

# elements of change

highlighting trends and issues in the criminal justice system

vol. 1 / no. 3

## Firearms Are Expected to Surpass Motor Vehicles as the Leading Cause of Injury-related Death in the U.S. by the Year 2003

Nationally, firearm-related deaths increased by 60% (from 23,875 to 38,317) between 1968 and 1991.<sup>1</sup> Based on trends identified by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), firearms are expected to become the leading cause of injury-related death in the United States by the year 2003.

According to the CDC,<sup>1</sup> prior to 1990, the number of firearm-related deaths exceeded motor vehicle-related deaths in only Alaska and the District of Columbia. Additionally, since 1968, the number of motor vehicle-related deaths has steadily decreased, while the number of firearm-related deaths has increased. The CDC reports that these trends may reflect differences in the approaches to preventing motor vehicle and firearm-related injuries and deaths. Specifically, "reductions in the occurrence of motor vehicle-related injuries have been associated with the development of a set of comprehensive and science-based interventions and policies; in contrast, there have been limited efforts to develop a systematic framework to reduce the incidence and impact of injuries associated with firearms."<sup>1</sup>

We can learn from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's (NHTSA) effective efforts at reducing motor vehicle fatalities. Based on NHTSA's campaign, the CDC recommends that any attempt to reduce firearm-related injuries and deaths should be multifaceted, and should contain at least the following three elements:

- 1) *Campaigns to change behavior*, including education about the risks and benefits of firearm possession and the safe use and storage of firearms;
- 2) *Legislative efforts* directed toward preventing access to/acquisition of firearms by specific groups that should not possess firearms (e.g., felons and children) and toward regulating the storage, transport, and use of firearms; and
- 3) *Technologic changes* used to modify firearms and ammunition to render them less lethal (e.g., requirements for childproof safety devices [i.e., trigger locks] and loading indicators).<sup>1</sup>



### In This Issue:

- 1) Firearm Deaths
- 2) Plea Practices
- 3) ISP and Community Corrections Program Outcomes

### GUN OWNERSHIP in the U.S., 1973-1994

\* *The percentage of American households who report owning guns has decreased.*

ISP (from 48% in 1973 to 41% in 1994)

\* *Ownership of shotguns and rifles has declined.*

ISP (from 40% in 1973 to 32% in 1994)

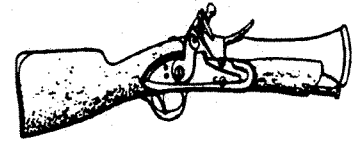
\* *Ownership of pistols has increased.*

ISP (from 20% in 1973 to 25% in 1994)

Source: Public opinion data from Davis and Smith, General Social Surveys, 1972-1994. *Journal of American Medical Association*, June 12, 1996.

# FYI Firearm-related Homicide

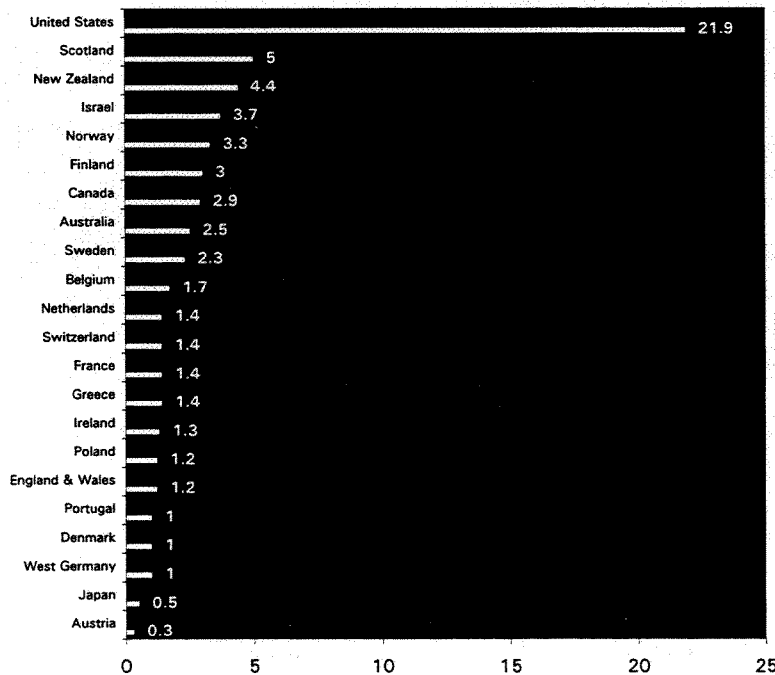
- 1 Nationally, the presence of a gun in a household increases threefold the risk of homicide for household residents.<sup>2</sup>
- 2 In the U. S., gun homicide has been the leading cause of death for young black males ages 15-19 since 1969.<sup>3</sup>
- 3 In 1990, approximately 15,000 Americans were murdered with guns.<sup>4</sup>  
If all Americans were shot and killed at the same rate as young black males, 260,000 Americans would have been murdered with guns in that year.<sup>5</sup>
- 4 The national firearm homicide rate for 15-19 year olds increased 61% from 1979 through 1989. The rate for homicide by all other methods remained stable or decreased.<sup>6</sup>
- 5 In 1987, 1300 males under the age of 19 were murdered with guns in the United States. In the same time period, in Canada, Japan, France, West Germany, Australia, England, Wales, and Sweden combined, fewer than 80 males under the age of 19 were murdered with guns.<sup>7</sup>



