

Fact Sheet

#8

*in a series of fact sheets
that examine questions
frequently asked about
the criminal justice
system.*

A Publication of the John Howard Society of Ontario

"Effective, Just and Humane Responses to Crime and its Causes."

Boot Camps for Young Offenders

Will young offenders be deterred from committing new crimes through the use of boot camps? Will the attitudes and skills developed through a boot camp experience reduce re-offending? Will boot camps save money? This Fact Sheet presents information on the origins and history of boot camps, examines the research on boot camps in other jurisdictions and explores practices that research has shown can make a difference in preventing youth crime.

The Ontario government is set to establish a "strict discipline program" for young offenders. The model favoured by this government is the military model, conventionally known as "boot camps". The government claims that an experience in "a highly structured atmosphere of rigorous physical discipline" (Press Release Nov. 20 1995) will act as a deterrent to reoffending and will improve the young offender's sense of self-worth, self respect and personal accountability. The public is demanding tougher sanctions for young offenders and the government states that boot camps are an appropriate response.

The notions underlying boot camps for young offenders - namely deterrence through increasing the severity of punishment, the promotion of self-discipline, and accountability through experiences that focus on structure and hard work - appeal to many intuitively.

It is our view that criminal justice policy and practice should be developed from sound research and evaluation.

Boot camps have been operating in other jurisdictions for over a decade. It is important to examine the experiences and the lessons learned in other jurisdictions in order to evaluate whether the boot camp model is right for young



offenders in Ontario and will be an effective use of scarce resources.

What are "boot camps"?

Origins

"Boot camp" is the colloquial term for a type of military basic training used throughout much of the 20th century. This form of basic training focused on rigorous physical exercise, long hours with a demanding schedule, strict adherence to rules, drill and ceremony - all led by a verbally abusive and sometimes physically abusive sergeant. The idea behind this type of training was to *make soldiers* who would obey without question and demonstrate extreme loyalty to their unit and to their leaders. The training was designed to prepare individuals to deal with the life-threatening situations of war and to adjust to their life in the military. **It was not designed to make citizens better able to deal with life in the community outside of the military.**

MILITARY MOVES AWAY FROM BOOT CAMPS

Studies conducted by the military itself have suggested overwhelmingly that the classic boot camp model is counterproductive for many of the military's own goals. The new training model emphasizes such things as health and stress reduction.

(Simon, 1995)

History of correctional boot camps

Correctional boot camps - the most common form of programs that come under the label of "shock incarceration" and/or "strict discipline" - first began in Oklahoma and Georgia in 1983. Their growth in the U.S. has been rapid. On January 1, 1994 there were over 8,000 prisoners in 50 boot camps operating in 34 states (Sourcebook 1994). Boot camps have garnered public and political support because this method of managing and treating offenders appeals to different people for different reasons. It appeals to those who want tougher, more punitive sanctions and to politicians who do not want to be seen as "soft on crime". It appeals to those people who view their own experience in a military boot camp as a positive, formative experience and to those who believe that offenders just need more discipline. It also appeals to those who think it will reduce the social and economic costs of incarceration. Legislation in some U.S. states permits sentence reductions which can be significant if an offender agrees to participate in and successfully completes a boot camp program. In some cases, a prisoner sentenced to a one year prison term will be released after 90 days upon successful completion of a boot camp program.

Boot camp programs in the U.S. all have in common a major emphasis on military drill and ceremony, physical training and hard labour. Although there are some programs for females and juveniles, generally the programs target males between the ages of 17 and 25 who most often do not have a past history of incarceration and have been sentenced for a nonviolent offence. Programs differ in the amount of supplementary rehabilitative programming (primarily drug treatment and academic education from a couple of hours a week to several hours a day) and in the level of supervision upon release (from regular probation to intensive supervision).

The Canadian context is somewhat different. At present, programs that come under the label of "strict discipline" operate only in Alberta and Manitoba.

Finding alternatives for incarceration is not one of the driving forces for the development of boot camps in Canada. Unlike the U.S., there is no provision in legislation to shorten sentences for offenders who have completed a boot camp program. The rhetoric surrounding the development and operation of these programs in Canada seems to relate more to the fear created by public misperceptions about the "crisis of youth crime" and the belief in the deterrent value of harsher punishment as a way of capping this perceived crisis.

