



Research in Brief

Challenge Incarceration Program

Outcome Evaluation – October 2006

Introduction

In the United States, the popularity of the boot camp concept has waxed and waned over the last 25 years. Widely perceived as a tough intermediate sanction capable of reducing offender recidivism, bed space needs, and operating costs, boot camps proliferated during the 1980s and early 1990s. By the mid-1990s, more than 100 adult and juvenile boot camps were operating in federal, state, and local jurisdictions. The number of boot camps has slowly declined since that time, however, as the results from evaluations of more than 30 boot camps have generally shown that, despite the ability to produce a modest reduction in costs, they do not have much of an impact on offender recidivism (MacKenzie, Wilson, and Kider, 2001).

In 1992, during the wave of popular support for boot camps, the Minnesota Legislature created the Challenge Incarceration Program (CIP), a correctional boot camp designed to save prison beds and lower costs by providing a reduction in prison time served to adult offenders who complete all three phases of the 18-month program. Although military regimentation, strenuous physical activity, and hard labor have figured prominently in the design and operation of CIP, offender rehabilitation has received primary emphasis since its inception in October 1992. For example, during Phase I, the “boot camp” phase, offenders participate in chemical dependency, education, cognitive skills, restorative justice, and transition programming. After completing Phase I, offenders are released to the community for Phases II and III, where they are required to participate in after-care programming, perform community service, and maintain employment while under intensive supervision for at least 12 months.

This report presents the results from a rigorous outcome evaluation of CIP since its beginning in 1992. The outcome evaluation focused on three main questions:

1. Has the demographic composition of the CIP population changed significantly in the last five years? If so, what are the causes?
2. Does CIP significantly reduce offender recidivism?
3. Does CIP reduce costs?

Has the demographic composition of the CIP population changed significantly in the last five years? If so, what are the causes?

Over the last five years, the CIP population has changed significantly. From FY 2000-2004, the percentage of white participants grew from 47 to 76 percent, the average age increased by three years from 29 to 32, methamphetamine offenders increased from 4 to 60 percent, and offenders from Greater Minnesota grew from 37 to 48 percent. The onset of these changes coincides with the implementation of new admissions standards in April 2000, which expanded the list of prohibited offenses, excluded offenders with more extensive criminal histories, and included for consideration factors such as gang affiliation, victim impact, community concern, and lack of residential ties within Minnesota.

To address concerns that the new admissions standards may have a disparate racial impact on the CIP population, this study examined whether the increase in white offenders has been influenced by these standards. This report also analyzed whether the increase in white of-

fenders is due to other factors such as the race, age, offense type, and sentencing county of all offenders admitted to prison each month.

The results show that the growing percentage of white CIP offenders has been due to the methamphetamine boom. None of the other variables in the statistical model, including the new admissions standards, achieved statistical significance, suggesting that they have not had a significant impact on the changes in the racial composition of the CIP population. The growing influx of methamphetamine offenders has influenced the makeup of CIP because these offenders are predominantly white (85 percent). Moreover, methamphetamine offenders are generally viable CIP candidates in that most have a relatively limited criminal history. Thus, as methamphetamine offenders started entering prison in greater numbers beginning in FY 2000, they began comprising a larger share of the CIP eligibility pool and, ultimately, the CIP population itself.

Does CIP significantly reduce offender recidivism?

In finding that boot camps have no effect on recidivism, the majority of evaluations have been limited in one or more of the following ways: 1) program-implementation problems, 2) poor comparative data, 3) reliance on only one measure of recidivism, 4) a brief follow-up period, and 5) the exclusion of program dropouts. This study attempted to improve on the existing boot camp literature by using a retrospective quasi-experimental design to compare the recidivism rates of all 1,347 offenders who entered CIP from FY 1993-2002 with a comparison group of 1,555 offenders who were released from a Minnesota correctional facility between January 1, 1993, and December 31, 2002. At 7.2 years, the average follow-up period for all 2,902 offenders is the second longest of any boot camp evaluation to date, trailing only Bottcher and Ezell (2005), whose average was 7.5 years. As a result, this study offers a rare look at the long-term effectiveness of a boot camp.

