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The Dignity Assaults Initiative Implementation within the Michigan Corrections Organization: Staff Acceptance and Application of a Contemporary Policy Approach

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the implementation of one facet of the Dignity Assaults Initiative (DAI) in the state of Michigan. The DAI focused upon the corrections environment and the consistent management of two different types of staff assaults, perpetrated by inmates: liquid assaults and sexually deviant behavior. This research applied a survey focused on the examination of the sexually deviant behaviors addressed by this policy initiative. The survey was distributed to Michigan corrections employees through the Michigan Corrections Organization, and collected data regarding the policy implementation, frequency of exposure to sexually abusive/harassing behaviors and the appropriate responses to such behaviors. The data in this study found that participants did not see the DAI as effectively reducing the numbers of sexually deviant behaviors; however, the majority of the participants were aware of the DAI. The types of appropriate responses necessary to combat the sexually abusive/harassing behaviors of inmates were focused upon the formal mechanisms – formal reporting and segregation prior to administrative review. The data also indicated that both male and female staff may be exposed to sexually abusive/harassing behaviors of inmates, but when the number of occurrences over a career is evaluated, the impact upon female corrections employees is much higher.

KEYWORDS

Prisons; sexual assault; gender

Introduction

The management of inmate behavior can be complex. Many times, policy approaches to particular inmate behavior are made more complex by outside stakeholders, employee labor organizations, or cultural barriers within the correctional facilities. The management of sexually abusive behavior of inmates that is directed toward staff is an example of a complex management issue because the range of abusive behaviors may include verbal abuse, exhibitionist masturbation, and physical assault. Corrections leaders are well-equipped to deal with the physical assaults as a criminal matter and normally deal with those types of incidents consistently across jurisdictions. However, other types of sexually abusive behavior, such as exhibitionist masturbation, have not been handled as consistently across jurisdictions.

The manner in which this particular behavior is managed has been the subject of litigation (See Freitag v. Ayers, 2006). In an effort to avoid litigation and to move to create an environment

in which inmates treat staff in a respectful manner, some agencies have taken steps to address this misbehavior in an effort to reduce or eliminate these types of actions.

The Dignity Assault Initiative (DAI) was launched in 2016 in the state of Michigan. The goal of this initiative was to provide consistent and methodical approaches to two different types of assaults of Michigan staff by inmates: liquid assaults (when an inmate has thrown urine, blood, feces, spit, or another unknown substance onto an employee) and sexually deviant behavior (when an inmate exposes his genitalia to an employee for personal or sexual gratification).

The DAI was implemented to address issues brought forward by members of the Michigan Corrections Organization (MCO) who were concerned about the manner in which these assaults were handled. Even though many of these assaults were handled efficiently, there was a percentage of the cases that were falling through the cracks where no action was taken or the actions were inconsistently addressed. The fact that a number of these incidents were not handled in a manner that would result in a referral for additional criminal charges made many of the members of the organization feel as if their safety was being compromised. They felt that inmates would view the lack of response as a chance that they would not be held accountable.

As a result of “listening sessions” with members of the MCO, these types of assaults were discussed throughout the state. Interestingly, these two assaults (liquid assaults and sexually deviant behavior) seemed to be connected. Staff reported that the liquid assaults were the result of a lot of sexual exposures. In other words, inmates would expose themselves to female staff, but that type of behavior did not seem to intimidate the male staff so they would resort to a liquid assault. (It is easier to expose themselves than to save feces and urine to use as a weapon.)

It was this connection that led to the decision to address both types of assaults in the DAI initiative. The Michigan Corrections Organization organized a meeting with the Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC), Michigan State Police, and the Prosecuting Attorneys Association of Michigan. Consensus to address these behaviors was easy because no one involved in this discussion believed that corrections staff should have to put up with these types of assaults. MDOC Deputy Director was quoted as stating:

Being ‘dressed out’ (liquid assaults) is not something that should ever be considered a part of the job. It is a crime and one that robs our employees of their dignity. Our staff members need to know that when they are assaulted, we will do everything possible to ensure the case is handled correctly so that it can be turned over to MSP with the goal of seeing a prosecution.” (Press release MCO)

This DAI has been in place since 2016. The goal of this research study is to examine the effectiveness of this initiative upon the sexually abusive actions of inmates, by surveying members of the Michigan Corrections Organization. This study explored the following research questions:

- (1) What is the frequency that Michigan corrections employees are exposed to sexually abusive/harassing incidents and what types or variables are associated with this exposure.
- (2) What impact has the DAI had upon the prevalence of sexually abusive behavior of inmates toward staff?

