

Juvenile Crime and Justice

Boot Camps

Contributors: Patricia E. Campie
Editors: William J. Chambliss
Book Title: Juvenile Crime and Justice
Chapter Title: "Boot Camps"
Pub. Date: 2011
Access Date: December 09, 2014
Publishing Company: SAGE Publications, Inc.
City: Thousand Oaks
Print ISBN: 9781412978583
Online ISBN: 9781412994132
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412994132.n4>
Print pages: 45-59

©2011 SAGE Publications, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

This PDF has been generated from SAGE knowledge. Please note that the pagination of the online version will vary from the pagination of the print book.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412994132.n4>

Chapter 4: Boot Camps

[p. 45 ↓]

As a response to 1990s tough-on-crime initiatives, juvenile boot camps were first modeled after adult boot camps for criminal offenders. Protocols were later developed, with varying results. Some residential camps featured an emphasis on treatment and skill building within a positive culture, while others placed an emphasis on military-like discipline. While boot camps are less expensive in the short run than incarceration, and maintain a high degree of public support as an appropriate punishment for youths and an effective way to keep communities safe, concerns have been raised over the way these camps are sometimes implemented. Studies examining whether boot camps actually affect youth recidivism have shown very little evidence of effectiveness; in some cases, these studies have even shown higher recidivism outcomes for youths who have been boot camp participants. Boot camps have even been caught up in serious controversies such as death and injury lawsuits. While the juvenile justice system in many jurisdictions has started to shift away from the use of boot camps as an intervention for youth offenders, the approach remains popular with the general public and is widely implemented in several states throughout the United States, mainly through the provision of private, fee-based services for parents. From the history of juvenile boot camps, current trends have emerged, as well as current thinking on the pros and cons of using the boot camp approach as an effective deterrent to juvenile crime.

[p. 46 ↓]

History of Boot Camps

Juvenile boot camps became popular in the 1990s as a tough-on-crime response to what appeared to be a rising tide of violent crime among youths. These camps were modeled after the adult boot camps used for criminal offenders and featured military-like discipline and an emphasis on physical conditioning. Juvenile boot camps were

initially conceived to be highly structured residential programs providing youths with up to 90 days of programming, sometimes followed by transitional supports back into the community, known as aftercare.

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Study

As the number of boot camp programs grew throughout the country during the 1990s, The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) created a model boot camp protocol in 1995 and funded three pilot sites to study to what degree, if any, the boot camp approach was an effective response to juvenile crime. Studies were conducted in Cleveland, Denver, and Mobile, Alabama, to examine the efficacy of the boot camp approach.

Recidivism outcomes were shown to be either weak in the intended direction or strong in the opposite direction, with one of the three sites so poorly administered that little reliable data could be generated for the study. A major limitation at each site was the manner in which aftercare services were implemented, with no site able to administer its aftercare process as intended. Some of these sites were either completely redesigned during the study period or were shut down entirely.

As the 1990s wound down, juvenile crime statistics started to show a steady decline in juvenile offending, which continued through FBI data released in 2008. Despite this statistical drop in the number of crimes committed by youths and the decreasing severity of violent crimes committed, public support and federal funding continued to support the implementation of juvenile boot camps. This was true in spite of the fact that the research was not yet in on whether or not boot camps were effective for reducing delinquency. The few studies that were beginning to accumulate suggested that boot camps had either no impact on recidivism or, in the case of the OJJDP study, may actually result in an increase recidivism among boot camp participants.

In 2001, a meta-analysis was conducted by researchers Doris MacKenzie, David Wilson, and Suzanne Kider to examine the overarching deter-rent [p. 47 ↓] effects

across boot camp programs to determine how well they deterred future offending. Twenty-nine quasi-experimental and experimental studies were used to evaluate programs that had the features of residential boot-camp environments. Recidivism rates of program participants were compared to equivalent groups of youths receiving a different correctional sanction. The study produced mixed results, mainly explained by the substantial variation among boot camp implementation processes and differing program content in each setting. In nine of these settings, boot camp participants exhibited lower recidivism rates than those from a comparison group of equivalent youths. In eight of the 29 studies, the comparison groups had lower recidivism than the boot camp groups. In the remaining 20 studies, no significant differences in re-offending rates between groups were found.

