



National Institute of Justice

Research in Brief

August 2001

Issues and Findings

Discussed in this Brief: A comparison of 27 boot camps to 22 more traditional facilities by measuring components of the institutional environment to determine the impact of juvenile correctional institutions and programs.

Key issues: Despite their growth in popularity in the 1990s, correctional boot camps remain controversial. Critics question whether their military-style methods are appropriate to managing and treating juvenile delinquents and positively affecting juvenile behavior while they are confined and after their release. Boot camp advocates contend that the facilities' program structure gives staff more control over the participants and provides the juveniles with a safer environment than traditional facilities.

Key findings: Using site visits, 14-point scale surveys of juveniles and staff in both types of facilities, and structured interviews with facility administrators, this study revealed:

- Juveniles in boot camps more frequently reported positive responses to their institutional environment. Boot camp juveniles said they were better prepared for release, were given more therapeutic programming, had more structure and control, and were more active than comparison facility youths. The one exception was that boot camp youths were

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A National Study Comparing the Environments of Boot Camps With Traditional Facilities for Juvenile Offenders

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During the 1990s, correctional boot camps became an increasingly popular sentencing option for juvenile delinquents. In 1996, 48 residential boot camps for adjudicated juveniles were operating in 27 States. Only one of those boot camps opened prior to 1990.

Boot camp programs are modeled after military basic training. Offenders often enter the programs in groups that are referred to as platoons or squads. They are required to wear military-style uniforms, march to and from activities, and respond rapidly to the commands of the "drill instructors." The rigorous daily schedule requires youths to wake up early and stay active throughout the day. Although programs differ somewhat, the schedule usually includes drill and ceremony practice, strenuous physical fitness activities, and challenge programs (e.g., ropes courses) as well as required academic education. Frequently, youths in the camps receive summary punishments, such as having to do pushups, for misbehavior.

Pros and cons of boot camps

Despite their growing popularity, correctional boot camps are controversial. The controversy primarily is over whether the

camp atmosphere is conducive to positive growth and change. Proponents of the camps believe that the structure of the programs and the control staff have over the participants create a safe environment in which the youths are less likely to fight with or be victimized by other youths than they would be in traditional correctional facilities. Furthermore, advocates argue that the incorporation of the military model builds camaraderie among youths and fosters respect for staff.

In contrast, boot camp critics say that the camps' confrontational environment is in direct opposition to the type of positive interpersonal relationships and supportive atmosphere that are needed for youths' positive development. From their perspective, the boot camp environment is antithetical to quality therapeutic programming. The boot camp atmosphere itself—strict control over juveniles' activities and confrontational interactions between drill instructors and

Issues and Findings

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more likely to report that they were in danger from staff.

- Staff in boot camps more frequently reported favorable perceptions of their institutional environments, such as a caring and just environment and more structure and control compared with traditional facility staff. Additionally, boot camp staff more frequently reported favorable working conditions, such as less personal stress and better communication among staff.
- Overall, juvenile and staff perceptions of the institutions' environments were similar. The five juvenile and staff scales with the highest correlations were environmental danger, resident danger, care, quality of life, and control.
- Initial levels of anxiety were slightly higher for boot camp youths; initial levels of depression were higher for comparison facility juveniles. Anxiety and depression decreased over time for juveniles in both facilities. Juveniles in both types of facilities experienced a decrease in their social bonds with family, school, and work while they were institutionalized. These changes, however, were statistically insignificant.
- In general, boot camps were more selective about the juveniles admitted to the facility. Boot camps admitted fewer juveniles who had psychological problems or were suicide risks, and they required psychological, medical, and physical evaluations before allowing juveniles to enter. In 25 percent of the boot camps, juveniles had to volunteer for the program.

Target audience: Correctional policymakers and practitioners.

youths—may cause juveniles to fear the correctional staff, which would create a negative environment for therapy and educational achievement.

Furthermore, critics argue, the camps' emphasis on group activities does not allow programs to address individual youths' problems. According to critics, juveniles' needs vary greatly, and effective programs should assess each individual's needs and provide appropriate individual programming. Many boot camps, however, manage juveniles in units or platoons. Youths enter the facility in a unit and remain with that unit for educational classes and treatment programs. Moreover, the military philosophy and highly structured daily schedule may not permit the flexibility needed to address individual problems.

Certain components of boot camps are also suspected of making it more difficult for juveniles to make the transition back to the community. Most delinquents will return to the community after being institutionalized for a relatively short time. For juveniles to succeed in the community, they need to receive help while they are institutionalized. Critics are concerned that boot camps, with their focus on group activities, regimentation, and military drill and ceremony, will not address what juveniles need to successfully make the transition back to the community. When returning to an environment that lacks such regimentation and positive group activities, the juveniles may revert to their old ways of surviving in and relating to the community in which they live.

Another problem critics find with group orientation is that it may cause youths to view the system as unjust. For example, juveniles may think the program is unfair or abusive if their entire platoon is punished because one member of the group misbehaved or because of the controversial nature of the interactions between themselves and drill instructors.

What research shows. Although the boot camp environment appears to be radically different from that of traditional residential facilities and some fear its potentially negative impact, studies have not shown that either type of facility is more effective in reducing recidivism. In general, no significant differences have been found for either adults or juveniles when recidivism rates of boot camp participants have been compared with others receiving more traditional correctional options.¹

In recent years, the importance of understanding the institutional environment or conditions of confinement has become a focus of attention in corrections. One reason for this interest is that research has shown that the prison environment has an impact on inmate adjustment and behavior. Facilities "possess unique and enduring characteristics that impinge on and shape individual behavior."² Because increasing numbers of juveniles are being confined in institutions, it is important to understand the effect this confinement is having on juveniles' behavior while they are confined and after they are released.

