 11,381 | 59.1 | 8,460 | 43.9 | 788 | 4.1 | 1,296 | 6.7 | 22 | 0.1 | 815 | 4.2 |
| 1987 | 20,096 | 17,859 | 10,556 | 59.1 | 7,807 | 43.7 | 772 | 4.3 | 1,095 | 6.1 | 16 | 0.1 | 866 | 4.8 |
| 1988 | 18,209 | 17,971 | 10,895 | 60.6 | 8,147 | 45.3 | 753 | 4.2 | 1,105 | 6.1 | 15 | 0.1 | 875 | 4.9 |
| 1989 | 19,645 | 18,954 | 11,832 | 62.4 | 9,013 | 47.6 | 865 | 4.6 | 1,173 | 6.2 | 34 | 0.2 | 747 | 3.9 |
| 1990 | 21,597 | 20,273 | 13,035 | 64.3 | 10,099 | 49.8 | 746 | 3.7 | 1,245 | 6.1 | 25 | 0.1 | 920 | 4.5 |
| 1991 | 23,305 | 21,505 | 14,265 | 66.3 | 11,411 | 53.1 | 741 | 3.4 | 1,113 | 5.2 | 30 | 0.1 | 970 | 4.5 |
| 1992 | 24,526 | 22,716 | 15,489 | 68.2 | 12,580 | 55.4 | 706 | 3.1 | 1,111 | 4.9 | 42 | 0.2 | 1,050 | 4.6 |
| 1993 | 23,760 | 23,271 | 16,189 | 69.6 | 13,252 | 56.9 | 754 | 3.2 | 1,059 | 4.6 | 38 | 0.2 | 1,086 | 4.7 |
| 1994 | 24,703 | 22,076 | 15,456 | 70.0 | 12,769 | 57.8 | 723 | 3.3 | 953 | 4.3 | 19 | 0.1 | 992 | 4.5 |
| 1995 | 23,438 | 20,232 | 13,790 | 68.2 | 11,282 | 55.8 | 654 | 3.2 | 929 | 4.6 | 29 | 0.1 | 896 | 4.4 |
| 1996 | 21,500 | 16,967 | 11,453 | 67.5 | 9,266 | 54.6 | 561 | 3.3 | 685 | 4.0 | 20 | 0.1 | 921 | 5.4 |
| 1997 | 20,675 | 15,289 | 10,369 | 67.8 | 8,104 | 53.0 | 624 | 4.1 | 637 | 4.2 | 34 | 0.2 | 970 | 6.3 |

- Numbers not given.

Source of data: *Crime in the United States*

Review Essay: Race To Incarcerate

John Riley

In recent years, the number of adult Americans in jail or prison has grown at an unprecedented rate. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, America's jails and prisons held approximately 578,800 people in 1980. By 1990, that number had grown to 1,148,702 inmates. In 1998, by mid-year, our prison and jail population had risen to over 1.8 million persons. These numbers delineate an increase in our use of incarceration that would have been hard for most observers to imagine twenty years ago.

This essay focuses on *Race to Incarcerate*, Marc Mauer's recent contribution to the growing literature on America's obsession with prison and punishment. Mauer is well known for his work with the Sentencing Project, an effort that has resulted in the publication of a number of influential studies that are particularly well known for calling attention to problems of racial disparity in the justice system. The Sentencing Project grew out of pilot projects organized by the National Legal Aid and Defender Association and the National Council on Crime and Delinquency in the early 1980s. Incorporated in 1986, it provides information and technical assistance to individuals and organizations interested in promoting alternatives to incarceration. Since its start in the 1980s, the Sentencing Project has played a role in sentencing reform initiatives in twenty states. *Race to Incarcerate* represents an extension of that effort and offers a fairly comprehensive introduction to the philosophy that animates Mauer's work with the project.

In its general outlines, Mauer's understanding of sentencing policy is now shared by many. For Mauer growth in our prison population has been fueled by periods of steeply rising crime rates, by the media's assembly line approach to the production of news stories that distort the reality of crime, and by cynical political efforts to capitalize on citizens' fear. It has been fashionable to focus attention on gang members, drive-by shootings, "drug kingpins," and serial killers. Rather than address the underlying causes of crime, legislators have responded to the media's vision of our crime problem with a "war on drugs," and with "get tough" sentencing policies that include "three-strikes" laws, mandatory minimum sentences, and juvenile waiver laws that allow young offenders to be processed as adults. Supporters describe these initiatives as efforts to reduce crime by getting dangerous people off the streets and by setting a stern

example for those who might otherwise choose to pursue criminal activities.

