

## Sexual Coercion Reported by Men and Women in Prison

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*An anonymous survey of 1,800 men and women in a Midwestern state prison system revealed that 104 of 516 respondents (20%) had been pressured or forced at least once to have sexual contact against their will while incarcerated. Supporting the validity of this finding, a sample of staff estimated that the sexual coercion rate was 15%. The reported incident rate was 22% for male and 7% for female respondents. Based upon descriptions of worst case incidents, at least 50% of sexual targets had been forced to have intercourse (anal, vaginal, or oral), with one fourth of the cases qualifying as gang rape. Another 10% of targets were subjected to an attempt at forced intercourse. One fourth of targets reported less severe cases of forced and pressured sexual touching. Prison staff were reported as perpetrators in 18% of the incidents. Most targets rated the immediate and long-term effects of the incident as very negative. One half of the targets did not tell anyone about the incident, and only 29% reported the incident to prison authorities. We encourage social scientists to conduct research on prison sexual coercion to aid in treatment of victims, HIV management, and development of prevention strategies.*

Sexual coercion of prison inmates is a subject largely ignored by both society and scientists. In 1934, Joseph Fishman, a former inspector of federal prisons, noted that every year large numbers of boys, adolescent youths, and young men are "made homosexual, either temporarily or permanently" by relentless perpetrators in U.S. prisons. In the preface to his book, Fishman wrote, "We are living in a frank and realistic age, yet the subject of sex in prison—so provocative, so vital, so timely . . . is shrouded in dread silence" (p. 5). The silence has largely prevailed throughout the century. According to a review by Dumond (1992), there have been fewer than a dozen studies conducted on inmate sexual assault in U.S. prisons.

This absence of research is conspicuous in the social sciences and sexology. Although researchers in these fields have conducted hundreds of studies on the sexual coercion of women and children in community settings, few have focused on incidents involving adolescents and

adults in prisons. For example, a special issue of the *Journal of Social Issues* on the topic of adult sexual assault (White & Sorenson, 1992) did not include research on adults assaulted in prison settings. A recent review article on trends in rape research in the *Annual Review of Sex Research* (Muehlenhard, Harney, & Jones, 1992) had no discussion of prison sexual assault. We found that the chapters on sexual coercion in 10 human sexuality textbooks published from 1992-1995 had an average of only two paragraphs on inmate victims.

There are many reasons why social scientists have not studied prison sexual coercion. Lack of awareness of the problem may be the primary cause. Because prison rape happens in controlled institutional settings, official information about sexual assaults is tightly contained. Surprisingly, even the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics (Snell, 1993) does not assess or report on the incidence of sexual assault in prisons. Academic researchers who

try to obtain this information may meet resistance from prison administrators (French, 1979; Ibrahim, 1974).

Another reason for the limited research may be social scientists'

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misperceptions about the nature of sexual coercion in prisons. Cotton and Groth (1982) have written that the myths that surround prison rape have led people to dismiss it as consensual activity. Many people have difficulty understanding how a heterosexual man can be forced to participate in sexual acts against his will. Consequently, they may wrongly assume that forced sex in prison is a homosexual activity, victims have in some way given their consent to participate, and the consequences of assault are not substantial.

It is also possible that researchers have avoided this topic because of prejudice against inmate victims (Ibrahim, 1974). Perhaps social scientists share a public opinion that inmates who have been sexually assaulted are not "true" rape victims. To the credit of years of rape-awareness education, individuals who are raped in community settings are generally viewed by the public as undeserving victims of circumstance. In contrast, incarcerated inmates who are raped may be perceived as deserving of their fate because of the crimes they have committed against society. Although this stance may sound harsh, a recent poll of 400 registered voters in Massachusetts revealed that 50% agreed that society in general accepts prison rape as part of the price criminals pay for wrongdoing (Sennott, 1994).

As a consequence of the lack of research, conclusive data on the prevalence of prison assault are unavailable (Dumond, 1992). In one of the earliest studies conducted in the 1960s, Davis (1982) estimated that approximately 2,000 of 60,000 men (3%) in Philadelphia jails were sexually assaulted each year. Two thirds of the reported incidents were described as completed rapes. After interviewing more than 3,000 inmates, Davis concluded that few young, slightly-built prisoners could escape the "epidemic" of sexual assault in city jails.

A more conservative picture was drawn by Lockwood (1980, 1994), who found that although 28% of 89 inmates interviewed in a New York state prison had been the target of sexual aggression, only one inmate (1.3%) said he was raped. Also reporting low rates, Nacci and Kane (1983) estimated that 2% of 330 inmates in federal prisons had someone force or attempt to force them to have sex against their will (with battery). Only .3% reported a completed rape.

