



# RESEARCHER-PRACTITIONER PARTNERSHIPS TO IMPACT SEXUAL ASSAULT AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE POLICY

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## Abstract

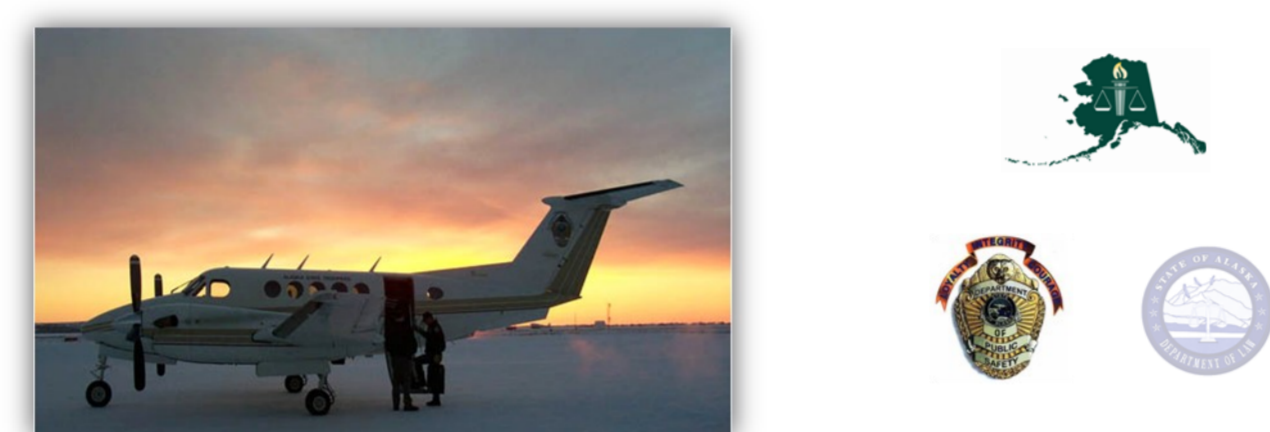
The Alaska Department of Public Safety and the UAA Justice Center conducted numerous research projects and published numerous articles on domestic violence, sexual assault, child sexual abuse, and stalking. These research projects were used to develop new multidisciplinary and multifaceted initiatives to combat violence against women in Alaska. This poster describes our researcher-practitioner partnership and its impact on policy and practice.