Furthermore, considerable research shows that correctional treatment programs can successfully change behavior. Results from meta-analyses, literature reviews, and assessments of the quality of the research on the effects of treatment show that treatment programs with particular characteristics are successful in reducing future delinquent and criminal activities.³ Effective programs target offenders who are at risk of recidivism, are modeled after cognitive-behavior theoretical models and are sensitive to juveniles' learning styles and characteristics, and address the characteristics of youths directly associated with criminal activity. Youths should receive sufficient dosage of treatment (e.g., amount of contact, length of program), and the

treatment should have therapeutic integrity (e.g., appropriately trained staff). From this perspective, measuring the conditions of confinement becomes important to understanding which program components are necessary for effective treatment.

Focus on outcomes. Another justification for the interest in the conditions of confinement in juvenile

institutions is the recent attention given to quality management and performance-based standards. Quality management has played an important role in the restructuring of private organizations and corporations, and these concepts are currently being applied to public agencies.⁴ Quality management focuses on outcome-based decisionmaking. Traditionally, standards for correctional institutions

have been based on expert opinions about “best practices” in the field of corrections. Total quality management and performance-based standards change the focus from views on best practices to desired outcomes. From this perspective, the focus shifts from what is thought to be the best way to manage a facility to the actual outcomes desired. Broadly defined, outcomes include client and staff

I Methodology

In 1996, the researchers surveyed juvenile correctional agencies and identified 48 boot camps in operation; another 2 jurisdictions were developing boot camp programs. Two programs were eliminated because they were nonresidential facilities. Of the remaining 46 programs, 27 in 20 States participated in the study. Although it was not possible to compare program aspects of those that were not in the study with those that were, the participating programs were geographically representative of the United States.

A matched comparison facility in the same State was identified for each participating boot camp. Each comparison facility was selected in consultation with the agency responsible for and/or the administrator of the boot camp. The comparison facility was selected as the most likely facility to which juveniles would have been sent had they not gone to boot camp. Comparison facilities were traditional institutions such as training schools and detention centers. For the study, 22 traditional institutions were compared with 27 boot camps.*

The 49 participating correctional facilities were visited between April 1997 and August 1998. During the site visits, 4,121 juveniles and 1,362 staff were surveyed. Structured interviews also were conducted with facility administrators to obtain

data from institutional records and information on policies and procedures.

The juvenile survey contained 266 questions about demographic information, previous criminal history, attitudes, and experiences in the facility. The survey was administered in group settings of 15 to 20 juveniles. The informed consent and all items on the survey were videotaped and played on a VCR to reduce the amount of reading required of the youths.

The 216-item staff survey asked respondents to describe their demographic, background, and occupational characteristics. Both the juvenile and staff surveys included a series of items about perceptions of the facility's environmental conditions. Staff were asked additional questions about working conditions. Both surveys included items presented as statements (e.g., staff treat residents fairly; punishments given are fair), to which respondents answered according to a five-point scale ranging from “never” to “always.”

The structured interviews with facility administrators consisted of 244 questions. Information was obtained about the facilities' policies and procedures, population characteristics, screening and admission criteria, the emphasis placed on programming components, staff and education issues, and visitation. The

survey also requested statistical information from institutional records.

Fourteen scales were formed using factor analyses: control, resident danger, staff danger, environmental danger, activity, care, risks to residents, quality of life, structure, justice, freedom, therapeutic programming, preparation for release, and individual planning (see “Perceptual Environmental Conditions Scales” for scale descriptions). These scales were used to measure how staff and juveniles viewed the environment of the facility in which they lived or worked.

Across all facilities, juvenile and staff perceptions of the environments in boot camps were compared with perceptions of those in the comparison facilities using analysis-of-variance models. Overall differences between juveniles in the boot camps and those in the comparison facilities were compared on the 14 environmental scales. Similarly, boot camp staff perceptions were compared with traditional facility staff perceptions. Demographics (e.g., age, race/ethnicity, sex) were used as controls.

* The number of boot camps exceeded the number of traditional facilities because two boot camps participated in one State, but there were no comparison sites for these facilities. One comparison site and two boot camps were selected in three other States.

experiences, short-term changes, and long-term impacts.

In trying to understand the impact of correctional institutions and programs, many researchers have argued that outcomes must be broadened for various measures of effectiveness. The focus of the study described here was to compare boot camps with more traditional facilities by measuring conditions of the institutional environment (see “Methodology”). The environments of the institutions were measured from several perspectives: the perceptions of staff and juveniles, data in institutional records, and the policies and procedures (as reported by administrators). To examine the impact of the environment on juvenile offenders, changes experienced by juveniles while confined were studied. Changes in juveniles’ attitudes, stress levels, and social bonds (ties to family, school, and work) were expected to reflect their responses to the institutional environment and to be associated with future criminal behavior.

Juvenile perceptions of the institutional environment⁵

Demographics. The majority of the juveniles participating in the study in both facility types were black or white males who were approximately 16 years old. On average, these youths were 13 years old when they were arrested for the first time and had previously been committed to institutions 2.5 to 3 times. On average, juveniles in the boot camps had shorter sentence lengths than juveniles in comparison facilities (10 months compared with 16 months). They also had spent less time in the facility (3 months compared with 7 months). Juveniles in boot camps were significantly less likely than youths in traditional facilities to

Perceptual Environmental Conditions Scales

Control: Do staff have control over the residents? Do residents do what staff tell them? Do residents escape? Do residents have drugs or weapons?

