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National Criminal Justice Reference Service

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Hi, I'm Anne Bolin with the National Criminal Justice Reference Service, or NCJRS. I wanted to begin with a couple of statistics that came out recently that really struck me.

What would you say are the chances that an American will go to prison during their lifetime? How about a 1 in 20 chance? That's according to a report we published last month that looked at several factors and extrapolated the lifetime likelihood of going to State or Federal prison. 5% of all people, or 1% of women and 9% of men, will go to prison during their lifetimes if the 1991 incarceration rate remains the same. Is that scary?

But how about another recently-published report, which we can see as positive if not still a little alarming. Since the Brady bill was enacted, each month an average of 6,600 firearms purchases were prevented by background checks of potential gun buyers. Over 70% of those people were rejected because they were already felons. That's 6,600 gun purchases per month prevented due to the Brady act--which may be scary, but which shows that Federal actions really can make a difference in the landscape of crime in this country.

I start with those two reports to give you an idea of the kind of information that is coming out of NCJRS. We distribute a huge amount of information each year, and I hope that this presentation will give you an idea of what kinds of services we can provide to you and your patrons.

Background

Congress recognized the need to collect criminal justice information in a central location, and directed the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), which is the research and development agency of the U.S. Department of Justice, to "serve as a national and international clearinghouse for the exchange of information" in criminal justice. So in 1972, NIJ established its clearinghouse, the National Criminal Justice Reference Service, or NCJRS. NCJRS has grown to serve all the agencies of the Office of Justice Programs within the U.S. Department of Justice. So NCJRS is actually an umbrella clearinghouse for several clearinghouses serving the Department of Justice and the White House's Office of National Drug Control Policy.

For the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, or OJJDP, NCJRS provides information and services to juvenile justice professionals and policy makers, produces and distributes the agency's publications, and prepares customized responses to information requests.

For the Office for Victims of Crime, or OVC, NCJRS responds to requests from crime victims, victim services agencies, and researchers for victim-related information. Topics addressed include child physical and sexual abuse, victim services, domestic violence, victim-witness programs, and violent crime.

For the Bureau of Justice Statistics, or BJS, NCJRS aims to provide easy access to crime and justice data. In addition to distributing BJS publications, the clearinghouse responds to statistics requests by quoting statistics over the phone and offering document data base searches, statistics information packages, referrals, and other related services.

For the Bureau of Justice Assistance, or B.A., NCJRS provides State and local criminal justice professionals with reference and referral services, distributes publications, and participates in conferences and other outreach activities. B.A.'s mission is to support innovative criminal justice programs through funding, technical assistance, training, and information dissemination.

NCJRS also includes the White House's Office of National Drug Control Policy, also known as the "Drug Czar's" office. NCJRS gathers and disseminates information on drug policy and the intersection of drugs and crime, placing special emphasis on serving the information needs of local and State criminal justice and health policy makers and practitioners.

Information Collection and Dissemination

So what kinds of information is NCJRS collecting and disseminating? This gives you an idea of the basic subject matter we are dealing with:

- Law enforcement (e.g., community policing, effective policing strategies)
- Courts (e.g., managing the huge caseload now before our courts)
- Corrections (e.g., providing health care to inmates, especially HIV-positive inmates)
- Juvenile Justice (e.g., programs to prevent juvenile delinquency)
- Victims (e.g., rights of the victim)
- Drugs and Crime (e.g., how drug use affects other crimes)
- Violence
- Criminal Justice

- Technologies (e.g., smart guns and less than lethal technologies)

We cover these subjects by collecting and distributing:

- Research, and evaluations of research and programs
- Program descriptions
- Statistics, and
- Funding Opportunities

NCJRS focuses on serving professionals in the criminal justice field, including Federal, State and local policy makers, criminal justice researchers including academia, law enforcement officers, court personnel, prison and jail personnel, juvenile delinquency workers, victims rights advocates, public health officials, the media, and of course librarians, who serve all of these groups.

NCJRS sends out hundreds of new publications every year; in fact about 4 million paper documents go out of our warehouse each year. Of course, depository libraries receive almost all of this material via GPO.

