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PROFILE OF 1989 NEW COMMITMENTS
WITH SUGGESTED ALCOHOL ABUSE PROBLEMS
BASED ON MAST SCORES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background. Prior to 1981, the Department relied on the self-reports of offenders upon reception as the basis for statistics on alcohol abuse among the inmate population. In order to develop improved estimates of the extent of alcohol abuse among the inmate population, the Department began in 1981 to administer the Michigan Alcohol Screening Test (MAST) to new commitments in cooperation with the Fellowship Center of the New York City Mission Society. A series of four prior research reports has examined the results of these MAST tests.

Purpose of Report. As part of this ongoing series, this report reviewed all male and female new commitments received in 1989 to determine the percentage with suggested alcohol abuse problems based on their MAST scores.

Main Finding. This survey found that 24.1 percent (4,409) of the 18,265 commitments in 1989 for whom MAST results are available had MAST scores of 9 or more which are viewed as being strongly suggestive of alcohol abuse.

Significant variations were observed among commitments from different regions in the State. Forty-five percent (45.3%) of commitments from upstate counties had MAST scores of 9 or more as compared to only 18.9 percent from New York City.

Conclusion. Based on available MAST score data, this brief survey found that alcohol abuse continues to be a serious problem among new admissions, especially from Upstate communities.

Available MAST data for 1989 new commitments suggests that nearly one-in-every-four commitments (24.1%) had a serious alcohol abuse problem prior to incarceration.

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**PROFILE OF 1989 NEW COMMITMENTS
WITH SUGGESTED ALCOHOL ABUSE PROBLEMS
BASED ON MAST SCORES**

This report examines the number and characteristics of a sample of male and female new commitments received in 1989 with suggested alcohol abuse problems based on their scores on the Michigan Alcohol Screening Test (MAST).

Background. Prior to 1981, the Department utilized the self-reports of offenders upon reception as the basis for statistics on alcohol abuse among the inmate population.

Upon reception, offenders were asked if they were non-users of alcohol or if they would classify their use as "moderate" or "excessive."

However, the resulting statistics using these self-reports were criticized as significantly under-estimating the extent of alcohol abuse among the inmate population. It was argued that individuals with alcohol abuse problems commonly refuse to admit this problem either intentionally or unintentionally.

Department research supported this criticism of self-report statistics of alcohol abuse by using case folder data contained in probation reports and other documents. While the use of case folder data generated higher estimates of alcohol abuse in the inmate population, these estimates were undermined by the nature of the data sources in the case folder. The case folder material was obviously not specifically designed to identify alcohol abuse in any systematic fashion.

Department Use of MAST Test. In view of this situation, the Department perceived a need to develop a more systematic and accurate estimate of the extent of alcohol abuse in the inmate population.

The Fellowship Center of the New York City Mission Society was asked to assist the Department in improving its classification procedures in this area. The Mission Society recommended that the Department utilize the Michigan Alcohol Screening Test (MAST) for this purpose.

The MAST form, which is currently in use at Department reception centers, consists of 25 questions regarding alcohol use. English and Spanish language versions are available. The responses of the offenders are scored according to weighted score basis. Under this approach, affirmative responses to certain questions are scored higher than others based on the content of the question.

Based on the established scoring procedure, the Mission Society indicates that MAST scores of 9 or more are clearly indicative of alcohol abuse.

Initial Department Research on MAST Scores in 1982. Soon after the Department began using the MAST, this office developed a research project in 1982 to utilize the MAST data to generate an improved estimate of the extent of alcohol abuse in the inmate population as well as a profile of offenders identified as alcohol abusers by this test. 1/

Of these 847 surveyed male new commitments in 1981, 295 (35%) had MAST scores of 9 or more.

This estimate of the extent of alcohol abuse in the inmate population was found to be significantly higher than the percent of these adult male new commitments who have reported excessive alcohol use. Of these 847 cases, 35 percent had MAST scores of 9 or more while only 19 percent admitted excessive alcohol use.

Subsequent Research on Alcohol Abuse Among 1985 Male New Commitments. In June 1985, the Department of Correctional Services (DOCS) did a sample survey of all male new commitments received between January and April inclusive of that year. Similar to the prior study, this survey found that of the 3,294 male new commitments, 1,120 (34%) had MAST scores of 9 or more which are viewed as being strongly suggestive of alcohol abuse. 2/

1/ "Profile of Male Offenders With Suggested Alcohol Abuse Problems Based on MAST Scores." Donald Macdonald and Jody Grossman, New York State Department of Correctional Services, May 1982.

