WHAT WORKS IN CORRECTIONAL INTERVENTION

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I. INTRODUCTION

Recent changes in correctional policy have involved decreasing amenities for prisoners, three strike laws, chain gangs, and other punitive measures. Policy makers suggest that these policies be implemented with the public will. While there is little doubt that the public wants criminals to be punished, there is also a great deal of evidence that most people support the rehabilitation of offenders. This paper will address two broad questions: 1) what does the public want to be done with offenders? and 2) what do we know about the effectiveness of correctional intervention programs?

II. PUBLIC OPINION

Studies from across the country consistently show that public support for treatment and rehabilitation remains strong.[1] A summary of this literature can be stated as follows:

- The public is fairly rational in its views; people favor a balanced approach to dealing with crime.
- They support punishment or getting tough, but they also believe it is important to rehabilitate offenders.
- They support imprisonment, but mainly for serious and violent offenders.
- They support community corrections if it involves more than just putting convicts on the street with no supervision or treatment.
- They are very supportive of rehabilitation for juveniles.
- They are very supportive of early intervention programs.

It is also clear that while the public supports rehabilitation and treatment of offenders, it wants programs that work. Furthermore, survey research

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1. Brandon K. Applegate et al., *Public Support for Correctional Treatment: The Continuing Appeal of the Rehabilitative Ideal*, 77 PRISON J. 237 (1997). This study reviewed a number of surveys. The authors also found results similar to other studies and concluded that support for rehabilitation, which appeared to have weakened in the 1970s, may have stabilized in the intervening 15 years.

reveals strong support for public protection as an important goal of corrections.[2] Consequently, disagreements arise as to the best methods to achieve these and other correctional goals. On one side are advocates for more punitive policies such as an increased use of incarceration, punishing smarter (e.g., boot camps, electronic monitoring, day reporting facilities), or simply increasing control and monitoring if the offender is supervised in the community. Those advocating such strategies of crime control do so on the basis of the often interrelated goals of punishment)deterrence, retribution, and incapacitation. The limits of these approaches have been outlined and debated by others.[3] The ultimate effect of most of these polices has been described by Clear as "penal harm."[4]

III. THE PUNITIVE MOVEMENT

As Cullen and Applegate imply, the most disheartening aspect of these "get tough" policies is their dismissal of the importance of programming that is designed to rehabilitate offenders.[5] Cullen and Applegate further question whether the penal harm movement's rejection of rehabilitation is sound public policy. As many states have found, simply locking up offenders and "throwing away the key" has proven to be a very expensive approach to crime control. This approach is also very limited, since the vast majority of offenders will one day return to society. Many will return unchanged at best, and, at worst, with many more problems and intensified needs for services.[6] For those advocating incapacitation, one must also ask what should be done with offenders while incarcerated? Some scholars, such as Cullen and Applegate, do not believe that incapacitation and rehabilitation are mutually exclusive.[7] Furthermore, since the vast majority of offenders are supervised in the community at differing degrees of intensity, it is even more important that we develop programs that work toward reducing recidivism.

Many of the "intermediate sanctions" that have been developed over the past few years are but a few examples of "programs" that often fail to live up

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2. Applegate, *supra* note 1.
3. WILLIAM J. BENNETT ET AL., BODY COUNT: MORAL POVERTY . . . AND HOW TO WIN AMERICA'S WAR AGAINST CRIME AND DRUGS (1996); ELLIOTT CURRIE, CONFRONTING CRIME: AN AMERICAN CHALLENGE (1985).
4. TODD R. CLEAR, HARM IN AMERICAN PENOLOGY: OFFENDERS, VICTIMS, AND THEIR COMMUNITIES (1994).
5. FRANCIS T. CULLEN & BRANDON K. APPLEGATE, OFFENDER REHABILITATION: EFFECTIVE CORRECTIONAL INTERVENTION (1998).
6. Joan Petersilia, *California's Prison Policy: Causes, Costs, and Consequences*, 72 PRISON J. 8 (1992).
7. CULLEN & APPLEGATE, *supra* note 5.

to their expectations, particularly in terms of reductions in recidivism.[8] These results are often attributed to policies that emphasize control and surveillance over treatment and service delivery.[9]

