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Strategies to Prevent Prison Rape by
Changing the Correctional Culture

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This research was conducted as a collaboration between the Urban Institute and the Association of State Correctional Administrators.

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ABOUT THIS REPORT

To discover successful strategies and programs for addressing the problem of sexual violence in state prisons, a research team from the Urban Institute and the Association of State Correctional Administrators interviewed prison officials in 45 states. This report presents promising initiatives and practices identified in 11 states.

What did the researchers find?

Prison officials said inmates had many reservations about reporting sexual violence. Inmates were afraid that prison officials would not protect them from retaliation if they reported incidents. In addition, many inmates doubted that prison officials would take reports of sexual violence seriously.

Commitment to changing the institutional culture in prisons is important, but resistance to change — among agency staff and corrections officers as well as inmates — was often cited as the greatest challenge.

Strong leadership in state prison administrations is critical to changing prison culture. Zero tolerance for sexual violence and other predatory behavior was cited as the foundation for successful programs.

To deal with the effects of sexual violence and eventually eliminate it, state correctional administrators recommend:

- Developing a department-wide strategy and specific policies and programs for inmate education as well as investigation, prosecution, provision of victim services, and accurate documentation of sexual assaults.
- Cultivating management, staff and inmate buy-in to the strategy.
- Developing staff in-service training programs that specifically address rape, and ensuring that staff will be protected from false allegations.
- Developing inmate education programs that explain prison policies and practices regarding rape, inmate rights, and how to avoid assault.

Janine M. Zweig and John Blackmore

Strategies to Prevent Prison Rape by Changing the Correctional Culture

Before the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) of 2003, little information was available about what state prison systems were doing to prevent, detect, investigate or deal with the consequences of sexual violence within their institutions. No one had systematically documented which state prisons were carrying out specific strategies to address the problem. During the late 1990s, Human Rights Watch requested information about rape prevention practices from state prisons and the Federal Bureau of Prisons. The organization learned that few departments were addressing prison rape at the time.¹ Most state prisons did not have a rape prevention program in place. Only six departments reported that they provided specialized training to correctional officers in recognizing and responding to rape. PREA has changed all that. The legislation has motivated many prisons to develop or refine specific rape prevention strategies.

Confronting sexual violence in prisons

In 2005, the Urban Institute teamed up with the Association of State Correctional Administrators to study the issue of prison rape. With funding from NIJ, researchers documented state prison initiatives designed to address rape and documented specific practices that correctional officials identified as promising or innovative. The research team surveyed correctional administrators in 45 states and conducted a series of interviews with 67 correctional officials who either designed or were running the promising programs. The team developed 11 case studies based on visits to state prisons having the best programs and strategies in place. The states in which case studies were conducted — Connecticut, Idaho, Kansas, Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas and Utah — were chosen because the research team determined

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they would provide the most informative lessons.

Many of the case study states were trying to change the prison institutional culture as a step toward preventing sexual violence. Commitment to change is one of the most important parts of many states' prevention initiatives. However, resistance to cultural change — by correctional staff and inmates alike — was identified as posing the greatest challenge. One commonly cited barrier was the unwillingness of agency staff and correctional officers to change their attitudes and behaviors. Some line staff and supervisors were not comfortable with the idea that a prisoner could also be a victim. Some “old-timers” still argued that the purpose of the prison was to protect the public, not to protect inmates from other inmates. Some harbored the belief that life in prison should be “hard” and punishing.

Other agency directors stated that staff members resisted change out of fear of false accusations. Prison staff members worried that inmates, once encouraged to come forward with information about rapes, would unfairly accuse staff members. On

the other hand, administrators in some states reported that the greater challenge was developing confidence within the inmate population that prisons would take rape seriously, take swift action to deal with reported incidents, and otherwise protect prisoners.

