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Community Problems in Alaska: Public Perceptions

As part of a research project undertaken in late 1994 with the Alaska Department of Public Safety, the Justice Center conducted a public opinion telephone survey concerning quality of life and public safety issues in Alaska communities. The project was funded by a federal grant from the Office of Justice Programs.

One purpose of this survey was to obtain

the opinions of Alaska residents about the most serious problems in their community and the relationship of public safety agencies to the perceived problems. A secondary concern was to obtain information regarding the actions which residents believe most appropriate for dealing with the problems

Please see *Community Problems*, page 5

HIGHLIGHTS INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- The Bureau of Justice Statistics examines tort cases in 75 U.S. counties (page 2).
- The Justice Center reports on 1991–1994 crime and arrest statistics at the University of Alaska Anchorage (page 3).

Table 1. Most Serious Community Problem

Question: Considering the wide range of issues affecting the quality of peoples' lives, what do you think is the most serious problem facing your community today?

N = 605

| | | |
|---|---|-------|
| Substance abuse | Drugs, alcohol, substance abuse, related crime | 24.8% |
| Crime and violence | Increase in crime, safety from crime, violence, violent crime, killings | 15.2 |
| Economy | Economic situation, economy, jobs, employment, unemployment, shortage of oil revenue | 7.8 |
| Juvenile delinquency | Juvenile behavior, violence, crime, or drug use, juveniles have no respect, gangs, kids | 7.6 |
| Family breakdown | Family breakdown, poor parenting, home life, divorce, working parents, indifference, apathy, parent/public apathy, lack of involvement | 5.3 |
| Education | Education, poor schools, quality of teachers, lack of funds | 4.7 |
| Other government/services | Wages and benefits for public employees, city expenditures not spent where needed, better trails, budget, have city pay for city services, support of social services, our leaders/government/politicians, highway improvement, roads, water supply, sewage | 4.2 |
| Poverty and homelessness | Homelessness, housing, poverty, income, money, beggars | 3.5 |
| Lack of moral standards | Lack of moral teaching in school, people living without God, lack of belief, lack of moral standards | 2.9 |
| Too much government | Government intrusion, too much public assistance/welfare, government interfering with hunting and fishing industries, overtaxation | 2.4 |
| Recreational/educational opportunities | Cuts in or lack of kids' recreational/educational activities, need a recreation center with running water | 2.0 |
| Deteriorating social attitudes | Racial discord, chauvinism, hatred, bitterness, lack of unity/getting along in community, deteriorating social attitudes, greed, people not taking responsibility for themselves | 1.7 |
| Other concerns about juveniles | Kids wandering around, bored, need jobs, children do not want an education, teen pregnancy, education for teen pregnancy | 1.5 |
| Environment and resource issues | Environmental issues, environmentalist vs. resource user, mining, logging | 1.5 |
| Lack of government services | Lack of law enforcement, police department intervention, lack of money to remove snow, lack of transportation, not enough public services, lack of government money coming into community | 1.3 |
| Theft, burglary | | 0.7 |
| Drunk drivers, DWIs | | 0.6 |
| Population and industry growth | Fast-growing tourism, growth management, population growth | 0.5 |
| Other social concerns | Child care, child abuse, elderly | 0.4 |
| Fishing and hunting | Fishing industry has gone down, fishing quota lowered, young people lack of going hunting | 0.3 |
| Rising utility/freight rates | Utility rates increasing, high freight rates | 0.2 |
| Other concerns | Store shortages, too much TV, gay and lesbian rights, threat of moving capital, kids have too much supervision, moose, lack of sophistication in business enterprise, weather too cold, too much snow | 1.7 |
| Don't know | | 8.6 |

Percentages may not add to 100% because of rounding and weighting.

A BJS Report

During a one-year period ending in 1992, state courts of general jurisdiction in the nation's 75 largest counties disposed of an estimated 378,000 tort cases involving 1.4 million plaintiffs and defendants. Individuals suing businesses accounted for a third of all cases. The average time courts took to dispose of a tort case was just over one-and-one-half years. Trial verdicts accounted for three per cent of all tort cases disposed.

