

An Evaluation of
SHOCK INCARCERATION
In Louisiana

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A Cooperative Project of the Louisiana State University and
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An Evaluation of
SHOCK INCARCERATION IN LOUISIANA

Executive Summary

Shock incarceration is a relatively new alternative correctional program. Offenders in these programs spend a short period of time in a boot camp type program involving physical training, drill, labor and strict discipline. As of January, 1990 there were 21 shock programs in 14 state adult correctional systems.

This report describes the results of an evaluation of the shock incarceration program in the Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections (LDPSC). The evaluation was completed by the Louisiana State University in collaboration with the LDPSC with funding from the National Institute of Justice.

THE LOUISIANA SHOCK INCARCERATION PROGRAM

The LDPSC shock incarceration program called IMPACT (Intensive Motivational Program of Alternative Correctional Treatment) began in 1987. The program has two phases. In the first phase offenders spend 90 to 180 days in a medium security prison participating in a rigorous boot camp-type program. Offenders who successfully complete the program are released from prison and are placed under intensive supervision in the community, the second phase of the program.

Participants in the program are young, nonviolent offenders who are serving time on their first felony conviction. They must be recommended by the Division of Probation and Parole, the sentencing court and corrections staff. They are granted parole by the parole board.

Offenders must volunteer for the program and can drop out at any time. Those who do not volunteer to participate or who drop out are required to serve time in prison until they are parole eligible.

While in the boot camp program, the daily activities of offenders are carefully supervised. Along with the daily work, physical exercise and drill, offenders participate in group counseling, drug education and other rehabilitation activities.

THE EVALUATION

The present study had three major components: 1) a process evaluation; 2) an examination of system level changes including the costs and benefits of the program; and, 3) an examination of inmate changes.

In the process portion of the evaluation the development of the program was documented, program goals were described, interviews were conducted with inmates, judges, prison staff, and community supervision agents. Data was collected from department records to supplement information from interviews.

The system level analyses focused on changes in the system that occurred as a result of implementing the shock program. The probability that the program acted to "widen-the-net" to incarcerate more offenders was examined. A model was developed and used to predict bedspace savings. The cost of the shock program was compared to the cost of other sentencing options.

Inmate changes in behavior and attitudes during the prison phase of the program and inmate behavior during the community supervision phase of the program were examined in a quasi-experimental design in order to examine the impact of the program on the individual offenders. Comparison groups were formed from similar offenders who had been sentenced to prison and probation. Their behavior and attitudes were compared to those of offenders who served time in the shock program.

PROGRAM GOALS:

The major purpose of the shock program in Louisiana is to "provide a satisfactory alternative to the long-term incarceration of primarily youthful first offenders, thereby helping to relieve crowding conditions that exist in prisons throughout Louisiana. The program also seeks to promote a positive image of corrections and, in general, to enhance public relations."

Within this framework the goals are:

- o To reduce prison crowding, and
- o To change the offender so that upon release future criminal behavior will be reduced, and offenders will live more fulfilling lives as contributing members of free society.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SHOCK INMATES

The offenders who entered the shock program were, on the average, 23 years old with a 10th grade education. Forty percent were white and 60 percent were nonwhite.

The offenders were approximately 19 1/2 years old at the time of their first arrest, 85 percent had some prior criminal history (although this was their first felony incarceration), and 18 percent had previously spent time in prison or jail for a misdemeanor.

Thirty percent entered shock as probation violators. The majority of them were serving time for theft, burglary, or a drug-related offense. Their average maximum sentence length was 46 months. The major difference between those who completed the shock program and those who did not was in sentence length. The dropouts had shorter sentences.

MAJOR FINDINGS: Process and Implementation

Decision making

- o A three-stage recommendation process for entering the shock program and release decisions depend upon numerous individuals (judge, probation and parole agents, corrections staff, parole board). This resulted in some tension and difficulties during the development of the program.
- o One area of tension results from differing philosophies of decision makers. Whether the primary goal of the program is seen as one of rehabilitating offenders or reducing prison crowding can lead to very different courses of action.

