

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS FOR PREVENTING INMATE SEXUAL ASSAULT: Examining Wardens' Beliefs†

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ABSTRACT: *Inmate sexual assault has long been a problem within the American correctional system. Prison sex researchers have prescribed various remedies and solutions for dealing with this issue. However, few of these studies have examined wardens' beliefs regarding possible remedies for inmate sexual assault. Using data collected from 226 wardens in 2001, this study examines the beliefs that wardens hold concerning the effectiveness of institutional policies and procedures, staff training, and increased supervision by staff on sexual assault among inmates. On average, wardens feel these possible solutions would reduce inmate sexual coercion. Multiple regression analyses reveal that race, education, percentage of inmates sexually assaulted and known by the warden, and percentage of inmates having consensual sex are statistically significant variables associated with these remedies.*

INTRODUCTION

Correctional administrators, social scientists, and society alike have long ignored the problem of inmate sexual assault. However, a growing amount of concern and calls for reform regarding this "curse on American corrections" have surfaced in recent years (Amnesty International,

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2001; Hensley, 2002; Mariner, 2001). In fact, Congress is in the process of formulating and debating a bill referred to as the "Prison Rape Reduction Act of 2002." Prison sex researchers have made valuable advances into the study of inmate sexual assault and have issued calls for substantive changes in correctional policy since the 1960s.

For nearly four decades, a handful of researchers have engaged in prison sexual assault studies to provide administrators with knowledge about the incidence and dynamics of sexual assault in prison. These same individuals have prescribed various remedies and solutions for dealing with this important and critical issue. However, researchers typically have paid very little attention to correctional administrators' responses to these solutions. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine beliefs that wardens share regarding possible solutions for preventing inmate sexual assault.

MALE INMATE SEXUAL ASSAULT (1968–1995)

The actual extent of male inmate sexual assault was not revealed until Davis (1968) conducted the first empirical study within three facilities of the Philadelphia jail system. Relying upon interviews with 3,304 inmates and 570 custodial staff, reviews of prison records, and polygraphs of selected inmates and staff, Davis verified 156 incidents of sexual assault over a 26-month period. He believed this figure was a "conservative estimate" whose true number he calculated to be around 2,000 (p. 13). Of the more than 60,000 inmates who passed through the system during this period, 3.3% were sexually assaulted, two-thirds of which were completed rapes.

Lockwood (1978, 1980) examined six New York State prisons and found that 28% of the target sample ($n = 107$) had been victims of 152 incidents of sexual aggression. Gangs of inmates routinely circumvented institutional security measures and carried out these attacks. Lockwood identified characteristics of victims and aggressors in the hopes of properly placing inmates within the institution, especially in light of the severe physical and psychological consequences for targets. Proffering the use of protective custody for vulnerable inmates, he also emphasized the crucial role the correctional environment played in encouraging sexual aggression, especially "in dormitories, cottages and other indefensible spaces" (Lockwood, 1982, p. 25).

Wooden and Parker (1982) collected 200 completed anonymous questionnaires from a random sample of over 600 inmates in a medium-security California prison. Their results were disturbing. Up to 14% of the surveyed prisoners said they had been pressured into having oral or anal sex against their wills. Unless an inmate victim was removed im-

mediately from the general population, he would be marked forever as a "punk." Forced to comply with continued victimization or into a protective pairing arrangement with an older inmate ("hooking up"), the punk engaged in sex which was not fully consensual and often a form of sexual slavery.

Nacci and Kane (1983, 1984a, 1984b) conducted a two-part study of sexual assault by surveying 330 male inmates and 500 correctional officers from a stratified random sample of 17 federal prisons. They used a very narrow definition of sexual assault which included only incidents involving violence. The team reported that 29% of the population had been propositioned for sex and 11% were targets of sexual aggression. Nacci and Kane (1983) provided correctional administrators with vital paradigms to adopt in understanding why inmates participated in homosexual acts. Examining sexual assaults and prison aggression, they identified three social or interpersonal causes behind such violent acts. These aspects were described as systemic (poor supervision, untrained staff, and poor programming), group (homosexual activity, gang membership, drug trafficking, racial tensions, and gambling), and individual (personal social needs, impress peers, build reputation, and avoid exploitation).

