

PATTERNS OF CRIME IN THE CIRCUMPOLAR NORTH

by

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March 1999

Paper Presented at the Annual Meetings of the
Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences,
Orlando, Florida.

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A comparison of police crime data from Greenland, Alaska, and Canada's Yukon and Northwest Territories reveals a number of commonalities across the Arctic including property crime rates similar to those found to the south and violent crimes rates many times those outside the region. Geographic and ecological characteristics specific to Arctic communities are considered to explain the differences in the relative frequency of criminal behavior and in the nature of the criminal acts themselves. The paper concludes with a reconsideration of the applicability of "Southern" style criminal justice system responses used in the area given the atypical nature of crime in the region.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Portions of the data used in this report were gathered using funding from research grant # 411-90-0014 from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. The author would like to thank Dr. Nancy Schafer, Gabe Tierce, Deb Schmidt, Richard Curtis, Cassie Atwell, and Kelly Connor of the UAA Justice Center and the Alaska Community Jails Research Consortium for the use of their data. The author is solely responsible for the content within.

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INTRODUCTION

As a region of the globe, the circumpolar north has been referred to as the “fourth-world”. Similarities in geography, climate, demography, history, and indigenous cultural heritage set the region apart from the remainder of the world (Sugden, 1982). From the Russian North, east to Alaska, across the Canadian Yukon and Northwest Territories to Greenland, the circumpolar north is truly a world unto itself. An additional similarity shared across the jurisdictions of the Arctic is their patterns of crime. This paper examines the rates of violent and property crime in the Arctic. Comparisons of those rates with rates found outside the region will show that the circumpolar north is a relatively violent place and that to a greater extent the violence is generally directed at family members or close intimates. Once an understanding of these variations is provided, this paper will argue against the “southern” criminal justice system’s reactive response to violence that is prevalent in the Arctic. What is needed, this paper concludes, is an approach based in the unique characteristics of criminal behavior in the region.

THE CIRCUMPOLAR NORTH: CLIMATE, GEOGRAPHY, POPULATION, CULTURE, AND HISTORY

As a region, the circumpolar north shares a similar climate, geography, population structure, culture, and history. These characteristics make the region different from any other part of the globe. Each of these characteristics, to some extent, also has a role in the creation of the atypical crime patterns found in the region.

Undoubtedly, the most significant difference between the circumpolar north and the remainder of the planet (save the Antarctic) is its climate. Over a year’s time, the ambient temperature in the region can range between +70°F and –70°F (Sugden, 1982). In the winter, the combination of cold and wind can make it feel as though it is -100°F or less (Armstrong, Rogers, & Rowley, 1978). These temperature extremes have an influence upon the interaction of people living in the region. The warmer months of the year are a period of intense activity. Arctic inhabitants take advantage of the relatively warmer weather to conduct subsistence activities in preparation for the colder months of the year which are much more sedentary. During these hunting and fishing activities the population is more broadly dispersed across the land compared to in the winter months when the population is almost exclusively concentrated in permanent settlements.

Given its hostile climate, the Arctic, as a region, is second only to the Antarctic in its sparseness of population. Population densities across the circumpolar north computed in persons per land area are very low. For example, it is possible to seat the entire population of Canada's Northwest Territories (NWT) — which comprises one-third of the nation's land mass — in the Sky Dome in Toronto. The settlements in which the large majority of Arctic residents inhabit are anything but sparse although the region as a whole has low population densities. Rather than being viewed as rural, the communities of the circumpolar north can be thought of as "micro-urban."¹ Most of the communities in the Arctic are laid out in an almost suburban fashion, with little distance between homes, so as to allow for cost efficiencies in the delivery of public services and utilities.

Alaska's North Slope Borough is typical of the low total population densities and high settlement densities found in the Arctic. With a land area of more than 87,000 square miles, the North Slope Borough is bigger than the smallest ten US states combined. It is about the same size as Utah. There are only nine states (Texas, California, Montana, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, Colorado, Wyoming, and Oregon) larger than the North Slope Borough (US Bureau of the Census. 1992). The 1996 population density for the North Slope was 0.08 persons per square mile or one person per 12.7 square miles (Alaska Department of Community and Regional Affairs [Alaska DCRA], 1999; US Bureau of the Census. 1992). Although there is a tremendous amount of land on the North Slope, the inhabitants of the borough reside in relatively crowded communities. The combined land area of the eight villages in the borough is 110 square miles which allows for a population density of about 63 persons per square mile within the village limits (Alaska DCRA, 1999).

As would be expected, the populations of settlements in the Arctic are quite small. With the exception of the administrative and service hubs (e.g., Yellowknife, NWT, or Nuuk, Greenland or Barrow, Alaska), the typical community in the circumpolar north has less than 1,000 inhabitants. The median village population in the North Slope of Alaska in 1996 was 367 residents (Alaska DCRA, 1999). The average Canadian Arctic village isn't much larger. In the Yukon the median village population in 1996 was 452 residents (Yukon Bureau of Statistics. 1998) while in the NWT the median village population that year was 563 (NWT Bureau of Statistics, 1997) (See Table 1).

¹ This characterization of Arctic communities was first suggested by Bob Langworthy following his first trip to the Alaskan bush.

Table 1: Selected Demographic Indicators, Jurisdictions of the Circumpolar North and Corresponding National Figures, 1996.