We know that crime rates have fallen in recent years. The FBI's Uniform Crime Reports for 1997 show that murder rates have fallen from a peak of 10.2 per 100,000 in 1980 to 6.8 in 1997. Overall rates of violent crime, as reflected in the FBI's index crime statistics, fell from a high of 758 per 100,000 in 1991 to 610 per 100,000 in 1997, the lowest number recorded since 1987. Property crime rates have also fallen. The Uniform Crime Reports for 1997 show a 14 per cent decline in property crimes since 1988.

Some will argue that this is a result of "get tough" policies, but in reality it is not clear how much of the recent reduction in crime rates can be attributed to our increased willingness to incarcerate offenders. While rates of violent crime have certainly declined in recent years, Mauer points out that an examination of long-term trends shows that crime rates have both risen and fallen as the prison population has increased. And violent crime rates today are still much higher than they were in the years preceding the expansion of the correctional system. For these and other reasons, many criminologists believe that factors other than the increased use of incarceration have contributed to a reduction in crime rates. Moreover, those persons who are usually incarcerated as a result of "get-tough" policies do not seem to be the drive-by shooters, "drug kingpins," serial killers, or other violent and dangerous predators featured on the evening news. The majority of those incarcerated in recent years have been nonviolent offenders, imprisoned for property crimes, public order offenses, and the possession, distribution, and use of controlled substances. Increasingly, prisons are being used to house petty thieves, the deinstitutionalized mentally ill, and addicts who support their habits by working at the lowest levels of illegal drug distribution networks.

According to Mauer, a substantial portion of the increase in our prison population is accounted for by the confinement of drug offenders, having important implications for criminal justice policy. Because to a great extent our war on crime has been a war on drugs, it has been a de facto war on America's minority community. In recent years, many of the drug crimes that have resulted in prison sentences have involved the use of crack cocaine, a substance that is believed by many in law enforcement to be the drug of choice in African-American neighborhoods.

Editor's Note

The *Alaska Justice Forum* plans to begin occasionally including reviews of newly-released work on justice issues. The accompanying review essay discusses *Race to Incarcerate* by Marc Mauer, which is being published by the New Press (ISBN 1-56584-429-7).

—Antonia Moras

It seems unlikely that anyone in law enforcement ever conspired to fill prison beds with blacks by targeting low-level drug dealers and users in African-American communities. Even so, this has clearly been the result of criminal justice policies in the late twentieth century. This is true in spite of the fact that there is compelling evidence to suggest that, overall, African-Americans use illegal drugs at a rate that is similar to that of white Americans.

As Mauer and his colleagues at the Sentencing Project point out, on an average day, one in three African-American men between 20 and 29 years of age are under some form of correctional supervision. While perhaps not consciously racist in conception, our crime policies have been unequivocally racist in effect. Today, while African-American men make up less than 7 per cent of the overall population, they account for almost one-half of those incarcerated in America.

Because good data on other minority communities are often lacking, Mauer focuses primarily on the African-American experience of the criminal justice system. He does so recognizing that the experience of African-Americans is similar in fundamental ways to that of many other minority groups. In some minority communities, many observers fear that prison experience has become an expected right of passage for young, economically disadvantaged men. We have no formula with which to calculate the harm experienced when families and communities lose so many fathers, sons, and brothers to the criminal justice system. But this loss, coupled with recent growth in incarceration rates for women in these communities, is cause for grave concern.

Mauer draws on abundant research literature to support his analysis of sentencing policy. His argument incorporates some of the most important recent research findings, relevant historical scholarship, and his own considerable experience with the Sentencing Project. In the end he succeeds in calling our attention to fundamentally irra-

tional features of the criminal justice system, a system that may be more of a threat to our sense of community than many of the crimes which it is ostensibly organized to prevent.

In addition to its discussion of race and sentencing policy, *Race to Incarcerate* also offers a worthwhile account of the origins of the “get tough” movement, insightful discussions of politics and the media’s coverage of crime news, and an examination of the relationship between social class and criminality that lends context to the issue of race. The book is filled with examples of the unintended consequences of current justice system policies, with one chapter explicitly devoted to this theme. Many readers will benefit from Mauer’s discussion of the costs of imprisonment, and particularly from his analysis of the public health issues associated with rising levels of incarceration. His explanation of the replacement effect, a term which refers to the likelihood that new offenders will emerge to take the place of those we incarcerate, is equally important to a realistic understanding of the justice system’s ability to control crime.

Nevertheless, there are moments when it seems as if Mauer’s enthusiasm for sentencing reform clouds his interpretation of the available data. In claiming that the decline in juvenile homicide rates cannot be explained by rising rates of adult incarceration, for example, he ignores the growth in juvenile detention, and the possibility that incarceration might have a deterrent effect on those who watch older friends and siblings sentenced to adult facilities. This is surprising, as he acknowledges this kind of

“younger sibling effect” a few pages later in his discussion of declining rates of drug use.