MALE INMATE SEXUAL ASSAULT (1995–2002)

New evidence emerged about the incidence of sexual assault in America's prisons during the mid-1990s. One team of researchers examined 101 inmates from a therapeutic community in a Delaware prison and found that few inmates were affected by forced sexual contact (Saum, Surratt, Inciardi, & Bennett, 1995). They uncovered only five attempted and one completed rape. Saum et al. (1995) concluded that most sexual activity in prison was consensual and not rape. They also identified a wide range of factors (i.e., security level, number and type of inmates, single vs. multiple cells, and amount of free time) which "either facilitate or discourage sexual activity" (p. 429).

On the other hand, other investigators found widespread sexual abuse among a sample of 486 male and 42 female inmates in three Nebraska prisons (Struckman-Johnson, Struckman-Johnson, Rucker, Bumby, & Donaldson, 1996). Notably, this study was also the first to examine rates of female inmate sexual coercion. Struckman-Johnson et al. (1996, p. 70) reported that 22% ($n = 101$) of the male inmates and 7% ($n = 3$) of the female prisoners had been "pressured or forced to have sexual contact (touching of genitals, oral, anal or vaginal sex)" against their wills. A quarter of these incidents qualified as "gang

rapes." These results were confirmed by a separate survey of 714 correctional administrators, unit managers, security, and treatment staff.

In a larger follow-up study, Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson (2000a, 2000b) analyzed anonymous surveys of 1,799 male inmates and 475 staff from seven different prison facilities in four Midwestern states. They found that 21% of the inmates had experienced at least one episode of forced or pressured sexual contact during incarceration. Another 7% reported being raped in their current facility, with a wide variation of rates ranging from 4% to 21% among the institutions. Furthermore, 20% of the inmates in the larger prisons reported sexual coercion or assault by male and female staff members.

A more recent study involved face-to-face interviews with 174 inmates in three (one minimum, medium, and maximum security) male Oklahoma correctional facilities. Hensley, Tewksbury, and Castle (in press) revealed that 14% of the inmates were sexually threatened, but only 1% were sexually assaulted. Typical targets were white, single, had committed Type I offenses, and did not know their attackers.

FEMALE INMATE SEXUAL ASSAULT (1995–2002)

There have been several recent studies of coercive sex among female inmates. Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson (1999, 2000a) surveyed a sample of 263 inmates from three Midwestern prisons. They found varying rates of sexual coercion and rape in women's prisons, with a majority of incidents being perpetrated by female inmates. In some institutions, staff members were responsible for 20% to 50% of the offenses. The largest institution which also had a greater racial diversity, more barracks and dormitory-style housing, and inmates convicted of violent crimes exhibited the highest rate of coercion (19% versus 6% and 8% in the two smaller prisons).

Using an innovative approach, Alarid (2000) conducted a content analysis of letters from one female prisoner housed in at least five different units of one Southern prison over a five-year period. She found that sexual harassment and pressuring occurred more often than sexual assaults and generally went unreported. Women who engaged in homosexual liaisons were most vulnerable to sexual coercion. Rape occurred less often, but when it did, victims were more likely to be victimized by multiple perpetrators.

Hensley, Castle, and Tewksbury (in press) returned to a more traditional means of data collection in the most recent study of sexual coercion in female correctional facilities. They administered surveys to 245 female inmates in one female southern correctional facility. Almost 5% of the inmates reported incidents of sexual coercion, while 2%

admitted to perpetrating incidents of sexual coercion against other inmates. Compared to the three previous studies on sexual coercion in female prisons, the sexual assault rate at this location was relatively low.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Although disparity exists in the rates of sexually coerced inmates, researchers have provided correctional administrators with a number of possible remedies and solutions to combat this problem. Early prison sex researchers articulated such critical reforms as more work opportunities for inmates, reducing prison overcrowding, providing adequate classification systems, and using improved surveillance (Carroll, 1977; Fuller & Orsagh, 1977; Ibrahim, 1974; Jones, 1976; Scacco, 1975, Weiss & Friar, 1974). Subsequent researchers refined these suggestions.