Alberta has one small facility which is a "work camp" for aboriginal young offenders but is not operating any boot camps. In Manitoba, all young offenders in secure custody are subject to the "Made in Manitoba" model of boot camp which has been described by correctional officials in that province as "focusing on rigorous confinement, austere conditions, defined expectations and consequences, highly

structured activities and release preparation and supervision aimed at preventing future criminal activity".

It has been reported that Ontario is considering a model based on the Sgt. H. Johnson Youth Leadership Academy in New York State. The facility, staffed by "former military leaders", offers an "intensive, highly structured, military-style residential program" generally 6 months in length (can be extended for program noncompliance) followed by a 5 month aftercare program in New York City where all program participants come from and return to upon completion of the residential phase of the program.

In Ontario in 1994-95, 247 young persons were sentenced to custody for longer than 6 months - only 63 for longer than 12 months. Not all would meet the criteria of repeat offenders nor would all be appropriate for this type of program because of age or need for specialized services. It is unlikely that there would be sufficient numbers of appropriate young offenders to replicate the program offered by the Sgt. H. Johnson Youth Academy in Ontario. Even if there were sufficient numbers, the youth would come from all over the province and the distances in Ontario would create inefficiency and design problems which are not present in New York State (i.e. transportation costs, barriers to maintaining contacts and supports in the young person's home community, and consistent aftercare programs maintained in various communities).

What do we know about the effectiveness of boot camps?

A substantial body of research about the effectiveness of boot camps has been done in the U.S. To date, there has been no research study to evaluate the effectiveness of the "Made in Manitoba" model of boot camps.

The study recognized as the most comprehensive and systematic is an evaluation of boot camp programs in eight states (Mackenzie and Souryal, 1994). This study included programs which varied in their emphasis on supplementary programming and in intensity of supervision upon release. All programmes used control groups to allow for the comparison of the effectiveness of boot camps relative to other sanctions and measured recidivism to show if the attitudinal and behavioural change was maintained in the community.

The study found that:

- 1) while boot camp participants left the program feeling more positive than regular prison inmates about their experience - as measured by self-report questionnaires - boot camp participants and the comparison sample did not differ in objective measures of changes in antisocial attitudes during incarceration;
- 2) boot camp graduates did not adjust more positively to community supervision - as measured in terms of pursuing employment, educational, residential and financial stability and treatment; and
- 3) the boot camp experience did not result in a reduction in recidivism rates in five States. The three States that did show a lower rate on one measure of recidivism were those where the programs had a strong rehabilitative focus and an intensive supervision component after release.

If the military boot camp atmosphere alone had an impact on program participants, boot camp participants in each State would have had lower recidivism rates than comparison samples. A non-military program with a strong rehabilitative component followed by intensive supervision might be just as effective as one with a boot camp atmosphere.

(Mackenzie & Souryal, 1994 pg.42)

The study also showed that boot camps could result in expanding the use of incarceration if offenders, who would otherwise have been kept in community programmes, are sentenced to a term of imprisonment so that they can participate in a boot camp. Programs with intensive supervision upon release can also result in more people being returned to jail - not for a new crime but for a violation of a condition of parole.

Another recent study in the U.S., sponsored by the National Institute of Justice, evaluated three demonstration projects of boot camps for repeat young offenders age 15 - 18. The study only looked at boot camp participants while in the programs which included an aftercare phase. There were no control groups or long-term follow-up for those studied. While the program demonstrated a high completion rate, improvements in educational performance, physical fitness and behaviour during boot camp, the researchers found that:

...what appeared to be a promising prognosis at the conclusion of boot camp disintegrated during aftercare. All three programs were plagued by high attrition rates for noncompliance, absenteeism and new arrests during the aftercare period.

(Bourque et al. 1996: 111).

Unlike the military, when a youth leaves a correctional boot camp he leaves its structure and support and way of life and returns to an environment that has already failed him.

(Bourque et al., 1996: 112)

What are the Alternatives to Boot Camps? Research on “What Works” to reduce reoffending

In contrast to the research on boot camps which shows no sustained positive effects, there is a substantial body of research on “what works” to reduce reoffending .