I'm very glad to report that 95% of this new printed material is also going up on our Web site in full text as it is distributed in print. NCJRS has no plans to discontinue printing documents, but we do find ourselves reaching more people who can use our information by putting it online, and we love the ability for users to gain such quick access to the full text of documents by going to them directly online. We'll look at the NCJRS Web site in just a couple of moments.

NCJRS Document Data Base

But first let me talk about the NCJRS Document Data Base, which many of your libraries probably own on CD-ROM. In fact, when this audience hears the word "NCJRS" you may only think of the CD-ROM.

The NCJRS Document Data Base is a bibliographic database of abstracts for criminal justice literature.

This slide shows the subjects we collect on and how they are distributed statistically. As you can see, our big emphases are law enforcement and courts, with corrections and statistics also big. Juvenile justice is also a very important area that has been growing recently.

NCJRS collects a variety of materials, including books, Federal Government documents, and journal articles.

NCJRS collects beyond the scope of other collections, including State and local government reports, NCJRS agency-sponsored research studies and reports, evaluation reports,

training manuals, speeches, program descriptions, and international criminal justice publications.

We are proud of our collection of materials that other sources don't collect: what can be thought of as the grey literature in criminal justice, like unpublished papers and local government reports. Often when researchers look to see what is really happening in anti-crime efforts, what kinds of programs work and which don't work, it's that grey literature that comes through with some answers.

As many of you know, the CD-ROM is a GPO depository item.

The database is also available on DIALOG as file 21. The file on DIALOG is updated monthly. We've been on DIALOG for years and years, and in fact the NCJRS database has existed as an online-only bibliographic database since the early 1970's.

Let me point out also that we do produce print bibliographies from the database. These are searches of the database on the most popular topics--like community policing, violent juvenile offenders, or capital punishment--and are available for sale. We have over 100 topics available in print form. It is also possible to have NCJRS perform a search of the Document Data Base for a charge, and patrons should call NCJRS to ask for such a custom search.

One thing we're really excited about is that the Document Data Base is going to be coming onto the Web in the next couple of months; I would estimate in June. We are not sure yet what the accessibility will be, and whether we will be required to charge access fees or not. I wish I had an answer on that for you today, but I do not. The Web address on the screen is our basic Web site address, and when the Document Data Base comes on line you can be sure that we'll feature it on the home page. I will also announce it on GOVDOC-L, for those who subscribe to that listserv.

I am working on the user interface for the Web product and think it's going to be really user friendly with some nice features. Let me say that we encourage feedback from users on our products and invite you to let us know about features you like or don't like. The software GPO uses is not infinitely customizable, or sometimes customization comes with a prohibitive cost, so we aren't able to incorporate every enhancement that we would like--however, the CD-ROM in fact has had some changes made to it over the past few years in response to comments from depository librarians. So I assure you that your comments don't fall on deaf ears.

Document Delivery

A very important fact about the Document Data Base is that all of the items abstracted on it are available for interlibrary loan (ILL) from NCJRS. There is a charge of \$4.50 per item for ILL's which needs to be prepaid, which you can do by check, credit card, or deposit account. The address and telephone to initiate a loan are on the screen. Please just send us a standard ALA interlibrary loan form and we will get the material out to you. Our collection is not on OCLC., so the ALA forms are the way to go.

Keep in mind also that whenever NCJRS has copyright clearance, we will make a photocopy of a publication abstracted in the database, so that is another option for document delivery. The charge is \$5 per publication, plus 10 cents per page. Whenever NCJRS is able to make photocopies of a document, the data base record will say in the sale field, "NCJRS paper reproduction sales." Then just give us a call or mail, fax or e-mail your request to us.

Microfiche Ceased

Some of you may be aware that NCJRS went through a big round of budget cuts, actually taking effect exactly one year ago today. We lost several staff members and along with them the microfiche program. So NCJRS is no longer putting documents on microfiche, but we hope to go to electronic imaging in the not too distant future. For those libraries that have retrospective collections of NCJRS microfiche, keep in mind that the Document Data Base is the best index to the fiche. About one third of what is on the Document Data Base is available in full text on the fiche, and for each publication available on the fiche, the SALE field of the data base record says "NCJRS microfiche sales," just as it says "paper reproduction sales" on the screen here.