Bowker (1980) outlined a series of solutions that relied heavily on scientific management principles. He advised that better data collection and resource deployment, enhanced security, and improved classification could help manage the problem more effectively. In a follow-up analysis, Bowker (1982) explored a set of assumptions about prison violence and recommended what he considered to be the five most promising management strategies for correctional managers to implement. They included minor structural modifications, classifying inmates by their victimization potential, increasing security and staffing, better unit management, and decreasing incarceration rates. Wooden and Parker (1982) tracked this line of thinking when they prescribed heightened security, more staff training, improved screening, better placement, and segregation of vulnerable inmates in the appropriate security level.

Nacci and Kane (1984a, 1984b) also felt that correctional staff should receive comprehensive training about both the dynamics of prison sexuality and the profiles of targets, participants, and aggressors. In addition, centralized data collection about sexual assaults, organized by motives, was encouraged to help managers identify actual incidence rates and plan effective countermeasures. Furthermore, Nacci and Kane (1984a, 1984b) proposed improvements in prison architecture, surveillance, accreditation, information-sharing, inmate risk-assessment, better investigative procedures, and forensic evidence collection procedures.

Despite these recommendations, Tewksbury and West (2000, p. 377) reported that the scant research from the late 1980s and early 1990s offered few concrete solutions and "failed to adequately address the policy (and theoretical) needs of corrections." Vital remedies, however, would emerge. Dumond, for example, (1992) provided a compre-

hensive, yet concise, examination of this behavior which included a discussion of the institutional hierarchy and epidemiology of prison sexual assault. He recommended six strategies for administrators to adopt. They were accurate identification of the incidence of prisoner sexual assault, implementation of comprehensive crisis intervention, provision of long-term strategies for victims, on-going correctional staff training, mandatory reporting of inmate sexual assaults, and swift prosecution of offenders.

Alarid (2000), along with Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson (1999, 2000a), contended that prison managers could initiate concrete steps to reduce inmate sexual coercion. Promising strategies included the use of single cells, better inmate classification, separating vulnerable inmates, punishing sexual predators, increasing staff supervision of problem areas like showers and bathrooms, and more human and video surveillance during critical time periods such as meals and sleep periods, training staff to recognize and respond to coercive situations, and forbidding sexual contact between staff and inmates.

ADMINISTRATIVE RESPONSES

Research on responses to inmate sexual assault has been scant over the past four decades. During the 1960s and 1970s, researchers often made allegations without any corroborating data that correctional administrators and staff members were ignoring inmate sexual assault. For example, Sagarin and MacNamara (1975, p. 21) argued that "prison rapes cannot occur without the connivance or at least deliberate inattention of prison authorities." Unlike previous researchers, Lockwood (1978, 1980) contended that correctional staff knew about sexual violence and worked diligently to control it. However, these efforts were thwarted by a combination of sexually aggressive inmates, overcrowded conditions, program needs requiring inmates to intermingle, and legal limitations. Wooden and Parker (1982), however, denounced correctional administrators and staff for their apathetic attitudes and neglectful behaviors.

More recent research by Eigenberg (1989, 1994, 2000a, 2000b) has found that correctional officers' responses to inmate sexual assault is a complex issue and can vary by situation. Eigenberg (1989), a former Bureau of Prisons staff member, examined correctional officers' attitudes about prison rape in Texas. She found that 87% of the surveyed officers ($n = 166$) believed that rape in prison was not rare and that 73% felt that inmates did not report such assaults to prison officials. Along with these findings, Eigenberg noted much variability in the willingness to respond to such incidents. About half the officers engaged in

victim-blaming. Eigenberg (1989) concluded that staff attitudes influenced both victim willingness to report and the effectiveness of officer intervention.

In a continuing series of studies, Eigenberg (1994, 2000a, 2000b) found that correctional staff were less likely to respond to homosexual or consensual incidents. At times, it can be difficult to distinguish consensual from coercive acts. As a remedy, she argued that staff training should emphasize vigorous enforcement of existing disciplinary codes about prison sex. She also recommended more compassionate, yet professional, communication with sexual assault victims. The overall goal of correctional administrators and staff should be a more collective effort to not only enact measurements of prevention, but to realize that sexual coercion does occur in every institution.

