

# Research & Advocacy Digest

Linking Advocates & Researchers

## *Prison Rape and Sexual Coercion Behind Bars*

### Letter From The Editor

JANET ANDERSON, ADVOCACY EDUCATION DIRECTOR, WCSAP

This edition of the Research and Advocacy Digest focuses on the issue of prison rape and sexual coercion behind bars. While hard data on sexual assaults in prison is sparse, most of us in society and within the anti-rape movement know that the rape, torture, brutality and sexual assault of inmates by other inmates and staff are part of the fabric of everyday prison life.

Sexual assault of adult and juvenile offenders within our prisons has reached pandemic proportions. According to the United States Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics and other studies, it is estimated that at least 13% of the inmates in the United States have been sexually assaulted in prison, and many of those have suffered repeated assaults by both other inmates and staff officials. Under this estimate, nearly 200,000 inmates now incarcerated have been, or will be, the victims of rape, and the total estimate of inmates who have been sexually assaulted in the past 20 years likely exceeds 1,000,000.

Struckman (2000), who conducted a study of prisons in three Midwestern states, (this study can be found within this journal) found that approximately one in five male inmates reported a pressured or forced sex incident while incarcerated and about one in ten male inmates reported that they had been raped. In addition, rates for women, who are most likely to be abused by male staff members, vary greatly among institutions. In one facility, 27% of women reported a pressured or forced sex incident while in another facility, seven percent (7%) of women reported sexual abuse. Furthermore, Forst found that youth in detention are also extremely vulnerable to abuse, and those juveniles incarcerated with adults are five times more likely to report being victims of sexual assault.

Man & Cronan (2002), found that victims are typically the young, vulnerable, the weak, gays, previous rape victims, the outcasts, those who can't defend themselves and the mentally ill. For women behind bars, male custodial officers have vaginally, anally, and orally raped female prisoners and have abused their authority by exchanging goods and privileges for

### Inside

- 3-6 Interview with Lara Stemple, JD
- 7-14 Research Abstracts
- 15 Additional Resources

### Contributors

Janet Anderson, Editor, WCSAP  
Suzanne-Brown McBride, WCSAP  
Lydia Guy, WCSAP  
Lara Stemple, JD - Stop  
Prisoner Rape

---

sex. Male corrections officers are often allowed to watch female inmates while dressing, showering, or using the toilet, and some regularly engage in verbal degradation and harassment of women prisoners. (Stop Prisoner Rape Fact Sheet).

Those who suffer this atrocity and brutal treatment behind bars suffer serious impacts - physical injury, shock, disbelief, post-traumatic stress disorder, fear, nightmares, substance abuse, HIV, infection with other diseases, flashbacks, anger, shame, guilt, and rage, to name a few. Yet, according to the Human Rights Watch, “responses to prisoner rape have been indifferent and irresponsible. Reporting procedures, where they exist, are often ineffectual and complaints are routinely ignored by prison staff and government authorities and punishment is rare.” Furthermore, most staff are not held accountable and many of the victims are silenced, retaliated against, shamed and consequently discouraged from reporting.

Yet, while these horrific facts are staring us in the face, Rich Lowry writes, “Our tolerance for prison rape is a great mystery. We profess to abhor rape, to adore personal dignity, to uphold the rights of the downtrodden -- yet we sentence tens of thousands of men, [women and juveniles] every year to the most bestial kind of abuse, without a second thought.”

But there is hope. Based on a series of findings regarding prison rape - (untrained staff, lack of awareness by the public and government, underreporting, health consequences of sexual assault, lack of adequate physical and mental health treatment, HIV and other communicable disease contraction, increased racial tension, increased health care expenditures, increased risk of recidivism, civil strife and violent crime and increased endangerment to public safety when brutalized inmates are released), the United States Congress passed the Prison Elimination Act of 2003 or better known as PREA. This public law calls for the unprecedented development of national standards to address prisoner rape, a review panel with subpoena power to call before it officials responsible for the worst rape rates, and the allocation of up to \$40 million in funds for state programs to address the problem.

Government officials, prison officials, policy-makers and the general public at-large are not the only ones among the ranks of those who have disregarded this issue. Social scientists, who conduct thousands of studies on a wide range of topics have also ignored or backed away from this topic as well. Struckman (1996), poses several possibilities for this: “lack of awareness, particularly since information coming from prisons is tightly controlled, misperceptions about the nature of sexual coercion, and buying into the myth that heterosexual men can’t be forced to participate in a sexual act against his will, and most disturbingly, prejudice against inmate victims – perhaps sharing public opinion that inmates who have been sexually assaulted are not true victims and are perceived as deserving their fate because of their crimes – the price they must pay for their societal wrongdoings.”

However, I cannot write about other’s ignorance and collusion of prison rape without admitting my own complicity. As someone who considers myself to be a social justice activist and one who attempts to stand up against oppression, researching this topic forced me to examine my own participation and ignorance of this horrific problem, and yes, that acknowledgement was a painful one for me to swallow.

