

Prison sexual assaults unreported and ignored

Interviews with 150 male ex-prisoners have revealed more than 75 per cent knew about a sexual assault behind bars and that 23 per cent had felt some pressure to perform a sexual act while in prison.

Dr Dot Goulding and Dr Brian Steels (pictured) from Murdoch University's [Centre for Social and Community Research](#) interviewed the ex-prisoners, who served time in prisons in the Perth metropolitan area.



"These statistics are confronting and cannot be ignored by the State Government, the Department of Corrective Services and the general public," said Dr Goulding.

The study found that young men, gay men first time prisoners and drug dependent prisoners are most at risk of being sexually assaulted.

Main findings of the report:

- 54 per cent said they had knowledge of sexual assault in West Australian prisons;
- 23.3 per cent said that they had been placed under pressure to provide unwanted sexual acts;
- 77.3 per cent had knowledge of an assault and had experienced a degree of pressure to perform some kind of sexual act (Groups 1 & 2 above combined);
- 14 per cent said they had been sexually assaulted whilst held in a WA prison;
- 4 per cent admitted to predatory sexual behaviour in prison. Four of these said they had previously been sexually assaulted in prison;
- 4.6 per cent were unsure if sexual assault occurred in prisons; and
- 2.6 per cent claimed sexual assaults do not occur in prisons.

"The fact that prisoners are the victims of sexual abuse in these institutions is a sad indictment on a system that often turns a blind eye," said Dr Goulding.

"Until this study, prison sexual assault was largely hidden from public view, is usually left out of corrective services' annual reports, is frequently ignored by senior policy makers, and goes largely unchallenged by judges and lawyers, creating little more than a disinterested whisper outside of prison walls."

Of the 21 prisoners who were sexually assaulted, only eight of these sexual assaults were officially reported to the authorities.

"The non-reporting of sexual assault within the prisons environment is often put down to the high levels of personal shame associated with male-to-male rape and most importantly, a real fear of ongoing and escalating violence if the assaults are reported to the authorities," said Dr Goulding.

The study was funded by [Lotterywest](#) and strongly supported by the [Uniting Church](#) because of their ongoing concern about the treatment of people in the prison system.

The report made a number of recommendations to curb the number of sexual assaults made in prison. [Read the report in its entirety.](#)

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