Literature review

Review of the literature reflects a focus of five primary themes: the correctional culture, sexual harassment, failure to report, public safety threat related to sexually abusive/harassing behaviors of inmates, and policy implementation.

Correctional culture

Much research has been conducted on the impact of the correctional environment, including the impact of the correctional officer culture upon corrections employees (Britton, 1997b; Crewe, Liebling, & Hulley, 2011; Esselstyn, 1966; Klofas & Toch, 1982; Pollock, 1986). Farkas and Manning (1997) described the corrections culture and work as “people work” which is often fraught with adversarial and conflicting issues which includes unpredictability, uncertainty, and secrecy. Issues such as shift work, staff shortages, and high turnover rates have been identified as part of this work environment and as the cornerstones of the culture (Swenson, Waseleski, & Hartl, 2008). Additional stressors are described as: exposure to traumatic, operational, and organizational issues that increase negativity and the increasing effects of corrections fatigue (Denhof, Spinaris, & Morton, 2014). Danger is also an ever-present aspect of this work, and the reactions to danger are built into the cultural expectations and responses (Armstrong & Griffin, 2004; Castle & Martin, 2006; Dowden & Tellier, 2004; Gordon, Proulx, & Grant, 2013; Lambert & Paoline, 2008).

Work in corrections also includes dealing with primary and secondary trauma. As a result, individuals can develop the following behaviors: cynicism, hyper-vigilance, chronic suspicion of others, loss of empathy, desensitization, loss of trust, loss of innocence, safety concerns, intimacy problems, difficulty in relationships, boundary issues, increased anger, disgust, sadness, distorted worldview, intimacy difficulties, questions of spirituality, decreased tolerance, intrusive imagery, disturbing thoughts and distress (Lewis, 2015). The likelihood of employees developing depression symptoms and burnout symptoms has also been found to be significant in this workplace (Griffin, Hogan, & Lambert, 2012).

Corrections is a very masculinized place to work. Griffin, Armstrong, and Hepburn (2005) described the prison environment as an exceedingly masculinized organization, and they describe the dominant group as possessing physical strength and having a willingness to use force. As a result, a key feature of this work environment is one of gender resistance. Jones (2016), found a resistance to fully embrace the need for specific policy changes, based upon gender. Jones proposed that the policy change process was hampered by many barriers related to the workplace culture that was very resistive to adaptations for female employees. Other researchers have studied the effect of gender upon the corrections workplace and culture and found that women had a calming effect or normalizing effect upon the environment, particularly as it applies to the management of inmates (Alpert & Crouch, 1991; Carlson, Thomas, & Anson, 2004; Peterson, 1982; Wicks, 1980)

Sexual harassment

Very few work environments stay the same over time, and corrections is no exception. The biggest single factor that changed the corrections officer’s culture was the inclusion of women into many positions and levels (Hemmens, Stohr, Schoeler, & Miller, 2002). This inclusion occurred slowly throughout the history of this country until the 1990s. Then, due to a rising volume of litigation and court decisions in the 1980s (“Hudson v. Palmer,”

1984), many systems began to quickly move women into more positions within the prison system. This “forced” integration into what had previously been heralded as a man’s world, was very difficult for both the men who were already in place and the women who were part of that era (Wicks, 1980). This change in composition is important towards understanding the culture in the corrections workplace as differences.

Zimmer (1986) offered perhaps the first in-depth view of the world of the female corrections officer. In this early account, Zimmer discussed the process by which inmates actively tried to “drive females out” of their housing areas. The inmates were described as using sexually suggestive and harassing behaviors to encourage females to bid for a job elsewhere. Zimmer described the methods female officers used to discourage sexually abusive behavior from inmates, which included talking to the inmate later about the behavior, using the formal disciplinary system, and even “asking a few friendly male guards to intervene and teach the inmates a lesson in proper conduct” (p. 102). Zimmer proposed specialized training for female officers that included how to deal with inmate sexual advances and sexual misconduct.

Crewe (2006) examined the views that inmates held regarding female officers and classified these views into four categories: sexualization and sexual desire, cynicism about professional motives, masculine validation through feminine contact, and chivalry. The sexualization view was defined as: female staff serving as an “outlet for fantasies of sexual contact and conquest” (p. 403). Prisoners described female officers as sexual failures on the streets or as officers who used their sexuality to control inmates (Crew, 2006).

