

Study examines Nebraska inmate rape

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targets," she said. Male victims tend to be 20 to 35 years old, white and physically inferior, she said.

Assailants tend to be large men who have been convicted of a violent crime and are serving a long sentence, Struckman-Johnson said. They have been in prison long enough to work the system and avoid getting caught, she said.

The victims are nearly helpless in prison because the perpetrators have the advantage. They have plenty of time to plan their attacks, they can get help from other inmates and they can stage attacks almost anywhere, Struckman-Johnson said.

The perpetrators used isolated locations that were easy to escape from like showers, the infirmary, the library, the back of the kitchen and the yard, she said.

In some reported cases, prisoners attacked new cell mates within an hour of their assignments, Struckman-Johnson said.

Perpetrators get away with the attacks because the prisons have limited staff and can't watch everything, Struckman-Johnson said.

"They just don't have the person-power to do it," she said. "There might be as few as three or four guards watching over several hundreds of them in the yards.

"It's an extremely big problem for prison administration to deal with."

Accuracy?

Struckman-Johnson said she presented her study to the Nebraska Department of Corrections last May. Since then, the NDC has discussed ways to reduce sexual assault in prisons.

Steven King, planning and research director for the Nebraska Department of Corrections, said although prison administrators were concerned about the findings of the study, King said, he thought the study was inaccurate.

He said many prisoners probably lied on the survey and made up accounts of sexual assault.

"We see a lot of inmates trying to manipulate the system, and a survey is an opportunity to do that," he said.

King referred to a recent incident in which a prisoner was found with blood on his face. He told medics he had been sexually assaulted, but later changed his story and said he had been beaten up, King said.

Only a handful of reported rapes are confirmed each year by prison administration, King said. He said the number of rape victims was less than 1 percent of the 3,066-member

prison population, not 12 percent as reported in the study.

"Internally, we just don't see the level of sexual assault at the level in that study," King said.

Struckman-Johnson, however, said her results were sound. The only inaccuracies might have come from the number of surveys that weren't returned, she said.

"I believe in the data that I got," she said, "What I question is the data I didn't get."

She could tell survey responses were honest by comparing similarities, she said.

"There were consistencies in the way the whole picture fit together," she said.

Inmates had nothing to gain by lying, she said, but risked trouble if their perpetrators found out they reported the assaults.

Her survey of 264 prison staff members supported her results.

Prison staff, mostly security guards, estimated the sexual coercion rate at an average of 15 percent, Struckman-Johnson said.

"The staff agreed that it was happening, too," she said.

Prevention

King said prison staff took active measures to prevent any sexual

activity and sexual assault.

"Our prisons are safe and secure. It's not like you see in 'Shawshank Redemption' where the good guys are behind bars and the bad guys are on the staff."

Inmates who have been assaulted or think they may be a target can get protective custody for as long as they feel in danger, he said.

If inmates identify their perpetrators, administrators will keep them in separate facilities for the rest of their sentences, King said.

The perpetrator would be punished with isolation or loss of good behavior time, and the incident would endanger his chances of parole, King said.

The study prompted Corrections Director Harold Clarke to authorize a committee, led by King, to review the prisons' prevention techniques. The committee, which hasn't met yet, probably would focus on more orientation for inmates and encouraging inmates to report incidents to administration, King said.

"We try to do everything and work to prevent it, period," King said.

Preventing prison rape also would prevent a lot of the psycho-

logical damage that the victims suffer, Struckman-Johnson said.

She said after the prisoners left corrections, the trauma of the rapes could translate into violence against society, particularly against men.

Many times, victims will break up with their significant others or experience marital problems after release, she said.

Preventing sexual assault in prison would return mentally healthy convicts to society, Struckman-Johnson said.

"There's no question you'll have a better adjusted person returning to society."

