The context of sexual violence in facilities for women & girls

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Overview

- Pathways to crime for adult & juvenile female offenders
- The critical role of context in sexual assault
- Current research
  - Moss Group/NIC Staff Focus Groups
  - New Jersey Estimates
  - BJS/NIS findings
  - Owen, Wells & Pollock study
Questions:

- What makes sexual violence possible in a facility? What is the context of vulnerability?
- What are the possibilities for safer correctional environments for women and girls?
- What do we do about consensual relationships? Are they possible within locked worlds?
- How can we avoid punishing relational behavior? How do we avoid PREA being used as a rationale to further punish women & girls?
Implication of these backgrounds for sexual violence in female facilities

- Inappropriate sexualization
- Sex defined as “love” or as a commodity
- Boundary issues
- Challenges in defining domestic violence
- Fears about disclosure & reporting
- PTSD and re-traumatization
- Crisis and long-term treatment issue
- Trauma remains untreated and cycle continues
Context

- Individual factors: Past abuse, relationships, definitions of self & situation
- Physical & environmental factors: Physical plant, staffing
- Organizational factors: Staff & inmate culture
- Definitions: Official, operational and personal
Prior research on sexual victimization of women

- **Gaes & Goldberg:**
  - Methodological and definitional problems
  - Fewer studies on adult women (any of juvenile females?)
  - Rates are all over the place

- **Alarid:** Reports significant sexual violence in one case study

- **Greer:** Sees victimization as more prevalent than other studies

- **The relational issue**
Current Research

- Moss Group/NIC Staff focus groups
- New Jersey prevalence studies
- BJS/NIS findings on female inmates
- Gendered Violence and Safety (Owen, Wells & Pollock)
Women Offenders and Sexual Assault: Findings from staff focus groups

The Moss Group

NIC
Knowledge of sexual assault

- Lack of first hand knowledge about specific incidents
- Rumors and credibility
- Relationships
- Difficulty in determining consensual and coerced relationships
Issues with reporting

- Inmate’s credibility is generally in question
- There is the fear of retribution
- Inmates “manipulate” officers by covering for perpetrators
- Inmates will report on other SA incidents, but not their own
- Inmates don’t trust staff
Staff culture and reporting issues

- Difficulty in realizing credibility:
  - There is often a lack of physical evidence of a SA
  - Inmates with mental health issues are often regarded as deluding these events
- General staff attitude of distrust:
  - “I still think the traditional mindset is an inmate is an inmate is an inmate.”
  - “Now there is a feeling that we are not to trust anyone.”

- At the same time, the staff report a general lack of trust from the inmates
Female to female victimization is NOT defined as clearly as male/male or male/female sexual violence

- Obvious biological differences
- Cultural definitions of sexual violence—
  - emphasis on male staff sexual misconduct
  - narrow definitions of sexual assault
Staff acknowledge the role of trauma in inmates’ lives

“Most of the women have been victims; not just in prison, but on the outside also. Most women have been victims and they think that it’s okay [to be sexually assaulted or abused].”
Staff sexual misconduct

“Staff sexual misconduct involves using power to get what the staff member wants. We are supposed to be taking care of the offenders, not hurting them.”
Not just the fellas

- Staff noted that while misconduct is typically framed as male staff & female inmates, female staff are also at risk for committing misconduct.
Staff voice disapproval at SSM

- **Surprise at “who gets involved”**
- **Feelings of betrayal & resentment**
- **Creates safety problems for everyone:**
  
  “It happens when people are not doing their jobs”
Characteristics of the victims

- New inmates
- Smaller, soft spoken or overly loud and aggressive (as a front)
- Easily or readily intimidated
- Emotionally needy
- Low self-esteem
- Promiscuous before entering the institution
Grooming is a process

- Systematic coercion is used to get a “partner” rather than a sudden attack.

- Commonly by flattery, compliments or favors.
Role of staff

- Most staff see protecting inmates as their job.
New Jersey Study
Nancy Wolf & colleagues

- Interviewed 564 women (lots of men, too)
- Six month rates for women
  - In/in 3.2% rape OR non-consensual sex
  - Staff 1.7%
- When adding “abusive sexual contacts”
  - In/in 21.2%
  - Staff 7.6%
New Jersey Study

Predictors of vulnerability for inmate/inmate incidents are some combination of:

- Older age
- Being white
- Diagnosed mental disorder
- Substance abuse history
- **Victimization history prior to age 18**
The critical role of prior victimization

- Women indicated prior victimization before 18 were four times more likely to report at least one incident of abusive sexual contact.
Many studies have found that prior victimization is a marker of future victimization. Why?