Inmate perpetrated harassment has included exhibitionist masturbation; masturbation in plain view of staff in order to intimidate or harass them. While some offenders may have engaged in this deviant sexual behavior prior to women working in the housing areas, it was not frequently reported. Once women began to work in virtually every housing unit in the country, the challenge of dealing with this behavior increased (Britton, 1997a).

An issue that is not often discussed is that of the connection between inmate perpetrated harassment of female staff and sexual harassment of female staff by co-workers. This connection is based on the premise that inmates watch staff for clues of what types of behaviors are tolerated and adapt their behaviors (negative and positive) in response (Lancaster, 2006). Research regarding harassment of female employees by co-workers has been conducted in a variety of work environments and with a variety of different types of employees (Pryor & Whalen, 1997; Texeira, 2002; Vartia & Hyyti, 2002; Zimmer, 1986). Martin and Jurik (2007) studied the corrections environment and concluded that the pervasiveness and seriousness of sexual harassment in corrections has a negative impact on women officer’s work experience, particularly when they work in an organization that promotes and/or tolerates such conduct.

Failure to report

Another serious concern regarding the corrections workplaces is the very real possibility that much of the harassing behavior is not reported, whether the perpetrator is an employee or an inmate. Bergman, Langhout, Palmieri, and Cortina (2002) studied this issue and confirmed that reporting sexual harassment did not improve the job outcomes (and at times worsened it) because “reporting does not occur in a vacuum.” They found that when it was reported, the organization reacted in a variety of ways, including: offering support, ignoring

the issue, or retaliating against the reporter. Gutek and Koss (1993) found that women used avoidance tactics as an indirect strategy to deal with the harassment.

Strategies to deal with harassment may be influenced by the issue of power when examining sexual harassment perpetrated against female staff by male inmates. Benson (1984) described three different power relationships within sexual harassment: “Power – when the abuser has formal power over the victim, Contra-power – when the victim has power over the abuser, and Peer harassment when the abuser and victim have equal power” (p. 117). Often, only the formal power of the officer has been considered, this approach ignored the fact that the power of the male gender may exceed that of a female, even one in a position of formal power or authority. The concept that sexual harassment perpetrators can be from subordinates or others with less power was also concluded in the work of Dougherty (2006).

Researchers have also examined the consequences of sexual harassment (Gutek & Koss, 1993; Willness, Steel, & Lee, 2007). Gutek and Koss (1993) found negative effects for the economic and career status of individuals who had been sexually harassed, but they also identified physical symptoms and effects upon job performance as being negatively impacted by the act of reporting sexual harassment.

Brooks and Perot (1991) studied the predictability of sexual harassment. They concluded that labeling the offensive behavior was a necessary component of this process. If the action is not labeled as sexual harassment then the reaction to the behavior may be a silent acceptance. Therefore, the organizational climate must communicate an intolerance of sexual harassment and the expectation that such behavior will be reported (Fitzgerald, Drasgow, Hulin, Gelfand, & Magley, 1997).

Public safety threat

Heil, P., Harrison, L., English, K., & Ahlmeyer, S. (September, 2009) examined the connection between inmates who are sexually abusive/harassing while in prison and their behavior once released into the community. They concluded that when prison sex offenders were compared with other types of sex offenders, the time elapsing prior to a new criminal offense, or the length of time an offender remains crime-free in the community was shorter than other offenders. The analysis of the data in this study concluded that “Offenders who act out in highly structured prison environments are prone to continue criminal behavior in less structured community environments “ (p. 905). The need to monitor institutional behavior as it links to behavior after release has also been concluded by McDougall, Pearson, Bowles, and Cornick (2009). This type of connection is supported by the research that examines cross-over behaviors which are defined as a continuum of sex offences that include public masturbation and indecent exposure (Heil, Ahlmeyer, McCullar, & McKee, 2000; Heil, Ahlmeyer, & Simons, 2003; Kleban, Chesin, Jeglic, & Calkins, 2012; O’Connell, 1997; Thomas, 2010).

Worley and Worley (2013) examined sexually abusive behavior of inmates toward staff and described public autoerotism an aggressive form of masturbatory behavior designed to harass, antagonize, or unsettle employees. As part of this study, four inmates justified masturbating in the presence of female staff members by suggesting that females had no business in the penitentiary and therefore got what they deserved. This finding is

supported by the work of Macdonald (1973) who identified a possible motive of indecent exposure as motivated by anger or contempt for women.