*continued on pg. 16*

---

# Interview with Lara Stemple, JD

## Executive Director of Stop Prisoner Rape

**WCSAP: Thanks Lara for taking the time to do this interview for WCSAP. Could you talk about your organization, Stop Prisoner Rape, and what it does?**

**Lara:** Stop Prisoner Rape was founded 25 years ago by a survivor of prisoner rape. It was originally an all volunteer run organization but approximately four years ago we began to hire professional staff to continue its work. Our mission is to end sexual violence against men, women and youth in all forms of detention, which includes prisons, jails and immigration centers. Stop Prisoner Rape is an advocacy-based organization and one that uses human rights principles to inform our work. When we describe our work we use what we call the three “A’s” - Accountability, Attitudes, and Access.

Accountability – This is where we work to hold institutions accountable for the sexual abuse that occurs within their facilities. We accomplish this through policy and legislative means.

Attitudes – What I mean by this is our desire to change people’s attitudes about the seriousness of prisoner rape in a pretty fundamental way. Currently, prisoner rape is something that has been ignored and something that people continue to joke about. We believe this promotes callousness for an issue that is fundamentally an abuse of human rights. Our argument is that while it’s not funny when women, men, children and others are raped in society at-large, it’s not funny when men, women and children are raped behind bars. To assist us in this work we use effective media campaigns. We strongly believe that it is possible to change societal attitudes in a fundamental way. Take the example of drunk-driving. Based on extensive media campaigns, advocates were able to accomplish a dramatic

shift in societal attitudes and behavior and we are working toward the same thing.

Access to resources for survivors of rape in prison

This is where we work collaboratively to bring in partners, like legal aid, rape crisis centers, and other organizations whose mission would be a fit, and encourage them to provide their services to this population. Many organizations seek to reach underserved and marginalized populations, and prisoner rape survivors fit that description all too well. Over 400 organizations have agreed to provide services to prisoner rape survivors, many opening their doors to this population for the very first time.

**WCSAP: Can you talk about the issues that are inherent to prison rape and discuss some of the underlying conditions that perpetuate it?**

**Lara:** When talking about prisoner rape, it is important to separate how this issue impacts men and how it impacts women, as the dynamics are different. Women behind bars are more likely to be sexually abused by male staff. Because of that power imbalance, it makes it very difficult for women to speak out. For example, we wrote a report about a facility in Ohio and the sexual abuse of women that was occurring there. In this case, we found that women were told that if they didn’t have sex, they were going to be written up on disciplinary charges and forced into administrative segregation. Administrative segregation included complete isolation, 23-hour lock-down, dark and dirty conditions, and the loss of basic privileges that other inmates receive. And of course, this coercion certainly inhibited the women from speaking out. Luckily, we were able to find out about this from three staff whistleblowers who were willing to come forward, go on record, and tell us what was happening.

---

For male inmates, the dynamics are very different. While some male inmates are certainly sexually abused by staff, most male inmates tend to be sexually abused by other inmates. And in this case, we see patterns of domination that actually work out along the lines of our traditional understandings of gender power dynamics.

**WCSAP: Can you explain what you mean by that?**

**Lara:** What I mean is that when a male inmate is sexually assaulted by another male inmate, the victim is “feminized” by the perpetrator. The perpetrator, despite the fact that he is initiating the same-sex contact, is allowed to maintain his heterosexual identity. These perpetrators have a high status within the prison hierarchy; they are dominant and well-respected. Victims are sometimes called female names and have a very low status in the prison hierarchy.

When a new inmate arrives, other inmates will try to determine whether he is vulnerable. If he can’t defend himself from attack, he will be “turned out,” meaning anyone can use him as a sexual object. As a coping strategy, some of these victims will engage in what is called “protective pairing” in which a more vulnerable inmate hooks up with a stronger, dominant inmate and has sex with him in exchange for protection from other inmates. So, within male prisons, what we see are a lot of relationships forming that are extremely coercive in nature.

**WCSAP: The research on prison rape was extremely sparse. Can you talk about why you think that is the case?**

**Lara:** For a long time prisoner rape has been neglected by the criminal justice system, by advocates, by scholars and by the community at-large. Prisoner rape is something that has been widely accepted as part of the culture. Those who have conducted research, like Cindy Struckman-Johnson and others, were pioneers.

At the time they were doing their research, there was no government funding or grants, so they were funding the research themselves. At this point in time, their work is the best and most current data that we have. However, with the passage of the Prison Rape Elimination Act of 2003, (PREA), we can look forward to new nationwide data.

**WCSAP: Can you speak to the issues of racism, homophobia and classism as it pertains to prison rape?**

**Lara:** The issue of homophobia is one that cuts through this work entirely and needs to be watched when implementing a response. What we don’t want to see happen is a witch-hunt for inmates who are engaging in consensual same-sex sex in prison. We want to make it clear that this bill is not designed to crack down on consensual inmate-inmate sex.

