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# Staff Perceptions of Risk for Prison Rape Perpetration and Victimization

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## Abstract

Since the inception of the Prison Rape Elimination Act in 2003, increased attention has been directed toward identifying and eliminating acts of institutional sexual violence. However, few empirical studies have systematically explored risk factors that staff perceive as important when ascertaining risk for prison sexual perpetration and victimization. This study examined ratings from 10 staff for 315 female and 1,842 male inmates screened for admission to correctional facilities in a Midwestern state. Overall, findings indicate that a low proportion of inmates were rated medium–high risk for either perpetration or victimization. In addition, results suggest that staff perceived risk factors for sexual violence somewhat differently for female and male inmates. Furthermore, data revealed that staff considered presentation characteristics more relevant than empirically derived risk factors when determining vulnerability to prison rape. Implications for institutional policy and prison sexual assault screening are discussed.

**Keywords:** prison rape, sexual victimization, sexual abuse, risk, staff perceptions

Since the inception of the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA; 2003), government agencies have collaborated with researchers and practitioners to evaluate and target the problem of sexual assault within the U.S. prison system. "There have been few studies on the prevalence of sexual assault within correctional facilities. These studies are typically small in scale, covering only a few facilities and generalizations to the national correctional population are not appropriate" (Bureau of Justice Statistics [BJS], 2004, p. 1). As such, one of the undertakings of PREA was to identify prevalence rates of sexual victimization across numerous institutions. To accomplish this goal, the Bureau of Justice statistics surveyed 60,500 inmates nationwide in 2007 (Beck & Harrison, 2007). Results from this survey indicate prevalence rates of 16,800 nonconsensual inmate-on-inmate sexual acts. Inmates reported an additional 10,600 abusive sexual contacts. When considering reports from staff, there were a total of 262 substantiated reports of inmate-on-inmate nonconsensual sex acts (unwanted contacts involving oral, anal, or vaginal sex or other sexual acts), out of a total of 2,205 reported acts (Beck, Harrison, & Adams, 2007). In addition, there were a total of 158 substantiated claims of inmate-on-inmate abusive sexual contacts (unwanted contacts involving touching of the inmate's butt, thighs, penis, breast or vagina in a sexual way), of a reported amount of 834.

The prevalence rates support another important purpose of PREA, which is to develop national standards for the detection and prevention of prison sexual assault (PREA, 2003, § 3). Despite the dearth of empirical research in this area, some data exist to suggest that prison rape is not evenly distributed within the general population of incarcerated offenders (Hensley, Tewksbury, & Castle, 2003). That is, some prisoners may be at greater risk for perpetrating sexual assault, while others may be at a greater risk for sexual victimization. Despite indications that there may be different risk characteristics for sexual perpetration or victimization while incarcerated, few investigations have systematically evaluated risk factors for prison sexual assault.

### *Empirically Derived Risk Factors for Victimization*

Research in this area is limited, but some studies have begun to identify risk factors relevant to perpetrators and victims of prison sexual assault. Certain presentation characteristics, such as race, age, gender, and size have been identified in the literature as risk factors. For example, race/ethnicity appears to factor into risk for perpetration and victimization in opposing ways. In a sample of 1,788 inmates, researchers found that 21% reported experiencing at least one incident of unwanted sex while incarcerated and of those 375 individuals, 74% reported that the perpetrator was African American (Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-

Johnson, 2000). In general, estimates of perpetration by African American inmates range from 58% to 75% (see Carroll, 1977; Hensley et al., 2003; Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 2000). Conversely, a risk factor for victimization is being of European American descent (see Dumond, 1992; Hensley et al., 2003; Hensley Koscheski, & Tewksbury, 2005; Hensley, Struckman-Johnson, & Eigenberg, 2000; Hensley & Tewksbury, 2002; Moss, Hosford, & Anderson, 1979; Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 2000; Tewksbury & West, 2000). Currently, there is no empirically validated theory to explain such findings.

Another identified risk factor for perpetration and victimization is victim stature or size. Toch (1977) "contended that sexual assaults were contingent on the perceived strength or weakness of an inmate" (Hensley & Tewksbury, 2002, p. 237). Hensley and colleagues (2003) found that victims of sexual assault in prison were either small in stature, large, or overweight. However, most studies of this kind lacked operational definitions for small or large stature. In one exception, Lockwood (1980) found that, on average, victims weighed 15 pounds less than perpetrators, though no subsequent research has confirmed this specific weight difference. Nacci and Kane (1984) pointed out that "assaulters are average in weight but larger than their targets" (p. 47); but offered no operational definition for average weight.