Mauer’s discussion of falling burglary rates is also troubling. In an effort to show that factors other than incarceration may account for reductions in crime, Mauer points to a recent decline in burglary rates which coincided with a period of *falling* rates of incarceration for burglary. He suggests that burglary rates may have fallen as a result of a shift to alternative forms of criminal behavior, notably drug sales and robbery. According to Mauer, a review of the 1980-1995 prison population statistics “does not suggest that an increase in the number of imprisoned burglars was necessarily the primary factor at work” in reducing rates of burglary. But Mauer fails to rule out the possibility that increased incarceration rates for other crimes might have reduced the number of potential burglars on the street. The number of people imprisoned for burglary may fall while the number of potential burglars in prison rises. In making this argument, Mauer ought to address the possibility that incarceration for other crimes may have played a significant role in the reduction of burglary. We cannot assume that potential burglars will only be arrested for burglary or that increased incarceration rates for other crimes are irrelevant. In fact, potential burglars will be prevented from committing burglary while serving time for any crime, including drug offenses and armed robberies. In failing to acknowledge that incapacitation may take place across crime categories, Mauer assumes an unwarranted level of criminal spe-

cialization.

The central themes on which Mauer focuses are by now quite familiar, particularly to those who have had the opportunity to read Michael Tonry’s *Malign Neglect*, Nils Christie’s *Crime Control as Industry*, or John Irwin and James Austin’s *It’s About Time*. Some readers may fault Mauer for a lack of originality or for his uncritical use or occasional neglect of an important scholarly work. In general, *Race to Incarcerate* makes frequent use of recent research findings, but it is not an exhaustive review of the empirical research on sentencing. It is also fair to say that there is not much that is new here for those who have the luxury of closely following the research literature on crime and justice issues. For those who do not have that luxury, *Race to Incarcerate* offers a worthwhile effort to make some of those findings conveniently accessible to a larger audience.

Mauer and his colleagues at the Sentencing Project have already made a substantial original contribution to the research literature on sentencing policy. This latest work puts that contribution in a broader context, provides an introduction to some of the more influential empirical research on sentencing, and encourages honest and responsible thinking about justice. In the end, Mauer’s effort to encourage a reevaluation of America’s obsession with prisons and punishment provides a reasonably lucid and concise account of a complex and important issue.

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Justice Center Project Highlights

The following is a list of some of the current Justice Center research and public education projects. The Justice Center Web Site presents further information and findings from many of these projects at <http://www.uaa.alaska.edu/just/research/>.

- | | |
|---|---|
| Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring Project (ADAM) (JC 0001)—Robert H. Langworthy, Cassie Atwell | Child Welfare and Alaska Native Tribal Governance: A Pilot Project in Kake, Alaska (JC 9910)—Lisa Rieger |
| Judicial Candidates Evaluation Surveys (JC 9207)—Richard W. Curtis | State Justice Statistics Program: Sex Offender Research (JC 9911)—Allan R. Barnes |
| Alaska Natives: Careers in Corrections (JC 9501.05)—John Riley | Alaska Native Technical Assistance and Research Center (JC 9915)—Robert H. Langworthy |
| The Structure of Large Municipal Police Organizations During the Community Policing Era (JC 9805)—Robert H. Langworthy | The Effect of the DARE Program Upon Rural Alaska Students (JC 9921)—Darryl Wood |
| Turnover Among Alaska Village Public Safety Officers (VPSO): An Examination of the Factors Associated with Attrition (JC 9901)—Darryl Wood | The Changing Legal Environment and ICWA in Alaska: A Regional Study (JC 0012, proposal pending)—Lisa Rieger |
| Community Jails Statwide Research Consortium (JC 9902)—N.E. Schafer | Emmonak Elders’ Group Juvenile Accountability Project (JC 9990, proposal pending)—N.E. Schafer |
| The Impact of Untreated Sex Offenders on the Prison Population in Alaska: A Study of Risk Level and Amenability of Treatment (JC 9914)—Robert H. Langworthy | Spatial Concordance of DWI Arrest and Alcohol-Related Traffic Accidents (JC 0014, proposal pending)—Robert Langworthy |
| Jails and Fire Safety (JC 9905)—N.E. Schafer, Sandy Belfield | Assessment of CANS: A SAC, Anchorage Police Department and Alaska Division of Juvenile Justice Partnership (JC 0006, proposal pending)—Robert H. Langworthy |
| Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Jail Monitoring Project (JC 0002)—N.E. Schafer, Cassie Atwell | |

Judicial Council Report on Palmer Probation Project

The Alaska Judicial Council has released a report which contains a description and evaluation of the fifteen-month pilot probation program for misdemeanor domestic violence offenders recently completed in Palmer. The report describes the nature of the program, the characteristics of supervised offenders and outcomes for these offenders. It also presents the results of an evaluation which compared outcomes for offenders in the program with those from a set of cases in which the offenders did not receive supervision. The evaluation also included an interview component which elicited reactions to the program from its participants.

