

Boot Camp Corrections: A Public Reaction

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BOOT CAMP CORRECTIONS: A PUBLIC REACTION

Since the 1970s, the mass media, politicians, and academicians have made reference to the "get tough on crime" philosophy embraced by American society. That philosophy oriented such things as stiffening of sentences, lessening judicial discretion, emasculating parole boards, increasing the use of imprisonment (forcing the construction of more prisons), and a return to the use of capital punishment.

While the objective reality of those conditions cannot be ignored, the basis upon which they have been implemented may present more of a puzzle. One assumption is that since those changes are primarily the result of legislative action, we expect that in this representative democracy the legislators' votes reflect their constituents' opinions. On the other hand, some research over the last five years suggests a lack of complete concordance between public opinion and the change in criminal justice policy toward a solely (or even primarily) punitive stance. In other words, is American society following a "get tough" philosophy because that is what the public wants, or because that is what politicians, correctional administrators, and policy makers think the public wants? In addition, if the "get tough" policy is interpreted as requiring imprisonment and longer sentences, it is questionable whether effective use is made of unconventional methods which the public may actually favor.

This paper reports the result of research which addresses

both of those problems. On the one hand, is a concern with public attitudes regarding societal response to criminals and at the same time there is an interest in the acceptance of an alternative to imprisonment called shock incarceration or boot camp corrections. We begin with discussion of the research on public opinion about correctional policy, proceed to a description of existing boot camp programs, then present the results of a survey on reaction to shock incarceration as an option to imprisonment.

The Myth of a Non-progressive Public

Immarigeon (1986) suggests that a barrier blocking the implementation of system-wide correctional reform is the apparent tough mood of current public opinion. "Legislators and criminal justice policymakers have shaped correctional policy according to what they see, or claim to see, as the public's active interest in society's being 'tough enough' in its response to the criminal offender" (Immarigeon, 1986, p. 1). Similarly, Cullen, Clark, and Wozniak comment on the perception that "current criminal justice policies are a direct reflection of the increasing salience of lawlessness for citizens and their subsequent plea that the state punish and cage the wicked" (1985, p. 16). If it is true that criminal justice policy simply reflects public desire, we are not only secure in the knowledge that our representative democracy works, but should arguably show restraint in putting forward programs which contradict those attitudes. On the other hand, if the policy does not reflect

public desire, we may stifle innovation under the mistaken impression that it violates the public will. Recent studies suggest that the latter condition may be more true.

Riley and Rose (1980) tested the assumption that a representative form of government presents a situation where the public, at least indirectly, influences the decisions of public officials. The results of their work provide one of the first indications that public officials misinterpret public attitudes about punishment. They found that despite contrary views by correctional decision makers, the public had a positive attitude toward "progressive reform" rather than being predominantly punitive. The public, for example, was much more receptive to community based programs and to parole and probation than policy makers expected (Riley & Rose, 1980).

Four years later, Gottfredson and Taylor (1984) surveyed policy makers and the general public and found remarkable concordance of opinion between the two groups regarding the desirability of using community based options in response to prison overcrowding. The problem, however, was that policymakers perceived the public as being generally punitive and made decisions based on those misperceptions. Specifically, Gottfredson and Taylor (1984) found the general public to stress utilitarian goals (e.g., rehabilitation and deterrence) over punitive ones just as did the policymakers. However, while both the public and the policy groups held attitudes characterized as rather liberal, non-punitive, utilitarian, and reform oriented,

the policy group attributed almost the reverse to the public. The authors refer to this predicament as an example of pluralistic ignorance wherein persons underestimate the extent to which others share the beliefs and sentiments which they themselves hold (Gottfredson & Taylor, 1984, p. 196).

Cullen, et al. (1985) emphasize the complexity of public opinion in their report on a survey of Texans' attitudes about response to criminals. While the respondents expressed a desire for more prisons, they were equally in favor of simultaneous development of community corrections programs. In fact, Cullen, et al. (1985) suggest that "get tough" policies probably do reflect (or at least do not violate) public sentiments. However, decision makers seem to have missed the complexity of the public's views and failed to see an acceptance of rehabilitative and reform oriented policies as well.