These are some of the results from a study of tort cases in state courts conducted by the Civil Trial Court Network Project. The basis is a representative sample of the 75 courts where nearly half of all tort cases nationwide are handled, making this the closest that exists to a tort study national in scope. These survey data establish a benchmark

Recent BJS Reports

The following recent studies and reports from the Bureau of Justice Statistics are available from the Alaska Justice Statistical Analysis Unit:

"Prisoners in 1994," national census of state and federal prisons, NCJ-151654.

"Drugs and Crime Facts, 1994," a summary of drug data published by the Bureau of Justice Statistics in 1994," NCJ-154043.

"Prison Sentences and Time Served for Violence," an examination of sentencing data from throughout the country, NCJ-153858.

"Civil Jury Cases and Verdicts in Large Counties," civil justice survey of state courts in 1992, NCJ-154346.

"Criminal Victimization 1993," results of the annual National Crime Victimization Survey, NCJ-151658.

"Violence Against Women: Estimates from the Redesigned Survey," estimated data on violence against women in 1992 and 1993 from the National Crime Victimization Survey, which has been redesigned to produce more accurate reporting in this area, NCJ-154348.

Study of Tort Cases

against which future tort reforms can be evaluated. Moreover, survey results provide a baseline that individual courts can use for comparison.

Types of tort cases

In tort cases, plaintiffs allege injury, loss, or damage from negligent or intentional acts of the defendants. Types of cases vary. Over the one-year period, the two most frequent kinds disposed were from automobile accidents (60%) and premises liability cases alleging harm from inadequately maintained or dangerous property (17%).

Other types of cases included those that are a primary focus of current tort reform activity: product liability (3%), toxic substance (2%) and medical malpractice cases (5%).

In 92 per cent of tort cases, the plaintiff cited personal injury as the type of harm involved. Property damage was cited in five percent, and financial loss or injury to reputation was claimed in the remaining three percent. The majority of tort cases involving personal injury (64%) or property damage (60%) were auto torts.

Types of tort case dispositions

The most common method of tort case disposition was an agreed settlement (73%). About ten per cent of the cases were dismissed for a lack of prosecution or failure to serve a complaint on the defendant.

In the vast majority of tort cases, litigants settled the complaint without going to trial. Therefore, details of tort settlements are unknown. Little systematic data are available regarding why cases are settled or the cost of settlement for either party.

A jury (2%) or bench (1%) trial verdict disposed relatively few cases. Medical malpractice claims (7%) were more likely than product or premises liability, auto, or toxic substance cases to be disposed by a jury or bench trial.

Uncontested tort cases

In 28 per cent of tort cases, the defendant failed to file an answer to the complaint. Failure to answer in a timely manner (usually within 30 to 45 days) gives the plaintiff the right to file a motion for a default judgment. Such uncontested tort cases comprised 81 per cent of all cases disposed by default judgments. Most uncontested cases were disposed by agreed settlement

Table 1. Types of Tort Cases in State Courts in the Nation's 75 Largest Counties, 1992

| Primary case type | N | Per cent |
|--------------------|----------------|----------|
| Auto | 227,515 | 60.1% |
| Premises liability | 65,492 | 17.3 |
| Product liability | 12,857 | 3.4 |
| Intentional injury | 10,879 | 2.9 |
| Malpractice | | |
| Medical | 18,452 | 4.9 |
| Nonmedical | 6,860 | 1.8 |
| Slander/libel | 3,159 | 0.8 |
| Toxic substance* | 6,045 | 1.6 |
| Unknown tort | 4,708 | 1.2 |
| Other negligence | 22,347 | 5.9 |
| Total | 378,314 | |

* Toxic substance cases, a type of product liability case, were collected and reported as a separate category.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics

(65%) or dismissed for lack of prosecution or failure to serve the complaint on the defendant (23%).

Case processing time

Mean case processing time from filing to disposition was 19.3 months and the median was 13.7 months. Within one year, 44 per cent of all tort cases were disposed, and by two years, 74 per cent were disposed.

