Testing a Swift, Certain, Fair Model in a Women’s Prison

Improving the behavior of incarcerated women

Agency: Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (PADOC) State Correctional Institution (SCI) Muncy

Trial Duration: 02/01/17–05/05/17

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Context
Efforts to improve behavior of incarcerated females may benefit from consistency and speed in delivering modest sanctions for low-level violations. The Swift, Certain, Fair (SCF) model was tested.

Key Finding
The SCF model appears to be feasible and effective when used with incarcerated women.

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

Background
The Swift, Certain, Fair (SCF) model requires that incarcerated persons understand the expectations of them and the consequences for misbehaviors. Agencies implementing SCF may target frequent low-level misbehaviors: a misbehavior leads to a swift sanction (which may preclude a hearing and so not be appropriate for more serious misbehaviors). The model sets sanctions for each misbehavior, typically a loss of privilege or cell restriction. Research indicates that the sanctions don’t have to be severe to be effective.

Trial Design
SCI-Muncy, a facility for women, tested an SCF model in general-population housing. Two pods, A (n=125) and B (n=125), were randomly assigned to the SCF or control condition (business-as-usual). The SCF sanctions were applied only to misconducts occurring on the housing unit. An infraction/sanction grid described the procedure. Participants could opt out of the SCF condition at any time before or during the trial. If a participant refused the SCF sanction, she would receive the usual procedure for informal misconducts.

Results
Misconducts include informal misconducts (IM, low-level misbehaviors), and formal misconducts (FM, more serious misbehaviors that require a formal hearing). The groups differed in the number of IMs (p<0.05). No difference was found for number of FMs. These results indicate that the SCF model is effective in reducing misbehaviors in incarcerated women at this facility.

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