Despite the punitive movement, there is increasing evidence that correctional treatment can be effective in reducing recidivism among offenders.[10] Nonetheless, some scholars remain unconvinced.[11] The debate surrounding treatment effectiveness has been ongoing since Martinson's proclamation that "nothing works," with many still clinging to this mantel, despite evidence to the contrary.[12]

IV. PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE INTERVENTION

As mentioned above, much evidence has been generated reaching the conclusion that many rehabilitation programs have in fact produced significant reductions in recidivism. The next critical issue is the identification of those characteristics most commonly associated with effective programs. Through

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8. Edward J. Latessa et al., Evaluation of Ohio's Community Correction Act and Community-Based Correctional Facilities (1997) (report on file with University of Cincinnati); Joan Petersilia, *Probation in the United States*, *in* 22 CRIME AND JUSTICE: A REVIEW OF RESEARCH 149 (Michael Tonry ed., 1997).
9. Betsy Fulton et al., *The State of ISP: Research and Policy Implications*, FED. PROBATION, Dec. 1997, at 65. Those programs that have shown some reductions in recidivism have adopted a more balanced approach to offender supervision. With this model, an equal emphasis is placed on monitoring the offender and delivering services.
10. D.A. Andrews et al., *Does Correctional Treatment Work? A Clinically Relevant and Psychologically Informed Meta-Analysis*, 28 CRIMINOLOGY 369 (1990); Paul Gendreau & D.A. Andrews, *Tertiary Prevention: What the Meta-analyses of the Offender Treatment Literature Tell Us About "What Works,"* 32 CAN. J. CRIMINOLOGY 173 (1990); Francis T. Cullen & Paul Gendreau, *The Effectiveness of Correctional Rehabilitation: Reconsidering the "Nothing Works" Debate*, *in* AMERICAN PRISONS: ISSUES IN RESEARCH AND POLICY 23 (L. Goodstein & D. MacKenzie eds., 1989); Patricia Van Voorhis, *Correctional Effectiveness: The High Cost of Ignoring Success*, FED. PROBATION, Mar. 1987, at 56.
11. Daniel H. Antonowicz & Robert R. Ross, *Essential Components of Successful Rehabilitation Programs for Offenders*, 38 INT'L J. OFFENDER THERAPY & COMP. CRIMINOLOGY 97 (1994); Steven P. Lab & John T. Whitehead, *An Analysis of Juvenile Correctional Treatment*, 34 CRIME & DELINQ. 60 (1988) ; C.H. Logan & G. G. Gaes, *Meta-Analysis and the Rehabilitation of Punishment*, 10 JUST. Q. 245 (1993). Lab and Whitehead concluded that there was not evidence that treatment programs for juvenile offenders were not effective despite the fact that 40% of the programs they had reviewed found reductions in recidivism. For an excellent rebuttal of Logan and Gaes, *see* Cullen & Applegate, *Introduction*, *in* OFFENDER REHABILITATION: EFFECTIVE CORRECTIONAL INTERVENTION xviii (1998).
12. Robert Martinson, *What Works?)Questions and Answers About Prison Reform*, 35 PUB. INTEREST 22 (1974).

the work of scholars such as Andrews[13] and Gendreau,[14] several "principles of effective intervention" have been identified. The following statements summarize these principles of effective intervention:

- Services should be intensive and behavioral in nature, and focused on higher risk offenders.
- Behavioral strategies enforced in a firm but fair manner by qualified staff.
- Programs should target criminogenic needs (e.g., antisocial attitudes, value and beliefs supportive of criminal behavior, negative peer associations, substance abuse, etc.).
- Responsivity should occur between staff, offenders, and programs.
- Programs should disrupt criminal networks.
- Programs should provide relapse prevention in the community.
- High levels of advocacy and brokerage should be provided.