Age is another risk factor for both sexual perpetration and victimization within correctional settings. Researchers generally suggest that perpetrators are younger than other inmates but older than victims (Chonco, 1989; Nacci & Kane, 1984). Struckman-Johnson and colleagues (1996) found that targets were marginally older than the general prison population. Hensley et al. (2005) echoed this finding and reported the mean age for targets was 34 compared with a mean sample age of 33. Hensley and colleagues (2003) found the average age of targets of sexual assault to be 20.5 years, but they did not offer a mean age of perpetrators, confirming the notion that less is known about perpetrators of sexual assault. While the literature lacks consensus regarding the age at which one is at risk for victimization or perpetration, in general, victims consistently appear to be younger than perpetrators.

Gender also may be differentially associated with risk for sexual violence perpetration and victimization. National statistics suggest that approximately 90% of perpetrators and victims of prison sexual assault are male inmates (Beck & Harrison, 2006). As such, the majority of the empirical literature to date has focused primarily on factors associated with risk for prison sexual violence in male inmates. Despite low reported rates of sexual coercion in female correctional institutions, some research has begun to examine factors associated with sexual coercion among female inmates (Hensley et al., 2003). Overall, these studies have identified

several of the same demographic characteristics associated with prison sexual violence in male facilities. For instance, African American ethnicity and homosexual sexual orientation were both associated with risk for sexual perpetration, while White ethnicity and heterosexual orientation prior to incarceration were both associated with risk for sexual victimization (Hensley et al., 2003). Thus, although limited research exists, more investigations on the prevalence and nature of sexual coercion within female correctional samples are needed.

### *Empirically Derived Risk Factors for Perpetrators*

Perpetrators traditionally have been understudied in the literature regarding prison rape; therefore, only a few unique risk factors have been noted. Chonco (1989) indicated that inmates reported perpetrators of sexual violence had "many prior criminal offenses, serving a longer than average sentence, or serving life sentences, and with prior placements in different institutions" (p. 74). This article further suggests that having had prior placements in different institutions may serve as a time of education for the perpetrator, making him or her more savvy in selecting targets, which suggests a higher level of knowledge regarding prison life. Finally, this study found that perpetrators were "guilty of more serious and assaultive felonies than victims, and they have served at least six months of their current sentences" (p. 74). Overall, these identified risk factors suggest that as one is more exposed to the prison culture, he may be more likely to perpetrate sexual violence.

Regarding enhanced risk for victimization, sexual orientation is commonly cited. Nacci and Kane (1984) reported that 70% of self-identified homosexuals or bisexuals were targets of sexual assault in prison. Hensley and colleagues (2003) reported that 50% of the targets in their sample self-described as heterosexual compared with 78% of the total sample. An earlier study found that 42% of self-described as heterosexual compared with 78% of the total sample (Hensley et al., 2003). Wooden and Parker (1982) found that 41% of the inmates who reported sexual victimization in their sample were homosexual. These authors noted that an attitude of acceptance toward homosexuality or open activity that endorses homosexual behavior can increase an inmate's risk for sexual victimization.

Other victimization risk factors cited within the literature have not been as well studied or documented. These variables include single marital status, a current diagnosis or history of mental illness, a history of special education classes, and presence of a developmental disability (Dumond, 2000; Hensley et al., 2003). In addition, risk factors such as a middle-class background, nongang affiliation, conviction for

a sexual crime, unpopularity with staff or peers, causing another inmate to get into trouble, or reporting a prior history of sexual victimization have been associated with increased risk of victimization (Dumond, 2000; Hensley et al., 2003; Hensley & Tewksbury, 2002; Nacci & Kane, 1984; Struckman-Johnson, Struckman-Johnson, Rucker, Bumby & Donaldson, 1996). Previous literature simply points to these particular factors as being related to sexual victimization but does not highlight the reasons why such characteristics may heighten risk for sexual assault. One plausible explanation is that there may be homogeneity among inmates such that those with identifiable differences may be more at risk than those who blend seamlessly into the inmate population. Furthermore, in the prison culture, inmates who commit certain types of criminal activity may be treated differently, suggesting that the type of crime may place one at risk for victimization. For example, inmates who commit sex offenses against children have been shown to be at increased risk for physical and sexual victimization perpetrated by fellow inmates.

