

ICPSR 3016

**Attitudes Toward Crime and
Punishment in Vermont: Public
Opinion About an Experiment With
Restorative Justice, 1999**

Description

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Bibliographic Description

ICPSR Study No.: 3016

Title: Attitudes Toward Crime and Punishment in Vermont: Public Opinion About an Experiment With Restorative Justice, 1999

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Judith Greene, Justice Strategies

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Scope of Study

Summary: By the summer of 1998, the Vermont Department of Corrections (DOC) had completed three years of operational experience with "restorative justice," a concept that involves compensating victims and establishing community-based reparative boards that determine how offenders can make amends for their crimes. The purpose of this project was to update the benchmark findings from an earlier survey of Vermont residents in 1994, to assess public attitudes about the reforms and changes that had been instituted by the Vermont DOC, and to explore the possibility of expansion of responsibilities of the reparative community boards. This project involved a telephone survey of a new sample of 601 adult residents of Vermont. The interviewing was conducted on March 15-21, 1999. Respondents were asked a series of trend questions to update the 1994 findings. Respondents were also asked questions about two other programs: the diversion program, in which selected first offenders who fulfilled the terms of a community-based sanction could have their records expunged, and the furlough program, in which offenders making the transition from prison to the community were supervised for an interim period. The survey also explored whether Vermonters would like to see the responsibilities of the reparative boards expanded to include community notification and other types of cases. Residents assessed whether crime in general, violent crime, and illegal drug use had

increased compared to five years prior, whether more prisons should be built, whether Vermont's jails and prisons were overcrowded, and whether violent offenders were being released before completing their sentences because of overcrowding. They commented on how often offenders in four scenarios should go to prison and how often they believed that these offenders in fact did go to prison. Respondents rated the performance of various segments of the Vermont criminal justice system and, given 15 offense scenarios, were asked whether the offender should spend time in jail or in community service and rehabilitation. In addition, respondents were asked whether anyone in their household had been a victim of a crime within the last three years and, if so, whether it was a violent crime. Demographic data include sex, employment, education, race/ethnicity, and age category of the respondent, and the county and region where the resident lived.

Subject Term(s): alternatives to institutionalization, communities, community service programs, correctional facilities, corrections management, criminal histories, diversion programs, program evaluation, public opinion, restitution programs, restorative justice, victim compensation, violent offenders

Geographic Coverage: United States, Vermont

Time Period: • 1999

Date(s) of Collection: • March 15, 1999 - March 21, 1999

Unit of Observation: Individuals.

Universe: All adult Vermont residents in 1999.

Data Type: survey data

Methodology

Purpose of the Study: In 1991, the Vermont Department of Corrections (DOC) took on the challenge of "reinventing government" as it pertained to crime and corrections in Vermont. The reform program involved the design of an array of innovative intermediate sanctions programs that ran along two tracks. For offenders whose behavioral problems presented a risk to public safety, planners designed targeted treatment options, a work camp, and a violent offender program within the prison system. For less serious, nonviolent offenders, the planners undertook a reshaping of community supervision practices with the adoption of "reparative probation." This involved the establishment of community boards that

determined how each offender could make amends for harm done, and the creation of a revolving restitution fund to assure that victims could receive just compensation (also known as "restorative justice"). In March 1994, the new plan was ready for implementation and was tested by the DOC for public acceptability using public opinion research techniques, including a statewide telephone survey of 400 residents. The DOC incorporated the results of this first survey into the series of changes in the criminal justice system that were being implemented. By the summer of 1998, the Vermont DOC had completed three years of operational experience with restorative justice. The purpose of this project was to update the 1994 benchmark findings, to assess public attitudes about the reforms and changes that had been instituted, and to explore the possibility of the expansion of the responsibilities of the reparative boards.