The Palmer Project

The project in Palmer, which ran from 1998 through the first part of 1999, was conceived as a pilot project which would provide probation supervision to a selected group of offenders convicted of misdemeanor domestic violence violations. The majority—about 95 per cent—of Alaska offenders convicted of domestic abuse are convicted of misdemeanors and ordinarily receive no formal supervision once released from custody. This absence of supervision has been perceived as a weak link in the criminal justice system. The pilot project was funded by a \$131,000 grant under the federal Violence Against Women Act. It had two goals: to develop offender accountability and to increase victim safety. It comprised a collaborative effort among various branches of the justice system serving Palmer: local law enforcement; the district attorney's office; district and superior court judges; the Valley Women's Resource Center; and the Palmer probation office.

Those planning the program decided to target more serious domestic violence offenders for inclusion in the program, on the theory that supervision resources should not be expended on less serious offenders who might be likely to succeed without extra attention.

Over the fifteen months a total of 47 offenders were supervised. Most often, the district attorney's office made the request that an offender be admitted to the program, although judges also ordered supervised probation *sua sponte*. Defense attorneys typically did not ask for their clients to be admitted to the program.

One probation officer supervised all the domestic violence misdemeanants in the program. The caseload averaged about 40 offenders per month early in the program

and 30 per month later. (This contrasts with an average active *felony* probation caseload of about 100 offenders per officer in the Palmer probation office.)

A review of the probation officer's contact log showed the intense level of supervision permitted by the small caseload. The officer averaged 42 contacts with each offender and met face-to-face with all but three offenders. During these contacts, she inquired about employment, residence and compliance with treatment requirements and initiated discussions about the offender's perspective on what had happened and the nature of domestic violence.

The probation officer also contacted most of the supervised offenders' victims—a practice not normally associated with probation supervision—to ask about the victim's sense of safety and the offender's behavior.

Characteristics of Offenders

The Judicial Council report presents a list of characteristics of offenders in the supervised group and a similar list for offenders in the set of cases which was used as a control group for purposes of statistical comparison. The report details how the control group was chosen from 1997 and 1998 filings in the Palmer court system.

Almost all offenders, in both the program group (47) and in the set of cases selected as a control group (123) for the purposes of the evaluation, had been charged with assault in the fourth degree, which is a misdemeanor. A few had originally been charged with Assault III, a felony. All had been convicted of a misdemeanor offense against an intimate partner—most commonly assault or interfering with a domestic violence report. Most offenders were married to or living with the victims at the time of the offense. Sentences imposed by judges typically included incarceration for several days or weeks; conditions of probation requiring offenders to complete a batterer intervention program and substance abuse assessment or treatment; and, in some cases, a suspended fine. Judges seldom ordered restitution or community work service.

The majority of offenders had at least one prior misdemeanor conviction—89 per cent of the supervised group and 62 per cent of the unsupervised. About 60 per cent of the supervised offenders were under the influence of alcohol or drugs at the time of the offense. Because of the way information is maintained in criminal history records and court files, data on substance abuse for the

control group was less reliable, although for a little over half (54%) there was some indication in the records of a history of substance abuse.

The supervised offenders and those in the control group were mostly Caucasian, although minorities were slightly overrepresented in both groups compared to the general population of the Mat-Su valley. Women were 2 per cent of the supervised group and 17 per cent of the control group. The average age of supervised offenders was 34 years. In the control group the average age was 35.5 years.

All but two of the supervised offenders (4%) possessed at least a high school degree or GED. No educational information was available for the control group. Over half of the offenders in both groups reported full or part-time employment.

Outcomes

Five (11%) of the supervised offenders



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were alleged to have committed a new domestic violence offense against the same victim and two (4%) against another victim. A new offense against the same victim was alleged for eleven of the control group (9%) and a new offense against a different victim for two (2%).

The probation officer filed one or more petitions to revoke probation against 72% of the supervised offenders (34). Petitions to revoke were filed against only half (60) of the control group.

For those with treatment programs ordered as a condition of probation, about a third of both the supervised offenders and the other group successfully completed court-ordered batterer-intervention programs. Thirty-seven per cent of the supervised group partially completed their programs, as did 21 per cent of the control group.

