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Research in Brief

Michael J. Russell, Acting Director

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An Evaluation of Shock Incarceration in Louisiana

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Shock incarceration programs, or boot camps as they are commonly called, appeared in the early eighties as an alternative to traditional correctional programs. Offenders in these programs spend a relatively short period of time in a quasi-military program involving physical training, drill, manual labor, and strict discipline. Since 1983, 41 boot camp prisons have been opened in 26 State correctional jurisdictions, in addition to many programs developed and being considered in cities and counties, and for juveniles.¹

The Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections (LDPSC) began its two-phase shock incarceration program, called Intensive Motivational Program of Alternative Correctional Treatment (IMPACT), in 1987. In the first phase of the LDPSC program, offenders spend 90 to 180 days in a medium-security prison participating in a rigorous boot camp program. While in the boot camp phase of the program, the offenders' daily activities are carefully supervised. In addition to daily work, physical exercise, and drills, offenders take part in group counseling, drug education, and other rehabilitation activities.

Offenders who successfully complete the first phase of the program are paroled and begin the second phase in which they are

placed under intensive supervision in the community. This phase requires offenders to have at least four contacts a week with their supervising officers, adhere to a strict 8 p.m. to 6 a.m. curfew, perform community service, and work. Parolees are screened for alcohol and illegal drugs. These restrictions are gradually relaxed over the first year of supervision if the offender successfully complies with the requirements.

This *Evaluation Bulletin* describes the results of a 1991 National Institute of Justice (NIJ) evaluation of the Louisiana shock incarceration program. The research considered design and implementation issues of Louisiana's IMPACT program. The study suggests some potential benefits of the shock incarceration program, identifies some areas where jurisdictions should be cautious when developing programs, and highlights key questions to be considered in ongoing NIJ evaluations of shock incarceration programs.

The evaluation

The evaluation of the Louisiana program was designed to identify the goals defined by the jurisdiction and to examine the success or failure of the program in meeting those goals. The evaluation consisted of three major components, which examined:

- How the program was implemented (process evaluation).
- Changes in inmate behavior and attitude as a result of participation in the program.
- System-level changes, including the costs and benefits of the program.

Program implementation

The process evaluation described program goals, documented the program's implementation, and interviewed inmates, judges, prison staff, and community supervision agents.² Evaluators collected data from department records to supplement information from interviews.

Program goals

The State of Louisiana specified that one major purpose of its shock incarceration program is to "provide a satisfactory alternative to the long-term incarceration of primarily youthful first offenders, thereby helping to relieve crowded conditions that exist in prisons throughout Louisiana. The program seeks to promote a positive image of corrections and, in general, to enhance public relations."³

Another goal of the program is to equip individual participants with the life skills necessary for them to succeed in everyday life, both inside and outside the prison

Soon after shock incarceration programs appeared on the corrections scene in the mid-eighties, the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) launched a research program to answer key questions about boot camps: How does the boot camp experience influence offenders? Does it deter them from future criminal activity? What are the best ways to organize and staff boot camp programs to ensure maximum impact?

NIJ research indicates that although there is a common core of military-type drill and discipline within these programs, there are also wide variations in their operations, activities, time served, number served, release procedures and aftercare. The rigorous physical exercise, military drill, and discipline, as well as the housing barracks and other noninstitutional characteristics, distinguish correctional boot camps from traditional prisons and jails.

This *Evaluation Bulletin* is a product of one of the first NIJ studies of shock incarceration, which was used as a model for an ongoing study of boot camp programs. To provide more far-reaching guidance, NIJ is currently examining boot camp programs that vary in elements expected to influence the results of the programs. When completed, the multisite study in eight States should give policymakers more definitive information on the impact of these programs and the importance of specific components of the programs in enabling jurisdictions to meet their goals. Based on the results of this assessment, a set of professional standards will be established to assist public officials and corrections professionals in the development, operation, improvement, and evaluation of correctional boot camp programs.

