

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
JOINT MEETING
SENATE JUDICIARY STANDING COMMITTEE
SENATE HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES STANDING COMMITTEE**

January 24, 2011

1:31 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

SENATE JUDICIARY STANDING COMMITTEE

Senator Hollis French, Chair
Senator Bill Wielechowski, Vice Chair
Senator Joe Paskvan
Senator John Coghill

SENATE HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES STANDING COMMITTEE

Senator Bettye Davis, Chair
Senator Dennis Egan
Senator Johnny Ellis
Senator Kevin Meyer
Senator Fred Dyson

MEMBERS ABSENT

SENATE JUDICIARY STANDING COMMITTEE

Senator Lesil McGuire

SENATE HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES STANDING COMMITTEE

All members present

OTHER LEGISLATORS PRESENT

Representative Bob Miller

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

ALASKA VICTIMIZATION SURVEY
- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

LAUREE MORTON, Interim Director
Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault
Juneau, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Delivered the presentation of the Alaska Victimization Survey.

ANDRE ROSAY, Ph.D., Director
Justice Center
University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA)
Anchorage, AK

POSITION STATEMENT: Delivered the presentation of the Alaska Victimization Survey.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[1:31:20 PM](#)

CHAIR HOLLIS FRENCH called the joint meeting of the Senate Judiciary Standing Committee and the Senate Health and Social Services Standing Committee to order at 1:31 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Paskvan, Wielechowski, Coghill, and French from the Judiciary Standing Committee and Senators Dyson, Meyer, Ellis, Egan and Davis from the Health and Social Services Standing Committee.

Alaska Victimization Survey

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CHAIR FRENCH announced that the business before the committee would be to hear from Lauree Morton and Andre Rosay who would present the findings from the Alaska Victimization Survey. He noted that in 2009 the Judiciary Committee heard a day-long presentation on sexual assault and subsequently recommended completing a victimization survey.

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LAUREE MORTON, Interim Director, Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, thanked the committee for hearing the results of the 2010 Victimization Survey, particularly because they are difficult statistics and stories. She said she applauds the committee's efforts to work with CDVSA to help end domestic violence and sexual assault in Alaska.

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ANDRE ROSAY, Ph.D., Director, Justice Center, University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA), thanked Marny Rivera, Darryl Wood, and Brad Myrstol for their collaboration on the project. In summary, he said, the presentation would include recent statistics for forcible rape from the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR); the recommendation for a victimization survey that the Senate Judiciary Committee made in 2009, key results from the FY10 Alaska Victimization Survey; and the Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault plans for FY11 and FY12.

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MR. ROSAY informed the members that the UCR statistics reflect information that law enforcement agencies throughout the state submit to the Department of Public Safety (DPS) on forcible rape, which is defined as "the carnal knowledge of a female forcibly and against her will definition." He noted that an important limitation to the UCR statistics is that they only include forcible rapes that are reported to law enforcement.

SENATOR DYSON asked if they preclude forcible rape of males.

MR. ROSAY said that's correct; the UCRs define a victim as female only.

Additional limitations to UCR data include the following:

- Not all police agencies participate in the UCR program
- UCR statistics exclude:
 - Statutory rapes
 - Rapes against incapacitated victims
 - Rapes with male victims
 - Other sex offenses, such as online enticement of minors
 - Rapes committed with more serious offenses, such as homicide

Nonetheless, Mr. Rosay said, these statistics do provide longitudinal data for assessing the rate of forcible rape reported to law enforcement over time and across jurisdictions.

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CHAIR FRENCH recognized that Representative Miller had joined the committee.

MR. ROSAY displayed a line graph of UCR statistics from 1996-2009 for the rate of forcible rape reported to law enforcement for the U.S., Alaska, Anchorage, and Fairbanks. From 1996 to

2007 the rates in Alaska and Anchorage have been persistently higher than in the U.S. The Fairbanks data, which has only been collected since 2003, shows rates that were even higher than in either Anchorage or all of Alaska. All 4 rates declined slightly in 2008. In 2009 the U.S. rate continued to drop slightly, whereas there was an increase in the rates in Anchorage, Fairbanks and Alaska as a whole.

