

Improving Behaviors with a Swift, Certain, Fair Model

Providing consistent and transparent discipline for misbehaviors

Agency: Pennsylvania Department of Corrections State Correctional Institution (SCI) Benner Township

Trial Duration: 11/14/16–02/14/17

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Context

The criminal justice system has dedicated efforts to develop appropriate and workable discipline in prison settings. Continuing misbehaviors by residents are taxing the current disciplinary process and use of segregation is limited.

Key Finding

The SCF group had more total misconducts than the control group; however, the control group had more lower-level misconducts than the SCF group.

*BetaGov trains agency personnel to become research-savvy “Pracademics” who lead trials.

Background

The swift, certain, fair (SCF) model of discipline provides an outline of targeted misbehaviors and their consequences, and requires that discipline for infractions is implemented with immediacy and consistency. The SCF approach, with sanctions that are relatively mild, has improved outcomes in probation settings, but was tested at SCI-Benner Township in a prison setting.

Trial Design

General-population units were randomly assigned to the intervention condition (SCF) or the control condition (business-as-usual). Participants in the SCF condition were given a description of the model, targeted misbehaviors, and sanctions given for infractions. They could opt out of the model and receive standard disciplinary action for misbehaviors. Discipline for those in the control group was maintained as usual. The two groups were not differentiated in any way except for the SCF model.

Results

The table at right shows characteristics of the groups. More residents in the SCF condition had the highest custody level (higher custody level = expectation of

greater behavioral problems), although mental health status and risk scores were similar between the two groups. The SCF group had 3.8% of the entire facility’s misconducts, compared with 1.9% for the control group. The SCF group had 0.5% of the entire facility’s lower-level misconducts, compared with 1.4% for the control group. The method of data collection overlooked misbehaviors in the control group when only a warning was given, which may have undercounted control-group misconducts. There were no grievances, staff or inmate assaults, or inmate fights reported during the trial for either group.

Trial Group Characteristics

	SCF (n=150)	Control (n=153)
Average Age	35.1	37.8
Ethnicity/Race: Black	54.7%	42.5%
White	25.3%	52.9%
Hispanic	16.7%	4.6%
Other	3.3%	0.0%
Custody Level: 2	46.7%	45.8%
3	23.3%	35.9%
4	29.3%	18.3%

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