NCJRS Web Site

So while we're not producing the microfiche, we are putting lots and lots of full text documents from the Department of Justice online on the Web site. So let me give you a little tour.

This is the Justice Information Center, or NCJRS' Web site, at <http://www.ncjrs.org>.

We've tried to orient the Justice Information Center for someone who is looking for information on a particular topic, because that is the way most users come to us. From the first screen you can choose from any of the main subject areas we cover, like corrections or juvenile justice or law enforcement. For example, let me choose Courts.

As I've mentioned, we link to hundreds of full text documents--actually more than 700--but also to lots of other Internet sites related to criminal justice, and we also provide some information on listservs in the field. From this screen I'll choose documents.

We try to provide all publications in two formats: in plain ASCII text, and in PDF or Adobe Acrobat format. For example "Assessment... Day Fines" is in ASCII.

Next I'll back out of this and go to another topic area. Let's look at Juvenile Justice. This is broken down further into topic areas, so let's look at Corrections.

"Boot Camp Drug Treatment..." is an example of a PDF file. This Adobe Acrobat format has the advantage of retaining all of the graphics, so for example with a publication like this we are able to view the graphs. The user does need to have the Adobe Acrobat software loaded on their desktop to view these files. The software is free and a link from the home page shows you how to download it.

I'll go back to the home page. There is a keyword search function here, which unfortunately I can't demonstrate because I'm not using a live connection. But you can search on any word appearing anywhere in the full text of the ASCII publications as well as the html files. The search, which uses the Excite search engine, supports full boolean logic.

Below the topic areas is a link to "New This Week," which lists everything we've put up in the last week. You can also click on previous weeks to see what else is new. There's also a link to Current Highlights, which lists the most noteworthy new items, and usually things stay up there for about one month.

There is also a link here to lists of conferences in criminal justice. We plan to make this a searchable database, but for now you can look at lists of conferences in the field with their dates and contact information.

There is also a link to Justice Grants, which as you might imagine is a popular spot. This area lists all of the funding opportunities coming out of the NCJRS agencies, and usually gives you the full text of grant solicitations and often the application forms needed. Most of these grants are for criminal justice professionals, be they academic researchers or practitioners in the field like government workers who deal with juvenile delinquents. There aren't funding opportunities for general college and university study, because these agencies aren't oriented toward that type of aid.

There is also a paragraph explaining NCJRS on the home page, and links to each of the government agencies which supports NCJRS.

I wanted to point out that one of the NCJRS agencies, the Bureau of Justice Statistics or BJS, is about to unveil its new Web site this month. Not many people outside of BJS have seen it yet, so the drama is building up now to see what it will be like--I've heard that it's going to be great.

BJS is very committed to making statistical data available in a usable electronic form to everyone who can make use of it. For example, when they put the text of one of their publications online, they are also making a live online link to the original data set itself, for researchers to download and manipulate. This is a great boon to any researchers using criminal justice statistics. I believe that someone from BJS is going to be speaking here at the conference tomorrow, and I encourage anyone with an interest in criminal justice or even just in statistics to attend.

Then scrolling down below the links to the agencies we have again the Current Highlights.

JUSTINFO

After that is a little explanation for JUSTINFO. JUSTINFO, or Justice Information, is an electronic newsletter we put out twice a month. It comes to subscribers via e-mail, and we use a listserv to maintain the distribution list.

Here is the information on how to subscribe. Send the message "subscribe justinfo your name" to <listproc@ncjrs.org>. Then twice a month you'll get a short summary of all the

new publications we've come out with, along with a URL for where to find them online and/or information on how to get them in print. We also let people know about grant opportunities, noteworthy conferences, new agency initiatives, and things like that. I encourage you to subscribe to JUSTINFO if you work with criminal justice information. Like I said, it will come to you via e-mail twice a month, on the 1st and the 15th of the month.

Then at the bottom of the home page it lets you know that users can send questions to the e-mail address <askncjrs@ncjrs.org>. Users can send publication orders for things in print, or ask reference questions. We have recently dedicated a entire full time position just to answering the reference questions we get coming into the askncjrs mailbox.

Since we're at the bottom of the home page let me go a little more into the reference services we offer.

