



Sexual Victimization in Correctional Facilities: The Facts

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What is the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA)?

Correctional facilities present a unique context in which people can experience sexual violence. Indeed, many people experience sexual violence while incarcerated in correctional facilities by other incarcerated people, correctional staff, or both.[1,2,3] As a result of various advocacy, human rights, and research organizations calling for action on this issue for decades, Congress passed the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) in 2003.[1,2,3] PREA requires nationwide data collection and research about sexual violence in federal, state, and local correctional facilities, and established the National Prison Rape Elimination Commission to develop national standards for addressing this issue.[1,2,3] Despite PREA's enactment in 2003, PREA standards that were established in 2012, and growing national discourse about sexual violence in correctional facilities, many challenges persist, and sexual victimization nonetheless remains a widespread issue.[1,2,3,4]

Have You Heard?

- While estimates of the rates of sexual victimization range from as low as less than 1% to as high as 41%, the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics estimates that 3% of incarcerated men are sexually abused in U.S. correctional facilities annually.[3,4]
- Staff sexual misconduct and harassment are more often reported than sexual violence perpetrated by incarcerated people against each other.[2]
- Survivors of prior sexual violence, people with behavioral health needs, and people who identify as LGBTQ+ disproportionately experience sexual violence in correctional facilities.[1]

What are the Consequences of Sexual Violence in Correctional Facilities?

Survivors of sexual violence experience a range of behavioral health consequences both inside and outside of correctional facilities.[1,2,5] Many incarcerated survivors experience anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, rape trauma syndrome, and suicidal ideation.[1,3,5] Given the unique context of incarceration, the effects of experiencing sexual violence in prison may feel more significant for incarcerated people than for people outside of prison.[1,2,4] Though sexual violence is traumatic no matter the situation, experiencing sexual violence within institutions of total control can be particularly devastating, given limited access to family and social supports, medical and mental health care, and victim services.[1,2,4,5]

How to Support Incarcerated Survivors

Though the enactment of PREA and the subsequent standards were momentous steps toward eliminating sexual violence in correctional facilities, more work needs to be done to advance effective implementation, prevent further violence, and ultimately better support survivors.[1,2,3,4,5] In continuing to enforce PREA implementation and develop policies to address sexual violence in correctional facilities, it is critical that policymakers, practitioners, researchers, and community members fully understand PREA's impact and outcomes. To accomplish this, policies should account for survivors' experiences with PREA's reporting and investigation processes, including victim services, and incorporate the lived experiences of marginalized groups.[1,2,4,5] Improving support for incarcerated survivors should also entail a shift away from the current legal framework, as it fails to address the systemic barriers survivors of sexual violence face when reporting abuse, and facilitates institutional neglect to persist with little consequence.[5]

Resources

Texas

- **Texas Board of Criminal Justice –**
<https://www.tdcj.texas.gov/tbcj/prea.html>

National

- **Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) Sexual Victimization in Correctional Facilities (PREA) –**
<https://bjs.ojp.gov/topics/corrections/prea>
- **Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) Sexual Abuse Prevention –**
https://www.bop.gov/inmates/custody_and_care/sexual_abuse_prevention.jsp
- **National PREA Resource Center –**
<https://www.prearesourcecenter.org/>
- **National Sexual Violence Resource Center Prisons –**
<https://www.nsvrc.org/resource-topics/prisons>

References

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- [2]Tewksbury, R., & Mahoney, M. J. (2009). Sexual victimization and requests for assistance in inmates' letters to the National Prison Rape Elimination Commission. *Federal Probation*, 73(3), 57-61.
- [3]Wolff, N., Blitz, C. L., Shi, J., Bachman, R., & Siegel, J. A. (2006). Sexual violence inside prisons: Rates of victimization. *Journal of Urban Health*, 83(5), 835-848.
- [4]Martini, O. (2025). From deliberate indifference to civil negligence: Protecting male prisoners from sexual violence in United States prisons. *Immigration and Human Rights Law Review*, 6(1), 1-27.
- [5]Wolff, N., & Shi, J. (2009). Contextualization of physical and sexual assault in male prisons: Incidents and their aftermath. *Journal of Correctional Health Care*, 15(1), 58-77.

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Resources

- Aging and Disability Resource Center 855-937-2372
- Cyber Civil Rights Initiative 844-878-2274
- Mothers Against Drunk Driving 877-623-3435
- National Child Abuse Hotline 800-422-4453
- National Domestic Violence Hotline 800-799-7233
- National Human Trafficking Hotline 888-373-7888
- National Sexual Assault Hotline 800-656-4673
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 988
- Texas Abuse Hotline 800-252-5400
- Texas Council on Family Violence <https://tcfv.org/survivor-resources/>
- Texas Association Against Sexual Assault <https://taasa.org/get-help/>
- Victim Connect Resource Center 855-484-2846