

Testimony of

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Oversight of State-Run Juvenile Correctional Facilities Known as “Boot Camps”

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Correctional boot camps as we know them today were started in adult prisons in 1983 in Georgia and Oklahoma. They rapidly spread throughout the nation, first to other adult systems and then to juvenile correctional systems. By 1995 the Bureau of Justice Statistics reported the existence of 52 state-level programs and three federal programs with more than 8,000 beds dedicated to adult offenders. In 2000 there were at least 70 boot camps in 26 states for adjudicated delinquents. When I talk about correctional boot camps, I am talking about programs for adult offenders and adjudicated delinquents (Koch Crime Institute 2001).

The most distinguishing characteristic of a correctional boot camp is the quasi-military atmosphere that resembles military basic training. Most programs include military dress and titles, drill and ceremony, a structured daily schedule of activities and rigorous physical exercise. As in military basic training, inmates often enter the camps in squads or platoons. There may be an elaborate intake ceremony where inmates are immediately required to follow the rules, respond to staff in appropriate ways, stand at attention and have their heads shaved. The participants are required to follow a rigorous daily schedule of activities. They arise early each morning and are kept active for most of the day. Staff are addressed by military titles. Punishment for misbehavior is immediate and swift and frequently involves some type of physical activity such as push-ups. A graduation ceremony often marks the successful completion of the program. Family members and others from the outside public may be invited to attend the ceremony.

The programs differ greatly in the amount of emphasis placed on rehabilitation versus physical training and hard labor (MacKenzie and Hebert 1996). Some programs devote a relatively large amount of time each day to therapeutic programming such as academic education, drug treatment or cognitive skills. In other camps inmates may spend the majority of their time in physical training, drill and work. Some programs provide reentry or aftercare services to assist participants with adjustment to the community. Boot camps for juveniles are required to provide educational programming during the school year.

Boot camps differ greatly particularly in the amount and type of therapeutic programming. These differences often reflect the goals of the boot camps. The heterogeneity among boot camps makes broad conclusions about the effectiveness of the boot camps problematic. Surveys of administrators and staff in the boot camps have found that the goals rated as most important are providing a safe environment, providing academic education, attempting to rehabilitate and reducing recidivism. Almost all surveys emphasized the goal of reducing recidivism.

I began studying these programs in 1987 when I was awarded a grant from the National Institute of Justice. Since then I have conducted research examining both adult and juvenile programs including multi-site studies of adult programs and a national study examining the environments of juvenile programs (MacKenzie and Armstrong 2004). In my role as the first researcher to complete evaluations of correctional boot camps I had the opportunity to visit a large number of boot camps to observe the activities, consult

with staff and administrators, review evaluations and collect data for our studies. I have visited programs for males and females, for juveniles and adults and in federal, state and local jurisdictions.

Evidence-Based Corrections

I have worked hard to make my research policy relevant. I strongly believe in evidence-based decision making in corrections. That is, strategies for reducing crime should be based on scientific evidence. By the term “evidence-based corrections,” I refer to the need to use scientific evidence to make informed decisions about correctional policy (MacKenzie, 2002; MacKenzie, 2001, MacKenzie 2000; MacKenzie 2005; MacKenzie 2006). It is disappointing how seldom scientific research is used to inform decisions in corrections.

In studying the boot camps, I was particularly interested in whether the programs were achieving their stated goals. I did not limit my research to just examining the recidivism of those going into the boot camps because many jurisdictions want the camps to achieve a variety of goals. However, I begin by review the data on recidivism because almost everyone views this at the major goal of the programs.

Impact on Recidivism

My colleagues and I recently completed a systematic review and meta-analysis of correctional boot camp. We used the statistical technique of meta-analysis to examine the results of all studies we could identify that had examined the recidivism rates of boot camp releasees and compared these rates to a comparison group of offenders who did not participate in the boot camp (see MacKenzie, 2006 or http://www.campbellcollaboration.org/doc-pdf/Wilson_bootcamps_rev.pdf). We began the study by identifying all published and unpublished studies examining boot camps. To be included in the analysis the studies had to be evaluated as having a reasonable research design. We identified 25 studies of adult programs and 18 studies of juvenile programs. The results for the adult and juvenile samples are very similar (see attached figures). Few studies found any significant differences between the offenders or delinquents who went to the boot camp compared to those who spent time in some other program. The analysis indicated that the expected recidivism rates were almost identical. If the rate for the comparison group was 50 percent then the boot camp participants was estimated to be almost identical at 49.4 percent. Nine studies found boot camp participants had lower recidivism, eight found boot camp participants had higher recidivism but the majority of studies (27) found no difference between the two groups in recidivism. So at this point in time, there is no evidence that correctional boot camps are effective in reducing the future criminal activities of adults or juveniles.