### Alaskans Choose Respect to End the Epidemic of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault



<http://gov.alaska.gov/parnell/priorities/choose-respect.html>

## Building Partnerships

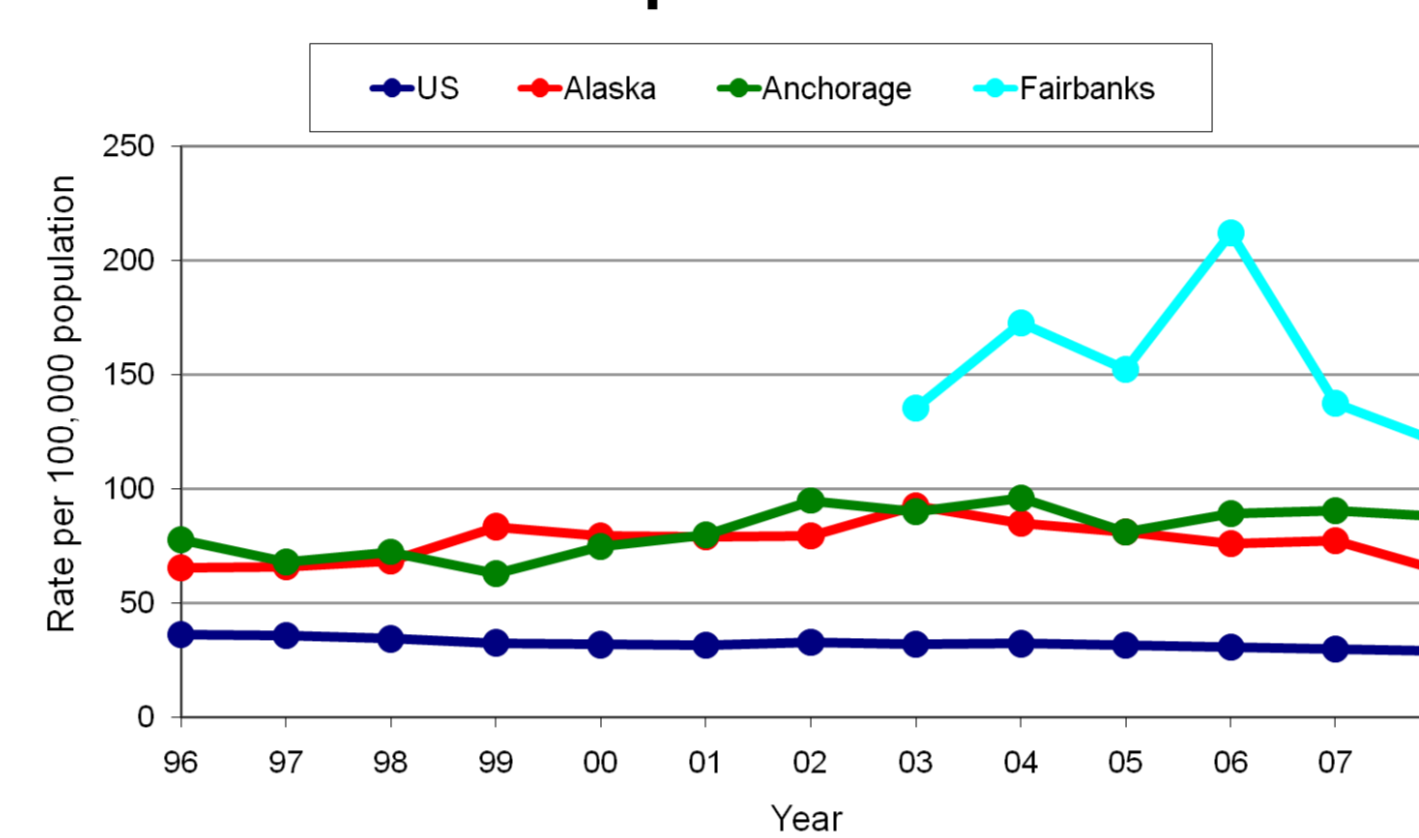


Originally designed to overcome the lack of reliable data, key partnerships were formed between the UAA Justice Center, the Alaska State Troopers, and the Alaska Department of Law.

We work together in pursuit of common goals. We learn from each other by bringing complementary skills. We understand the necessity of true partnerships to bring about social change. We share ownership in the research process and responsibility in planning and decision-making. We work collaboratively to define and execute research. We rely on each other's strengths for dissemination and to impact policy.

## Context

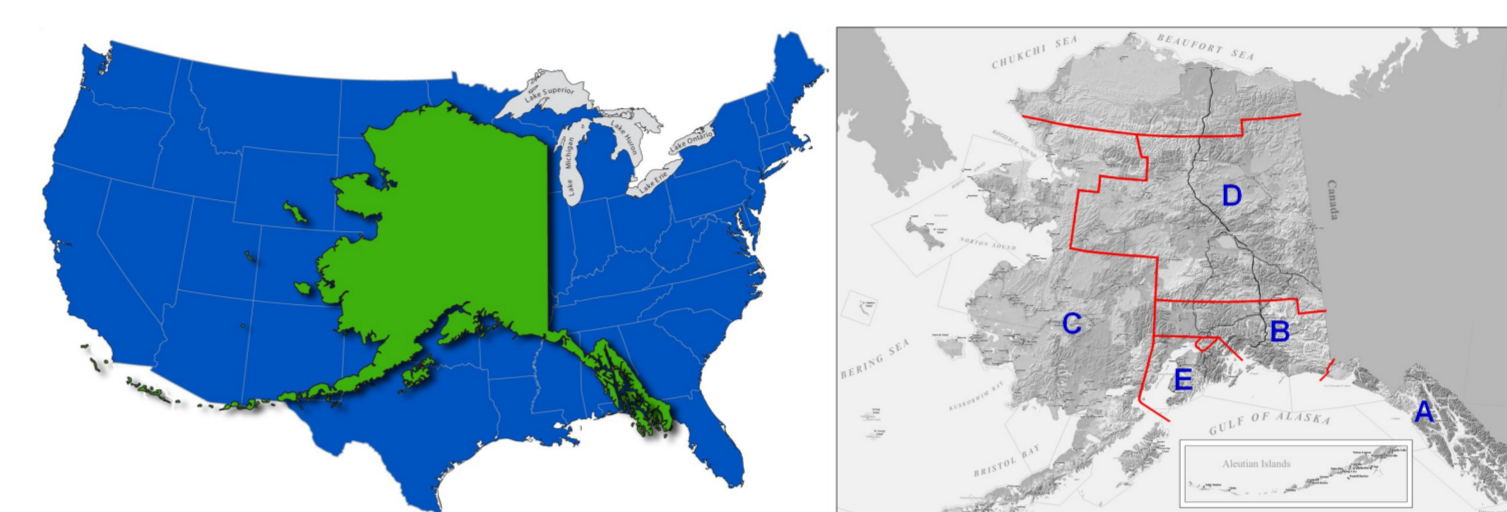
### UCR Forcible Rape Statistics: 1996-2008