Resident danger: Do residents worry about being hit or punched by other residents? Are they afraid of other residents? Are residents mean to one another? Do they fight? Do residents get sexually attacked?

Staff danger (juvenile perspective): Are residents afraid of staff? Do staff grab, push, or shove residents? Are staff mean to residents?

Staff danger (staff perspective): Are residents mean to staff? Are staff in danger of being hit or punched by residents? Do residents grab, push, or shove staff?

Environmental danger: Do staff protect residents? Is residents’ property safe? Are gangs in the institution? Do staff catch and punish troublemakers? Are there enough staff to keep residents safe? Do staff prevent violence and forced sex among residents?

Activity: Do residents have activities to keep them busy? Do they spend time on school work? Are they busy at night? Do they plan what they will do when they leave? Do they exercise? Do they have activities when they are not in school?

Care: Do staff encourage residents to try new activities? Do staff help residents with school work after class? Do staff tease residents? Do they help residents with personal problems? Is the health care good? Are residents friendly? Will someone help if a resident has a problem? Do staff care about residents?

Risk to residents: Are insects, rodents, or dirt a problem? Is there a bad odor or poor air circulation? Do residents know what to do in case of fire? Do many accidents happen? Are the jobs safe?

Quality of life: Do residents exercise? Is it noisy? Is there a lot of space in the living area? Do residents have privacy in the shower and toilet? Is the food good? Do residents get enough to eat? Is the visiting area crowded?

Structure: Do residents follow a set schedule? Do they study at certain times? Do they know what will happen if they break a rule? Are they messy? Do staff change their minds about rules?

Justice: Are residents punished even when they do not do anything wrong? Do staff use force? Can residents file a grievance against staff? Are residents aware of the grievance process? Can staff and residents work out problems? Will something bad happen if a resident files a grievance? Do residents deserve the punishments they receive? Are punishments fair?

Freedom: Do residents have to work when they do not want to? Can they choose the type of work? Can they read or listen to music whenever they want? Are they encouraged to make decisions?

Therapeutic programming: Will the programs help residents find a job, understand themselves, keep focused on their goals, learn new skills, and/or return to school? Does the substance abuse treatment help residents? Are religious services offered? Do residents receive individual attention? Are they healthier since coming to the facility?

Preparation for release: Are residents encouraged to plan for release? Have they made plans to find a job, return to school, get drug treatment, and find a place to work? Do they set goals for the future?

Individual planning (staff only): Do residents have individual meetings with staff? Do they get help with their problems? Do they receive individual counseling?

have experienced family violence and to have used illegal substances. Juveniles in boot camps, however, were significantly more likely than juveniles in traditional facilities to have problems with alcohol abuse.

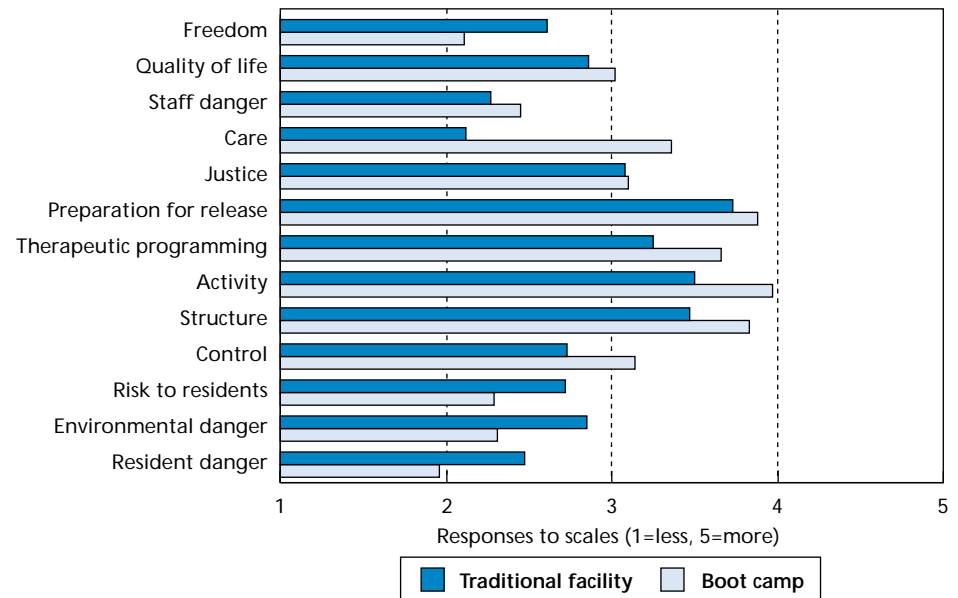
Perceptions of the institutional environment. Juveniles in boot camps responded favorably to their institutional environments more frequently than juveniles in comparison facilities (see exhibit 1). Across all sites, juveniles in boot camps more frequently responded positively to their institutional environment, with the exception of safety from staff. Specifically, boot camp juveniles were more likely to report that they were in danger from staff. Juveniles in the boot camps reported more frequently that their environments prepared them for release, provided therapeutic programming, had structure and control, and kept them active. On average, juveniles in boot camps reported less environmental danger, less danger from other residents, and fewer environmental risks than juveniles in comparison facilities. Juveniles in boot camps reported less freedom.

Staff perceptions of the institutional environment⁶

Demographics. The majority of the staff in both facility types were male and white. Boot camp staff were an average age of 36; comparison facility staff were slightly older, on average, at 39 years old. Most boot camp (85 percent) and comparison (85 percent) staff had attended or graduated from college. More boot camp staff had military experience (49 percent compared with 29 percent of the comparison facility staff).

