

A REVIEW OF RESEARCH FOR PRACTITIONERS

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The State of ISP: Research and Policy Implications

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INTENSIVE SUPERVISION programs (ISP) are among the most popular forms of alternative sanctions in the United States. Every state has some type of ISP operating within its boundaries. A review of literature since the 1993 release of the RAND results,¹ however, reveals a dearth of empirical assessments of ISP, leaving practitioners and policy makers floundering as to whether or not they should continue investing in these staff- and time-intensive programs, and, if so, how they should design these programs to achieve the desired correctional objectives.

The purpose of this column is to consolidate what is known about the effectiveness of ISPs in a manner that sheds light on tough questions, guides program modifications, and stimulates future research. We will begin with a brief description of three models of ISP that have emerged over an equal number of decades. Next, we will report on the major evaluative research findings including preliminary results from an evaluation of the newest model of ISP—the American Probation and Parole Association's prototypical model, which advocates a focus on intensive services and a balanced approach to supervision.² Finally, we will explore the policy implications of ISP research.

ISP Models

Intensive supervision dates back to the early 1960s when the California Special Intensive Parole Unit and the San Francisco Project were implemented to experi-

ment with smaller caseloads of offenders (Neithercutt & Gottfredson, 1975; Carter & Wilkins, 1976; Banks, Porter, Rardin, Sider, & Unger, 1977). More contemporary ISPs have retained small caseloads in their design, but they differ in most other ways. Three basic models of ISP are described below. Although this brief portrayal of ISPs cannot begin to account for all the variants of ISP scattered across the nation, it reflects the prominent program design in the era referenced.

Early ISPs

The first wave of ISPs in the 1960s and early 1970s was designed primarily as a probation management tool to examine the effectiveness of various caseload sizes (Petersilia & Turner, 1990). The experimentation with smaller caseloads was based on the assumption that smaller caseloads would allow for increased contact and lead to greater success (Banks et al., 1977). Probation and parole programs during this era operated under the "rehabilitative ideal," which focused on individual offenders and sought to reduce recidivism through interventions aimed at changing offenders' attitudes and behaviors (Sechrest, White, & Brown, 1979). Rehabilitative interventions were the primary focus of these programs; punishment and community protection were seen as secondary goals. These early ISPs met their demise when research revealed that offenders in ISP had similar or marginally lower arrest rates and more technical violations than offenders under regular supervision (Neithercutt & Gottfredson, 1975; Carter & Wilkins, 1976; Banks et al., 1977).

The Georgia Model

The Georgia Department of Corrections reintroduced the concept of ISP in 1982 in response to prison crowding and a shrinking budget. Most states followed suit throughout the 1980s, developing ISPs as alternative sanctions for offenders who would have otherwise gone to prison. Program designs reflected the leading penal principles of the time—deterrence and incapacitation

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(Clear & Hardyman, 1990). The emphasis was on controlling the offender in the community through the use of punishment and surveillance-oriented measures including frequent contact, drug testing, curfews, electronic monitoring, and stringent responses to technical violations. Treatment components and other service-oriented components generally received a lower priority. Research results for this vastly different approach to ISP were no more favorable than those of early ISPs. Findings suggested that these ISPs failed to alleviate prison crowding and that there were no significant differences between recidivism rates of ISP offenders and offenders within comparison groups (Petersilia & Turner, 1992; United States General Accounting Office, 1993). Despite these negative findings, the surveillance-oriented ISP continues to be the prominent model in the United States.

APPA's Prototypical ISP

Several evaluations have revealed evidence of a relationship between greater participation in treatment and employment programs and lower recidivism rates (Petersilia & Turner, 1992; Pearson, 1987; Byrne & Kelly, 1989). Building on these research findings and a growing body of literature on the principles of effective intervention (Gendreau & Andrews, 1990; Andrews, Zinger, Hoge, Bonta, Gendreau, & Cullen, 1990),³ the American Probation and Parole Association (APPA) developed a prototypical model of intensive supervision. This model shifted the emphasis of ISPs from exclusive incapacitative and punitive measures to a more integrated approach of interventions and risk-control strategies. Although this model advocates a focus on treatment and services, it recognizes the need for a full range of probation and parole activities including intervention, surveillance, and enforcement (Fulton, Gendreau, & Papparozi, 1996). Intervention includes the entire gamut of treatment and services provided to offenders. Surveillance involves those activities related to monitoring offender activity as well as the social environment of the offender. The enforcement component speaks to the need to hold offenders strictly accountable for their actions. This model was based on the belief that a balanced approach to supervision would lead to the achievement of short-term in-program crime control while also achieving the long-term goals of behavioral change. This model of ISP has been implemented in approximately 10 sites across the nation. Preliminary results from a recent evaluation of this prototypical model in a Midwestern and Northeastern site once again reveal null results—no significant differences in recidivism rates were found between offenders in ISP and those assigned to regular supervision (Stichman, Fulton, Latessa, & Travis, forthcoming).

Despite less than favorable research results, ISP continues to garner a high level of support and commitment

from a broad constituency. Judges enjoy the sentencing option it provides; administrators appreciate the many resources ISPs have generated for probation and parole; and line staff believe that ISP represents the way probation and parole should have been conducted all along. Given this commitment, it becomes imperative for community corrections professionals to examine further the available research in an attempt to discover how these null results might be transformed into favorable outcomes. The next section of this column provides a detailed discussion of ISP research results in an attempt to shed light on what is known about the effectiveness of ISP and its various designs and components.