Study Design: The researchers conducted a telephone survey of a new sample of 601 adult residents of Vermont. The interviewing was conducted in the evening, from 5:30 to 9:30 p.m. on March 15-21, 1999. The telephone interviews lasted an average of 25 minutes. Respondents were asked a series of trend questions to update the 1994 findings. Respondents were also asked questions about two other programs: the diversion program, in which selected first offenders who fulfilled the terms of a community-based sanction could have their records expunged, and the furlough program, in which offenders making the transition from prison to the community were supervised for an interim period. The survey also explored whether Vermonters would like to see the responsibilities of the reparative boards expanded to include community notification and other types of cases. The interviews were conducted by Gazelle International of New York City, under the overall supervision of Doble Research. The questionnaire was developed after careful consideration of findings from background and four focus groups conducted by the researchers and from the results of Judith Greene's research in 1998 that included site visits and information and documentation collection activities. The questionnaire was pretested for length and understandability twice, each time with ten Vermonters selected at random. In addition, Doble Research observed three reparative board meetings, conducted 25 in-depth interviews with reparative board members, victims, and offenders, and conducted 15 in-depth interviews with Vermont judges, prosecutors, and defense attorneys.

Sample: Probability sample.

Sources of Information: telephone interviews

Description of Variables: Residents assessed whether crime in general, violent crime, and illegal drug use had increased compared to five years prior, whether more prisons should be built, whether Vermont's jails and prisons were overcrowded, and whether violent offenders were being released before completing their sentences because of overcrowding. They commented

on how often offenders in four scenarios should go to prison and how often they believed that these offenders in fact did go to prison. Respondents rated the performance of various segments of the Vermont criminal justice system and, given various offense scenarios, were asked whether the offender should spend time in jail or in community service and rehabilitation. In addition respondents were asked whether anyone in their household had been a victim of a crime within the last three years and, if so, whether it was a violent crime. Demographic data include sex, employment, education, race/ethnicity, and age category of the respondent, and the county and region where the resident lived.

Response Rates: Not available.

Presence of Common Scales: Several Likert-type scales were used.

Extent of Processing: Standardized missing values.

Checked for undocumented or out-of-range codes.

Access and Availability

Note: A list of the data formats available for this study can be found in the [summary of holdings](#). Detailed file-level information (such as record length, case count, and variable count) is listed in the [file manifest](#).

Some instruments administered as part of this study may contain contents from copyrighted instruments. Reproductions of the instruments are provided solely as documentation for the analysis of the data associated with this collection. Please contact the data producers for information on permissions to use the instruments for other purposes.

Original ICPSR Release: 2001-04-12

Version History: The last update of this study occurred on 2005-11-04.

2005-11-04 - On 2005-03-14 new files were added to one or more datasets. These files included additional setup files as well as one or more of the following: SAS program, SAS transport, SPSS portable, and Stata system files. The metadata record was revised 2005-11-04 to reflect these additions.

Dataset(s):

- DS1: Attitudes Toward Crime and Punishment in Vermont: Public Opinion About an Experiment With Restorative Justice, 1999

Publications

Final Reports and Other
Publication Resources:

A list of publications related to, or based on, this data collection can be accessed from the study's download page on the NACJD Web site or through the ICPSR Bibliography of Data-Related Literature at <http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/ICPSR/citations/index.html>. The list of citations includes links to abstracts and publications in Portable Document Format (PDF) files or text files when available.

Final reports and other publications describing research conducted on a variety of criminal justice topics are available from the National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS). NCJRS was established in 1972 by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), an agency of the U.S. Department of Justice, to provide research findings to criminal justice professionals and researchers. NCJRS operates specialized clearinghouses that are staffed by information specialists who supply a range of reference, referral, and distribution services. Publications can be obtained from NCJRS at NIJ/NCJRS, Box 6000, Rockville, MD, 20849-6000, 800-851-3420 or 301-519-5500. TTY Service for the Hearing Impaired is 877-712-9279 (toll-free) or 301-947-8374 (local). The URL for the NCJRS Web site is:

<http://www.ncjrs.gov/>

NIJ Data Resources Program

About the DRP: The National Institute of Justice Data Resources Program (DRP) makes datasets from NIJ-funded research and evaluation projects available to the research community and sponsors research and training activities devoted to secondary data analysis. Datasets are archived by the National Archive of Criminal Justice Data (NACJD) at the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) at the University of Michigan.

The NACJD maintains a World Wide Web site with instructions for transferring files and sending messages. Criminal justice data funded by the Department of Justice are available via the Internet at this site at no charge to the user. NACJD may be contacted at NACJD/ICPSR, P.O. Box 1248, Ann Arbor, MI, 48106-1248, 800-999-0960. The URL for the NACJD Web site is:

<http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/NACJD/>