Perceptions of the institutional environment. As in the juvenile survey, staff in boot camps more frequently

Exhibit 1. Boot camp and traditional facility youths' perceptions of their environment



Note: Each scale shows a significant difference between boot camp juveniles and traditional facility juveniles. Compared with juveniles in traditional facilities, juveniles in almost all the boot camps (90 to 100 percent) viewed their facilities as having better environments for preparing them for release and better therapeutic programming; being more active, more structured, and more controlled; and posing less danger from other residents, less danger from the environment, and fewer risks. Compared with juveniles in traditional facilities, juveniles in most of the boot camps (68 to 81 percent) reported their facilities as posing more danger from staff, being more caring, and having better quality of life and more justice.

reported favorable perceptions of their institutional environment than traditional facility staff (see exhibit 2). Boot camp staff more frequently reported that juveniles were given more therapeutic programming and experienced a caring and just environment compared with reports of traditional facility staff. Boot camp staff also were more likely than staff in traditional facilities to say the juveniles were more active, and the camps had more structure and control and less freedom. Conversely, boot camp staff reported less frequently than traditional facility staff that there was danger to juveniles from the environment and other risks, from other juveniles, and from staff. Less consistent differences were found for the remaining three

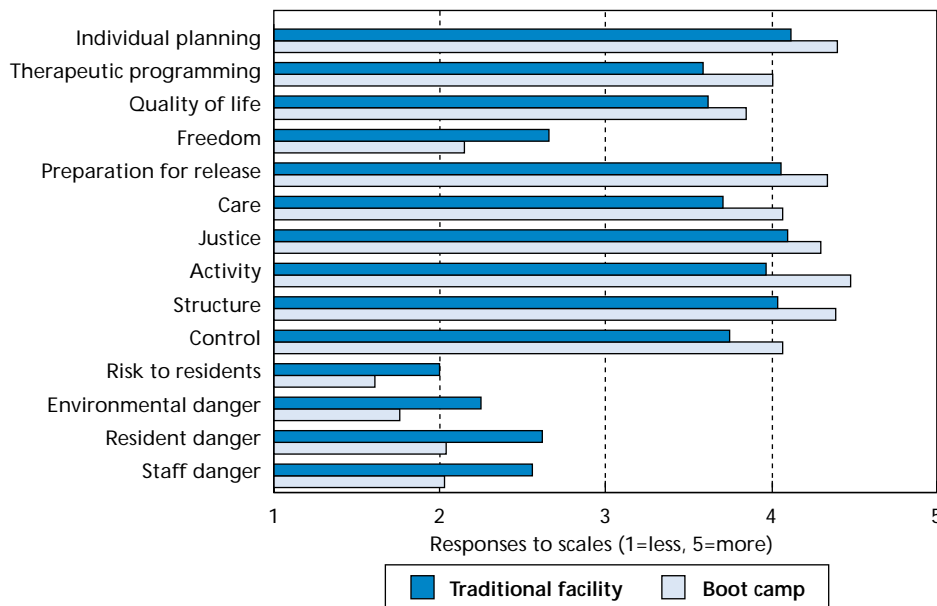
scales (quality of life, preparation for release, and individual planning).

Work experiences. In comparison to staff in traditional facilities, boot camp staff also more frequently reported favorable working conditions (see exhibit 3). They reported less personal stress, better communication among staff, more support from the administration, and, in general, more satisfaction with their working conditions.

Comparison of staff and juvenile perceptions

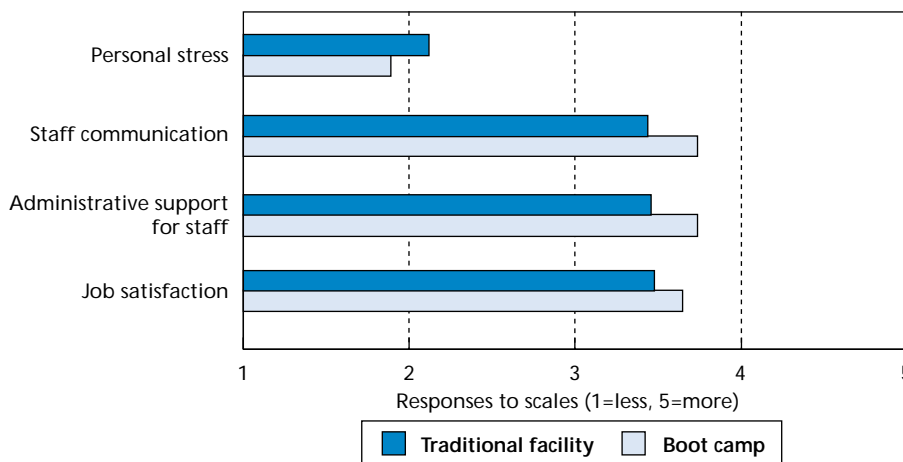
One interest of this research project was to find out whether juveniles and staff had the same perceptions of the particular facility in which they were

Exhibit 2. Boot camp and traditional facility staff perceptions of their environment



Note: Each scale shows a significant difference between boot camp staff and traditional facility staff. Compared with staff in traditional facilities, staff in almost all the boot camps (85 to 100 percent) viewed their facilities as being more caring, more active, more structured, and more controlled; having more justice, less freedom, and better therapeutic programming; and posing less danger from residents, less danger to staff, fewer environmental dangers, and fewer risks. Compared with staff in traditional facilities, staff in most of the boot camps (75 to 85 percent) reported their facilities as having better preparation for release and better quality of life and providing more individualized attention to residents.