### *Rationale and Aims of Present Study*

There are many consequences associated with sexual victimization in prison, including injuries from violent physical attacks, risk for sexually transmitted disease, and psychological effects, including posttraumatic stress disorder (Dumond, 2003; Jones & Pratt, 2008; Kunselman, Tewksbury, Dumond, & Dumond, 2002; Mariner, 2001). These consequences highlight the necessity for researchers to illuminate factors that may contribute to the eradication of prison sexual assault. Literature on prison sexual assault "has been both sparse and fraught with methodological inconsistencies" (Jones & Pratt, 2008, p. 281). Prior research on risk for prison sexual assault has generally used cross-sectional methodology that requires inmates to retrospectively self-report a sexual assault experience as well as self-report other characteristics and qualities. Because there is a significant body of literature detailing potential underreporting in research concerning sensitive information (e.g., Latkin & Vlahov, 1998; Macleod, Hickman, & Smith, 2005), investigating alternative methods of collecting such information is critical. Therefore, it may be helpful to collect data on risk for sexual assault from other sources such as staff. Because staff spend a substantial amount of time with inmates, they may have exposure to clinically significant variables that assist in identifying inmates at risk for perpetrating and experiencing sexual assault. In addition, Struckman-Johnson and colleagues (1996) found that both inmates and correctional staff felt that prison sexual assault would be reduced if better screening and classi-

fication procedures were used to separate potential victims and perpetrators. Previous researchers have noted the importance of surveying staff in addressing issues related to prison sexual assault (Eigenberg, 2000a, 2000b). Furthermore, staff are often asked to assist in the placement and classification of inmates into different housing units based on predictions of risk and, therefore, are often called on to evaluate risk as a routine part of their jobs. In addition, staff are often the first to make reports of sexual misbehavior when and if it does occur and therefore have the most contact with victims and perpetrators. However, without knowing what factors staff are evaluating when making decisions of risk, it is possible that there is not a uniform method employed in classification of prisoners.

Staff are often asked to make predictions of risk on an inmate's arrival to a facility. In such a situation, little collateral information is available. Traditional risk assessment tools require significant background information and are impractical in intake settings due to lengthy administration times. As such, researchers have highlighted the need for assessment tools that are time-efficient and easy for clinicians to use (McNiel & Binder, 1994). In addition, many of the traditional risk assessment tools used to predict violence in other settings require extensive psychological training (e.g., Psychopathy Checklist-Revised; Hare, 1991; HCR-20: Assessing Risk for Violence, (Version 2); Webster, Douglas, Eaves, & Hart, 1997), which most prison intake staff responsible for initial risk assessments may not have received. Furthermore, some research suggests that practitioners perceive behavioral/presentation characteristics as more relevant to violence risk assessment than empirically validated risk factors (Elbogen, Mercado, Scalora, & Tomkins, 2002). Therefore, the development of an instrument that can be used with limited historical information but reflects risk factors from the empirical literature that are both available to and considered important by staff may help to guide the creation of a brief, yet efficient staff-implemented risk tool.

Although a small body of literature has examined staff definitions of rape and estimated frequency of prison sexual violence (see Eigenberg, 2000a, 2000b; Hensley, Dumond, & Tewksbury, 2002), only one study has considered the factors that staff deem important in determining risk for prison rape perpetration or victimization. In 2006, the National Institute of Corrections partnered with The Moss Group, Inc., and surveyed staff members at 12 jails and prisons to receive input regarding development of training strategies. At two thirds of the facilities, staff noted that they felt that they did not have training on how to properly handle sexual misconduct between inmates. Staff stated that in male facilities "male sex drives, forced abstinence, interpersonal conflicts, the exploitative nature of inmate culture, and the pursuit of power over weaker inmates" (2006, p. 4)

contributed to rates of sexual assault. In female facilities, staff noted "the need to connect with others, histories of abuse and inappropriate sexualization, predatory behavior, and staff sexual misconduct" as contributing to sexual victimization (Owens & Wells, 2006, p. 4). However, while these variables may facilitate a climate supportive of sexual assault, they are not easily identifiable on admission, therefore making these variables impossible to use when making classifications to reduce risk.

To address gaps in the literature, the purpose of the current study was to investigate variables that contribute to correctional staff appraisals of risk for prison sexual assault perpetration and victimization. This was accomplished by examining risk factors previously identified in the literature and behavioral characteristics that staff deem relevant to risk based on their exposure to and experience with inmate victimization. This study represents a preliminary investigation of staff perceptions of risk factors for prison sexual perpetration and victimization. Findings from this study are expected to guide the creation of time- and energy-efficient staff-administered prison rape risk instruments. Furthermore, because much of the literature on prison rape has involved male inmates or staff who manage male inmates, the present study attempted to extend this research by assessing staff risk ratings of female inmates.

The first goal of the study was to examine whether risk factors derived from the prison rape literature are used by staff when making predictions of risk. To address this goal, staff were presented with a list of variables, some empirically derived and some clinically relevant, to examine the extent to which empirically validated risk factors are being used. Due to the limited information available to staff when making risk ratings, it was hypothesized that staff would endorse presentation characteristics (e.g., stature) at higher frequencies than historical factors (e.g., prior victimization).