Thirty-five per cent of the supervised offenders completed substance abuse programs and 42 per cent partially completed the required treatment programs. Thirty-two per cent of the control completed their programs and 34 per cent partially completed the programs.

Evaluation

The Judicial Council evaluation used both quantitative and qualitative data to understand the effects of the program. The quantitative data, some of which is detailed above, was obtained from court and probation files, from the Alaska Public Safety Information Network (APSIN) and from treatment providers. It became the basis for a statistical comparison. In addition, both structured and informal interviews were conducted with judicial officers, police, attorneys and victim service providers. One offender and one victim were also interviewed. (Attempts to contact more victims and offenders were hampered by time and scheduling constraints.)

As the discussion in the previous section indicates, the supervised offenders resembled the control group in many variables including ethnicity, age, employment, relationship to victims and charges. The groups differed on several important variables including gender, prior record, and conditions of probation.

After discussing the problems which undercut precise comparability, the report presents the results of the statistical comparison between the two groups. The comparison found: the difference between the supervised group and the control group in complying with conditions on completing treatment program was not statistically significant; no statistically significant dif-

ference in the rates at which the two groups re-offended appeared; a statistical difference did exist in the percentages of probation revocation between the groups, with the supervised offenders more likely than those in the control group to have their probation revoked.

(Another quantitative finding which emerges from the study as it is reported is that women were named as defendants in almost a quarter (23%) of all the Palmer intimate-partner assault cases examined for the study. They accounted for 17 per cent of those ultimately convicted. This was true even though Palmer prosecutors dismissed cases against women at a much higher rate than they did for men.)

The other component of the Council evaluation was based on interviews conducted with those involved in the program. (Those who were interviewed were not aware of the results of the quantitative evaluation at the time of the interview.) With the exception of defense attorneys, the people interviewed were satisfied with the project and asked that it be continued. Judges, prosecutors, law enforcement and victim service providers perceived the program as a helpful resource. They relied on the probation officer to keep track of offenders they regarded as being at high risk of re-offending or violating probation. They also believed that the probation officer played an important coordination role among all players in the justice system. Defense attorneys argued that the program was ineffective in helping their clients to complete court-ordered conditions of probation, with their supervised clients more likely to be charged with offenses or violations unrelated to the original crime – in their opinion, a consequence that did not help clients complete treatment or stay out of jail.

The program provided an important re-

source to victims, many of whom kept in close touch with the probation officer. This level of victim service is not normally available for misdemeanor cases in the criminal justice system.

Observations

Based on the findings of the evaluation the Judicial Council made three observations. First, since this evaluation suggests that probation supervision did not help offenders complete court-ordered treatment, more research should be done before deciding to start any future monitoring programs. Research should examine other models of post-release monitoring which might be more effective.

Second, since the program provided a valuable resource to victims and a level of victim service not regularly available for misdemeanor cases, future research could focus on how to replicate this level of service in a cost-effective way.

Finally, the evaluation points to three other areas for possible research. Victims, offenders, prosecutors, defense attorneys, and probation officers might together design a post-release monitoring program aimed toward helping offenders complete court-ordered treatment. Another research project could re-examine the offenders studied in this report at a later date. Finally, additional research is needed to illuminate how often and under what circumstances women are involved as the offender in domestic violence cases.

Copies of the report, "Evaluation of Pilot Probation Program for Misdemeanor Domestic Violence Offenders," which is discussed in this article, may be obtained from the Alaska Judicial Council or through its web site at <http://www.ajc.state.ak.us/>.

New Faculty Appointments

Pamela Kelley and Deborah Periman have joined the faculty of the Justice Center as assistant professors in the Paralegal Studies Certificate Program. Kelley will serve as coordinator of the program. Both Kelley and Periman are members of the Alaska Bar. Kelley received her law degree from Indiana University and has practiced in the areas of family law, bankruptcy, and commercial litigation and transactions. She also works as a volunteer with women's organizations, particularly those concerned with the prevention of domestic violence. Periman received her degree from Willamette University College of Law and has practiced in the area of civil litigation. She has also previously taught legal research and analysis as an adjunct professor at the Justice Center.

The Justice Center Paralegal Studies Certificate Program is approved by the American Bar Association. Students can earn the certificate separately or as part of a baccalaureate or associate degree program.