The states that took part in the study have tried to change the institutional culture in their prisons in several ways, for example:

- Changing negative prison culture by showing strong leadership and modeling positive behavior and attitudes at the highest levels of management with the idea that this would “trickle down” to managers and staff throughout the prisons.
- Conducting in-service staff training programs to gain staff cooperation with new rape elimination programs and policies while assuring them of protection from false allegations.
- Educating inmates about prison policies and practices regarding rape, inmates' rights, and ways for inmates to protect themselves both from sexual violence and from false allegations of such violence.

Changing correctional culture: Leadership matters

Although many state prison officials acknowledged that changing the prison culture would be a significant challenge in any efforts to prevent prison rape, most identified strong, consistent leadership from the senior levels within their departments as the most effective method of addressing this challenge. Most of the 11 case study states developed statewide policies that include staff training, investigation procedures, documentation procedures, victim services and prevention efforts. A commitment to changing the correctional culture, made at the most senior levels of corrections departments, was a common theme throughout many of the states' new prison rape policies and procedures. This high-level commitment to cultural change throughout the correctional system is being reflected in changes in the attitudes of both staff and inmates. Most of these departments have officially adopted policies of zero tolerance toward prison rape as a sound basis for several new programs. In addition, many officials see that actively addressing the issue of prison

rape is part of a larger goal of operating safe prisons — they believe that incidents of rape reveal a breakdown in overall prison security.

The Texas Department of Criminal Justice's Safe Prisons Program and the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction's Ten Point Plan are regarded by many prison officials as the most comprehensive statewide prison rape initiatives. Other states have used these initiatives as models for policy and program development. The centerpiece of the Texas Safe Prisons Program is the proclamation of zero tolerance for sexual abuse or any form of predation. Every correctional employee is obliged to ensure the safety and security of prisoners. Ohio's Ten Point Plan also stresses zero tolerance for sexual and other predatory behaviors. In Ohio, both staff and administrators feel there has been an "overall change in tone" over the past several years that has originated with the director and spread to the facilities throughout the system.

Oregon's approach to preventing and responding to sexual violence is part of a larger effort to initiate a change in the prison culture,

as reflected in the Oregon Accountability Model. The model's objective is to raise awareness about prison rape and institute a policy of zero tolerance. The program involves protecting inmates and staff and improving security, with the goal of creating an environment in which inmates and staff feel safe. Some prison officials in Oregon identified the change in prison culture as one of the main strengths of their approach.

Idaho's Maintaining Dignity program is another example of a statewide initiative that seeks to effect a cultural change in the attitudes of staff and inmates toward prison rape. This program reinforces the message that rape is neither an unavoidable nor an acceptable part of prison life. Some state prison officials reported that changing the prison staff culture has been one of the greatest challenges in carrying out Directive No. 325, Idaho's official prison rape policy. Prison officials in other states expressed similar views. In most cases, both administrators and staff identified strong leadership from the top as critical to achieving cultural change.

Staff training: Showing staff how to create safer prisons

The researchers asked state prison officials to tell them about their efforts to educate staff about prison rape. Thirty-six (80 percent) of the 45 participating states had staff training programs specifically devoted to sexual violence. Many of the programs had been set up in response to the Prison Rape Elimination Act. The 11 states in which case studies were conducted all require staff, contractors and volunteers to take part in training in preventing and responding to sexual violence. They used several approaches to develop or improve their staff training. In Idaho, the PREA Coordinator worked with local investigators, the National Institute of Corrections, and the state police to develop the program. In Pennsylvania and Texas, correctional staff developed the training, and state-level sexual assault coalition members — experts from outside corrections — reviewed the program and provided suggestions.

In contrast to the statewide programs already mentioned, Maine's staff training on prison rape was developed

by staff of one facility — the Maine Correctional Center (MCC) — rather than the central office of the state corrections department. In this case, an investigator at the center launched local efforts to ameliorate local instances of sexual violence. The investigator, with other state prison representatives and a representative from the local attorney general's office, attended a National Institute of Corrections training on prison rape prevention. Subsequently, he worked with other staff at MCC to develop a four-hour training program and produce a training manual dealing with staff sexual misconduct.