Polls conducted by the University of South Carolina also found both punitive and rehabilitative attitudes held by their respondents. A primary factor in distinguishing which philosophy dominated was whether the offender was violent or nonviolent. While South Carolinians clearly wanted violent criminals behind bars, they just as decidedly favored such alternatives as community service, victim restitution, electronic surveillance, and closely-supervised probation for nonviolent offenders (College of Criminal Justice, 1986, 1987).

These studies imply that the general public is not as dogmatic about imprisonment for all criminals as we may have

thought. However, since legislators and policy makers may be unaware of the potential for public support, pluralistic ignorance works to obstruct innovation in corrections and the development of options to imprisonment. One such potential area of innovation is an alternative known in the media as boot camp corrections. Before gauging public reaction to this program, its newness requires a description of its form and structure.

Boot Camp Corrections

In 1983, Georgia began a program called "shock incarceration" wherein a judge could sentence offenders (who agreed to participate) to a military style "boot camp" regimen under the direction of the Department of Corrections. The term "shock incarceration" is accurate (the program is located at a correctional facility and program failure may result in traditional prison assignment) however, it is also easily confused with the term "shock probation" which has been around a much longer time. Similar programs in other states have provided other names like Louisiana's IMPACT (Intensive Motivational Program of Alternative Correctional Treatment), and Regimented Inmate Discipline (RID) in Mississippi. However, the media has preferred the name "boot camp corrections" and, despite its informality, we choose to use it for its descriptive value.

Typical Programs

The General Accounting Office (1988) identified seven states operating boot camp programs at the end of 1987. The oldest ones were those in Georgia, Oklahoma (both started in 1983) and

Mississippi (1985). Florida, Louisiana, New York, and South Carolina began programs in 1987. Kansas, Michigan, Missouri, New Hampshire, and North Carolina were to start similar programs in either 1988 or 1989. The programs reviewed, draw their participants primarily from impressionable, young adult felons who are not hardened criminals. For example, the New York program is limited to non-violent felony offenders age 16-24 and serving their first term in state prison (Schaefer, 1988).

The inmates are assigned to the program either by direct sentence from a judge (with inmate acceptance), or by corrections officials (with judicial approval) choosing from a list of volunteers from inmates originally sentenced to prison. The inmates spend anywhere from 90 to 180 days in the boot camp program at which time successful completion gains their placement on probation (typically at maximum supervision level) for the remainder of their sentence. Failure to complete either the program or probation may result in return to prison or to the judge for re-sentencing (General Accounting Office, 1988).

Program Structure

The typical boot camp program provides a highly regimented agenda involving strict discipline, drill and ceremony, and physical training. Most the programs reviewed by the General Accounting Office (1988) require hard physical labor (e.g., clearing land, digging ditches, draining swamps) in addition to institution maintenance and housekeeping. While marching, shining shoes, and doing pushups, the inmates are learning

discipline, self esteem, determination, punctuality, cooperation, and attention to detail. They are, in other words, learning they can control their bodies, their tongues, and their actions (Rivers, n.d.).

A story reported by Rivers (n.d.) provides an inmate's perspective on the regimen's impact:

"Yeah, yeah! The day we kept duck walking the fence. I couldn't do it. I just fell over. Then I remembered, I did it before so I must could do it again. So I duck walked some more. The guy behind me -- he fell down just before I did -- he said 'hey wait' and got up and started off again. I guess he figured if I didn't quit he wouldn't either" (Rivers, n.d.).

While discipline and physical training/labor are key to all the programs, it is important to note that most also include activities in areas like education and counseling, community service, vocational assessment, job seeking skills, health education, and drug and alcohol treatment.