Exhibit 3. Boot camp and traditional facility staff perceptions of working conditions



Note: Each scale shows a significant difference between boot camp staff and traditional facility staff. Compared with staff in traditional facilities, staff in the boot camps reported less stress, better communication among staff, more support from the administration, and more overall job satisfaction.

confined or worked. Overall, there was strong agreement between juvenile and staff perceptions of the institutions' environments. The five juvenile and staff scales with the highest correlations were environmental danger, resident danger, care, quality of life, and control. For 10 of the scales, the correlations between staff and juveniles' environmental ratings were more than 0.85; the correlations for the remaining two scales were 0.38 (individual planning) and 0.60 (justice).

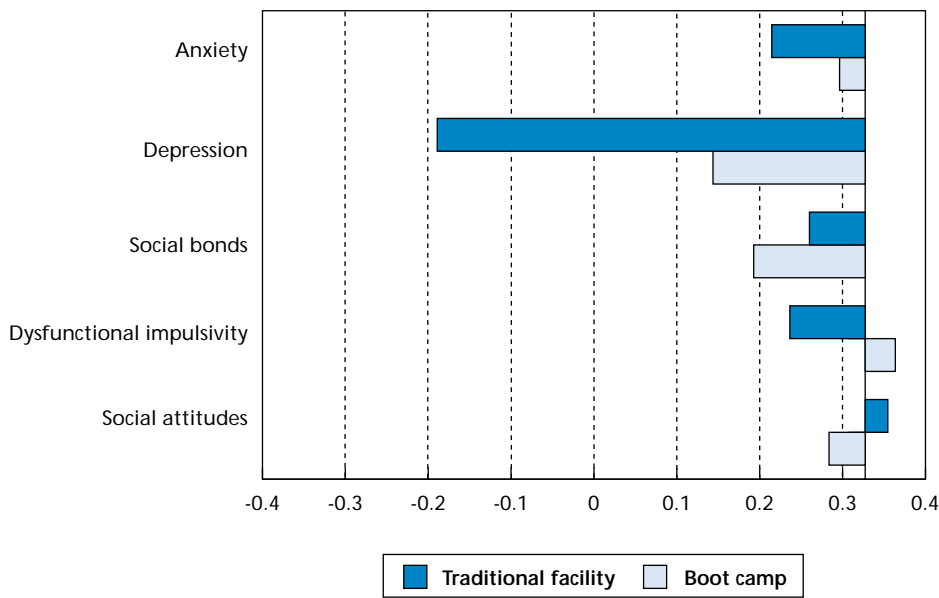
Individual adjustment and change

The survey was given to 550 youths in the facilities twice to examine changes in adjustment over time. This permitted an examination of the changes youths underwent while they were confined. Anxiety, depression, social bonds, dysfunctional impulsivity, and social adjustment were measured (see exhibit 4). The adjustment and change variables were selected for practical and theoretical reasons.

Critics of boot camps have been particularly concerned about the level of stress created by the strict, military-based, confrontational model. They fear such an atmosphere will create excessive stress and will mitigate any positive effects from academic and therapeutic treatment programs that the camps may offer. Initial levels of anxiety were slightly higher for the boot camp juveniles, but initial levels of depression were higher for the comparison youths. The levels of anxiety and depression decreased over time for juveniles in both facilities; however, these reductions were greater for the boot camp youths.

Social bonds have been found to be associated with reductions in criminal

Exhibit 4. Changes over time for juveniles in boot camps and traditional facilities



Note: Juveniles in both types of facilities became less depressed and anxious during their institutionalization. Decreases in depression and anxiety were greater for juveniles in boot camps. Social attitudes of juveniles in both types of facilities changed little. Juveniles in both types of facilities experienced a decrease in their attachment to family, school, and work (bonds). Juveniles in boot camps became less dysfunctionally impulsive.

activity.⁷ If juvenile facilities improved such bonds, future criminal activities might be reduced. Disappointingly, juveniles in both types of facilities reported a weakening in their social bonds to family, school, and work while they were institutionalized. These changes, however, were small, and the differences were not statistically significant.

Theoretically, an inability to control one’s impulses⁸ and antisocial attitudes⁹ is associated with delinquent and criminal activities. For this reason, changes in dysfunctional impulsivity (i.e., the inability to control one’s impulses) and social attitudes (or, conversely, antisocial attitudes) during the time the youths were in the facility were examined. Juveniles in boot camps reported decreased

dysfunctional impulsivity and increased prosocial attitudes (conversely, decreased antisocial attitudes). In contrast, juveniles in the comparison facilities reported more dysfunctional impulsivity and decreases in prosocial attitudes (conversely, increased antisocial attitudes).

Summary of perceptions and change

Overall, these results provided strong evidence that those who lived and worked in boot camps perceived their environment more positively than those who lived and worked in more traditional facilities. On average, both staff and juveniles in boot camps perceived less danger and more components that were conducive to positive change, such as more help in planning

for release, more programming in the facility, a more just system, more activity, a more caring environment, and more individual attention. However, juveniles in boot camps more frequently reported perceptions of danger from staff.

Juveniles in both types of facilities became less depressed and anxious over time, but the decreases in depression and anxiety were greater for those in boot camps. Boot camps also appeared to be associated with more positive changes during the time juveniles were confined. Boot camp youths became less antisocial and reported less dysfunctional impulsivity compared with youths in traditional facilities. These changes were small, however, and youths in both facility types reported decreases in ties to family, school, and work. Thus, although youths in boot camps on average had a more positive view of their environments, there was little evidence that these perceptions translated into psychosocial changes that would reduce the likelihood of future delinquent or criminal activities.