## Five-Year (1988-1992) Cumulative State by State Ranking of Firearm-related Deaths\* (rate per 100,000)

Rank	State	Rate
1	Washington, D.C.	48.9
2	Louisiana	23.0
3	Nevada	22.5
4	Mississippi	19.3
5	Alabama	19.1
6	Texas	18.7
7	Georgia	18.5
8	New Mexico	18.3
9	Florida	17.5
10	Arizona	17.4
11	Tennessee	17.3
12	Arkansas	17.3
13	Wyoming	16.4
14	South Carolina	15.9
15	North Carolina	15.9
16	Missouri	15.3
17	California	15.2
18	Michigan	14.7
19	Montana	14.6
20	Maryland	14.5
21	Virginia	14.2
22	Oklahoma	14.2
23	Alaska	14.0
24	Idaho	13.7
25	West Virginia	13.6
26	Kentucky	13.6
27	New York	13.2
28	Illinois	12.4
29	<b>COLORADO</b>	<b>12.3</b>
30	Vermont	11.9
31	Oregon	11.9
32	Indiana	11.5
33	Utah	11.3
34	Kansas	11.2
35	Washington	10.5
36	Pennsylvania	10.4
37	Ohio	10.0
38	Maine	9.4
39	Wisconsin	9.2
40	Nebraska	8.6
41	South Dakota	8.5
42	Delaware	8.4
43	Connecticut	8.0
44	North Dakota	7.5
45	New Hampshire	7.5
46	Minnesota	7.4
47	Iowa	6.9
48	Rhode Island	5.4
49	New Jersey	5.3
50	Massachusetts	4.6
51	Hawaii	4.6

## International Homicide Rates for Males 15-24 Years Old, 1986 and 1987, Rate per 100,000



Source: Fingerhut, L.A., and Kleinman, J.C. (1990). International and interstate comparisons of homicide among young males. *Journal of the American Medical Association* 263:3292-3295.

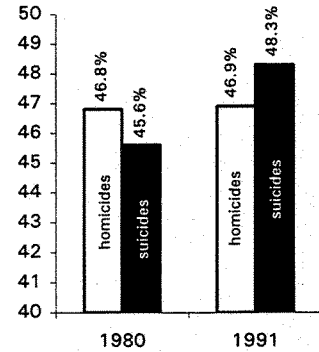
\* Firearm-related deaths include suicide, homicide, accidental, unknown intent, and legal intervention.