Case processing was most rapid for auto torts (median of one year). One reason for the relatively short processing time was that auto tort cases were among the types with the fewest number of litigants (median of three). Also, compared to all other types, auto torts were the most likely to have an individual (rather than institutions) as the defendant.

Product liability and medical malpractice cases had a mean processing time of about two years. Toxic substance cases took, on average, 3.5 years from filing to disposition.

Tort cases disposed by a jury had a median case processing time of nearly two years.

The longest processing time for a sampled case was 14 years and 5 months. This case of negligence involved three individuals who named 14 defendants (individuals, businesses, and a government agency). It was disposed by an agreed settlement.

This article was adapted from the Bureau of Justice Statistics report "Tort Cases in Large Counties," NCJ-153177. Copies of the entire report may be obtained from the Alaska Justice Statistical Analysis Unit.

Crimes and Arrests on the UAA Campus

UAA educational and research sites are relatively free from serious crimes, according to 1991-1994 crime statistics compiled by the Justice Center. Under the Crime Awareness and Campus Security Act of 1990, institutions of higher education must prepare, publish and distribute to students

and employees an annual compilation of reported crimes and arrests which have occurred on a campus. The act and its amendments require accurate compilation of the number of reports and arrests for murder, sex offenses, robberies, aggravated assaults, burglaries and motor vehicle thefts which

occurred on campus. In addition, the numbers of arrests for liquor law violations, drug abuse violations and weapons possession violations on university property must also be reported. The Justice Center at the Uni-

Please see Campus Crime, page 4

Table 1. University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA) Reported Crimes, 1991-1994^a

| | Reported offenses | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | TOTAL | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|-------------------|----|----|----|------------------------------|----|----|----|----------|----|----|----|---------|----|----|----|-------|----|----|--------------------|----|----|----|---------------------|----|----|----|-------|----|----|----|----|
| | Murder | | | | Sexual offenses ^b | | | | Burglary | | | | Robbery | | | | | | | Aggravated assault | | | | Motor vehicle theft | | | | Arson | | | | |
| | 91 | 92 | 93 | 94 | 91 | 92 | 93 | 94 | 91 | 92 | 93 | 94 | 91 | 92 | 93 | 94 | 91 | 92 | 93 | 94 | 91 | 92 | 93 | 94 | 91 | 92 | 93 | 94 | 91 | 92 | 93 | 94 |
| Anchorage sites | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Goose Lake Campus (Main Campus) | - | - | - | - | - | - | 2 | - | 6 | 7 | 3 | 8 | - | - | - | - | 5 | 3 | 6 | - | 5 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 | - | - | 2 | 19 | 13 | 14 | 12 |
| Adult Learning Center | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 1 | - |
| Aviation Center | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Aviation Complex | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Carlton Trust Bldg: Educational Talent Search | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Center for Human Development | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 1 | - | - |
| Downtown Center (ENRI & Continuing Education) | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | - |
| Drug Abuse Research Field Station | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Educational Opportunity Center | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Mining & Petroleum Training Services (MAPTS) | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | - |
| North Pacific Fisheries Observer Training | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Small Business Development Center ^c | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Women's Gymnastic Team Program | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Anchorage sites subtotal | - | - | - | - | - | - | 2 | - | 8 | 8 | 4 | 8 | - | - | - | - | 5 | 3 | 6 | - | 5 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 3 | - | - | 2 | 21 | 15 | 16 | 12 |
| Other UAA sites | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Copper Center: Copper Basin Center | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Cordova: Cordova Center | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Eagle River: Chugiak/Eagle River Extension | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | - |
| Homer: Kachemak Bay Branch | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Juneau: Institute of Mining Technology | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Kodiak: Kodiak Cillege | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Palmer: Matanuska-Susitna College | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Soldotna: Kenai Peninsula College, Mining & Petroleum Training Services (MAPTS) | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 2 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | 1 | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | 2 | 2 | 1 | - |
| Valdez: Prince William Sound Community College | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Other sites subtotal | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 3 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | 1 | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | 3 | 2 | 1 | - |
| TOTAL | - | - | - | - | - | - | 2 | - | 11 | 8 | 4 | 8 | - | - | - | - | 5 | 4 | 6 | - | 5 | 5 | 5 | 2 | 3 | - | - | 2 | 24 | 17 | 17 | 12 |