National Institute of Justice Analysis

The National Institute of Justice (NIJ) released a 10-year retrospective analysis of boot camps in 2003. This comprehensive study looked more generally at the practice of boot camps across both adult and juvenile implementations by reviewing studies that had previously been done on boot camps from the late 1980s through the end of the 1990s. Similar to the meta-analysis done by MacKenzie, Wilson, and Kider, the studies that were reviewed in the NIJ study were not conducted in similar manners, and the boot camps included in these studies were designed and implemented in very dissimilar ways. Overall, this retrospective analysis conducted by NIJ found no convincing evidence that boot camp programs reduce recidivism among adult or juvenile offenders. Like previous reports, the NIJ study found that

- participants reported positive, short-term changes in attitudes, behaviors, and problem-solving skills;
- participants' perceived gains in positive, short-term changes did not generally result in lowered recidivism upon completion of the boot camp program;
- those boot camp programs that did produce marginal impacts on reducing recidivism were unique in that they offered more treatment programming to participants; however, there were boot camps that included treatments that did not produce any recidivism benefits;

- boot camp costs were generally less expensive than the costs of providing standard incarceration;
- boot camp implementation models, including staff training, participant eligibility criteria, and engagement strategies varied greatly;
- effective aftercare and reentry practices were not strongly tied to the boot camp experience; and
- the disciplined setting in which therapeutic programming was made available created a sense of safety among participants, which translated into short-term improvements in participant attitudes.

The California Youth Authority (CYA) commissioned a study in 2002 to address the criticism that many boot camp studies were limited in their explanatory power because they had not utilized rigorous study designs. In response to these shortcomings, the CYA commissioned a boot camp research study using an experimental design and control and treatment group to explore the effectiveness of California's juvenile boot camps. The study was longitudinal in nature, following youths past their boot camp experience to look at long-term reoffending behavior. In 2006, followup arrest data were collected on study participants, and researchers found that there were no statistically significant differences between boot camp participants and youths in the control group with regard to average arrest frequency or time to first arrest after exiting the program.

Recent Trends

In Florida, one of the first states to respond in the 1990s with tough-on-crime juvenile policies sanctioning youth offenders as though they were adults, boot camps became part of the juvenile correctional system. Until 2006, Florida boasted the greatest number of juvenile boot camps than any other jurisdiction in the United States. Because of this, Florida juvenile boot camps presented a potentially rich source of research information to study the impacts of boot camps on youth outcomes.

In 2004, researchers from Yale University conducted a study on the effectiveness of Florida's correctional programs (including its boot camps) as part of a study looking at the relative cost-effectiveness difference between public and private correctional programming and facilities. At the time, all juvenile boot camps in Florida were run by

county sheriff's departments, with oversight provided by state justice officials. Youths 14 to 18 years of age were eligible for participation in the camps, and were selected by county officials using a subjective standard related to how well the youths could tolerate rigorous physical activity and how much they could stand to benefit [p. 49 ↓] from a highly structured and disciplined environment. Study results determined that privately run boot camp facilities in the state resulted in statistically significant higher recidivism rates than publicly run correctional facilities. The study also found that the short-term cost savings of using a private boot camp provider over a public corrections option was not great enough to mitigate the long-term recidivism "cost" that resulted from youths participating in these programs.

Despite the fact that most research studies cannot confirm a definitive link between boot camp participation and deterrence from reoffending, many states still continue to use this form of intervention with delinquent youths. And, while boot camps are less expensive to implement in the short run than traditional youth placement alternatives (akin to incarceration), and public support for these programs is high, very serious concerns continue to mount over the way these camps are sometimes implemented. Some camps have been accused of using unnecessarily harsh and physically punitive sanctions, often against very minor, first-time offenders. Some of these incidents have even resulted in youth deaths, from which subsequent wrongful death suits have been filed, leading some states to reconsider whether they should continue to use this publicly popular youth delinquency intervention even when studies have failed to demonstrate their effectiveness.