Benefits of the program

Boot camp corrections has been proclaimed as filling both general correctional goals and more specific administrative aims. The correctional goals are an interesting combination of deterrence and rehabilitation/reintegration. For the former, it is assumed that the unpleasantness of the boot camp experience will make inmates want to avoid serving further time in prison (General Accounting Office, 1988; Staff, 1987). Or, as Flowers

(1986) put it, a brief period of incarceration under harsh physical conditions, strenuous manual labor and exercise within a structured environment will "shock" the younger and less serious criminally oriented offender out of a future life of crime. The rehabilitation/reintegration objective is achieved when the boot camp experience enhances the inmate's capabilities for living a law abiding life as a result of the self-control, self-esteem or educational experience gained from successful program completion (Flowers, 1986; General Accounting Office, 1988).

The programs are popular for administrative purposes since they may serve to appease the public's perceived desire to "do something about crime" (Staff, 1987; Staff, 1988), can serve to control prison crowding problems (Falcioni, 1988; Staff, 1987; Yurkanin, 1988), and may reduce the costs associated with handling the inmate (Yurkanin, 1988). The cost aspect is, however, a potentially misleading argument. Florida, for example, spends \$32.40 per day to house an inmate in prison with each inmate staying about four years. The cost to Florida for an inmate in a boot camp program increases to about \$34.00 per day, but they will only stay 90 days (Falcioni, 1988). New York estimates that a camp operating for one year with 500 inmates will cost about \$9,000 per inmate compared with a \$19,400 cost under regular prison conditions (Yurkanin, 1988). A possibly hidden cost are expenses incurred by the probation department which must provide expensive supervision at the intensive or maximum level when the prisoner finishes boot camp.

Problems of the program

The problems associated so far with boot camp corrections tend to center on such concepts as discrimination, abuse, and net widening. Because participation in boot camp programs require a physically fit person, strict medical requirements typically restrict program eligibility to those capable of a high level of physical conditioning and work (Flowers, 1986). The potential for both physical and verbal abuse is also recognized. Oklahoma official, for example, discovered they could not leave staff at the program for more than six months. After that time, they tended to over-exercise their authority (Pagel, 1986). Some have suggested that abuse is present in the form of dehumanizing effects which the strict regimen presents. But, as the Georgia ACLU chapter noted, it would be very difficult to get the courts to see as cruel and unusual something used daily by the military (Staff, 1988).

Net widening refers to the potential for a program designed as an alternative to incarceration to attract persons who would have actually received less supervision, rather than those for whom the program was designed. While boot camp may well reduce the number of persons placed in prison, this can only be done if the persons placed in the boot camp programs are ones who would have been sent to prison anyway. In other words, any net widening effect boot camps may have will offset potential lessening of the prison population. This would seem to be more likely in states where inmates are sentenced directly to the

program by a judge (who might have placed the person on probation had the program not existed) than in states where boot camp participants are chosen from among those persons already sentenced to prison. In any event, it is a potential problem which must be considered as program evaluations are conducted.

Methodology

We became interested in the topic of boot camp corrections after hearing it discussed at the 1988 Annual Congress of the American Correctional Association. Speakers at a section devoted to these programs noted the paucity of either descriptive or evaluative information on this alternative to imprisonment. Of particular interest to us, however, were comments regarding the "marketing" of the program to the public. For example, Dale Parent (1988) noted that boot camp corrections had both punitive and rehabilitative aims but the former would be emphasized when presented to the public. About a month later, one of us was serving on a policy committee charged with developing guidelines for an Intensive Supervision Probation program initiated in the local judicial district. Despite what appeared to be obvious rehabilitative features (e.g., maintain a job and positive family relations, access to community services, avoiding the stigma of incarceration, etc.) the program was presented as an option to prison rather than an alternative to probation. The emphasis was on its punitive (e.g., house detention, electronic surveillance, mandatory drug testing, etc.) rather than rehabilitative aspects. The fact these two anecdotes actually reflected a "marketing

plan" intrigued us. This encouraged a study to determine if the general public was emphatically opposed to correctional programs proposed on the basis of rehabilitative goals. Because the boot camp corrections programs included punitive features (e.g., strict discipline, physical training and labor) and less obvious rehabilitative ones (e.g., learning respect for authority, raising self-esteem), it was chosen as the specific program about which subjects would be asked.

