

Equal Justice Initiative

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://eji.org/news/sexual-assault-in-alabama-prisons-jails-highest-in-nation/>

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A study released last week by the Department of Justice reveals that Alabama prisons and jails have some of the highest rates of sexual assault in the nation.

The Bureau of Justice Statistics conducted a nationwide survey of inmates in federal and state prisons and in county jails between October 2008 and December 2009 and reported that at least 88,500 adults held in U.S. prisons and jails were sexually abused during that time. According to the survey, two of the four jails with the worst rates of inmate-on-inmate abuse in the country are located in Alabama.

The reported rate of inmate-on-inmate sexual victimization at the Madison County Detention Facility in Huntsville was more than three times the national average. Madison County had the highest rate of inmate-on-inmate sexual victimization of any jail surveyed that houses male inmates. In addition, the Houston County Jail ranked fourth among the high rate facilities for inmate-on-inmate sexual assault, with inmates reporting incidents of sexual assault at a rate more than twice the national average.

In response to these statistics placing the Houston County Jail among the worst facilities in the nation for sexual violence, Houston County Sheriff Andy Hughes claimed that there is no problem with sexual assault at the jail and told a local news station that he does not believe the statistics. Jail Commissioner Keith Reed took the position that there is nothing the jail can do about sexual assaults that take place outside the presence of guards. These officials told reporters that they do not intend to take any steps to reduce incidents of sexual assault in the jail in the wake of this report.

Inmates at the two Alabama prisons that participated in the survey also reported higher than average rates of sexual victimization. Almost nine percent of inmates surveyed at William Donaldson Correctional Facility in Bessemer reported being the victim of some form of sexual assault. The rates of both inmate-on-inmate sexual abuse as well as staff-on-inmate sexual misconduct at Donaldson were roughly twice the national average. Reports of inmate-on-inmate sexual victimization at Bibb Correctional Facility were also higher than the national average.

Two other Alabama facilities, Baldwin County Corrections Center and Marengo County Detention Center, were asked to participate in the study but refused to cooperate.

The findings in the Department of Justice study echo numerous accounts that EJI has received from inmates in correctional facilities throughout Alabama. These inmates report that sexual violence is widespread in both jails and state prisons but is frequently overlooked or ignored by officials at these facilities.

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