Firearms
(continued from page 1)

figure have been assembled from *Crime in the United States*, the annual publication based on the UCR, and *Crime Reported in Alaska*, the annual publication of the Alaska Department of Public Safety, which details the state's UCR figures. Some points should be noted regarding the data. First, the annual national totals for the various categories are estimates. In the category of murder and non-negligent homicide, a slightly different total is presented for each year for those murders on which supplemental data were supplied. This provides the basis for calculating the figures on firearm use. Next, some gaps in the series of numbers exist, particularly for Alaska. In the first years of the seventeen-year period discussed, the reporting did not include much supplemental data. Finally, although the UCR is conceived as a comprehensive national crime reporting program, in reality in Alaska, for any given year over this period, a number of police agencies from a variety of locations chose not to participate. Those departments choosing not to contribute figures have included at various times agencies located in comparatively sizeable communities.

Figure 1 linearly depicts the rises and falls in the numbers of homicides over the period studied. As can be seen, the number of murders committed with firearms, the number of murders committed with handguns, and the total number of murders

in the U.S. describe irregular, but similar lines; that is, the peaks and valleys which occurred over the seventeen-year period in the two sub-categories detailing firearms use corresponded to similar rises and falls in the total number of homicides. Since 1993, there has been a decline in annual totals; a similar decline occurred in the early 80s.

The more detailed presentation of data in Table 1 reveals that the highest annual number of homicides during the period occurred in 1993: 23,271. Since then, the total has dropped substantially—to 15,289 in 1997, which is the lowest of the entire period. The percentage of murders in which firearms were used varied from 58.3 per cent in 1983 to 70 per cent in 1994. The percentage committed with handguns varied from 43 per cent in 1985 to 58 per cent in 1994.

In Alaska the percentage of murders committed with firearms fluctuates more widely over the same period, from 44 per cent in 1991 to 73 per cent in 1985. A couple points regarding the Alaska figures in Table 2 should be noted. First, since the total num-

ber of homicides in any given year is small, slight differences in numbers of those committed with firearms result in wide percentage differences. Also, the Alaska reporting did not begin to specify percentages committed with firearms until 1985 and actual numbers were not published until 1991.

In comparison to their use in murders, firearms are used in robberies and aggravated assaults much less often in both Alaska and the nation as a whole. Over the seventeen years, the percentage of robberies in the U.S. in which firearms were involved ranged from 33 per cent in 1987 to 42 per cent in 1994 (Table 3, Figure 2). For assaults, the percentages ranged from 20 per cent in 1997 to 25 per cent in 1993. In Alaska over the same period, the percentages for robbery ranged from 30 per cent in 1988 to 41.5 per cent in 1997, and for assaults, from 19 per cent in 1988 to 24.5 per cent in 1994 (Table 4, Figure 2). The Alaska high and low percentages for both robbery and aggravated assault are similar to those for the U.S. as a whole, although they occur in different years.

On the Web: Focus on Gun Control

Internet resources reflecting a spectrum of research and positions on gun control issues are available through the Justice Center Web Site page *Focus on Gun Control*, <http://www.uaa.alaska.edu/just/focus/guns.html>. The page includes links to resources on Alaska and national firearms law, including constitutional law; statistics on firearms and crime; and organizations advocating for or against gun control legislation.

Table 2. Percentage of Murders and Nonnegligent Manslaughters in Alaska in Which Firearms Were Used, 1980-1997

Row percentages.

| | Total number of crimes | Total with firearms | | Handguns | | Rifles | | Shotguns | | Semi-automatic pistol | | Revolvers | | Unknown firearm | |
|------|------------------------|---------------------|--------|----------|--------|--------|--------|----------|-------|-----------------------|-------|-----------|-------|-----------------|-------|
| | | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| 1980 | 38 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| 1981 | 58 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| 1982 | 81 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| 1983 | 65 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| 1984 | 54 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| 1985 | 52 | - | 73.0 % | - | 56.0 % | - | 17.0 % | - | 0.0 % | - | 0.0 % | - | 0.0 % | - | 0.0 % |
| 1986 | 49 | - | 70.0 | - | 49.0 | - | 12.2 | - | 8.2 | - | 0.0 | - | 0.0 | - | 0.0 |
| 1987 | 51 | - | 61.0 | - | 39.0 | - | 12.0 | - | 10.0 | - | 0.0 | - | 0.0 | - | 0.0 |
| 1988 | 33 | - | 62.0 | - | 44.0 | - | 15.0 | - | 3.0 | - | 0.0 | - | 0.0 | - | 0.0 |
| 1989 | 43 | - | 61.0 | - | 29.0 | - | 28.0 | - | 4.0 | - | 0.0 | - | 0.0 | - | 0.0 |
| 1990 | 37 | - | 51.0 | - | 37.0 | - | 11.0 | - | 3.0 | - | 0.0 | - | 0.0 | - | 0.0 |
| 1991 | 45 | 20 | 44.4 | 16 | 35.6 | 3 | 6.7 | 1 | 2.2 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 |
| 1992 | 44 | 27 | 61.4 | 17 | 38.6 | 7 | 15.9 | 3 | 6.8 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 |
| 1993 | 52 | 27 | 51.9 | 17 | 32.7 | 7 | 13.5 | 3 | 5.8 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 |
| 1994 | 37 | 24 | 64.9 | 20 | 54.1 | 2 | 5.4 | 1 | 2.7 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 1 | 2.7 |
| 1995 | 55 | 31 | 56.4 | 20 | 36.4 | 6 | 10.9 | 1 | 1.8 | 3 | 5.5 | 0 | 0.0 | 1 | 1.8 |
| 1996 | 45 | 32 | 71.1 | 12 | 26.7 | 0 | 0.0 | 7 | 15.6 | 6 | 13.3 | 7 | 15.6 | 0 | 0.0 |
| 1997 | 50 | 27 | 54.0 | 15 | 30.0 | 6 | 12.0 | 4 | 8.0 | 2 | 4.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 |