A twelve question survey was given to 139 people in a variety of sites (e.g., hotels, offices, stores, homes, class rooms). Because boot camp corrections is still an unfamiliar term, the questionnaire began with the following paragraph briefly defining such programs.

All across our country, states are trying to find ways to reduce prison overcrowding, prison costs, and the returning of persons to prison after their release. We would like to request your assistance in gauging public attitudes toward a new program for adult offenders which may help respond to those problems. The program is called "boot camp corrections" because, instead of going to a regular prison, the inmate is sentenced to a facility which provides a highly structured environment involving strict discipline, military drills, marching, and calisthenics. The "boot camp" lasts for 3 to 6 months (instead of a typical 2 to 3 year sentence) and upon successful completion of the program the inmate is returned to the community and placed on probation for the remainder of the sentence. Persons failing to complete the "boot camp" are sent to regular prison.

Subjects were then asked if they would support the use of such a program in their state (question #1) and what type criminal should be considered for that program (question #2). The choices for the second question were: non-violent, violent, first time offender, male, female, and repeat offender. Subjects

were then told that regardless of their answer to question 2, they should respond to questions 3 and 4 as if only young, non-violent, first time, adult male offenders would be placed in the program. The intent was to encourage responses from subjects who may not be in favor of such a program but was in a position of living in a state where one was being implemented. Those characteristics reflect the type inmate in existing boot camp programs. Question 3 then asked respondents which of three reasons would MOST encourage their support for the program if their state had decided to start one. The options (of which only one could be chosen) included:

- a. The program reduces overcrowded prisons
- b. The program costs less than it would to put the same individual in prison
- c. The program helps inmates adjust to authority and become law-abiding citizens after their release

Similarly, question 4 asked respondents which of three aspects of the program would trouble them the most if their state had decided to start a boot camp facility. The options (of which only one could be chosen) included:

- a. The inmates spend only 3 to 6 months in confinement instead of the regular term of imprisonment (for example, 3 years)
- b. Persons who may have been placed on probation without any prison time may instead be put in "boot camp" and therefore receive more punishment than they would have otherwise
- c. The program is discriminatory since inmates with physical impairments cannot participate

The remaining questions requested information about the respondents sex, age, occupation, military history, military rank, and income.

An additional question asked them to mark on a scale (see Figure 1) where they felt their opinions on crime and punishment would fall. They were not simply asked for their political persuasion since it is possible for someone to consider themselves, for example, a political "liberal" yet have very "conservative" views on how criminals should be treated. Instead, we hoped to measure the respondents' "punitive persuasion" as being either liberal, moderate, or conservative. Allowing subjects to place themselves on a continuum, rather than checking one of three seemingly mutually exclusive categories, was intended to increase response level and subject comfort. Ninety-six percent (96%) of the subjects (N=134) answered this question. For coding purposes, the line (which was three inches in length) was divided into thirds. When a mark fell in the left third the subject was counted as liberal (N=30), the middle third meant moderate (N=55), and the right third indicated conservative (N=49).

Figure 1

moderate

liberal

conservative

As the data are comprised primarily of nominal level measurement, responses were gathered as frequencies and subjected to cross tabulations and chi square techniques. The non-random

sample reflects a reasonably diverse population with 50% males (N=70) and 50% females (N=69) at all educational levels (except "less than 12 years"), ages (except under 18), and income brackets. Despite the presence of subjects in each age category, the 35-44 (N=16), 45-54 (N=5), 55-64 (N=3), and 65+ (N=3) were collapsed to one category of 35 and over (N=27) making it more similar to the remaining two categories of 18-24 (N=82) and 25-34 (N=30). In addition, the few subjects with military experience (N=17) required that we drop that variable from the cross tabulations.