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system. "The program is based on the expectation that the acquisition of these skills and personal abilities will significantly increase offenders' abilities to lead law-abiding, creative, and fulfilling lives as contributing members of society."⁴

Program characteristics

The process evaluation uncovered characteristics of the IMPACT program through data analysis, interviews, and detailed direct observation. Some of the aspects

of decisionmaking, staffing, location, rehabilitation, and punishment are discussed below.

Decisionmaking. Disagreements among individuals or agencies about which offenders were appropriate candidates for shock incarceration resulted in some tension and difficulty during the first year of the program. These difficulties appeared to be related to differing views of the primary goals of the program—rehabilitating offenders or reducing prison crowding—and led to some disagreements about courses of action.

Staff. Drill instructors and correctional officers in the program viewed themselves not only as authority figures responsible for control, but also as role models and agents of behavior change through positive reinforcement and support. Most staff training occurred on the job and, according to administrators, some correctional officers appeared to have difficulty adjusting to a new role that incorporated elements of supportive guidance with the traditional role of authority. In addition, some of the administrators who were interviewed expressed the opinion that there is a potential for abuse of authority in the program because staff employ summary punishments, such as making inmates drop to the ground to do pushups or stand at attention for a specific period of time.

Staff interviews indicated that there had been a relatively high level of turnover of personnel (estimates were that prison staff stayed in the program an average of 6 months), which may reflect burnout resulting from the high level of stress caused by the intensity of the program.

The program also had an impact on probation and parole agencies. The intensive supervision required for shock incarceration parolees demanded more from parole agents than traditional supervision caseloads. This created difficulties for probation and parole agencies in terms of costs, workload, and danger according to the district supervisors. Intensive supervision requires that agents check on parolees in all parts of the jurisdiction at all hours of the day and night.

Location. The Louisiana shock incarceration program is situated within a larger prison complex, Hunt Correctional Center, which means that a higher level of administrative structure oversees the program. This type of organization may provide protection from potential abuses of authority by staff. Its location within the larger prison also permits staff to be rotated into and out of the program with minimal difficulty for individual staff members and the institution. One potential disadvantage, however, is that staff may easily be rotated into the program without the benefit of training.

Rehabilitation. The program incorporates elements that other research has shown are associated with the rehabilitation of criminal offenders: strict rules and authority, anticriminal modeling and reinforcement, problem solving, use of community resources, and development of interpersonal relationships.⁵

Also, the correctional personnel who work with the inmates in the two phases of the shock program do not view the program solely as a means of "getting tough" with offenders—punishing them, initiating retribution, or keeping them busy. Rather, staff endeavor to bring about positive changes in the lives of the offenders. In the opinion of both the staff and the inmates, interaction between staff and inmates is more positive than in a regular prison.

Punishment. The discipline and required physical activity are tough treatment for offenders who would otherwise escape such conditions. Offenders reported that time in boot camp was physically and mentally taxing; many dropped out before completing the program. The difficulty of the boot camp regimen achieved the principal public purpose of punishment in a much shorter period of time than prison sentences.

Inmate evaluation

The evaluation examined changes in inmate behavior and attitudes during the prison phase of the program, as well as offender behavior during the community

supervision phase, to assess the program's impact upon the lives of individual offenders. In addition, the behavior and attitudes of offenders who served time in the shock incarceration program was compared with attitudes of similar offenders who had been sentenced to prison and probation.

IMPACT selection process

To be considered for participation in IMPACT, an offender must have been convicted of a felony offense and must be sentenced to a term of imprisonment of 7 years or less. Offenders must then be recommended by the Division of Probation and Parole, the sentencing court, and corrections staff. This three-stage process begins with the probation or parole agent who recommends an offender to shock incarceration during the presentence investigation. Then during the sentence disposition, the sentencing judge may recommend an offender to shock incarceration. The diagnostic staff at the Department of Corrections make the final determination as to whether the offender is eligible and suitable for the program.

This three-group recommendation process ensures that candidates for the program are drawn from that population of offenders who would normally be sentenced to prison, rather than from those who would normally be given probation. Only offenders who are sentenced to a regular prison term may be recommended for the boot camp program.