The average UCR rate of forcible was:

- 162% higher in Alaska than in the U.S. (1996-2008),
- 184% higher in Anchorage than in the U.S. (1996-2008),
- 398% higher in Fairbanks than in the U.S. (2003-2008).

### Law Enforcement in Alaska



Alaska State Troopers (AST) is the only agency mandated by state law to provide police services in Alaska. The State of Alaska is one-fifth the size of the lower 48, encompassing roughly 570,000 square miles. Population density is 1.15 people per square mile. Many communities (64%) are not connected by road. In 38% of non-hub villages, there is no local law enforcement presence. In 46%, AST is assisted by Village Public Safety Officers (VPSOs). AST includes five detachments (C Detachment is larger than Texas). All prosecutions are handled by the Criminal Division of the AK Department of Law.

## Dissemination

To achieve maximum impact on policy and practice, we emphasize joint dissemination in multiple formats.

With joint dissemination, we recognize and rely upon each other's strengths, overcoming our own substantive and research limitations.



"The practitioner partner increases the acceptance and perceived usefulness of the content [and] the research side ensures methodological rigor and credibility" (Wuestewald & Steinheider, forthcoming).

Formats include:

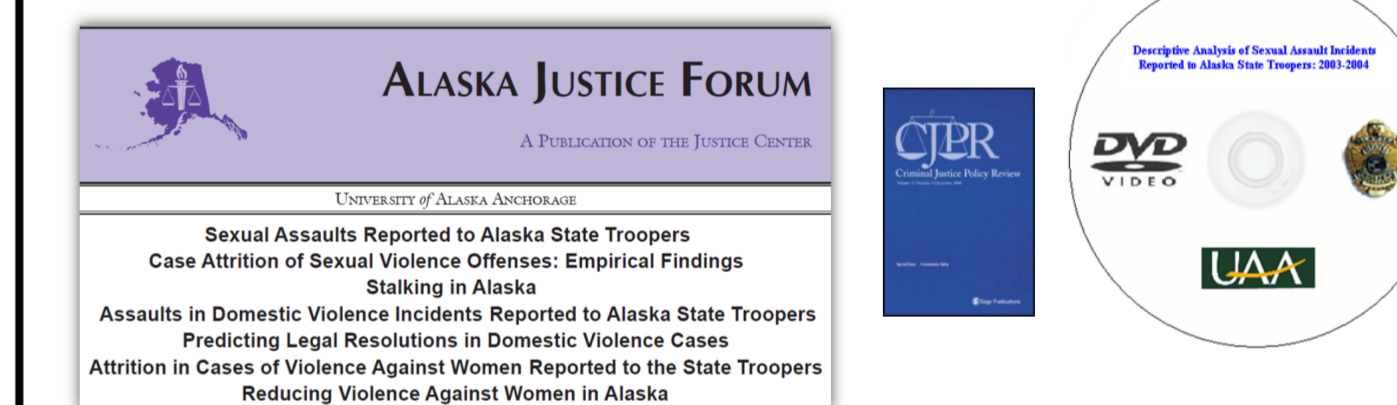
Local and national press releases and conferences,