The second goal of the study was to examine how the risk factors relate to the overall risk rating. It was hypothesized that the number of factors endorsed would be positively associated with a higher overall risk rating. Staff were asked to mark risk factors as present and then provide a rating of risk, therefore, the number of risk factors marked did not necessarily dictate the final rating of risk. In addition, though several of the risk factors on the instrument used by staff were empirically derived, other factors were deemed by staff to be clinically relevant, therefore not all factors were derived from the literature. Therefore, it was hypothesized that empirically derived variables from the literature on prison rape perpetration (i.e., multiple prior incarcerations, prior acts of violence, intimidating or aggressive attitude at intake, familiarity with the prison environment, presenting as emotionally cold, and a history of predatory behavior) would be associated with a higher risk rating for prison sex-

ual perpetration. In addition, it was hypothesized that variables derived from the literature on prison rape victimization (i.e., presenting as intellectually challenged, socially awkward, naive, small in stature, unassertive, reporting a history of sexual assault or concerns about sexual pressuring in prison, presenting as homosexual, and having committed a child sexual offense or hate crime) would be associated with a higher risk rating for sexual victimization.

Finally, because much of the literature on risk factors for prison rape has been conducted with male inmates (Dumond, 1992, 2000; Hensley et al., 2003, 2005), the third goal of the study was to explore whether risk factors found among male inmates are equally predictive of overall risk status among female inmates. As there are indications that sexual assault in male and female institutions may differ with regard to the nature and severity of the abuse (e.g., Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 2006), it was hypothesized that fewer of the empirically derived risk variables would be associated with risk for sexual perpetration and victimization among female inmates.

## Method

### *Participants*

Ten staff members were responsible for collecting data on inmates on entry into the correctional system. Staff members ranged in age from 30 to 50 ( $M = 40.8$ ;  $SD = 10.55$ ) and 90% ( $n = 9$ ) were male. In terms of ethnicity, 90% ( $n = 9$ ) were European American and one was Hispanic/Latino. All raters had a minimum of a high school diploma, 60% ( $n = 6$ ) reported some postsecondary education, and 40% ( $n = 4$ ) had completed college. Raters had worked in a correctional facility for an average of 16.78 years ( $SD = 8.64$ ), and had been at their current position for an average of 8.5 years ( $SD = 6.85$ ). Three raters were Sergeants, five were Lieutenants, and the remaining two were case managers.

### *Measures*

*The Inmate Level of Risk Screening Measure.* This measure was designed for the purposes of initial screening of inmates on admission to the Department of Correctional Services. Similar to the approach used by McNiel and Binder (1994), the instrument includes empirically derived and clinically relevant variables. Eight items related to risk for sexual violence within the institution comprise the perpetration section (see appendix for items). These items included both clinically relevant and empirically derived variables. Staff members were asked to identify the presence of

each risk factor and make an overall rating of risk (low, medium, or high) for perpetration of sexual assault within the prison. The overall rating of risk was not directly related to the number of risk factors endorsed by staff. Cronbach's alpha for these items is .61. Nine items comprised the section assessing for risk for sexual victimization within the institution (see appendix) and clinicians were asked to complete the same procedure as with the perpetration items. Cronbach's alpha for the perpetration items was .62.

### *Procedure*

Data were collected immediately on initial admission into the state correctional system. In addition to the information collected on the screening measure, demographic information such as ethnicity, gender, and age was also collected. Staff completed the screening measure immediately on inmate transfer to a different facility and data were collected over approximately 18 months. Inmates were interviewed briefly and limited historical information (such as previous admissions) was available to staff at intake. Based on these sources of information, staff completed the Inmate Level of Risk Measure.

To enable staff to reliably code the Inmate Level of Risk Measure, 2 full-day training sessions were offered. At least one staff person conducting admission intakes at each facility attended a training session, during which operational definitions for each item were reviewed and questions were discussed. In addition, a series of videotaped admissions interviews were viewed and staff completed the Inmate Level of Risk Measure for each inmate. Risk ratings were collectively reviewed as a group to achieve risk rating consensus between the staff coders.

The measure was completed as part of a routine intake procedure and the data were compiled into a database on receipt of Institutional Review Board approval from the Department of Corrections and the university. All identifying information collected during the intake was excluded for the purposes of this study.

## **Results**

### *Inmate Descriptive Characteristics*

The sample of offenders was comprised of 315 female inmates and 1,842 male inmates. For the purposes of analyses, males and females were examined separately. For the female sample, the mean age was 35.05 years ( $SD = 9.27$ ), while for the male sample, the average age was 33.92 ( $SD = 10.49$ ). The female sample was 72.1% White, 14.3% African

American, 4.4% Latina, 7.6% Native American, and 1.6% were classified as other. For the male sample, the mean age was 33.92 ( $SD = 10.49$ ). The sample was 58.9% White, 22.8% African American, 12.8% Latino, 4.5% Native American and 1.0% Asian.