After being selected, offenders must then volunteer for participation in the program. Other requirements deemed by the three groups to be important in determining suitability for the program are age (under 40 years), no history of violence, and no psychological or physical disability that would prohibit full participation. Thus, most participants are young, nonviolent offenders who are serving a sentence following their first felony conviction. Violent, hardened, or career criminals are not considered appropriate candidates for the Louisiana program.

IMPACT participants can drop out of the program at any time. Nominated offenders who do not choose to participate, who drop

out of the program, or who do not make sufficient progress in the boot camp program are required to serve their sentences in a traditional prison until they become eligible for parole. Successful completion of the program can reduce the amount of time the offender spends in prison, and this is assumed by Louisiana officials to be a strong incentive for completing the program.

Characteristics of shock program participants

During the first year of the program, 298 offenders entered the Louisiana shock program. On average, they were 23 years old with a 10th grade education. Forty percent were white, and 60 percent were nonwhite.

On average, the offenders were 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 previously had

spent time in prison or jail for a misdemeanor.

Thirty percent of the offenders who entered the shock incarceration program had previously violated probation. The majority of participants were serving time for burglary (43 percent), drug-related offenses (24 percent), or theft (12 percent); they had an average maximum sentence of 46 months.

Approximately 43 percent of the entrants dropped out without completing the program. Those who dropped out had to return to a traditional prison and serve the remainder of the sentence. They had to serve an average of 7 months longer than they would have if they had completed the program. There were no differences in age, race, gender, probation violations, or crime type between those who did or did not complete the program.

Evaluation Methodology

This research project used a pretest-posttest nonequivalent control group design to examine attitude change as a result of shock incarceration. This is a quasi-experiment designed to answer questions about causes and effects in settings where experiments cannot be done. A researcher who cannot randomly assign people to treatment conditions can design a quasi-experiment to determine whether a treatment has an effect.

The attitudes of offenders were measured prior to participation in the shock incarceration program and after 3 months in the program. The attitudes and changes in attitudes of the boot camp sample were compared to a similar sample of offenders who had spent 3 months in a traditional prison. The samples were carefully selected to be similar to each other, but they were not

randomly assigned to shock versus traditional prison.

The performance of offenders during community supervision was examined in a posttest design using monthly measures of positive adjustment and recidivism. This was a correlational study using survival analyses statistically controlling for differences among samples. Two major threats to validity in this design are selection and mortality. Data recorded at entry to prison prior to admittance to the shock program permitted an examination of mortality. However, because subjects were not randomly assigned to shock versus traditional incarceration, it is possible that samples differed prior to treatment. For this reason, results should be cautiously interpreted, and it will be particularly important to compare these results to results from other studies.

Inmates' reactions

During incarceration. To determine the changes that occurred in a 3-month time period, samples of 116 boot camp graduates, 92 program dropouts, and 98 regular inmates were compared (see "Evaluation Methodology" on page 3). Inmates were asked a series of questions about the boot camp experience. On the whole, offenders believed shock incarceration was a more constructive way to serve time than a regular prison sentence. Offenders participating in the shock program reported that they had learned valuable lessons and skills while serving their time. By comparison, regular prison inmates maintained that they had learned only that they did not want to return to prison.

Offenders in IMPACT adjusted to the shock incarceration environment differently than offenders serving time in a traditional incarceration program.⁶ They had more favorable attitudes toward staff, but had more conflicts with other inmates. Over the 3-month period studied, the boot camp offenders raised their levels of approval for staff. Both traditional inmates and boot camp participants reported an increased number of conflicts with other inmates.

IMPACT offenders left boot camp with stronger positive attitudes about their future and their experiences in the program than they had had at the beginning of the program. By comparison, prison inmates had negative attitudes that became even more negative during their time in prison.

