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Sex, Love and Abuse Behind Bars

Sam Lewis | July 11, 2011 6:00 AM

City Limits Magazine conducted a four-month investigation into New York state prison staff abusing of female inmates. This piece is adapted from the original *City Limits* report by Kelly Virella.

CITY LIMITS

Tucked between galleries and high-end condominiums, right across the street from Chelsea Piers, sits Bayview Correctional Facility, a medium-security prison for women. Among the 167 prisons that participated in a recent federal survey, Bayview had the highest percentage of alleged incidents of inmate sexual abuse by staff in the country in 2008 and 2009. Nearly 12 percent of inmates there during that period reported sexual misconduct. That's five times greater than the national average — 2.2 percent — for women's prisons. The Bureau of Justice defines sexual abuse in prisons as including all sexual contact — including that in which an inmate is a willing participant — as well as verbal sexual harassment and voyeurism.



Bayview Facility in Manhattan had the highest percentage of alleged incidents of inmate sexual abuse by staff in the United States. City Limits/Marc Fader

Peter, a prison guard who worked the night shift at Bayview, told investigators that he took female inmate Jeanette to have sex in a stairwell in the prison in 1999. By 2001, the two were having sex in a number of places — on the roof, in her room, in the gym and even in the officer's station.

Each later told investigators that they had romantic feelings for each other. Jeanette thought the two were going to "live happily ever after"— until they started to argue and, she says, he began to hit her. Their relationship became even more complicated when Jeannette found out she was pregnant.

The guard, Peter, was convicted of rape in the third degree. He spent nearly two years

According to a federal

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in jail. Jeannette filed a lawsuit in 2004 against the New York State Department of Correctional facilities (DOCS). She alleged the agency was responsible for what happened to her. The case is pending.

Read the full story of Peter and Jeanette [here](#).

Sexual abuse in prisons — even if it involves willing participation by the inmate — is a concern because guards are given immense control over inmates’ lives and bodies, making the relationships between those behind bars and those tasked with supervising them both complex and problematic.

According to a federal survey, in 2008 and 2009, three out of 11 U.S. correctional facilities found to have the highest rates of alleged inmate sexual abuse by prison staff were in New York State.

Through the Freedom of Information Law, *City Limits* obtained documents showing that prisons officials frequently failed to forward inmates’ complaints of sexual abuse to the prison system’s inspector general, who is responsible for investigating such reports.

City Limits also found New York State’s Department of Corrections did not refer workers for prosecution in 16 of the 44 incidents from 2005 through 2009 where the employees appear to have violated state statutes regarding sexual abuse of inmates.

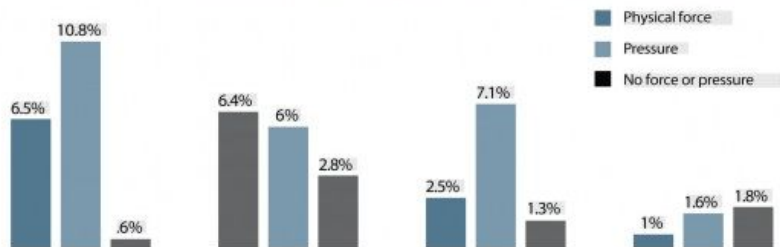
survey, in 2008 and 2009, three out of 11 U.S. correctional facilities found to have the highest rates of alleged inmate sexual abuse by prison staff were in New York State.

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Inmates Reporting Sexual Abuse: What Caused It



Correction officials in New York Sate testified before a federal panel in April 2011 about inmate allegations of sexual abuse by prison guards. In a response to the *City Limits*’ report, the state corrections commissioner, Brian Fischer, wrote: “The history of preventing sexual assault and prosecuting perpetrators in New York State’s prisons is characterized by our Department’s progressive and groundbreaking efforts to eliminate this unacceptable behavior.”

He added: “It is our Department’s firm commitment that all of our employees and offenders are always reminded that it is a fundamental right of all incarcerated persons to be free of the threat of physical violence and abuse of any type, including sexual abuse.”

Read the City Limits report [here](#).

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