THE CURRENT STUDY

As the previous literature review indicates, prison sex researchers have had more success examining inmate responses than dissecting administrative reactions. Correctional administrators, especially those with authority to develop and implement policy, are critical players in the daily lives of prison inmates. Wardens have the capability to influence the structure, culture, and activities within their institutions. At the same time, these prison authorities are subject to a number of official and unofficial influences. For example, legislation, case law, and policy decisions made at higher political levels form part of the constellation of influences. What is not fully understood at this time is what unofficial influences (personal and socially constructed attitudes, perceptions, and values) interact with official influences to guide the policy decisions for institutional management.

Understanding the attitudes, values, and beliefs of wardens concerning a particular aspect of institutional operations and management is the focus of the present research. More specifically, the present study examines the perspectives that prison wardens have about sexual assaults with a special emphasis on identifying what factors affect their beliefs that institutional policies and procedures, staff training, and increased supervision play a role in preventing sexual assaults between inmates.

METHODOLOGY

Subjects

Data for the present study come from anonymous surveys distributed in August 2001 to 441 state prison wardens from around the coun-

try. Half the male facilities in each state were randomly selected for sample inclusion. All the wardens of women's prisons ($n = 62$) were surveyed because of the relatively small number of female prisons. Federal correctional facilities, privately operated correctional facilities, pre-release centers, and juvenile detention facilities were excluded from the study. The sample was drawn from the American Correctional Association's (2000) directory which listed the addresses and contact persons for each institution. Five states (Delaware, Illinois, Massachusetts, New York, and Pennsylvania) refused to participate in the study.

Each warden received a questionnaire, along with a cover letter and a stamped, self-addressed return envelope. The cover letter described the research project and provided instructions. Respondents were not required to sign an informed consent since they represent public officials. Additional steps to increase the response rate included mailing reminder cards and duplicate surveys. A total of 226 officials from the original sample of 441 wardens replied, yielding a 51.2% response rate.

According to the American Correctional Association's (2000) directory, approximately 80% of all state adult facilities were managed by male wardens. The sample respondents were 83% male. In addition, approximately 73% of all state wardens were white, 21% were African American, and 6% were classified as other. By way of comparison, 77% of the sample respondents were white, 18% were African American, and 5% fell into the other category. Thus, the sample appears to be representative of the population in terms of gender and race.

Measures

Wardens were asked three questions with respect to sexual assaults among inmates. The first question inquired "How effective do you believe institutional policies and procedures can be in preventing sexual assaults between inmates?" A second item asked, "How effective do you believe staff training can be in preventing sexual assaults between inmates?" The final question was "How effective do you believe increased/enhanced supervision by staff can be in preventing sexual assaults between inmates?" Each question was coded on a ten-point scale where a score of one meant "not at all effective" and a value of ten equalled "completely effective." These items served as dependent variables.

Demographic characteristics (gender and race) were recorded for the study group. Data were also collected on each warden's educational background and the number of months as a warden. Other items reflected the sexual assault rate of the institution (number of officially

reported sexual assaults divided by the number of current inmates times 100), percentage of inmate sexual assaults known by the warden, and whether the facility was a male or female institution. Wardens were asked to estimate the percentage of inmates having sex against their wills and the percentage of inmates having consensual sex. Other items reflected whether the facility had a conjugal visitation program, size of the inmate population, the ratio of inmates to correctional staff, and whether the institution was holding more inmates than its official capacity.

RESULTS

For descriptive purposes, the 10-point scales were collapsed into the three categories of "completely effective" (8-10 on the scale), "somewhat effective" (4-7 on the scale), and "not at all effective" (1-3 on the scale). A majority of wardens (53.5%) believe that institutional policies and procedures are somewhat effective in preventing sexual assaults between inmates. Only 6.7% of the responding wardens feel that institutional policies and procedures are completely ineffective. Slightly more than half of the wardens (51.3%) assert that staff training can be completely effective in preventing inmate sexual assaults. Only 4.9% of the respondents mark staff training as "not at all effective." Finally, 74.4% of the wardens feel that increased staff supervision by staff is a completely effective prevention tool while only 1.2% marked the "not at all effective" scale points.

