Invisible Men: 
How to Work with Prisoner Rape Survivors 

September 3, 2015 
National Sexual Assault Conference 

Photo Credit: William Hotz/Baltimore Sun
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Just Detention International

JDI is a health and human rights organization that seeks to end sexual violence in all forms of detention.

Core goals:
1. Hold government officials accountable
2. Change public attitudes about sexual violence behind bars
3. Ensure survivors get the help they need
Special Thanks

This project is supported by Grant No. 2013-TA-AX-K030, awarded by the Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice.

The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this session are those of the presenters and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women.
What brings you to this workshop?
Objectives

1. Understanding of the dynamics of sexual violence in men’s detention facilities
2. Increase awareness and understanding of the needs of male survivors in detention
3. Learn best practices for ensuring safety and promoting healing and for these men and boys

Session Agenda

I. Terms and Definitions
II. Demographics, Prevalence and Dynamics
III. Impact
IV. Types of Services
V. Stories from an Advocate
Understanding the Language

**Prison Rape Elimination Act**

- **What is PREA?**
  - Sexual Abuse and Sexual Harassment

- **How does PREA apply to you?**
Basics of Sexual Abuse in Male Detention Facilities

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

OVER 2.3 MILLION ADULTS AND 70,000 YOUTH are incarcerated in U.S. prisons, jails, and youth detention facilities

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
More than 90% of all prisoners in the U.S. are male

LIFETIME LIKELIHOOD OF IMPRISONMENT

1 in 9 of all men
1 in 17 white men
1 in 6 latino men
1 in 3 black men

Original design concept by The Sentencing Project. © Just Detention International
86% of youth in residential placement are male


1 in 11 former inmates in men’s state prisons reported being sexually abused behind bars

Source: Beck, Berzofsky, Casper & Krebs (2013). Sexual Victimization in Prisons and Jails Reported by Inmates, 2011-2012. © Just Detention International. (Approximately 11% of former inmates of men’s state prisons reported one or more incidents of sexual abuse during their most recent period of incarceration.)
1 IN 10 MALES IN JUVENILE FACILITIES REPORTED BEING SEXUALLY ABUSED WHILE IN DETENTION


STUDY SHOWS NEARLY EQUAL RATES OF SEXUAL ABUSE BY STAFF AND OTHER INMATES

82% of sexual assaults of males in youth detention are committed by staff.

Likely Targets

- Gay, Bisexual, or Transgender
- Mentally ill
- Survivors of previous trauma
- First-Timers
- Young
- Small in stature
- Minorities
- Physically disabled
What factors do you think influence someone in sharing that they have been victimized?
Jeff’s Story

Reframing
Safety

Question for your organization:
What can our advocates do to assist incarcerated survivors in creating safety?

Anger

- Meet people where they are at emotionally
- Know that anger may be the first emotion
- Understand that they may be labeled as troublemakers
Fear

• Fear is there for a reason
• It may be expressed as fear of another person, a system, or of the future
• Don’t brush it off

Photo Credit: Steve Liss, Open Society Foundation

Isolation/Despair

Question for your organization:

How can we decrease the sense of isolation and despair for incarcerated survivors?
Drug Use

There are many different ways that we try to regulate ourselves with “addictions” after sexual violence has taken place.

Suicidal Thoughts

Questions for your organization:

• How do you support incarcerated survivors who have suicidal thoughts?
• What are some resources?
Complex Trauma Histories

- History of trauma
- Sexual harassment
- Lack of control in the corrections environment
- Retaliation
- Repeated abuse

Ivory’s Story

“Often, people think that you deserve whatever happens to you in prison because you have committed a crime. But no one should be sexually assaulted by an officer. Inmates have no power to protect themselves, so we rely on the officers to make it a safe environment.”

— Ivory, prisoner rape survivor
Relationship to Perpetrator

Services That Can Be Offered

• Hotlines
• Written Correspondence
• Individual Meetings
• Group Meetings*

• Medical Advocacy
• Legal Advocacy
• Systems Advocacy
Hotlines

- How long will the calls be?
- How confidential is the line and phone area?
- Do you have a plan for off-topic calls?
- Do you know how someone can make a report?

Written Correspondence

- Are there limits to confidentiality?
- What can you provide?
- Who on staff will be responding?
Individual Meetings

- What is the direction the individual wants to take?
- What is the goal of the meeting?
- What considerations do you need to plan for?
- What communication do you need with the facility?

Group Work

Use educational groups to communicate available services
Medical Advocacy

Questions for your organization:

• What is your agency’s policy around medical accompaniment?
• Has your agency been trained on medical accompaniment for males?

Legal Advocacy

• Does your agency provide legal advocacy through collaboration or referrals?
• What is the role of your legal advocacy?
• What are some of the common needs?
**Systems Advocacy**

- Who are the individuals at your agency that provide this support?
- What are their individual roles?

**Trace’s Story**
Initial Concerns

• What if this person has a violent past?
• What if they threaten me?
• What if I am threatened by other inmates?
• What if this person is in prison for sexual assault?
• What if they are just mean to me?
• What if this is all a joke?

Tips

• Accept that your feelings of fear and nervousness are normal
• Process your feelings beforehand
• Avoid asking about the survivor’s crime
• Try to remained non-judgmental, non-blaming, and non-shaming
Jose’s Story

Initial Challenges

• Jose was closed off and intimidating

• He did not want to talk about the attempted rape
**Tips**

- Meet survivors where they are at
- Understand that “intimidating” behavior is likely a natural trauma response
- Show survivors your commitment
- Be patient
- Find similar interests and build trust

What concerns do you have about working with this population?
Question to Take With You:

What are ways that we can support each other?

Question and Answer
Resources

- JDI’s Advocate Resources: justdetention.org/advocate-resources
- National Sexual Violence Resource Center: nsvrc.org
- PREA Resource Center: prearesourcecenter.org
- 1 in 6: 1in6.org
Contact Us

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