Furthermore, Gendreau and Andrews have delineated many of the characteristics of effective programs through the development of an instrument known as the Correctional Program Assessment Inventory (CPAI).[15] Below is a brief summary of some of what is known about the characteristics of effective correctional intervention programs. Effective programs:

- are well designed and implemented around a sound theoretical model, and have qualified, involved leadership;
- receive appropriate clients and conduct standardized and objective assessments of offenders on risk, need, and responsivity factors;
- target crime producing behaviors, use effective behavioral treatment models, deliver services and treatment effectively, and prepare offenders to remain or return to the community;
- have staff who are well educated, qualified, experienced, well trained, supervised, and have input into the program;
- make sure that quality assurance is provided and evaluations are regularly conducted; and
- have support both internally and in the community.[16]

V. EXAMINING PROGRAM QUALITY

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13. Andrews et al., *supra* note 10.
14. Paul Gendreau, *The Principles of Effective Intervention With Offenders*, *in* CHOOSING CORRECTIONAL OPTIONS THAT WORK 117 (Alan T. Harland ed., 1996).
15. PAUL GENDREAU & D.A. ANDREWS, THE CORRECTIONAL PROGRAM ASSESSMENT INVENTORY (5th ed. 1994).
16. *Id.*

Few would argue that the quality of a correctional intervention program has no effect on outcome. Nonetheless, correctional researchers have largely ignored the measurement of program quality. Traditionally, quality has been measured through process evaluations. This approach can provide useful information about a program's operations; however, these types of evaluations often lack the "quantifiability" of outcome studies. Previously, the primary issue of researchers has been the development of criteria or indicators by which a treatment program can be measured. While traditional audits and accreditation processes are one step in this direction, thus far they have proven to be inadequate. For example, audits can be an important means to ensure that a program is meeting contractual obligations or a set of prescribed standards; however, these conditions may not have any relationship to effective intervention. It is also important to note that outcome studies and assessments of program quality are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Combining outcome indicators with assessments of program quality can provide a more complete picture of an intervention's effectiveness. Fortunately, there has been considerable progress in identifying the hallmarks of effective programs.

A. The Correctional Program Assessment Inventory

The CPAI is a tool that has been used for assessing correctional intervention programs. The CPAI assesses a program on six primary areas: 1) program implementation and leadership; 2) offender assessment and classification; 3) characteristics of the program; 4) characteristics and practices of the staff; 5) evaluation and quality control; and 6) miscellaneous items such as ethical guidelines and levels of support.[17] Each section is scored as "very satisfactory" (70% to 100%), "satisfactory" (60% to 69%), "satisfactory but needs improvement" (50% to 59%) or "unsatisfactory" (less than 50%).[18] The scores from all six areas are totaled and the same rating scale is used for the overall assessment score. Not all of the six areas are given equal weight, and some items may be considered "not applicable," in which case they are not included in the scoring.

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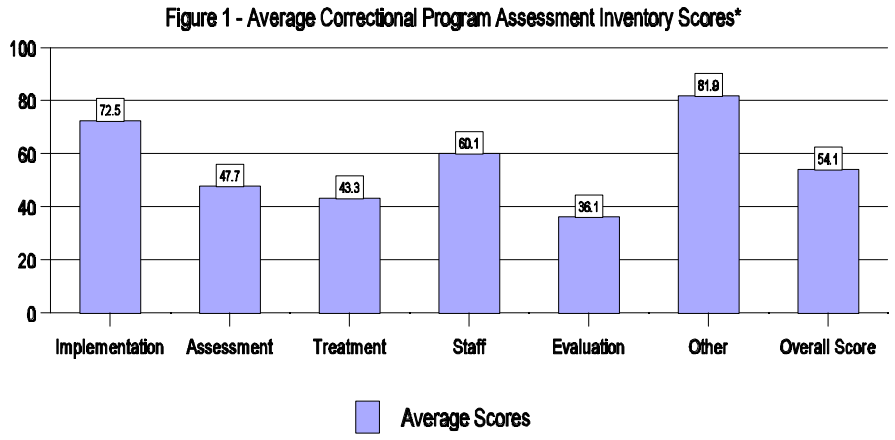
17. *Id.*
18. The "satisfactory, but needs improvement" category was created because of what we thought were substantial differences between a program that scored in the sixties, and one that scored in the fifties. In actuality, all programs in these ranges need improvement.