Backlash at Boot Camps

In 2006, after several sensationalized news reports of juveniles in Florida being severely injured and killed while under juvenile boot camp supervision, there were public and political calls to shut down boot camp facilities. Added to these allegations was the sober news that Florida's juvenile justice system was reporting that up to 62 percent of graduates from the several boot camps around the state had been rearrested after release. The final blow to juvenile boot camps in Florida came after a 14-year-old boy died from having ammonia tablets pushed up his nose by boot camp program staff as punishment for minor misbehavior. Consequently, in May 2006, Governor Jeb Bush

endorsed state legislative actions that effectively prohibited the use of juvenile boot camps as a consequence prescribed through the juvenile justice system in the state. Other states are following suit as the incidence of lethal restraint used against youths in boot camp settings continues to rise.

In February 2010, a Philadelphia family settled a \$10.5 million wrongful death lawsuit against a boot camp in Tennessee, where their 17-year-old son [p. 50 ↓] was sent by the Philadelphia Department of Human Services, even though the department knew at the time that this boot camp had been reported to be a danger to youths. A family court judge ordered the boy to be placed at the boot camp to receive mental health treatment after he violated his probation by missing a court hearing, and then tested positive for marijuana use. During the civil court case brought by the youth's parents against the camp, video surveillance tapes showed a boot camp staff member on the ground strangling the young man after he refused to leave his room. The boot camp facility in Tennessee was operated by a Philadelphia-based, for-profit company, and city officials claimed they were sending youths to the Tennessee facility because no providers in Pennsylvania would agree to take these troubled youths. After the death of this 17-year-old, the Philadelphia Department of Human Services stopped sending youths to this facility (which continues to operate, but under a different name) and has now cut all of their out-of state placements by half in order to keep closer ties to, and oversight of, the settings in which these youths have been placed. It cost the city of Philadelphia more than \$6 million to send 14 youths to the facility over the course of the three years prior to terminating its relationship with the Tennessee facility.

A Cottage Industry

The use of juvenile boot camps as a formal response to delinquent acts is declining as jurisdictions shift their scarce dollars toward evidence-based programs that are designed to address a youth's criminogenic needs, in the hopes of reducing recidivism. However, the boot camp industry remains a robust supplier of disciplinary services for parents who are dealing with troubled teens. The cost to send a youth to one of these programs may be as high as \$10,000 for a 30-day program, with many programs extending offers of credit and payment plans to allow families to finance the cost of these services.

A series of specialty, spinoff camps have also developed in the wake of boot camps losing their toehold in the juvenile justice system and moving into the private sector. Wilderness programs claim to offer a less militaristic approach to troubled teens, but still aim to provide youths with a physically demanding environment that stresses individual responsibility and character development. These programs are even more expensive than private boot camps, costing upwards of \$18,000 to attend. Faith-based intervention has also become popular in recent years. The Christian outpatient treatment [p. 51 ↓] program Second Chance advertises their camp as focusing on “spiritual renewal resulting in inner transformation through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ,” and describes their process to include positive techniques such as “point systems, phase levels, and rewards and consequences.” They emphasize that there are treatment methods they refuse to use, which include such negative techniques as intimidation, psychotropic medication, mechanical restraints, and lockdown facilities.

Most recently, a new intervention known as Brat Camp has taken hold in the United States, patterned after a reality television show produced in the United Kingdom. The reality television show was so popular that it was renewed for three additional seasons, and similar shows have been created in the United States and Germany. The youths in these reality television shows tend to come from wealthier families and seem to typify normal teenage misbehavior rather than the serious or delinquent offending behavior that boot camps were originally created to counter. In actuality, however, these so-called brat camps offer the same type of setting and programming found in traditional wilderness camps, where youths need to take care of themselves, live in sparse accommodations, and are challenged by extreme levels of physical activity.

