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## Houston County Jails Rank Fourth in Inmate-On-Inmate Sexual Victimization

Houston County ranks fourth in the nation for jails with high rates of sexual victimization among inmates right behind areas like Miami Dade and Orleans Parish.

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From the looks of it, this is a very disturbing finding. Of the 286 jails that were surveyed, Houston County Jail ranks fourth with an estimated four percent of its inmate population being sexually victimized.

"It's hard to put a lot of stock in these numbers here reported by inmates since we have no actual knowledge of it," said Sheriff Andy Hughes.

Sheriff Andy Hughes adamantly denies the findings by the Bureau of Justice Statistics which says  four percent of Houston County Jail inmates been have sexually victimized by other inmates while in custody.

According to the study, on average 1.5 percent of male prisoners are involved in inmate on inmate sexual activity while in jail. Houston County is almost three times the average, something jail Commander Keith Reed says does not add up.

"There were 528 inmates in the facility on the day of this survey. Based on their report of a four percent, that means 21 of those 528 inmates alleged to be involved in sex acts in the Houston County Jail. Of those 21, only one actually reported to us that they were a crime victim," said Jail Commander Keith Reed.

Reed says having only one report of sexual assault during the 2008-2009 survey period proves these cases are rare, but Reed did admit jail staff cannot be everywhere.

"It is difficult to prevent because these types of acts occur in inmates cells. The cells are not covered by cameras, we do not have a camera in the inmates cell, so if the inmate does not report the event or the staff does not discover the event while making a security round, then that event is undocumented, then we can't do anything about undocumented or unreported events," said Reed.

This survey was conducted anonymously by the Bureau of Justice Statistics through a questionnaire on a touch screen computer. Sheriff Hughes says the jail volunteered for the survey but says the report has too many variables and he questions the integrity of the inmates.

Sheriff Hughes says he does not plan to do anything differently to prevent this activity in the jail. The one report of sexual assault was investigated and found to be false by a grand jury. Also, the definition of sexual victimization can be anything from touching to rape.

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