Staff Issues

- o There was a relatively high level of staff burnout.
- o Drill instructors and correctional officers in the program viewed their jobs not only as authority figures involved with control, but also as models and agents of behavior change through positive reinforcement and support.
- o Most staff training occurred on the job. Some correctional officers appeared to have difficulty changing from their traditional role of control to a role incorporating both control and supportive guidance.
- o The potential for abuse of authority by the staff in the program does exist. Staff do use summary punishments (e.g., making inmates drop and do ten pushups).
- o The intensive supervision required during community supervision of shock parolees creates difficulties for probation and parole in terms of costs, workload, and danger.

Location of Program

- o The program is located within a larger prison which means there is a higher level administrative structure that oversees the program rather than only those directly involved. This may be a protection from potential abuses of authority by staff.
- o The location also permits staff to be rotated into and out of the program with minimal difficulty for the individual staff member and the institution.

Offender Perspectives

- o Offenders believed, on the whole, that shock was a more constructive way to serve time in comparison to prison.
- o Shock offenders reported that they had learned valuable lessons and skills while in the program; prison inmates reported that they had only learned that they did not want to return to prison.
- o The majority of shock offenders reported that intensive parole supervision helped them in the process of reintegrating.

Retribution versus Rehabilitation

- o Elements that have been found to be associated with rehabilitation are incorporated in the program: rules and authority; anticriminal modeling and reinforcement; problem solving; use of community resources; interpersonal relationships.
- o Correctional personnel working with the inmates in the two phases of the shock program do not view the program as only a means for "getting tough," punishing, initiating retribution, or keeping offenders busy.
- o Staff are hopeful that they can bring about positive change in the lives of the offenders.

- o In the opinion of both the staff and inmates, interactions between staff and inmates are more positive than in a regular prison.

MAJOR FINDINGS: System Level Analyses

- o The three phase recommendation process with the final decision by corrections staff did reduce the tendency to net widen.
- o About 23 percent of the offenders arriving at the diagnostic center with recommendations for admittance to the shock program were rejected or did not volunteer for the shock program.
- o Only an average of 64 offenders were in the program at any one time during the first year, despite the fact that there were 120 beds available.
- o Approximately 27 percent of the entrants dropped out of the shock program and another 16 percent were required to leave for disciplinary, medical or other reasons.
- o The amount of time offenders spent in prison was significantly reduced if they completed the shock program. Those who completed the program served approximately 4 months in prison before being released on parole. If they had served their sentence in prison, the earliest they could have been released would have been after approximately 15 months.
- o The small number of offenders entering the program appears to result from either a small pool of eligible prison-bound offenders or too few offenders recommended for the program by the judges.
- o A model developed to examine bedspace indicated that over the year approximately 154 prison beds were saved.

- o Estimates using the bedspace model (which allows changes in various parameters to be examined) indicated that the program had the potential for having an impact on prison crowding. This is particularly true if only prison-bound offenders are sent to the program and if offenders who are eligible for the program (but do not enter) are not being released by the parole board at their earliest eligibility date.

MAJOR FINDINGS: Costs

- o The major cost savings of the program is due to the fact that offenders in shock spend less time in prison not that the cost per day is cheaper.
- o The cost per day is slightly higher for the shock program than for a regular medium security prison.
- o Using the results of the bedspace analysis it was estimated that 154 beds were saved per year by the program at a cost of \$27.98 per day for a total cost savings of \$1,573,833.03.
- o A cost analysis for an individual offender serving time in either shock or prison suggested that for each offender who completed the prison phase of the program there was a cost savings of \$13,787.99.
- o The second phase of the program involved a period of intensive supervision for the shock parolees but not for the prison parolees. It was estimated that this phase cost \$5,956.06 more for the shock offenders.
- o If both phases are considered together there is a direct cost savings of \$7,831.93 for each offender who completes shock or a savings of \$783,193.00 for each 100 offenders who complete the program.

- o There are other hidden financial costs and benefits that should be considered when completing a system/cost analysis (e.g., construction, disincarceration).

**MAJOR FINDINGS: Inmate Adjustment and Change during
the Institutional Phase**

- o In comparison to a group serving time in a regular prison, shock offenders adjusted to prison differently. They were less anti-staff and had more conflicts with others. Over the three months studied the shock offenders became even less anti-staff and both groups reported more conflicts.
- o Shock offenders left prison with stronger positive attitudes about their future and their experiences in the program than they had at the beginning of the program. Prison inmates were more negative in comparison to shock offenders in these attitudes, and they became even more negative over time in prison.
- o The shock offenders had more positive social attitudes even before entering the shock program, and they became even more positive while in the program. In comparison the prison inmates also became more positive in their social attitudes while in prison, but they never became as positive as the shock offenders.
- o Shock offenders leave prison with more prosocial attitudes than they entered with, and they report that their experience was beneficial. Prison inmates also leave prison with more prosocial attitudes than they entered with, but they do not report that their experience was beneficial.
- o There was some suggestion that the shock program increases the offenders' perception of their ability to control specific events in their lives.