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SENATOR DYSON questioned why the significant rate increase in Fairbanks in 2006 wasn't reflected in the Alaska rate for that year.

MR. ROSAY surmised that there was a decline elsewhere in the state.

SENATOR PASKVAN asked if there's been an analysis to determine why the Fairbanks rate is so much higher than the Alaska rate.

MR. ROSAY replied that hasn't been done, but he would touch on why some of these rates change over time. Ms. Morton would discuss the surveys that are planned for Fairbanks that will help determine why those rates are higher.

SENATOR PASKVAN asked if he has any thoughts about the higher rates even if they aren't supported by a study.

MR. ROSAY declined to speculate, but said it's reasonable to conclude that it's because the victimization rates are significantly higher in the Fairbanks North Star Borough. He added that they hope to have a specific answer to that question within a year.

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SENATOR EGAN asked if the higher rate is only for Fairbanks rather than the Interior.

MR. ROSAY confirmed that the rate is for the city of Fairbanks only.

SENATOR COGHILL asked if the date is from police and service organization reports.

MR. ROSAY clarified that the UCR statistics only include data that were reported to law enforcement. Thus, unreported cases are not included in the graph.

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MR. ROSAY displayed a slide summarizing the UCR forcible rape statistics for 2007 to 2008 and 2008 to 2009 in the four jurisdictions. In 2007 to 2008 there was a decline in the rate of forcible rape reported to law enforcement in all jurisdictions, but in 2008 to 2009 there was an increase in Alaska, Anchorage, and Fairbanks. In 2009 the Anchorage rate was the highest it had been since 1996.

MR. ROSAY highlighted that an important limitation with these data is that it's impossible to know if the high rates in Fairbanks are due to higher victimization rates, higher reporting rates, or both. He said he believes that this limitation was the impetus for the Senate Judiciary Committee recommending a victimization survey, to look at both offenses that are reported to law enforcement and offenses that are not reported.

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CHAIR FRENCH confirmed that for a long time it's been known that the reported rate of rape in Alaska is far higher than in other states, but the underlying question is whether it's because there's a higher rate of reporting or because there's actually a higher rate of rape in the Alaska population than in any other state. It's not possible to answer that question without a victimization survey, he said.

MR. ROSAY referred to the UCR forcible rape statistics for 1996 to 2009 for the four jurisdictions and emphasized that it's not possible to know if things in Fairbanks are better or significantly worse, but they expect to be able to answer that question following the FY11 surveys.

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MR. ROSAY displayed pie graphs showing the composition of violent crime in the U.S. and Alaska for 2009. Violent crime includes murder, non-negligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault. This UCR data indicates that 12 percent of the violent crime that is reported to law enforcement in Alaska is attributable to forcible rape, whereas that number is 7 percent in the entire U.S.

MR. ROSAY suggested that Ms. Morton discuss the recommendation for the victimization survey and the Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault before he reviews the survey results.

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SENATOR PASKVAN asked if the rates for Alaska and the U.S. include data on average ages.

MR. ROSAY pointed out that the Alaska rate is, on average, two times higher than the U.S. rate and the Fairbanks rate is, on average, five times higher than the U.S. and so he believes that there has to be some bigger difference than age composition to account for the large difference in rates.

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MS. MORTON recapped the 2009 Senate Judiciary Committee's review of sexual assault statistics and some strategies to reduce the rates including the recommendation to fund a victimization survey. Money to do that was included in the Council's budget in 2010.

MS. MORTON informed the committees that the nine-member Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault is housed within the Department of Public Safety (DPS). Five commissioners or their designees from the departments of Public Safety, Law, Corrections, Health and Social Services, and Education and Early Development sit on the Council. Four public members are appointed by the governor and one of those is a rural seat.

The Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault has a vision that Alaska will be free from domestic and sexual violence. Its mission is to provide safety to Alaskans who are victimized or impacted by domestic violence and sexual assault through a system of statewide crisis intervention, perpetrator accountability and prevention services.

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MR. ROSAY continued to explain that the 2010 Alaska Victimization Survey was developed with funding from the Council. The survey was designed to establish a baseline that would provide statewide estimates for intimate partner and sexual violence. He noted that a limitation of the survey is that it provides just one statewide estimate, but regional estimates will be provided very soon.

This survey was modeled after the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Surveillance System (NISVSS), which is the state of the art in measuring violence against women. The survey was developed by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) in cooperation with the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) and the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD). The UAA Justice Center relied

on the NIPSVSS survey to ensure that the Alaska results would be directly comparable to the results from other states. RTI administered the survey by randomly calling people on both landlines and cell phones. During development and implementation of the survey, the primary goal was to maximize the respondents' safety and confidentiality.

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MR. ROSAY referenced the handout that includes information about the specific questions that were used in the survey. The surveyors first asked respondents about their general health followed by questions about psychological aggression and control and slowly moved to ask about sexual violence and intimate partner violence. They moved slowly to allow time to establish a rapport with the respondents so that they would feel more comfortable when answering the more difficult questions on sexual violence.

MR. ROSAY explained that the survey uses behaviorally specific questions and avoids terms like "rape," "sexual assault," "domestic violence," or "victim" because these are words that the respondents must define. Instead, the surveyors asked about behaviors like whether they have vaginal sex and, when necessary, an explanation of what that means was provided. For example, "by vaginal sex, we mean that a man or a boy put his penis in your vagina." While the survey is graphic, the data is far better when behaviorally specific questions are used rather than asking individuals if they've been a victim of sexual assault, he said.

MR. ROSAY continued to explain that the survey is also careful to attribute the behaviors to the perpetrators rather than to the respondents. For example, the respondents are not asked if they had vaginal sex with others. Instead, respondents are asked if others had vaginal sex with them. This is particularly important, he said, when looking at alcohol or drug-involved sexual assault because it puts less blame on the respondent and the data is better when these types of questions are used.

MR. ROSAY relayed that respondents generally were thankful for the survey just as they are with other victimization surveys. Prior research indicates that respondents don't mind answering these difficult questions and understand the value of the survey. In fact, 94 percent of the respondents completed the entire 25 minute survey.

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MR. ROSAY said that the survey respondents were limited to English-speaking adult women residing in a household with at least 1 land or cell phone. In May and June of 2010, 871 adult women throughout Alaska were surveyed. The sample, overall, provides an excellent representation of the Alaska population of women, he said. Nonetheless, there were some minor differences between the sample and the larger population. Because of this, they used sample weight to control for selection, non-response, and coverage. The results, he explained, that were included in the presentation are the weighted results.

In order to protect the confidentiality of the respondents, he said, he did not want to give out too much information on the survey respondents; but he could share a small amount about who they are. On average respondents were 46 years old, they ranged from 18 years of age to over 80. Seventy-two percent of respondents were White, 15 percent Alaska Native and 5 percent Hispanic. If these statistics are compared to the Alaska population they match that extremely well. About half of the respondents were currently married at the time of the survey, 35 percent had a high school degree or less, and 56 percent reported a household income of less than \$50,000 per year. The sample is geographically representative; the respondents came from throughout the state of Alaska. However, because it is geographically representative it also means that it is geographically concentrated in the Anchorage municipality, Fairbanks North Star Borough, and the Mat-Su Borough.

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CHAIR FRENCH asked if they were able to get an adequate sample from Western Alaska, an area of particular concern for sexual assault.

MR. ROSAY said no because the key goal for this first victimization survey was to provide one statewide estimate. As they move forward they will produce regional estimates, but at this point they only have this one statewide estimate.

CHAIR FRENCH asked if they did get samples and responses from Western Alaska, but not to a degree that allows them to draw any specific conclusions about that area.

