

Research in Review

Bureau of Management Information Services

Division of Planning, Research and Statistics

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Summary and Major Findings of Articles Reviewed in This Issue

Harry K. Wexler, et alii. 1999. "The Amity Prison TC Evaluation: Reincarceration Outcomes." *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 26(2), 147-167. Page 3

This article reports on the results of an outcome evaluation of a well-known therapeutic community (TC) program in the California state prison system. The study finds that inmates completing both the in-prison TC and an aftercare program have substantially lower rates of recidivism than inmates not receiving treatment. The aftercare component is especially emphasized.

Travis C. Pratt and Jeff Maahs. 1999. "Are Private Prisons More Cost-Effective than Public Prisons? A Meta-Analysis of Evaluation Research Studies." *Crime & Delinquency*, 45(3), 358-371. Page 5

This article reports on an intensive review (meta analysis) of the literature on prison privatization, in the attempt to determine whether there is any consensus in the literature on the relative cost-effectiveness of private and public prisons. The authors find that factors such as prison size, age and security level are more powerful predictors of cost-effectiveness than is public versus private management.

John D. Wooldredge. 1999. "Inmates Experiences and Psychological Well-Being." *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 26(2), 235-250. Page 6

This article reports on a study of the factors that contribute to psychological well-being among adult male inmates. The study found that inmates with greater program participation, more frequent visitation and less conflict with other inmates had relatively few psychological difficulties resulting from their imprisonment.

Fiona H. Biggam and Kevin G. Power. 1999. "A Comparison of the Problem-Solving Abilities and Psychological Distress of Suicidal, Bullied, and Protected Prisoners." *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 26(2), 196-216. Page 7

This article reports on a study of how various types of vulnerable inmates adjust to incarceration. Inmates on close suicide watch showed the highest levels of psychological distress and cognitive distortion, followed by inmates in general population who are subject to bullying by stronger inmates.

Robert C. Granger and Rachel Cytron. 1999. "Teenage Parent Programs: A Synthesis of the Long Term Effects of the New Chance Demonstration, Ohio's Learning, Earning and Parenting Program, and the Teenage Parent Demonstration." *Evaluation Review*, 23(2), 107-145.

Page 9

This article summarizes the results of several evaluations of parenting programs for teenagers in the community. These evaluations find that these programs have positive outcomes for teens on measures of educational attainment, employment and parenting skills.

Department of Corrections Research Note

The following is a review of a recent article by Superintendent Harry Wilson and Kathy Gnall, Chief of Planning, Research and Statistics.

Harry Wilson and Kathleen Gnall. 1999. "Performance Measures and Strategic Planning for Corrections." *Corrections Compendium*, 24(6), 4-5, 26.

This article presents a discussion of the application of performance measurement to the correctional setting. The authors discuss the difficulty of defining and measuring good performance within public agencies. They make the case that corrections departments, like many public bodies, have multiple and sometimes conflicting goals and missions, making it difficult to develop simple indicators of performance. The authors then demonstrate how performance indicators can be developed within corrections. They use as a case study the department's drug interdiction program, where indicators such as positive urines and drug finds serve as a measure for the development of best practices and benchmarks for the control of drugs within the institutions. This article provides interesting insight into how public managers can assess and document progress towards agency goals.

Research Notes on Integrity in the Research Process

The journals that contribute to *Research in Review* recently published several pieces that deal in some way with research ethics and integrity. The following two brief reviews illustrate two aspects of research integrity. The first article concerns potential conflicts-of-interest, where a researcher has a personal interest (often financial) in the topic being researched. The second article concerns the treatment of individuals who are the subjects of research activity, exploring alternative methodologies that can minimize harm to research subjects. These articles provide insight into how the scholarly community polices itself, and how concerns for scientific integrity can impact the conduct and use of applied social research.

Gilbert Geis, et alii. 1999. "Private Prisons, Criminological Research and Conflict of Interest: A Case Study." *Crime & Delinquency*, 45(3), 372-388.