2/ "Profile of 1985 New Commitments With Suggested Alcohol Abuse Problems Based on MAST Scores." Donald Macdonald and Jody Grossman, New York State Department of Correctional Services, June 1985.

Alcohol Abuse Among 1987 New Commitments. In June 1988, the third report in this series examined the MAST scores of 1987 new commitments. 3/ This report found a decline in the percentage of new commitments with MAST scores of 9 or more. Of all 1987 new commitments, 27.8 percent had MAST scores of 9 or more as compared to 32.7 percent of all 1985 new commitments.

This decrease of 4.9 percent appeared to be largely attributable to the combined impact of the surge of New York City commitments and the decreasing percentage of these New York City commitments with high MAST scores.

The percentage of New York City commitments with high MAST scores declined 4.4 percent from 28.0 percent in 1985 to 23.6 percent in 1987. This decrease is roughly equivalent to the overall decline of 4.9 percent.

The explosion of drug commitments in 1987 from New York City contributed to this decreasing percentage with MAST scores of 9 or more. In 1987, 3,847 drug commitments were received from New York City as compared to 1,671 in 1985. Among the 1987 drug commitments from New York City for whom MAST data was available (3,240), only 20.8 percent (674) had scores of 9 or more.

Alcohol Abuse Among 1988 Commitments. In February 1989, the fourth report in this series examined the MAST scores of 1988 new commitments. 4/ This report found that the percentage of new commitments with MAST scores of 9 or more was approximately the same as in 1987. In 1987, 27.8% had MAST scores of 9 or more. In 1988, 28.1% had MAST scores of 9 or more.

Purpose of Present Research. The objective of the present research project is (1) to analyze the MAST scores of 1989 new commitments with reference to the findings of the preceding 1982, 1985, 1987 and 1988 research reports and (2) to update findings on the overall percentage of commitments of previous studies to the Department with high MAST scores.

In particular, this report was designed to assess the impact of the continued increase in New York City drug commitments to the Department in 1989 on the overall percentage of commitments with high MAST scores.

3/ "Profile of 1987 New Commitments With Suggested Alcohol Abuse Problems Based on MAST Scores." Robert Fisher and Donald Macdonald, New York State Department of Correctional Services, June 1988.

4/ "Profile of 1988 New Commitments With Suggested Alcohol Abuse Problems Based on MAST Scores." Robert Fisher and Donald Macdonald, New York State Department of Correctional Services, February 1989.

Standard Criterion: MAST Score of 9 or More. Similar to the preceding studies, this research considers MAST scores of 9 or more as being "strongly suggestive of alcohol abuse."

As noted previously, this criterion was initially suggested by the Fellowship Society. More recently, a 1988 report of the Vera Institute of Justice supports the use of this criterion. 5/ This Vera study found that MAST scores of 9 or more were highly related to other measures of alcohol abuse.

Moreover, it should be noted that the manual for the MAST indicates that a score of seven or more suggests a pattern of behavior reflective of "alcoholism." The Director of the Department's Alcohol and Substance Abuse Treatment Program (ASAT) thus emphasizes the Department's continued use of a MAST score of 9 as the criterion for alcohol abuse in its research series exceeds this cutoff point of seven. As such, the Department's use of this more rigorous criterion may be seen to generate conservative statistics on the extent of alcohol abuse among commitments. 6/

Findings: Percent of 1989 New Commitments with MAST Scores of 9 or More. The basic question addressed by the present study is: What percentage of the 1989 new commitments had MAST scores of 9 and over?

Of all new commitments in 1989 (for whom MAST scores are available), 24.1 percent (4,409) had MAST scores of 9 and above.

5/ Young, Douglas and Mark Usdane, Alcohol, Drugs & Crime, Vera Institute of Justice, New York, NY, March 1988.

6/ The Department's Director and Assistant Director of ASAT have pointed out that the MAST is most appropriately viewed as assessing the existence of a pattern of behavior reflective of "alcoholism" rather than "alcohol abuse" or "an alcohol abuse problem" (as categorized in the Department's series). In this research series, the terms "alcohol abuse" and "alcohol abuse problem" have been and are used interchangeably with "alcoholism" with reference to MAST score interpretation. At the suggestion of the Department's ASAT staff, this definitional issue is noted for the reader, who is familiar with the differing definitions of these terms in the professional literature of the field.