Correlational coefficients among the dependent variables indicate that the three items are adequately independent of one another, thus justifying the need to examine all three separately. Even where significant differences do emerge, the magnitude of these relationships are only moderate. The strongest correlation exists between staff training and policies and procedures ($r = .59$). Moderate correlations are also found between policies and procedures and supervision by staff, as well as between staff training and supervision by staff ($r = .42$ and $.43$, respectively).

Table 1 presents the zero-order relationships between the independent and dependent variables. The most salient variable is wardens' estimate as to the proportion of inmates who were forced to have sex against their wills. In other words, as the perception of nonconsensual sex drops, wardens are more likely to believe that institutional policies and procedures, staff training, and increased supervision prevent inmate sexual assault. Additionally, as the perception of consensual sex declines, the belief in the efficacy of staff supervision rises. Finally,

non-white wardens are more likely to think that increased supervision prevents sexual assaults.

TABLE 1
Zero-Order Correlations Between Independent and Dependent Variables ($n = 215$)

Variable	Policies & Procedures	Staff Training	Increased Supervision
Gender	.05	.06	-.02
Race	.07	.04	.16*
Education	-.04	-.10	-.05
Months as Warden	.09	.04	.05
Sexual Assault Rate	-.06	.01	.07
Assaults Warden Knew	.08	.13	.09
Sex of Institution	.00	-.02	-.09
% Forced Sex	-.16*	-.15*	-.15*
% Consensual Sex	-.11	-.12	-.15*
Conjugal Visitation	-.00	-.07	.01
Number of Inmates	-.05	-.10	-.09
Inmate-to-Staff Ratio	-.08	-.03	-.11
Overcrowded Facility	.01	-.03	-.02

* Denotes statistical significance at the .05 level.

Coding: Gender (0 = Female, 1 = Male); Race (0 = White, 1 = Other); Education (0 = Less than a Four-Year Degree, 1 = Four-Year Degree, 2 = Graduate Work); Sex of Institution (0 = Male, 1 = Female); Conjugal Visitation Program (0 = No, 1 = Yes); Overcrowded Facility (0 = No, 1 = Yes).

While intercorrelations between the independent variables are not presented here to save space, most coefficients are not significantly related to each other. The strongest correlation exists between the percentage of inmates having consensual sex and sex of institution ($r = .56$). No multicollinearity exists between the independent variables.

Because the dependent variables are normally distributed, a series of multiple regression analyses are performed. The only statistically significant variables in the models are race, education, percent sexually assaults the warden knew about, and percent inmates having consensual sex. In the first equation, wardens increasingly point to policies and procedures as having an impact as the perceived amount of consensual sex decreases. Two significant predictors emerge in the second model. The less educated wardens and wardens who are more aware of incidents in their institutions are more likely to think that staff training prevents inmate sexual assaults. Finally, non-white wardens tend to believe that increased supervision would prevent sexual assaults. In all

three instances, the models explain between 10% and 13% of the total variance.

TABLE 2
OLS Regression Summaries ($n = 215$)

Variable	Policies & Procedures			Staff Training			Increased Supervision		
	<i>b</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	β	<i>b</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	β	<i>b</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	β
Gender	.63	.43	.14	.40	.39	.10	-.06	.32	-.01
Race	.49	.33	.12	.32	.29	.09	.62	.25	.20*
Education	-.24	.18	-.11	-.33	.16	-.17*	-.07	.13	-.04
Months as Warden	.00	.00	.06	.00	.00	.02	.00	.00	.02
Sexual Assault Rate	.99	1.11	.09	.95	.99	.09	.76	.83	.09
Assaults Warden Knew	.01	.00	.13	.00	.00	.17*	.00	.00	.11
Sex of Institution	.47	.50	.10	.14	.44	.03	-.44	.37	-.12
% Forced Sex	-.02	.03	-.07	-.04	.03	-.14	-.04	.02	-.19
% Consensual Sex	-.02	.01	-.23*	.00	.01	-.11	.00	.01	-.08
Conjugal Visitation	.50	.62	.08	.07	.56	.01	.47	.47	.10
Number of Inmates	.00	.00	-.09	.00	.00	-.06	.00	.00	-.13
Inmate-to-Staff Ratio	.00	.01	.02	.00	.01	.01	.00	.01	-.10
Overcrowded Facility	-.06	.28	-.02	-.28	.25	-.09	-.22	.21	-.08
Constant		6.40			7.24			8.55	
R^2		.32			.33			.37	
Adjusted R^2		.11			.11			.13	

* Denotes statistical significance at the .05 level.