This essay and case study explores the possibility of conflicts-of-interest in some of the research published on the privatization of prisons, where such research is conducted by scholars who are supported by the private prison industry. The point out that even where outright research fraud is not at issue, the existence of a financial connection between a scholar and an industry studied by that scholar calls into question the objectivity of the research. They note that biased findings can be produced "legitimately" by structuring the research design to produce the desired results. Thus, the

research consumer should be aware of any potential threats to the objectivity and validity of studies, particularly on controversial topics such as prison privatization. This essay provides interesting insight into the human limitations associated with the ostensibly objective process of scholarly research.

Graham L. Staines, et alii. 1999. "Sequential Assignment and Treatment-As-Usual: Alternatives to Standard Experimental Designs in Field Studies of Treatment Efficacy." *Evaluation Review*, 23(1), 47-76.

This article presents a detailed and technical treatment of alternatives to the random assignment of individuals to treatment programs in pursuit of research objectives. The authors note that random assignment of individuals to treatment and control groups often raises objections from program administrators on the grounds that it is unethical to deny treatment to clinically needy individuals in pursuit of an "ideal" research design. The authors discuss two alternatives to random assignment - sequential assignment and treatment as usual - that can approximate the methodological power of a pure random design. These alternatives essentially involve using waiting lists to allow individuals to be distributed naturally into different treatment and comparison groups. This article illustrates the ethical conditions that surround applied research conducted within public agencies. It also demonstrates that practical alternatives to random assignment are available to researchers.

Detailed Reviews

Harry K. Wexler, et alii. 1999. "The Amity Prison TC Evaluation: Reincarceration Outcomes." *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 26(2), 147-167.

This article presents the results of an outcome evaluation of the Amity prison therapeutic community (TC). While prison TC's have already received a fair bit of attention in the scholarly evaluation literature, they are of sufficient importance to warrant continued study. This study adds to the growing body of literature that finds that TC's hold great potential for preparing offenders to return to sobriety and law abiding behavior after release from prison.

The authors note that TC's have received a great deal of attention in the prison treatment field. Prison TC's provide seriously addicted, incarcerated offenders with the opportunity to undergo intensive, long-term treatment and counseling for their addictions. Inmates participating in TC's are typically isolated from the general population and are expected to comply with a regime of treatment that often consume most of an inmate's day. This "total immersion" approach to drug treatment is intended to break through the cognitive and motivational barriers that impede recovery for many addicted offenders. While TC's are expensive and challenging to operate, the link between addiction and continued criminality has been well established, lending support to efforts to break cycles of substance abuse among offenders.

The present study builds upon existing evaluations of programs such as Key/Crest in Delaware and Stay'n Out in New York. The authors note that one primary drawback of many TC evaluations has been a lack of attention to aftercare. They argue that there is sufficient evidence to indicate that aftercare is a vital component of a TC. Without aftercare provisions, the benefits gained from participation in a prison TC may fade after release to the street. They also argue that the impact of

TC's upon offenders' post release behavior should also be understood in light of static and dynamic criminological variables that influence behavior, including attitudes, education and age.

In their present study, the authors examine the impact of the Amity TC on offenders' post release outcomes. The Amity TC operates out of the R.J. Donovan medium security prison in San Diego. This TC provides twelve months of treatment, divided into three phases (common to many TC's). Amity also provides a community aftercare option to graduates of the prison TC for up to one year after their release to the street. The community TC can accommodate up to forty individuals at one time. Not all graduates of the prison TC take advantage of the community TC.

The authors explored the differential outcomes of five groups of inmates: those who did not have any TC treatment, those who had some TC treatment (TC dropouts), those who completed the prison TC, those who completed the prison TC and *some* community aftercare, and those who completed both the prison TC and the *full* aftercare component. For the purposes of this study, inmates were randomly assigned to the prison TC. The California Department of Corrections would not permit random assignment to the community TC. Outcome was measured by reincarceration rates and time-to-failure for reincarceration.

The authors found that inmates who completed both the prison TC and the full community aftercare component had the best outcomes of all five groups. Reincarceration rates at twelve months post-release were 8.2 percent for offenders who completed both TC and aftercare, compared to 44.9 percent for inmates who dropped out of the prison TC phase. The reincarceration rate for offenders who completed the prison TC, but who had no aftercare, was 40.2 percent. Similar patterns held at two years post-release. The authors also found that time to reincarceration was directly related to time spent in treatment. Offenders who had the full course of in-prison and community treatment took the longest time to fail (when they did fail). Age, criminal history and personal distress were also significant predictors of success upon release. Older inmates with less serious criminal histories tended to do the best. The most powerful predictor of post-release success, however, was *full* participation in the aftercare component.