Results

The idea of a boot camp corrections program received broad based support among the subjects with 78% replying that they would support the use of such a program in their state. The support does not vary by sex, age, education, occupation, income level or punitive persuasion. In other words, support for boot camp corrections was found among both males and females of all ages, occupations, educational and income levels, and regardless of whether the subjects saw themselves as having liberal, moderate, or conservative opinions on crime and punishment.

[Figure 2 about here]

The majority of subjects (59%) were most likely to support boot camp corrections because of the program helping inmates adjust to authority and become law abiding citizens after their release (see Figure 2). The least support was given for boot camp corrections as a means of reducing overcrowded prisons (16%)

or as simply a cost saving effort (22%). The choosing of one of those three responses was not influenced by the subject's sex, age, occupation, income, nor punitive persuasion. However, there was a greater tendency (not significant) for liberals age 18-24 to support the program because it would "help inmates adjust to authority" (70% of the young liberals indicated that reason) than it was for moderates (58%) and conservatives (57%). Thus, while a majority of respondents were attracted to the "adjust to authority" response, this was especially true for young liberals (see Table 1).

[Table 1 about here]

The aspect of the program found most troubling to the subjects was that inmates in boot camp corrections would spend only three to six months in confinement instead of the regular term of imprisonment (see Figure 3). Seventy-one percent of the subjects were most troubled by that facet while 17% felt the program's discrimination against inmates with physical impairments was the more serious problem. Only 7% were concerned that persons placed in boot camp corrections may not have received any prison time at all if the program did not exist (i.e., net widening).

[Figure 3 about here]

The specific choice among those three was not influenced by sex, age, occupation, or income. However, one's punitive persuasion did seem to make a difference ($p < .01$) with moderates and conservatives being especially troubled by the less prison time feature (see Table 2). This was particularly true ($p < .01$)

for young moderates and conservatives (see Table 3).

[Table 2 about here]

The subjects agreed that boot camp corrections would be most appropriately used for either male or female non-violent, first-time offenders. Of the 137 subjects responding to this question, anywhere from 108 to 124 chose those characteristics as suitable for inmates in the boot camp program. Far fewer chose either violent (31 responses) or repeat (36 responses) offenders as being proper (see Figure 4).

[Table 3 about here]

[Figure 4 about here]

Conclusion

This study supports Gottfredson and Taylor's (1984) argument that public attitudes toward the criminal offender includes a utilitarian component (deterrence and rehabilitation) rather than a simple "knee-jerk" punitive one. However, like the South Carolina polls (College of Criminal Justice, 1986, 1987), those attitudes were more likely to be present when the offenders are non-violent rather than violent. As Cullen, et al. (1985) suggested, public sentiment regarding response to criminals is more complex than decision makers seem to realize.

Since boot camp corrections combines both deterrent and rehabilitative objectives at the expense of long term incapacitation, it seemed an ideal program upon which to gauge public attitude. As the survey results show, the public is willing to support alternatives to imprisonment for both

deterrent and rehabilitative reasons. This is especially so if the inmates placed in the program are neither violent nor repeat offenders. The broad base of support shown by the sample further suggests that policy makers should willingly put forward creative alternatives to imprisonment and feel free to emphasize both the rehabilitative and punitive aspects.

Some correctional programs seem to be inherently attractive to persons of all punitive persuasions. Work release, for example, appeals to conservatives favoring the payment of room and board, restitution, and other fees by the offender as s/he learns the virtues of hard work. Those with a more liberal perspective emphasize the rehabilitative aspects gained from positive community and family contacts, self-reliance, and avoidance of the prison environment. Similarly, boot camp corrections has attraction for a wide cross-section of punitive persuasions. In its attempt to provide offenders with strict discipline and rigorous physical labor (deterrence), it tries to help them learn to adjust to authority, instill order and discipline in their lives, and become law-abiding citizens (rehabilitation). While this study found the rehabilitation aspect to be particularly intriguing to the "liberal" subjects, it was also important for half of the "moderates" and some 43% of the "conservatives."