Cheeseman Dial and Worley (2008) studied boundary violators (inmates who targeted staff members for inappropriate relationships) and found that inmates used public masturbation to determine if an officer was open to a relationship. The participants in this study explained that if the staff member ignores the behavior it is a signal that they condone it and may be open to establish a relationship. Lambert, Worley, and Worley (2018) also examined this behavior as a possible motive related to the process of boundary violations between inmates and staff.

Cusack (2014) described how inmates may use “gunning” in order to victimize female guards. The act of gunning is defined as masturbating in the sight of a female guard who is able to observe the male inmate. Chapman (2009) examined the nature and consequences of inmate perpetrated harassment directed at female corrections officers and found a lack of reporting or a reluctance to report sexually abusive behaviors of inmates. The study proposed the existence of a disjunction of the employee not labeling themselves as a victim of harassment from inmates. However, even without the label, the effect of being subjected to this type of unwanted sexual attention was found to have resulted in negative psychological and physiological effects. Chapman examined the legal definition of sexual harassment and the types of behaviors that female corrections officers must endure. Specifically, Chapman identified the fact that inmates may actually maintain power over female officers.

Hanrahan (1997) concluded that sexual harassment undercuts a woman’s position for social equality in two ways: both sexually and economically. The nurses in this study felt unprepared to deal with the sexual harassment because their training did not do anything to provide guidance on how to handle these issues, and this lack of training communicated a minimization of these issues. The nurses differentiated between harassment from patients and the harassment from staff in the workplace. They defined the harassment from staff as a way to try to control them, but the nurses were reluctant to use the term sexual harassment when discussing incidents involving patients. Gittleson, Eacott, and Mehta (1978) also found in an earlier study that nurses were hesitant to report indecent exposure with almost one-third of all such incidences going unreported.

Policy

Implementing policy change that results in a change in the culture is often very difficult, particularly when employees do not feel like they are a part of the process. Micieli (2008) examined the work of the officer when implementing policy change and many of the participants in that study declared that they felt that they were only one step above the inmates. Sykes (1958) described the same type of relationship in *The Society of Captives*. Lipsky (1980) proposed the theory of street-level bureaucracy based on the assertion that the real implementation and even development of policy occurs at a very low level in service bureaucracies.

There is no universally accepted method or paradigm to guide the work of change management, even though a great deal of research has been devoted to this topic (Caldwell, 2005). One consistent theme in change management literature is the importance to attend to the needs of the employees. If this is not done, resistance within the organization can occur. This

resistance can derail the intended improvements and the end result is that the organization is weakened (Bhaskar, Bhal, & Ratnam, 2003).

The manner in which change is communicated, can be a very real determining factor in the success of the change (Jimmieson, Peach, & White, 2008; Lane, 2008; Zorn, Page, & Cheney, 2000). Some change adoption research suggests that the change process fails as often as 70% of the time (Varkey & Antonio, 2010). Johnston (2005) described change by using the analogy a giant learning to dance. Johnson contended that big agencies must be able to use the “power of the giant with the agility of the dance” (p. 71).

Many corrections systems are complex in size and design. Flaherty-Zonis (2007), created a guide specifically designed for corrections agencies: “Building culture strategically: A team approach for corrections” which details a plan to change the culture

using the APEX model. This model presents a roadmap for correctional agencies to use as they begin a change which includes: assess the culture, define the goal, organize for results, plan the implementation strategy, implement the change management plan and sustain the change effort.

Methods

Sample

This study employed a cross-sectional design utilizing a survey questionnaire distributed to members of the Michigan Corrections Organization (MCO), a state correctional officer’s union with a voluntary membership of 6100 corrections staff. A total of 255 surveys were collected, with 221 proving viable based on full completion. The sample of 255 of the 6100 total MCO membership yielded a 4% response rate. However, at 221, the current sample size reflects a 6–7% margin of error, resulting in a 95% confidence level. The survey participants closely mirrored the gender breakdown of the entire sample pool: MCO members – 82% male and 18% female, survey participants: 80% male and 20% female. Additionally, a total of 88.13% (n = 193) participant’s current assignment included the supervision of subordinate staff. Descriptive statistics are provided in [Table 1](#).