As for race – it is important to keep in mind that ethnic and racial populations are at greater risk of being sexually assaulted in prison due to the disproportionately high rates of incarceration for these groups. In some literature you will find that white inmates are the ones who are most often targeted in prison. While that may be empirically true, when you begin to look at this from a broader perspective, young black men are more overwhelming likely to go to prison and therefore are at higher risk. Another factor to consider is that male inmates tend to organize themselves more along racial lines and join gangs within their race which may offer some measure of protection. However, there are times when inmates are victimized by members of their own race, so it’s dangerous to make oversimplifications about how race impacts this issue.

The same is true regarding classism. Unfortunately, it is a reality of our criminal justice system that if you have the money to hire lawyers, you’re less likely to wind up in

---

prison. Because low-income people are more likely to be incarcerated their risk of prisoner rape is higher.

**WCSAP: Can you summarize some of the key findings about prisoner rape?**

**Lara:** When we cite statistics, we use Cindy Johnson-Struckman's study of prisons in four Midwestern states. She found that approximately one in five male inmates reported a pressured or forced sex incident while incarcerated and about one in ten male inmates reported that they had been raped. In addition, rates for women, who are most likely to be abused by male staff members, varied greatly among institutions. In one facility, 27% of women reported a pressured or forced sex incident while in another facility, 7% of women reported sexual abuse. In addition, juveniles incarcerated with adults are five times more likely to report being victims of sexual assault.

**WCSAP: I was unable to find any studies that specifically dealt with juvenile sexual abuse within juvenile detention centers. Do you know of any?**

**Lara:** Unfortunately, there isn't strong research on the sexual abuse of juveniles within juvenile facilities. Luckily, PREA does call for research in this area.

**WCSAP: Because the research on prisoner rape is so sparse, what kinds of gaps have you noticed, and what kinds of research do you think might be useful to collect?**

**Lara:** As a result of PREA, the Bureau of Justice Statistics is currently in the process of conducting a national prevalence and incidence study. In addition, other types of qualitative studies have been funded by the National Institute of Justice, and we are seeing a tremendous amount of research roll out as a result of the bill. Once this activity is underway, we will have a better

sense of what kinds of research will still need to be gathered.

**WCSAP: For those who are unfamiliar with PREA or the Prison Rape Elimination Act, can you describe what it is, what it does, and what your hopes are for it?**

**Lara:** The Prison Rape Elimination Act does several things. The law calls for the collection of nationwide data on prisoner rape, the creation of a commission to oversee the development of national standards to address prisoner rape, the allocation of funds for new state programs to address the problem, and a review panel to call before it officials responsible for the 3 worst-performing states and the 2 best-performing states. I also want to point out that this law pertains to a range of facilities: local, state, federal, and immigration detention centers.

**WCSAP: This bill sounds very promising. What results are you seeing as a result of it? And what kind of response have you received?**

**Lara:** At first there was some grumbling about the law, but it dissipated quickly and many corrections facilities are now working hard to try and address this problem. We have been told by many states that they don't want to be found to be one of the worst performing, so I think this provision in the law has been very motivating. The Department of Justice research and the training components developed by the National Institute of Corrections have also come a long way and will have a significant impact on the field.

**WCSAP: What sanctions, if you will, will be applied to those 3 worst performing states, if any?**

**Lara:** Coming before the panel is the punishment itself, and states do want to avoid it. Also, all states will have to adopt the new federal standards called for under PREA or risk losing federal funds.

---

**WCSAP: With these standards being developed, will the facilities have the opportunities to partake in some training programs so they will better equipped to address the issue?**

**Lara:** Yes, the National Institute of Corrections has been developing training materials including videos for staff and inmates, all of which are available on their website.

**WCSAP: We talked about how this issue has been ignored by virtually everyone. Our particular audience for this publication is to advocacy groups, rape crisis centers, therapists, coalitions, etc. Can you give us some advice about what these groups could do to assist survivors of prisoner rape?**

**Lara:** One of the things we have done is produce a Resource Guide for Survivors of Rape Behind Bars and we have it available for all 50 states. If there is someone who believes they would be able to provide services to prison rape survivors, they should contact us to be listed in the guide. Many prisoner rape victims are extremely hesitant to come forward due to shame or because they think that the agency won't be comfortable working with them. So, this Resource Guide is our attempt to connect prisoner rape survivors to those working to end sexual violence in their communities who are willing to help. Many rape crisis centers and victim advocacy programs have in their mission the desire to reach out to neglected and marginalized communities. We would like to encourage all those within the field to consider reaching out to this group, an extremely neglected and marginalized population that has experienced a great deal of trauma.

“One of the things we have done is produce a Resource Guide for Survivors of Rape Behind Bars and we have it available for all 50 states. If there is someone who believes they would be able to provide services to prison rape survivors, they should contact us to be listed in the guide. Many prisoner rape victims are extremely hesitant to come forward due to shame or because they think that the agency won't be comfortable working with them. So, this Resource Guide is our attempt to connect prisoner rape survivors to those working to end sexual violence in their communities who are willing to help.”