Institutional policies and procedures¹⁰

The structured interview with facility administrators was designed to elicit information about the type of juveniles who enter the facility, the daily schedule, selection and admission procedures, facility characteristics, educational and staff issues, health and medical assistance policies, safety and security issues, and institutional impacts. While perceptions provide important information about the facilities, equally important is information about policies and procedures that might have an impact on those who live and work in the facilities.

Control and structure. One explanation for juvenile and staff perceptions of a safe environment in boot camps could be a result of the increased structure and control over the juveniles' activities. Administrators were asked a series of questions about how structured juveniles' daily activities were. More boot camps required juveniles to get up, shower, and study according to a set daily schedule (see exhibit 5). Not surprising, boot camps also had more military-style components. Most of these components were indicative of regimentation and structure. For example, in the majority of the boot camp facilities, staff and juveniles wore uniforms, and the youths practiced drill and ceremony, entered the facility in groups, and marched to activities. Thus, the information from the administrators was similar to the perceptions of staff and juveniles in suggesting that boot camps provide much more structure for juveniles than the traditional institutions. These differences may explain

why juveniles in boot camps had more favorable perceptions of their institutional environments.

Characteristics of juveniles in the facilities. Another possible explanation for the differences in perceptions is that the juveniles in boot camps differed from those in traditional facilities. Although individual differences were controlled for statistically in the perceptual analyses, there is an inherent selection bias at the administrative level if those who entered boot camps differed from those who went to traditional facilities. This issue was examined by asking how selective facilities were about their populations. In general, boot camps were found to be much more selective (see exhibit 6). Fewer boot camps admitted juveniles who had psychological problems or were suicide risks. More boot camps required psychological, medical, and physical evaluations before juveniles were admitted into the facility. Additionally, more facility personnel

in boot camps were able to select juveniles for their program, and in 25 percent of the boot camps, juveniles had to volunteer for the program. None of the traditional facilities required juveniles to volunteer.

The question of whether juveniles with certain past histories or offenses were admitted to the facilities was also examined (see exhibit 7). For example, administrators were asked whether juveniles who committed arson are permitted to enter the facility and, if so, whether the number of such individuals is limited. In general, comparison facilities admitted delinquents who committed more serious offenses.

The examination of the structure and admission components of the facilities suggested that the environments of the two types of facilities differed substantially. One possibility is that these different environments lead to different experiences and, hence, different perceptions of the environment. This investigation of the characteristics of the juveniles in the facilities and the selection process, however, suggests that the differences in perceptions may result from characteristics of the juveniles admitted. From this perspective, juveniles who enter boot camps are different from those who go to the traditional facilities (e.g., less aggressive, fewer psychological problems); therefore, because of this selection process, boot camp juveniles judged their environment more positively.

Therapeutic components. It was somewhat surprising that juveniles and staff perceived the boot camp environment as having more components conducive to rehabilitation. In general, those who lived and worked in boot camps viewed their environment as being more just and

Exhibit 5. Structure and military components in juvenile boot camps and traditional facilities