### *Data Analytic Plan*

Analyses for the present study were examined separately for each gender. Preliminary analyses examined correlations between the number of risk factors marked as present and the overall risk rating. Logistic regression analyses were employed to examine relationships between the risk factors and overall ratings for sexual perpetration and victimization. In all cases, the dependent variable (overall staff rating of risk for inmate sexual perpetration and victimization) was dichotomized into low and medium/high risk due to the low base rate of inmates classified as medium or high risk for sexual violence.

### *Descriptive Analyses*

Staff rated 87.9% of females as low risk for propensity to commit sexual violence, 11.1% as medium risk, and 1.0% as high risk. For risk of sexual victimization, 87.3% were rated low and 12.7% were rated medium risk. The mean number of risk factors for those rated as low risk for perpetration was .42 ( $SD = .77$ ) and for those rated medium/high risk was 2.58 ( $SD = 1.15$ ). For victimization the mean number of risk factors marked present for the low risk group was .15 ( $SD = .40$ ) and for the medium/high risk group was 2.78 ( $SD = 1.37$ ).

In the male sample, staff rated 93.8% as low risk for propensity to commit sexual violence, 5.9% as medium risk, and .3% as high risk. For risk for victimization, staff rated 94.4% as low risk, 5.2% as medium risk, and .4% as high risk. The mean number of risk factors marked present was .92 ( $SD = 1.07$ ) for those rated low risk for perpetration, and 3.77 ( $SD = 1.27$ ) for those rated medium/high risk. For ratings of victimization, the mean number of risk factors was .52 ( $SD = .84$ ) for those rated low risk, and 3.45 ( $SD = 1.46$ ) for those rated medium/high risk.

### *Perpetration*

To examine the first hypothesis that staff would be more likely to endorse presentation characteristics rather than historical variables, frequencies were examined for each risk variable. For the female sample, multiple incarcerations was marked present in 25.7% of the sample, prior violence in 4.4%, intimidating in 3.8%, prison wise in 18.1%, cold in 1.9%, predation in 11.7%, and nature of index offense in 2.2%. For

the male sample, multiple incarcerations was marked present in 42% of the sample, prior violence in 4%, intimidating in 6.9%, prison wise in 33.7%, cold in 8.5%, a history of predation in 9.6%, and the type of charge in 5.2%.

To evaluate the second hypothesis that the number of risk variables endorsed would be positively associated with the overall risk rating, correlations were conducted. In the female sample, the number of items marked present was significantly positively associated with the overall risk rating for perpetration ( $r = .66, p < .001$ ). In the male sample there was a significant positive relationship between number of risk factors marked present and the overall risk rating for perpetration ( $r = .54, p < .001$ ).

To further examine how specific risk factors related to overall risk for perpetration, logistic regression analyses were conducted. In the female sample, results indicated an overall significant relationship,  $\chi^2(9) = 174.47, p < .001$ . Furthermore, the model accounted for 43% of the variance (Cox & Snell  $R^2 = .43$ ) and correctly classified 96.8% of the inmates. In addition, 78.9% of individuals labeled high risk and 99.3% of individuals rated low risk were classified correctly. Two of the variables significantly contributed to the model: intimidating or aggressive attitude during intake (Wald = 16.85,  $p < .001$ ) and a history of predatory violence (Wald = 10.55,  $p = .001$ ; see Table 1).

The logistic regression for the male sample also revealed significant relationships between the risk factors and overall risk rating,  $\chi^2(9) = 504.03, p < .001$ . This model accounted for 24% of the variance (Cox & Snell  $R^2 = .24$ ) and correctly classified 96.3% of the male inmates. Furthermore, 54.8% of individuals rated high risk and 99.0% of individuals rated low risk were properly classified. Interestingly, for the men, all the risk factors significantly contributed to the model except age and ethnicity: multiple incarcerations (Wald = 4.34,  $p = .037$ ), prior violence (Wald = 42.72,  $p < .001$ ), intimidating or aggressive behavior at intake (Wald = 85.50,  $p = .000$ ), prison wise (Wald = 3.84,  $p = .050$ ), cold (Wald = 49.21,  $p < .001$ ), history of predatory behavior, (Wald = 15.24,  $p < .001$ ), and history of sexual charges (Wald = 48.15,  $p < .001$ ). Table 1 summarizes the results of the model.