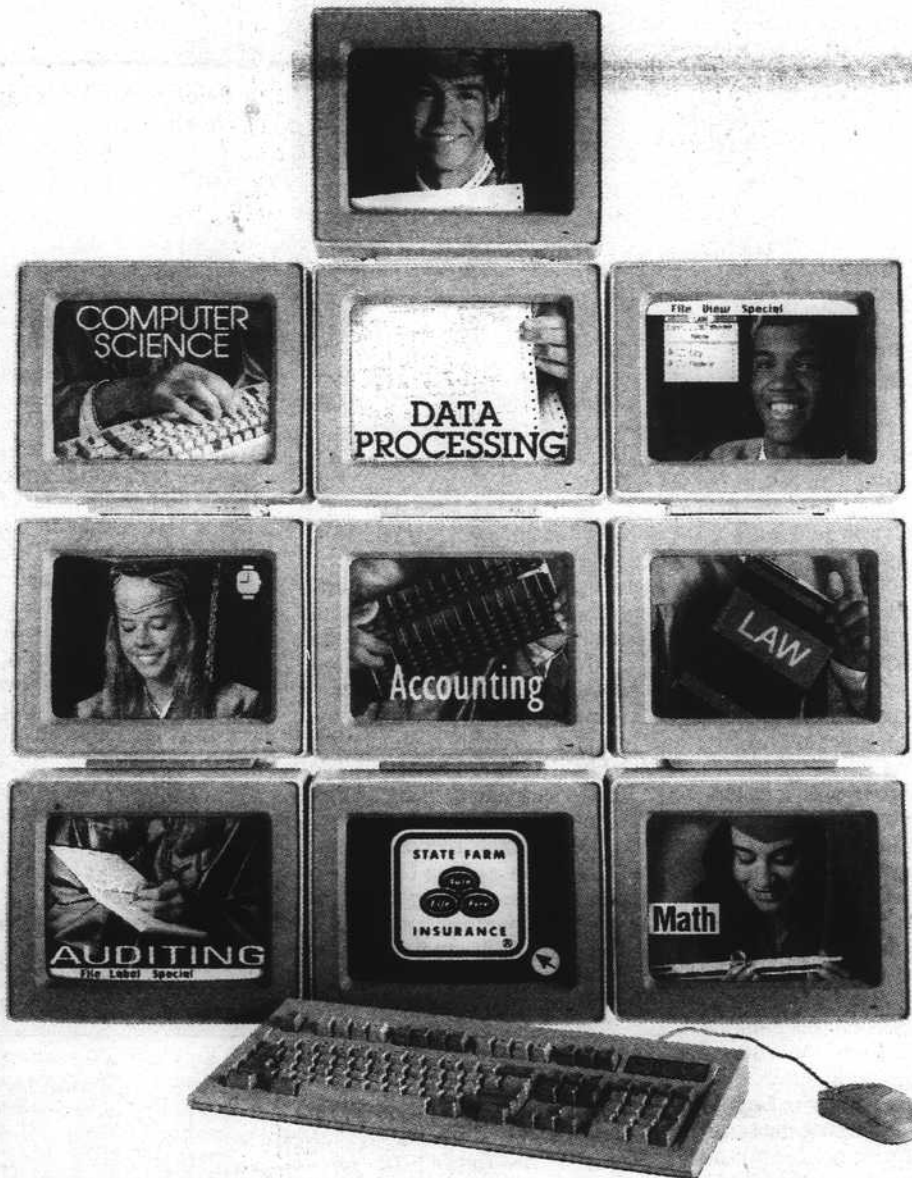
The purpose of prison is corrections — to reform the individual to society's standards, she said. Sexual assault in prison reverses that process, she said.

"It's the cruelest kind of assault because it's a violation of body and spirit."

For that reason, Struckman-Johnson said, inmate rape should not be accepted as part of prison punishment.

"When people are to be punished, they are to be kept isolated from society in uncomfortable conditions," she said. "Nowhere in there is the concept that includes torture."

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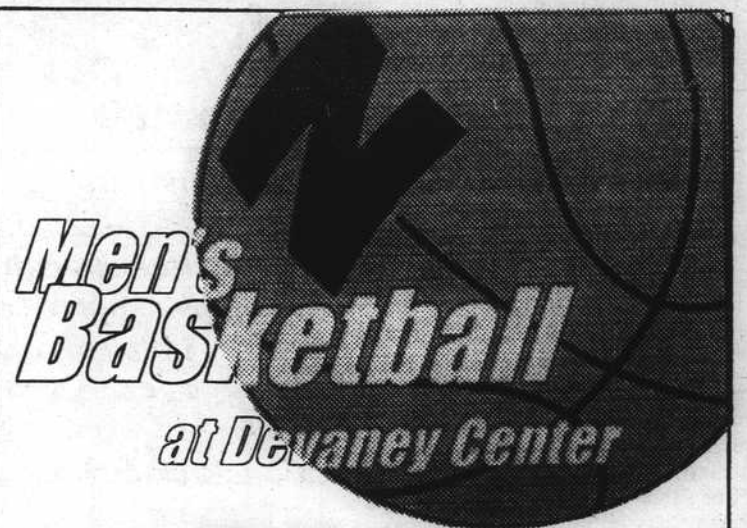
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Hours of distribution are 8:30-11:30 a.m. and 1:00-4:00 p.m. each day.

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