Source: Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment

# Suicide Accounts for the Greatest Number of Gun-related Deaths in Colorado and Nationally

- 1 Nationally, the presence of a gun in a household increases fivefold the risk of suicide for household residents.<sup>8</sup>
- 2 Between 1980 and 1992 in the United States, the annual number of firearm suicides increased by 18%. Firearms accounted for 77% of the increased number of suicides between 1980 and 1992.<sup>9</sup>
- 3 Nationally, on average, one adolescent 10 to 14 years of age commits suicide with a gun every 6 hours – approximately 1,500 lives lost annually.<sup>10</sup>

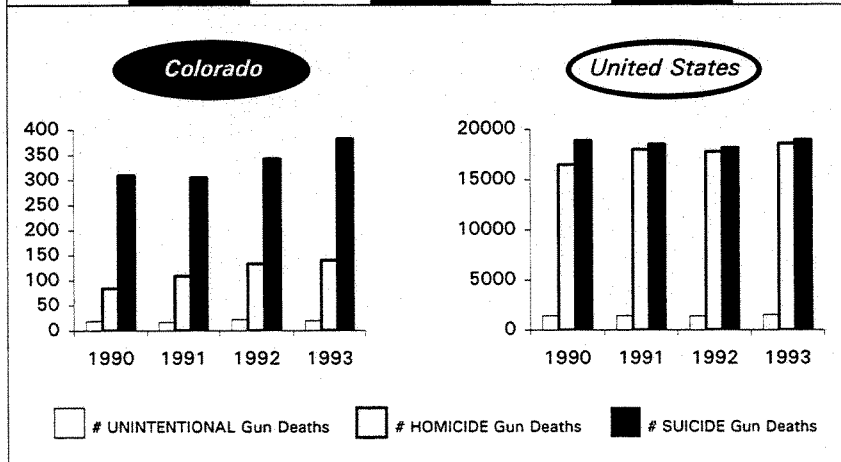
In the U.S., Suicides Have Surpassed Homicides as the Leading Manner of Firearm-related Deaths



Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (1994). *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 43(33):609.

Firearm-related Homicides, Suicides, and Unintentional Deaths: Colorado and the U.S., 1990 - 1993, Number and (Rate/100,000)

Year	Homicides/ Legal Intervention		Suicides		Unintentional/ Undetermined Deaths	
	Colorado	U.S.	Colorado	U.S.	Colorado	U.S.
1990	84 (2.5)	16507 (6.6)	310 (9.4)	18885 (7.6)	19 (0.6)	1416 (0.6)
1991	109 (3.2)	17986 (7.1)	305 (9.0)	18526 (7.4)	17 (0.5)	1441 (0.6)
1992	133 (3.9)	17790 (7.0)	343 (10.0)	18169 (7.1)	22 (0.6)	1409 (0.6)
1993	140 (3.9)	18571 (7.2)	382 (10.7)	18940 (7.4)	20 (0.6)	1521 (0.6)



Source: National firearm data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. Colorado firearm data from the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment.

Source Notes:

- 1 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (1994). *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 43(33).
- 2 Kellermann, A.L., Rivara, F.P., Rushforth, N.B., et al. (1993). Gun ownership as a risk factor for homicide in the home. *New England Journal of Medicine* 329:1084-91.
- 3 Fingerhut, L.A., Ingram D.D., and Feldman, J.J. (1992). Firearm homicide among black teenage males in metropolitan counties. *Journal of the American Medical Association* 267:3054-3058.
- 4 Federal Bureau of Investigation (1993). *Crime in the United States. Uniform Crime Reports, 1992*. U.S. Department of Justice, Washington, D.C.
- 5 Fingerhut, L.A. (1993). Firearm mortality among children, youth, and young adults 1-34 years of age, trends and current status: United States, 1985-90. *Advance Data from Vital and Health Statistics*, No. 231, National Center for Health Statistics, Hyattsville, MD.
- 6 Fingerhut, L.A., Ingram, D.D., and Feldman, J.J. (1992). Firearm and nonfirearm homicide among persons 15 through 19 years of age. *Journal of the American Medical Association* 267:3048-3053.
- 7 Fingerhut, L.A., Kleinman, J.C., Godfrey, E., and Rosenberg, H. (1991). Firearm mortality among children, youth, and young adults 1-34 years of age, trends and current status: United States, 1979-88. *Monthly Vital Statistics Report* 39:1-15, National Center for Health Statistics, Hyattsville, MD.
- 8 Kellermann, A.L., Rivara, F.P., Somes, G., et al. (1992). Suicide in the home in relation to gun ownership. *New England Journal of Medicine* 327:467-472.
- 9 Kacher, S.P., Potter, L.B., James, S.P., and Powell, K.E. (1995). *Suicide in the United States 1980-1992, Violence Surveillance Summary Series, No. 1*, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Atlanta, GE.
- 10 Katcher, M.L. (1994). Firearm injuries among children and adolescents: The facts. *Wisconsin Medical Journal*, October, pp. 511-514.


