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Research
in Action

James K. Stewart, Director

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Shock Incarceration Programs in State Correctional Jurisdictions—An Update

by Doris Layton MacKenzie and
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Shock incarceration—a relatively new type of sanction—is attracting considerable interest as an alternative to traditional imprisonment for young adult offenders. Eleven States now have shock incarceration programs and another 11 are developing them. The programs are designed to “jolt” these offenders into abandoning crime.

It is too early to tell how successfully shock incarceration programs are meeting their objectives, and differences among the programs could be important factors in their success or lack of success. A larger amount of empirical data will enable us to tell if the initial enthusiastic acceptance of these programs is warranted.

Offenders sentenced to shock incarceration spend a relatively short period (90 to 180 days) in prison in a military style boot camp that provides a highly regimented program involving strict discipline, physical training, and hard labor resembling some aspects of military basic training. If they success-

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fully complete the program, they are subsequently placed under community supervision.

Housed separately from the regular inmates, either in an independent facility or in a separate housing unit within a larger facility, offenders spend about 6 hours a day at work and 2 to 3 hours in military drills and physical training.

NIJ sponsors studies

To track the development of shock incarceration programs, the National Institute of Justice has sponsored several studies:

- A descriptive analysis of the programs implemented before 1988. A full report of this study conducted by Dale Parent will be published later this spring.
- An evaluation of the shock incarceration program in the State of Louisiana, conducted by the Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections and Louisiana State University. Early findings indicate that these programs are having a rehabilitative effect. Participating offenders show positive feelings about the program and about their ability to change their behavior.

- A multisite study to examine what specific program components seem to work best and for what types of offenders. The first step was a survey of 50 State correctional jurisdictions. The survey identified 11 States with shock incarceration programs. A summary of the program descriptions is presented in table 1.

Differences among programs

One of the most important differences shown in the table is who selects offenders for this sanction—the judge or a corrections department official. This factor may have an impact on whether the programs “widen the net” to include offenders who would not otherwise have been incarcerated or whether the sanction is used as an alternative to longer term incarceration and thus reduces prison crowding.

The survey turned up other program differences as well: in postrelease dispositions (regular parole or intensive parole or a combination of the two), participation of nonviolent offenders, and participation of offenders committing their first felonies.

Additionally, the programs differ in the amount of emphasis they place on rehabilitation, education, and vocational education. The participant’s ability to enter or leave the program

Table 1.

Characteristics of Shock Incarceration Programs, 1988

State	Year Program Began	Number of Programs	Number of Participants	Average Number of Days Served	Placement Authority	Voluntary Entry	Voluntary Dropout	Located in Larger Prison	Release Supervision
Alabama	1988	1	53	90	Judge	—	yes	yes	regular
Arizona	1988	1	35	120	Judge	no	no	yes	varies
Florida	1987	1	66	101	Judge	no	no	yes	moderate
Georgia	1983	2	200	90	Judge	yes	no	yes	varies
Louisiana	1987	1	51	120	Corrections Dept./Judge	yes	yes	yes	intensive
Michigan	1988	1	120	90	Judge	yes	no	no	intensive
Mississippi	1985	1	197	180	Judge	no	yes	yes	regular
New York	1987	2	445	180	Corrections Dept.	yes	yes	no	intensive
Oklahoma	1984	1	150	120	Corrections Dept.	no	no	yes	varies
South Carolina	1987	2	85	90	Judge	yes	yes	yes	varies
Texas	1989	1	200 (capacity)	—	Corrections Dept./Judge	no	no	yes	varies

voluntarily also differs from jurisdiction to jurisdiction.

For more information

The following materials offer additional information on shock incarceration as a new sanction for young adult offenders:

“Shock Incarceration: Rehabilitation or Retribution?” by D.L. MacKenzie, L. Gould, L.M. Riechers, and J.W. Shaw. This article will appear in the fall issue of the *Journal of Offender Counseling, Services & Rehabilitation*.

Inmate Adjustment and Change During Shock Incarceration, by D.L. MacKenzie and J.W. Shaw. This paper, presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Society of Criminology in October in Chicago, may be obtained from D.L. MacKenzie, National Institute of Justice, 633 Indiana Avenue NW., Washington, DC 20531. NIJ

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