

# What is "Stop Prisoner Rape"?

**Stop Prisoner Rape, Inc. (SPR)** is a small but growing national non-profit organization dedicated to combatting the rape of prisoners and providing such assistance as we can to survivors of jailhouse rape. Soon we hope to start organizing state chapters.

Both our president and past president are survivors of jail gang-rapes which followed arrests for protesting the war in Indochina, and its president spent five years in federal prison. Thus we maintain a prisoner's practical perspective rather than an academic or administrative one. We believe that prisoners themselves can be most effective in discouraging rape in their own institutions, but believe there is much that administrators and outsiders must and can do to address this horror.

As rape is frequently used worldwide by administrations against political prisoners, SPR has a particular interest in the political prisoner.

According to the best and most thorough statistical survey of a prison (a medium-security California institution, reported in 1982 by Prof. Wayne Wooden and Jay Parker), 14% of the prison population was sexually assaulted in that prison. The authors believed that this underreported the extent of rape, and being limited to events in that institution it did not count prisoners who had been raped in jails or other prisons and learned to pair off with a protector as soon as they arrived. A still unpublished 1994 statewide survey has found an even greater sexual assault rate. The only survey of a jail, by Philadelphia District Attorney Alan Davis in 1968, reported that over 3% of the men who passed through the jails of that city were sexually assaulted; Davis also stated he believed it to be an undercount. We do not know how many boys are raped in juvenile facilities, but by all accounts the situation is the worst at that level. Women prisoners are raped by guards and staffers to an unknown extent, but we do consider it a serious problem..

SPR has taken the position that rape is menticide, the killing of the mind and spirit. The consequences of rape trauma syndrome, already horrendous for female and gay male victims in the community, are greatly magnified for incarcerated males who are forced into an unfamiliar passive sexual role (most victims as well as almost all jailhouse rapists are heterosexual by self-description and by practice outside of confinement) and then must adapt to a continuous unwanted same-sex situation from which they cannot escape. Furthermore, with most keepers refusing to allow condoms in their institutions, and HIV rampant among prisoners, survivors who pair off with a protector in order to avoid continuous gang rape (the usual outcome) are put at great and avoidable risk of infection with the AIDS virus. SPR considers this to be murder by government policy.

SPR does what it can with very limited resources to educate prisoners, the public (which is the ultimate Keeper), and incarceration professionals, and to reach out to survivors both in and outside the walls. We work with lawyers for survivors filing damage claims and encourage class actions against institutions which do nothing to protect the youngest and least violent residents against the terror of sexual assault; we also entered a brief on prisoner rape in the U.S. Supreme Court (*Farmer v. Brennan*) in late 1993; this brief had a marked influence on the Court's opinion (decided June 6, 1994). We also seek to prod public officials to deal with this problem. On the other hand we want to cooperate with administrators willing to face this problem by providing realistic staff training. Eventually we would like to provide face-to-face counseling for incarcerated survivors. We also provide free literature to prisoners and free copies of a 90-minute audio tape, *Becoming a Survivor*, to prisoners who have been or expect to be sexually assaulted and who request and are able to receive them. SPR worked closely with the Safer Society Press to produce the Prisoner Rape Education Project (PREP), of which this tape is a part. Another tape is designed for prisoner orientation programs and emphasizes rape avoidance, while a 46-page booklet for institutional staff members discusses realistic ways that the institutions can discourage rape and improve the wretched lot of the survivor.

Much of our work consists in attempts to get the public media to end the curtain of silence which has so long surrounded the rape of prisoners. Rape of males has long been such a tabooed subject for public discussion that numerous myths and misconceptions have been allowed to flourish. It is important to know that anyone can be raped, that rape is a crime of power which cannot alter the victim's masculinity or sexual orientation.

Once a prisoner is raped, he is stigmatized and marked as a victim for repeated sexual assault for as long as he remains locked up. Most victims are young, small, and non-violent, unable to defend themselves against ruthless exploitation. It is estimated (applying the findings of previously published systematic surveys of a jails and a prison to the 1.3 million males locked up in America in 1994) that some 60,000 unwanted sexual acts take place behind bars in the United States every day, victimizing in the course of a year some 130,000 adult males in prisons, 30,000 in jails, and 40,000 boys held in juvenile and adult facilities. Full of rage and without the opportunity to receive psychological treatment for Rape Trauma Syndrome, these men and boys will usually return to the community far more violent and antisocial than before they were raped. Some of them will perpetuate the vicious cycle by becoming rapists themselves in a misguided attempt to "regain their manhood" in the same manner in which they believe it was "lost." The number of women sexually victimized by male guards and staff is large but unknown. The purposes of SPR are to provide education, information, and advocacy at all levels with regard to this ongoing nightmare of sexual assault and enslavement; to provide encouragement, advice, counseling, and legal support to survivors; to train the staff which must deal with them; and to combat this systematic horror in every way possible.

Established in 1979 by Russell D. Smith as "People Organized to Stop Rape of Imprisoned Persons" (POS RIP)

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