

Examining Sexual Victimization among Male and Female Inmates

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Overview

- Sexual victimization and perpetration among prisoners is a national concern (Dumond, 2003) because it can negatively impact mental and physical health, as well as the reentry process (e.g., Human Rights Watch, 2001 and Struckman-Johnson, Struckman-Johnson, Rucker, Bumby, & Donaldson, 1996)
- Growing awareness of the negative consequences of sexual violence in correctional facilities led to the passage of the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) in 2003
- Studies regarding the prevalence of such events in prisons are few, but it is estimated that 2 to 40 percent of incarcerated men and women have been victimized in prison (Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 2002; Wolff, Blitz, Shi, Bachman, & Siegel, 2006)
- This study seeks to understand the prevalence of sexual victimization, harassment and, perpetration among both male and female inmates incarcerated in a Midwestern state, using data collected since 2016

Research Questions

- Do male and female prisoners share similar demographic and incarcerating characteristics?
- Do male and female prisoners experience the same amounts of sexual victimization and harassment?
- Do male and female prisoners commit the same amount of sexual perpetration?

Data and Statistical Analyses

- Data
 - 687 female and 1,045 male prisoners housed in separate prisons located in a Midwestern state were surveyed about their experiences during their current incarceration
 - Supplemental official data (e.g., demographics and incarcerating variables) were provided by the department of corrections of the Midwestern state
- Analyses
 - T-test and chi-square analyses to assess differences between male and female prisoners on the following:
 - Demographic characteristics
 - Variables related to incarceration
 - Prevalence of sexual victimization, sexual harassment, and sexual abuse perpetration

Research Question One

- On average, male and female prisoners exhibit different background characteristics and incarcerating variables from one another

Variable	Female				Male			
	Mean/ %	SD	Min.	Max.	Mean/ %	SD	Min.	Max.
Demographics								
Age	36.28	10.57	18.87	80.81	33.67	11.62	18.00	85.00
Married	20%	—	0	1	15%	—	0	1
LGBTQI	26%	—	0	1	4%	—	0	1
High School Diploma or higher	57%	—	0	1	77%	—	0	1
Diagnosed mental health disorder	62%	—	0	1	38%	—	0	1
Diagnosed substance use disorder	39%	—	0	1	29%	—	0	1
Comorbidity	34%	—	0	1	45%	—	0	1
Experienced abuse as a child	63%	—	0	1	34%	—	0	1
Experienced abuse as an adult	63%	—	0	1	3%	—	0	1
Race/ethnicity								
White Non-Hispanic	77%	—	0	1	60%	—	0	1
Black Non-Hispanic	15%	—	0	1	31%	—	0	1
Hispanic*	5%	—	0	1	6%	—	0	1
Other Non-Hispanic*	4%	—	0	1	2%	—	0	1
Incarceration								
Gang member	4%	—	0	1	12%	—	0	1
Violent offense	25%	—	0	1	35%	—	0	1
Sex-related offense	1%	—	0	1	7%	—	0	1
Non-violent offense	73%	—	0	1	58%	—	0	1
Prior prison term*	44%	—	0	1	48%	—	0	1
Time served (months)	25.47	61.62	0.03	455.95	38.27	75.63	0.71	594.06
Sentence length (months)	158.60	185.97	1.37	1740.00	97.53	106.03	3.16	817.90
Security level								
Minimum	72%	—	0	1	11%	—	0	1
Medium	3%	—	0	1	87%	—	0	1
Maximum	25%	—	0	1	2%	—	0	1

*Non-significant differences between male and female samples

Research Question Two

- In this sample, more female than male prisoners have experienced instances of coerced sexual victimization during their current incarceration

Coerced Sexual Victimization Items	Percent	
	Female	Male
An inmate touched your vagina, breasts, inner thigh, or anus?	10.3	2.0
An inmate inserted something into your mouth, vagina or anus?	4.9	1.3
You provided sexual favors to another inmate by making physical contact with her mouth, breasts, vagina, anus, buttocks, groin, or inner thigh?	5.8	1.2
Answered yes to any of the above questions	10.8	2.3
If any of these things happened to you, please answer the following questions:		
At the time of these events, did you say NO to them or wish you could say NO?	2.6	1.5
Did you receive anything in return for participating in any of these actions?	1.0	0.5
Did another inmate threaten to harm you unless you engaged in any of these actions?	1.2	0.4
Answered yes to any of the above contingency questions	3.6	1.8

- Sexual harassment is the most common form of sexual victimization experienced by this sample, especially for female prisoners

Sexual Harassment Items	Percent	
	Female	Male
Other inmates asked you for sex?	12.7	4.7
Other inmates made sexual comments or used obscene language or gestures?	25.5	7.9
Other inmates made insulting comments about your body?	18.5	5.3
Answered yes to any of the above questions	30.4	10.3

Research Question Three

- Female inmates in this sample are more likely than male inmates to admit to perpetrating some form of sexual abuse

Sexual Abuse Perpetration Items	Percent	
	Female	Male
You received a disciplinary report for sexual actions or sexual contact with another inmate?	7.9	1.8
Staff members told you that you were behaving in a sexually inappropriate way?	5.1	1.3
Other inmates told you that your behavior was sexually inappropriate?	2.5	0.9
Other inmates told you that you were making them feel sexually uncomfortable?	1.9	0.5
Answered yes to any of the above questions	10.6	2.5

Conclusion

- While this study finds prevalence rates of sexual victimization in prison to be on the lower end of what previous studies have found, it still necessitates further research on prison sexual abuse
- For this study, the significant gender differences regarding sexual victimization, harassment, and perpetration indicate a need to examine the potentially gendered causes and correlates of sexual abuse in prison

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