MR. ROSAY answered yes. There were too few respondents and the margins of error would be very large.

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He continued with the results of the survey beginning with intimate partner violence. He explained that intimate partner violence includes two measures:

- Threats of physical violence
- Physical violence

Both of these measures were limited to intimate partners only, defined as romantic or sexual partners. He said that both of these measures were then combined into a single composite, called "intimate partner violence." He said he would show the committee the three separate statistics: one for threats, one for physical violence, and one for a composite that includes threats and physical violence.

He said in order to measure threats of physical violence by intimate partners they asked:

- Have your romantic or sexual partners made threats to physically harm you?

In order to measure physical violence by intimate partners they asked:

- Have your romantic or sexual partners:
 - Slapped you?
 - Pushed or shoved you?
 - Hit you with a fist or something hard?
 - Kicked you?
 - Hurt you by pulling your hair?
 - Slammed you against something?
 - Tried to hurt you by choking or suffocating you?
 - Beaten you?
 - Burned you on purpose?
 - Used a knife or gun on you?

He reiterated that they used behaviorally specific indicators, rather than asking them directly if the respondents were victims of domestic violence.

[1:56:24 PM](#)

MR. ROSAY continued by presenting the result of the lifetime estimate: 47.6 percent of adult women in Alaska have experienced intimate partner violence in their lifetime. This equates to 117,685 adult women. In many respects, these numbers confirm what they already suspected. However, now they are able to specifically tell the committee the magnitude of the problem.

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CHAIR FRENCH asked how that number compares to the Lower 48.

MR. ROSAY answered that that information is not yet available but those results should be available soon. At that time they will be able to make direct comparison between Alaska and the Lower 48.

MR. ROSAY continued to explain that intimate partner violence includes both threats and physical violence. They estimated that 31 percent of adult women have experienced threats in their lifetime and 44.8 percent of adult women have experienced physical violence in their lifetime. This equates to 76,644 adult women who have experienced threats in their lifetime and 110,763 adult women who have experience physical violence in their lifetime.

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SENATOR COGHILL asked if the threats and the physical violence are totally separate or if the 110,000 also include the threats.

MR. ROSAY answered that many respondents experienced both threats and physical violence. Those who experienced both were counted once under the composite labeled Intimate Partner Violence, but they were counted separately under threats and physical violence. This means that these are, unfortunately, not mutually exclusive categories.

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MR. ROSAY said that they estimated that almost 10 percent or 1 in 10 adult women in Alaska have experienced intimate partner violence in the past year. In regard to threats, they estimated that six percent of adult women had experienced threats of physical violence in the past year and almost 9 percent had experienced physical violence in the past year. He reiterated that some women experienced both threats and physical violence in the past year.

He said they estimated that 23,240 adult women in the state of Alaska experienced intimate partner violence in the past year.

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SENATOR DYSON asked if the survey asked about alcohol involvement in either the sexual threats or sexual violence.

MR. ROSAY replied not in the intimate partner violence questions, but they did ask about alcohol and drug involvement in the sexual violence questions. He said that the survey is currently 25 minutes and the national survey is significantly

longer. He explained that they made the decision to keep the survey under 25 minutes so they had to cut out a lot of the material in order to keep it within this time frame.

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MR. ROSAY continued with the sexual violence definitions and estimates. These definitions included two measures:

- Alcohol or drug involved sexual assault
- Forcible sexual assault

He explained that contrary to previous measures, these are not limited to intimate partners. The measures are now combined to create a single "sexual violence" composite, which includes both alcohol and drug related sexual assault and forcible sexual assault.

For alcohol or drug involved sexual assault measures they asked respondents the following questions:

- When they were alcohol or drug intoxicated and unable to consent, has anyone:
 - Had vaginal sex with you?
 - Made you receive anal sex?
 - Made you perform oral sex?
 - Made you receive oral sex?