	Median Community Population	Population per square kilometer, 1996	Population Growth 1986 to 1996	Birth Rate per 1,000 Women age 15 to 64, 1996	Population age 19 or less, 1996
Greenland	1084	0.13	1.0 %	68	34.0 %
Denmark	—	122.58	2.8 %	39	23.5 %
Northwest Territories	563	0.02	23.3 %	78	40.9 %
Yukon Territory	452	0.07	35.7 %	42	29.6 %
Canada	—	3.04	17.0 %	36	26.7 %
North Slope Borough	367	0.03	29.6 %	68	41.6 %
United States	—	28.95	9.6 %	44	28.8 %

* Land area used to compute this figure does not include Greenland's inland ice cap.

Sources: Alaska Department of Labor, 1987, 1998; NWT Bureau of Statistics, 1997; Statistics Canada, 1999; Kalaallit Nunanni Naatsorsueqqissaartarfik (Statistics Greenland), 1998; United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 1998; United Nations, Department of International Economic and Social Affairs, 1989; US Bureau of the Census, 1995; Yukon Bureau of Statistics, 1998.

Generally speaking, the communities of the Arctic are widely dispersed and there is difficulty of travel between settlements that is not faced outside the region. Most communities in the region, especially those situated on the Arctic Ocean, are accessible only by air, or, for a few months during the summer, by water. During the winter some communities are connected by snowmobile or temporary ice-roads; except in the Yukon Territory and parts of Alaska and the NWT, there are few permanent roads connecting settlements.

Although the population of the Arctic is small, it is growing at a rate that is among the highest in the world. For example, the Inuit population of the eastern Canadian Arctic, with an annual growth rate higher than that of Mexico, Bangladesh, or Sierra Leone, is doubling every 21 years (Wood, 1997). Similar growth is seen in the North Slope of Alaska. Its population doubled between 1970 and 1995 (Alaska Department of Labor, 1984; 1998). Except for Greenland, as shown in Table 1, the populations in the Arctic have grown at a rate over the past decade that is faster than what is found in the respective nations. The primary component in the growth of the Arctic population is the tremendously high birth rates found in the region. As seen in Table 1, the birth rates of all of the Arctic jurisdictions are higher than those of their

non-Arctic counterparts. These high birth rates have resulted in populations that are significantly younger in the Arctic than elsewhere in the developed world. Population pyramids of the circumpolar north more closely resemble those of third world nations than those of the larger nations of which they belong. The proportion of the population age 19 and less in 1996 in each of the Arctic jurisdictions listed in Table 1 was larger than that for their nations as a whole.

These rapidly growing populations have had a twofold impact that can potentially result in a greater propensity for violence and other criminal behavior in the communities of the far north. First, the populations of the Arctic, while small, have begun to exceed the natural carrying capacities of the land. Today there are too many people in the Arctic for the land to support through subsistence hunting and fishing alone (Weeden, 1985). The population growth in the Arctic has also outpaced employment opportunities. Aside from government jobs and some seasonal construction work, there is little wage employment available in the settlements of the circumpolar north (Irwin, 1988). The lack of wage employment, combined with the decline in opportunities for hunting and fishing, have resulted in a greater degree of idleness among village residents, which, from a routine-activities perspective, has the potential for increased levels of interpersonal violence.

Although there is a broad linguistic variation across the circumpolar north, the peoples of the Arctic share a number of common cultural characteristics. Extremes in seasonal ecology and variations in resource availability necessitated the movement of the population and its organization for subsistence purposes (Graburn & Strong, 1973). In the days before the settlement of Arctic populations in permanent communities, the people of the region moved from place to place in small groups, following the fish and game that provided their food, clothing, shelter, and modes of transportation. Their traditional methods of livelihood, as noted by Graburn & Strong (1973), included land hunting, sea-mammal hunting, fishing, and — in the Eurasian Arctic — reindeer herding.

However, over the past 100 years or so, with the expansion of European cultures from the south, the semi-nomadic traditional means of subsistence of circumpolar peoples have been replaced by settlement in permanent communities and reliance upon goods and services from outside the region for survival. In what has been characterized as a colonial process (Dryzek & Young, 1985; Kellough, 1980; Paine, 1977; Rea, 1968; Tobias; 1976), the traditional, self-reliant lifestyle of the indigenous peoples of the Arctic has been replaced with a dependent and subordinate status (Berger, 1995; Slezkine, 1994; Irwin, 1988; Larsen, 1990). The introduction

of European cultures from the south is also said to have resulted in rapid and overwhelming change in the cultures of Arctic circumpolar peoples (Van Dyke, 1982; Zaslow, 1984). This, in turn, created widespread cultural shock and disruption at both the community and individual levels (Larsen, 1991; Lee, 1995; Pretes, 1988) and is seen to be a predominate explanation held by indigenous Arctic residents of the relatively high levels of violence in the region (Sørensen, 1990).

CRIME IN GREENLAND, THE NWT, THE YUKON, AND THE NORTH SLOPE BOROUGH

The uniqueness of the circumpolar region as compared to the remainder of the world is also reflected in its patterns of crime. Based upon an examination of crime statistics from a number of sources, the following four assertions can be made about the special nature of crime in the Arctic:

- Reported levels of violent crime are higher in circumpolar jurisdictions than elsewhere, while their rates of property crime that are similar to those found outside the region,
- There are broad variations in the levels of crime across the Arctic with some communities experiencing very high crime rates and others having quite low rates of crime,
- Most violent crime involves victims and offenders that are intimates or relatives and violence against strangers is virtually unheard of, and
- As is the case outside the Arctic, a relatively small number of offenders in circumpolar jurisdictions are responsible for a large number of offenses.