**69.9%\***  
of Offenders  
Charged with  
a Sex Offense in  
1994 Were  
Convicted of a  
Sex Offense \*\*

### In 1994, 7 Out of 10 People Charged with a Felony Sex Offense Were Convicted of a Sex Offense

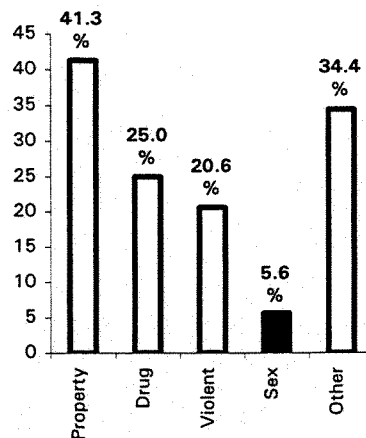
The Division of Criminal Justice's court database contains the three most serious offense charges filed for each offender in a sample of all Colorado offenders (see Source to the right for a description of the sample). Seriousness is determined first by felony class and second by offense type -- violent offenses being considered more serious than property offenses, for example, when the felony class is the same.

The graph to the right represents, by offense category, the three most serious offense charges filed for each offender in the 1994 court sample. Because we record the three most serious offenses, each offense category in the graph is not mutually exclusive. For example, an offender charged with both a sex crime and a drug crime would be represented twice.

The illustration to the left and below shows, for offenders in the sample charged with felony sex offenses, what proportion were convicted of a sex offense, and what proportion were not. For those not convicted of a sex offense, a more detailed description of the case charges and disposition is provided.

 If this section looks familiar...you're right. This analysis is part of an ongoing look at plea practices in Colorado. In the last issue of Elements of Change we broke down the charge and conviction patterns of violent offenses, and in future issues we will do the same for property and drug offenses.

**Charges Filed in Colorado, 1994 (Offense categories not mutually exclusive)**



Source: DCJ's 1994 court database. Annually, DCJ collects data on-site from a 20% sample of court cases filed in nine of the state's 22 judicial districts. The nine judicial districts represented in the court database are: 1st (Jefferson County), 2nd (Denver County), 4th (El Paso County), 8th (Larimer County), 10th (Pueblo County), 17th (Adams County), 18th (Arapahoe County), 19th (Weld County), and the 21st (Mesa County). These jurisdictions represent 80% of Colorado's population.

Note: *Violent* = assault, vehicular assault, menacing, extortion, reckless endangerment, homicide, kidnapping, robbery. *Property* = burglary, theft, motor vehical theft, forgery, fraud.