According to this study, if policy makers, legislators, and corrections officials are interested in introducing a prison alternative to the public, they need not hide behind a strictly

punitive objective. A majority of persons (especially "moderates" and "conservatives") will be concerned about inmates spending less actual time in prison. However, if the program is used for either male or female, first-time non-violent offenders, the public reaction should be favorable. In addition, an explanation regarding the deterrent and rehabilitative features of the program will likely encourage broad-based support from the general public.

The suggestion by Gottfredson and Taylor (1984) that a situation of pluralistic ignorance is at work to stifle prison alternatives seems to be both appropriate and relevant. The assumption that "get tough on crime" means "put everyone in prison" perpetuates a myth, exacerbates the problem of prison crowding, and inhibits innovation. In an effort to avoid those problems, we agree with Riley and Rose (1980) in their call to increase responsiveness to public opinion by providing decision makers with empirical data using scientific survey techniques.

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Table 1 Reasons for Supporting Boot Camp Corrections by Punitive Persuasion and Age

| REASON | AGE 18-24 | | | |
|---------------------|-------------------|---------------|------------------------|---------|
| | LIBERAL (n=20) | MOD (n=36) | CONSERVATIVE (n=21) | |
| reduce crowding | 15% | 25% | 5% | |
| less cost | 15% | 17% | 38% | |
| adjust to authority | 70% | 58% | 57% | |
| Total | 100% | 100% | 100% | p < .15 |

| REASON | AGE 25-34 | | | |
|---------------------|------------------|--------------|------------------------|---------|
| | LIBERAL (n=5) | MOD (n=7) | CONSERVATIVE (n=15) | |
| reduce crowding | 20% | 0% | 20% | |
| less cost | 20% | 29% | 13% | |
| adjust to authority | 60% | 71% | 67% | |
| Total | 100% | 100% | 100% | p < .75 |

| REASON | AGE 35 + | | | |
|---------------------|------------------|--------------|------------------------|---------|
| | LIBERAL (n=4) | MOD (n=8) | CONSERVATIVE (n=13) | |
| reduce crowding | 25% | 13% | 15% | |
| less cost | 25% | 0% | 39% | |
| adjust to authority | 50% | 88% | 46% | |
| Total | 100 | 101% | 100% | p < .35 |

Table 2 Troubling Aspects of Boot Camp Corrections by Punitive Persuasion

| REASON | LIBERAL (n=29) | MOD (n=51) | CONSERVATIVE (n=48) | |
|---------------|-------------------|---------------|------------------------|---------|
| less time | 55% | 77% | 83% | |
| net widening | 3% | 14% | 4% | |
| discriminates | 41% | 10% | 13% | |
| TOTAL | 99% | 101% | 100% | p < .01 |

Table 3 Troubling Aspects of Boot Camp Corrections by Punitive Persuasion and Age

| REASON | AGE 18-24 | | | |
|---------------|-------------------|---------------|------------------------|---------|
| | LIBERAL (n=20) | MOD (n=36) | CONSERVATIVE (n=21) | |
| less time | 55% | 81% | 91% | |
| net widening | 5% | 14% | 0% | |
| discriminates | 40% | 6% | 10% | |
| Total | 100% | 101% | 101% | p < .01 |

| REASON | AGE 25-34 | | | |
|---------------|------------------|--------------|------------------------|---------|
| | LIBERAL (n=5) | MOD (n=6) | CONSERVATIVE (n=14) | |
| less time | 40% | 67% | 86% | |
| net widening | 0% | 17% | 0% | |
| discriminates | 60% | 17% | 14% | |
| Total | 100% | 101% | 100% | p < .15 |

| REASON | AGE 35 + | | | |
|--------------|------------------|--------------|------------------------|---------|
| | LIBERAL (n=4) | MOD (n=9) | CONSERVATIVE (n=13) | |
| less time | 75% | 67% | 69% | |
| net widening | 0% | 11% | 15% | |
| dicriminates | 25% | 22% | 15% | |
| Total | 100% | 100% | 99% | p < .95 |