B. Results From CPAI Assessments



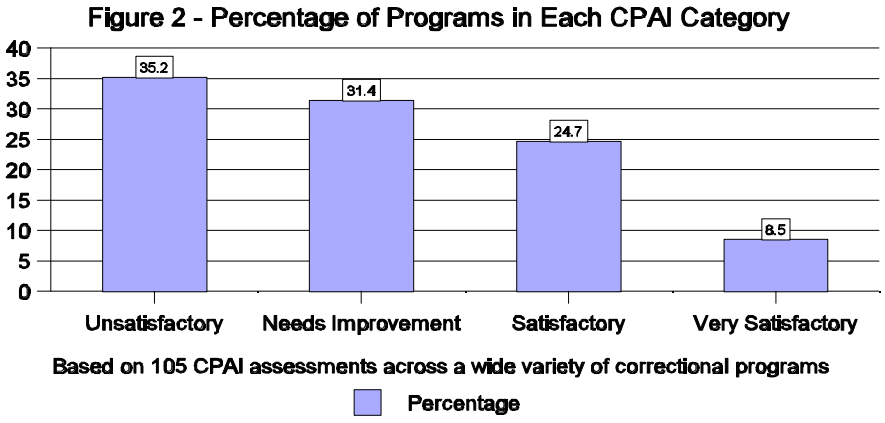
To date, researchers from the University of Cincinnati have assessed more than 100 correctional programs across the country. The average scores from across 105 programs are presented in Figure 1.[19] In three of the areas, including the most important (treatment), the average scores were less than 50%, which is in the unsatisfactory range of the scale. The staff scores were slightly higher, falling just in the "satisfactory" range. Implementation and the "other" category were found to be "very satisfactory." Overall, the 105 programs we assessed averaged just over 54% on the CPAI. Figure 2 shows the percentages of programs that scored in each category. Only 8.5% of the programs we assessed scored in the "very satisfactory" range, while more than 66% scored either "satisfactory but needs improvement" or "unsatisfactory."

19. These included adult and juvenile, and community-based as well as institutional programs.

* The average scores are based on 105 CPAI results across a wide range of programs. Very Satisfactory = 70% or higher; Satisfactory = 60-69%; Needs Improvement = 50-59%; Unsatisfactory = <50%.

Although there is a great deal of variation between (and within) programs, below is a summary of some of the major strengths and weakness in each of the CPAI areas across the 105 programs assessed.

1. Program Implementation and Leadership



Strengths: Effective programs have strong leadership and involvement of the program director.[20] For the most part we have found qualified and experienced program directors, who were involved in designing the program. They tend to be involved in the hiring and training of staff, and in many instances they provide some direct services to offenders. It is also important for the survival and support of a program that the values and goals of the program be consistent with existing values in the community or institution in which it resides, and that there be a documented need for the program. Support for the program also depends on perceptions of cost-effectiveness. We usually find that most correctional programs meet these conditions.

Weaknesses: There are two flaws that are common in this area. Effective programs are based on strong theoretical models that are derived from the treatment literature. Nevertheless, many of the correctional intervention programs we examined were basically designed with little regard for the empirical research on what works with the type of offenders they were serving. In addition, effective programs are usually begun on a pilot basis to work out the logistics. Thus far, we have found few programs that piloted their treatment components before full implementation.

2. Offender Assessment and Classification

Strengths: The vast majority of programs we studied have written criteria for admissions, receive appropriate clients, and have a rational legal/clinical basis for the exclusion of certain types of offenders. We also found that, in general, most programs attempt to assess some offender characteristics related to risk and need.

Weaknesses: While many programs did indeed attempt to assess offenders regarding risk and need, doing so did not involve the incorporation of a standardized, objective, actuarial instrument. The absence of actuarial risk/needs assessment instruments was particularly evident in programs that deal with juvenile offenders. Even when a standardized assessment is being performed at some point in the offender's entry/progress, it is seldom found that the information gathered is being used to distinguish offenders by risk. In other words, even when proper (and potentially beneficial) assessments are being performed, the information is not influencing the decision-making process, let

20. Program director refers to the individual responsible for service or treatment delivery. This is not necessarily the administrator of the program.

alone service delivery. In addition, it is generally found that staff assessments of offenders are based on a quasi-clinical approach that does not result in a summary score. Likewise, it has been very rare to find that programs are routinely measuring with standardized instruments responsivity characteristics, such as levels of motivation, intelligence, or psychological development.

3. Characteristics of the Program

Strengths: This is a critical area in scoring the CPAI. Unfortunately, it is also one that typically results in low scores.[21] Effective intervention programs focus the vast majority of their efforts on targeting criminogenic needs and behaviors.[22] In general, we have found that many correctional intervention programs target these behaviors (although we still find programs that provide intensive services and treatment in non-crime producing areas, such as self-esteem). Another common strength was that many programs have criteria for program completion, and upon discharge many offenders are routinely referred to programs and services that help meet their needs.