a. Reporting categories designated by the Crime Awareness and Campus Security Act (CACSA) of 1990.
 b. Offenses reported under the "Sexual offenses" category included rapes only in 1991 and 1992; an amendment to CACSA, effective August 1992, resulted in this category changing to include additional sexual offenses.
 c. The Small Business Development Center was added to the monitoring list in 1994.

Note: Aviation Admin/Voc-Tech Labs was removed from the monitoring list in 1993; it had no reported offenses in 1991-1993. Alaska Teleconferencing Network (Carlton Trust Building) was removed from the monitoring list in 1994; it had no reported offenses in 1991-1994.

Statistics compiled by the Justice Center, University of Alaska Anchorage, from police and Alaska State Troopers records.

Campus Crime
(continued from page 3)

University of Alaska Anchorage compiles and publishes this annual report for UAA.

Calendar Year 1994

No incidents of murder, sexual assault, or aggravated assault were reported on any

UAA campus or educational site in 1994 (Table 1). Burglary was the most frequently reported offense with eight burglaries reported on the Goose Lake campus. Two motor vehicle thefts and two arsons were reported on the Goose Lake campus.

Thirty-three arrests were reported for liquor law violations and seven arrests were reported for drug abuse violations on the Goose Lake campus. No arrests were re-

ported for weapons law violations on the Goose Lake campus (Table 2).

No offenses and no arrests were reported on any other UAA campus or educational site in 1994 (Table 2).

Review of 1991, 1992 and 1993

In 1991, the first year of reporting mandated under the act, no incidents of murder, rape (changed to sexual offenses in 1992), or robbery were reported on any UAA campus or educational site. Six burglaries were reported on the Goose Lake campus, with one each reported at the Center for Human Development, the Downtown Center, and the Chugiak/Eagle River Extension. Two burglaries were reported at the Kenai Peninsula College campus.

Five aggravated assaults, five motor vehicle thefts, and three arsons were reported on the Goose Lake campus (Table 1).

Additionally, 25 arrests for liquor law violations were reported on the Goose Lake campus. No arrests were reported for liquor law violations on any other UAA campus or site. There were no arrests for drug abuse or weapons law violations reported on any UAA campus or site (Table 2).

In 1992, no incidents of murder, sexual offenses, or arson were reported on any UAA campus or educational site. Seven burglaries were reported on the Goose Lake campus and one burglary was reported at the Adult Learning Center. Three aggravated assaults were reported on the Goose Lake campus, with one additional reported on the Kenai Peninsula College campus. Three motor vehicle thefts were reported on the Goose Lake campus, with one additional reported at the Center for Human Development and one reported on the Kenai Peninsula College campus (Table 1).

In 1992, there were seven liquor law violation arrests, three drug abuse violation arrests, and no weapons law violation arrests reported for the Goose Lake campus. No arrests for liquor law, drug abuse, or weapons law violations were reported on any other UAA campus or site in 1992 (Table 2).

In 1993, no incidents of murder or arson were reported on any UAA campus or educational site. Aggravated assault was the most frequently reported crime, with six on the Goose Lake campus. Five motor vehicle thefts were reported in 1993, three on the Goose Lake campus, one reported at the MAPTS site, and one reported on the Kenai Peninsula College campus. Three burglaries were reported on the Goose Lake campus, and one burglary was reported at the Adult Learning Center (Table 1). Two sexual offenses, both on the Goose Lake