Since the majority of juvenile boot camps and wilderness camps act as private entities providing fee-for-service programming to justice agencies, social service organizations, and individual families, they are not under any sort of comprehensive government regulation. Consequently, there is no central clearinghouse of data on how many of these camps exist, what programmatic features they contain, how their staff are trained, or what outcomes they achieve.

Pro: Advantages of Juvenile Boot Camps

Completion Rates

Some boot camps report youth dropout rates as high as 50 percent. However, when juvenile boot camp programs are located in an area that is secure and away from a youth's normal neighborhood or home community, program completion rates tend to be quite high, ranging from 75–96 percent, as compared with a maximum of 80 percent program completion in most other settings where youths receive delinquency intervention programming.

Delinquency intervention programs that require youth attendance either due to a prescribed loss of freedom (secure confinement) or as a condition of **[p. 52 ↓]** probation tend to have higher completion rates than voluntary intervention programs, or those with no judicial enforcement consequence for failure to attend. In addition, intervention programs that successfully limit negative disruptions from peers and family members can have the effect of helping youths develop new relationships within the intervention program, which can also help boost program completion rates if those relationships are positive.

There has been little evidence to suggest that many boot camps typically contain these supportive environments. However, the idea of a boot camp setting as envisioned in the OJJDP program guidelines and offering a structured, active environment where supportive adults help youths learn new pro-social skills is the type of intervention setting that typically has the best chance of producing high completion rates and positive youth outcomes.

Competency Development-Educational Outcomes

Among those boot camps where program staff is documenting education outcomes, and youths are receiving educational supports, youths have shown positive gains in their reading, spelling, language, and math skills. The OJJDP-funded study conducted in Cleveland in the 1990s showed that these educational gains allowed youths to advance their work an entire grade level in each of these academic areas.

One of the more unique boot camp profiles comes from Texas, where a local public school partners with the county juvenile court and probation department to house a juvenile boot camp within the school. The Specialized Treatment and Rehabilitation program, known as STAR, was found to produce positive outcomes with regard to youth perceptions of teamwork and life skills, while still supporting youth educational needs in their home school. Negative findings from the study included greater recidivism effects, and for more serious offenses than the original offenses triggering boot camp participation in the STAR program. After the state of Florida outlawed the traditional boot camp model in 2006, that state adopted the STAR approach in its boot camp jurisdictions, intent on focusing more on educational and aftercare outcomes than on the military-like discipline that was blamed for several injuries and deaths among boot camp youths in that state.

Cost Savings Compared to Incarceration

When used as an alternative to juvenile correctional facilities, boot camps are more cost-effective due to the shortened length of stay, which is typically [p. 53 ↓] 90 days. For serious offenders, boot camps are more cost-effective if only a 90-day or shorter correctional sentence would be the alternative course of action. However, these short-term gains in terms of reduced cost are not realized in the long term, according to most studies that examine boot camp cost effectiveness.

Youth and Public Perceptions

In a study of more than 4,100 youths confined to boot camps or youth correctional facilities, researchers at the University of Maryland found that youths in boot camp environments reported feeling safer from peer conflicts as compared with youths in traditional correctional settings. Boot camp youths also reported their environments to be more structured, supportive, active, and controlled as compared to youths from the correctional setting. Youths in these correctional settings reported their environment to be less therapeutic and less focused on successful transition back to the community than youths in boot camp settings. However, in both the boot camp setting and the traditional correctional setting, all youths still reported higher than average levels of fear and conflict between themselves and staff supervising youth behavior.

Con: Disadvantages of Juvenile Boot Camps

A Flawed Theory of Change

Juvenile boot camps were created in the image of the military model that tries to break individuals down to build them up. The use of military service as a diversion alternative for adult offenders is no longer practiced in the United States. However, when juvenile boot camps were originally introduced in the 1980s, the idea garnered bipartisan support. More liberal voters like the idea of shorter sentences for youth offenders and in an environment other than traditional confinement. Conservatives liked the get-tough disciplinary approach used in the boot camp model, likening it to a military setting.