The impact of CIP participation on recidivism was analyzed, while simultaneously controlling for the effects of other variables such as discipline history, number of prior felony convictions, and offender race. In addition, a multi-stage sampling technique was used to create a Control group that was equivalent to the CIP group in that there were no statistically significant differences between the two groups for the control variables used in the analyses. Program participation was measured as 1) all CIP participants and the Control group, and 2) Phase I completers, Phase I dropouts, and the Control group. Recidivism, on the other hand, was defined as 1) a felony reconviction, 2) a reincarceration for a new criminal offense, and 3) any return to prison (i.e., reincarceration due to a new crime or technical violation). Although technical violations do not constitute a new criminal offense, which is why they have not been included in prior recidivism analyses performed by the department, they were included in this report in order to examine whether CIP has reduced costs.

The results revealed that CIP offenders and, in particular, Phase I completers had lower rates of reoffending (i.e., felony reconvictions and reimprisonment for a new offense) than the Control group. In particular, the Control group was more likely to be reimprisoned for a crime against a person (19 percent) than CIP offenders (11 percent). Phase I dropouts, however, were more likely to be reincarcerated for a property offense (42 percent), whereas Phase I completers were more likely to be reimprisoned for a drug offense (44 percent).

When the definition of recidivism was expanded to include returns to prison for either a technical violation or a new crime, the findings showed that offenders in the CIP and Control groups returned to prison at virtually the same rate (47.6 vs. 47.0 percent). Whereas the Control group was much more likely to return for a new crime, CIP offenders were more likely to return to prison for a technical violation. For example, 73 percent of the Control group offenders returned to prison due to a new crime

as opposed to 45 percent of CIP offenders. In contrast, 55 percent of the CIP offenders returned to prison for a technical violation compared to 27 percent of the Control group. To control for the effects that demographic (e.g., age, gender, race); criminal history (e.g., prior convictions/prison commitments, age at release, age at first conviction/prison commitment); and sentencing/institutional variables (e.g., sentencing county, offense type, discipline convictions) might have on the dependent variable (recidivism), a series of statistical models was estimated. The results revealed that CIP significantly lowers the rate of reoffending when recidivism was measured as a felony reconviction or as a reincarceration for a new crime, a finding that was robust across both measures of CIP participation. In particular, CIP decreased the time to reoffense by 32 percent for felony reconvictions and 35 percent for reincarcerations for a new crime. CIP participation did not have a statistically significant impact, however, when recidivism was operationalized as any return to prison (i.e., technical violation or reincarceration for a new crime).

Does CIP Reduce Costs?

Boot camps are capable of reducing costs in two ways: 1) offering program graduates a reduction in time served, and 2) decreasing the amount of time offenders spend in prison following release. When prior evaluations have examined whether boot camps reduce costs, they have focused mainly on the savings produced by early release; i.e., the reduction in time served. Of the few studies that have attempted to measure the amount of recidivism savings, none have used actual data that measured recidivism as any return to prison; i.e., new offenses as well as technical violations.

The present study calculated the cost reduction resulting from both early release and a decrease in recidivism; i.e., any return to prison. The results show that prior to FY 1998 (its sixth fiscal year of operation), the early release provision did not generate a reduction in costs. Since that time, however, it has decreased costs by \$14.4 million due to increased graduation

rates, expanded program capacity, lower per diems, and changes made to statutory and departmental admissions standards that increased the number of bed days saved per CIP graduate. Moreover, the size of the early release cost reduction has grown larger each year, averaging nearly \$3 million per year during the FY 1998-2002 period (see Figure 1). Overall, the early release component has reduced costs by a total of \$13.6 million.

The results further reveal that costs have been decreased by approximately \$4.5 million through a reduction in recidivism. Although CIP and Control group offenders returned to prison at roughly the same rate, CIP offenders stayed, on average, 40 fewer days in prison because they were less likely to return to prison for a new crime and, thus, they generally had shorter lengths of stay. Combined, CIP has reduced costs to the State by an estimated \$18.1 million through early release and a decrease in recidivism.

Conclusion

The findings from this outcome evaluation have several implications for boot camps, in particular, and correctional program evaluations in general. First, due to the methodological strengths of this evaluation—a carefully matched Control group, a relatively long follow-up period, and multiple measures of recidivism and program participation—the results presented here offer what is arguably the most credible evidence to date that boot camps are capable of reducing recidivism and costs. This study thus confirms what researchers suggested more than a decade ago: Boot camps can be effective correctional programs, but only if they put rehabilitation first by emphasizing therapeutic programming, closely supervising program graduates after release, and providing lengthy aftercare.