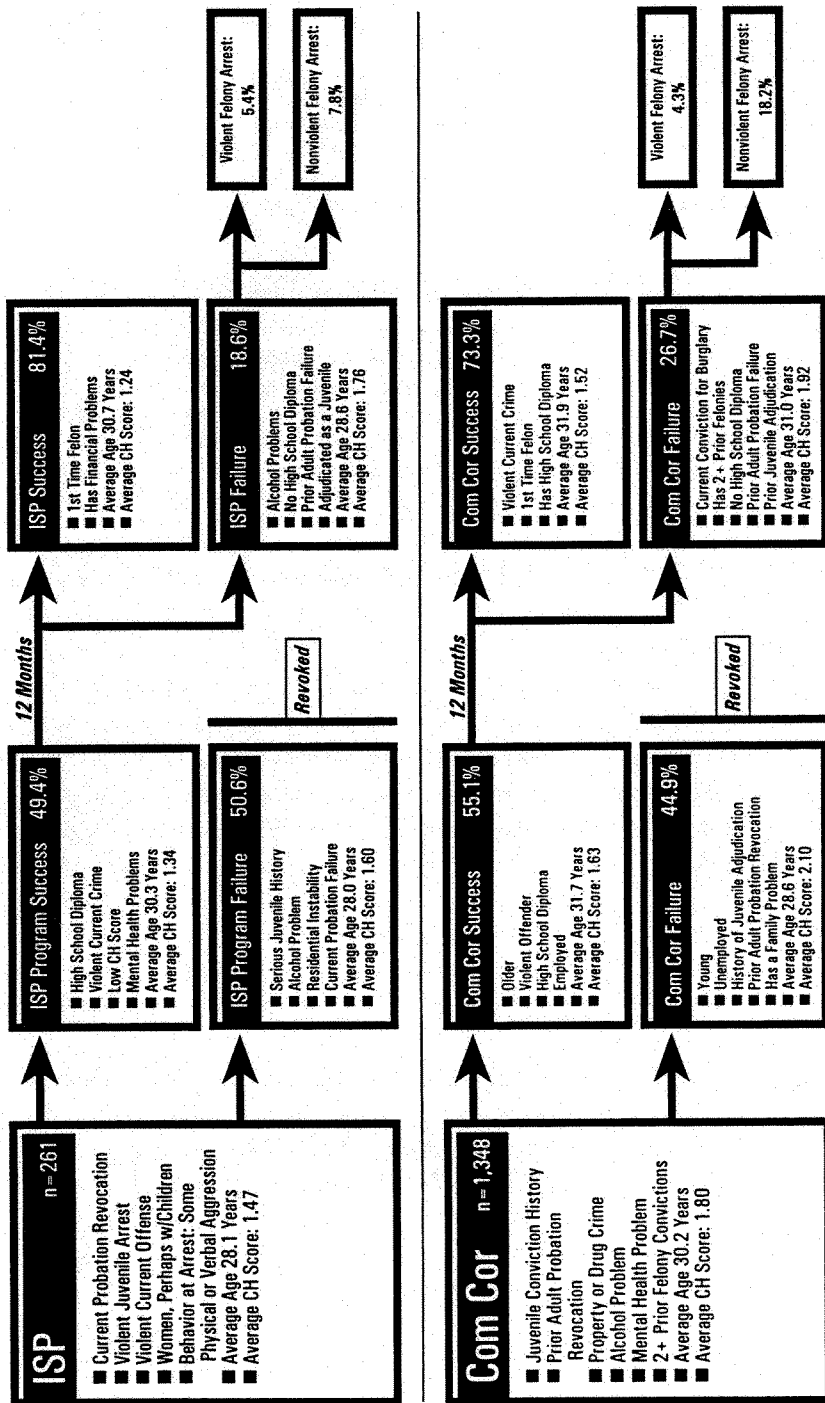
\* NOTE!!!: ALL percentages in this illustration (the illustration to the left) refer back to the TOTAL NUMBER OF SEX OFFENSES CHARGED IN 1994 (the combined total of sex charges resulting in a sex conviction and sex charges not resulting in a sex conviction).

\*\* For the group *Offenders Charged with a Sex Offense Resulting in a Sex Conviction*: (Remember, as stated above, the following percentages refer back to the TOTAL number of sex offenses charged in 1994 -- not just those resulting in a sex conviction) 58.7% were charged with a sex offense only, 3.1% were charged with a sex and violent offense, 6.6% were charged with a sex and nonviolent offense, and 1.5% were charged with a sex, violent, and nonviolent offense.

For more information: Contact Susan Colling at the Division of Criminal Justice, (303)239-4664.

 Charge Description\*       Case Disposition\*

Charge Description*	Case Disposition*
15.8% Charged w/ Sex Offense Only	1.5% Convicted of Violent
	6.6% Convicted of Nonviolent
	7.7% Case Dismissed/Acquitted
4.1% Charged w/ Sex & Violent Offense	2.05% Convicted of Violent
	2.05% Case Dismissed/Acquitted
6.1% Charged w/ Sex & Nonviolent Offense	1.0% Convicted of Violent
	4.6% Convicted of Nonviolent
	0.5% Case Dismissed/Acquitted
4.1% Charged w/ Sex, Violent, & Nonviolent Offense	1.0% Convicted of Violent
	1.6% Convicted of Nonviolent
	0.5% Convicted of Violent & Nonviolent
	1.0% Case Dismissed/Acquitted



**Group Descriptions:** All cases that terminated Colorado ISP and community corrections in 1993.

**Data Source:** Offender data and technical violation data were collected directly from case files by DCJ staff. Outcome data includes traffic, petty, misdemeanor, and felony crimes committed in the 12 month period following program release. Arrest data are from CBI electronic rap sheets.