The only other comprehensive survey was conducted by Wooden and Parker (1982) in a medium security prison in California. In contrast to low rates documented in other studies, these authors found that 14% of a randomly selected sample of 200 inmates reported in an anonymous survey that they had been pressured into having sex against their will. The rate was 41% for homosexuals, 2% for bisexuals, and 9% for heterosexuals.

Eigenberg (1994) contended that the prison rape rates found in these major studies may be low estimates of the actual behavior. In her opinion, the stigma of being raped and reporting rape (being a "snitch") causes inmates to underreport rape to researchers. However, even the most conservative estimates of prisoner sexual assault rates translate into a high number of victims among inmate populations nationwide. According to extrapolated estimates made by Donaldson (1993), more than 100,000 persons in prisons and more than 250,000 persons in jails are sexually victimized each year.

The current study was undertaken to gain information about prison sexual coercion that would be relevant for the 1990s. As researchers representing psychology, sexology, and criminal justice, we intended that our results be used by professionals in all areas to increase understanding of this problem. In spring 1994, we were given access to the total inmate population of a state prison system. Given

that previous research has shown conflicting rates of prison sexual coercion, our major goal was to estimate the percentage of inmates who had been pressured or forced to have sexual contact against their will while incarcerated.

Our second purpose was to document the dynamics of sexually coercive incidents. We wanted to find out what types of persons perpetrated the contact, how the contact was made, and what level of sexual activity resulted. Other goals were to assess inmates' emotional reactions to sexual coercion and to determine whether inmates officially reported incidents. Our final purpose was to assess inmate and staff opinions on how to prevent sexual coercion in prison.

Our research plan had two unique features. First, we planned to contrast the sexual coercion rates of male and female inmate populations. To our knowledge, our study would produce the first public data on sexual coercion among adult women in a prison setting. Second, we planned to survey prison staff on their perceptions of the level of coercive sexual activity in the prison. These estimates potentially would serve as a source of validation for sexual coercion rates reported by inmates.

## Method

Most prior research on sexual coercion in prisons is based upon personal interviews, a method that can easily result in underreporting this sensitive behavior. We chose to distribute anonymous surveys to the total prison population and a sample of staff, with replies to be returned by mail. The disadvantage of this method is that, as outsiders, we were restricted in our strategies to obtain the participation of inmates. The great advantage of the method is that it protected the confidentiality of the respondents and allowed anonymous and potentially more accurate reporting of sexual victimization (Eigenberg, 1994).

### Respondents

The total inmate population consisted of 1,801 persons (1,708 men and 93 women) housed in two men's maximum security facilities (A,  $n = 785$  and B,  $n = 467$ ), one men's minimum security facility ( $n = 456$ ), and one women's facility ( $n = 93$ ) in the state prison system of a rural Midwestern state in spring 1994.

The total staff sample consisted of 714 persons working at the four facilities (maximum security A,  $n = 318$ ; maximum security B,  $n = 185$ ; men's minimum security,  $n = 151$ ; women's facility,  $n = 60$ ). The staff sample constituted 48% of 1,496 persons employed at the four facilities. The sample included almost all persons from the occupations of administration, security, and treatment and excluded those in food service, clerical, business, and facilities-management positions.

### Measures

*Inmate survey.* Attached to the survey was an informed consent form that reviewed the purpose, contents, and anonymous nature of the survey. The first survey section assessed demographic information and criminal history. This was followed by the Prison Environment Inventory (Wright, 1985), a 48-item scale that measures perceptions of the rules, safety, support, and personal freedom of the prison environment.

To assess sexual coercion, we adopted Sorenson, Stein, Siegel, Golding, and Burnam's (1987) strategy of assessing general information about overall coercion experience and specific information about one incident. This format was used effectively in our previous study of sexual coercion of college men (Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1994). The key question was "Since the time you have been in a Nebraska prison, has anyone every pressured or forced you to have sexual contact (touching of genitals, oral, anal, or vaginal sex) against your will?" Responses were

"Yes," "No," and "Not sure." The number of incidents and persons involved were then assessed.

To obtain *estimates* of the prevalence of sexual coercion, inmates were then asked "In the prison you are in now, about what percentage of inmates do you think have been pressured or forced to have sexual contact against their will? Circle your best guess." The choices were a row of percentages: 0%, 1%, 5%, 10%, and upward in increments of 10% to 100%. Inmates' prevention ideas were solicited with the free-response question, "What do you think are some good ways to prevent sexual assault in prisons?"

The final section was reserved for the most sensitive items, including sexual orientation. Inmates with sexual coercion experience were asked questions about one "worst case," incident—either the only one that happened or the one time that was most serious or harmful. Inmates first indicated the *number* and *gender* of perpetrator(s) and their *relationship* to the perpetrator(s) from a list of six alternatives (another inmate—stranger to you; another inmate—known to you; a person working at the prison; a person visiting the prison; "other").