When carrying out prison rape training, the 11 case study states use various learning strategies and instructional techniques, including:

- Requiring staff training that is repeated on a regular basis as refresher courses or “booster” sessions. Conducting annual (as in Texas), biannual (Oregon), or triannual (Pennsylvania) in-service training.
- Providing training in a classroom setting (at least for prison staff recruits) that

may involve a lecture format, often supplemented by slide presentations.

- Providing written materials that participants are encouraged to keep and refer to after the classroom training is over (provided by 10 of the states).
- Showing videos (provided in eight of the states) in the classroom that portray an inmate's victimization — shared by the inmate himself or by a narrator — making the issue more immediate and accessible to staff.
- Using computer-based training so staff can train themselves (provided by two states).
- Role-playing prison incidents (used by seven states in their training programs).

In Minnesota, the training is conducted through several distinct programs. The “Crossing the Line” training was developed to ensure that all employees, volunteers and contractors understand that they must maintain a professional bearing with, and a personal detachment from, the prisoners. The “Crossing the Line” curriculum involves

a series of lectures, large and small group discussions, and minilectures. Other programs in Minnesota prisons that address sexual violence issues are “Avoiding Set-Ups,” “Life Inside,” and “Sexual Misconduct.”

Regardless of how the staff training is provided or who delivers it, the training in the case study states covers a wide variety of topics related to sexual violence. Exhibit 1 identifies the topics covered in staff training courses in the 11 case study states. Most states focus on the nature of prison rape, its effects and ways to respond to incidents. Ten of the 11 states cover specifics of PREA, information about the effects of rape on victims, detecting victims in the prison population, the dynamics of inmate-against-inmate rape, investigating incidents of rape, and addressing victims’ needs for safety and for information about meeting their medical needs. Staff training was less focused on detecting staff perpetrators and inmate-against-staff violence. Notably, only four case study states provided information to staff on the dynamics of inmate-against-staff sexual violence, and only three states provided information on how to detect staff perpetrators.

Inmate education: Helping inmates protect themselves

Inmate education programs that provide information about prison rape are considered an important part of the rape prevention strategies of all 11 case study states identified as having innovative approaches. All 11 states either have already set up inmate education programs or are developing such programs. These states provide education about sexual violence in prisons at reception, and many of these states have policies requiring that prisoners receive educational information when they transfer to a different prison. Most states present educational information orally and in writing. Several states, such as Minnesota, Kansas and Oregon, have developed videos that inmates watch during their orientation sessions.

Minnesota provides inmates with an orientation program consisting of formal classes, video presentations and written materials. New inmates receive written and oral information about sexual violence prevention, intervention and self-protection. Inmates learn that sexual misconduct is prohibited. They also learn

Exhibit 1. Topics Covered in Training on Sexual Violence in Case Study States

Topic	Connecticut	Idaho	Kansas	Maine ^a	Massachusetts	Minnesota	Ohio	Oregon	Pennsylvania	Texas	Utah
Defining prison rape	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Specifics about Prison Rape Elimination Act	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Specifics about state legislation and criminal statutes	X	X			X	X	X		X	X	X
Specifics about punishments, prosecution and liability of staff perpetrators		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Information about the effects of prison rape on victims	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
Information about the effects of rape on the prison community	X	X	X	X	X	X		X		X	X
Education about what behaviors are unacceptable		X	X		X	X		X	X	X	X
Addressing situations where inmates report being vulnerable to rape	X	X	X		X	X		X			X
Detecting victims	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Detecting staff perpetrators		X			X	X					
Detecting inmate perpetrators		X	X		X	X	X	X		X	X
Dynamics of inmate-against-inmate rape	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
Dynamics of staff-against-inmate rape		X	X	X	X	X		X	X		X
Dynamics of inmate-against-staff rape		X	X						X		X
Investigating incidents	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
Addressing victims' safety needs		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Addressing victims' medical needs		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Addressing forensic evidence collection	X	X	X		X	X	X	X		X	X
Documenting reported incidents		X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Carrying out disciplinary action		X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X

^a Training topics identified for Maine are for training provided specifically in the Maine Correctional Center.

how to identify and report misconduct (including the possibility of reporting to nonuniformed staff), how a false accusation is defined, and the penalties for making a false accusation. Within the first 28 days after admission,² all inmates are required to watch a video, "Sexual Misconduct for Staff." They also receive a brochure titled "Sexual Abuse/Assault Prevention and Intervention," which defines sexual misconduct as abuse or assault. Inmates are informed of steps to take to reduce their chances of being raped.