Data from Greenland, the Yukon Territory, the NWT, and the North Slope Borough of Alaska are considered below as support for these assertions.

PROPERTY AND VIOLENT CRIME RATES

In Table 2 the crime rates for four circumpolar jurisdictions are presented in comparison with the nations of which they are associated with. For the purposes of comparison between jurisdictions on an equal level, the violent and property crime rates were computed using the offenses that correspond with the Canadian Uniform Crime Reports. The violent crime rate includes attempted and completed homicide, forcible sexual assault, robbery, and all levels of assault from simple up to that which causes bodily harm. Burglary, theft/larceny, and motor vehicle theft are the offenses that make up the property crime rate. The figures in the assault column include all levels including simple assault. Instead of comparing it with the US, the North Slope Borough is compared with the State of Alaska; it is impossible to compute an

assault rate or a violent crime rate for the US that would correspond with those of the other nations because the US Uniform Crime Reports (e.g., FBI, 1998) do not include simple assaults. However, the offense rate figures for the State of Alaska made available by the Alaska Department of Public Safety (1996) are comparable with the other jurisdictions because simple assaults are reported and because the crime rate in Alaska is an adequate proxy measure of the US crime rate.²

Two conclusions about crime in the circumpolar north can be drawn from the figures presented in Table 2. First of all, the Arctic jurisdictions have rates of reported assault and violent crime that are substantially higher than those found outside the region. For instance, the NWT, the jurisdiction with the highest levels of reported assault and violent crime in the Arctic, had rates that were roughly five times those found nationally in Canada. A similar difference between the circumpolar region and its national counterpart is found for Greenland and Denmark. Although the Greenlandic rates of assault and violent crime are relatively low compared to the other Arctic jurisdictions, they are still more than five times those found in Denmark. The only place where there is not a major difference between the circumpolar region and the corresponding “nation” is for the North Slope Borough and the state of Alaska. The rates of reported violent crime and of reported assaults for the North Slope are only about 25 to 30 percent higher than those of the state as a whole. This lack of a major difference, however, is more indicative of relatively high rates of violent crime in Alaska and across the US as a whole than it is suggestive of a lack of violence on the North Slope.

The levels of property crime in the circumpolar jurisdictions shown in Table 2 are similar to those of their respective national rates. In Greenland, for instance, both the burglary rate and the property crime rate were less than what was recorded for Denmark in 1995. The burglary and property crime rates in the North Slope Borough are very much like those found in Alaska. It is only in the Canadian Arctic where the circumpolar jurisdictions have property crime rates that surpass those of the nation as a whole. Even then, however, the differences between Arctic jurisdiction and nation for property crime rates are nowhere near as vast as for violent crimes.

² On average, over the 10 year period 1988 to 1997, the Alaska violent crime rate was 5 percent less than the US rate while the property crime rate for Alaska was only 1 percent less than the US rate (FBI, 1989-1998). In 7 out of those 10 years the violent crime rate in Alaska was within (i.e., plus or minus) 15 percent of the national rate. For property crimes, the Alaskan rate between 1988 and 1997 was within 10 percent of the national rate in 8 out of 10 years (FBI, 1989-1998).

Table 2: Rates of Assault, Violent Crime, Burglary, and Property Crime per 1,000 Population in Four Circumpolar Jurisdictions and Corresponding Nations, 1995.

	Assault	Violent Crime*	Burglary	Property Crime*
North Slope Borough	25	27	10	38
Alaska	19	22	8	46
NWT	40	48	30	72
Yukon	27	32	26	84
Canada	8	10	13	48
Greenland	11	16	16	49
Denmark	2	2	21	83

* Offenses for violent and property crime correspond with those of the Canadian Uniform Crime reports.

Sources: Alaska Department of Public Safety, 1996; Danmarks Statistik (Statistics Denmark), 1998; Statistics Canada, 1996; Kalaallit Nunanni Naatsorsueqqissaartarfik (Statistics Greenland), 1998.

CRIME RATE VARIATION ACROSS CIRCUMPOLAR COMMUNITIES

Given the relatively high crime rates found in the circumpolar jurisdictions, especially the high rates of reported violent crime, one might expect all communities in the region to be similarly affected. However, an examination of community level crime rates within the circumpolar jurisdictions shows otherwise. Some Arctic communities experience very high crime rates while others are relatively crime free.

A good example of the broad range of community experiences with crime and violence is found in Greenland. In Table 3, the reported rates of assault and burglary per 1,000 population over a 10 year period are presented. As is shown, some municipalities have especially high rates of reported assaults and burglaries while others have relatively low rates. For the assault rates, the municipality with the highest rate had a rate that was 152 percent higher than the national rate whereas the municipality with the lowest rate had a rate that was 54 percent less than that experienced nationally. A similar range of burglary rates is found in Greenland ranging from 62 percent above the national rate to 85 percent below the national rate.

Table 3: Mean Annual Rates of Assault and Burglary per 1,000 Population, Greenlandic Municipalities, 1984 to 1993.