Weaknesses: Offenders typically have not been spending a significant percentage of their time in structured programs. In addition, the amount of services and treatment provided has not varied by risk and need levels. Yet another characteristic of an effective program is the use of a treatment model that has been found to be effective. Since programs are rarely designed around a theoretical model, it was not surprising to find a lack of a consistently applied treatment model in place. In general, the major shortcomings found when considering the "Characteristics of Program" portion of the CPAI include: lack of programmatic structure; incomplete or non-existent treatment manuals; few rewards to encourage program participation and compliance; the ineffective use of punishment; staff being allowed to design their own interventions regardless of the treatment literature base; and a host of very obvious and definable, yet ineffective treatment models. This area of the CPAI also examines the extent to which matching occurs between offenders and staff, offenders and programs, and staff and programs. Even when matching is found to occur, it is uncommon to observe it being based on specific responsivity criteria. In addition, it is very rare to find a program that includes family and/or friends of the offender in the

21. The Program Characteristics area of the CPAI accounts for about one-third of the total score.
22. Criminogenic needs refers to those areas that are found to be strong predictors of criminal behavior, such as antisocial attitudes, criminal values and beliefs, negative peer associations, etc.

treatment process. Finally, many programs failed to provide aftercare services or booster sessions.

4. Characteristics and Practices of the Staff

Strengths: Although there is a great deal of variation from program to program regarding staff quality, for the most part we found educated and experienced staff working with offenders. Often staff were selected on personal characteristics such as life experience, fairness, firmness, and problem-solving skills. We also found that staff usually had input in the structure of the programs, and that on-going training was provided.

Weaknesses: Staff turnover was often a problem with some types of correctional programs (e.g. halfway houses), and we rarely found staff who had received sufficient training on the interventions and treatments utilized by the program. Clinical supervision was not routinely provided, and staff were rarely assessed on service delivery skills.

5. Evaluation and Quality Control

Programs that study themselves tend to be more effective than programs that do not. Data provides insight into program and offender performance, helps identify who is successful and who is not, and allows adjustments to be made.

Strengths: File review and case audits were usually conducted.

Weaknesses: Periodic, objective, and standardized assessment of offenders to see if criminogenic factors were being reduced was uncommon. In short, most programs do not develop meaningful performance measures (to measure either program or offender performance over time). We also found that the majority of programs were not tracking offenders after they had left the program, and formal evaluations involving comparison groups were the exception.

6. Other Items

Strengths: Most of the programs we examined score well in this area. In general, offender records are complete and are kept in a confidential file. Changes that jeopardize programs, funding, or community support are rare.

Weaknesses: Some programs do not have ethical guidelines for intervention, and public agencies tend not to have advisory boards, while those operated by non-profits do.

While these results indicate that the majority of correctional programs we assessed do not fully meet the principles of effective intervention, they do provide some useful information on how to improve the quality of correctional interventions. The most common shortcomings of the programs we assessed include:

- Programs tend to be atheoretical.
- There is a lack of standardized, objective risk/need assessments (especially with juveniles), or assessments conducted, and everyone gets the same treatment.
- Little attention is paid to responsivity between staff, offenders, and programs.
- Staff training is inadequate and the quality of staff varies greatly.
- There are too few rewards and too many punishers. In addition, the punishers that are used are not effective because of how they are administered.
- Few measures of program performance are taken.
- Family members are not involved in the treatment process.
- Aftercare and booster sessions are lacking.
- Few formal evaluations are conducted.

VI. CONCLUSION

What do we know from the correctional research? First, we know that the public continues to support rehabilitation efforts; however, it wants offenders held accountable. They also want programs that work at achieving the goals of public protection and rehabilitation, two goals that are not mutually exclusive. Second, when we review the body of literature on program effectiveness, there are several important points that can be made. We know that some correctional programs are more effective at reducing recidivism than others. We also know that the more effective programs meet the principles of effective intervention. Furthermore, the most effective programs have certain characteristics that can be measured. Unfortunately, it also appears that relatively few correctional programs are providing services and treatment consistent with the principles of effective intervention.