Dr. Don Andrews of Carleton University and his colleagues have received international recognition for their work identifying the components of programs that reduce reoffending. They have found that programs that have demonstrated a reduction in recidivism are ones which are designed to:

- i) manage and treat offenders according to the young offender’s level of risk (assigning low-risk offenders to more intensive programs actually *increases* reoffending rates);
- ii) target the characteristics and circumstances of those who present a higher risk that, if changed, actually reduce criminal conduct; and
- iii) employ the styles and modes of treatment that are appropriate for offenders.

This important body of research does not suggest a “one-size-fits-all” approach to youth crime. Rather it suggests an individualized approach that depends on a careful assessment of the young person’s level of risk and his/her needs matched to appropriate services that are well designed and delivered by well-trained and supervised staff.

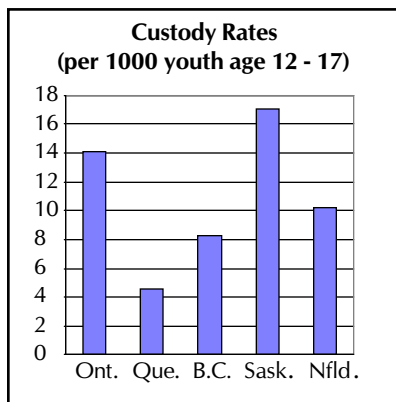
Of particular relevance to the proposal to develop boot camps in Ontario, Dr. Andrews’ research found that *programs designed according to the principles of deterrence or labelling theory do **not** work*. Research does **not** support the idea of increasing the length or harshness of punishments on the basis that such punishment would act as a deterrence to youth crime. Another important finding of the research was that *treatment services in the community yield more positive results than treatment services within correctional facilities*.

If we are serious about reducing the level of youth crime and not just punishing young offenders, we should be using our resources, both in terms of energy and money, to develop and implement alternatives to custody - not new forms of custody.

Are We "Too Soft" on Youth Crime Now? : Looking at the Evidence

Comparing Ontario's use of custody with other provinces

Despite the fact that there is one law dealing with young offenders in Canada, there is a great deal of provincial variation in how the law is administered and, in particular, the use of custody. A recent study by Doob and Spratt (forthcoming) showed that, of the five provinces studied, Ontario had the second highest youth incarceration rate for all offences. The authors found that factors such as differences in crime rates could not explain the variation between those provinces such as Ontario and Saskatchewan where the rates of youth incarceration are high compared to British Columbia and Quebec, where the rates are substantially lower. Provincial variation in sentencing practices also could not explain the variation in youth incarceration rates given that "once the case



Source: Doob and Spratt, forthcoming

assaults, theft under \$1000 and possession of stolen goods). These findings led the authors to conclude that:

...provincial policies, or lack of them, that determine how many young people are brought to court appear to be the major determinant of provincial custody rates.

The John Howard Society of Ontario is an organization of citizens who accept responsibility for understanding and dealing with the problems of crime and the criminal justice system.

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Repeat Offenders

Although the data is not available for Ontario, the national figures show that recidivists do not appear to be brought to court for more serious offences than first offenders. About 19% of recidivist cases involved a violent offence, compared with 25% of first offenders. At the same time, *cases involving recidivists were 4 times more likely to receive a sentence of custody than cases with first-time offenders.*

Conditions in Ontario young offender facilities

Generally, youth held in secure custody facilities already must adhere to firm institutional rules and regulations. While the Ontario government is telling Ottawa politicians to "get tougher", the Office of the Child and Family Advocacy has been investigating the recent incidents of mistreatment and inadequate care of young offenders in the Elgin-Middlesex Youth Detention Centre. The Advocate documented incidents in which young offenders were struck, kicked, humiliated, intimidated, subjected to segregation applied in an inappropriate manner and had their basic needs neglected. How much more "strict discipline" can we impose without being abusive?

Ontario Needs Alternatives to Custody - Not New Forms of Custody

Instead of spending energy and money devising new ways of incarcerating youth in Ontario we should be taking lessons from jurisdictions like Quebec which has a substantially lower rate of youth incarceration. We should be paying attention to the literature on "what works" with respect to programs and services that reduce reoffending by young people.

Sources:

Bourque, Blair B. et al. *Boot Camps for Juvenile Offenders: An Implementation Evaluation of Three Demonstration Projects*. National Institute of Justice, January 1996.

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