

The correctional funnel and correctional policy

[Law](#), [Criminal Justice](#)



As one of the three major components of the criminal justice system, corrections is believed to be responsible for administering punishment to criminals, thereby preventing future crimes through deterrence and incapacitation, limiting offenders' opportunity to commit further crimes, or reducing their inclination to commit crimes as a result of correctional treatments. The fallacy in this expectation is that the correctional system in reality handles an extremely small percentage of criminals. The correctional funnel shown in Figure 1. 2 illustrates this phenomenon; there is a large numerical difference between the number of crimes reported and the number of offenders convicted and facing any specific correctional sanction. As illustrated in Figure 1. 2, of approximately 10 million felony crimes reported in 2000, only about 1 million individuals (10 percent) were convicted, only about 600, 000 (6 percent) received a sentence of jail or probation, and only about 400, 000 (4 percent of the number of crimes) were sent to prison. 2 The public often believes that adopting a policy of lengthening prison sentences will deter offenders, and that keeping them in prison longer will significantly reduce crime. However, the relatively small number of crimes that results in a sentence of imprisonment makes it unlikely that even major modifications of prison sentences will have a significant impact on crime rates. The last few sections included a description of the mission of corrections, the role of corrections within the criminal justice system, and a discussion of the correctional funnel. These three topics do not, at first reading, appear to have a common theme among them. However, they all relate to correctional policy development. The development of correctional policy, for discussion purposes in this text, is the

process that includes considering the mission and role, relevant information, and the best interests of the public (in terms of issues such as safety and cost), and then deciding what broad approaches to take to best meet the goal of protecting society. The correctional funnel is a good example of how, with thoughtful examination, it can be seen that extending sentences significantly may have a deterrent and incapacitative effect on those in prison. However, since they represent such a small percentage of the overall population that commits crimes, the direct impact on a reduction of crime rates is questionable. Throughout this textbook, the “ A Question of Policy” boxes encourage discussion of some of the difficult policy issues facing public officials and correctional administrators. Staff that work in corrections to aid in the policy development process are correctional policy analysts. These positions represent interesting and valuable potential jobs for students majoring in criminal justice and corrections. The “ Your Career in Corrections” box presents the role of policy analysts.