- o Problem drinkers who entered the shock program appeared to become less socially maladjusted during the program. This was not true for problem drinkers in regular prison.

MAJOR FINDINGS: Performance during Community Supervision

- o During the first 6 months 6.9% of the shock parolees, 6.0% of the parolees, 2.8% of the probationers, and 12.1% of the dropouts failed on community supervision (absconded, were revoked, or were jailed).
- o Survival analyses indicated that only the probationers failed significantly less than the shock parolees during community supervision.
- o There were no significant differences in the groups in the percent arrested during the first six months of community supervision: 14.3% of the shock parolees; 15.4% of the parolees; 14.2% of the probationers; and, 23.0% of the dropouts.
- o Older offenders failed and were arrested less often than those who were younger.
- o Those who had previously spent time in a prison or jail failed more often than those who had not.
- o When previous incarceration is controlled for there were no differences in arrests.
- o The shock sample was involved in significantly more positive activities during community supervision in comparison to the other samples.
- o Over a six month period of community supervision the positive social activities of all groups declined.

- o The finding that problem drinkers had more sporadic performance than nonproblem drinkers during community supervision suggested that they may have more difficulty adjusting during the transition to community living.
- o An exploratory analysis suggested that those who did not have a history of criminal activities and who were young may adjust better during community supervision if they have completed the shock program.

CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Prior to this evaluation there has been little available research to guide policy makers in decisions regarding the implementation of shock programs in their jurisdictions. This research will give policy makers who are considering implementing programs some initial information that can be used to justify their existence, design, and implementation. Although shock programs vary from one program to another in their structure, development, and goals, the Louisiana program does have many similarities to other program that are already operational. Nevertheless, generalizations to other programs should be done carefully, beginning with a comparison of the anticipated program to the characteristics, operations, and goals of the Louisiana program. There are large differences in programs in their structure, development and goals.

Overall the present research suggests some potential benefits of the shock program, highlights some areas where jurisdictions should be cautious when developing programs, and introduces many questions.

One of the major goals of the Louisiana program was to reduce prison crowding. Findings reveal that this program may have a direct effect on prison crowding, as it reduces the need for bedspace. However, in order to have an impact on bedspace needs, careful selection will have to be made to ensure that offenders are drawn from prison-bound offenders. It is also crucial that the

program be made acceptable to all decision makers.

There also appear to be some benefits for the individual inmates who complete the program. They have more positive attitudes, they believe their future will be better, they are less anti-staff than other inmates, and they report that the experience has been beneficial. They also view the program as good for them physically because of the physical exercise and drug-free environment. Upon release they also become involved in more positive social activities.

The dilemma is that despite these positive signs there is no evidence that their criminal behavior is reduced. Some would interpret this finding as meaning that the program is not effective in meeting one of its major goals--to decrease recidivism. Our interpretation is that it is too early to tell. The positive changes may be important as more community supervision data becomes available. Or, and we think this might be a viable option, the offenders may need some additional support or help in making the transition to the community. The effectiveness of the program in reducing recidivism remains a question.

The process portion of this evaluation clearly indicated the importance of identifying the goals of the shock program and developing the program to facilitate reaching those goals.

The hard physical exercise and labor, summary punishments, boot camp atmosphere and strict discipline present some potential for either abuse or accidents. The staff and administration in Louisiana are well aware of these possibilities. Any jurisdiction developing such programs should educate themselves about these potential problems. Careful selection and training of staff is highly recommended.

Boot camp prison programs are rapidly developing throughout the nation. The shock programs differ greatly, and it is difficult to generalize all results from one program to another. For this reason, we have begun a multi-site study of shock incarceration. The participating sites vary in dimensions that are expected to influence the impact of the program. The current study was used as a model for the multi-site study. When completed the multi-

site study, along with the current study, should give policy makers information regarding the impact of these programs and the importance of specific components of the program in enabling jurisdictions to meet their goals.