Major Evaluative Research Findings

Commonly stated goals of today's ISPs are: increased public safety; rehabilitation of the offender; the provision of an intermediate punishment; a reduction in prison crowding; and a reduction in costs (Fulton, Gendreau, & Papparozi, 1996). How well they are achieving these goals is addressed below through a discussion of findings from program evaluations spanning the three primary ISP models.

Are ISPs Implemented as Designed?

Before program effect can be examined, it must be determined whether or not the program was implemented as designed. A key finding of early ISP experiments was that intensive supervision was difficult to achieve because of interference from other duties and because officers were unsure of what to do with the extra time created by reduced caseloads (Banks et al., 1977; Neithercutt & Gottfredson, 1975; Clear & Hardyman, 1990). In later evaluations, the method for measuring program intensity determines how successfully current programs are achieving the desired level of supervision. For the most part, process evaluations have revealed that today's ISPs achieve intensive levels of supervision when measured by surveillance-oriented activities such as the number and type of supervision contacts and the number of drug tests conducted (Erwin, 1987; Pearson, 1987; Baird & Wagner, 1990; Latessa, 1991; Petersilia & Turner, 1992; Stichman et al., forthcoming). Most of these same ISPs, however, do not reveal a significant increase in the level of services and interventions provided to ISP offenders. RAND found that less than 50 percent of the ISP offenders participated in some counseling during the followup period and that slightly more than 50 percent of the ISP offenders were employed (Petersilia & Turner, 1993). Even within APPA's prototypical model of ISP (a model that claims to place an equal emphasis on treatment and services), the level of treatment and services delivered in ISP was found to be significantly more intensive than regular supervision in only one of the evaluation sites (Stichman et al., forthcoming). Based on these findings, an obvious ques-

tion becomes "do intensive levels of supervision or services make a difference in case outcomes?"

How Effective Are Specific Components of ISP?

Most evaluations suggest that increased contact alone does not make a difference in terms of overall recidivism rates. Even when intensive levels of supervision were achieved in the early rehabilitation-oriented ISPs, closer contact did not lead to improved recidivism rates for ISP offenders (Banks et al., 1977; Neithercutt & Gottfredson, 1975). Results are similar when examining the surveillance-oriented Georgia model. In its 14-site randomized ISP experiment RAND found that the level of face-to-face contact with offenders ranged from 2.7 contacts per month in Contra Costa County, California, to 22.8 contacts per month in Waycross, Georgia. A comparison of recidivism rates both within and across sites reveals no relationship between the level of contact and recidivism: no differences were found in the recidivism rates of ISP and comparison group offenders within sites despite significant differences in the level of contact; and the recidivism rates in Seattle, Washington, and Macon, Georgia, were both about 46 percent with the Seattle program conducting 3.4 contacts per month and the Macon program conducting 16.1 contacts per month (Petersilia & Turner, 1993).

Preliminary evaluation results from the study of APPA's prototypical ISP once again reveal a null relationship between the overall level of contact with offenders (as measured by the number of collateral contacts, field visits, and office contacts) and case outcomes. An examination of office contacts alone, however, reveals a positive relationship between the number of office contacts and success in ISP in the Midwestern jurisdiction (Stichman et al., forthcoming). This finding may stem from the nature of the contact more so than the quantity of contact. According to program design, ISP officers in this prototypical model are to serve as counselors and advocates for the offender. Contact should not only be "frequent," it should also be "substantive," aimed at assistance and problem resolution (Fulton, Stone, & Gendreau, 1994).

Byrne and Kelly's (1989) evaluation of the Massachusetts Intensive Probation Supervision program (IPS) raises similar issues. They found that the program was not implemented as designed, with only 27.2 percent of the IPS offenders receiving the high degree of supervision required by the program model. Further examination of the degree of program implementation revealed a positive correlation between the degree of implementation (as measured by supervision quantity, supervision style, enforcement of conditions, and system response to noncompliance) and success rates. This relationship also was found in the control group. Unfortunately, without better measures of the nature of supervision contacts in both the Massachusetts ISP and APPA's Midwestern

evaluation site, it is difficult to determine exactly which programmatic aspect(s) are responsible for these improved outcomes. It is fairly safe to conclude, however, that an increase in the level of contact alone is not likely to lead to a reduction in recidivism.

What about more intensive treatment and services? Several evaluations revealed a relationship between participation in treatment and services and reduced recidivism rates. Johnson and Hunter's (1992) evaluation of Colorado's Specialized Drug Offender Program (SDOP) compared the recidivism rates of offenders randomly assigned to three types of offender treatment within two county probation departments: regular probation; SDOP (i.e., a form of ISP for drug-involved offenders that emphasizes increased contacts, drug screening, and primary treatment referrals); and SDOP with the addition of a cognitive component. The researchers found that both SDOP treatments resulted in lower revocation rates than regular probation, with offenders in the cognitive group having the lowest revocation rates. This finding supports several meta-analyses of correction interventions, which found that programs that incorporate cognitive skills training and cognitive restructuring are associated with lower rates of recidivism (Andrews, Zinger, Hoge, Bonta, Gendreau, & Cullen, 1990; Gendreau & Andrews, 1990; Gendreau & Ross, 1987).