Figure 2 Reason for Supporting Boot Camp Corrections by Percent of Responses

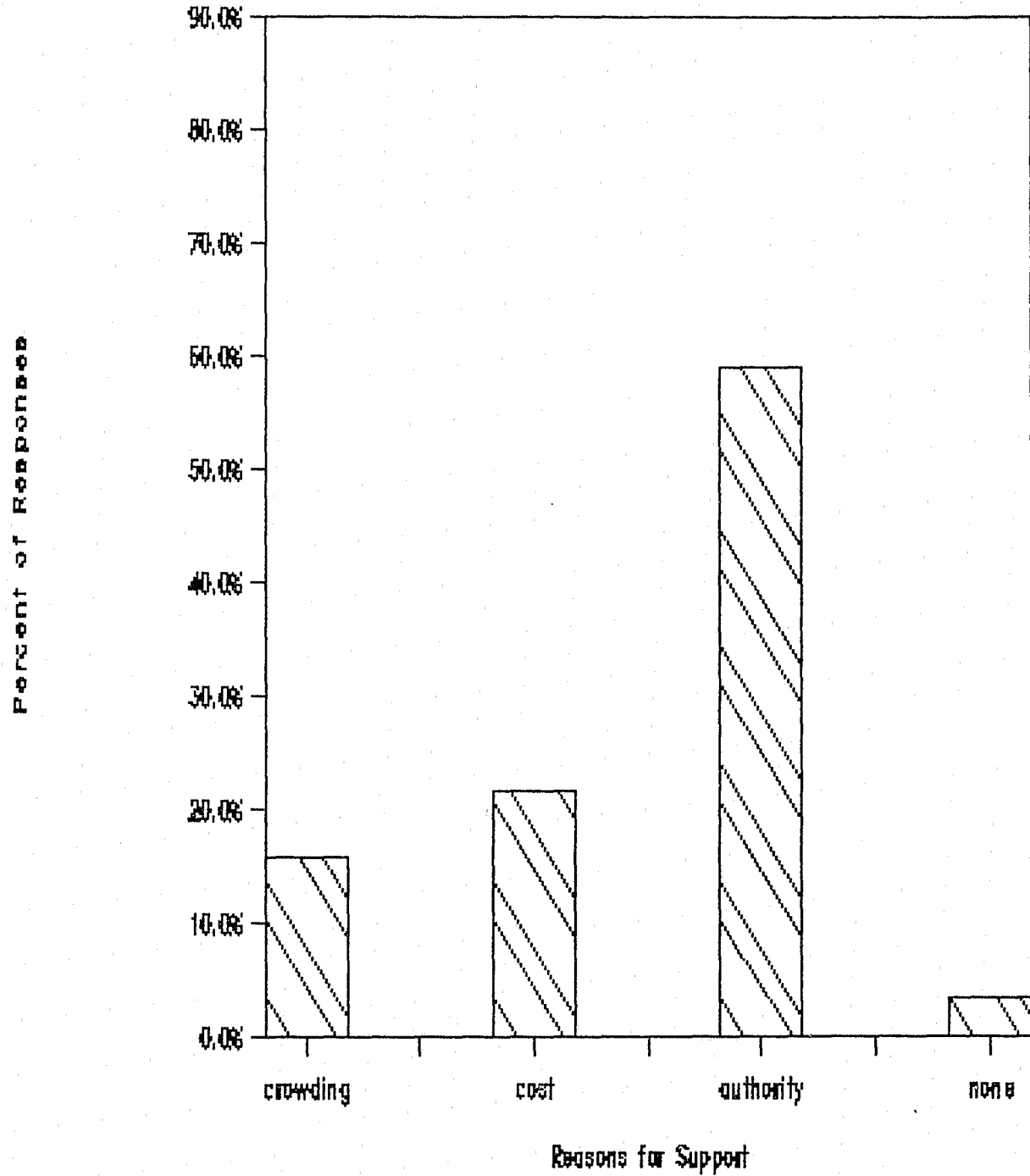


Figure 3 Troubling Aspects of Boot Camp Corrections