TABLE 1: MAST SCORES FOR 1989 NEW COMMITMENTS

<u>MAST Score</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
0 - 4	11,454	62.7%
5 - 8	2,402	13.2%
9 and above	4,409	24.1%
TOTAL	18,265	100.0%

Missing Cases = 3,503 (16.1% of all 1989 new commitments)

In comparison to 1988, the percentage of new commitments with MAST scores of 9 or more has declined slightly (24.1% in 1988 as compared to 28.1% in 1988).

It should be noted that the percentage of new commitments in the "possibly alcoholic" category (MAST scores from 5 to 8) concurrently declined by 3.1 percent in 1989.

Since 1987, the percentage of new commitments in both of these categories have declined while the percentage with low MAST scores (0-4) has steadily increased. The percentage with MAST scores under 5 has risen from 51.1 percent in 1987 to 62.7 percent in 1989.

TABLE 2: MAST SCORES OF 1985, 1987 AND 1988 NEW COMMITMENTS

<u>MAST Score</u>	<u>1985</u>		<u>1987</u>		<u>1988</u>	
	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
0 - 4	4,419	49.0	6,408	51.1	8,465	55.7
5 - 8	1,649	18.3	2,644	21.1	2,457	16.2
9 and above	2,946	32.7	3,482	27.8	4,266	28.1
TOTAL	9,014	100.0	12,534	100.0	15,188	100.0%

Missing Cases = 3,406 (27%) of all 1985 new commitments

Missing Cases = 3,171 (20%) of all 1987 new commitments

Missing Cases = 2,401 (13.7%) of all 1988 new commitments

Differences in MAST Scores Between Males and Females. Among 1989 new commitments for whom MAST data exist, there are differences in MAST scores by sex.

TABLE 3: MAST SCORES OF NEW COMMITMENTS CLASSIFIED BY SEX

MAST Score	Total		SEX			
	Number	Percent	Male Number	Male Percent	Female Number	Female Percent
0-4	11,443	62.7	10,652	63.3	791	55.2
5-8	2,396	13.2	2,062	12.3	334	23.3
9 or up	4,406	24.1	4,097	24.4	309	21.5
TOTAL	18,245	100.0	16,811	100.0	1,434	100.0

Missing = 3,523 (16.2%) of new commitments.

Males are slightly more likely to have high MAST scores than females (24.4% as compared to 21.5%).

A somewhat higher percentage (16.5%) of males compared to females (10.2%) were missing MAST scores. The percentage difference is not believed to substantially affect the above comparison. However, the fact that over 3,300 male new commitments are missing MAST scores is a matter for concern even if the overall percentage of missing cases (16.5%) is less than the percent missing among the 1985 and 1987 new commitments (27% and 20%, respectively).

ASAT staff point out that nearly one third (1,167) of the cases without MAST data were received in June 1989 when the Department experienced an unprecedented surge in commitments. Approximately 40 percent of June 1989 commitments lack MAST data. For most months in 1989, less than 15 percent of the commitments lack MAST scores.

Substantial Regional Differences. As in preceding studies, regional differences were found in the 1989 new commitments MAST scores. Among Upstate New York new commitments, 45.3 percent (1,190) had MAST scores of 9 or above compared to 31.4 percent (661) of Suburban New York City and only 18.9 percent (2,557) of New York City new commitments.