A program evaluation of an electronic monitoring program combined with intensive drug and alcohol treatment in Clackamas County, Oregon, revealed similar results. Although there were no overall differences in recidivism rates between the experimental group and offenders placed on electronic monitoring without the treatment component, there were significantly lower recidivism rates for those offenders who successfully completed the intensive drug and alcohol treatment program (Jolin & Stipak, 1992). This finding supports previous research suggesting a positive correlation between treatment retention and success rates (Anglin & Hser, 1990).

Although participation in treatment and services was generally low across the RAND sites, there was indication of a relationship between such participation and recidivism reduction. To further explore this relationship, supplementary analyses were conducted on the California and Texas sites. Each offender was given a summary score ranging from zero to four, with one point assigned for participation in each of the following: any employment during the followup year; any counseling sessions attended; any community service performed; and any restitution paid. Data analyses revealed "that higher levels of program participation were associated with 10-20 percent reduction in recidivism" (Petersilia & Turner, 1993, p. 8).

The state of New Jersey has experienced some success with ISP that also appears to be related to a

stronger emphasis on treatment and services. In an evaluation of the program operated by the New Jersey Administrative Office of the Courts, 12 percent of the offenders in ISP were convicted of a new crime at the end of 2 years, compared to 23 percent of the offenders in a matched group (Pearson, 1987). This program places an emphasis on meeting offenders' treatment needs and working with community members to enhance the offenders' chances for successful reintegration. Counseling is described as the cornerstone of the program. An evaluation of the ISP operated by the New Jersey Department of Corrections also found lower rates of recidivism rates for ISP offenders (Paparozzi, n.d.). The recidivism rates of ISP offenders were 20 percent lower than the rates of subjects in a matched comparison group. Of significance is the fact that ISP subjects received twice as many treatment referral services as the comparison group.

Unfortunately, an issue that has been largely ignored in ISP research is program quality. Does it matter how much contact or services ISP offenders are getting if what they are getting in the first place is not promoting long-term behavioral change? In the recent evaluation of APPA's model ISP, the Correctional Program Assessment Inventory (Gendreau & Andrews, 1994) was conducted on the ISP programs and selected service providers at each site. This inventory is designed to measure the extent to which programs meet certain principles of correctional intervention that have been shown to be associated with reductions in recidivism. The CPAI findings revealed a higher quality of services for ISP offenders in the Midwestern site, which reported lower levels of treatment and services than the Northeastern site. This provided an opportunity to explore whether it is the quantity or quality of services that makes a difference. Preliminary data analysis suggests that the Midwestern site is achieving a higher rate of success than the Northeastern site even after controlling for offender demographics, criminal history scores, and other key variables. This confirms what has been found in the rehabilitation literature—programs that meet certain principles of effective intervention are associated with lower rates of recidivism. Thus, it may be that *what* is done with ISP offenders is more important than *how much* is done with them.

Is ISP More Successful With One Type of Offender or Another?

According to the "risk principle," intensive services should be targeted to high-risk and high-need offenders (Andrews & Bonta, 1994). Most programs state that they are designed for high-risk offenders; yet the stringent eligibility criteria often inadvertently relegates these programs to low-risk offenders. In many of the sites involved in RAND's randomized ISP experimentation, less than two-thirds of the ISP population scored

"intensive risk" (Petersilia, Turner, & Deschenes, 1992). Evaluations of the early ISPs found that ISP produces an "interaction effect" with more intense controls actually being harmful to lower-risk offenders who tended to be targeted for ISP (Banks et al., 1977; Neithercutt & Gottfredson, 1975; Clear & Hardyman, 1990). An evaluation of the ISP operated by the Georgia Department of Corrections found similar results—low-risk offenders assigned to ISP had significantly higher rates of recidivism than low-risk offenders sentenced to regular probation, but the rates of recidivism for high-risk offenders were similar across both programs (Erwin & Bennett, 1987). By mistakenly targeting low-risk/need offenders, ISPs are unnecessarily increasing program failures and wasting valuable ISP resources. Lower-risk offenders are generally able to begin to lead a prosocial lifestyle with minimal support from a probation or parole officer.

Aside from the above-mentioned research pertaining to high-risk offenders, there is limited research to suggest which type of offender is most successful in ISP. Erwin and Bennett (1987) found that offenders convicted of drug- and alcohol-related offenses responded most positively to Georgia's ISP as evidenced by the 90 percent success rate. A study of ISP in Harris County, Texas, found that no particular offense type was associated with success, but that offenders with prior misdemeanor convictions and offenders who were unemployed at the time of placement were more likely to commit both technical violations and new crimes (Jones, 1995). ISP offenders in Ohio were more likely to complete supervision if they were white, employed at the time of arrest, reported no history of substance abuse, and were low risk (Latessa et al., 1997). Colorado's Specialized Drug Offender Program with the cognitive component appeared to be more effective with offenders who had an extreme drug or alcohol problem and offenders who were at least 30 years old (Johnson & Hunter, 1992). Clearly, aside from high-risk/high-need offenders, it is impossible to conclude which type of offender will respond most favorably to ISP. Even those with the most cynical attitudes toward correctional treatment will admit that some programs are effective with some types of offenders (Gendreau, Cullen, & Bonta, 1994). Therefore, the answer to this research question will depend on the nature of the program and the specific offender needs the program is designed to address.