Survey

The survey included questions dealing with staff knowledge and effectiveness of the DAI, the prevalence of sexually abusive/harassing behavior, and asked participants to identify the most appropriate response when dealing with a variety of sexually abusive/harassing behaviors. (see [Appendix A](#)).

The DAI defined sexually deviant behavior to include only incidents when an inmate exposes his genitalia to an employee for personal or sexual gratification. The study sought to examine the responses to a wider range of sexually abusive behavior within the work environment so that the following inmate actions were included in the survey: sexually abusive/harassing verbal abuse, sexually abusive/harassing gestures, exhibitionistic masturbation defined as masturbation in plain view of staff in order to intimidate or harass them, unwelcome physical contact to include touching and/or grabbing, threats of sexual assault, attempted or actual sexual assault. The expansion of the types of sexually abusive/harassing behaviors examined was informed by the work of Chapman (2009).

Several steps were taken to address the research questions driving this study. First, the occurrence and prevalence of sexually abusive/harassing behavior was examined. Second,

Table 1. Descriptive statistics.

	n	%
Gender		
<i>n</i>	219	
Male	175	79.91
Female	44	20.09
Age		
<i>n</i>	219	
21–29	27	12.39
30–39	52	23.85
40–49	79	36.24
50–59	54	24.77
60+	6	2.75
Race/Ethnicity		
<i>n</i>	219	
American Indian or Alaskan Native	9	4.11
Asian/Pacific Islander	0	0
Black/African American	7	3.2
Hispanic	3	1.37
White/Caucasian	192	87.67
Other	8	2.75

a chi-square analyses were completed to measure association among relevant categorical variables. Thirdly, data was examined regarding the appropriate staff response to sexually abusive/harassing behaviors.

Analysis

Data was collected that indicated the frequency of occurrences; therefore, chi-square tests of independence were conducted to measure association among all relevant categorical variables in this study. According to Pearson's statistical technique, chi-square will indicate larger values as the minimum association between differences is zero, which shows evidence of a stronger relationship among variables and greater support against the null hypothesis (Daniel, 1978). Chi-square analyses have assumptions and limitations. First, the sample size must be random, large, and in frequency form. Second, cases must be assigned to at least one cell in the analysis, either observed or expected. A limitation to chi-square analyses is that it measures the degree of association between variables, but little else (Agresti, 1996). Agresti (1996) and Field (2005) indicated that Cramer's *V* is a statistic that can further evaluate the association by squaring the Pearson chi-square statistic and dividing by sample size and rows/columns. For this project, the dependent variables were utilized with independent variables of interest to calculate Pearson's chi-square statistic and values for Cramer's *V* to show the strength of the relationship.

Results

Survey outcomes

Awareness of the DAI was confirmed by 84% of sample participants; however, not all participants understood that the DAI included both liquid assaults and indecent exposure in view of staff. The data indicates that more male participants believed that the DAI initiative included only liquid assaults and more female participants believed that the DAI initiative included indecent exposure (Table 2). While a high number of participants were

Table 2. Participant response to dignity assault initiative.

	N	%	Male	%	Female	%
<i>Are you aware of the Dignity Assault Initiative with the Michigan Department of Corrections?</i>	219		183		36	
Yes	175	79.91	145	82.86	38	86.36
No	44	20.09	30	17.14	6	13.64
<i>Has the Dignity Assault Initiative reduced the number of times that staff are subjected to sexually abusive/harassing behavior?</i>	212		170		42	
Yes	70	33.02	55	32.35	15	35.71
No	142	66.99	115	67.65	27	64.29
<i>Have you been subjected to the following sexually abusive/harassing behaviors by inmates? (N = Yes)</i>	217		174		43	
Sexually abusive/harassing verbal abuse	152	70.04	111	63.79	41	93.18
Sexually abusive/harassing gestures	139	64.05	97	56.73	42	95.45
Exhibitionistic masturbation	122	56.22	84	49.12	38	86.36
<i>*Male prisoners who expose themselves or masturbate for self-gratification or to degrade the officers</i>		62		68		78
Unwelcome physical contact to include touching and/or grabbing	37	17.05	21	12.5	16	36.36
Threats of sexual assault	96	44.23	72	42.35	24	55.81
Attempted or actual sexual assault	12	5.52	5	2.98	7	16.28
<i>*Assault with liquid missiles, often composed of human fecal matter and/or urine</i>		89		98		90
<i>*Specific language from DAI</i>						

familiar with the DAI, only 33% reported that they believed that the DAI reduced the number of times staff were subjected to sexual abusive/harassing behavior (Table 2).