Thus, the authors found that the benefits of treatment build over time. Prison TC's are complemented by on-going treatment in the community. Again, post-release treatment was found to be the single most powerful indicator of whether an inmate would avoid reincarceration. This finding supports Inciardi's conclusions regarding the Key/Crest program in Delaware (reviewed in *Research in Review*, Vol. 1, No. 1). The authors conclude that the integration of prison treatment with community-based resources is essential to the successful rehabilitation of offenders.

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on the efficacy of prison-based TC's in reshaping the behavior of criminal offenders. The primary weakness of this study lies in the reliance upon reincarceration as the measure of program success. Other indicators such as employment, family re-adjustment and long-term sobriety (apart from criminal activity) can also be useful indicators. While more research is clearly needed before any definitive conclusions can be reached, it is becoming clear that offenders are responsive to time in treatment. More treatment given over

repeated treatment episodes does appear to positively impact offenders, especially where treatment continues in the community. Research currently underway within the department will contribute to our understanding of treatment impacts.

Travis C. Pratt and Jeff Maahs. 1999. "Are Private Prisons More Cost-Effective than Public Prisons? A Meta-Analysis of Evaluation Research Studies." *Crime & Delinquency*, 45(3), 358-371.

This article presents the results of a meta-analysis of the literature on the efficiency of public and private prisons, examining a variety of variables, in addition to public/private status, that might contribute to the efficiency of prison operations. This study provides interesting insight into the difficulty of attributing efficiency claims to a single factor, such as organizational sector.

The authors begin by reviewing the basic arguments for and against the privatization of prisons. Briefly, private prisons (and indeed any private organization) are often assumed to operate more efficiently and effectively than their public counterparts, due in large part to economies thought to be "inherent" to the private sector. The authors note the increasing attention given to privatization in corrections, driven by the rapid growth in the prison population over the past decade, and the resulting strain on public correctional resources.

The authors also note that discussions of the benefits of prison privatization reveal that cost efficiency and effectiveness may ultimately be largely determined by factors that are independent of public or private management status. These factors include the age of the prison, its size, and its security level. Specifically, higher costs may be associated with institutions that are older, smaller and higher security, regardless of whether they are publicly or privately managed.

The authors point out that studies of the benefits of prison privatization have failed to provide a clear answer to the question of whether private prisons operate more efficiently. Moreover, prison privatization research is plagued by ideological contamination. Privatization is an inherently political issue; objectivity is easily compromised when studying such a topic.

In order to arrive at some sort of consensus regarding the value of prison privatization, the authors undertook a meta-analysis of the prison privatization research. Meta-analysis involves the systematic review, evaluation and synthesis of existing research on a given topic, with the goal of generating overall conclusions that are supported by this body of research. Meta-analysis typically sets standards for which types of studies are included in this review, leaving out research that is methodologically inadequate or obviously biased.

The meta analysis undertaken by the authors includes 33 comparative evaluations of public and private correctional institutions. These studies focused upon cost-effectiveness and efficiency, rather

than program performance. Cost effectiveness was measured as the operational cost per inmate per day. The authors acknowledge that efficiency is only one indicator of performance. Their meta-analysis, however, needed to focus upon a single, easily defined outcome dimension.

The research studies analyzed by the authors indicate that private prisons have an apparent cost advantage of \$2.45 per day over public prisons. This cost difference is not statistically powerful enough, however, to conclude that private prisons are consistently more cost effective than public prisons. The authors did find that the age, size and security level of the facilities were powerful predictors of an institution's daily cost per inmate. Specifically, high cost institutions were more likely to be older, higher security and smaller, regardless of who was running them. The authors conclude that the prison privatization debate needs to more fully consider the broader range of variables that contribute to institutional economies.