- Numbers not given

Source of data: *Crimes Reported in Alaska*

Table 3. Percentage of Murders, Robberies, and Aggravated Assaults in the U.S. in Which Firearms Were Used, 1980-1997

| | <u>Murder</u> | | <u>Robbery</u> | | <u>Aggravated assault</u> | |
|------|--------------------------|------|----------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| | N (supple- mental) | % | N | % involving firearms | N | % involving firearms |
| 1980 | 21,860 | 62.4 | 548,809 | 40.3 | 654,957 | 23.9 |
| 1981 | 20,053 | 62.4 | 574,134 | 40.1 | 643,720 | 23.6 |
| 1982 | 19,485 | 60.2 | 536,888 | 39.9 | 650,042 | 22.4 |
| 1983 | 18,673 | 58.3 | 500,221 | 36.7 | 639,532 | 21.2 |
| 1984 | 16,689 | 58.8 | 485,008 | 35.8 | 685,349 | 21.1 |
| 1985 | 17,545 | 58.7 | 497,874 | 35.3 | 723,246 | 21.3 |
| 1986 | 19,257 | 59.1 | 542,775 | 34.3 | 834,322 | 21.3 |
| 1987 | 17,859 | 59.1 | 517,704 | 33.0 | 855,088 | 21.4 |
| 1988 | 17,971 | 60.6 | 542,968 | 33.4 | 910,092 | 21.1 |
| 1989 | 18,954 | 62.4 | 578,326 | 33.2 | 951,707 | 21.5 |
| 1990 | 20,273 | 64.3 | 639,271 | 36.6 | 1,054,863 | 23.1 |
| 1991 | 21,505 | 66.3 | 687,732 | 39.9 | 1,092,739 | 23.6 |
| 1992 | 22,716 | 68.2 | 672,478 | 40.3 | 1,126,974 | 24.7 |
| 1993 | 23,271 | 69.6 | 659,757 | 42.4 | 1,135,099 | 25.1 |
| 1994 | 22,076 | 70.0 | 618,817 | 41.6 | 1,119,950 | 24.0 |
| 1995 | 20,232 | 68.2 | 580,545 | 41.0 | 1,099,179 | 22.9 |
| 1996 | 16,967 | 67.5 | 537,050 | 40.7 | 1,029,814 | 22.0 |
| 1997 | 15,289 | 67.8 | 497,950 | 39.7 | 1,022,492 | 20.0 |