Are ISPs Effective in Treating the Needs of Offenders?

Several evaluations have examined the extent to which ISPs contribute to improvements in substance abuse, employment, and other key problem areas. An evaluation of an Indiana ISP found that the ISP group had more stable adjustments to community life after completing their sentences than did the comparison group of offenders released from prison (Van Ness,

1992). Indicators of social adjustment were weekly income, an index of occupational prestige, and an Adjustment Criteria Index consisting of 10 indicators of successful living in the community (Van Ness, 1992).

Johnson and Hunter (1992) measured the extent to which regular probation and the two variations of Colorado's Specialized Drug Offender Program (SDOP; one with and one without a cognitive component) addressed 18 dimensions of offender need including antisocial attitudes and beliefs, problem-solving abilities, self-control, drug use, and susceptibility to peer and other external influences. For 16 of the 18 dimensions, the success rates of the two SDOP treatments surpass those of regular probation. Success on the dimensions most associated with some form of drug use are far higher for both SDOP treatments than for regular probation. Cognitive treatment appeared most effective in reducing offenders' susceptibility to external influence.

In an evaluation of Massachusetts's ISP, Byrne and Kelly (1989) measured offender change by comparing the probation officer's initial assessment in the areas of substance abuse, employment, and marital/family relationships with an assessment at the end of a 1-year followup period. Those offenders who showed initial improvement in employment and substance abuse had lower rates of recidivism. The evaluators concluded that ISP had an indirect impact on recidivism through its direct impact on offender change, offering "strong support for crime control through treatment."

The evaluation of APPA's model ISP in the Northeastern jurisdiction revealed that offenders in ISP made significantly more overall progress in case objectives than offenders under regular supervision (Stichman et al., forthcoming). The level of services provided to ISP offenders in this jurisdiction was significantly higher than the level of services provided to offenders under regular supervision. This was not the case in the Midwestern site, where no significant differences in overall progress were found, suggesting that the mere availability of additional resources may enhance the achievement of case objectives. Interviews with administrators and line staff at each of the evaluation sites support this contention—the increased ability for ISP staff to develop resources for their clients was listed as a key program strength.

How Successful is ISP at Diverting Offenders From Prison?

Prison crowding served as the impetus for developing ISPs across the nation. Most program evaluations, therefore, address how successfully ISPs are at diversion. The results are nebulous at best. It is nearly impossible to distinguish changes resulting from criminal statutes and sentencing practices, those resulting from increases in the prison-prone age group, and changes that are a result of ISP's impact on prison crowding.

Erwin's (1987) evaluation of the Georgia ISP indicated that, when matched on certain characteristics, the ISP offenders more closely resembled the prison population than the probation population. Furthermore, from the time of program implementation to the conclusion of the evaluation, the prison population decreased by 10–20 percent while the probation population increased by 10–20 percent. Erwin concludes that these data provide evidence of the diversionary impact of Georgia's ISP.

The New Jersey Administrative Office of the Courts developed a "back-end program" to ensure true diversion from prison. Offenders could apply for ISP 30 to 60 days after the execution of their custodial term. Eligible offenders, identified through a stringent selection process, were released from prison for two 90-day trial periods. If they were successful during these trial periods, their original sentence was suspended, and the offenders were officially placed in ISP. To measure the diversionary effect of the program, Pearson (1987) compared ISP cases to a matched sample of approximately 100 felons sentenced to prison for ISP-eligible crimes before the program was instituted. Data reveal that the ISP group served an average of 109 days in prison per person and that the comparison group served an average of 308 days per person. Pearson (1987) concluded that ISP saved about 200 prison days per participant or about 62,000 offender-days of prison time per year based on the 311 offenders entering ISP.

A longitudinal examination of rates of incarceration in Florida revealed an increase in incarceration rates for most offense categories despite the availability of the Florida Community Control Program (FCCP), which was implemented in 1983 as a prison diversion program (Wagner & Baird, 1993). Further examination of these rates suggested that the sentencing guidelines called for a greater use of prison and, therefore, adversely affected the diversionary potential of FCCP. In an attempt to determine the number of true diversions to FCCP, program evaluators compared the criminal history profiles of offenders sentenced to FCCP with those sentenced to prison and non-prison sanctions. They then examined the predicted sentences of FCCP offenders based on sentencing policies and known offender characteristics. This analysis suggested that 52.3 percent would have been sentenced to prison had FCCP not been available. The program evaluators consider this "an unqualified success."

An evaluation of Ohio ISP programs implemented under the 1981 Community Corrections Act (CCA) found a limited diversionary effect (Latessa, Travis, & Holsinger, 1997). ISPs were implemented in 25 counties in an effort to reduce the extent to which offenders convicted of Felony 3 and 4 offenses were sentenced to prison. The researchers found that the programs did appear to reduce the number and rate of commitments

to prison for Felony 4 offenses but not for Felony 3 offenses. Furthermore, it appeared that this diversionary effect was time-bound; that is, the initial impact of the CCA programs on a county's commitment rate dissipated with time. The researchers note that this time-bound effect could be the result of the limited capacity of the CCA programs—once the programs reached their capacity, eligible offenders were turned away and once again sentenced to prison.