### *Victimization*

With respect to victimization, staff members rating female inmates marked the intellectually challenged item as present in 5.4% of the sample. The socially awkward item was marked as present in 7.9%, naive was present in 10.8%, history of sexual victimization in 2.5%, small stature in 7.3%, unassertive in 8.9%, concern in 1.9%, sexual orientation in .6%, and

**Table 1.** Summary Table for Logistic Regression for Risk for Perpetration

	Female		Male	
	$\beta$	Odds ratio	$\beta$	Odds ratio
Ethnicity	-0.11	0.89	0.24	1.27
Multiple incarcerations	1.64	5.17	0.91	2.49
History of prior violence	24.85	6.200	2.76**	15.90
Intimidating or aggressive	5.25**	190.90	3.31**	27.40
Prison wise	2.19	8.93	0.84*	2.33
Cold	0.94	2.55	2.28**	9.76
History of predatory behavior	2.45*	11.59	1.28**	3.60
History of sexual assault	25.711	1.471	2.92**	18.50
Age	-0.08	0.05	0.02	1.02

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$

nature of the crime in 2.5%. In the male sample, intellectually challenged was marked in 6.0% of the sample, socially awkward in 16.2%, naive in 29.5%, history of sexual victimization in 1.6%, small stature in 6.9%, unassertive in 4.1%, concern in 1.0%, sexual orientation in .3%, and nature of the crime in 2.7%.

To examine how the number of risk characteristics endorsed related to overall risk for victimization, correlations again were conducted. In the female sample, there was a significant positive association between the number of risk characteristics endorsed and overall risk for victimization ( $r = .82, p < .001$ ). In addition, a significant positive relationship emerged between the number of risk variables endorsed and overall risk for victimization in the male sample as well ( $r = .62, p < .001$ ).

To further explore relationships between risk factors and overall victimization risk ratings, logistic regression analyses were conducted. Among female inmates, the model significantly predicted risk ratings,  $\chi^2(11) = 187.33, p < .001$ , with 45% of the variance in risk for victimization accounted for (Cox & Snell  $R^2 = .45$ ). Overall, the model correctly classified 96.8% of inmates, properly identifying 85.0% of individuals rated high risk and 98.5% of individuals rated low risk. Four variables significantly contributed to this model: intellectually challenged (Wald = 6.44,  $p = .011$ ); naive (Wald = 14.30,  $p < .001$ ); small stature (Wald = 17.45,  $p < .001$ ); and unassertive (Wald = 8.42,  $p = .004$ ). Table 2 summarizes these results.

The model for victimization in the male sample also was significant,  $\chi^2(11) = 504.70, p < .001$ . This model accounted for 24% of the variance (Cox & Snell  $R^2 = .24$ ) and correctly classified 97.4% of the inmates. Furthermore, 68.0% of individuals rated high risk and 99.1% of individuals

rated low risk were properly classified. Seven variables significantly contributed to this model: intellectually challenged (Wald = 10.36,  $p = .001$ ); awkward (Wald = 13.02,  $p < .001$ ); a history of victimization (Wald = 8.81,  $p = .003$ ); small stature (Wald = 64.97,  $p < .001$ ); unassertive (Wald = 42.18,  $p < .001$ ); concern over victimization in the prison environment (Wald = 25.15,  $p < .001$ ); and nature of index offense (Wald = 48.70,  $p < .001$ ). Table 2 summarizes these results.

Analyses were conducted to examine differences between the models across genders. Fisher's  $Z$  test reveals significant differences in the models specified for perpetration ( $Z = 3.91$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and for victimization ( $Z = 4.486$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

## Discussion

The present study is one of the first to examine risk factors that correctional staff consider important when making predictions of inmate sexual perpetration and victimization risk. During admission to prison, staff often make risk ratings after a short interview and with little background information available, therefore traditional risk assessment instruments are not useful in these instances because of their heavy reliance on historical factors (McNiel & Binder, 1994). Understanding factors that staff consider important when assessing risk within this context is essential to the development of useful screening instruments. One goal of the present study was to examine which empirically derived variables staff have access to and consider important when assessing risk in intake contexts. To accomplish this goal, staff were provided with a list of pre-selected empirically derived and clinically relevant variables from which they determined the presence or absence of each characteristic. Staff also determined an overall rating of risk for victimization and perpetration, not directly related to the number of factors they marked as present. This procedure enabled researchers in the present study to evaluate the relative importance staff assigned to the factors. Data from this preliminary study are intended to guide the development of future staff-administered risk instruments.

