How to Get a Conjugal Visit

By Laura McClure and Michael Mechanic

NEWS: Shackled births, prisoner experiments, and rampant TB? Just another day

Photo: Mark Allen Johnson/Zuma Press

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48 states allow the shackling of female

THE SHOWER MYTH
You go to prison, you get raped.
inmates while they are giving birth. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists says the practice puts "the health and lives of the women and unborn children at risk."

Less than 1% of prisons distribute condoms.

2/3 of gay, bisexual, and transgender inmates in California report being sexually assaulted.

Disease rates in US prisons compared to general population:

**HIV:** 490% higher  
**AIDS:** 500% higher  
**TUBERCULOSIS:** 400% higher  
**HEPATITIS C:** 2,000% higher

US prisons and jails house 3 times as many people with serious mental illness as US mental hospitals do.

In June 2006, the Institute of Medicine recommended an increase in the use of prisoners as biomedical test subjects after laboratory scientists complained of a shortage of rhesus monkeys.

The South Carolina Senate has considered legislation that would take up to 180 days off prisoners' sentences if they donated an organ.

In their first two weeks out of lockup, ex-cons are 13 times more likely to die than the average person, according to a recent study in the *New England Journal of Medicine.* Leading cause: drug overdose.

Hollywood version, anyway. "It can be horribly violent," says Nancy Wolff, a Rutgers University professor who studies sexual assault, "but it's not as big of a problem as people think."

In a Bureau of Justice Statistics survey of nearly 24,000 inmates from 146 state and federal prisons, about 1 in 50 reported nonconsensual sex with a fellow inmate last year, with few incidents involving violence. Roughly 1 in 100 reported staff sexual misconduct only. Wolff did a similar survey of California prisoners in 2004. "Many of the men would say, 'You've been watching too much Oz.' They were actually angry with me at times for wasting their time, when they really wanted to focus on issues that are much more pertinent to their lives. They argued to me that prison rape was much more of a problem in the past, but AIDS it's just too risky." When sex occurs, Wolff says, the most likely victims are offenders, snitches, transsexuals, effeminate men, and...inmates with gambling debts.

**FAILURE TO CONJUGATE**

State-sanctioned prison sex makes people squirm, hence the official term for Big House hanky: *Mechanic*

Some "family visits" reward well-behaved inmates and their better halves with up to three days in a condom-stocked trailer. Mississippi prisoners can score 60 minutes in a "bedroom-like" facility during visiting hours, and last year California became first to allow overnight visits by domestic partners, gay or straight. (Although lifers need not apply.)

Outside of those states and three others—Washington, and New Mexico—yet any. Federal prisons don't allow conjugal visits, although the wife of one condemned inmate reports that, in the 1990s, San Quentin's guards tended to look the other way while they snuck a quickie in the visitors' bathroom. But the spouses posting on sites like want more regular hookups. Notes "Distressed Wife" of Ohio: "Women need more than just a kiss and hug every two weeks in three years."
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LETTERS

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Readers respond.

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