Stringent responses to technical violations hinder an ISP's ability to divert offenders from prison. This problem is best portrayed by the evaluation of the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles' (TBPP) ISP. Based on statistics showing that 20 percent of all incoming inmates to the Texas Department of Corrections are revoked parolees, the TBPP targeted high-risk parolees as a means to reduce prison commitments. In the end, ISP increased prison commitments for this group (Turner & Petersilia, 1992). Thirty percent of all randomly assigned ISP participants were in prison as compared to 18 percent of those assigned to routine parole. Offenders in both groups were equally likely to be incarcerated for a new arrest, but ISP offenders who committed technical violations were twice as likely to be incarcerated as were their counterparts on regular supervision.

Another obstacle to diverting offenders from prison lies in the stringent selection criteria. Most ISPs automatically exclude violent offenders. Many programs require the offender's agreement to participate. RAND's evaluation of Marion County, Oregon's ISP, which was designed as a prison diversion program, depicts the manner in which such criteria impede the ability to divert offenders from prison (Petersilia & Turner, 1993). By the time offenders went through several levels of review and consented to program participation, only 28 offenders were diverted during the 1-year evaluation period.

Tonry (1990) states that because of net widening and high revocation rates, a front-door ISP may inadvertently increase the prison population. Many offenders sentenced directly to ISP may have otherwise been placed on regular probation. Therefore, for those individuals, not only is there an increased likelihood of detecting violations, but they are more likely to be incarcerated for those violations. Tonry further suggests that even back-door programs (e.g., the ISP operated by the New Jersey Administrative Office of the Courts) have difficulty achieving prison diversion because of judges sentencing borderline cases (who would have otherwise received probation) to prison and inviting an application for ISP.

Does ISP Reduce System Costs?

Directly related to diversion is the goal of saving money. ISP evaluations yield mixed results in this area. Cost analyses in many of the ISP evaluations simply

compare the per diem costs of prison with the per diem costs of ISP and argue that a savings was realized for each offender diverted from prison for any length of time (Erwin, 1987; Pearson, 1987). These cost models fail to take into account net widening and reprocessing as the result of technical violations and new arrests. Furthermore, no real cost savings would be realized until a prison or at least the wing of a prison could actually close its doors or until diversion prevented the building of another prison.

Baird and Wagner's (1990) cost analysis of FCCP was more comprehensive than most as it considers the costs associated with net widening. It reveals a \$274,600 savings per 100 offenders. The evaluation of Ohio ISPs (Latessa et al., 1997) also accounts for costs associated with net widening and suggests the programs resulted in a cost savings of \$46 million. Latessa et al. (1997) also note that the ISP programs generate revenue for the counties and victims through offender payment of fines, court costs, and restitution with the average amount paid per offender being \$297.39. RAND's analysis indicates that ISPs are more expensive than originally thought (Petersilia & Turner, 1993). ISP costs were about 75 percent of the costs of sending offenders to prison and about twice the cost of regular supervision.

Does ISP Provide an Intermediate Punishment?

Proponents of intermediate punishments, as ISP is often regarded, argue that such programs are needed to achieve the just deserts objective of making the punishment fit the crime (Tonry & Will, 1988). Conceptually, ISPs offer an intermediate form of punishment in that they curtail the freedom of offenders through such features as a high level of face-to-face contacts, drug testing, curfew, and electronic monitoring (Petersilia, Peterson, & Turner, 1992). Serving as an intermediate sanction was a primary goal of the ISP developed by the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles. Program evaluators suggest that the program did achieve this goal as evidenced by closer monitoring of ISP offenders and the expeditious and stringent handling of infractions (Turner & Petersilia, 1992). Likewise, Ohio's ISP programs served as an intermediate sanction as evidenced by a higher revocation and incarceration rate for ISP offenders who did not meet the conditions of community supervision than for offenders who violated regular supervision (Latessa et al., 1997).

Whether or not an ISP achieves the goal of providing an intermediate punishment, however, is largely determined by offenders' perceptions of ISP. A study of Texas inmates discovered that offenders do see ISP as punitive. Inmates judged 5 years of ISP as more punitive than 1 year in prison but not as harsh as 3 years in prison (Petersilia & Deschenes, 1994). Given that administrators, researchers, and offenders agree that ISP provides an intermediate punishment, the next ques-

tion then is "does the provision of an intermediate punishment achieve public safety?"

What Effect Does ISP Have on Public Safety?

The ultimate test for any correctional program is "how well does it protect the public from the offenders under its supervision?" This area of ISP research creates the most debate. Researchers, policy makers, and practitioners all have differing opinions about the indicators of public safety. Based on his evaluation of Wisconsin's High Risk Offender Program (HRO) Wagner (1989) argued that ISP does reduce criminal activity among its offender population because of the increased ability to detect and respond to violations. He found that although offenders in HRO had higher rates of supervisory failure than a control group of offenders under traditional parole supervision, the failures in the HRO groups were primarily because of technical violations, whereas the control group's failures predominantly resulted from new criminal convictions. Wagner concludes from these findings that HRO "suppressed criminal behavior by pre-empting it with technical violations" (p. 26) and thus increased public safety by reducing criminal activity among a high-risk group of offenders.