The New York Times



Co-authored reports and publications in both academic and practitioner outlets (print, video, web), and

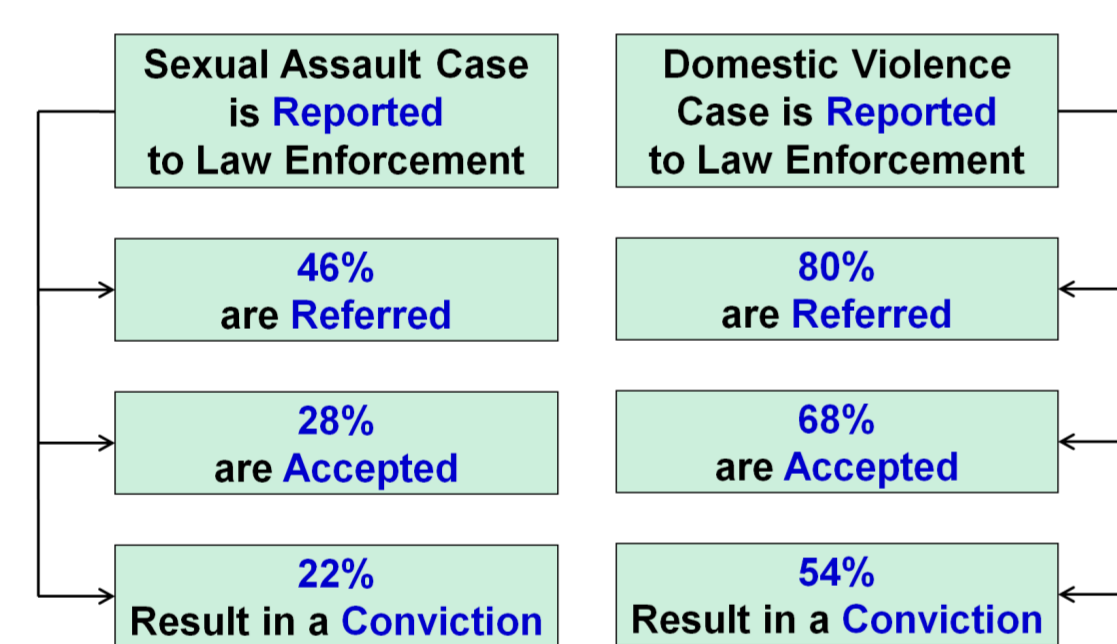


Trainings; local and national presentations for researchers, practitioners and policy-makers.



## Sample Results

### Case Processing



### Factors that Improved Case Processing:

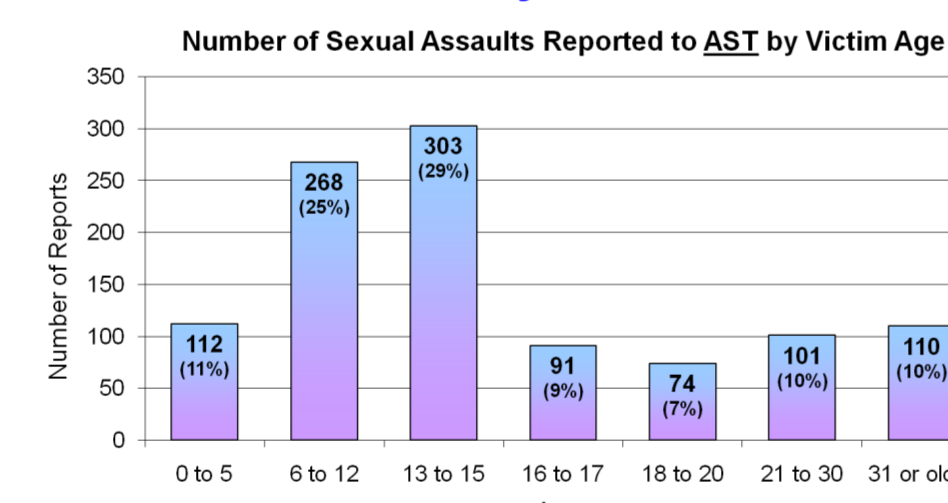
- Having local police paraprofessionals (e.g., VPSOs),
- Conducting full investigations to uncover multiple charges,
- Collecting photographic evidence (injuries, scene),
- Conducting interviews and tape recording interviews, and
- Securing victim cooperation with law enforcement.