**WCSAP: Lara, I thank you for the time and energy you have spent doing this interview, as well as thank you and Stop Prisoner Rape for the incredible work you are doing.**

For more information on Stop Prisoner Rape, go to [www.spr.org](http://www.spr.org) or call 213-384-1400

LARA STEMPLE, JD, IS THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF STOP PRISONER RAPE (SPR). A GRADUATE OF HARVARD LAW SCHOOL, MS. STEMPLE IS A HUMAN RIGHTS LAWYER WHO HAS FOCUSED HER WORK ON SEXUAL RIGHTS, IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE RIGHTS, SEXUAL VIOLENCE, AND HIV/AIDS. SHE RECENTLY SERVED AS A ROCKEFELLER POST-DOCTORAL FELLOW AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY'S PROGRAM ON SEXUALITY, GENDER, HEALTH AND HUMAN RIGHTS AND TAUGHT A CLASS AT UCLA ON HEALTH AND HUMAN RIGHTS. MS. STEMPLE HAS ALSO SERVED AS THE SENIOR ADVOCACY OFFICER FOR THE PACIFIC INSTITUTE FOR WOMEN'S HEALTH IN LOS ANGELES, AND SHE HAS WORKED IN THE INTERNATIONAL AND DOMESTIC DEPARTMENTS OF THE CENTER FOR REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS IN NEW YORK.

---

# Research Articles

## **Male Prison Rape: A Search for Causation Prevention**

Knowles, Gordon James. The Howard Journal, Vol. 38(3) Aug 1999, 267-282.

The basis for this article is a content analysis methodology of literature spanning four decades. Knowles's stated focus is to "gain a sociological understanding of male prison rape, but more importantly, to focus on why whites are raped by blacks more than other racial or ethnic groups." Knowles begins by defining rape. He then provides brief overviews on the topics of prevalence, victimology, prison rape and HIV, psychological effects of prison rape, prison argot and cultural norms.

Mid-way through the article he puts forth his hypothesis for the causation of prison rape - "black racism." Knowles references, but does not cite specifically, a vast body of work which states unequivocally, that male prison rape is predominately inter-racial with perpetrators being disproportionately black and victims white. He offers a variety of causes; imprisonment exacerbates black rage, black inmates feel justified because of societal inequities, and that "blacks saw more prestige in having sex with whites over other ethnic groups." Knowles's conclusions regarding the cause of prison rape are succinctly expressed in the following excerpt.

*"In essence, prison rape in the United States may not be an issue of power, sex or even homosexuality, but rather an issue of humiliation targeted against whites by raping them. This persistent victimization of whites over any other ethnic or racial group is why conditions need to be implemented to protect whites from rape or future rape."*

Dr Knowles's analysis of prison rapes, are in effect, hate crimes perpetrated by black inmates against white inmates. His primary prevention strategy is to separate prison populations by race. While this solution is tragically flawed, over-simplistic and fundamentally racist, it is the only possible conclusion which can be drawn given the author's initial hypothesis and supporting documentation.

## **Prison Rape in Context**

O'Donnel, Ian. The British Journal of Criminology, Vol. 44, March 1, 2004, 241-255.

Sexual violence has long been a ubiquitous experience for prisoners incarcerated in the United States. Researchers, policy makers, and prison reform advocates have attempted to determine the scope, dynamics and causal factors contributing to this phenomenon. The pandemic of prison rape is not universal to the penal systems of all countries. In fact, the United States has the dubious distinction of being an anomaly. The preponderance of literature on prison rape has focused on deconstructing the prison experience across jurisdictions and countries, but have not focused on causal factors which may be country specific. This article contrasts the prison industrial complexes of the United Kingdom and the United States in the hopes of providing an explanation of the elevated prevalence of rape in prisons in the United States.

Ian O'Donnel offers three basic premises for the omnipresent status of rape in United States prisons: 1) United States history of race relations including the legacy of slavery, 2) higher levels of societal violence in the United States, and; 3) higher levels of cynicism within prison

---

staff. While the article offers an interesting comparison of prison rape in the United States and the United Kingdom by analyzing existing literature on prison rape, it is most useful in offering an explanation as to why the preponderance of literature is not necessarily applicable in understanding the dynamics of rape in prison in the UK than in providing insight into dynamics in the US.

The first sections of the article explore themes common to prison rape in both countries, including, but not limited to, issues of gender, argot roles and epidemiology:

#### Gender

“Prison sexual violence is only partly related to sexual gratification and is never about mutual fulfillment. It is a stark demonstration of power. In this way, it mirrors heterosexual rape in the wider community.”

#### Argot roles

“The language used to refer to the act of prison rape is non-sexual; a clear indication that it is about power rather than sex. The intention is to redefine a man as a woman, by forcing upon him a female role, often described as “turning him out.”

#### Epidemiology

“It is very difficult to obtain reliable data on the actual (as opposed to the perceived) risk of sexual violation faced by prisoners.” He goes on to explore the various factors which make empirical data collection difficult, such as differences in definitions of sexual violence, differences in study time frames, varying research priorities, and evidence collection strategies.