Others would argue that reduced recidivism is the only true measure of public protection—a criteria for which most studies have not yielded promising results. Many ISP evaluations have revealed an increase in technical violations for ISP offenders as compared to offenders placed in other sentencing options, but no significant differences in the new offense rate (Erwin, 1987; Wagner & Baird, 1993; Petersilia, Peterson, & Turner, 1992). The average recidivism rate across 12 sites studied by RAND, as measured by new arrests, was 37 percent as compared to 33 percent for the control groups. Intermediate sanction proponents use such evidence to say that community protection has at least not been compromised by ISPs (Tonry & Will, 1988).

A study in Indiana that compares the new conviction rates of ISP clients and offenders released from prison reports more promising results (Van Ness, 1992). Offenders from both groups who had completed their sentences at least 6 months before the evaluation were matched on key characteristics including gender, felony type, level of felony, age, and race. Arrest records revealed that the prison group was significantly more likely to have a new conviction for both property and person crimes.

One study suggests, however, that such behavioral change among ISP offenders is not long lasting. An evaluation of Arizona's ISP found that recidivism rates for offenders in ISP were equal to, or slightly lower than, those sentenced to standard probation (GAO, 1993). The evaluators considered this to be a favorable result because of the greater risks presented by the ISP offenders. When offenders completed ISP, however, and

moved to standard probation, they were arrested with increasing frequency. The GAO report concludes that Arizona's ISP was relatively effective in controlling crime during the period when offenders were under the direct supervision of the program, but the effect is not a lasting one.

Therefore, what ISPs appear to provide is in-program crime control through the blanket conditions placed on offenders and stringent responses to technical violations. In practice, we will never truly know whether or not those offenders incarcerated for technical violations would have committed criminal offenses. In fact, initial evidence questions the existence of a correlation between technical noncompliance with conditions of supervision and criminal behavior (Petersilia & Turner, 1990; Greene, 1988). More research is needed on this issue to determine the true extent to which ISPs protect the public.

Research Limitations

Limitations in correctional research make it difficult to draw firm conclusions about ISP practices. A 1990 report from the United States General Accounting Office (GAO) outlines five major problems with research on intermediate sanctions. First, to demonstrate program effect, it is necessary to ensure that the observed outcomes were unlikely to have occurred by chance alone. This requires either a careful matching design or random assignment to ISP or a control group, both of which are difficult to achieve. Second, the validity of recidivism as the primary outcome measure is an important issue when examining these evaluation results. Because recidivism represents only officially recorded crimes, it may underestimate the true incidence of criminal behavior. Additionally, because of the closer contact ISP requires between officers and offenders, the likelihood of criminal behavior being detected is increased. This leads both researchers and policy makers to question whether changes in recidivism rates are truly the result of changes in offender behavior or merely reflections of the improved ability to detect new criminal behavior (Nidorf, 1991; Petersilia & Turner, 1993). Third, cross program generalizations limit researchers' ability to draw overall conclusions. Although each of the sites involved in the randomized ISP experiment agreed to develop programs based on the Georgia model, in essence RAND conducted 11 separate evaluations because of the impact of jurisdictional variations and program adaptations (Petersilia & Turner, 1993). Fourth, the followup periods of most ISP evaluations have been restricted to 12 to 18 months. These short followup periods make it impossible to determine the persistence of program effects. Fifth, there is no clear definition of success. This is best illustrated by the fact that some practitioners and researchers see high rates of return to prison for technical violations as a success be-

cause they are pre-empting criminal behavior and therefore protecting the public (Nidorf, 1991; Wagner, 1989), while others see these rates as a clear indication of program failure.

Summary of Findings

Although there are inherent problems in the research, the importance of these evaluations to probation and parole practices cannot be ignored. A knowledge base now has been established from which probation and parole agencies can enhance their programs and begin achieving their stated goals. In summary, the significant findings from ISP evaluations include:

- ISPs have failed to alleviate prison crowding;
- Most ISP studies have found no significant differences between recidivism rates of ISP offenders and offenders within comparison groups;
- There appears to be a relationship between greater participation in treatment and employment programs and lower recidivism rates;
- ISPs appear to be more effective than regular supervision or prison in meeting offender needs;
- ISPs that reflect certain principles of effective intervention are associated with lower rates of recidivism;
- ISP does provide an intermediate punishment; and
- Although ISPs are less expensive than prison, they are more expensive than originally thought.

Policy Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

Given that ISPs have not, for the most part, achieved their stated goals, the obvious question becomes "should we continue to include ISP as a key component within community corrections?" If the best we can do is "not compromise public safety" at twice the cost of regular supervision, policy makers should certainly question the efficacy of current ISP practices. The blanket conditions placed on ISP offenders and the stringent response to technical violations compound prison crowding and increase costs (Parent, Wentworth, Burke, & Ney, 1992), therefore subverting the commonly stated goals that are often the impetus of ISPs. This cyclical quandary and the ever-increasing prison population would certainly suggest that diversionary purposes alone cannot justify the continuation of ISPs. There are, however, four very pragmatic reasons for continuing the operation of ISPs. These reasons will be discussed below followed by recommendations for research-based enhancements to ISP and suggestions for future research.