However, criminological research has failed to show any connection between a youth's delinquent behavior and the lack of military-like disciplinary practices in their lives. Instead, criminogenic factors affecting a youth's likelihood of offending have been identified as either static or dynamic. Static factors are those not impacted by any intervention or prevention program, such as age, gender, prior history of offending, or

parental history of [p. 54 ↓] crime. Dynamic factors associated with youth crime involve peer relationships, academic engagement, family bonding, and individual-level factors such as moral reasoning and impulse control. Boot camps are not designed to impact any of the criminogenic factors identified with youth offending. Instead, boot camps may decrease the protective factors that keep youths from offending or re-offending by removing them from school and family and traumatizing youths through punishments that are disproportionately harsh.

Allegations of Abuse and Neglect

In a 2007 study conducted by the Government Accountability Office (GAO), investigators reported thousands of abuse allegations against youth boot camp and wilderness facilities. Of the 10 programs where teenagers died under dubious circumstances, five were still operating at the time of the GAO's study—often using a new name or in a different place.

A few of the more disturbing examples of the types of abuse and neglect that have occurred in juvenile boot camps as documented by the GAO include the following:

- A 15-year-old who died from a severed neck artery after being held face down in the dirt for 45 minutes.
- A 14-year-old at an Arizona boot camp who died of dehydration after being forced to sit in 113-degree desert heat as punishment for asking to go home. The program closed, and the director was sentenced to six years in prison for manslaughter.
- A case where boys at a boot camp were required to stand with bags over their head and a hangman's noose around their necks.

There is no central clearinghouse for reporting alleged abuses from participating in a boot camp or residential program for youths. When allegations arise, states may submit these reported incidents to a federal database, but this reporting is only on a voluntary basis.

Inconsistent Program Implementation

Because residential programs for youths are largely unregulated, boot camp programs can vary greatly in the way they select youths, train staff, and design their programming. These management inconsistencies can lead [p. 55 ↓] to substantial problems mixing repeat and first-time offenders together, creating issues with overuse of force during training exercises led by staff, and lack of structured activities that are effective for developing the pro-social, educational, or competency development skills youths may need to succeed.

Boot camp programs also suffer from poor aftercare planning, which is an essential component of successfully transitioning youths from court supervision so they can succeed in the community on their own. In the OJJDP study from 1995, this critical component was either poorly implemented or lacking altogether in those boot camps, and the results from that study showed how recidivism was actually worse for participants in two of the three boot camps studied, with the third site showing just slightly better recidivism outcomes as compared with a control group. Many boot camp settings are placed in remote locations where the military-like boot camp environment can be played out through wilderness exercises, ropes courses, survival tests, and the like. The isolation of these settings from other social, educational, and employment opportunities further complicate the process for ensuring that youths experience an appropriate and seamless transition from the boot camp environment to the community in which they live, work, and go to school.

Higher Overall Costs

Low-level and first-time offenders who are sent to boot camps end up costing jurisdictions more money in the short run than they would otherwise save from being on standard probation due to costs associated with the program, such as housing, staffing, meals, equipment, and transportation.

While short-term boot camps are more cost effective when used as an alternative to juvenile correctional facilities, these short-term reductions in cost are not realized in

the long term, according to most studies that examine boot camp cost effectiveness. The long-term outcomes for boot camp participants have been shown to include new delinquent or criminal offenses, often more serious than the acts for which the boot camp program was prescribed. Because of this, the cost for each episode of providing boot camp to a youth might be less expensive than placing that youth in a state facility, but the successive costs of having this same youth continue to require the attention of the juvenile or criminal justice system eventually outweighs these short-term savings. If the boot camp program does not provide treatment services for mental health or substance-abuse needs, those needs will still need to be met (and paid for) after the youth exits the program. Research into collateral effects from a negative boot camp experience suggest that [p. 56 ↓] youths may require additional counseling or treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder after participating in a boot camp experience. These post-program costs, if added to the proximal cost of having a youth in the boot camp program, could be adding additional expense to what might already be an ineffective delinquency intervention.