DISCUSSION

Prison wardens believe that institutional policies and procedures, staff training, and increased staff supervision are effective means of preventing sexual assaults between inmates. Furthermore, the endorsement of these administrative responses as suitable mechanisms to alleviate or control inmate sexual assaults has several implications. First, it is interesting to note that early research suggested that sexual assaults in prisons were racially motivated and typically involved African-American aggressors and white victims (Carroll, 1977; Hensley, Tewksbury, and Castle, in press; Toch, 1977). This "fact" has clearly influenced the thinking and "knowledge" of white wardens. White wardens are significantly less likely than their non-white counterparts to believe that increased levels of supervision will deter sexual assaults among inmates successfully.

Second, wardens who believe that they are more aware of the sexual assault incidents that occur in their institutions are more likely to see additional and enhanced staff training as effective deterrents. Wardens who believe that effective channels already exist about what tran-

spires among inmates also think that providing further training to their staff would enhance the ability to head off sexual assault incidents. These wardens place a premium on the value of information to stem this problem.

Third, wardens who believe that consensual sex among inmates is not a common occurrence in their institutions are more likely to believe that rules discourage and deter sexual assaults. Again, this is to be expected. If wardens believe their current policies are keeping consensual sex rates down, it makes sense that they would also subscribe to the notion that policies and procedures could control other problematic behaviors, including sexual assaults.

Finally, the largest disappointment with the present study is that the independent variables specifically chosen to reflect warden traits, institutional characteristics, and warden perceptions explain so little of the variation in what wardens think effectively deters sexual assaults among inmates. In short, the variables included in this analysis do not provide much information about why wardens possess varying attitudes and beliefs. It appears that the "true explanation" for the variations in their beliefs regarding these three possible solutions lies elsewhere. Perhaps one should turn to other warden characteristics such as political affiliations, philosophical beliefs, the content of formal education, personal values and experiences, professional values and experiences and other considerations to achieve a more definitive understanding. Advocates seeking to implement possible responses or solutions might be advised to look elsewhere for clues about which wardens are more or less likely to support these actions.

CONCLUSION

Despite nearly 40 years of well-documented evidence and specific preventative strategies, "U.S. correctional officials have manifested either ignorance, misunderstanding, or more alarmingly, deliberate indifference" (Dumond & Dumond, 2002, p. 90) about the crisis of inmate sexual assault. In the first national study of inmate sexual assault, Mariner (2001) learned that most correctional authorities deny that such a problem exists. Furthermore, Mariner (2001) found that only 23 corrections departments maintain distinct statistical information on inmate sexual assault. Yet, those data appear faulty. None of the states reported incidence data that were consistent with the estimates that Struckman-Johnson constructed from the large sample surveys of mid-western prisons she and her colleagues conducted (Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1999, 2000a, 2000b; Struckman-Johnson et al., 1996). Even more disturbing, Mariner (2001) found that only six state

correctional departments and the Bureau of Prisons provided specialized training in the area of inmate sexual assault.

One Federal Bureau of Prisons (1997) publication provides a succinct template for correctional managers. In addition, Hensley's (2002) *Prison Sex: Practice and Policy* has culled an interdisciplinary team to provide administrators with the most recent data to address the many complex issues about inmate sexual assault. Faced with inaction by the majority of correctional departments, a bi-partisan coalition in both houses of Congress has introduced the "Prison Rape Reduction Act of 2002" to identify the incidence of the prisoner sexual assault, establish a preventative and prosecution program, and develop national standards for training correctional staff and intervening with victims (Stop Prisoner Rape, 2002). It appears that correctional administrators finally may be compelled to respond to this cancer which they have been ignoring.

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