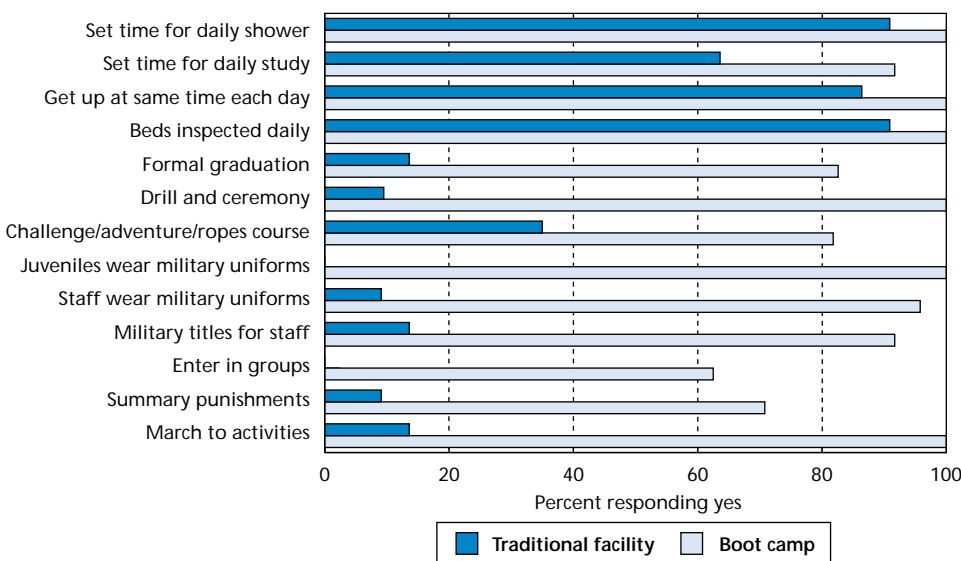


Exhibit 6. Selection criteria used by boot camps and traditional facilities

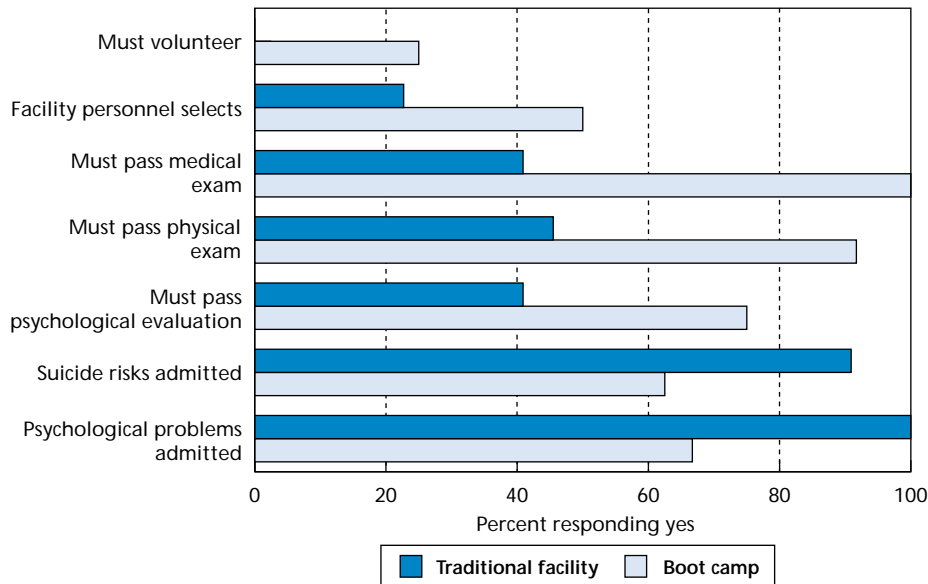
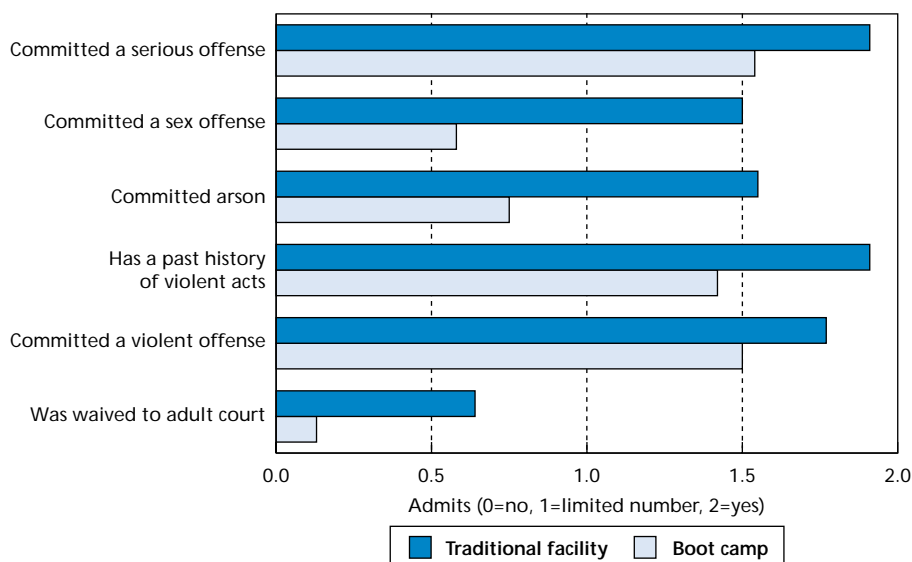


Exhibit 7. Admittance criteria of boot camps and traditional facilities



caring, better preparing juveniles for release, and having more therapeutic programming. Staff in most of the boot camps also believed that their facilities provided more individual planning and therapeutic programming. This research attempted to verify the perceptions by obtaining information

about programming, treatment, and the efforts facilities made to help youths maintain outside contacts (see “Differences in Therapeutic Programming and Individual Attention”). However, few differences were found in the average number of hours devoted to education per week.

Differences in Therapeutic Programming and Individual Attention

- On average, boot camps scheduled 25.3 hours of educational classes per week compared with 25.7 hours scheduled in the comparison facilities.
- In boot camps, an average of 25.3 percent of juveniles took a General Educational Development (GED) test in the past year; 42.9 percent of the juveniles in the traditional facilities took a GED test.
- Of those who took a GED test, an average of 78.3 percent passed in the boot camp and 75.2 percent passed in the traditional facilities.
- Juveniles attended classes grouped according to their appropriate grade levels (not with groups, housing units, or platoons) in 54.2 percent of the boot camps and 59.1 percent of the comparisons.
- Boot camps had 10.1 juveniles for every 1 teaching staff; comparison facilities had 6.6 juveniles for each teaching staff member.
- Boot camps had 3.5 juveniles to every 1 custody or treatment staff; comparison facilities had 1.6 juveniles to every custody or treatment staff.
- On average, boot camps scheduled physical fitness activities (including drill and ceremony practice) for 18.8 hours per week compared with 12.3 hours in the comparison facilities.

Fewer boot camp youths took a General Educational Development (GED) test, but overall passing rates for those who did were about the same in both facility types. In 54.2 percent of the

boot camps, juveniles attended classes with others in their grade levels, compared with 59.1 percent of comparison facilities. Comparison facilities had more teaching staff and more custody and treatment staff per juvenile, making it possible that juveniles in the traditional facilities would receive more individual attention. Boot camp facilities scheduled more physical fitness activities than traditional facilities, but this was not considered as treatment, education, or therapy.

Another project interest was visitation policies, because such activities would permit juveniles to stay in contact with their families. Community contact is important because many juveniles are confined for only a short period of time and will be released to live most likely with their families. Therefore, attempts at successful community reintegration should start while juveniles are confined.¹¹ Overall, the boot camps permitted less visitation (see “Contact With the Outside”). More than half the camps did not allow visits during the juveniles’ first month of confinement, and almost one-fifth did not permit visits at any time. Comparison facilities had fewer restrictions on visitation. Boot camps also were more likely than traditional facilities to require visitors to schedule their visits in advance.

Conclusion

The perceptions of staff and youths provide important insight into the adequacy of these programs as correctional options for juvenile delinquents. This research found that juveniles and staff in the boot camps perceived their environment as more caring than did those living and working in the comparison facilities. These results show that youths in the boot

camps were more likely to agree that staff members encourage residents to try new activities and help residents with schoolwork or other problems. Youths and staff also believed that the treatment of residents was more just in the boot camps.