Participants were asked to identify the types and frequency of sexually abusive/harassing actions to which they have been exposed and then to identify the types and frequency of sexually abusive/harassing actions which their co-workers and subordinates have been exposed. The survey asked about frequency in terms of never or rarely occurring, occurring less than five times in a career, occurring 5–10 times during a career, occurring 10–20 times during a career, or occurring more than 20 times in a career or a daily occurrence. A review of this data indicated that in most instances, participants identified more exposure to sexually abusive/harassing behaviors of inmates to which they had personally been exposed when compared to their reports of the frequency of exposure to co-workers and subordinates. As would be expected, unwelcome physical contact and attempted or actual sexual assault were the types of behaviors that had the smallest frequency. The data in this survey indicates that the frequency of personal exposure to sexually abusive/harassing verbal abuse, gestures, and exhibitionistic masturbation was highest for female participants. However, when participants were asked about the frequency in which their co-workers or subordinates have reported these same types of behaviors the differences between female and male participants reports is not as pronounced, and in some cases, male participants reported a higher frequency (Table 3).

Chi square analysis

Further analysis of the frequency of exposure was completed using the Chi-Square Analysis (Table 4). This Chi-square analysis indicated a significant relationship between gender and which types of sexually abusive/harassing behaviors each participant reported being exposed to. Specifically, significance ($p > .01$) was indicated between the variables of gender and sexually abusive/harassing verbal abuse $\chi^2(1, N = 70.04) = 14.658$ (Male participants reported the occurrence at 63.79%, where female participants reported 93.18% occurrence).

Table 3. Occurrence of exposure to sexually abusive/harassing behavior.

	Male-never or rarely	Female-never or rarely	Male 10+	Female 10+
<i>Participants occurrence of exposure to sexually abusive/harassing behavior by inmates throughout their career</i>				
<i>(Percentages)</i>				
Sexually abusive/harassing verbal abuse	25	15	46	72
Sexually abusive/harassing gestures	30	20	41	65
Exhibitionistic masturbation	38	25	30	65
Unwelcome physical contact	73	90	4	4
Threats of sexual assault	45	61	21	34
Attempted or actual sexual assault	81	95	2	0
<i>Occurrence of exposure to sexually abusive/harassing behaviors of co-workers or subordinates</i>				
<i>(Percentage)</i>				
Sexually abusive/harassing verbal abuse	6	6	24	22
Sexually abusive/harassing gestures	12	4	23	23
Exhibitionistic masturbation	11	2	24	24
Unwelcome physical contact	42	11	9	6
Threats of sexual assault	25	8	18	11
Attempted or actual sexual assault	51	16	6	5

Table 4. Chi-Square result.

	χ^2	<i>df</i>	Fe	<i>p</i>	<i>p</i>
Sexually abusive/harassing verbal abuse	9.725	4	60	0.211	0.045
Sexually abusive/harassing gestures	3.532	4	60	0.127	0.473
Exhibitionistic masturbation	5.999	4	70	0.166	0.199
Unwelcome physical contact to include touching and/or grabbing	1.207	4	50	0.074	0.877
Threats of sexual assault	2.484	4	70	0.106	0.648
Attempted or actual sexual assault	6.21	4	50	0.168	0.184
Sexually abusive/harassing verbal abuse	14.658	1	0	0.259	0.00
Sexually abusive/harassing gestures	24.295	1	0	0.333	0.00
Exhibitionistic masturbation	20.972	1	0	0.309	0.00
Unwelcome physical contact to include touching and/or grabbing	14.864	1	0	0.261	0.00
Threats of sexual assault	2.565	1	0	0.108	0.109
Attempted or actual sexual assault	11.565	1	25	0.23	0.001
Sexually abusive/harassing verbal abuse	0.785	1	0	0.06	0.378
Sexually abusive/harassing gestures	1.174	1	0	0.073	0.279
Exhibitionistic masturbation	2.187	1	0	0.1	0.139
Unwelcome physical contact to include touching and/or grabbing	6.598	1	25	0.174	0.016
Threats of sexual assault	2.301	1	0	0.102	0.129
Attempted or actual sexual assault	2.091	1	25	0.098	0.158
Expected count <25% Fishers Exact Test reported					

Cramer's V for this analysis was .26 (moderately strong relationship), and as such, there is a practical value associated with this finding.

