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BUREAU OF JUSTICE STATISTICS
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BUREAU OF JUSTICE STATISTICS RECEIVES POLICY IMPACT AWARD

WASHINGTON – The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) and its data collection agents will receive the 2014 Policy Impact Award from the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) for their innovative and salient efforts to measure sexual victimization in correctional facilities under the Prison Rape Elimination Act, 2003 (PREA).

AAPOR, a leading association of survey research professionals, said its reasons for selecting BJS was both the state-of-the art, multi-measure, multi-mode data collections that relied on victim self-report surveys and administrative records, and the subsequent findings from the research.

The award citation states, “the findings, and their extensive publicity, have triggered special investigations by governors and state legislatures and immediate changes in policies and plans of action. Findings from the project are now cited extensively in training for correctional administrators on how to prevent and respond to prison rape. Without these data, national standards for best practices to eliminate rape and other related violence among prisoners could not have been promulgated.”

Allen J. Beck, BJS Senior Statistical Advisor and program lead, will accept the award on behalf of BJS and its data collection agents—RTI International, Westat, NORC at the University of Chicago and the U.S. Census Bureau—at the annual AAPOR conference in Anaheim, California, May 17.

According to Beck, when PREA passed in 2003 and required BJS to measure sexual victimization in correctional facilities, there was no infrastructure for such a data collection and there was little agreement on a methodology that would generate accurate estimates. Both inmate self-reports of sexual victimization and reports from facility administrators were considered high risk for both overreporting and underreporting of incidents.

“We had to develop a complex statistical infrastructure that would enable us to measure a very sensitive issue that was far more nuanced than we knew,” said Beck. “The prison rape data collection represents a 10-year effort to build a program for accurately measuring the prevalence of sexual victimization in the nation’s more than 7,600 correctional facilities covered under PREA,” he added.

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The BJS-led team actively reached out to all stakeholders as it developed survey protocols, measurement strategies and reporting criteria. The team established definitions of sexual victimization that would hold true for each survey and facility, addressed complex human subject concerns such as protecting respondents from retaliation by other inmates or facility staff, set statistical standards for defining high-rate facilities and developed a plan for disseminating the findings.

The 14 separate reports on prison rape released by BJS since 2004 have been extensively covered by the media, researchers and public interest groups at the local, state and national level. Almost immediately upon release, the BJS data led to several direct policy or program actions at the local, state, and federal levels. Facility and state-level rankings have resulted in immediate action in states with high-rate sexual victimization facilities. Some states have conducted special investigations following the release of PREA data.

The PREA statistics program includes four separate collections: the Survey on Sexual Violence, the National Inmate Survey, the National Survey of Youth in Custody, and the National Former Prisoner Survey. These surveys combined reached a level of data collection not seen previously, by assessing the incidence of sexual victimization in correctional facilities through victim self-reporting, surveying facilities' administrative records, reaching out to ex-offenders now living in the community and surveying youth held in juvenile and adult facilities.

According to Beck, the effort shows the effectiveness of combining the talents of four major data collection agencies. In addition to Beck, BJS principal staff involved in the PREA research were former BJS statisticians Paige M. Harrison, Paul Guerino and Christopher J. Mumola. Among the data collection agencies, the principal staff included David Cantor, John Hartge and Tim Smith at Westat; Marcus Berzofsky, Rachel Caspar and Christopher Krebs at RTI International; Candace Johnson at NORC; and Greta Clark at the U.S. Census Bureau.

All the BJS PREA-related reports and documents, and additional information about BJS's statistical publications and programs can be found on the BJS website at <http://www.bjs.gov/>.

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