Table 2. University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA) Reported Arrests, 1991-1994^a

| | Reported arrests | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|----------------------|----------|-----------|-----------|----------------------|----------|----------|----------|-----------------------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| | Liquor law violation | | | | Drug abuse violation | | | | Weapons law violation | | | | TOTAL | | | |
| | 91 | 92 | 93 | 94 | 91 | 92 | 93 | 94 | 91 | 92 | 93 | 94 | 91 | 92 | 93 | 94 |
| Anchorage sites | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Goose Lake Campus (Main Campus) | 25 | 7 | 12 | 33 | - | 3 | 3 | 7 | - | - | - | - | 25 | 10 | 15 | 40 |
| Adult Learning Center | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Aviation Center | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Aviation Complex | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Carlton Trust Bldg: Educational Talent Search | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Center for Human Development | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Downtown Center (ENRI & Continuing Education) | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Drug Abuse Research Field Station | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Educational Opportunity Center | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Mining & Petroleum Training Services (MAPTS) | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| North Pacific Fisheries Observer Training | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Small Business Development Center ^b | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Women's Gymnastic Team Program | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Anchorage sites subtotal | 25 | 7 | 12 | 33 | - | 3 | 3 | 7 | - | - | - | - | 25 | 10 | 15 | 40 |
| Other UAA sites | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Copper Center: Copper Basin Center | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Cordova: Cordova Center | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Eagle River: Chugiak/Eagle River Extension | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Homer: Kachemak Bay Branch | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Juneau: Institute of Mining Technology | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Kodiak: Kodiak College | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Palmer: Matanuska-Susitna College | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Soldotna: Kenai Peninsula College, Mining & Petroleum Training Services (MAPTS) | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Valdez: Prince William Sound Community College | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Other sites subtotal | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| TOTAL | 25 | 7 | 12 | 33 | - | 3 | 3 | 7 | - | - | - | - | 25 | 10 | 15 | 40 |

a. Reporting categories designated by the Crime Awareness and Campus Security Act of 1990.

b. The Small Business Development Center was added to the monitoring list in 1994.

Note: Aviation Admin/Voc-Tech Labs was removed from the monitoring list in 1993; it had no reported arrests in 1991-1993. Alaska Teleconferencing Network (Carlton Trust Building) was removed from the monitoring list in 1994; it had no reported arrests in 1991-1994.

Statistics compiled by the Justice Center, University of Alaska Anchorage, from police and Alaska State Troopers records.

campus, were reported in 1993.

Twelve arrests for liquor law violations, three arrests for drug abuse violations, and no arrests for weapons law violations were reported on the Goose Lake campus in 1993. No arrests for liquor law, drug abuse, or weapons law violations were reported on any other UAA campus or site in 1993 (Table 2).

Conclusions

The University of Alaska Anchorage 1991–1994 crime statistics indicate that UAA educational and research sites are relatively free from serious crimes, although the levels of reported person crimes of sexual offenses and aggravated assaults, particularly in 1993, on the Goose Lake

campus may be cause for concern. However, since no sexual offenses were reported in 1991, 1992, or 1994, 1993 was atypical.

The property crime of burglary is more frequently reported than any other offense, and thus may be worthy of specific attention. Although perhaps not as serious as crimes against persons, burglaries may have significant financial impact on the victim, whether an individual or the university system. Burglaries may also be more preventable with physical security crime prevention techniques than person crimes.

Reports of motor vehicle theft remained relatively constant from 1991 to 1993 and showed a significant decrease in 1994.

Because a number of factors impact crime statistics (likelihood of individuals reporting, recording procedures, crime pre-

vention measures employed, geographic location, population, demographic characteristics of the surrounding community, number of on-campus students, accessibility of outside visitors, etc.), and because of the smallness of the figures caution should be exercised in making comparisons between various locations and across years. The statistics on the reported offenses may best be used in focusing the selection and application of crime prevention measures on each campus.

The preceding article is based on "Reported Crimes and Arrests, 1994: University of Alaska Anchorage," Justice Center, 1995. Copies of the entire report may be obtained from the Justice Center. Roger C. Miller is an instructor at the Justice Center; Cassie Atwell is a Justice Center research associate.

Community Problems (continued from page 1)

they identified. Among the items, interviewees were asked to identify: first, the most serious problem in their community; second, the most serious *public safety* concern; and third, possible solutions to the problem. Interviewers contacted a statewide sample of 603 residents.