*Tactics* were assessed by asking "What kind of pressure or force was used by this person to have sexual contact with you?" Respondents were to check "all that happened" from a list of alternatives that included five pressure tactics (persuasion—talked you into it; bribe; blackmail; threatened to withdraw their love for you; got you drunk or high) and five force tactics (threatened to harm or hurt you; scared you because they were bigger and stronger; physically held you down or restrained you; physically harmed you; used a weapon). A write-in "other" category was listed.

*Sexual outcome* was measured by the question "What kind of sexual acts did the person pressure or force you to do? Check all things that happened." Alternatives included attempts (tried to touch you but was prevented), gen-

ital touching (touched your genitals or sexual parts; made you touch his or her genitals or sexual parts), oral sex (engaged in oral sex—give head, fellatio), anal intercourse (anal sex—in the butt, sodomy), vaginal intercourse (engaged in vaginal sex), and "other." Inmates were then requested to describe in their words what happened.

To assess *emotional consequences*, inmates were asked "How much did the incident emotionally upset you at the time it happened?" The scale ranged from (1) It was not upsetting to (7) It was very upsetting. The item for long-term effects was "Has the incident had any lasting bad effects on you?" The scale ranged from (1) It has had no bad effect on me to (7) It has had a severe bad effect on me. Inmates were then asked "What kind of bad effects has the incident caused? Check all the bad effects that you have had." The first alternative was "no bad effects have occurred," followed by eight categories of emotional reactions (nervous around some people; don't like people getting physically close to me; don't trust people; worry about my reputation as a man/woman; worry that it will happen again; flashbacks/bad dreams; depression; thoughts of suicide). Alternatives of "have physical injuries" and "other" ended the list.

To assess *disclosure*, inmates were asked if they had told anyone about the incident and, if yes, to check alternatives for all types of persons told (another inmate; counselor/clergy; teacher; medical person; prison staff—not administrative; prison administrators; friends-family outside of the prison; "other").

*Staff survey.* The staff survey consisted of a consent form, a demographic page, the Prison Environment Inventory, and measures for estimates of the prevalence of sexual coercion and prevention ideas that were identical to those asked of inmates.

### Procedure

About 1,800 packets containing an explanatory note, an inmate survey,

and a pre-addressed, postage-paid return envelope were transported to prison mailrooms and distributed to all available inmates. One week later, inmates were issued a reminder card to complete the survey. Persons were encouraged to replace lost surveys with a new one from unit managers. The same procedures were used to prepare and distribute 714 staff surveys.

## Results

### Characteristics of the Samples

Surveys were returned by 528 inmates (486 men and 42 women). Allowing for an estimated 20 inmates who were in transit on the day of survey delivery, the return rate was 30%. As 12 returned surveys could not be used, the final sample size was 516. The number of usable surveys and return rates from each facility were 204 from men's maximum security A (27%), 164 from men's maximum security B (36%), 106 from men's minimum security (23%), and 42 from the women's facility (45%).

Table 1 presents a comparison of the distribution of inmates in the population and the return sample for key demographic characteristics. The two groups were similar for age, most severe crime, minimum sentences, and average time in prison. They differed in that Whites were overrepresented and Blacks were underrepresented in the return sample. Compared to the total prison population, the return sample had a greater proportion of inmates whose most severe crime type was against persons.

Surveys were returned by 264 staff (186 men and 78 women). Estimating that 10 staff members did not receive a survey, the return rate was 39%. The return rates were 34% for the three men's facilities (177 men and 48 women) and 62% for the women's facility (9 men and 30 women). Job assignments of responding staff were 6% administrative, 28% unit management, 53% security guards, 10% treatment, and 3% other. Staff had

Table 1

*Characteristics of the Prison Population, Return Sample, and Target Sample*

Characteristic	Total prison population <sup>a</sup> n = 1801	Return sample n = 516	Target sample n = 104
Age			
17-25	27%	22%	19%
26-36	40%	44%	51%
37-47	25%	25%	27%
48+	8%	9%	4%
Race			
White	56%	67%	78%
Black	34%	22%	18%
Native American	3%	4%	0%
Hispanic	7%	4%	2%
Orientation			
Heterosexual	—	86%	70%
Bisexual	—	11%	26%
Homosexual	—	3%	2%
Most severe crime type <sup>b</sup>			
Against persons	60%	70%	76%
Drug-related	11%	12%	7%
Against property	21%	14%	14%
Public order	5%	4%	3%
Most severe crime <sup>c</sup>			
Murder	14%	16%	17%
Sex offense	21%	24%	34%
Aggravated assault	7%	10%	12%
Robbery	12%	12%	11%
Drug related	11%	12%	10%
Minimum sentence-yr.			
0-5	50%	49%	40%
6-10	23%	22%	24%
11-20	13%	11%	13%
21-30	4%	5%	5%
31-60	2%	3%	3%
Life	8%	10%	15%
Average years in present facility	3.7	3.6	4.5

<sup>a</sup>Data on the prison population were obtained from Nebraska Department of Corrections records for May 1995.

