

Pros and cons of boot camps research paper example

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



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Boot camps began in the United States first in the adult prison in 1983 and were later introduced in the juvenile prisons. It is a program where the offenders are in a camp and there are vigorous activities during the day such as drill, ceremony and physical training. There are correctional officers in charge of the offenders who are given military titles. When the offenders do something wrong, they are punished by physical activities such as push-ups. The juvenile boot camps are less intense in terms of physical activities. The juveniles are given academic education and therapy sessions. At the end of a certain period, the offenders graduate and leave the camps. There has been great interest on the impact of the boot camps on the offender's attitude, recidivism and employment ability. Various studies have been conducted over the years with conflicting results or findings.

Effects of Boot Camp Programs

The main objective in boot camps is rehabilitation where the offender's mentality is shifted from a criminal mentality to an environment which is friendly and ordered in a military manner. It aims to help individuals respond well to authority. The boot camps provide facilities where offenders are held

reducing the congestion that is present in the United States prisons. In a research study, the researchers wanted to find out the factors that determined whether the offenders would be non-recidivists, recidivists and parole violators after participating in boot camps. Were boot camps effective in the life of the offenders?

In prior researches that have been carried out, findings show that the main factors that affect recidivism are the age of individual at the initial crime, the time he or she began drug

use, instance of previous incarceration and the scores of the individual on the Jesness

inventory scale. The Jesness inventory looks at various personality deficiencies such as social maladjustment, immaturity levels and low levels of frustration tolerance.

The Jesness inventory has been in use for over 30 years. It was a tool that was developed after a research was conducted on personality traits on inmates. In the research, there were 2045 males and 1261 female participants both of delinquent and non-delinquent status. The tool concentrates on the examination of 11 critical aspects such as autism, alienation, withdrawal, social anxiety, social maladjustment, repression, denial, value orientation, immaturity and asocial index.

In the theory of crime proposed by Gottfredson and Hirschi, personality traits such as impulsivity, risk seeking behaviour, self-centredness and desire for instant gratification were present in a person as young as 10 years and these traits were the primary motivators for an individual to commit crime and

engage in drug abuse (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990). On the other hand, those personality traits that would influence people not to engage in crime again after a boot camp experience would be resilience, self-esteem, high expectations of future success and self-efficacy.

Considering all these factors, it is therefore expected that the perception the offenders will have of the boot camp experience and the environment and its potential to change their lives will determine whether they will be repeat offenders. The offenders have various kinds of needs and if they feel that the program will address their needs, then they will take the program positively. Toch identified several needs that should be addressed in a boot camp experience that will reduce the rate of recidivism in the offenders.

The needs include privacy, emotional feedback, support and freedom. Other needs include social stimulation, activity and structure (Toch, 1977). Studies were conducted to evaluate the offender's attitudes towards the boot camp experiences and it was noted that the inmates adjusted well to the environment and they have positive attitudes about the program and toward the staff in the institution (McCorkle, 1995). They also expected the program to change their behaviour.

Attending boot camp is a voluntary process and there are those who prefer the program to incarceration as they view it as an expeditious process causing them to attain freedom faster. It is expected that those who view the program as just an expeditious path to freedom will be more likely to become repeat offenders than those who appreciate the experience of the boot camp experience.

A research was conducted in a boot camp in a Southern State. There were 480 participants aged between 15 and 30 years. In the boot camp there were certain characteristics that one should possess to allow them to volunteer for boot camp. It had to be the first time the offender had been referred to the adult correctional facility in the State. The sentence given should have been of a period of ten years or less. The individual should not have a record of violent offences in the police records.

The IQ should be high, at least 70 and above. Lastly, the individual should have no physical or psychological problems. The participants selected had served in the boot camp for one year. Not all the offenders finished the boot camp program. There are those who dropped out. The Southern State boot camp had a drop-out rate of 20%.

Initially, the researchers had selected 500 participants but twenty people dropped out of the program. The population of offenders had different characteristics to give the research solid findings. In terms of race, 42% of the population were Caucasian, 45% were African American while only 10.4% of them were Hispanics. 63% of them were married while the rest were single. They had been admitted to the boot camp for different offences.

These were property, person and drug offenses.

During the three-year follow up period, the highest percentage of the offenders had come back to the boot camp on committing property offenses (38.5%). 20% of the offenders were brought back for violating parole. The rest had committed either drug related offenses or person crimes. Half of the population had ever been in juvenile incarceration and after the three year

period, half of them were brought back to the boot camp. The average number of days the offenders had their freedom before being arrested was 725 days.

Data was collected through the use of questionnaires and interviews by the staff psychologists. The researchers were investigating the relationship that several factors had in relation to the rate of recidivism in the people who had gone through boot camp. The factors considered were race and current age of individual, age when individual started criminal activities, age when the individual began drug abuse and scores on the reading score on the Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT).

The researchers conducted a search in the Division of Youth Services to check if the participants had any juvenile records. The research findings confirmed that the participants in the boot camp fell into either of the three groups, recidivists, non-recidivists and parole

violators. The findings were consistent with the prevalent literature. The recidivists had certain distinct characteristics.

First of all, they were younger and had started crime at an early age. They viewed boot camp as an expeditious process to gain freedom. They had friends who engaged in unlawful behaviour who they spent considerable with. They had also started abusing drugs when they were quite young. They had ever been incarcerated in the juvenile prisons. They also had quite high scores on the Jesness Inventory (Benda, 2001).