Municipality	Assault Rate per 1,000	Index (Greenland = 100)	Burglary Rate per 1,000	Index (Greenland = 100)
Aasiaat	14.7	160	38.2	155
Ilulissat	6.7	73	23.1	94
Ittoqqortoormiit	11.7	128	29.2	119
Kangerlussuaq	4.2	46	4.2	17
Maniitsoq	8.8	96	20.4	83
Nanortalik	7.4	81	25.1	102
Narsaq	8.4	91	38.3	155
Nuuk	6.2	67	23.0	93
Paamuit	14.9	163	36.0	146
Qaqortoq	10.4	113	40.0	162
Qasigiannuguit	9.7	106	20.4	83
Qeqertarsuaq	8.8	97	15.6	63
Sisimiut	7.8	86	24.3	98
Upernavik	23.1	252	3.7	15
Uummannaq	6.3	69	9.6	39
Greenland, Total	9.2	100	24.7	100

Source: Larsen, 1995.

There is also a broad range of community experiences with crime in the Yukon Territory. As shown in Table 4, some, but not all, Yukon communities are places with high rates of reported violent and property crime. On average, between 1991 and 1996, the violent crime rate per 1,000 residents of Yukon communities ranged between 242 percent above to 32 percent below the territorial rate. The differences between communities for property crime in the Yukon were less pronounced. Between 1991 and 1996, Yukon communities had property crime rates anywhere between 126 percent above to 34 percent below the rate for the territory. A striking feature of the community crime rates in the Yukon is the differences between Whitehorse, the territorial capital and home to about two-thirds of the territorial population, and the remainder of the communities. Compared with most other jurisdictions in the Yukon, Whitehorse has much less reported violent or property crime. Without Whitehorse, the territorial crime rates for the Yukon would be much higher.

Table 4: Mean Annual Rates of Property and Violent Crime per 1,000 Population, Yukon Territory Communities, 1991 to 1996.

Community	Violent Crime Rate per 1,000	Index (Yukon Terr. = 100)	Property Crime Rate per 1,000	Index (Yukon Terr. = 100)
Beaver Creek	64	229	130	156
Carcross	41	148	95	114
Carmacks	68	244	128	154
Dawson City	27	95	76	91
Faro	19	68	92	111
Haines Junction	29	102	55	66
Mayo	41	146	67	81
Old Crow	74	264	189	226
Pelly Crossing	96	342	126	152
Ross River	81	290	180	216
Teslin	53	188	76	91
Watson Lake	62	223	105	126
Whitehorse	22	79	80	96
Yukon Territory, Total	28	100	83	100

Source: Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 1992-1997.

THE HIGH PREVALENCE OF FAMILY / SPOUSAL VIOLENCE IN THE CIRCUMPOLAR NORTH

Despite the broad differences between Arctic communities in terms of their crime rates, the region as a whole is certainly crime prone. Even those communities that are below the levels of crime that are typical for their region have rates of property and, especially, violent crime that rank above rates found outside the region. Added to these already alarming findings is the realization that a much larger proportion of the violence found in the circumpolar north, as compared to elsewhere, is spousal and/or family violence. More so than in the south, violence in the Arctic is family violence. This is problematic for a couple of reasons. First, it is a problem because violence in the circumpolar north is more likely to be used as a way for men to achieve a measure of power in a contemporary setting that has taken away their traditional powers (MacLeod, 1987; Sørensen, 1990; Zellerer, 1993; 1996a). It also problematic because violence is more likely to occur in the home which is last place where violence should occur and where people have the highest expectations of safety (Johnson, 1996).

At first, one would think that it would be difficult to measure the proportion of spousal and family violence in the circumpolar north. After all, national victimization surveys have not

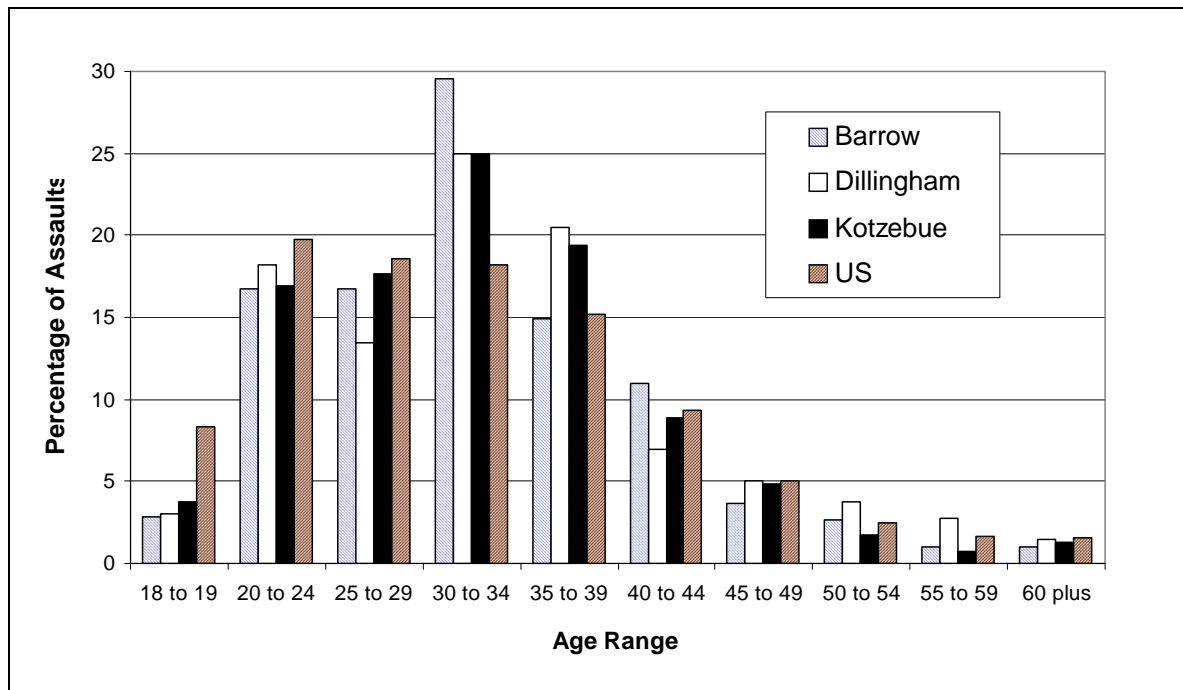
included the region within their samples (Sacco & Johnson, 1990; Statistics Canada, 1994). However, there are a couple of ways to show the extent to which violence in circumpolar north communities is family and spousal violence. First, by treating the ages of violent offenders as a proxy measure of family violence, comparisons between the ages of violent offenders in and out of the Arctic will provide a rough indication of where spousal and family assault is more prevalent. According to Gottfredson and Hirschi (1986, p. 220; 1990, p. 128), violent offenses that occur within the family occur at a relatively constant rate over the age span whereas violence against acquaintances and strangers occurs primarily when the ages of offenders are in the late teens and early twenties. If this assertion is true, then it would be logical to expect that the jurisdictions with higher average violent offender ages would have higher prevalence of family violence when compared to those jurisdictions with lower average violent offender ages.