Compared to other correctional programs, there is a fairly large body of research examining the impact of boot camps on recidivism. Furthermore, the quality of the studies based on the research design was fairly high. If the major goal of the boot camps

is to reduce recidivism then there is little reason to continue to use these programs in correctional settings. However, if the programs are designed to meet other correctional goals such as reducing the need for bed space and/or providing an acceptable mechanism for early release then more work needs to be done to examine whether the therapeutic components within a boot camp would be effective in reducing recidivism.

Reducing Prison Crowding

I have completed research examining other goals of the boot camps. Some camps are developed with the goal of reducing prison overcrowding (MacKenzie and Piquero 1994). My study examining adult programs and their effectiveness in reducing prison crowding suggests that most programs are so small given the size of the correctional population that there is little chance that the programs will reduce crowding. The only way crowding might be reduced is if the programs are used as early release mechanisms. However, many risk-averse criminal justice practitioners may use the boot camps as alternatives to probation or parole as opposed to using them for delinquents who would otherwise be detained in a facility. Thus, the danger is netwidening. That is, the net of correctional control will be increased because the juveniles will have to spend time in the boot camp instead of in the community on probation.

Environment of Boot Camps

As my colleagues and I visited boot camps we noticed that there were some positive things going on in the camps. Juveniles in the boot camps often seemed to have good relationships with the staff. They were certainly more physically fit. At times their attitudes seemed better than the attitudes of those in traditional facilities. For this reason we completed a study to examine the environment of boot camps relative to traditional facilities as perceived by the youth and staff in the facilities.

In 1997 when we started the study, we identified 50 privately and publicly funded secure residential boot camps for juveniles. Twenty seven camps agreed to participate in the project (54% of the total number of boot camps). There were 2,390 boot camp youth in the study (33 % Caucasian, 36% African American, 19 % Hispanic, 12 % other). For each boot camp we identified a traditional facility where the juveniles would have been incarcerated if they were not in the boot camp. These traditional facilities were the comparisons to the boot camps. One thousand five hundred sixty six youth in the traditional facilities participated in the study (31 % Caucasian, 33 % African American, 20 % Hispanic, 16 % other).

The youth in the boot camps perceived the boot camp more favorably relative to those in the traditional facilities. They reported generally feeling safer, and they perceived the environment to be more therapeutic and helpful. The boot camps were also perceived as more structured and placed more constraints on freedom for the juveniles. Youths in the boot camps did not experience more anxiety or depression. Based on observational information gained through site visits, I believe that these findings reflect the positive atmosphere of many but not all of the boot camps. Caucasians and Hispanics

who perceived the environment as positive in both the boot camps and traditional facilities developed more positive social attitudes while incarcerated. The same was not true for African American youth, they did not change.

There is concern that the boot camp environment may be particularly detrimental for youth with abuse histories. We did find that juveniles in the boot camps who had a history of abuse had more difficulties in the boot camps suggesting the camps may be ineffective and potentially detrimental to persons with a history of family violence.

What Works in Corrections

Since their beginning the boot camps have been controversial. Advocates argue that the atmosphere of the camps is conducive to positive growth and change. From their perspective, the camps provide a positive atmosphere that will force participants to confront past misbehavior, admit the errors of their ways and change in ways that will result in less criminal activity in the future. Other advocates believe that the strict discipline and physical exercise will “straighten-out” these wayward youth.

Critics of the camps take a very different view of the effect of the military basic training atmosphere. They argue that many of the components of the camps are in direct opposition to the type of relationships and supportive conditions that are needed for quality therapeutic programming. According to them the confrontational atmosphere of the camps is antithetical to constructive therapy. Behavioral therapy and the use of rewards and punishments to change behavior require substantial clinical knowledge and training. Few boot camp staff have the prerequisite training and experience, and so they will not be able to develop programs that successfully change the behavior of inmates. Furthermore, the confrontational interactions may be reminiscent of previous abusive situations for those who have been abused in the past. They may respond with extreme stress or helplessness – reactions that may inhibit their participation in therapeutic programs even if such programs are provided within the boot camp.