In an effort to avoid bias, interviewers explained only that the survey was being conducted for the University of Alaska; the Department of Public Safety was not mentioned. The answers obtained were recorded and consolidated into broad categories to facilitate understanding.

Major Community Problem

Perhaps the most striking feature of the responses is the absence of a consensus on community problems. Interviewees cited a range of problems from drug abuse to cold weather. The most frequently cited serious problem (Table 1) concerns drugs, alcohol, substance abuse and associated crime; however, statewide, only one out of four respondents (24.8%) identified problems in this category as the most serious overall problem in their community.

The second category of most frequently cited serious problem—noted by 15.2 per cent of respondents statewide—involve concerns related to crime and violence. More specifically, interviewees identified increasing crime and decreasing safety, violent crimes and killings.

Economic issues affecting Alaska communities, primarily lack of jobs, unemployment and the general economy, formed the third most frequently cited serious problem area, with about 7.8 per cent

of Alaskans noting such concerns as primary.

Many Alaskans identified problems associated with the behavior of juveniles, their attitudes and criminality. Still others voiced concerns with what they perceive as a breakdown in family and home life, parental authority, indifference and apathy. Concerns about the quality of education are also prominent across the state, with people commenting on the quality of schools, a lack of funding and the quality of teachers. Aside from the concerns voiced by a fairly large group of people about violence and violent crime, the only other crimes or types of crimes identified as "serious problems" were theft and burglary, and drinking and driving.

Public Safety Concerns

Following the question regarding the most serious *community* problem, each interviewee was asked to "narrow" his or her focus and identify the most serious *public safety* issue facing the community. Fewer respondents answered this question than answered the previous question, perhaps because in some instances they had already identified a public safety issue as the most serious problem. (Again, the public safety concerns voiced by respondents were coded into broad categories of like or similar responses. The statewide categorizations are displayed in Table 2.) In assessing the relative importance of some of the concerns expressed, it may be useful to keep in mind that answers to open-format questions reflect "top-of-mind" issues immediately important to the interviewee. The range of specific public safety problems identified was as broad as Alaska is diverse, including concerns about substance abuse, road conditions, teen pregnancy and winter

weather. It is clear, based on the responses, that adult Alaskans are not of one mind on

Please see Community Problems, page 6



Alaska Justice Forum

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Community Problems
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public safety problems. Many of the concerns expressed were unique and so closely tied to a community or a respondent they were mentioned only once. Moreover, none of the problems identified was mentioned by more than 16 per cent of the interviewees. The range of these responses seems to illustrate the importance of a community-by-community approach to public safety problems.

“Crime,” not further specified, is the third most frequently mentioned public safety concern, at 9.1 per cent. The level of concern about drinking and driving vehicles was striking, as was the level of concern with law enforcement services.

Alcohol and drug use and substance abuse were, as in the previous question, the

most frequently cited problem, with 15.9 per cent of the interviewees identifying this area as the most serious public safety concern. The second most commonly cited group of public safety concerns were those relating to streets and roadways, with 10.3 per cent identifying a broad range of street and highway-related deficiencies and issues as the most serious problem in their communities.

Suggested Solutions

Respondents were also asked their suggestions for solutions to the problems they identified. The solutions offered are organized in Table 3 by categories of the cited public safety concerns. For example, of the respondents who identified alcohol, drugs and substance abuse as the most pressing problem facing their communities,

one-fifth (20.2%) suggested educational efforts to be the most effective solution. As a solution to alcohol and drug problems, “family ties, parental responsibility and involvement” formed the second most frequently offered suggestion. A number of people (7.2%) recommended strengthening laws and making penalties associated with drug and alcohol abuse tougher. Still others (6.5%) suggested legally restricting access to alcohol and drugs, while others (3.0%) suggested legalizing drugs. About five per cent suggested funding more law enforcement officers in an effort to solve the problems of drug and alcohol abuse in their communities.

Concerns about roadway hazards, poor maintenance, sidewalk problems and snow removal were cited as most pressing by 10.3

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Table 2. Most Serious Public Safety Concern

Question: What do you think is the most serious public safety concern facing your community?