Recidivism Rates

Although comprehensive studies have not been possible due to the lack of program fidelity at many boot camp programs, those studies that have been undertaken show that first-time and persistent offenders tend to have higher recidivism rates when they are mixed together in a boot camp environment once they are released back to the community.

Studies measuring the efficacy of boot camps continue to demonstrate little benefit, from either a recidivism or positive youth development perspective. Further, the litigation, investigation, and corrective action costs of responding to complaints over cases of excessive abuse and neglect increase the collateral costs of operating boot camps for the providers, as well as for the jurisdictions that must account for the safety and effectiveness of these court-sanctioned facilities.

In sum, juvenile boot camps are no longer the program of choice for juvenile justice agencies and courts, although they still are used in some jurisdictions and have created a cottage industry to serve parents looking for solutions to dealing with troubled teens.

Modeled after the adult boot camps used for criminal offenders and featuring military-like discipline and an emphasis on physical conditioning, boot camp environments do not produce long-term savings or increased public safety, as studies have shown that recidivism rates for boot camp participants are often higher than for youths placed in other interventions, placed on probation, or sent to residential placement or juvenile corrections. Although short-term educational performance benefits have been shown in some boot camps that emphasize educational achievement activities, these results have been sporadic across the research literature. Further, while public support has continued to be strong for the use of these camps, highly publicized cases of alleged abuse and neglect, even resulting in death, have called into question the intimidation techniques often used at boot camps to instill discipline in unruly youths. As a result, boot camps have been prohibited from use in some jurisdictions, which are instead focusing their scarce economic resources on intervention programs with a strong evidence base, rooted in research on the static and dynamic criminogenic [p. 57 ↓] characteristics that best predict future offending behavior and support the development of youth competencies into adulthood.

Patricia E.Campie National Center for Juvenile Justice

See Also:

- [At-Risk Youth](#)
- [Group Homes](#)
- [Juvenile Detention Facilities](#)
- [Juveniles in Adult Correctional Facilities](#)
- [Out-of-Home Placement](#)
- [Treatment and Rehabilitation.](#)

Further Readings

Bayer, Patrick David, Pozen. "The Effectiveness of Juvenile Correctional Facilities: Public Versus Private Management." Discussion Paper No. 863. New Haven, CT: Yale University, November 2004.

Bottcher, Jean. "Examining the Effectiveness of Boot Camps: A Randomized Experiment With a Long-Term Follow Up." *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, v.42/3 (2005)

Dilanian, Ken. "GAO Study Reveals Boot Camp Nightmare." *USA Today* (October 10, 2007)

Family Treatment Services. <http://www.purposedrivencamp.com> (Accessed February 2010).

Graham, Troy. "Family of Boy Strangled at Tennessee Center Settles Suit for \$10.5 Million." *Philadelphia Inquirer* (February 12, 2010)

Latessa, Edward J. ChristopherLowenkamp. "What Are Criminogenic Needs and Why Are They Important?" *For The Record* (Fourth Quarter, 2005)

MacKenzie, Doris David, Wilson SuzanneKider. "Effects of Correctional Boot Camps on Offending." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, v.126/578 (2001)

Parent, Dale G. *Correctional Boot Camps: Lessons From a Decade of Research*. Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice, 2003.

Second Chance. <http://www.2chance.org> (Accessed September 2010).

Styve, Gaylene, et al. "Perceived Conditions of Confinement: A National Evaluation of Juvenile Boot Camps and Traditional Facilities." *Law and Human Behavior*, v.24/3 (2000)

Trulson, C., et al. "Social Control in a School Setting: Evaluating a School-Based Boot Camp." *Crime Delinquency*, v.47 (2001)

WJHG. "Boot Camps Abolished in Florida." <http://www.wjhg.com/home/headlines/2905871.html> (Accessed September 2010).

<http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412994132.n4>