by percent of Responses

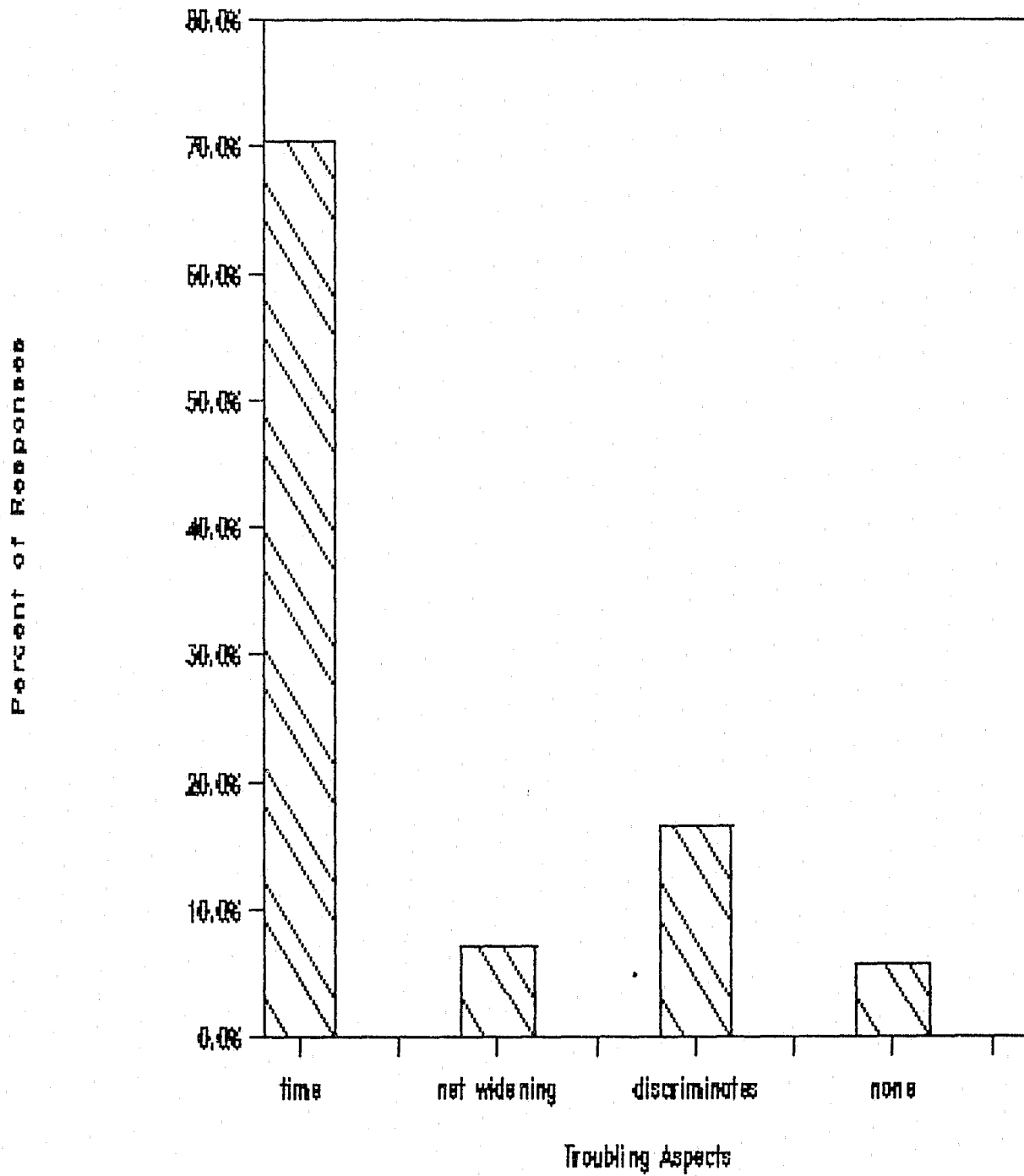


Figure 4 Types of Offenders Considered Appropriate for Boot Camp Corrections by Percent of Responses