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For forcible sexual assault they asked the respondents the following questions:

- Has anyone used physical force or threats to physically harm you to:
 - Make you have vaginal sex?
 - Make you receive anal sex?
 - Make you perform oral sex?
 - Make you receive oral sex?
 - Put their fingers or an object in your vagina or anus?
 - Try to have vaginal, oral, or anal sex with you?

2:03:35 PM

MR. ROSAY continued with the lifetime sexual violence estimates. Overall, they estimated that 37.1 percent or more than 1 in every 3 women experienced sexual violence at some point in their lifetime. This equates to 91,725 women. They estimated that 26.8 percent or more than 1 in every 4 adult women experienced at least 1 alcohol or drug involved sexual assault in their life time. He emphasized that they did not ask respondents how many times people assaulted them while intoxicated. They simply asked them whether or not it happened. Because of this it is quite

likely that many of the respondents were victimized multiple times.

In terms of forcible sexual assault they estimated that 25.6 percent or 1 in every 4 women experienced a forcible sexual assault at some point in their lifetime.

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He continued that in regard to the numbers for the lifetime estimates 91,725 adult women experience sexual violence at some point in their life time.

He said that the past year estimates reflect that 4.3 percent or 10,631 adult women have experienced sexual violence in the past year. That includes 8,901 women who have experienced at least 1 alcohol or drug involved sexual assault and 6,181 women who experienced at least 1 forcible sexual assault in the past year. He reiterated that many women have experienced both measures of sexual violence.

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CHAIR FRENCH asked how the estimate of 10,631 self-reported victims of sexual violence compares with the Uniform Crime Report numbers.

MR. ROSAY answered that it's difficult to compare those numbers because it includes things that would not be included in the UCR. However, he said, the question "Has anyone used physical force or threats to physically harm you to make you have vaginal sex?" does compare directly to the UCR. They estimate that almost 5,000 adult women were forced to have vaginal sex in the past year. This means that 4,995 forcible rapes were committed in the past year.

CHAIR FRENCH asked what the UCR would indicate to him.

MR. ROSAY replied the UCR generally shows that there are between 500 and 550 rapes reported per year.

CHAIR FRENCH observed that the self-reported victimization rate is nearly 10 times the rate reported to police. He asked if that comports with numbers from other jurisdictions.

MR. ROSAY answered he has only seen that comparison for all sexual violence; they don't have the data to answer the question for just forcible rape.

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SENATOR PASKVAN asked if there has been any follow-up analysis to the prosecution rates to these categories.

MR. ROSAY replied not in the victimization survey but they have done some work tracking offences reported to law enforcement through prosecution and conviction. Because of this there are some statistics available from previous surveys that they have done.

CHAIR FRENCH drew the committee's attention to the Spring/Summer 2008 edition of the Alaska Justice Forum, entitled "Case Attrition in Sexual Violence Offences." He explained that it is an excellent review of what happens to cases from the report, the follow-up by the police, referral to the DA, acceptance by the DA, and prosecution. In summary, he said, once a case is accepted by the DA there is nearly an 80 percent conviction rate when a strong case has been built in the field. However, an enormous amount of police work and nursing work has to be done in order to build strong sexual assault cases. Without the upstream work between the report and acceptance for prosecution, a huge amount of attrition takes place.

MR. ROSAY agreed and emphasized that what they are adding to this is the even bigger hurdle from the crime itself to the report.

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MR. ROSAY said with regard to lifetime estimates they estimate that 58.6 percent or 144,881 adult women in Alaska have experienced intimate partner violence, sexual violence, or both in their lifetime. They further estimate that 47.6 percent have experienced intimate partner violence and more than 1 in 3 or 37.1 percent have experienced sexual violence.

The summary of past year estimates indicates that 1 in 10 or 11.8 percent of women in the state of Alaska have experienced intimate partner violence, sexual violence, or both in the past year. That includes 9.4 percent who have experienced intimate partner violence and 4.3 percent who have experienced sexual violence.