<sup>b</sup>Respondents committing crimes in more than one category are counted only in the most severe category. Categories are presented from most to least severe.

<sup>c</sup>Respondents committing more than one listed crime are counted for only the most severe crime. Crimes are presented from most to least severe. Respondents who did not commit one of the listed crimes are not counted for this characteristic.

Table 2

*Comparison of Reported Sexual Coercion Rates to Rates Estimated by Inmates and Staff*

Facility	Reported rate	Respondent estimates	
		Inmates	Staff
Men's maximum security A	23%	19%	19%
Men's maximum security B	22%	26%	16%
Men's minimum security	16%	16%	11%
Women's facility	7%	3%	8%
All	20%	19%	15%

worked an average of six years at their currently assigned job.

#### *Estimated Rates of Pressured and Forced Sex*

On the average, inmates estimated that 19% of inmates in their facilities had been pressured or forced to have sexual contact. The average staff estimate was 15%. See Table 2 for a comparison of inmate and staff estimates for each facility.

#### *Reported Rates of Pressured and Forced Sex*

One hundred four inmates (20% of 516 responding inmates) answered "yes" to the sexual coercion question. These individuals (101 men and 3 women) are hereafter referred to as *targets* instead of *victims* because some were able to prevent sexual contact. See Table 2 for the reported percentage of targets for each facility. The actual rate for the men's minimum security facility may have been as low as 10% because several targets currently in this facility described worst case incidents that had occurred at maximum security facilities A and B. The incident rate for all male facilities combined was 22%.

#### *Targets and Descriptions of Worst Case Incidents*

Refer to Table 1 for a comparison of the demographic characteristics of the target and total return samples. Targets were slightly older and had a greater representation of Whites and bisexuals than did the total return sample. A greater percentage of the target sample had committed sex offenses as their most severe crime. We found that when sex offenders who committed murder were also considered, 38 of 104 targets (37%) had a sex offense conviction in their criminal history. The target sample also had somewhat longer minimum sentences and had been in prison longer than the total return sample.

Targets, on the average, had experienced nine episodes of pressured or forced sex. One third reported that it

Table 3

*Targets by Most Severe Sexual Outcome of Worst Case Sexual Coercion Incident*

	Targets			Total sample <i>n</i> = 516
	Men <i>n</i> = 101	Women <i>n</i> = 3	All targets <i>n</i> = 104	
Most severe act				
Attempt	14 (14%)	1 (33%)	15 (14%)	15 (3%)
Genital touching	14 (14%)	2 (67%)	16 (15%)	16 (3%)
Oral sex	8 (8%)	0 (0%)	8 (8%)	8 (2%)
Vaginal sex	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	1 (.2%)
Anal sex	51 (50%)	0 (0%)	51 (49%)	51 (10%)
Anal and vaginal sex	2 (2%)	0 (0%)	2 (2%)	2 (.4%)
Unknown	11 (11%)	0 (0%)	11 (11%)	11 (2%)

*Note:* Categories are mutually exclusive. Percentages are of column *n*.

had happened only once; 24% said 2-3 times; 14% said 4-5 times; 15% said 6-10 times; 4% said 11-20 times; 6% said 21-50 times; and 4% said 51-100 times. On the average, targets had experienced sexual coercion with four different persons.

*Sexual outcome.* Most targets reported that several sexual acts took place during the worst case incident. An analysis was conducted to classify targets by the most severe sexual act that occurred (Table 3). Of the 101 male targets, 52% were pressured or forced to engage in acts that included anal sex. Three men (3%) engaged in vaginal sex in incidents that involved female perpetrators (reportedly women working at the prison). The three female targets were pressured or forced to engage in less severe acts of genital touching or attempts at contact.

*Number of perpetrators.* Targets reported that, on the average, three perpetrators had participated in the worst case incident. For male targets, 50% said that only 1 perpetrator was involved, 30% said 2-3 persons, 10% said 4-5 persons, 6% said 6-10 persons, and 4% said 11-26 persons. For female targets, one incident involved a single perpetrator, and two incidents involved three to four perpetrators.

*Sex of perpetrator.* For worst case incidents, 93% of male targets reported male perpetrators, 2% reported female perpetrators, and 5% said that both men and women were perpetrators. One female target reported multiple male perpetrators, one reported

a single female perpetrator, and one reported multiple female perpetrators.

*Perpetrator relationship.* As shown in Table 4, more than half of the male targets reported that worst case incidents were perpetrated by other inmates, evenly divided between those known and unknown by the target. Many multiple perpetrator incidents involved both known and stranger inmates. An unexpected result was that 18% of the male targets reported that persons working at the prison had perpetrated the incident. Female targets (not included in the table because of the small sample size) reported that one incident involved an unknown inmate, one involved both known and unknown inmates, and one involved several persons working at the prison.