This research presents an interesting and useful review of the literature on prison privatization. Perhaps the one drawback to the article is that the authors seem to have an agenda of their own, which is to counter the commonly held assumption that the private sector operates more efficiently than the public sector. Of course, they do acknowledge that it is very difficult to remove ideology entirely from studies of highly controversial topics such as privatization. Their study does, however, point out the importance of examining the organizational context in which privatization takes place.

John D. Wooldredge. 1999. "Inmate Experiences and Psychological Well-Being." *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 26(2), 235-250.

This article examines the role played by programming, visitation and internal security in the psychological adjustment to prison of adult male inmates. This study provides further support for and insight into inmate treatment programs, where such programs help inmates to process their prison experience within minimal psychological and behavioral disruption.

The author begins by noting that the psychological adjustment of inmates to the prison environment is closely connected to the maintenance of institutional security and to the success of rehabilitation and treatment programs. Inmate psychological adjustment is driven by various inmate concerns or "needs", including privacy, safety, social interaction and structured activity. To the extent that these needs are met, inmates will be more or less amenable to the objectives of prison administrators.

While there exists a substantial body of research on inmate needs, the author notes that more research is needed into how these needs interact within each other, and how they can be managed to optimize inmate psychological adjustment to the institutional environment. Specifically, the author is concerned with the following inmate needs: safety, social interaction and program participation. Safety is defined here as the absence of harassment or assault by other inmates. Social interaction is defined as frequency of visitation with outsiders. This study also examines how these needs interact with demographic variables (e.g. age, race, education) and institutional variables (e.g. time served, sentence length).

To explore these questions, the author collected data from 581 adult male inmates at three Ohio state correctional institutions (two close security, one medium). The survey instrument measured inmates' psychological states, their extent of program participation, their frequency of outside visits, their history of having been targets of aggravated assault within prison, as well as demographic variables.

This study found that inmates' psychological health tended to increase with more time spent in programs and with frequency of visitation. As might be expected, psychological health tended to decrease with frequency of assault by other inmates. This research also found that inmates' psychological adjustment is not significantly related to the type of institution (i.e. linear versus pod design) or to the security level of the institution.

The author concludes that program participation and frequent visitation appear to promote the adjustment of inmates to the institutional environment. Programming in particular provides inmates with structure and predictability in their daily routines. This predictability gives inmates the sense that they have some control over their lives, as they know what they will be doing throughout the course of the day. This sense of control is enhanced where inmates have some choice regarding programming and other structured activities. Control over at least some aspects of one's daily life contributes to a sense of psychological well-being and to positive institutional adjustment.

This study appears to be well done, with no major shortcomings. It supports the notion that programming and other structured activities contribute to *routines* that make institutional life safer and more manageable for inmates and their custodians.

Fiona H. Biggam and Kevin G. Power. 1999. "A Comparison of the Problem-Solving Abilities and Psychological Distress of Suicidal, Bullied, and Protected Prisoners." *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 26(2), 196-216.

This study explores how adjustment to the institutional environment is related to the psychological states and problem-solving abilities of young adult offenders in Scotland. In addition to examining the challenges surrounding the management of young offenders, this article presents insight into how another nation studies and meets these challenges.

The authors discuss the relationship between personality factors and adjustment to prison, noting that problem-solving skills have been identified in the literature as being related to the ability of inmates to get along in the institutional environment. Inmates who are capable of developing reasonable solutions to problems facing them in prison are found to have better records of behavior and progress towards rehabilitation.

One criticism of previous studies noted by the authors is that they tend to treat inmates as an homogeneous group. The authors argue that it is important to study the relationship between problem-solving and institutional adjustment among young adult offenders. There has been increasing attention given in recent years to the high risk of suicide for this category of offenders in

Scotland.

To explore this relationship, the authors collected data from four groups of inmates at a Young Offender Institution (YOI) in Scotland, for a total sample of 100 inmates. The Scottish YOI's are similar in principle to SCI-Pine Grove, housing inmates from ages 16 to 21. The four groups of inmates were: inmates who are victims of bullying by other inmates but who remain in population ("circulation", in Scottish parlance), inmates who have been placed in protective custody due to adjustment difficulties, inmates who have been placed under special suicide watch, and inmates in general population who appear well adjusted. (Interestingly, the article notes that the inmates were not told about the true purposes of the study, in order to prevent distortion of responses. This deception apparently presented no Human Subjects Protection review problems in Scotland, as it likely would here).