Such a comparison is made in Figure 1. There, the ages of offenders that were arrested for assault during the years 1995 to 1997 in and around three Arctic Alaskan communities are compared with the ages of offenders that were arrested for assault in the US in 1996. At least for the three communities examined, the Alaskan assault arrestees are older than the US arrestees. Arrests for assaults among US arrestees peaks in the 20 to 24 age group. Among Alaskan arrestees for assault the peak age is 30 to 34 which is roughly ten years later than what is found nationally. If the age of arrest of assault offenders can be taken as a proxy measure of spousal and family assaults, then the 10 year difference in peaks of arrest ages in the Alaskan villages and in the US would give us a rough indication that intrafamilial violence is more prevalent in those Arctic communities than is found nationally.

A second, less-roundabout way of showing that spousal and family violence is more prevalent in the Arctic than elsewhere is to examine the victim-suspect relationship as recorded in police reports. In Figure 2, a comparison of the victim-suspect relationship recorded in Canadian UCR II assault reports in 1996 is compared with data gathered from Royal Canadian Mounted Police files of assaults committed in 1991 in a dozen Inuit communities in the eastern part of the NWT. There is a five year difference between the data because the national figures on police recorded reports of victim-suspect relationship only became available in 1996. Because of this five year difference, the figures should be viewed as a rough, rather than an exact, indication of the differences in prevalence of family and spousal violence in and out of the circumpolar north. Even with the five years between the data sets in mind, the difference in the proportion of assault arrests that are intrafamilial shown in Figure 2 is striking. Compared with

national data, it does appear as though the circumpolar Baffin Region of the NWT does have a higher prevalence of family and spousal assault. Slightly more than half of assaults reported to the RCMP in the Baffin Region were intrafamilial compared to a third of those reported to police nationally. Looked at another way, the proportion of arrests for spousal and family assaults in the Baffin Region of the NWT was roughly one-and-a-half times that of the same proportion found across Canada.

Figure 1: Percentage of Arrests for Assault by Age Range, Alaska Contract Jails, 1995-1997 and US, 1996.



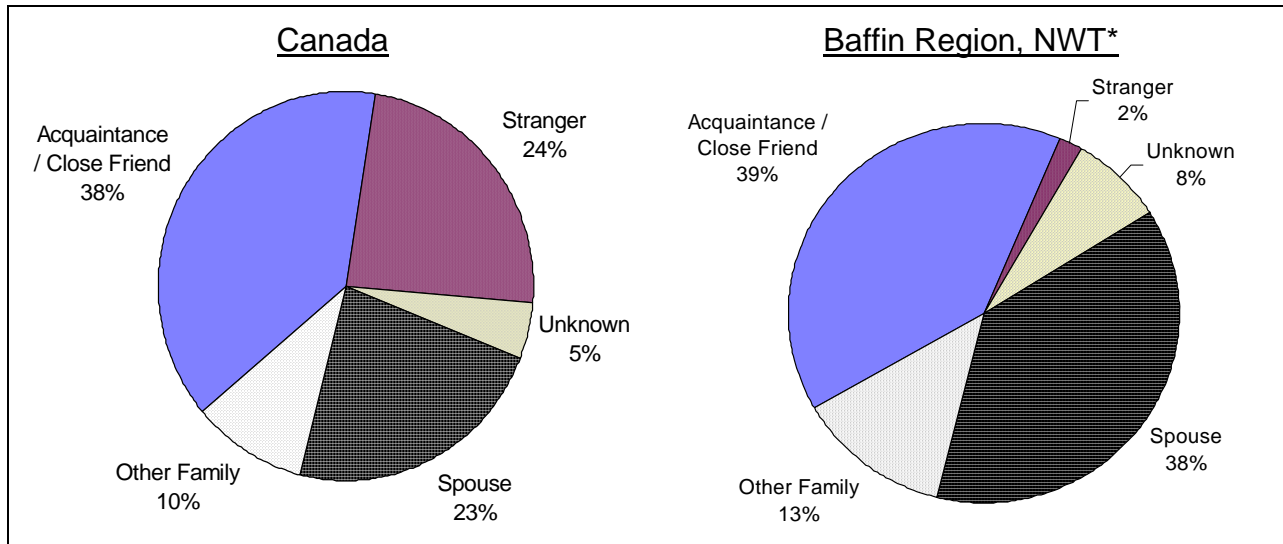
Sources: Alaska Community Jails Research Consortium; FBI, 1997.