The middle and final sections explore his basic hypothesis on the differences between prison rape in the United States and the United Kingdom and includes sections on race, racism, societal violence, and staff attitudes. Basic

to his thesis is the idea that the experiences of imperialism, colonialism, historical legacy of slavery, societal norms regarding violence, indifference of prison staff and multi-ethnic populations are unique to the United States or at the least, are expressed in profoundly different ways within the United States culture. While the United States has a long and ignominious history with all of these factors, and these factors are relevant to the analysis of prison rape, the analysis, as presented, is far too simplistic from which to draw conclusions.

### **The Evolving Nature of Prison Argot and Sexual Hierarchies**

Hensley, Christopher; Wright, Jeremy; Tewksbury, Richard; & Castle, Tammy. *The Prison Journal*, Vol. 83(3), September 2003, 289-300.

The existence of prison argots and sexual hierarchies is well documented in research literature within prisons in the United States. However, contemporary researchers have not focused on micro level issues such a prison culture, or more specifically, prison argots and sexual hierarchies. This article explores data from 174 face-to-face interviews with male inmates in a multi-security level correctional facility located in Oklahoma. The findings of the study indicate that prison subculture remains a major factor in the existence of prison rape, but that the exact nature of the argots and sexual hierarchies has changed.

The article begins with a discussion of prison subculture and the significance of prison argots. In order to understand rape, one must understand the cultural context in which it occurs, that enables one to implicitly or explicitly condone it. The author notes that:

*“Total institutions are closed, single-sex societies separated from society, socially and physically. Inhabitants of total institutions have essentially all decisions about the structure and content of their daily lives made*



*for them, and they share all aspects of their daily lives within these types of institutions. However, one area in which occupants of total institutions do retain some degree of control over is their individual and collective abilities to develop unique values, norms and means for exercising social control over such. Central to this cultural construction is the delineation of specific social roles, which are accompanied by rigidly proscribed behavioral expectations. These distinct values and behavioral roles are referred to as the prison subculture.”*

The article then provides an overview of prison argots and affirms the importance of language in understanding prison subculture:

*“Prison researchers who have studied male prison life have found that inmates use a special type of language or slang within the prison subculture that reflects the ‘distorted norms, values and mores of the offenders.’ As such, the vocabulary and speech patterns of prison inmates – what is known as prison argot – are largely distinct from those of non-inmates. Language, as is well known, provides the parameters of understanding and possibilities for constructing a social and cultural milieu.”*

Through a literature review of existing research on prison argots over the past seven decades, the authors identify three commonly acknowledged sexual roles (“wolves,” “fags” and “punks”). Wolves are defined as sexually aggressive inmates. Fags are defined as inmates exhibiting feminine characteristics. The label of “punk” is attributed to inmates who have been raped using methods of coercion or force. The hierarchy as outlined in the literature reviewed, consists of “wolves” occupying the top of the hierarchy, “fags” occupying the middle of the

hierarchy, and “punks” occupying the bottom of the hierarchy. The article then goes into detail about the intricacies, including sub-level distinctions, of the class systems attached to this traditional hierarchy, as well as the implications for identifying victims and perpetrators of sexual assault. The article also includes an overview of the research study methodology.

Research findings confirmed the continued existence of the three traditional sex roles (“wolves,” “fags” and “punks”), but also confirmed the refinement of the existing sexual roles into a multi-tiered, more nuanced structure. The primary differences occurred in the identification of two sub-categories in each of the “wolf” and “fag” roles. Wolves were now split into aggressive and non-aggressive wolves; “wolves” and “teddy bears.” Fags were now split into “fish” and “closeted gays.” “Fish,” a term previously used to indicate a new inmate, is now used to indicate inmates with feminine characteristics who willingly engage in sexual activity. “Closeted gay” is used to identify inmates with a masculine appearance, who engage willingly in sex and enter prison with an undisclosed homosexual identity. Researchers found that although the hierarchy was very similar to the traditional hierarchy, “fish” are gaining parity with aggressive wolves and “teddy bears” and “closeted gays” now occupy the middle range, with “punks” remaining at the bottom of the hierarchy. The authors conclude that sexual argot roles in prison support a rape culture and that in order to be effective, correctional administrators and staff must understand and take into account prison subculture.

### **Characteristics of Prison Sexual Assault Targets in Male Oklahoma Correctional Facilities**

Hensley, C.; Tewksbury, R.; & Castle, T. Journal of Interpersonal Violence, Vol. 18(6), June 2003, 595-606

The author first notes that the topic of male sexual coercion in correctional facilities has been

---

virtually ignored and argues that if America is truly going to address the issue of rehabilitation, examining the physical and social conditions of prisons is crucial. While some studies have indeed been conducted, very few have focused on characteristics of prison sexual targets, thus becoming the rationale for this study. The author first explores the early literature and notes an evolution in explaining characteristics of sexual assault targets:

- Carroll (1977), focused solely on race and drew the conclusion that blacks were more likely to be the aggressor of white victims due to “acts of revenge and retaliation for years of oppression by a white male dominated society.”
- Lochwood (1980), identified weight as a characteristic, identifying that those weighing an average of 15 pounds less than the aggressor as being more vulnerable.
- Nacci and Kane (1984), examined the relationship between sexual orientation and sexual assault, identifying a higher incidence of prison rape amongst this population.
- Chonco (1989), introduced the notion of youth, attractiveness, display of fear and not belonging to a prison gang as increasing one’s vulnerability.