*Tactics.* Most targets reported that perpetrators used more than one tactic to obtain sexual contact in worst case incidents. An analysis revealed that 10% of targets were subjected only to one or more pressure tactics

Table 4

*Male Targets by Perpetrator Relationship in Worst Case Sexual Coercion Incident*

Relationship of perpetrator to target	Male targets <i>n</i> = 101
Known inmate	55 (54%)
Stranger inmate	53 (52%)
Prison staff	18 (18%)
"Other" person	5 (5%)
Prison visitor	2 (2%)
Unknown	7 (7%)

*Note:* Percentages add to more than 100 because many targets reported multiple perpetrators.

Table 5

*Male Targets by Tactics Used in Worst Case Sexual Coercion Incident*

Tactic used by perpetrator	Male targets n = 101
Threatened to harm or hurt you	61 (60%)
Scared by size/strength of perpetrator	50 (50%)
Persuasion—talked you into it	36 (36%)
Physically held down/restrained	33 (33%)
Physically harmed	30 (30%)
Used a weapon	26 (26%)
Got you drunk or high	20 (20%)
Bribe	13 (13%)
Blackmail	11 (11%)
Threatened to withdraw love	7 (7%)
“Other” tactics	7 (7%)
Unknown	8 (8%)

Note: Percentages add to more than 100 because many targets reported multiple tactics.

(persuasion, bribe, blackmail, threat to withdraw love, and use of alcohol/drugs) and not to force tactics. The great majority (75%) had at least one force tactic used against them (threat of harm, being scared by perpetrator size/strength, being physically held down, being physically harmed, and having a weapon present). The tactic was listed as “other” or unknown in 15% of the incidents.

Male targets (see Table 5) reported that threat of harm and physical intimidation were the most common tactics used against them. One third of male targets were physically restrained, and nearly

one third were harmed in the incident. Of female targets, one was intimidated by size and verbally pressured, one was threatened with harm, and one was physically held down and physically harmed.

*Dynamics.* Targets were classified by categories of worst case incidents based upon the relationship and number of perpetrators, tactics used, and sexual outcome. Descriptions provided by 72 inmates (69% of all targets) were used to clarify the events of the incident.

As shown in Table 6, more than one fourth of the male targets were forced to engage in a completed act of intercourse (anal, oral, or vaginal) by two or more perpetrators. Most incidents in this category could be described as a “gang rape” in which a target was physically overpowered by a sudden attack of his assailants. The following descriptions illustrate this type of incident. The original grammar and spelling are maintained.

I was put in K-unit in D & E, A black inmate wanted to talk to me by his room. As I approached his room, I was pushed in the back by some-one, I tried to fight but there was 3 or 4 of them. Some one stuck his dick in my butt and I got out of there and thought about killing myself for allowing something like that to happen to me.

Was attacked from behind & the side by 3 people. Got the hell beat out of me. Busted my head, 3 ribs, nose & a foot. Swollen eyes & a

busted up mouth. Then was held and sodomized twice, and left to lay there.

Two inmates came into my room and told me to give it up. When I refused they started hitting me. When I still refused they pulled a knife and threatened to kill me. They made me perform fellatio on one of them while the other sodomized me. Then they switched. Then one of them performed fellatio on me and told me if I told I would die. It happened a few times so I checked into protective custody.

Some men experienced an attempt at multiple perpetrator forced intercourse. They were either rescued by another inmate or staff or were able to fight off the assailant, as illustrated by the following description:

Several inmates came up to me in gym and told me they were going to fuck me in the ass, we all got into a fight, that happen twice, until they found out I would fight every time and they finally gave up, and went to someone that was weaker, but I still got written up for fighting even though I was defending myself from assault, pretty fuck up ha!

A small percentage of male targets were forced to give sexual services to multiple perpetrators. Targets yielded to intimidation and threats of harm from varying groups of perpetrators rather than an outright physical attack. An illustrative description is

The person told me that if I did not do what he wanted he would make life here bad for me. He made me

Table 6

*Male Targets by Dynamics of Worst Case Sexual Coercion Incident*

Type of act	Perpetrator type			Total n = 101
	Inmate n = 75	Staff n = 13	Inmate/Staff n = 5	
Multiple perpetrator forced intercourse—completed	27 (35%)	1 (8%)	1 (20%)	29 (29%)
Multiple perpetrator forced intercourse—attempted	6 (8%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	6 (6%)
Multiple perpetrator forced intercourse—sexual service	3 (4%)	0 (0%)	4 (80%)	7 (7%)
Single perpetrator forced intercourse—completed	15 (20%)	3 (23%)	0 (0%)	18 (18%)
Single perpetrator forced intercourse—attempted	4 (5%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (4%)
Multiple perpetrator forced sexual touch—completed	0 (0%)	3 (23%)	0 (0%)	3 (3%)
Single perpetrator forced or pressured sexual touch—attempted or completed	16 (21%)	5 (38%)	0 (0%)	21 (21%)
Single perpetrator pressured sexual intercourse—completed	4 (5%)	1 (8%)	0 (0%)	5 (5%)
Unknown relationship/strategy/outcome	—	—	—	8 (8%)

Note: Categories are mutually exclusive. Intercourse includes anal, vaginal, and oral sex.

suck on his penis and after doing this for about a week, he wanted more. He and his friends made me bend over the desk and they took turns going in me from the back. I wish something could be done. This has happened more than once for me.