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MR. ROSAY highlighted the following important limitations to the statistics:

- The survey only provides one statewide average, which may mask large regional differences. They hope to provide

regional estimates following the FY11 and FY12 surveys. In part this is to examine the source of the difference between the Anchorage rate and the Fairbanks rate, which has had very large UCR rates since 2003.

- The survey excluded non-English speaking women; women who did not have phone access; women living in shelters, hospitals, or prisons; and women who were homeless.

MR. ROSAY warned that the estimates should be viewed as conservative because he believes that they would be higher among the women excluded from the survey.

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MR. ROSAY continued to highlight important limitations to the survey.

- The survey measured the number of victims, not the number of victimizations. In part this was to minimize the burden on the respondents, but because of repeat victimization it's likely that the number of victimizations would be higher than the number of victims. This is an important difference from the UCRs, which measures the number of offenses reported and not the number of people who report those offenses.
- The survey did not measure all forms of intimate partner violence or sexual violence. Therefore, these estimates should be viewed as conservative.
- While they believe that the survey produces the best data possible, these estimates may be conservative because of the continuing stigma of reporting intimate partner violence and sexual violence and because these are very difficult questions to answer over the phone.

[2:14:55 PM](#)

MS. MORTON thanked the women who participated in the survey who were asked to relive terrible experiences in order for others to learn the extent of intimate partner and sexual violence in the state of Alaska.

The FY10 Alaska Victimization Survey provided the first statewide, comprehensive, and behaviorally specific baseline measure of violence against Alaska women. As we move forward with prevention strategies, intervention strategies, and offender management, we will be able to look at the baseline and gauge whether or not we are improving. Within the next six months we hope to make national and state-by-state comparisons, but for the comparisons to remain viable it's important that the core questions remain the same, she said.

MS. MORTON urged legislators to consider these survey results to help guide policy and practice and budgetary changes to best get these numbers to come down. "It's difficult to know that 1 out of every 2 women in this room are affected, or could be," she said.

[2:17:01 PM](#)

MS. MORTON reported that regional surveys will be done in FY11 in Anchorage and Fairbanks with funding that came through the Council from the Legislature. The Governor's initiative provided funding for a rural pilot project and 11 communities submitted proposals. Last week the evaluation committee went over the proposals and made recommendations to the Commissioner of Health and Social Services. Once the result is announced, we will work with the community to implement strategies to reduce domestic violence and sexual assault and to help establish a baseline for that community, she said.

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MS. MORTON explained that for the FY11 surveys two questions were added to the core questions as a result of feedback from respondents, surveyors, and those informing the initiative work. The first asks if the victimization occurred in Alaska and the second question is to distinguish when child witnesses were present at the violence. She said it's important to note that funding for the surveys is coming through the Council because 2 of their 14 statutory mandates are to collect data, conduct surveys, present information to the Legislature on domestic violence, sexual assault, crisis intervention and prevention.

MS. MORTON emphasized the importance of continued funding for these surveys and said that the Council has requested in the Governor's budget \$400,000 to do more regional surveys in FY12, to work with the rural pilot project, and to assist 3 communities that are preparing for community readiness projects to obtain a baseline. The Council has \$280,000 in its base for research efforts and has requested at least \$150,000 for prevention efforts to begin to evaluate a program that's being introduced in schools called the fourth R for "relationships." This is an evidence-based strategy that was started in Canada and has moved to Alaska. It is being piloted in 20 schools this year.

[2:21:31 PM](#)

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked for a discussion of the other information that was gathered in the survey and if it has been released.

MR. ROSAY replied it should be available within a week and cautioned that the information is just as alarming. Both the lifetime and past year rates are shockingly high in terms of psychological aggression, coercion and control, entrapment, and harassment.

SENATOR PASKVAN asked about rates across income spectrums.

MR. ROSAY explained that the sample size isn't large enough for sub-groups of the population.

SENATOR COGHILL asked if there are other barriers to reporting besides stigma.

MR. ROSAY said that was not included in the survey, but could be included in future surveys.