THE “ONE MAN CRIME WAVE” AND COMMUNITY CRIME RATES IN THE CIRCUMPOLAR NORTH

Thus far, this paper has made — and provided some evidence for — three claims regarding crime in the circumpolar region of the globe: it is a much more violent place when compared to outside the region, some communities in the region are particularly affected by criminal behavior, and family and spousal violence is more prevalent in the Arctic than it is to the south. A final conclusion to be made about crime in the circumpolar north, a conclusion that marks a commonality between the Arctic and the land to the south, is that a relatively small number of offenders in circumpolar jurisdictions are responsible for a large number of offenses. This finding is interesting for a couple of reasons. First, it shows that, despite the differences, there are some things that the Arctic has in common with regions to the south in terms of its

crime patterns. More importantly, it is important to recognize the effect that a few offenders can have on the small communities of the region. Habitual offenders in places with small populations can have a large impact upon a community's crime rates. Conversely, if a community can effectively deal with their "one man crime waves," the quality of life for everyone in the community can be improved for everyone.

Figure 2: Proportion of Assaults by Accused-Victim Relationship, Baffin Region, NWT (1991) and Canada (1996) as Reported in Police Reports.



* Includes the communities of Broughton Island, Cape Dorset, Clyde River, Grise Fiord, Hall Beach, Igloolik, Lake Harbour, Nanasivik, Pangnirtung, Pond Inlet, Resolute, and Sanikiluaq. Does not include Iqaluit, the regional center.

Sources: RCMP Baffin Region Operational Files (Griffiths, Saville, Wood, & Zellerer, 1995); UCR II Data, Statistics Canada, 1998.

Marenin (1992) encountered the inflationary effect of habitual offenders upon the crime rates of five Athabaskan Alaska villages he studied:

Much of the criminal activity which is reported is committed by a few people in each village. This is an assessment of all Alaska State Troopers who were interviewed. During a discussion with the former "oversight" Trooper for these five villages, the question arose whether criminal activity, when he was there, was widely distributed. He responded immediately: "not in (village); there (name) is the one man crime wave." Later he described the situation in another village. There, the "(name) boys were out of control. They had the town treed." Reading the files, the same names would show up repeatedly as offenders or victims (p. 348).

A similar situation, found in a typical small village in the NWT (which shall remain nameless), provides a good example of the effect a small handful of offenders can have on a community's

crime rates. According to the records of the local RCMP detachment,³ there were 20 assaults in this village in 1991. With its population of about 200 people, the community assault rate was about 100 per 1,000 population. A total of 14 people committed these assaults; 10 people had only 1 assault and 4 people had 2 or more assaults. The 4 individuals who committed 2 or more assaults were responsible for half of the 20 assaults committed in the village. In other words, without the “contribution” of four individuals, the assault rate of the community would be cut in half to a more respectable 50 assaults per 1,000 population.

The effect of habitual offenders on the crime rates of circumpolar communities can also be seen through an examination of the records of bookings for assault arrests in three Arctic Alaskan communities. As shown in Figure 3, a handful of individuals arrested for assault are responsible for a substantial number of the total number of arrests for assault. Using a cutoff of four or more arrests per individual, Figure 3 compares the proportion of suspects falling above or below that line. Of the suspects booked in the Barrow contract jail (which includes individuals arrested from across Alaska's North Slope Borough) for assault arrests, 29 percent of the 491 bookings between 1995 and 1997 were for the 10 percent of suspects booked who had 4 or more arrests. Over the same time period in the Dillingham contract jail, the 7.5 percent of suspects with 4 or more arrests were responsible for 22 percent of the total number of assault arrests. In Kotzebue, 15 percent of the bookings for assault arrests were for 4.5 percent of the total number of suspects arrested. If an effective approach were developed to deal with the 28, 19, and 18 habitual assault offenders (defined rather arbitrarily here as those having 4 or more arrests over a three year period) in Barrow, Kotzebue, and Dillingham, respectively, a large portion of the assault problem in those areas could be controlled.