Exhibit 2 summarizes the prison rape inmate education programs in the 11 case study states. Regardless of how the inmate education is provided or who delivers it, a wide variety of topics is covered. These topics mostly focus on the nature of prison rape and its effects on victims. All case study states provide educational information to inmates on the definition of prison rape; the effects of rape on victims; how to report incidents of rape; what to do if assaulted, beyond reporting the incident (e.g., not showering so DNA evidence can be collected); ways to avoid rape; and dynamics of inmate-against-inmate rape. Only three

states included information on the dynamics of inmate-against-staff sexual violence.

The elements of prison culture change

The passage of PREA has compelled states to embark on efforts to address prison rape or further refine strategies that were under way before the act. Several state prison administrators have identified the corrections culture as an impediment to carrying out effective policy changes and have called for efforts to address this. Strong leadership, staff training and inmate education are critical to changing the prison culture and thus helping prevent sexual violence in prisons, both among inmates and between staff and inmates. However, there is not yet a solid body of evidence as to what strategies and interventions prevent rape. To learn what works, promising strategies must be put to the test.

The first phase of a research model based on the PREA mandates has been carried out. A series of studies funded by the Bureau of Justice Statistics will determine the prevalence of prison rape.

Exhibit 2. Topics Covered in Inmate Education Curricula in Case Study States

Topic	Connecticut	Idaho	Kansas	Maine ^a	Massachusetts ^b	Minnesota	Ohio	Oregon	Pennsylvania	Texas	Utah
Defining rape	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Specifics about the Prison Rape Elimination Act	X		X		X	X		X		X	X
Specifics about state legislation and criminal statutes			X	X	X	X				X	X
Rights of a prison rape victim	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X		X
Information about the effects of prison rape on victims	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Education about what behaviors are unacceptable	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X		X
What to do if inmate feels vulnerable to rape	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
How to report incidents that happen to self	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
What to do if assaulted, beyond reporting (e.g., not showering so DNA evidence can be collected)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
How to contact outside victim service provider	X				X	X			X	X	X
How to report incidents that happen to others	X	X	X	X	X	X		X		X	X
Ways to avoid rape	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Dynamics of inmate-against-inmate rape	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Dynamics of staff-against-inmate rape	X		X	X	X	X		X	X	X	
Dynamics of inmate-against-staff rape			X		X	X					
What happens if inmate makes a false report	X	X		X	X	X		X			X
Confidentiality	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X		X

^a Training topics identified for Maine are for training provided specifically in the Maine Correctional Center.

^b Massachusetts' inmate training curriculum was under development and review at the time this report was prepared. Listed items are likely to be a part of the final curriculum.

The National Institute of Justice has also funded several studies, such as the one described here. With these efforts in place, the next phases of a research model on the subject of prison rape will be as follows:

- Assessing the effectiveness or potency of interventions by testing single interventions across various settings (e.g., departments, types of facilities, types of populations).
- Comparing effective interventions over time to learn which ones are the most effective at reducing and preventing prison rape. This will involve quantitative and qualitative assessments of selected interventions, comparing their

effectiveness in different settings and with control settings where no interventions exist.

Notes

1. From Human Rights Watch, *No Escape: Male Rape in U.S. Prisons*, Washington, DC: Human Rights Watch, April 2001, available online at <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2001/prison>. An initial request for information letter was sent to correctional authorities in all 50 states; 47 responded, although the nature of the responses was not reported.
2. Prisoners readmitted within a year are not required to retake the orientation.

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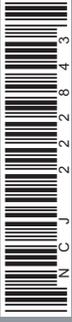
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