As there is no other study of this kind, there are no data available for comparison of these results. Overall, results indicated that staff classify a relatively small number of inmates as medium or high risk for prison sexual assault on entry into the prison system. Administrative implications may contribute to this finding. Specifically, institutional regulations require that staff isolate high risk inmates, and in overcrowded facilities, there may not be room to place all high risk inmates into seclusion. Staff may avoid such problems by assigning a lower risk rating. In addition to administrative implications, prison sexual assault is a low base rate be-

**Table 2.** Summary Table for Logistic Regression for Risk for Victimization

	Female		Male	
	$\beta$	Odds ratio	$\beta$	Odds ratio
Age	-0.022	0.98	-0.00	1.00
Ethnicity	0.137	1.15	-0.33	0.72
Intellectually challenged	3.33*	27.88	1.38**	3.97
Awkward	2.26	9.57	1.53/88	4.64
Naïve	3.64**	38.11	0.64	1.90
Victimization history	3.64	38.12	2.05**	7.80
Small stature	4.35**	77.39	2.89**	18.02
Unassertiveness	2.75*	15.60	2.79**	16.32
Expresses concern	3.05	21.17	4.25**	69.85
Sexual orientation	0.41	1.51	0.42	1.52
Nature of crime	25.21	8.91E+10	3.74**	41.88

\*  $p < .05$  ; \*\*  $p < .01$ 

havior (.4-5.5 substantiated incidents per 1,000 inmates in 2004 and 2005; see Beck & Harrison, 2006), thus, classifications made by staff are consistent with the expected rate of high risk behavior. Despite the low number of inmates classified as medium or high risk, results revealed a positive relationship between the number of risk factors marked presented and the overall rating of risk.

Findings generally were consistent with the hypotheses, though fewer risk factors were associated with risk for sexual perpetration or victimization in the female sample, likely because the empirically validated risk factors used in the present study were taken from literature using male samples. In general, it appears that staff rely on behavior and immediately observable characteristics when making risk ratings, though for a limited number of cases, institutional violence history also was considered. For both male and female inmates, staff were most likely to endorse multiple prior incarcerations and presenting as prison wise when making risk factor ratings for sexual perpetration. Because staff were often well established within the institution, reporting an average length of employment of 17 years, they may have been better able to readily identify inmates who had previously been incarcerated. Furthermore, the brief admission interviews often included questions about prior incarcerations. Because presenting as prison-wise may stem from being previously incarcerated, this variable may have been more readily obvious to staff when compared to the other variables listed as risk factors for prison sexual perpetration. Among both samples, staff also were more likely to endorse naïveté than any other risk factor for prison sexual victimization. Similar to prison-wise,

naïveté may be a presenting characteristic that staff are better able to identify on the basis of their considerable experience working in the institution. Among female inmates, staff weighed attitude at intake and history of predatory behavior as the most significant contributors to overall risk ratings for perpetration. Inmates perceived by staff as having an intimidating or aggressive attitude at intake were significantly more likely to receive a rating of medium or high. A history of predatory behavior was considered to a lesser degree. For male perpetration risk ratings, staff considered the same variables as in the female sample (attitude at intake and history of predatory behaviors) as well as the number of incarcerations, prior violence within an institution, history of sexual charges, and presenting as emotionally cold. Results indicate that inmates who staff perceived as having an intimidating or aggressive attitude at intake and those with a history of sexual charges and prior violence within an institution were more likely to receive higher ratings. Interestingly, for both genders, staff gave the most consideration to the inmates' attitudes at intake when making their appraisals of risk, which is consistent with the findings of Elbogen and colleagues (2002) suggesting that interpersonal interactions between staff and inmates heavily influences risk predictions.

The results for victimization risk indicate that overall staff considered many of the same variables when making classifications of risk for both men and women. The two exceptions that were more common in the male sample were concern over victimization in the prison environment and nature of the index offense. When examining variables that were more heavily weighted, differences were evident across genders. In the female sample, stature was most likely to result in a higher risk rating, whereas in the male sample, concern over victimization in the prison environment was most likely to result in a higher rating. These results suggest that staff consider different factors indicative of risk for prison sexual assault depending on the gender of the inmate. The differences in the models across genders may be due to differences in sample size or limited information available during the intake process. Moreover, the risk factors were derived from literature examining predominantly male samples, but these results suggest that men and women may present differently during admission into prison. Future research should examine risk for sexual perpetration and victimization separately for male and female inmates.

The variables staff marked as predictive of risk generally included factors observable at intake. One explanation for this finding may be that historical information, such as number of incarcerations or institutional violence, may not have been available to staff during the intake. Future research should examine other presentation characteristics that may be predictive of risk. Importantly, however, staff ratings reflected some of the risk factors previously identified in this literature, suggesting that

certain risk factors may be more meaningful or more available to staff than others. For example, Hensley and colleagues (2003) found that victims of sexual assault tended to be smaller in size; in the present study, size was one of the variables considered significant by staff when making ratings of risk for victimization in both male and female inmates. Similarly, Chonco (1989) indicated perpetrators of sexual assault tended to have prior incarcerations, which staff considered a significant risk factor for male inmates in the present study. Interestingly, sexual orientation, which has been highly studied in the literature (e.g., Hensley et al., 2005) was not a significant risk factor in the present study. This risk factor was marked present in less than 1% of the sample, likely because this information was unavailable during intake. If additional research confirms that knowledge of sexual orientation is unavailable during intake, removal of this risk factor from future instruments may be warranted.