First, probation and parole agencies need a method for handling high-risk and high-need offenders. An

analysis of current probation and parole populations indicates the presence of these individuals *whether or not* they are diverted from prison. Based on their prior criminal records and service needs, over 40 percent of the offenders placed on probation in 1986 were judged as being at a high risk of recidivating (Petersilia, 1996). The additional staff and resources available to ISP provide probation and parole agencies with the opportunity to develop ISPs that incorporate the program components and dosages necessary for achieving stated goals. Caseloads exceeding 100 restrict traditional supervision programs in most jurisdictions from providing the level of services or surveillance needed to protect the public from this population. Second, ISPs provide a much needed sentencing option for the courts. As stated previously, the "risk principle" suggests that offenders should be matched to programs that provide a level of intensity commensurate to their level of risk (Andrews & Bonta, 1994). The extremes of the continuum, probation and prison, do not account for all possible offender groups. Therefore, intermediate options are needed, not necessarily for "just deserts," but as a mechanism for matching the goals of sentencing with the risks and needs of offenders. Third, abandoning the intensive concept altogether may jeopardize the support and the resources that ISPs have generated for probation and parole. ISPs provided policy makers with a means to reduce correctional budgets without appearing easy on crime (Gendreau, Cullen, & Bonta, 1994). As such, they have gained support from a broad constituency and channeled resources into probation and parole agencies responsible for their implementation.

Provided that ISPs are likely to continue then, how can they be enhanced to achieve stated goals? First, ISPs must undergo a goal clarification process. ISPs claim to alleviate prison crowding, reduce costs, provide an intermediate punishment, protect the public, and rehabilitate offenders. The simultaneous achievement of all of these objectives appears to be nearly impossible. For example, the more stringently ISPs impose punitive conditions to provide an intermediate punishment and increase public protection, the more likely they are to exacerbate prison crowding and to approach the costs of imprisonment (Turner & Petersilia, 1992). Furthermore, the claim of reduced costs underestimates the increased level of staffing required, surveillance costs, and the expansion of social service resources needed to achieve the rehabilitative aims (Cochran, 1989). In an effort to sell ISPs and other community corrections programs as a low-cost alternative to prison, probation and parole agencies have left themselves financially short. Petersilia (1996) reports that although probation and parole agencies are responsible for supervising three-fourths of correctional clients, only one-tenth of the correctional budget goes toward their supervision. Petersilia argues for a "reinvestment

in community corrections" (1996, p. 26). Until that happens, ISPs should revisit their program design and establish goals that support the agency's mission and that can be realistically achieved given the target population and available resources.

Second, ISPs should focus on understanding and addressing offenders' criminogenic needs. Several ISPs have proven their ability to meet offender needs (Stichman et al., forthcoming; Byrne & Kelly, 1989; Johnson & Hunter, 1992; Van Ness, 1992). If these needs, however, are not related to criminal behavior, addressing them is of little value in terms of achieving correctional objectives. Successfully reducing an offender's criminal behavior requires an understanding of the factors that contribute to such behavior (Van Voorhis, Cullen & Applegate, 1995). Some of the strongest correlates of crime are peer relationships, family factors, substance abuse, and antisocial attitudes toward authority, education, and employment (Gendreau, Andrews, Coggin, & Chanteloupe, 1992). Programs successful in reducing these criminogenic needs can expect corresponding reductions in recidivism (Gendreau et al., 1994).

Third, ISPs must concentrate on improving their program integrity. Van Voorhis et al. (1995) suggest that treatment integrity can be improved in two key ways: 1) by implementing theoretically and empirically based interventions and 2) by ensuring that programs are implemented as designed. Meta-analyses of correctional rehabilitation studies suggest that programs that incorporate certain principles have been shown to reduce recidivism by an average of 40 percent (Gendreau et al., 1994). These principles include matching high-risk offenders with intensive levels of services, addressing criminogenic needs, using a behavioral or cognitive-behavioral treatment approach, matching the learning styles and personality of the offender to programs and staff, enforcing program contingencies in a firm but fair manner, employing well-trained staff who can relate to offenders in interpersonally sensitive and constructive ways, disrupting the criminal network, and providing a high level of advocacy and brokerage for the offender. As demonstrated earlier, ISPs that have incorporated even a portion of these principles are experiencing some level of success.

Methods for ensuring that a program is being implemented as designed include comprehensive staff training, detailed treatment manuals, and ongoing case audits and supervision. Van Voorhis et al. (1995) suggest that poor evaluation outcomes for correctional rehabilitation programs may be the result of programs that never occurred rather than because of the program design. It is clear that many ISPs do not provide an intensive level of treatment services as designed. More importantly perhaps is the fact that CPAIs conducted on the two prototypical ISPs revealed that even when intensive levels of treatment and services were achieved,

they did not always comply with the principles of effective intervention, nor did they reduce the recidivism rates of ISP offenders (Stichman et al., forthcoming).