N = 605

| | | |
|--|---|-------|
| Substance abuse | Drugs, alcohol, substance abuse | 15.9% |
| Road conditions | Street and road maintenance, road conditions, log trucks, keep highways clear in winter, don't allow studded tires, put middle lane through town, need new highway, dangerous streets, speed limit too high, roads unsafe for bicycles, not plowing the sidewalks or streets, inadequate snow removal, not enough street lights, driving concerns in winter, icy roads, no roads, people get lost, unpaved roads contributing to TB | 10.3 |
| Crime | | 9.1 |
| Drinking and driving, DWIs | | 6.5 |
| Concerns about police/law enforcement | Need more police, lack of police, troopers, inefficiency, lack of professionalism, bad police, lack of crime prevention, make police better | 6.2 |
| Violence, violent crime | | 5.0 |
| Other crimes | Rise in gang activity, gangs, robberies, burglary, theft, holdups, domestic violence, vandalism, assault, sexual abuse, break-ins and property destruction | 5.2 |
| Traffic | Traffic laws being broken, speeding, bad drivers, accidents, need traffic control, more lights, too much traffic, no headlights | 4.2 |
| Juvenile crime | Teenage and juvenile crime and violence | 3.6 |
| Concerns about guns | Handguns, guns, weapons, availability of guns, kids and guns, guns in schools | 3.0 |
| Inadequate criminal justice system | Not sentencing criminals long enough, penalties not severe, not enough jails, judicial system, criminal justice system | 1.8 |
| Environmental problems and concerns | Lack of clean water, sewer, dirty air in winter, oxyfuel, Potential hazards from mining, tsunami warnings, tank farm hazard and safety | 1.6 |
| Animal control and wild life protection | Moose, polar bears, wildlife, animal control, loose dogs, need more Fish and Wildlife protection | 1.5 |
| Other transportation safety issues | Boating, snowmachine safety, better ferry service needed, closure of airport runway | 1.4 |
| Child abuse and child safety | Child abuse, non-response to abuse in community, children's safety | 1.1 |
| Fire protection services | Fire department closed, fire protection, lack of funding for fire protection | 1.1 |
| Hunting concerns | Hunter safety, moose hunters too close to homes | 1.1 |
| Lack of various services | Lack of parking, lack of sidewalks, not enough public services, lack of medical attention or care, not enough emergency service workers at hospital, no recreation facility for kids | 1.1 |
| Other concerns about juveniles | Young kids drinking, idle time of young people, need curfew for teens, lack of authority in schools, better education for teenage pregnancy | 1.0 |
| Other concerns | Violence on TV, removal of legal arms from respectful citizens, homeless, tax expenditures, being free to go where you want to, kids not caring about each other, need better values, too much talk and not enough action, lack of moral sense, need better education, people who think they know best and want more power, possible mental health facility opening, winter weather, hypothermia, suicide, AIDS | 2.8 |
| Don't know | | 16.5 |

Percentages may not add to 100% because of rounding and weighting.

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tougher laws against violence, but respondents also believe that families and citizens need to become more involved and that education is also a solution.

Conclusion

Based on the information received from this survey, Alaskans have diverse opinions concerning both the nature of the problems facing their communities and the solutions to those problems. The data obtained seem to support community-by-community assessment and prioritizing of problems.

Future Forum articles will present additional findings from the longer study from which this article was taken.

1996–97 Judicial Fellows Program

The Judicial Fellows Commission invites applications for the 1996–97 Judicial Fellows Program. The Program, established in 1973 and patterned after the White House and Congressional Fellowships, seeks individuals from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds who are interested in the administration of justice and who show promise of making a contribution to the judiciary.

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postgraduate degree and two or more years of successful professional experience. Fellowship stipends are based on salaries for comparable government work and on individual salary histories, but will not exceed the GS 15, step 3 level, presently \$74,426.

Information about the program is available from:

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Judicial Fellows Program
Supreme Court of the United States
Room 5
Washington, DC 20543
(202) 479-3415

The application deadline is November 17, 1995.

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