The present study had several limitations. The measure used was developed as an internal tool for purpose of classification and its predictive validity is yet to be evaluated. In addition, interrater reliability data were unavailable as staff at each of the facilities did not rate the same inmates. Finally, internal consistency reliability coefficients for each scale tended to be low, suggesting that better efforts should be made to more precisely operationalize each risk factor. The low Cronbach's alpha values suggest that the items on each scale are not highly correlated with one another. This finding is not entirely unexpected because assessors did not have access to all pieces of information required to complete all scale items at the time of admission. To address this in the future, it may be advisable to remove items from the instrument that assessors routinely do not have information about at intake (e.g., sexual orientation).

Despite the limitations of the present study, this research represents an important contribution to the literature on prison sexual violence. Because prison staff are responsible for making inmate housing recommendations on entering the prison system, understanding factors that staff perceive as indicative of risk for prison sexual violence is critical. In addition, this information may be useful to correctional officers and correctional institutions when considering how to train individuals in making risk predictions. From an academic standpoint, it is important for researchers to consider the ease of implementation and feasibility of risk assessment tools when developing such instruments. Without surveying prison staff, our knowledge about the information actually available to prison staff would be severely limited and the resulting instruments would have little applied utility. However, these data have been useful in guiding the development of a more reliable and valid instrument to aid in the identification and classification of inmates on entry into the prison system. Finally, this study highlights the importance of considering possible gender differences when evaluating risk for prison sexual assault.

## Appendix

### *Risk Factors From Inmate Level of Risk Screening Measure*

Risk factors for perpetration		
Item	Description	Responses
Multiple prior incarcerations?	Mark item yes if inmate reports prior incarcerations or if computer shows previous confinements	Yes No
Prior violence within an institutional setting?	Mark yes if inmate admits to prior incident reports for violent behavior or if computerized record indicates a history of violence in prison	Yes No
Intimidating or aggressive attitude at intake?	Mark yes if inmate is verbally aggressive or attempts to verbally control intake interview	Yes No
Appears prison-wise; highly familiar with prison environment?	Mark yes if during initial interview inmate has specific questions regarding the institution suggesting a sophisticated knowledge of procedures above that typically encountered with new inmates (e.g., about recreational activities, visits, phone calls). All first-time offenders should receive a rating of no	Yes No
Appears emotionally cold?	Mark yes if during initial interview the inmate shows no remorse for index offense or a general lack of emotion regarding future plans	Yes No
Reported or displays a pattern of predatory violence or impulsive behavior?	Mark item yes if inmate's criminal history (as described within available records) indicates violence (i.e., multiple assault charges) or impulsive behavior (i.e., nonpremeditated)	Yes No
Reported history of charges and or convictions for sexual assault?	Mark item yes if current offense is sexual assault, if inmate reports history of sexually assaultive behaviors, or if criminal history indicates previous charge or conviction for sexual crime	Yes No

(continued)

*Risk Factors From Inmate Level of Risk Screening Measure (continued)*

Risk factors for perpetration		
Item	Description	Responses
Nature of crime	Mark yes if crime is sexual assault on child or vulnerable person, hate crime, etc.	Yes No
Victimization items		
Presents as intellectually/ cognitively challenged?	Mark yes if inmate presents as slow, demonstrates an inability to read or recite basic biographical information	Yes No
Socially awkward, timid, passive, or withdrawn?	Mark yes if inmate presents as shy, timid, or lacking in confidence	Yes No
Naïve to prison environment?	Mark yes if inmate asks a number of questions about prison or displays a general lack of knowledge about prison life	Yes No
History of physical or sexual victimization (or other victimization)?	Mark yes if inmate reports a history of sexual victimization at any point during his or her lifetime	Yes No
Slight physical stature, physical weakness, or physical condition that makes him or her vulnerable?	Mark yes if inmate displays a physical condition that might make him or her vulnerable (such as physical abnormality) or if he or she is smaller than the average inmate	Yes No
Unassertive, lacks self- confidence, projects weakness or fear?	Mark yes if inmate has a difficult time responding to questions	Yes No
Expresses concern about sexual pressuring or victimization?	Mark yes if inmate discusses fears of sexual pressuring or victimization during the initial interview.	Yes No
Displays sexual orientation in a way that projects vulnerability?	Mark yes if inmate discloses a homosexual sexual orientation	Yes No
Vulnerable to sexual victimization because of nature of his or her crime?	Mark yes if inmate's index offense makes him or her vulnerable to victimization (e.g., sexual assault of a child)	Yes No

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