Using another measure of attitude, general social attitude, the shock incarceration offenders had more positive social attitudes than their counterparts in prison even before entering the boot camp program, and they became still more positive while in the program. Although the general social attitudes of prison inmates also improved while in prison, their attitudes never became as positive as those of the offenders in shock incarceration.⁷

Offenders in shock incarceration reported that their experiences in the program were beneficial, while the prison inmates did not report positive experiences. There was some suggestion in the data collected that

the shock incarceration program increases the offenders' perception of their ability to control specific events in their own lives.

Under community supervision. The performance of the 74 offenders released from shock incarceration was compared to two groups of offenders who served different types of sentences (108 probationers and 74 parolees) and to 17 prisoners who dropped out of the shock incarceration program.⁸ The samples of probationers and parolees were selected to be as similar as possible to the offenders in shock incarceration (legal eligibility, age).⁹ All shock incarceration parolees were intensively supervised. The supervision of the other samples varied depending on the risk they posed, as measured by a standardized instrument used to assess risk of probationers and parolees.

Failure was defined as absconding, revoking parole, or being jailed for a new offense or a technical violation. During the first 6 months, 6.9 percent of the shock incarceration parolees, 6 percent of the other parolees, 2.8 percent of the probationers, and 12.1 percent of the boot camp dropouts failed while under community supervision.

Data analyses using survival analysis¹⁰ techniques indicated that the shock incarceration parolees did not differ from either the dropouts or other parolees in time-to-failure during community supervision. The shock incarceration parolees did fail more often than the probationers. However, when age and past criminal history were controlled in the analyses, no differences were found between offenders in shock incarceration and any of the other groups.¹¹

There were no statistically significant differences between the groups in the percentage arrested during the first 6 months of community supervision: 14.3 percent of the shock incarceration parolees, 15.4 percent of other parolees, 14.2 percent of the probationers, and 23 percent of the boot camp dropouts were arrested during their first 6 months of community supervision.

For all groups, younger offenders failed and were arrested more often than older offenders, and those who had previously spent time in a prison or jail failed more often than those who had not.

Inmates' Insights

In their interviews with shock incarceration program participants, researchers offered open-ended questions to elicit opinions on all aspects of their experiences. Inmates remarked on their initial difficulty with the rigorous exercises required, emphasized the strictness of the staff, and complained about the quality and quantity of the food. Many also indicated they realized the advantages of the boot camp. Some representative comments by various inmates follow.

- I volunteered for IMPACT because "I wanted rehabilitation that I wouldn't receive in prison."
- "This program teaches me to respect others and work with others. I learned confidence."
- "Classes teach how to take care of body, personal hygiene. How to tell the old gang, no. How to deal with peer pressure."
- "This is better than serving the 4 years of my regular sentence. . . . I will get out after 107 days."
- What is good about IMPACT is the "form of discipline. It teaches you to use your ears instead of your mouth."
- "The program helps pass time, changes people. [It teaches you to] look out for yourself so you don't go downhill."
- "The program's main thing is to teach you to stay out of trouble."

The research also examined the positive activities (such as starting work, attending school, or enrolling in vocational or technical training) of offender groups during community supervision. The majority of offenders from the shock incarceration group reported that their intensive parole supervision helped them reintegrate into society after release. Boot camp offenders

were involved in significantly more positive activities during community supervision as compared to the other samples. However, over a 6-month period of community supervision, the positive social activities of all groups declined.¹²

Correctional system changes

The system-level analyses focused on changes in the correctional system that occurred as a result of implementing the

IMPACT program. A statistical model was developed and used to predict how the program affected prison beds. The cost of the shock incarceration program was compared to the cost of other sentencing options.

Prison beds

Since one of Louisiana's goals for the program was to reduce prison crowding, the effect of the shock program on beds was examined.

Because the recidivism of offenders released from the shock program was not lower than similar offenders released from prison or under probation (see community supervision above), it cannot be assumed that prison crowding would be affected by a reduction in the numbers of offenders returning to prison.

A more direct effect on crowding would occur if offenders spent less time in prison. This would require: (1) a sufficient number of eligible inmates, (2) a large number of offenders completing the program, (3) a true reduction in the length of time offenders spend in prison, and (4) offender-participants who would otherwise be prison-bound.