In my recent book examining “What Works in Corrections,” I completed reviews of the research, systematic reviews and meta-analyses of various correctional strategies and programs. I identified 284 studies examining various correctional strategies and programs. Programs such as academic education, cognitive skills programs designed to change attitudes and thinking, drug treatment and drug courts were effective in reducing the recidivism of offenders. Interventions focusing on punishment, deterrence or control such as Scared Straight, arrests for domestic violence, intensive supervision, electronic monitoring and boot camps were not effective in reducing recidivism. Other ineffective programs appear to have little theoretical focus (e.g., some types of sex offender treatment, residential facilities for juveniles).

An interesting finding emerged when I compared the effective programs to the ineffective programs. Almost all of the effective programs focused on individual-level change. In contrast, the ineffective programs frequently focused on developing opportunities. For example, the cognitive skills programs emphasize individual-level

changes in thinking, reasoning, empathy and problem solving. In contrast, life skills and work programs, examples of ineffective programs, focus on giving the offenders opportunities in the community. Based on these observations, I propose that effective programs must focus on changing the individual. This cognitive transformation is required before the person will be able to take advantage of opportunities in the environment. Thus, correctional programming should focus first on bringing about an individual transformation and then provide opportunities in the community.

Should Boot Camps Continue? My Opinion.

I am worried about whether boot camps should continue. My research clearly demonstrates that there is no reason to continue the camps if the major goal is a reduction of future criminal activities. **BOOT CAMPS DO NOT REDUCE RECIDIVISM!** I believe the research is clear on this. My research does show some benefits to the camps particularly related to physical fitness and positive environments. However, the camps I was permitted to enter to study were probably the better camps. I would guess that these camps had better trained staff and had more therapeutic programming.

The question that arises is whether the camps should continue with an increased emphasis on therapeutic programming. At one time I believed that this was a reasonable decision given the research. However, today I would not agree. I think the danger of the camps is too great. I have seen too many news articles and media reports of injuries and deaths. There is too much chance that these camps will have poorly trained staff who are not knowledgeable enough about the physical and mental stress experienced by juveniles in these programs. To my knowledge we do not know if the injuries and deaths in the boot camps are comparable to those in traditional facilities. We need research on the number and types of injuries per participant that have occurred in these camps compared to the number and types that occur in traditional facilities. Maybe the media reports are focusing on the boot camps because they make interesting visuals for television. We also need empirical data on the training of the staff who are responsible for the incarcerated juveniles.

Therapeutic treatment of offenders and delinquents is effective in reducing later criminal activities. Research evidence clearly shows the type of programs that are effective. We need to use the results of this research to develop programs that have the characteristics of effective programs.

In the future, we should design small correctional programs for juveniles that include physical activities and structure but these do not have to use the military basic training model. We should make use of the research that demonstrates that we do have effective correctional programs. Research evidence exists to show the type of programs that are effective. These programs are what would be considered rehabilitation programs and not programs designed to scare, deter or control wayward youth.