### Factors with no Impact on Case Processing:

- Geography and Race: Cases from rural Alaska and cases with Alaska Native victims were not less likely to be referred for prosecution, to be accepted for prosecution, or to result in a conviction.

### Factors that Complicate Investigations:

- Age: 74% of sexual assault victims are under the age of 18.
- Alcohol use: 13-15 yr old sexual assault victims have highest intoxication rates.



- 98% of sexual assault victims are assaulted by a non-stranger.
- Most common suspect is often a family member.

## Importance of Data & Research

### Data can correct misconceptions

Example: Cases from rural areas and cases with Alaska Native victims are NOT less likely to be prosecuted.

### Data can identify why investigations are difficult

Example: Victim age, alcohol use, relationship to suspect.

### Research can identify how we can overcome difficulties in investigation

As a result, we are no longer in a position to request funding because we have a problem. We are now in a position to request funding because we have solutions that are driven by data and supported by research.



## Using Data to Develop and Define Initiatives

Agency acknowledges and understands that research is critical to developing policies and informing practice.



Key stakeholders and administrators participate in research development and dissemination because:

- They recognize the value of research,
- They are willing to be evaluated (and sometimes critiqued),
- They understand that true partnerships bring about social change, and
- They value research for policy, practice advocacy at state and local governmental levels.

## From Research to Policy and Practice

### Improving Training and Response

- (1) Implemented research-supported solutions,
- (2) Improved training (interviews & evidence collection),
- (3) Improved documentation of required notifications,
- (4) Strategically allocated funding (staffing and equipment),
- (5) Focused on four effective responses:
  - Enhancing local police presence (e.g., VPSO),
  - Strengthening alcohol prohibitions,
  - Enhancing investigation capacity, and
  - Promoting access to Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners.



Governor Sean Parnell announced a new and bold 10-year initiative to end the epidemic of sexual assault and domestic violence and make Alaska the national leader in fighting these scourges. The initiative includes:

- (1) A public education campaign for men to "Choose Respect,"
- (2) An increase in law enforcement presence in every community that desires it, with new VPSOs and Troopers,
- (3) Specialized domestic violence and sexual assault training across multiple disciplines,
- (4) Increased support for victims of abuse including funding for shelters and the availability of pro bono legal services,
- (5) Tougher penalties for sexual assault crimes and stronger sex offender registry requirements,
- (6) Prisoner re-entry programs to reduce recidivism, and
- (7) A position to coordinate state, federal, tribal, and non-profit domestic violence and sexual assault programs.

### Alaska State Legislature

Senator Hollis French, Chair  
State Capitol, Room 417  
Juneau, Alaska 99801  
Phone: (907) 465-3892  
Fax: (907) 465-6595



Committee Members:  
Senator Bill Wielechowski  
Senator Dennis Egan  
Senator Lesli McGuire  
Senator Gene Theriault

### Senate Judiciary Committee

Report and Recommendations: Reducing Sexual Assault in Alaska

- (1) Improve data systems to track sexual assault cases state-wide from report to conviction,
- (2) Fund a victimization survey to uncover actual rates of both reported and unreported sexual assaults,
- (3) Increase the number of villages with local law enforcement through the Village Public Safety Officer (VPSO) program,
- (4) Continue to support, as a state, programs and policies to reduce alcohol consumption, and
- (5) Address alcohol use, and its potential negative impact on personal safety, in awareness and prevention programs.