To expand on this research the authors interviewed 174 inmates. The variables measured included: 1) consensual inmate sex and inmate sexual coercion, 2) demographic information, 3) incarceration-related variables and, 4) whether they had been sexually threatened or assaulted, and if so, length of time after incarceration incident occurred, age of victim, race of perpetrator, number of occurrences, and relationship of target to perpetrator (stranger, known, etc.). Although participation in the study was voluntary, authorities enforced a 30 minute time limit on interviews and prohibited audio-recording making some analysis limited.

Of the 174 inmates interviewed, 24 (13.8%) reported being sexual targets and 2 (1.1%) reported being victims of sexual assault during their incarceration. When comparing the targets and victims to the general sample, 58% of the sexual assault targets were white 29% were African American, 8% were Native American and 5% were Hispanic. Approximately 42% were heterosexual, 42% were bisexual and 16% homosexual. Additionally, Type I offenders were more likely to be represented in the target group as well as those who were housed in a medium or maximum-security level prison. Those who had been targeted were incarcerated an average of 143 days before the first sexual encounter and 88% reported being threatened only once. Younger inmates (average age 20) were more likely to be targets than the rest of the sample.

The racial makeup of the perpetrators was white (38%), African American (58%) and Hispanic (4%).

Compared to previous research, the authors note that this study demonstrates that inmate sexual target rates were low and cite a narrow, and not agreed upon definition of sexual assault as a potential reason. While this particular study yielded lower rates of sexual coercion than anticipated, the authors believe that identifying characteristics of targets and perpetrators can help correctional facilities develop strategies that may reduce the rates of sexual victimization with their correctional facilities.

### **Sexual Coercion Reported by Women in Three Midwestern Prisons**

Struckman-Johnson, Cindy; & Struckman-Johnson, David. *Journal of Sex Research*, Vol. 39(3), August 2002, 217-227.

The overriding purposes of this study were: 1) to examine the incidence of sexual coercion among women in prison, 2) obtain inmates and staff’s perception of the sexual assault climate and,

---

3) describe characteristics of female targets of sexual coercion. This particular study is part of a multiple prison study of seven facilities for men and three facilities for women. All facilities have been kept confidential and only procedures and results are presented. All three facilities were a maximum-medium-minimum security facility.

Surveys were administered to the total inmate population in the three female facilities and to all security-related staff. The inmate survey consisted of questions regarding demographics, crime background, perceptions of the prison environment, opinions about prison sexual coercion, experiences with sexual coercion and reactions to a “worst-case” example. The staff survey included demographics, work history, perceptions of the prison environment, and opinions about actual and perceived sexual coercion rates.

#### Sexual Coercion Rates and Perception

Facility 1 – This facility had the worst rates with 27% reported being sexually coerced while incarcerated and 19% reported being sexually coerced in their current facility. Eighteen percent (18%) reported a worst-case incident and 5% of those were classified as rape. In terms of perception, 21% of the inmates perceived that women in the facility had been coerced, pressured or forced into sex while the staff perceived that 10% of the inmates were being sexually coerced. These results were close to those reported within men’s prison systems.

Facility 2 - Rates were substantially lower than Facility 1 with 9% reporting sexual coercion while incarcerated and 6% reporting sexual coercion in their present facility. None of the worst-case scenarios were classified as rape. In terms of perception, 11% of the inmates perceived that women had been coerced, as compared to 2% of the staff perceptions. Both inmates and staff perceived that the prison system protected them from sexual coercion in this facility.

Facility 3 – These rates were similar to Facility 2 in that both the statewide and current facility sexual coercion rates were 8% and none of the worst-case incidents were classified as rape. The inmates guessed a 13% perceived coercion rate versus a 4% perceived coercion rate by staff.

Worst-Case Incident – Twenty-eight percent (28%) of the women in Facility 1 reported a worst case incident. Half of these targets were white, while the rest were African American, Hispanic and Native American. Targets were typically heterosexual and about 1/4th were bisexual or homosexual. Approximately 1/3rd reported a single perpetrator, while over 40% had been assaulted by a group of two or three people. Fifty percent (50%) of the perpetrators were female and 50% were male. Forty-one percent (41%) of the perpetrators were Caucasian, 18% African American and 18% Hispanic, contrary to other studies citing black perpetrators or “black racism” as the predominant cause of sexual assault in prison.

The results of this study indicates that female sexual aggression is a serious problem within prisons but also reveals that the characteristics of the facility itself had some bearing on the frequency rates. For example, larger prison size, management issues, racial conflicts and inmate characteristics played a significant role in the higher rates of prisoner rape in Facility 1.

#### **Sexual Coercion Rates in Seven Midwestern Prison Facilities for Men**

Struckman-Johnson, Cindy; & Struckman-Johnson, David. The Prison Journal, Vol. 80(4), December 2000, 379-390.