Advantages. Not only did the boot camp youths perceive their facilities as more caring and just, they also believed the programs were more therapeutic and provided them with more preparation for their release. In comparison to those in traditional facilities, youths and staff in boot camps were more likely to agree that juveniles’ experiences in the facility would help them get a job, understand themselves, keep them focused on their goals, learn new skills, return to school, and address substance abuse problems. Boot camp staff on average believed that youths got more individual attention, were healthier since entering the facility, and were planning for their release through activities such as finding a place to work, planning to return to school, and setting goals for the future. Another positive aspect of the boot camps was staff perceptions of their working environment. In comparison to staff in traditional facilities, the boot camp staff reported feeling less personal stress, better communication among staff, a more supportive atmosphere for staff, and more satisfaction with their work.

Concerns. The one finding that supports the criticism of boot camps as institutions that offer little to improve interpersonal relationships was the data indicating that youths in the boot camps more frequently reported feelings of being in danger from staff. In contrast, traditional facility youths more frequently reported feelings of danger from other residents.

Contact With the Outside

- Boot camps schedule 4.0 hours per week for visitation; comparison facilities schedule 7.1 hours.
- Fifty-four percent of the boot camps had a “no outside visits” rule during the first month juveniles were in the facility; 14 percent of the comparison facilities had such a policy.
- Seventeen percent of the boot camps had a “no outside visits” rule during the entire time juveniles were in the facility; none of the comparison facilities had such a policy.
- Sixty-seven percent of the boot camp programs required visitors to schedule their visits in advance; only 36 percent of the traditional facilities required this of visitors.
- Juveniles in the boot camps were permitted to make 1.2 phone calls per week on average; juveniles in the comparison facilities could make 1.6 phone calls.

An additional concern raised by critics of boot camps is that the military basic training and confrontational interactions may create undue stress on a vulnerable youth population. The findings from this research suggest that there initially is an increased level of anxiety for youths in boot camps compared with those in traditional institutions. This increased level of anxiety, however, did not appear to be greatly dysfunctional. The juveniles were asked whether they agreed with statements indicating that they feel anxious, worried, upset, nervous, or not relaxed or calm; these questions reflect temporary emotions and not permanent anxiety or other

dysfunctional traits. Therefore, the increased anxiety for the youths in the boot camps may reflect the difficult early period of adjustment to boot camp.¹² Although the data are not completely comparable to what some boot camp staff refer to as the “break down” and “build the youths up” phases, they suggest some similarities in that the early period in the boot camp may temporarily create more anxiety. Youths, however, do not become more depressed or exhibit permanent psychological dysfunction.

Findings from this study also indicated that in boot camps and traditional facilities, attachments or bonds to family, school, and work decreased for juveniles. This might be expected because youths are removed from their communities, schools, and work opportunities and have limited contact with their families. Boot camp youths, however, reported less dysfunctional impulsivity over time. Youths in the traditional facilities became slightly more impulsive, but the change was small. Similarly, traditional facility youths became less prosocial in attitudes over time, while boot camp youths became more prosocial. Prosocial changes for both boot camp and traditional facility youths, however, were small and statistically insignificant. Given the small changes in attitudes among both boot camp and traditional facility youths, it is not surprising that research to date has found little difference between the recidivism rates for these two groups.

The findings of administrator surveys of facility policies, procedures, and daily schedules were largely consis-

tent with those from the perceptual surveys. Across all survey methods, boot camps were rated higher in institutional environments’ structure, control, and “military-ness.” Thus, some of the differences in perceptions of safety could be due to the structured nature of the environment. An environment that is structured and controlled by staff may be perceived by juveniles as safer.

Reasons for the differences.

However, differences between boot camps and traditional facilities in the juvenile selection process may also help explain why boot camps were perceived as having positive institutional environments. Boot camps, on average, were much more selective about who entered the facility. Therefore, one possible reason for the differences in perceptions may be that boot camp youths have characteristics that make them easier to work with, which can have an impact on all aspects of the institutional environment.

Another possibility is that differences in the facilities’ policies, procedures, and daily schedules led to differences in staff and juvenile perceptions. For example, if juveniles in boot camps received more individual attention or spent more time in treatment or educational programs, this may explain the perceptions of boot camps’ more therapeutic nature. Yet little measurable differences were found in the facilities’ therapeutic atmospheres. The few differences that were found favored the traditional facilities. For example, the traditional facilities had higher teaching-staff-per-juvenile and custody-or-treatment-staff-to-juvenile

ratios than the boot camps. The strict rules and regimented environment of the boot camps may mean that fewer staff are needed to control juveniles, but it also may mean that youths have less opportunity to receive individual attention.

Designing better programs. Together, the results from this study suggest that boot camps are successful in the first step—creating a positive environment. However, boot camps appear to lack the necessary focus on incorporating components of effective therapy.¹³ As a result, it is not surprising that boot camps have not been effective in reducing recidivism. An additional concern was the finding that boot camp youths more frequently perceived that they were in danger from staff. This is disappointing because so many of the other aspects of boot camps were viewed positively.

Additionally, this study found that few of the boot camps or traditional facilities had information about what happens to youths after they are released. Because the majority of these youths will return to their home communities, it is hard to understand how a facility can design a successful program that does not include gathering information about what happens to youths after they are released. If juvenile correctional programs are expected to have a positive impact on the future lives of these youths, it is important that they have information on what happens to the juveniles after they return to their communities. Otherwise, how else can a program effectively evaluate its performance?

Notes

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