Sexually abusive/harassing gestures reflected significance at $\chi^2(1, N = 64.05) = 24.295$ (Male participants reported the occurrence at 56.73%, where female participants reported 95.45% occurrence). Cramer's V for this analysis was .26 (moderately strong relationship), and as such, there is a practical value associated with this finding.

Exhibitionistic masturbation reflected significance at $\chi^2(1, N = 56.22) = 20.972$ (Male participants reported the occurrence at 49.12%, where female participants reported 86.36% occurrence). Cramer's V for this analysis was .31 (strong relationship), and as such, there is a practical value associated with this finding.

Unwelcome physical contact to include touching and/or grabbing reflected significance at $\chi^2(1, N = 17.05) = 14.864$ (Male participants reported the occurrence at 12.5%, where female

participants reported 36.36% occurrence). Cramer's V for this analysis was .26 (moderately strong relationship), and as such, there is a practical value associated with this finding.

When asked to identify the most appropriate response to each type of sexually abusive/harassing behaviors the most common appropriate response was either documenting in the formal reporting system or segregating the inmate pending administrative review. Surprisingly, these two responses were also selected as the most appropriate for both the sexually abusive/harassing verbal abuse and the sexually abusive/harassing gestures. Participants were much more likely to identify segregation of the inmate as the appropriate response to exhibitionistic masturbation (65%), unwelcome physical contact (88.7%), threats of sexual assault (76.5%), and actual or attempted sexual assault (91%) (Table 5).

Discussion

This study has revealed valuable information regarding the frequency of exposure to sexually abusive/harassing behavior of inmates, the acceptance or reliance upon specific types of responses to this behavior and the policy initiative implemented in the state of Michigan. Each of the areas of information are embedded within the corrections workplace culture, and as such must be interpreted within that cultural construct.

Analysis of collected data reflected that staff maintained a willingness to respond to sexually abusive/harassing behavior displayed by inmates, with a low percentage of survey participants choosing to ignore the behavior presented. This finding reflects an interest in behavior management in response to this type of behavior and challenges the notion that staff are unwilling to report or are desensitized as a result of the corrections environment of culture. Also notable is the large percentage of participants who selected segregation as the appropriate response to exhibitionistic masturbation (65%). This outcome notes that exhibitionist masturbation was perceived as a more serious behavior, warranting a higher level of management. These outcomes indicate a responsive posture in regard to sexually abusive/harassing behavior displayed by inmates. The responsiveness to address this behavior may be a result of the DAI and the support that staff in this agency feel about the importance of addressing the inmate's behavior.

Researchers have concluded that the prison environment is an exceedingly masculinized organization, with considerations of the distinction between the female and male staff member as a factor regarding sexually abusive/harassing behavior displayed by inmates. Outcomes of this research revealed a higher propensity for female staff to experience sexually abusive/harassing behaviors in all sexually abusive behaviors defined in this survey. It is

Table 5. What do you think is the most appropriate response? (Percentages).

	Verbal abuse	Harassing gestures	Exh Masturbation	Physical contact	Threats	Actual sexual assault
Full Sample (N = 219)						
Ignore the behavior	1.8	1.4	0.5	0.9	0.9	0.9
Use humor to insult the perpetrator	3.2	1.8	1.4	0.5	0.9	0.9
Order the inmate to stop the behavior	14.9	14	4.5	2.3	3.2	1.4
Document the incident in an informal system	7.2	8.1	4.1	1.8	3.6	1.8
Document the incident in the formal incident system	36.7	37.1	23.5	5	14	3.2
Segregate the inmate pending administrative review	35.3	36.7	65.2	88.7	76.5	91

notable, however, that male participants reported having been subjected to sexually abusive/harassing verbal abuse, sexually abusive/harassing gestures, and exhibitionistic masturbation, with occurrences reported between 49%–63% of male participants for these defined behaviors. Of particular interest was the strong relationship recognized through a comparative analysis of gender and exhibitionistic masturbation, with male participants reporting 49.12% occurrence of this type of behavior. However, when data was compared based on the frequency of the behavior being 10 or more times in a career, 65% of female participants reported this type of exposure compared to 30% of the male participants.

The data in this study indicates that both male and female staff may be exposed to sexually abusive/harassing behaviors of inmates, but when the number of occurrences over a career is evaluated, the impact upon female corrections employees is much higher. As a result, specific actions should be taken by corrections leaders to ensure that all female staff are aware of the tools that they have available to them to stop this type of exposure. Also imperative is organizational effort to ensure that female staff feel supported to take these actions. While occurrence and response to sexually abusive/harassing behavior is not just a “female” issue, the impact is disproportionately burdensome on female staff. Fully implementing a policy that changes this level of exposure necessarily must include a focus upon cultural change within the corrections workplace.