Source of data: Crime in the United States

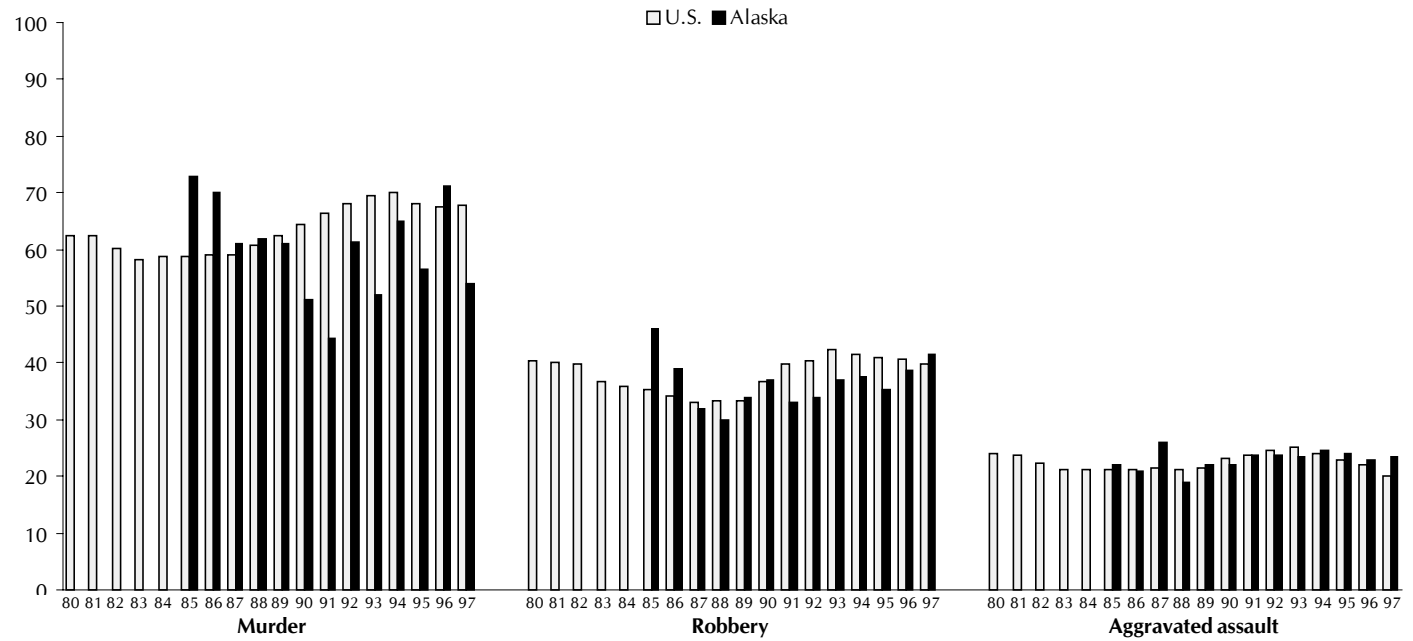
Table 4. Percentage of Murders, Robberies, and Aggravated Assaults in Alaska in Which Firearms Were Used, 1980-1997

| | <u>Murder/nonnegligent manslaughter</u> | | | <u>Robbery</u> | | | <u>Aggravated assault</u> | | |
|------|---|---------------------------|--------|-----------------|---------------------------|--------|---------------------------|---------------------------|--------|
| | Total crimes | <u>Involving firearms</u> | | Total crimes | <u>Involving firearms</u> | | Total crimes | <u>Involving firearms</u> | |
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | |
| 1980 | 38 | - | - | 445 | - | - | 1,364 | - | - |
| 1981 | 58 | - | - | 458 | - | - | 1,372 | - | - |
| 1982 | 81 | - | - | 574 | - | - | 1,626 | - | - |
| 1983 | 65 | - | - | 456 | - | - | 1,891 | - | - |
| 1984 | 54 | - | - | 538 | - | - | 1,934 | - | - |
| 1985 | 52 | - | 73.0 % | 480 | - | 46.0 % | 2,046 | - | 22.0 % |
| 1986 | 49 | - | 70.0 | 456 | - | 39.0 | 2,083 | - | 21.0 |
| 1987 | 51 | - | 61.0 | 376 | - | 32.0 | 1,569 | - | 26.0 |
| 1988 | 33 | - | 62.0 | 370 | - | 30.0 | 1,858 | - | 19.0 |
| 1989 | 43 | - | 61.0 | 352 | - | 34.0 | 1,882 | - | 22.0 |
| 1990 | 37 | - | 51.0 | 419 | - | 37.0 | 2,005 | - | 22.0 |
| 1991 | 45 | 20 | 44.4 | 643 | 213 | 33.1 | 2,192 | 520 | 23.7 |
| 1992 | 44 | 27 | 61.4 | 628 | 213 | 33.9 | 2,557 | 604 | 23.6 |
| 1993 | 52 | 27 | 51.9 | 713 | 264 | 37.0 | 3,126 | 730 | 23.4 |
| 1994 | 37 | 24 | 64.9 | 864 | 325 | 37.6 | 3,152 | 773 | 24.5 |
| 1995 | 55 | 31 | 56.4 | 918 | 325 | 35.4 | 3,042 | 730 | 24.0 |
| 1996 | 45 | 32 | 71.1 | 673 | 260 | 38.6 | 3,007 | 685 | 22.8 |
| 1997 | 50 | 27 | 54.0 | 598 | 248 | 41.5 | 2,544 | 598 | 23.5 |

- Numbers not given.

Source of data: Crime Reported in Alaska

Figure 2. Percentage of Murders, Robberies, and Aggravated Assaults in the U.S. and Alaska in Which Firearms Were Used, 1980-1997



Source of data: Crime in the United States; Crime Reported in Alaska

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