This study examined the sexual coercion rates in male prisons in seven Midwestern facilities and was part of a multiple prison study of these seven facilities for men along with and 3 facilities for women. All facilities have been kept confidential and only procedures and results are presented. Sexual coercion was defined as pressure or forced

---

sexual contact against one's will and the authors note that sexual coercion is a contributing factor to overall prison violence.

The total population in each prison was sampled, including all inmates and prison staff. The total return rate for all seven prisons was 1,788 for male inmates and 475 from security staff members.

Inmate and staff questionnaires were comprised of demographic data, perceptions of the prison environment, and opinions about, and remedies for, sexual coercion. Only the inmate survey contained questions regarding actual sexual coercion experiences both while incarcerated and at their current facility.

Data indicated that 21% reported at least one incident of pressured or forced sex while incarcerated (the rates for the seven prisons ranged from 16%-26%) while 16% reported being sexually coerced in their current facility, with rates ranging from 4%-17%. Overall, one in five males inmates reported a pressured or forced sex incident while they had been incarcerated and about one in ten male inmates reported that they had been raped.

Two-hundred fifty-four inmates or 14% reported information about a worst-case incident that happened in their current facility with at least 7% reporting rape. When describing a worst-case incident within the last 26-30 months, 7% reported sexual coercion and 4% reported being raped.

Estimates of sexual coercion rates by inmates were usually close to the reported statewide sexual coercion rates in their facility compared to staff estimates, which were lower than the statewide or facility rates.

Inmates in larger facilities gave lower ratings for their facility protection levels and higher rates were given for protection the smaller the prison facility. About 20% of those from larger facilities indicated that a male or female staff participated in their worst-case incident.

The authors produced a facility profile to help explain some of the findings. Facility 2 had the worst sexual coercion climate of the seven surveyed and postulated the primary cause appeared to be the use of barrack style housing, large prison inmate population size, racial conflict, and lax security, demonstrating that characteristics of the prison itself also plays a significant factor in rates of sexual violence within prisons.

### **Correctional Officers and Their Perceptions of Homosexuality, Rape and Prostitution in Male Prisons**

Eigenberg, Ellen, M. *The Prison Journal*, Vol. 80, Dec 2000, 415-433

In one Mid-Western state, 209 correctional officers responded to a survey that was designed to determine their attitudes about homosexuality, prison rape and prostitution in institutions. The researcher was interested in knowing if the officers had preconceived notions about the sexual practices of the incarcerated, and whether this impacted their job performance. Fifty-four percent (54%) of the officers felt that many homosexual practices in prison were the result of sexual deprivation and not necessarily the result of the inmates' perceived sexual orientation. Additionally, the vast majority of officers (84%) felt that prisoners willingly engaged in sexual intercourse in exchange for goods or privileges. Officers also indicated that it was often difficult to determine if sexual acts were consensual, or forced even though 94% agreed that sexual assaults should be aggressively and proactively stopped.

### **Sexual Orientation Perspectives of Incarcerated Bisexual and Gay Men: The County Jail Protective Custody Experience**

Fiftal-Alarid, Leanne. *The Prison Journal*, Vol. 80(1), March 2000, 80-95.

Although increased attention has been paid to diversity issues within prisons, the research pertaining to prisoners with alternative sexual

---

orientations, such as gay and bisexual individuals, have largely been ignored, overlooked and is extremely dated. A literature review of the early research focusing on prison inmate homosexuality was based on two major perspectives: essentialist and social constructionism. The early essentialist perspective of the 1970's was extremely narrow in focus and strictly defined sexual identity from a "normal" versus "deviant" perspective, as well as asserting that heterosexual men who resorted to sex in prison did so due to sexual deprivation. Furthermore, under this perspective, the concept of rape and consensual sex was ambiguous and largely undefined. The social constructionist perspective of the 1990's however, began to identify more of the complexities of sexual identity and sexuality within prisons and examined such traits of how offenders identified their own sexual identities and pre and post-prison influences on sexual behavior.

Expanding on the earlier work of Wooden and Parker, this study examined sexual identity and perceptions of treatment of other prisoners and staff of incarcerated bisexual and gay men. It did however break from this earlier work in two ways; 1) by focusing on gay and bisexual men, the study moved away from viewing the institution through the eyes of heterosexual prisoners and 2) data collection came from men in a special housing unit of an urban county jail versus a medium or maximum security prison.

Surveys were distributed to both those in the general population and those within protective custody. The 56 participants in protective custody were there at their own request to avoid physical and sexual victimization based on their sexual orientation. This population was also given an addendum to the general population survey, which included questions regarding sexual orientation, sexual preferences while incarcerated, treatment in jail and fear of treatment in prison when transitioned.

Approximately 84% of the sample felt that the general population inmates treated them

with disrespect and 91% felt that staff treated bisexual and gay men with more disrespect and supported them less than the general population. Those who identified as bisexual/heterosexual inmates reported more pressure to have sex and felt less safe in jail than in prison than those who identified as bisexuals/gay men and gay men. However, for those who were about to be transitioned to prison, 38% were fearful of being raped when they got to prison, particularly if they had not been incarcerated in the past.