About one fifth of the targets were forced to have completed intercourse with a single perpetrator. Most of these cases involved a cellmate, such as the following:

I had a roommate who told me he would kill me if I didn't let him have anal sex, He pinned me to his bed, and put all his weight on my legs with them in the air.

A small percentage of male targets were able to escape a single perpetrator's forceful attempt at intercourse, as illustrated by the following case, which happened to an elderly inmate in the prison infirmary:

He started slapping me around, tried to push his erect penis into my mouth. I bit it hard. That really pissed him off and also scared him.

Another small percentage of male targets were forced to engage in sexual touching by two or more perpetrators. Usually, the target would be held down and fondled or manually masturbated by the assailants. However, the most common sexual touch scenario—experienced by one fifth of male targets—involved being pursued by a single perpetrator who used persuasion and threats to demand sexual interaction. The perpetrator would often make a grab for the target's genitals. In most cases, the target prevented further contact by avoidance, refusals, defensive threats, and fighting. Examples are these:

He was always winking, blowing kisses and always trying to talk me into letting him give me a blow job. Until one day when he grabbed ahold of my penis and said I want you. Up until then I let it ride but after dinner that night I caught him by the tennis court where no guards could be and I smiled and said so you want me

and when he said yes I plant my foot upside his jaw and left him laying on the ground and that put a end to it.

He came in the shower (2-man shower) and reached for my genitals and I backed off and knocked his hand away from me. Then he said he wanted me to touch him and have oral and/or anal sex with me in the shower. I put my towel around me and told him didn't want him to even looking at me and if he tried this again I was going to knock him out. Later he told me he was going to tell staff what he thought he know about my crime and he was going to make some up and tell them I'm the one who done it, not him, if I said anything to staff.

A final small percentage of male targets were pressured—not forced—to have completed intercourse with a single perpetrator. Targets indicated that because of manipulation or being given alcohol and drugs, they engaged in sex with someone whom they initially resisted.

Eighteen male targets reported that persons working at the prison were perpetrators or coperpetrators in their incident. In at least two cases, a staff person joined with inmates to force an inmate to have intercourse. A more common scenario was one in which staff intimidated an inmate into sexual service. The following description is from a man exploited by both staff and inmates:

I'm scared easily and if I don't do what I'm told I usually get hurt! With the staff, they tell me if I don't do anything with them that they would make shit up to get me into trouble! And with the inmates it was force and nothing was said! They just did it! please help.

In a small number of cases, a single staff member used threats and intimidation to obtain intercourse with an inmate. An example is the following:

Once while I was sleeping at night a male guard told me the he wanted me to give him head until he got hard then told me that he wanted to screw me and if I didn't cooperate that I would get taken to

the hole and get a misconduct written on me and no one would believe me if I told.

In many cases, the targets were sexually fondled or masturbated by either a group of staff or a single staff person. One inmate indicated that he was verbally persuaded to have sexual intercourse with a female guard who followed him into the men's bathroom and told him what she wanted to do.

For female targets, two incidents were classified as "multiple perpetrator forced sexual touch—completed." One of these was perpetrated by several female inmates, and the other incident was perpetrated by several male staff. The third incident was classified as "single perpetrator forced or pressured sexual touch—attempted." Her description follows:

This woman kept trying to touch me. Telling me to get into shower with her naked. Said she was gonna come and join me in shower. As I was walking to my room she called me and exposed her private parts to me . . . She wanted me to be her 'woman' I said no.

*Emotional consequences.* The emotional impact of worst case incidents was extremely negative for most targeted inmates. On the average, targets gave a rating of 6.3 for the immediate impact of the incident on a scale where the maximum score of 7 reflected great upset. The endpoint 7 was marked by 77% of targets. The long-term effects of the incident received a mean rating of 5.5 on a scale where the maximum score of 7 indicated a severe bad effect. The endpoint 7 was marked by 54% of respondents. Male and female targets had similar scores on both scales.