Despite the program's potential to free up prison beds, an average of only 64 offenders were in the program at any one time during the first year, even though 120 beds were available to the program. This small number of offenders entering the program appears to have resulted from either a small pool of eligible nonviolent prison-bound offenders or a small number of offenders recommended for the program by judges, combined with the fairly large number who did not volunteer or who dropped out.¹³

About 23 percent of the offenders arriving at the diagnostic center with recommendations for admittance to the shock incarceration program declined to volunteer or were rejected. Approximately 27 percent of the entrants dropped out of the shock incarceration program, and another 16 percent were required to leave for disciplinary, medical, or other reasons. Thus, for every 100 inmates who entered prison with the potential to complete the shock incarceration program, only 34 actually completed the program and were paroled.

The amount of time offenders spent in prison was significantly reduced if they completed the shock incarceration program. Those who completed the program served approximately 4 months before being released on parole. If they had served their sentences in prison instead of in the shock incarceration program, the earliest they could have been released would have been after approximately 15 months.



A military regimen is an important part of daily life in Louisiana's IMPACT program at Elayne Hunt Correctional Center.

Statistical model

A bedspace model was developed to estimate the actual number of beds saved or lost as a result of the shock incarceration program and to examine the potential number of beds that might be saved if certain parameters in the model were changed.¹⁴ Dropout and failure rates, time served in prison, recidivism, and the probability of facing prison rather than probation were entered in the model as parameters.

The impact on prison capacity is particularly positive if only prison-bound offenders take part in the shock incarceration program and if offenders who are eligible for the program (but do not enter) are not released by the parole board at their earliest eligibility date. In the bedspace models, the researchers assumed that all offenders were prison-bound because of the three-stage decisionmaking process requiring judges to first sentence offenders to a term in prison and then recommend the shock program. Furthermore, data collected on the release dates for offenders who left the shock incarceration program and served time in a traditional prison indicated that they were not released at their earliest parole date. These estimates were used in the model.

Estimates produced by the bedspace model indicated that approximately 154 prison beds were saved during the course of 1 year; an average of 64 beds were used for the shock incarceration program. If all 120 beds available for the program had been used, approximately 288 prison beds would have been saved per year.

Costs

The research also examined whether shock incarceration is more expensive than traditional incarceration. LDPSC administrators estimated that for an individual inmate, the program cost approximately \$29.28 per day, which was slightly higher than the estimated \$27.98 per day for an inmate in a traditional medium security prison.

Inmates who completed the shock program spent an average of 4.12 months in shock before being released on parole. In con-

trast, a sample of offenders with similar sentences who served their time in traditional prisons were found to have served an average of 20.5 months before being released on parole. Using the per day cost estimates, the cost of the time in prison for offenders who complete the shock incarceration program would be \$3,676 (\$892.28 per month for 4.12 months), while the cost for offenders serving traditional sentences would be \$17,460 (\$851.71 per month for 20.5 months). Thus, for each offender who completed the in-prison phase of the shock incarceration program (and who otherwise would have served a traditional prison sentence), there was a cost savings of \$13,784 for the in-prison phase of shock incarceration.

However, the second phase of the IMPACT program involves a period of intensive supervision for its parolees that does not apply to regular prison parolees. This phase costs an estimated \$5,956 more for a shock incarceration parolee than for a traditional parolee. Therefore, this cost must be subtracted from the \$13,784 cost savings incurred during the in-prison phase of the program to calculate the total amount saved for an offender who completes the shock incarceration program. That is, if shock incarceration costs \$13,784 less for the in-prison phase but \$5,956 more for the parole phase, then a total of \$7,828 is saved for each offender who completes shock incarceration instead of a traditional prison sentence. Granted this is a rough estimate of the cost of IMPACT.

Other costs and benefits should be considered in the analyses of shock incarceration programs. Frequently these are hidden or not immediately obvious, such as the costs related to crimes that parolees might commit while in the community; selection, diagnosis, and assessment of participants; staff training; prison construction; and the heavy demands placed on prison staff.