### ISP & Community Corrections Outcomes of Those Sentenced in 1993: Who Fails and Who Succeeds?

Based on the characteristics analyzed in DCJ's recently published comparison of intensive supervision probation and community corrections clientele (see reference below), those who committed new crimes within 12 months of successfully completing ISP or community corrections were different from those who remained crime-free in a few important ways. ISP arrestees were significantly more likely to have an alcohol problem and not have a high school diploma. This group tended to be two years younger than the group that remained crime-free. Community corrections clients who committed a new crime were also unlikely to have a high school diploma. A slightly more "criminal" profile emerged in this group. The proportion of burglars in the rearrest group was 50% higher compared to the overall community corrections population, and a higher proportion of offenders with two or more prior felonies were rearrested compared to the overall community corrections group.

Those who remained crime-free during the 12 month follow-up period in both the ISP and community corrections groups were likely to be first time offenders. The ISP crime-free group accomplished this despite the fact that they had a higher probability, compared to the ISP group in general, to have financial problems. Community corrections clients who remained crime-free were more likely than the overall community corrections group to have a high school diploma.



*Report of Findings: Comparison of Intensive Supervision Probation and Community Corrections Clientele*

This report summarizes the findings from a study analyzing the differences between offenders sentenced to ISP and community corrections -- focusing on offender failures and successes in the two programs. The report may be obtained from the Division of Criminal Justice. Contact Suzanne Pullen at (303)239-4492.

# dcj notes

## \* *Announcing:*

### **8th Annual COVA Conference**

The Eighth Annual COVA (Colorado Organization for Victim Assistance) Conference will be held November 6-8 at the Hyatt Beaver Creek, Colorado. This year the theme of the Conference is *Building a Future of Victim Justice*.

The goal of the conference is to provide the best training experience possible for those working in the field of crime victims' rights. The tracks this year are *Program Management, Law Enforcement and Prosecution, Sexual Assault Issues, Domestic Violence Issues, and Model Programs and New Technology*. Each of these tracks will include one session on cultural diversity and one session on children's issues.

For more information, contact: Nancy Lewis at COVA  
789 Sherman Street, Suite 505, Denver, CO 80203  
ph (303)861-1160 or (800)261-2682  
fx (303)861-1265

*Elements of Change prepared and distributed by:*  
Office of Research and Statistics --- Kim English, Research Director  
(kenglis8@aol.com)  
Division of Criminal Justice --- William R. Woodward, Director  
(wwoodwar@safety.state.co.us)  
Colorado Department of Public Safety --- Patrick C. Ahlstrom, Executive Director  
(pahlstro@safety.state.co.us)  
Graphic design by John Patzman (jpatz@aol.com)

## \* *Announcing:*

### **DUF Challenge Grant Award**

DCJ's Office of Research and Statistics along with the Piton Foundation has been awarded a National Institute of Justice grant to further use and enhance data collected in the Drug Use Forecasting project. The grant project will take place over the next 18 months and will involve asking arrestees a series of questions looking at what social factors may have contributed to their involvement in crime and drugs. Look for updates on this project in future issues of the *Elements of Change* newsletter.

## \* *Report Release:*

### **Evaluation of the Reasoning and Rehabilitation Cognitive Skills Development Program as Implemented in Juvenile ISP in Colorado**

This report presents the findings from DCJ's evaluation of the Reasoning and Rehabilitation cognitive skill development program developed by Ross & Fabiano, as it was delivered to juveniles placed on Juvenile Intensive Supervision Probation in Colorado in 1994. The report may be obtained from the Division of Criminal Justice. Contact Suzanne Pullen at (303)239-4492.



Colorado Division of Criminal Justice  
Office of Research and Statistics  
700 Kipling Street, Suite 1000  
Denver Colorado 80215  
M460000703