

interview

Double Injustice: Rape of women in prison

When looking at the issue of rape, it is crucial to include our sisters inside prison walls in the discussion because they often are allowed no voice to speak out about the gross injustices that happen every day. off our backs staff womyn Sheri Whatley conducted this interview with Chino Hardin, a youth organizer for The Prison Moratorium Project based in New York City. Chino is the point person for the “No More Youth Jails” campaign. She has been arrested sixteen times, and incarcerated on over eight occasions, so has first-hand information to share about the issue of women being raped in prison.

oob: The mainstream is aware of the high rate of rape that men experience inside prison walls, but is largely ignorant of the fact that it also happens to women who are incarcerated. Could you give me an idea of how common it is for women prisoners?

CH: I think it's very common for women to get raped. It's not talked about as openly as it is about men (on the inside). The rates for women being raped vary from prison to prison. But when I was locked up I knew three girls who were raped by

boys who actually broke out of their cells. The boys were locked in the same facility with the girls— this was in a juvenile facility. Also, when I went to an adult facility I knew about women being assaulted by guards and other inmates.

I personally think you got a 50/50 shot. It's depending on what you go into prison for, and what prison you go to and how you present yourself when you're in that prison. In my experience with the older females, they tend to kind of look down on child abusers and child molesters.

oob: So it's about punishment?

CH: It's about putting the justification to the rape happening so they can sleep at night.

oob: Who's doing the raping? Is it the guards, other women prisoners, or other male prisoners?

CH: I know guards rape women and manipulate women into having sex with them, due to fear of not getting the privileges or making it harder for them throughout their course of time in sentencing. And little things, like promising the prisoners candy or cigarettes from the outside world [if they have sex with the guards]. Also, other women who are prisoners, as well as male prisoners [are raping incarcerated women].

oob: Are all these guards (who are doing the raping) men, or are some of them women?

CH: I never heard of any female guards attacking any female inmates.

oob: Do these people target certain prisoners to rape? For instance, lesbian or transgendered women?

CH: Lesbians and transgendered women are at the top of the list to be raped, because of things like homophobia and no programs for guards and prisoners to help [them] deal with issues that come up on daily basis. Guards use rape as form of punishment and it is the lesbian and transgendered community that receives this type of punishment for just being who they are.

If you're in a gang and, for example, they put you in the Blood house, and you're a Crip, then you'll be



“Sex between guards and female inmates is a given in prison; whether consensual or coerced, it has always taken place.” In most states it is illegal even if consensual. It also occurs in men's prisons and in juvenile facilities. Those who are incarcerated are vulnerable to sexual abuse from other inmates but in far too many cases, the sexual abuse comes at the hands of those entrusted to guard them.

When rape or sexual assaults by corrections officers and jailers do occur, reporting it is not always an option. Even if an inmate does report it, it is often ignored by the system, and the inmate is punished for daring to make trouble for the prison guard.