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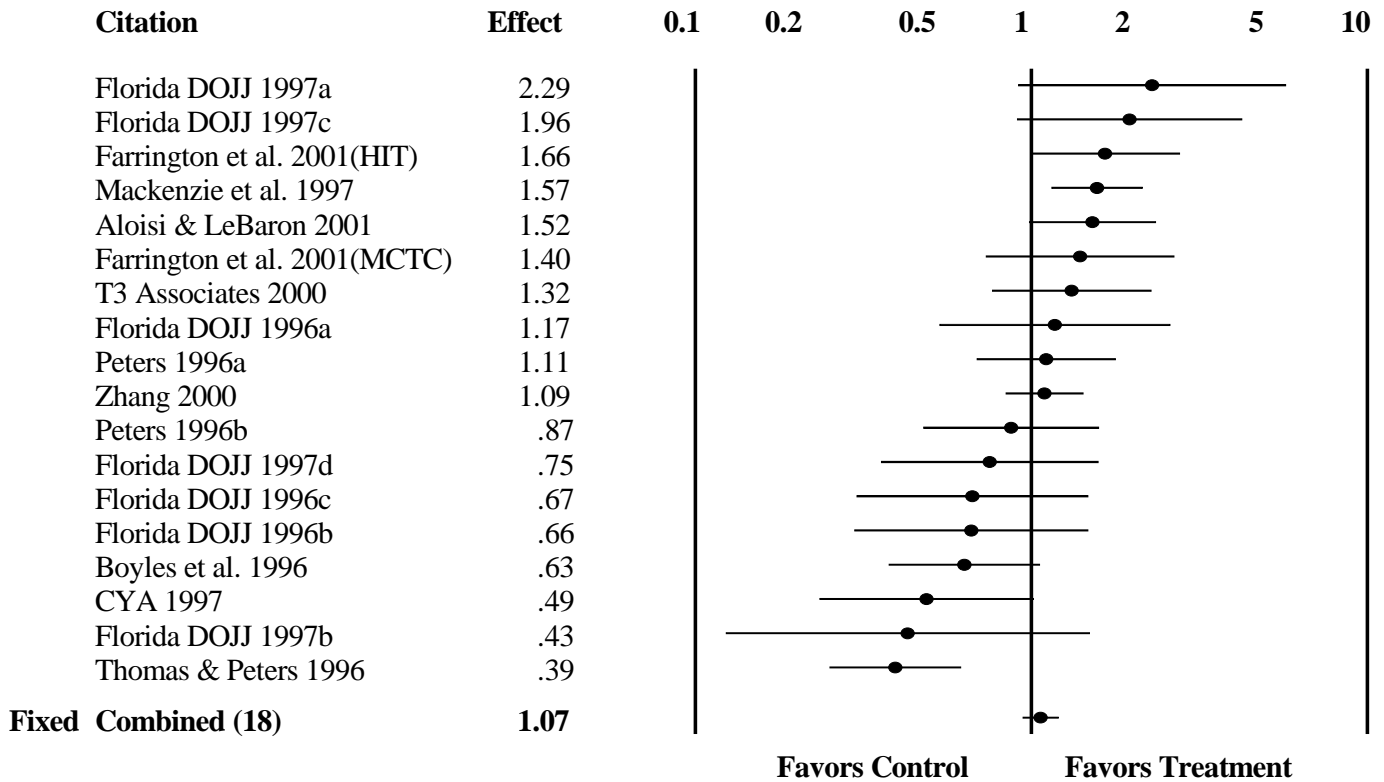
From *What Works in Corrections* (MacKenzie 2006)

Table 15.1 Programs, interventions and strategies examined in this book showing the chapters, intervention, numbers of evaluations, numbers of evaluations scored 5, numbers scored 2 and conclusions regarding the effectiveness of the programs.

Chapter in Book	Program/ Intervention/ Strategy	Studies Reviewed N=	Studies Scored 5 N=	Studies Scored 2 N=	Effective?
Education	Academic Ed	25	1	12	Yes
Education	Life Skills	5	0	1	No
Work	Vocation Ed	18	2	2	Yes
Work	Correctional Industries	4	0	2	No
Work	Work/Multi-Component	8	2	2	No
Cognitive Behavior	Moral Reconciliation Therapy	8	0	4	Yes
Cognitive Behavior	Reasoning and Rehabilitation	8	0	0	Yes
Cognitive Behavior	Cognitive Restructuring	9	0	0	Yes
Sex Offender	Cognitive Behavior	15	1	8	Yes
Sex Offender	Behavioral	4	0	1	Yes
Sex Offender	Hormonal/Surgical	6	1	2	Yes
Sex Offender	Psychosocial	3	0	3	No
Juvenile	Multi-Systemic	8	7	1	Yes
Juvenile	Residential Treatment	7	1	2	No
Juvenile	Community Supervision	11	3	2	No
Domestic Violence	Feminist	6	1	1	No
Domestic Violence	Cognitive Behavior	6	1	2	No
Domestic Violence	Arrests	9	9	0	No
Drug Courts	Drug Courts	32	2	5	Yes
Drug Treatment	Community	7	1	2	Yes
Drug Treatment	Incarceration-Based	29	1	10	Yes
Boot Camps	Adult Boot Camps	14	0	1	No
Boot Camps	Juvenile Boot Camps	17	3	0	No
Intermediate Sanctions	Intensive Supervision	16	3	2	No

Chapter in Book	Program/ Intervention/ Strategy	Studies Reviewed N=	Studies Scored 5 N=	Studies Scored 2 N=	Effective?
Intermediate Sanctions	Electronic Monitoring	9	3	1	No
TOTAL		284	42 (14.8%)	66 (23.2%)	

Juvenile Boot Camp Programs



Adult Boot Camp Programs