Based on the ISP studies reported in this article, we suggest that future research focus on three key issues. The first issue concerns the measurement of intermediate outcomes. As shown, properly designed ISPs can be effective in meeting offender needs. The American Probation and Parole Association recommends demonstrating such program accomplishments through the measurement of intermediate outcomes such as offenders' improvements in education and employment, reduced levels of substance abuse, and other behavioral or attitudinal changes in addition to the traditional outcome measure of recidivism (Boone & Fulton, 1995). Focusing on outcomes that are linked to specific program components and interventions will allow an agency to assess the effectiveness of these components and, more importantly, to disentangle their effects on recidivism. ISP resources can then be allocated to those programmatic aspects that lead to improvements in key problem areas and that also reduce recidivism.

The second suggestion for future research is to measure the quality of intervention provided to offenders. ISP research has focused on counting activities and measuring results and has provided minimal information about the nature or quality of the intervention. For example, how long do ISP officers spend with offenders during each supervision contact? What do they talk about? What treatment modality is being used at the local substance abuse program? Is the facilitator of the cognitive skills group good at modeling the desired behavior? Without answering such questions, evaluation provides little guidance for program improvements. Increasingly, agencies are conducting "evaluability assessments" before investing in outcome evaluations (Van Voorhis et al., 1995). Evaluability assessments involve an examination of a program's plan and practices to determine if: there is a clear understanding of the target population and problems being treated; the chosen intervention will adequately address the identified problem and if it is theoretically or empirically based; a plan is in place to assess if the intervention is being implemented according to design; staff are properly trained to carry out the intervention; and measures of program success have been defined. If these critical components are not in place, the program is not likely to succeed and is not suitable for an outcome evaluation (Van Voorhis et al., 1995). The CPAI used by Stichman et al. is an effective measure of program integrity. This assessment process concludes with a written report on the strengths and weaknesses and specific recommendations for improvements.

The third area proposed for future research is an examination of the organizational contexts of ISPs. In a study of ISP officers in Georgia and Ohio, Clear and

Latessa (1993) found that an organizational philosophy of treatment was more instrumental in producing support tasks than the officer's personal orientation toward treatment or control. Given the important role of organizational philosophy on officer performance, it may be that programs and research that pit one agency program against another are misguided. The fact that most ISP studies have shown no significant differences in rates of recidivism between offenders in ISP and offenders in comparison groups should really come as no surprise. Despite the different target populations and the different standards or focus of supervision across programs within a jurisdiction, agency personnel are all subject to the same organizational environment. Their performance is affected by the organizational climate, philosophies, and, most importantly, by the standards against which their performance is judged. Instead of expecting ISP to outperform regular probation, we should view it as a tool, as one component of a probation and parole system that addresses a specific need (Fulton, Gendreau, & Paparozzi, 1996). As such, ISP operations must coincide with the agency's basic principles of conducting the business of probation and parole. It is these basic principles then that should be the focus of future community corrections research. What is it about an organization and its people that contributes to program effectiveness? Perhaps it is not ISP that has failed; perhaps the underlying principles driving organizational practices are flawed.

Conclusion

ISP has held its ground as a key element of community corrections programming since its reemergence in 1982. Although the research suggests that ISP has not fulfilled its promise of alleviating prison crowding, it does appear to be serving the important function of providing an intermediate sanction for offenders who are too high risk for probation but who do not warrant incarceration. More importantly, it appears that ISPs that emphasize treatment and services are producing better results than strict surveillance-based ISPs in terms of addressing offender needs and reducing recidivism.

With the concept of ISP came an obsession with measuring *how much* officers do and *how much* offenders get. This focus on counting activities and demonstrating the "intensity" of ISP has detracted from program quality. Certainly, high-risk and high-need offenders require more services and more surveillance; but more of something that has no theoretical or empirical basis is not likely to contribute to positive outcomes regardless of how much it is done. Future research and development must tackle the difficult task of measuring and improving program quality and emphasize ISP practices that complement rather than compete with other probation and parole practices.

NOTES

¹In 1986 the Bureau of Justice Assistance provided funding for a multi-site demonstration of ISPs. Fourteen sites were selected to participate based on their agreement to develop an ISP based on the Georgia model and to participate in an independent evaluation requiring random assignment of cases to either ISP or a comparison group. RAND was selected by the National Institute of Justice to conduct the evaluation. For an overview of these research results, see J. Petersilia and S. Turner, "Evaluating Intensive Supervision Probation/Parole: Results of a Nationwide Experiment," *Research in Brief*, Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice, 1993.

²In response to ISP research and research on the principles of effective intervention, the American Probation and Parole Association developed a prototypical model of intensive supervision. A detailed description of this model can be found in B. Fulton, S. Stone, and P. Gendreau, *Restructuring Intensive Supervision Programs: Applying "What Works"*, Lexington, KY: American Probation and Parole Association, 1994. In 1996, the University of Cincinnati and the American Probation and Parole Association were awarded a grant from the National Institute of Justice for the evaluation of this prototypical model of ISP in two jurisdictions. Final reports are expected to be available in early 1998.

³The principles of effective intervention are based upon research that traces the developments within the offender rehabilitation agenda from the "nothing works" era (R. Martinson) to the present. For more information see: D. Andrews, I. Zinger, R. Hoge, J. Bonta, P. Gendreau, and F. Cullen (1990); P. Gendreau and D.A. Andrews (1990); and P. Gendreau and R. Ross (1987).

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