TABLE 4: PERCENT WITH MAST SCORE OF 9 OR MORE ^{7/}

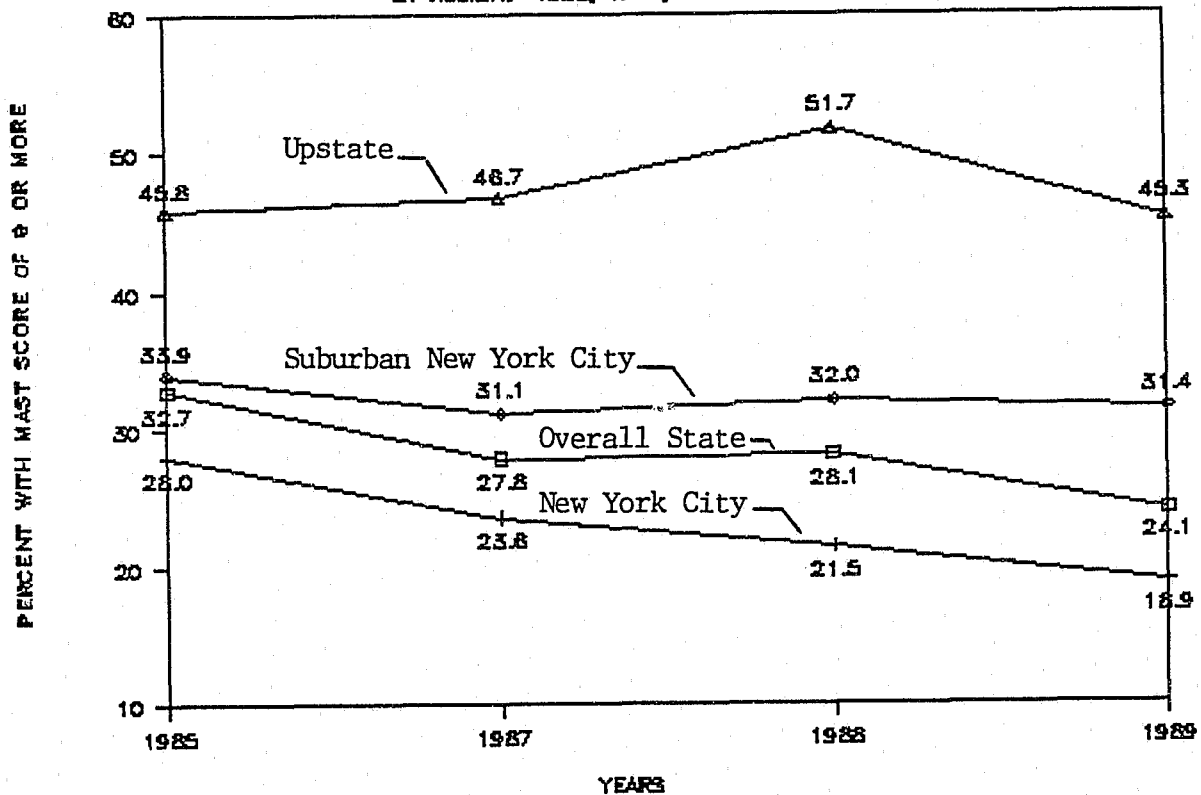
<u>REGION</u>	<u>1985</u>	<u>1987*</u>	<u>1988*</u>	<u>1989*</u>
Statewide	32.7	27.8	28.1	24.1
New York City	28.0	23.6	21.5	18.9
Suburban New York City	33.9	31.1	32.0	31.4
Upstate New York	45.8	46.7	51.7	45.3

* Analysis has determined that the number of cases without MAST data in each region does not bias the above findings.

These trends are illustrated by the following graph.

TREND IN MAST SCORES OF 9 OR MORE

BY REGION: 1985, 1987, 1988 AND 1989



^{7/} Percentages reported are based on cases for whom MAST data is available on the Department's computer system.

Impact of Regional Variation on Decreasing Percentage of Commitments with MAST Scores of 9 or More. The declining percentage of New York City commitments with high MAST scores appears to largely account for the overall decrease in commitments with MAST scores of 9 or more.

The percentage of New York City commitments with high MAST scores has declined 9.1 percent from 28.0 percent in 1985 to 18.9 percent in 1989. This decrease is roughly equivalent to the overall decline of 8.6 percent.

The explosion of drug commitments from New York City has contributed to this decreasing percentage with MAST scores of 9 or more. In 1985, 1,671 drug commitments were received from New York City. In 1989, New York City committed 8,004 for drug crimes. These drug crime commitments accounted for over half (51%) of all New York City commitments in 1989 as compared to only 20.0 percent in 1985.

Among 1989 drug crime commitments from New York City for whom MAST data was available, 16.1 percent had MAST scores of 9 or more.

Conclusion. Based on available 1989 MAST score data, this brief survey found that alcohol abuse continues to be a serious problem among new admissions especially from upstate communities.

Available MAST data for 1989 new commitments suggests that one-in-every-four commitments (24.1%) had a serious alcohol abuse problem prior to incarceration. Overall, alcohol abusers as a percentage of the inmate new commitments has declined slightly from 1985-1989 because of a decline in the percent of alcoholic abusers among new commitments from New York City. Among new commitments from Suburban New York City and Upstate, however, the percent of alcohol abusers has remained stable in that period.