Reference Services

We answer a large number of telephone requests: last month we had 7400 telephone inquiries. We answer a broad range of inquiries from a broad audience, and again we aim to focus on criminal justice practitioners in the field and researchers. On the screen is one of our 800 numbers and the askncjrs e-mail address I just mentioned. I brought a few hundred Rolodexâ cards with this information, so you should be able to get one of those. You are welcome to use the 800 lines yourself, or to refer patrons directly to us.

We have as a first line of defense, as it were, a staff who answer the 800 lines, and then for the tougher questions, we have people with experience in the field who can call people back. For example, we have two ex-police officers, someone who used to work in a prison, a couple of people who worked in court pretrial services; so we do have people with substantive knowledge who will try to answer your questions or lead you in the right direction.

JUVJUST

Here is the address to subscribe to the JUSTINFO newsletter again. I also want to say that we have another electronic distribution list called JUVJUST, which is just for juvenile-related information coming out of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention at the Department of Justice. The list is aimed at criminal justice professionals working with juveniles or on juvenile-related issues. To subscribe to that list, send a message to the same address on the screen, but make the body of the message say "subscribe juvjust your name."

Key Sources

I wanted to finish today by pointing out a couple of key sources in some of the most popular criminal justice subjects you may be having to address in your libraries today.

First, criminal justice statistics. We distribute a lot more than statistics, but we get so many statistics-related questions, and I know you do too, that I wanted to summarize the key sources for you.

The "Uniform Crime Reports" come out of the FBI and aren't distributed by NCJRS, but they're a very key source. The Uniform Crime Reports, which say "Crime in the U.S." on the cover and come out annually, report on crimes reported to the police. They get pretty detailed in their coverage of offenses and different areas of the country. You can also get to the data online at <http://www.fbi.gov/publish.htm>.

The "National Criminal Victimization Survey" is kind of the flipside to the Uniform Crime Reports. This is an annual survey that calls thousands of people up and asks them if they have been the victim of a violent crime. So while the Uniform Crime Reports pick up all crimes reported to the police, the Victimization Survey is also going to pick up crimes NOT reported to the police. That kind of data can be important for crimes often not reported, like violence against women. The address for the Bureau of Justice Statistics, which puts this out, is <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs>

And finally, the "Sourcebook of Criminal Justice Statistics," which is probably another dog-eared publication in your library if you get any crime-related questions. This is another publication of the Bureau of Justice Statistics, and compiles hundreds of charts from their various data collections, on tons of subjects such as prison and jail populations, the costs to governments of prisons and police forces, the race and sex of victims and perpetrators of crime, and so on. This Sourcebook is available online at <http://www.albany.edu/>.

sourcebook>. It is also going to be coming out very, very soon on CD-ROM, and that CD is probably going to become an important part of your reference collection.

Another big topic is drugs and crime. There are three publications we use constantly to respond to drug-related questions. Pulse Check: National Trends in Drug Abuse is an interesting publication. To create it, ethnographers go out in the field and actually ask people on the street, "What are you using and how much did you pay for it?" So it is used as a barometer of the types of drugs that are popular on the street, their purity, how people get them, etc. This used to be quarterly but now comes out twice a year.

The National Drug Control Strategy is the centerpiece document for the Drug Czar's office at the White House. It maps out the Federal Government's strategy for combating drugs and is constantly referred to in other documents and initiatives.

The last thing I'll point out is Drug Use Trends, a fact sheet which gets a lot of circulation. This is a good reference source also. By the way, all of the publications are available in full text on the NCJRS Web site at <http://www.ncjrs.org>, and are also available in print from us.

The last slide I have today is on Juvenile Crime. We get a huge number of questions about this, and in fact information on juveniles is the most-accessed part of our Web site. A couple of key sources we are currently using and distributing are listed here.

State Responses to Serious and Violent Juvenile Crime is a great resource on how states are combating violent juvenile crime problems. It also leads readers to a number of other sources of information.

Juvenile Court Statistics, put out by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, is one of the staple statistical sources we distribute.

And lastly, there is Combating Violence and Delinquency: The National Juvenile Justice Action Plan. This came out almost a year ago already, but we are constantly referring people to it as an outline of the juvenile crime problem in this country and ways that the Federal Government is addressing the problem.

Again, each of these is available in print from us and you may already have them in your depository collections, and they each are also available online.