SENATOR COGHILL asked if the significant summertime population shift and the dramatic fluctuation in the military population in the Fairbanks area were taken into account.

MR. ROSAY replied the respondents were only asked about their zip codes.

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SENATOR COGHILL commented that it was probably worthwhile to track whether or not the victimization occurred in or outside of Alaska. He stated that the rates of victimization were alarming.

CHAIR FRENCH thanked the governor for his efforts in this area. He stated that while he and the governor disagree on some issues, they stand shoulder-to-shoulder on this one. He thanked the administration for some of its efforts, including the Choose Respect campaign.

SENATOR FRENCH noted that Ms. Morton has been active in the domestic violence and sexual assault area for many years and asked if she had any idea that the numbers were so high

MS. MORTON replied the surveys confirm what they have thought to be true.

CHAIR FRENCH said that part of the desire to do a victimization survey was based on the hope that reporting was high and that possibly victimization rates were lower, but that wasn't the case. He asked for suggestions for what policy makers might do to address the problem.

2:27:19 PM

MR. ROSAY replied one recommendation is to continue the victimization survey in order to identify the prevention and intervention efforts that are working, that aren't working, and those that are promising. For example, when the VPSO presence is increased in a community, there's likely to be an increase in reporting, but they'd also like to see a reduction in the victimization rate over time. Right now it's difficult to know the best practices.

The UAA Justice Center has done a great deal of work looking at ways to facilitate case processing, but it's now clear that the rate of underreporting is significantly higher than they thought. This will change the thinking about prevention and should be an important component of legislators' work during the session. For a lot of reasons a lot of women don't want to report to law enforcement so prevention will be a very important factor in reducing these horrendous rates, he said.

CHAIR FRENCH recalled reading that the presence of a VPSO in a community greatly increases the likelihood of a prosecutable case. He suggested that it would be a good test to look at villages that will get VPSOs in the next year or so to make comparisons between the current and future rates of both reporting and victimizations.

MR. ROSAY responded this is something that they hope to look at soon. The Justice Center has applied to the National Institute of Justice to look at the impact of VPSOs on the health and safety of communities. This is a joint project with the departments of public safety, corrections, law, and health, the Tundra Women's Coalition, the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, the Alaska Native Justice Center, and UAA. The idea is to look broadly at the impact of VPSOs on communities. In the past they've seen that VPSOs facilitate prosecution and they reduce the rate of injury in assault cases.

CHAIR FRENCH asked if the assaults that take place have less serious injuries when a VPSO is present.

MR. ROSAY answered yes.

[2:30:45 PM](#)

SENATOR DYSON suggested that the Legislature might help small jurisdictions pay for rape test kits that cost about \$1,600. He also commented that this discussion is similar to suicide prevention. Everyone in the room wants to get past dealing with the problems, and start dealing with the circumstances that make this happen. Most suicide victims have been traumatized in many ways, including domestic violence and sexual assault and were overwhelmed with hopelessness. Someone has to take responsibility for the cultural norms in communities, he said.

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SENATOR COGHILL asked Ms. Morton how often women come into a shelter but don't report their victimization.

MS. MORTON replied there are many reasons that not everyone who comes to a shelter or a rape crisis center makes a report. But most programs do have someone to provide legal advocacy, explain options and procedures, and help them think through what the report might mean. She said she believes that reporting can improve as the prevention campaigns progress. In the past, some victims had to pay for their sexual exam kit. That no longer happens, but reporting can still be very difficult. Anything that can be done to assure that the system is working together and that community members are more knowledgeable will be helpful, she said.

SENATOR COGHILL reiterated that he's trying to find out the barriers to reporting.

SENATOR DYSON noted there has been a significant paradigm shift in the last several years to keep a person from being re-victimized.

CHAIR FRENCH thanked Ms. Morton and Mr. Rosay for the presentation.

[2:41:29 PM](#)

There being no further business to come before the committees, Chair French adjourned the hearing at 2:41 p.m.