- Transformative effect on identity
- Victimization stands as un-researched variables
- Victims engage in risky behavior as result of past victimization
New Jersey Study

- Predictors of vulnerability for staff/inmate incidents were different in terms of age
  - Victims of staff abuse were younger.
  - Levels of education also had some effect.
Critical role of definitions and instrumentation

- Rates are higher when “abusive sexual contact” and staff questions are added.
- Rates are higher when broader definitions of “victimization” and “perpetrator” are used.
- Enormous definitional impact in inter-gender differences.
- Continued discussion of the “low base rate” problem.
BJS/NIS findings for females

- Grateful for the details on women’s facilities
- Have a draft report that separates out the female facilities that I can send out
- This section outlines some of the highlights from the female sample
Three women’s facilities made the “Top Ten”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facility name</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Inmate-on-inmate</th>
<th>Staff-on-inmate</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rockville Correctional Facility, IN</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>10.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Valley State Prison for Women, CA</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>5.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mountain View Unit, TX</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>3.4</td>
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</table>
## All forms of sexual victimization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facility name</th>
<th>Non-consensual sexual abuse</th>
<th>All abusive contacts</th>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountain View Unit, TX</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>6.2</td>
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</table>
Unpacking these numbers
## Inmate/inmate sexual assault

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facility name</th>
<th>Physically forced</th>
<th>Pressured</th>
<th>Injured</th>
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<tr>
<td>Rockville Correctional Facility, IN</td>
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<td>7.5</td>
<td>3.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Valley State Prison for Women, CA</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>1.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mountain View Unit, TX</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>2.7</td>
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</table>
## Staff/inmate sexual assault

<table>
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<th>Facility name</th>
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<th>Pressured</th>
<th>Willing</th>
<th>Injured</th>
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<td>3.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mountain View Unit, TX</td>
<td>.7</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facility name</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Inmate-on-inmate</td>
<td>Staff-on-inmate</td>
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<td>-------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Utah State Prison, UT*</td>
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<td>Rockville Corr. Fac. IN</td>
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<td>Mountain View Unit, TX</td>
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<td>Julia Tutwiler, AL</td>
<td>314</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>115</td>
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Gendered Violence and Safety: 
A contextual approach 
to improving security 
in women’s facilities 

Owen, Wells & Pollock
Gendered Violence and Safety

- **Goal:** Gender-based descriptions of violence and safety in women’s correctional facilities.

- **Context:** The organizational, environmental and individual factors contributing to violence in women’s facilities.

- The effects of inmate and staff culture on safety and violence among women inmates.

- The experience of sexual victimization both prior to and during past or present incarcerations are expected to be significant factors informing this context.
Gendered Violence and Safety

This view suggests that sexual violence itself is embedded in the broader context of violence and safety and that this context is gender-based.
Gendered Violence and Safety

- These data will be used to
  - 1) to develop a narrative description of these issues
  - 2) to develop an instrument measuring safety and violence in women’s facilities and
  - 3) as a basis for operational practice bulletins informing staff training, inmate orientation, violence and assault prevention programs, victim treatment and other applications.

- Research staff will partner with practitioners to develop bulletins that will provide a foundation for gender-specific applications.
Initial findings:

- Most women did not report experiencing or hearing about outright sexual assaults involving violence & injury.
- Most common description involves demeaning and belittling interaction with small number of abuse staff.
- A few women provided descriptions of on-going relationships with staff or reported knowledge of staff sexual misconduct across several dimensions.
- In discussion, women expand on definitions of sexual violence within relationships.
Initial findings

- Women can tie their in-prison experience to prior abuse but may not initially recognize it as such.
- Women feel, as a group, that they alone are responsible for their own safety.
- Women, as a group, indicated little confidence in their facility’s ability to protect them from assaults by inmates or staff.
- Almost all women described concerns about retaliation and retribution in reporting any kind of sexual violence.
Discussion

- How can we shift the emphasis of PREA away from *only counting and investigating incidents* and move it toward three other goals:
  - Prevention?
  - Intervention?
  - Treatment, Programs & Services?
  - Perceptions of safety?