

REDUCING SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN JAILS

An Action-Research Partnership with Three Jails

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THE PROBLEM

- Recent BJS study shows 3.2% of jail inmates report being sexually victimized
 - Includes unwanted sexual contact from other inmates and both willing and unwilling sexual activity with correctional staff
- Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA)
- Jails are different than prisons

PROJECT BACKGROUND

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- Purpose: To work with jail administrators at 3 sites to develop, implement, and evaluate strategies for reducing sexual violence
- “Action research” partnership
- Applies a situational crime prevention approach to reducing sexual violence
- Explores related acts of physical violence and suicide/self harm

RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

- Collect data on violence in the facilities
 - Site observation tours, staff interviews, inmate interviews, analysis of incident data
- Synthesize findings and develop recommendations for reducing violence
- Select and implement interventions
- Conduct a process and impact evaluation of the interventions
 - Pre and post inmate surveys, incident data analysis, cost-benefit analysis

STUDY SITES

- Site 1:
 - 2600 male and female inmates, mostly pre-trial, all security levels
 - High rise building, includes booking area
- Site 2:
 - 1200 male inmates, pre-trial and sentenced, maximum and medium security
 - Direct supervision, significantly overcrowded
- Site 3:
 - 750 male inmates, mostly pre-trial, all maximum security
 - Heavy gang influence

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

PREVALENCE

- Very few incidents are reported or prosecuted
- Actual prevalence of inmate on inmate sexual violence is unclear
 - Staff and inmates had a range of opinions
- Consensual sex is happening, particularly among female inmates
- “Consensual” sexual contact between staff and inmates is a problem at some jails

DYNAMICS

- Privacy is critical (cells, closets)
- Classic victim and perpetrator characteristics
- Mental health inmates/units may be vulnerable
- Role of gangs is unclear
- Blurry line between consensual and forced sexual activity
- Jails vs. prisons

RECOMMENDATIONS

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- Enforce basic policies for cleanliness in housing units
- Repair broken and burned out light fixtures
- Enforce policy against blocking view into cells
- Restrict inmate and staff access to closets, offices, other private areas

INMATE MONITORING

- Install cameras to record dayroom activity, especially in blind spots
- Review procedures for movement to recreation and court
- Encourage officer accountability through spot checks, rewards, monitoring technology
- Train staff to recognize and respond to incidents appropriately

WEAPONS & CONTRABAND

- Limit inmate access to mops, mop buckets, brooms, razors, “street” shoes
- Employ random shakedowns, mobile metal detector, ION drug detection machines
- Review role of worker inmates in terms of access to and distribution of contraband
- Provide inmates with a means of securing belongings and track or limit commissary purchases

OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

- Expand staff training
 - Mental health issues, suicide/self-harm prevention
 - Interpersonal skills, conflict resolution, crisis intervention
- Improve inmate classification systems
 - Accurately classify inmates and identify those at risk for victimization/perpetration
 - Track other security risks (conflicts, gangs)
- Ensure mental health care is adequate
 - Medication, anger management, counseling

LESSONS FOR RESEARCH

LESSONS LEARNED

- Jails are different than prisons
- Data on sexual violence is limited
 - Develop multiple ways to gather information
- Rewards and challenges of action research
 - Rewards: Work closely with practitioners, findings directly influence practice
 - Challenges: “Real-world” constraints, ongoing changes in the facilities, policy vs. practice

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BJS Report:

Sexual Victimization in Local Jails Reported by Inmates

<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/abstract/svljri07.htm>