These inmates were interviewed by a psychologist who asked questions about their adjustment in prison and administered four research instruments. These instruments were the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale, the Profile of Mood States, the Beck Hopelessness Scale, and the Means-End Problem Solving Test.

The authors found that the inmates on special suicide watch exhibited the highest levels of depression and anxiety and the weakest problem-solving skills. Victims of bullying living in population also displayed high levels of depression and poor problem-solving skills. The bullied inmates also displayed the highest levels of hopelessness and anger-hostility, apparently due to their ongoing exposure to harassment.

On the whole, inmates living in protective custody, and well adjusted inmates living in population, displayed normal scores on the psychometric measures. Most inmates in the sample scored lower than average overall on the problem solving scale, which supports conclusions found in much of the literature on criminogenic risk factors.

The authors conclude that measures of depression, anxiety and problem-solving skills can serve as useful predictors of inmate adjustment. Moreover, they argue that programs to enhance the problem solving and coping skills of inmates can reduce levels of violence and bullying within prisons and can promote the positive adjustment of vulnerable inmates.

This study appears to be well done, although its conclusions are drawn from a rather small, limited sample. It presents interesting information about the relationship between problem solving skills and the adjustment of young adult offenders to the prison environment.

Robert C. Granger and Rachel Cytron. 1999. "Teenage Parent Programs: A Synthesis of the Long Term Effects of the New Chance Demonstration, Ohio's Learning, Earning and Parenting Program, and the Teenage Parent Demonstration." *Evaluation Review*, 23(2), 107-145.

This article reports on the impact of programs that provide services to teen parents (primarily mothers) in disadvantaged communities in several states. While these programs are targeted

towards the free population, and offer a wider variety of services than are found in prison-based parenting programs, this article does provide interesting insight into the efficacy of programs designed to promote responsible parenthood among troubled populations.

The authors begin by reviewing the history of programs designed to prepare teen parents to better fulfill their parental responsibilities. These programs are driven by the poor prospects often facing teen parents. The goals of these programs are typically to prepare teen parents for employment, to assist them in achieving a high school diploma or GED, to avail themselves of human services offered in the community and to enhance their parenting skills and their emotional bonds to their children.

The goals and content of these programs are similar to parenting programs offered in prison, although somewhat broader in scope. Most significantly, prison-based parenting programs must often focus more of their efforts on basic parenting skills, with less emphasis placed on job readiness or general education (though these may be provided by other programs available to inmates). These differences notwithstanding, studies of community-based parenting programs can lend insight into the effectiveness of prison-based programs.

The authors do not report on any original research in this article. Rather, they synthesize the results of three major evaluations of three prominent parenting programs: the New Chance Demonstration project run by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (a major provider and evaluator of social programs) in ten states from 1989 through 1992; the Learning, Earning and Parenting program begun in Ohio in 1989; and the Teenage Parent Program run in New Jersey by the federal government from 1987 through 1991. The evaluations of these programs have followed the clients for three to six years after completion of the programs. Such a lengthy follow-up period is rare in program evaluation, and lends support to the validity of the findings.

The evaluation studies reviewed by this article indicate that these programs have a positive impact upon clients across several dimensions. First, clients participating in the programs were more inclined to take advantage of other social services offered in the community, thereby increasing the bundle of resources available to themselves and their children. Second, program participants were more likely to either complete high school or acquire a GED. Third, program participants had higher rates of employment and earnings during the follow-up period. Finally, the programs had modest positive effects on parents' emotional support for their children, time spent reading to their children and on scores on an instrument used to measure parenting attitudes. No positive effects were found on children's cognitive development or educational achievement, though.

This review of three prominent evaluations of teen parenting programs provides general evidence of the effectiveness of interventions designed to enhance the parenting skills of individuals at risk for failure in their parental role. Although prison-based parenting programs differ in scope from the programs evaluated here, these findings provide some benchmark for studies of the effectiveness of inmate parenting programs.