Although the data from this study indicates that sexual activity that occurred in the special housing unit was overall less physically and sexually coercive, gay and bisexual men are still largely at an increased risk of sexual victimization because of the limited special housing options available in other institutions, as well as to the entrenched homophobia within our society and within prisons.

### **Sexual Assault and Coercion Among Incarcerated Women Prisoners: Excerpts from Prison Letters**

Fiftal-Alarid, Leanne. *The Prison Journal*, Vol. 80(4), December 2000, 391-406.

Using a somewhat unique methodology, the researcher kept an ongoing mail correspondence with a group of 25 female offenders during their times of incarceration. While the specific focus of the study was related to sexual coercion, inmates also provided the author with observations about prison culture and daily life. Three themes were culled from these letters: 1) a climate of apathy regarding sexual coercion among inmates, 2) sexual roles and personas adopted by inmates related to sexual behavior and, 3) institutional factors related to the incidence of coercion. The anecdotal observations of the inmates often commented about their perceptions of apathy related to coercive behavior. In the

---

letters, inmates described a lack of community outrage or resistance to acts of coercion. The author also includes inmates' descriptions of the use of sexual persona's (such as butch/ femme), but does not relate the sexual performance to any particular coercive patterns. Finally, the inmates' letters point out two important institutional contributors to sexual coercion: 1) open dormitory-style housing, which allow the inmates to frequently change their sleeping quarters, and 2) apathetic staff.

### **Research on Sex in Prison During the Late 1980's and Early 1990's**

Tewksbury, Richard; & West, Angela. *The Prison Journal*, Vol. 80(4) December, 2000, 368-378.

Studying appropriate and inappropriate sexual relationships within correctional institutions has historically been scarce. The researchers noted two primary foci of research:

- Acquisition and transmission of HIV/AIDS specifically focused on incidence rates and generally not focused on programming or prevention efforts.
- Investigations of the sexual habits of the incarcerated (including sexual assault and/or coercive sex) – Studies during the 80's-90's were largely anecdotal and focused on male prison populations. Sporadic references were made to inmate sexual assault, but there were no systematic studies. Some researchers however did make progress by examining sex and sexual assault both in the context of victim risk-assessments, and prison culture. Other researchers began to examine attitudes of both the incarcerated and corrections officers related to sexual violence.

The article concludes with some observations about the scholars and institutions that have sponsored prison research thus far - almost universally the

scholars studying this phenomenon have been non-tenured academics and were fairly new to their careers. Additionally, the institutions that have sponsored the research have tended to be small state universities and non-academic organizations.

### **Inmate Sexual Assault: The Plague that Persists**

Dumond, Robert, W. *The Prison Journal*, Vol. 80, December, 2000, 407-414.

This was less a research article and more an outline of how mental health staff in institutions can take leadership role in addressing sexual assault in prisons. The author comments on the difficulty of obtaining useful incidence data as well as a lack of systematic intervention strategies. When dealing with inmate on inmate assault, the author recommends that the mental health practitioners pay particular attention to suicidal risk, safety concerns, multidisciplinary collaboration with other corrections staff and the potential risk of the victim contracting/communicating HIV/AIDS. The article also points out that practitioners should be thoughtful about what type of service transition a victim should receive when they leave an institution and return to the community. The conclusion includes some discussion about staff on inmate assaults and encourages the development of educational programs and

---

## Additional Resources

### Websites:

#### **Stop Prisoner Rape**

3325 Wilshire Blvd., Ste. 340

Los Angeles, CA 90010

**Phone:** (213) 384-1400

**Fax:** (213) 384-1411

[www.spr.org](http://www.spr.org) Email: [info@spr.org](mailto:info@spr.org)

This is one of the most comprehensive sites available to obtain information regarding prisoner rape. It includes fact sheets, stories from survivors, and a variety of reports on prisoner rape.

### **Books**

Gates of Injustice: The Crisis of America's Prisons (2004) by Alan Elsner,

My Soul Said to Me: An Unlikely Journey Behind the Walls of Justice (2003) by Robert E. Roberts

Prison Sex: Practice & Policy (2002), Christopher Hensley, ed.

Prison Nation: The Warehousing of America's Poor (2002), Tara Herivel et al,

Protecting Your Health & Safety: A Litigation Guide for Inmates (2002) by Robert E. Toone

A Chained Society: Life Inside America's Prisons (2002) by D.C. Maxwell,

*continued from pg. 3*

I hope that you find the information presented here valuable and useful. I know I did. As mentioned, the research on this topic is sparse, but with the new PREA law enacted, we can look forward to the collection of sound and crucial data and the development of national standards and programs to address this issue within the near future. As you will see in this Digest, some of the works on the subject of prison rape are inherently racist, homophobic and oversimplified, while others are based on sound, scientific methodology. However, when gathering research for this publication it is incumbent upon us to provide you with all views and perspectives. Therefore, take what you like and leave the rest.

**WCSAP**

2415 PACIFIC AVE. SE,  
OLYMPIA, WA 98501  
360.754.7583  
(360) 709-0305 TTY  
WWW.WCSAP.ORG

Non-Profit US Postage <b>PAID</b> Olympia, WA Permit #282
---