Second, much like a new business that loses money before it begins to turn a profit, CIP did not reduce costs prior to FY 1998. As a result, an outcome evaluation of CIP after its first five years of operation may have led to the prema-

ture and erroneous conclusion that it does not “work” insofar as it does not save money. The “growing pains” that CIP experienced from FY 1993-1997 suggest that a great deal of caution should be exercised when conducting initial outcome evaluations of newly-started boot camps or correctional programs in general.

Finally, the growing perception over the last decade that boot camps are largely ineffective has been based mainly on results showing that boot camp participants are no less likely to recidivate than a comparison group of offenders. But as this study illustrates, determining whether a program “works” should not be limited to a simple question of “Did they recidivate?” Rather, in assessing whether a program is effective, the focus should be not only on

whether they recidivated, but also on why they returned and for how long.

References

Bottcher, J. & Ezell, M.E. (2005). Examining the effectiveness of boot camps: A randomized experiment with a long-term follow up. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 42, 309-332.

MacKenzie, D. L., Wilson, D. B., & Kider, S. B. (2001). Effects of correctional boot camps on offending. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 578, 126-143.

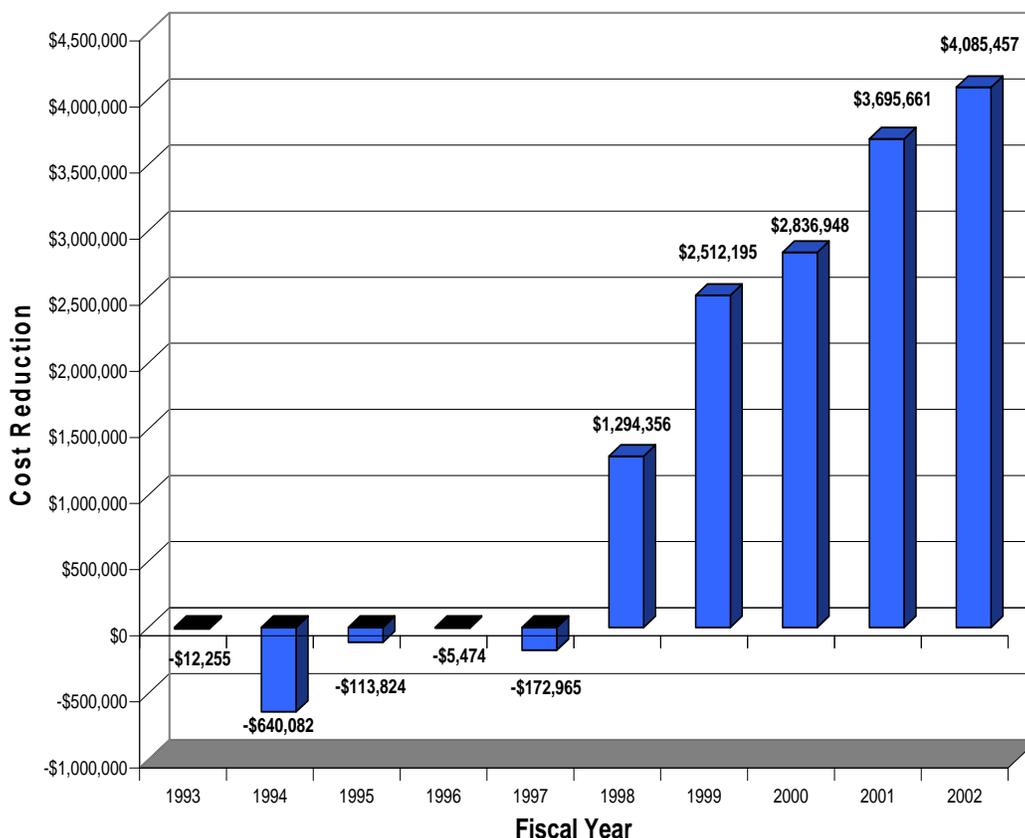


Figure 1. CIP Early Release Cost Reduction, FY 1993-2002

An Outcome Evaluation of the Challenge Incarceration Program – September 2006 is available in its entirety from the Minnesota Department of Corrections, 1450 Energy Park Drive, Suite 200, St. Paul, Minnesota 55108-5219, 651/642-0200, fax 651/642-0223, or www.doc.state.mn.us.