Implications to policy

The DAI in the state of Michigan is perhaps the first state-wide attempt to address the sexually abusive/harassing behaviors of inmates in the corrections system. In this state, the major stakeholders came together to send a message to their corrections staff that concern existed about the work environment and the types of assaults that their staff were experiencing. They also sent a message to their inmate population that put them on notice regarding the consequences of specific behaviors. The data in this survey affirms that the DAI was effectively communicated to the staff with 79.91% of the participants in this study indicating their awareness of the initiative (Table 2). However, when the data was further examined it revealed that more staff were aware of the prohibition against liquid assaults as part of this initiative than were aware of the inclusion of the sexually abusive behaviors and that the gender of the participant revealed a difference in understanding. This may be explained by specific implementation steps that did not include both assaults in each publication, notice, or training. The fact that there was less awareness of the inclusion of the sexually abusive behaviors in this initiative may also explain the data that indicated that 66.99% of the participants did not believe that the DAI reduced the number of times staff were subjected to sexual abusive/harassing behavior. If it was not clear to staff that the DAI included the sexually abusive/harassing behavior, then it would seem reasonable to report that the initiative did not help to reduce these behaviors. A more detailed examination of the implementation process should be undertaken to examine this issue.

Limitations

Data for this study came from surveys of corrections staff employed within the state of Michigan. In light of the fact that the effects of job characteristics may be contextual, one should be careful when generalizing to other types of facilities such as those that are privately operated, facilities that house jail inmates, or those with differing security levels. Also, given

the sample size, caution is recognized in generalizing this project's findings as typical staff response. The use of cross-sectional data did not allow for causality to be demonstrated.

Suggestions for future research

This study has examined the frequency of exposure to sexually abusive/harassing behaviors as well as the policy approach taken by corrections leaders in Michigan. While important information has been gained from this study, further study regarding the frequency of exposure and policy approaches to this issue in other jurisdictions are needed. A study that provides data from a variety of corrections agencies may provide a fuller picture of the actual incidence of these behaviors. Much can be gained by providing an analysis of procedures or policies that have been put in place and the effect of these policies upon the reduction of the behaviors.

There is also very little research conducted regarding the relationship between these types of sexually abusive/harassing behaviors and the future sexually deviant/criminal behaviors of the individual inmates. This type of connection between prison misbehavior and public safety would provide a sound basis for policy formulation and treatment programming.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Appendix A. Sample Survey Questionnaire

Below are seven survey questions as presented to respondents.

- (1) Are you aware of the Dignity Assault Initiative within the Michigan Department of Corrections?
 - (a) Yes
 - (b) No
- (2) Do you believe that the dignity Assault Initiative has reduced the number of times staff are subjected to sexually abusive/harassing/harassing behavior?
 - (a) Yes
 - (b) No
- (3) Have you been subjected to sexually abusive/harassing behaviors by inmates?

(4) If you have been subjected to these types of sexually abusive/harassing behaviors by inmates estimate the total number of times that you have been subjected to these types of incidents:

(5) Have you witnessed or been told of incidents where your co-workers or subordinates been subjected to sexually abusive/harassing behavior by inmates:

	Never	1–10 times over career	10–20 times over career	This happens regularly (More than 20 times)	This rarely Happens (Less than 5 itimes)
Sexually abusive/harassing verbal abuse					
Sexually abusive/harassing gestures					
Exhibitionistic masturbation (masturbation in plain view of staff in order to intimidate or harass)					
Unwelcome physical contact to include touching and/or grabbing					
Threats of sexual assault					
Attempted or actual sexual assault					

(6) What do you think if the most appropriate response to the following sexually abusive/harassing behaviors by inmates:

	Ignore the behavior	Use humor to insult the perpetrator	Order the inmate to stop the behavior	Document the information in the formal incident system	Segregate the inmate pending an administrative review (or ask that this be done)
Sexually abusive/harassing verbal abuse					
Sexually abusive/harassing gestures					
Exhibitionistic masturbation (masturbation in plain view of staff in order to intimidate or harass)					
Unwelcome physical contact to include touching and/or grabbing					
Threats of sexual assault					
Attempted or actual sexual assault					