Conclusions

In establishing the IMPACT program, Louisiana's major goal was to create a new sentencing option that would provide

placement for inmates who would otherwise be sent to the State's crowded prisons. This study reveals that programs like IMPACT may achieve this result. But to maintain a positive impact on prison bedspace needs, programs have to select participants carefully to ensure that shock incarceration candidates are consistently drawn from prison-bound offenders and that there are a sufficient number of eligible offenders who will complete the program.

This evaluation clearly indicates the importance of identifying the goals of the shock program and developing the program elements to reach those goals.

The hard labor, physical exercise, summary punishments, boot camp atmosphere, and strict discipline of the Louisiana shock incarceration program combine to present a potential for both accidents and staff abuse of authority. The correctional staff and administration in Louisiana are well aware of these possibilities. They recommend that any jurisdiction developing a shock incarceration program should educate itself about these potential problems.

There appear to be some benefits for individual inmates who complete IMPACT. They report more positive attitudes, are more optimistic about their futures, have more positive attitudes toward staff than other inmates, and state that the shock incarceration experience was beneficial. Due to the regime of physical exercise and the drug-free environment, many inmates also reported that shock incarceration was a healthy experience. Additionally, upon release they became involved in more positive social activities.

At this time, the effectiveness of IMPACT in reducing recidivism remains questionable. Positive changes may be apparent as more community supervision data become available. Clearly, offenders need additional support or help in making the transition back into the community. Although offenders experience some positive changes while in the program, these changes are not enough to enable them to successfully overcome the difficulties they

face when they return to their home environment.

The methodology used in this study is being applied to NIJ research on boot camp programs in eight different jurisdictions. It is anticipated that the multisite study will provide more definitive information on the issues raised by this initial evaluation of Louisiana's IMPACT. It is also expected to identify those elements needed for effective shock incarceration programs.

Notes

1. D.L. MacKenzie and L. Elis, 1992. "Survey of Correctional Boot Camps." University of Maryland, College Park, MD: unpublished manuscript.
2. D.L. MacKenzie, L.A. Gould, L.M. Riechers, and J.W. Shaw, 1989. "Shock Incarceration: Rehabilitation or Retribution?" *Journal of Offender Counseling Services and Rehabilitation*, 14:25-40.
3. The Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections, 1987. "IMPACT: Purpose, Policies, and Procedure." Baton Rouge, LA: unpublished manuscript.
4. See the Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections, 1987.
5. See D.L. MacKenzie, L.A. Gould, L.M. Riechers, and J.W. Shaw, 1989.
6. D.L. MacKenzie and J.W. Shaw, 1990. "Inmate Adjustment and Change During Shock Incarceration." *Justice Quarterly*, 7(1):125-150.

7. 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. J.W. Shaw and D.L. MacKenzie, 1992. "Shock Incarceration and Its Impact on Problem Drinkers." *The American Journal of Criminal Justice*, XVI(1): 63-96.

8. D.L. MacKenzie, 1991. "The Parole Performance of Offenders Released From Shock Incarceration (Boot Camp Prisons): A Survival Time Analysis." *Quantitative Criminology*, 7(3):213-236.

9. This was not an experimental design, so subjects were not randomly assigned to treatments (see "Evaluation Methodology" on page 3). Variables were entered in the data analyses to control for the differences among samples and the intensity of supervision.

10. Survival analysis is a statistical technique specifically designed to test for differences in time-to-failure for two or more groups.

11. See D.L. MacKenzie, 1991.

12. The study found that problem drinkers demonstrated a more sporadic performance than nonproblem drinkers during community supervision, suggesting that problem drinkers may have more difficulty adjusting during the transition to living in the community.

13. Since this study was completed, the eligibility criteria have been changed and

offenders with a past felony conviction may, under certain circumstances, be admitted to the program.

14. D.L. MacKenzie and D.G. Parent, 1991. "Shock Incarceration and Prison Crowding in Louisiana." *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 19(3):225-237.

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