On the other hand the non-recidivists had certain characteristics such as self-efficacy and reliance. They usually rate the staff support and the overall

effectiveness of the programs in the boot camp as high. They usually have higher rates of self-esteem compared to the parole offenders and the recidivists. They usually find the boot camp experience stimulating.

These findings may be useful to the policy makers in that the boot camp may not be an appropriate program to the younger offenders who repeat criminal acts. There should be an alternative program introduced which will reduce recidivism in them. Clearly peer influence plays a big role in recidivism and there should be efforts placed in teaching the offenders the impact of the influence that peers have in their life and what they can do to avoid peer pressure. This will mean understanding the role of the peers especially gangs have in the offender's life. They give the offenders respect, acceptance and security. More effort should be placed in this area.

In overall, the juvenile offenders can cause significant challenges to the criminal system. They are responsible for a significant level of crime and the question is whether they

can be rehabilitated to become better citizens or they are dangerous. They are still growing and it is believed that they can change more readily than their adult counterparts. In the 1980s and 1990s, judges felt the likelihood of rehabilitation was low and they would respond by getting juvenile waivers in order to commit the offenders to adult court.

However, there are judges who mitigate the sentence by sending the offenders to an adult boot camp. It is deemed better as it satisfies the harsh sentence meted out however the juvenile is taken to an environment that is not as harsh as the adult prisons.

A research was carried out on a boot camp in a northwestern state to examine its effectiveness on reducing recidivism in the juveniles who have been sent there by the courts. A research carried out in 2002 showed that boot camps have generated significant reductions in recidivism compared to the prison system (Farrington, 2002). There are yet other studies that have shown that there are youths have not responded well to the programs and have been just as likely to commit crime just as other comparison groups (Stinchcomb & Terry, 2001).

There are researchers who have found that the rates of recidivism are also influenced by the site of the boot camp. Interestingly, there are even research studies that have shown the rate of recidivism is higher in the offenders who had undergone boot camp programs (Wright & Mays, 1998). In other studies that showed no significant differences in the recidivism rates, the researchers highlighted that the findings changed when the boot camp programs were combined with other measures such as after care programs and intensive therapy (Wilson and MacKenzie, 2005).

Most of the offenders sent to boot camp are young, first time offenders and juvenile offenders who have been transferred to adult court. Boot camp for the juvenile offenders waived to adult court is usually for the purpose of giving probation rather than incarceration. The average period that the offenders stay in the boot camp is 180 days though there were those who were sent there for a period of 120 days.

The research study analysed offenders who had been sent to the boot camp or probation. The researchers selected offenders who less than eighteen

years old for the period selected 1995 to 1998. The study was conducted with the assistance of the staff at the State's Department of Corrections. Data was collected from the institution and phone interviews conducted with the individual county probation departments to find out whether the juvenile offenders had previously been arrested for a crime.

During the selected period, it was determined that there were 109 teenagers under the age of 17 years who were waived to the criminal court. 20 of the juveniles were sent to prison and had not yet been released. Of the 82 remaining juveniles, 42 were taken to the boot camp while the rest were released on probation. The juveniles sent on probation were used as a comparison group to the ones who had been sent to boot camp.

In these two groups there were not many differences in the juveniles in terms of age, criminal offence committed or race so these factors were not really analysed. In terms of prior sentencing, there was a significant difference between the two groups. Those who had been

sent to the boot camp had been previously arrested however those who had been sent on probation were initial offenders. There was therefore a need to put a control variable in the sample for the juveniles who had previously served a sentence in order for the findings to be solid and reliable.

The juveniles were assessed whether they had been arrested again after a period of two year street time. The researchers were interested to know whether there were non-recidivists and the rates of re-incarceration where the juveniles violated their parole or were convicted of a new felony. All the offenders who were sent to the boot camp program finished it. There were

no drop outs in the 42 offenders who were in the sample period selected.

Other controls that were placed on the sample were such variables such as the age, race and the offence type.

The findings showed that those juveniles who had been taken to the boot camp were less likely to be re-incarcerated upon their release. It was also noted that those juveniles who had committed a non-violent crime were less likely to be incarcerated than those who had committed a violent crime (Steiner & Andrew 2007).

93% of the samples were Caucasian. It was noted that the minority juveniles were more likely to be re-incarcerated regardless of such factors such as age, prior arrest and the offense that had been committed. The findings showed that those offenders sent to the boot camp were less likely to break parole than those who had been sent on parole. This could be attributed to the military discipline present in the boot camps which instilled discipline and

obedience in the juvenile reducing the rates of rebellion.

Discipline is really important for the success of the probation exercise.

However, the judges aim for lower rates of re-incarceration and not just probation success. It is about the long-term experience of the juvenile even in terms of getting reabsorbed in the society through employment and positive activities. However when it came to re-offend rates, there was no significance difference between juveniles sent to the boot camp and those sent on probation. The difference came when it came to the rate of

conviction of these crimes. There was a higher rate of conviction for the ones sent on probation than for those sent to the boot camp.

Conclusion

In general, the findings show that the recidivists in a graduation class of boot camp would be younger when they committed the crime, have prior records in juvenile incarceration and score higher than the rest on the Jesness inventory scale. The effects of boot camp are therefore not conclusive as it depends on so many factors. It is not the ultimate solution and the government through the policy makers need to come up with alternate programs for the young recidivists.

The research on boot camps should be conducted while putting other factors into consideration. The boot camps have been successful in some offenders due to the discipline imparted however they should be more therapy and psychological sessions where the staff invest more in understanding the offenders and what drives them to commit crimes. It is an innovative concept that has to be reviewed regularly to keep up with the changes in the environment and criminal justice. More research should be conducted in this area.

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