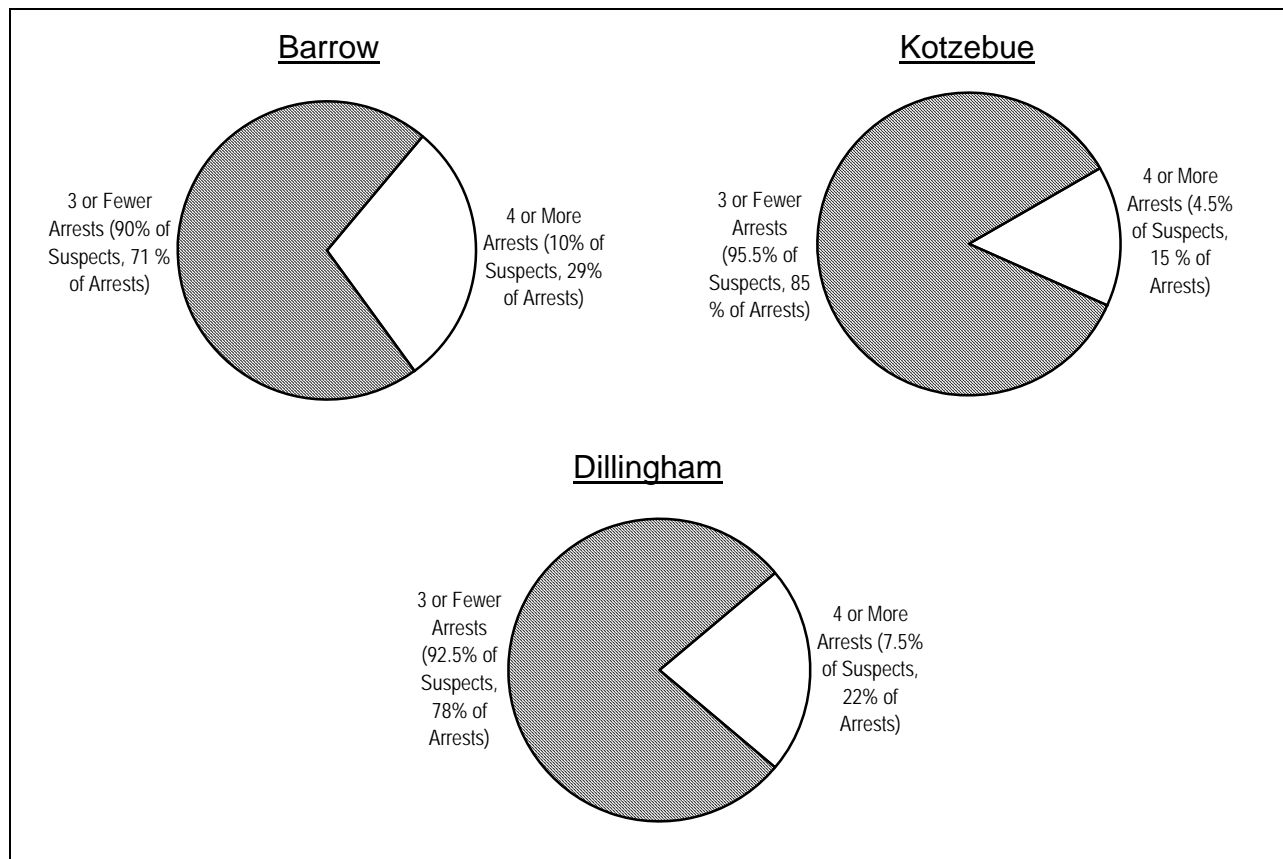
CIRCUMPOLAR CRIME PROBLEMS, REACTIVE AND CONTEMPORARY SOLUTIONS

It is one thing to say that effectively dealing with the small number of habitual offenders in a community can reduce its crime problem. It is an entirely different proposition to provide the actual solutions to do so. This is especially true in the circumpolar north where the intrafamilial nature of crime, the demands of geography and climate, and the current socioeconomic and demographic context make such efforts all the more difficult. As is shown below, many of the contemporary solutions for dealing with crime — especially family and

³ These data were gathered for the Baffin Region Crime and Justice Study (Griffiths, Zellerer, Wood, & Saville, 1995).

spousal violence — currently employed outside the region are hindered by the special circumstances of the circumpolar north.

Figure 3: Percentage of Bookings for Assault Arrests by Number of Bookings per Person, Alaska Contract Jails, 1995-97.



Source: Alaska Community Jails Research Consortium.

The people of the circumpolar north are served by criminal justice systems that have been largely imposed upon them during the colonization process. There is little difference in the way the system deals with crime committed in Barrow, Alaska compared to, say, Boston, Massachusetts. The system is primarily reactive, swinging into action only after an offense has been committed. As is the case outside the region (Hahn, 1998; Walker, 1998), the current “reactive” approaches for dealing with criminal behavior in the Arctic, falling along a continuum from the purely punitive to the nearly noninterventionist, have been largely ineffective. Alaska, where individuals from the circumpolar reaches of the state receive sanctions under the same presumptive sentencing legislation used in the urban areas of the state, is probably the most punitive in its use of imprisonment as a means of dealing with violence in the Arctic. Greenland,

where sentences of fines for rapists are not uncommon (Jensen, 1996b),⁴ is probably the least punitive. Neither of these systems, nor those in the NWT or the Yukon, have been particularly successful in going up against the crime and violence in their midst. The inability of the various systems to deal with crime and violence in the Arctic can be seen in the high rates of crime mentioned in the previous section of this paper and in the comparatively high rates of re-offending among the indigenous inhabitants of the region. In Alaska, for instance, Alaska Native offenders (those most likely to be from the circumpolar portions of the State) sentenced for felonies are substantially more likely to have been convicted for prior felonies compared to non-Native offenders (Alaska Sentencing Commission, 1992). The “revolving-door” of correctional treatment for aboriginal offenders is also seen in the Yukon Territory. According to LaPrairie (1992) “comparisons between the aboriginal and non-aboriginal inmates” held in the Yukon territorial prison in 1991 “revealed that 88 percent of the aboriginal inmates had prior incarcerations as compared to 25 percent of the non-aboriginal” (emphasis in original, p. 52). Similar failings are reported for the NWT (Griffiths, et al., 1995) and Greenland (Jensen, 1996a). While there should be no surprise that the imposed criminal justice systems are not particularly effective in the Arctic given their ineffectiveness to the south, it is probably foolish to expect the system to work in a cultural context without a traditional understanding of an adversarial legal system with concepts such as ‘the right against self-incrimination’ or ‘guilt’ (Morrow, 1993)

As to the south, people in the Arctic have begun to turn to other ways of dealing with the violence and other criminal behavior that effects their communities. Two alternatives to the methods of the reactive system currently *en vogue* outside of the Arctic, problem-oriented / situational crime prevention techniques and restorative justice reforms, have shown promise in some circumpolar jurisdictions. They are also, however, fraught with difficulties brought about by the nature of crime in the region.