## Enhancing Partnerships: Future Directions

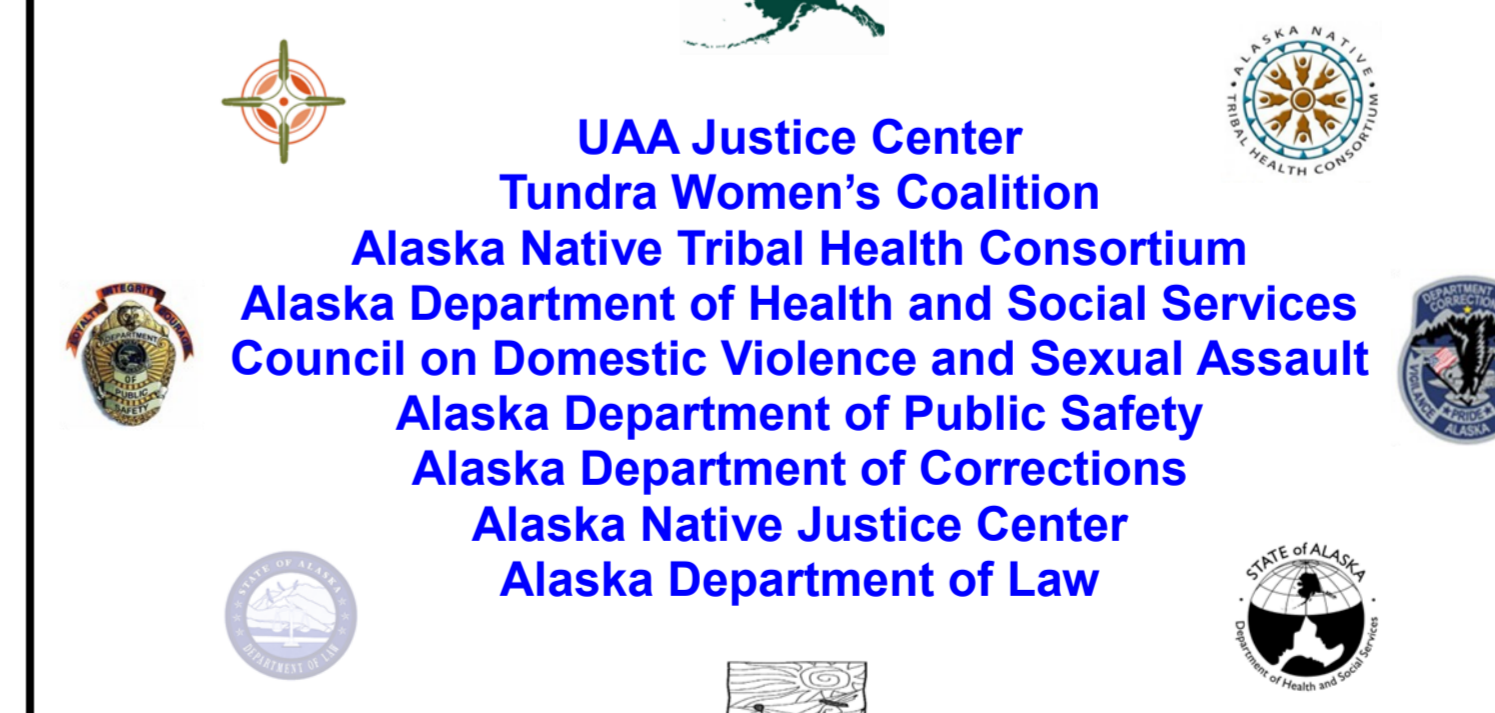
### New Collaborative Projects

#### Alaska Victimization Surveys

With funding from the Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, the UAA Justice Center & RTI started a victimization survey. The Alaska Victimization Survey is modeled after the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Surveillance System (NISVSS) survey. The NISVSS survey is designed to generate accurate and reliable estimates on intimate partner violence, sexual violence, and stalking victimization.

#### Effect of Village Public Safety Officers

This project will build and enhance researcher-practitioner partnerships to further develop policies and practices to end domestic violence and sexual assault in Alaska. This project will develop and execute a comprehensive, multi-disciplinary assessment of the effects that Village Public Safety Officers (VPSOs) have on public safety and public health outcomes in rural Alaskan communities.



- In response to Governor Sean Parnell's ten-year initiative to end the epidemic of domestic violence and sexual assault in Alaska:
- (1) Build & enhance partnerships with state, federal, tribal, and non-profit domestic violence and sexual assault programs,
  - (2) UAA Justice Center provides research support.