More than three fourths of the targets experienced at least one negative effect from the incident. For male targets (see Table 7), the most frequently experienced problems were feelings of distrust, nervousness around people, and depression. Physical injuries were sustained in 16% of the cases. The most common write-in responses to the "other" category were racial

Table 7

*Male Targets by Consequences of Worst Case Sexual Coercion Incident*

Consequence of incident	Male targets <i>n</i> = 101
Distrusts people	67 (66%)
Nervousness around some people	65 (64%)
Do not like people getting physically close	59 (58%)
Depression	57 (56%)
Worried about it happening again	55 (54%)
Worried about reputation as man/woman	45 (45%)
Flashbacks/bad dreams	37 (37%)
Thoughts of suicide	36 (36%)
"Other" consequences	22 (22%)
Physical injuries	16 (16%)
No bad effects occurred	12 (12%)
Unknown	11 (11%)

Note: Percentages add to more than 100 because most targets reported multiple consequences.

prejudice and a desire to kill or take revenge upon the perpetrator(s). The three female targets all reported distrust and nervousness. Two worried about the incident happening again and had bad dreams and flashbacks. One suffered depression, but none reported thoughts of suicide. The female targets did not report physical injuries.

*Disclosure.* Half of the targets did not tell anyone about their worst case incident. Male targets who disclosed the incident were most likely to confide in friends and family outside the prison (23%) or another inmate (23%). Some male targets confided in counselors/clergy (18%) and medical staff (10%). An analysis revealed that only 29% of male targets told either an administrative or a non-administrative staff member working at the prison. One of the three female targets did not tell anyone. The other two women told prison administrators and family and friends outside of the prison. One also confided in medical staff and another inmate. According to written explanations of 17 inmates who had not told anyone, the major reasons were fear of harm from the perpetrators, poor treatment by staff, and shame and embarrassment.

*Prevention Ideas*

Ideas for ways to prevent prison sexual assault were provided by 423 inmates (83% of the return sample). Most inmates offered several solutions. Three raters and the first author developed categories for describing distinct prevention ideas. The three raters then calculated the frequency that each solution was mentioned. Male and female inmates were combined for this analysis. The same procedure was used to analyze answers received from 205 staff (78% of the return sample).

For inmates, the most frequently mentioned solution (*n* = 89) was to segregate vulnerable inmates (e.g., those who are young, non-violent, new in prison, White) from sexual predators. Other favored solutions were allowing conjugal visits (*n* = 70), teaching inmates how to avoid sexual assault (*n* = 36), and increasing staff and supervision (*n* = 31).

Most staff wrote that the best way to prevent prison sexual assault is to hire more staff and increase supervision (*n* = 79). Other favored ideas included screening and segregating vulnerable inmates from sexual predators (*n* = 57), use of single cells (*n* = 37), and increasing staff's communication and concern with inmates (*n* = 35).

**Discussion**

The major finding of the study was that 20% of inmates responding to our survey reported the experience of being pressured or forced into sexual contact in a state prison facility. The accuracy of the 20% incident rate must be considered in light of the 30% return rate of the survey. Was it possible that every inmate in the prison facilities who had experienced coercive sex returned their survey to us? If so, then the actual incident rate for 1,800 inmates was 6%. However, we believe that the 20% rate was reasonably accurate for several reasons.

First, the 22% and 23% rates of sexual coercion found for the two men's maximum security facilities

are reasonably close to the 28% "sexual aggression" rate reported by Lockwood (1980). In addition, the estimated rate of anal/vaginal/oral intercourse in our study (12%) is close to the 14% sexual assault rate documented by Wooden and Parker (1982).

Second, the nearly identical rates found in two separate maximum security facilities serve as a replication of each other. As further evidence, the *estimates* of incident rates from both staff and all responding inmates in each facility were close to the *reported* incidents for that facility. This finding suggests that staff and non-target inmates had a general awareness of the level of non-consensual sexual activity in each facility.

Finally, we think that it was a difficult, risky decision for targeted inmates to return a survey to us. We concur with Eigenberg (1994) that it is not easy for inmates, especially men, to tell unknown strangers about an event as personal and traumatic as forced sex. In fact, half of the targets said they had not told anyone about being sexually coerced until they took our survey. Many targeted inmates informed us in returned surveys that they were very worried about being "found out" by other inmates or prison officials. We were also told that some inmates suspected that we were prison officials masquerading as researchers. Therefore, we believe it is likely that many persons who had been sexually coerced in prison did not return a survey to us and that our results are not an overestimate of sexual coercion.

An important finding of the study is that the incident rate of coerced sex was 22% for male inmates and 7% for female inmates. The lower rate for female inmates may have reflected the smaller, more manageable size of the women's facility and the greater proportion of non-violent offenders. Another possible explanation is that women are reportedly less likely than men to initiate sexually coercive acts (Struckman-Johnson, 1988). In

general, our study suggests that the rate of sexual coercion among women in prison is moderately low.

The major accomplishment of the study was the documentation of the dynamics of the worst case incidents reported by targeted inmates. Our findings indicated that one half of the targets had been forced to have intercourse, with about one fourth of all incidents qualifying as "gang rape." Another 10% of the targets reported an attempt at forced intercourse. One fourth of the targets were subjected to less severe acts of forced and pressured sexual touching.