Of the two alternatives to the reactive criminal justice system mentioned above, the one that has had the most play in the circumpolar north is the restorative justice approach.

Focused on changing the primary goal of justice intervention from punishment or treatment to reparation of harm and altering the justice process to include and meet the needs of victims, communities and offenders restorative justice has been

⁴ Jensen lists the sentences given in a dozen sexual assault convictions. For example there is the case of a “36 year old Greenlander fined d.kr. 1,500 (US\$ 214) for attempted sexual assault with a 13 year old girl” or the case of the “accused found guilty of consummated rape against a 40 year old woman” who was “fined d.kr. 3,000 (US\$428) equal to three weeks wages” (Jensen, 1996b, p. 39). According to Jensen, these sentences were handed down based upon the recommendations of the prosecutor.

generally associated with practices and processes such as restitution, community service, victim offender mediation, victim services and a variety of conflict resolution processes (Bazemore & Griffiths, 1997).

With their informal procedures, consensual decision-making processes, and localized solutions for local problems, there is a seemingly natural connection between the community-based methods of restorative justice and the traditional methods of conflict resolution formerly employed by the indigenous inhabitants of the circumpolar north (Jackson, 1992). Today, sentencing circles and Elders' tribunals are employed across the Arctic, some with reported success in slowing the "revolving-door" of offenders (Stuart, 1996). These forms of restorative justice allow for community involvement in the composition and implementation of criminal sanctions that are seen to best meet the needs of the offender, victim, and community. They also serve as a vehicle for the exercise of native peoples' rights to self-determination.

Although there have been some successes in the use of the restorative justice methods in the Arctic, there have been problems in their use as an answer to the domestic violence that is especially prevalent in the region. Serious concerns have been raised about the use of what is essentially a meditative solution for an offense of control that is used to maintain a fundamental power imbalance between victim and offender. Particularly strong concerns are raised by some regarding the use of these methods in the indigenous communities of the circumpolar north. A high tolerance for wife assault present in many Arctic communities (Sørensen, 1990), the exclusion of women's voices from the development of and participation in alternative justice models in the region (Zellerer, 1996a), and the power imbalances inherent in abusive marriages (Rowe, 1985) are all raised as potential problems with using restorative justice methods to deal with spousal assault. These conditions are said to combine to create a strong likelihood that victims will be coerced into taking part in the process so that offenders are not incarcerated but are instead allowed to remain in the community. This, it is said, makes it all the more likely that wife abusers will remain unaccountable and un-rehabilitated while the victims themselves will continue to be unprotected from future assaults (Zellerer, 1996a; Crnkovich, 1993). These potential effects of abuses of the restorative justice methods in the Arctic are compounded by the paucity of services in communities for victims of spousal assault due to a lack of economies of scale, the tremendous distances victims must travel to hub communities to take refuge in a women's shelter, and the scarcity available housing (created by the tremendous population growth in the region) for victims to transition into (Zellerer, 1996b) in the region.

The approaches to dealing with crime falling under the rubric of “problem-oriented, situational crime prevention” have not been employed as widely in the Arctic when compared to the application of restorative justice methods. A main reason for their lack of use in the Arctic is that they are geared more toward crimes in the public sphere while the largest proportion of crime in the Arctic occurs in the home. For instance, Goldstein, in his *Problem Oriented Policing* (1990), only offers the not-so-proactive “truncated use of the criminal justice system” (i.e., arrest without prosecution) (p. 44, 137) or “injunctive relief” (i.e., restraining orders) (p. 140) as responses to spousal assault.⁵ Likewise, none of the 22 successful case studies presented in Clarke’s (1992) edited text on situational crime prevention deals with crimes committed beyond public or semi-public places.

Although Goldstein and Clarke offer no examples of specific solutions that would apply to the communities of the circumpolar north, this is not to say that their problem solving, situational crime prevention approach cannot be applied in the Arctic. Clarke (1992, p. 11), for example, argues that measures to restrict access to the “facilitators” of crime — guns, automobiles, or alcohol — can have a meaningful effect on crime that goes beyond the techniques of opportunity reduction indicated by routine activity theory. Many communities in the Arctic, where the connection between alcohol abuse and violence is particularly acute, have taken steps to reduce or prohibit the availability of alcohol in an effort to reduce such violence. In fact, the difficulties of transport brought about by the vast Arctic landscape actually work in favor of efforts to restrict alcohol use. Recent studies examining the impact of community level prohibitions in the circumpolar north have supported such bans as a way of reducing the harm that generally accompanies alcohol use (Landen, et al., 1997; Chiu, Perez, & Parker, 1997; Wood, 1997).

CONCLUSION

⁵ Neither of these responses are particularly viable in the Arctic. Small community sizes, which insure the inevitability of encounters between victims and offenders, make the use of restraining orders untenable. Assuming that the results of research showing that unemployed wife abusers who are arrested — compared to those not arrested — have a greater likelihood of reoffending (Schmidt & Sherman, 1996) can be extended, the use of arrest without prosecution in an attempt to deter future spousal assaults is also counter-indicated because of the widespread unemployment found in the circumpolar north.

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