Two thirds of the targets had experienced other incidents in addition to their worst case incident. Overall, targets reported an average of nine incidents (with three incidents as the median). In fact, several inmates gave written descriptions of two or three worst case incidents that they considered equally harmful.

An unexpected finding was that persons working at the prison were reportedly involved in 18% of the incidents. We had a confirmation of some staff involvement from a female guard who contacted us privately and said that she had participated in sex with numerous male prisoners. Our study suggests that some persons working in prisons use their position of authority to gain sexual contact with inmates.

Another important finding of the study is that a majority of targeted inmates reported profound negative effects as a consequence of sexual coercion. Nearly 80% of targets reported significant emotional reactions following the incident, including half who experienced depression and one third who had thoughts of suicide. These data confirmed those of earlier researchers who documented symptoms of rape trauma syndrome among sexually assaulted inmates (Cotton & Groth, 1982; Lockwood, 1980; Peeples & Scacco, 1982).

In retrospect, our measures for the consequences of sexual coercion in prison were somewhat inadequate.

The items could not capture the intensity or the breadth of inmates' reactions. For example, many targets "extended" the seven-point scales by adding numbers, stars, and symbols to express a higher degree of upset. They added emotional reactions to our short list, such as a hatred, prejudice, and a desire for revenge. In future research, we recommend using a standardized scale to measure levels of depression and anxiety. A greater range of consequences should be assessed, such as attempts at suicide and medical problems related to injuries and transmission of STDs and AIDS.

A final important finding of the study was targeted inmates' low rate of disclosure about sexually coercive incidents. Only one half said that they had told anyone about the incident, and only 29% had informed prison officials. This fear of disclosure is a major barrier to efforts to identify, treat, and protect persons who have been sexually victimized in prison.

Our study has provided much needed information about pressured and forced sexual experiences of male and female inmates in a state prison system in the mid-1990s. The generality of our findings, however, may be limited in that we studied a relatively small, well-managed prison in a rural, sparsely populated state. The incidence of nonconsensual activity may be higher in prison systems with larger, more crowded inmate populations with greater ethnic diversity and conflict.

We believe that the topic of coercive sex in prison should be opened for research by social scientists and sexologists. Considering that nearly half a million men and women are admitted to and released from prison each year (Snell, 1993) and that 10 million pass through the nation's local jails (Perkins, Stephan, & Beck, 1995), prison sexual coercion is a social problem, not just a corrections issue. Three areas merit attention:

*Treatment of victims.* Research is needed on effective medical and men-

tal health-treatment models for victims. To date, there is only one rape trauma treatment program developed specifically for inmate victims (Donaldson, 1993). This information is needed not only by prison medical and counseling staff but by community professionals, as well. For example, Lipscomb, Muram, Speck, and Mercer (1992) reported that 80 of 119 male adult victims treated at a community sexual assault clinic over a three-year period were incarcerated inmates transported from the local prison. Substantial numbers of victims released from prison would benefit from follow-up care in community mental health facilities. The long-term consequences of rape trauma syndrome in released inmates—including potentially violent behavior—have yet to be evaluated (Donaldson, 1993).

*HIV management.* According to prison sexual assault expert Fay Honey Knopp (Donaldson, 1993), men who are forced into anal sex in prison are at increasing risk to AIDS. In 1993, it was estimated that 2.4% of inmates in federal and state prisons had HIV (Brien & Harlow, 1995). According to an unpublished study by the Centers for Disease Control, seven inmates (.03%) in an Illinois state prison acquired AIDS while confined ("Breaking the Silence," 1995). In what may be the first of many cases, several inmates in 1995 sued states because they acquired AIDS as a consequence of prison rapes ("Breaking the Silence," 1995).

Research on strategies for HIV management in prison settings may save the lives of inmates, as well as reduce the number of infected persons released from prison who can potentially spread AIDS to the general population. Social scientists could also work to change current prison policies that prevent implementation of practical solutions such as distributions of condoms. Illustrating this dilemma, psychologist Mary E. Craig Shea (personal communication, September 9, 1995)

reported that she once worked in a corrections mental health unit where two young men were frequently targeted for sexual assault. One of the victims was a known HIV patient, and the other had infectious TB. When staff requested that condoms be made available to inmates to prevent the spread of diseases, the officials refused. Providing condoms, they explained, would be condoning sodomy—an illegal sexual activity in prison.

**Prevention.** Although several prevention models are available in the literature (e.g., Cotton & Groth, 1982), there is little information on which solutions would work best. For example, we found that most staff preferred “management” solutions such as increasing staff and supervision. Many inmates, believing that the problem is related to sexual deprivation, favored conjugal visits. By studying the underlying dynamics of prison sexuality, social scientists and sexologists could provide invaluable guidance for the development of appropriate prevention policies.

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