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**A Comparison of, "Direct" and "Indirect" Supervision
Correctional Facilities**

FINAL REPORT

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IV.I. CONCLUSIONS

INTRODUCTION

This study set out to find the salient differences among correctional facilities operated by the divergent inmate management styles which are characterized as direct and indirect supervision. We have reported above on the methods and findings from a broad mailout survey and seven in-depth case studies. While some desired data could not be reliably assembled, we have amassed a great deal of pertinent information. We have also gained impressions from the exposure to so many individuals involved in both forms of supervision. These impressions are shared below, along with our summary of "hard" data findings.

Our study has revealed some of the multiple facets of direct supervision. Direct supervision reflects the physical design and condition of a facility, the policy and rules which govern staff supervision, the location of staffing, but also perhaps a "state-of-mind" of the officers and the inmates.

According to its proponents, the direct supervision style defines supervision as a matter of proximity and interpersonal relations, more than of visual observation from a distance. Security and safety come from the officer's function as a social facilitator and service provider, as much as from being "the cop on the beat." Indirect supervision relies more on visual observation under conditions of physical separation of inmates from staff. Thus, the indirect jail we studied relied heavily on view ports, electronic surveillance, and secured staff areas away from inmates. And the indirect prison installed closed control stations specifically to reduce officer vulnerability to inmates.

Based upon claims made by proponents and findings from prior research, we hypothesized that direct supervision facilities would perform better on most measures impacting staff and inmate perception, behavior, communications, safety, health, and so forth. It was also thought that direct supervision might cope better with crowding, cost less to build and operate, and have rather specific design implications. This final chapter, then, reports on our conclusions in reviewing the findings. These will be discussed by issue, comparing direct and indirect supervision facilities on each one. Finally, the limitations on our findings will be discussed, and recommendations for further studies will be offered.

REVIEW OF FINDINGS

What is Direct Supervision, Anyway? (Or, "Indirect Supervision, By Any Other Name")

Many prisons describe themselves as direct supervision, even though they have enclosed control booths at the housing units with at least some of their staff stationed in them. These staff are typically responsible for controlling doors, communicating over loudspeakers, and providing back-up. In addition, they have one or more staff who are stationed within the housing unit. This may be a floor officer who is assigned to the dayroom in one housing unit, or a "rover" who circulates among units - but spends a considerable amount of time face-to-face with inmates. This officer is typically responsible for room or cell checks, close up observation of activities and equipment, and direct communication with inmates. We refer to these facilities as "hybrids" (and one was included among our case studies). In fact, "pure" indirect supervision appears to be unusual among medium security prisons. These facts make it difficult to classify prisons and to identify ones that are truly limited to indirect supervision.

Jails, by contrast, appear to more closely follow the direct/indirect dichotomy. The preponderance of jails do not appear to station officers within the housing unit dayrooms (and rovers appear to typically do little more than perform security checks) and, thus, would be clearly classified as indirect supervision. The direct supervision jails are all quite new. However, some of them are provided with enclosed control booths, either because the system committed to direct supervision after plans were finalized, or as a fall back (preserving the option of reverting to indirect supervision at a later date) or as a failsafe measure (a haven in emergencies). See the discussion below of ways in which the presence of the booth may subvert direct

supervision goals

How Is Each Supervision Mode Perceived By Management?

Assuming that direct supervision and indirect supervision are understood, how do administrators and others perceive the appropriateness of each mode? From our mailout survey, we found that there was a trend toward direct supervision facilities being rated somewhat better. As one might expect, managers of direct supervision facilities were significantly more likely than managers of indirect facilities to feel that direct supervision was an appropriate design and management form for many or all inmate types. In interviewing these managers, we found a tendency for them to be "true believers," almost totally convinced about the efficacy of direct supervision and, possibly, blind to any possible shortcomings. Since direct supervision is the relatively new and less common mode of supervision, it is perhaps natural for these managers to be self-assured and even evangelical. Managers in the more prevalent indirect supervision facilities have no need to convince people that their mode is viable - and may well never have even considered the direct supervision alternative. On the other hand, some highly professional managers of indirect supervision facilities are becoming somewhat defensive, and wish to prove that they can achieve the same positive outcomes as direct supervision claims.

In What Ways Do Direct and Indirect Facilities Differ Physically?

We have mentioned the presence of an enclosed control booth at the housing unit as characterizing indirect supervision facilities (though this has been demonstrated not to necessarily be a decisive differentiation). We have also found from the mailout and case study surveys that direct supervision facilities are more likely to be "softer" and more "normalized" (e.g., to have movable furniture, wooden doors, and upholstered furniture). They do not, however, seem to be any more likely to have single versus double occupancy cells. The cells in direct supervision facilities, on the other hand, are more likely to have more amenities than those in indirect facilities. Sanitation levels, cleanliness and overall condition were not found to differ.

How Critical Is the Built Environment?

Three issues are dealt with here: environmental quality, visual surveillance, and the provision of an enclosed control booth.

How much does an improved quality of environment contribute to inmate management or other beneficial outcomes? Many interviewees spoke of the kind of behavioral expectations which the environment sets up. Direct supervision administrators were more likely to rate "softer," more flexible, and more "normalized" furniture as appropriate for their facility. From the case studies, inmates were more favorable toward conditions in the direct supervision than in the indirect supervision facilities. Direct supervision facilities were perceived as more satisfactory, and as having better privacy, and better environmental conditions.

The "softest" facility in the case study survey was Contra Costa (which was also suffering from extreme overcrowding). It did not seem to derive great added benefits in terms of outcomes compared to the other, harder direct supervision facilities (such as Pima or Lieber which have soft features but are relatively hard). An unanswered question, then, is at what point are the desired expectations communicated (or not) to inmates and staff?

A great deal of effort in correctional facility design has gone into making cell doors, the dayroom and other inmate-occupied areas visible from a staff station. In either supervision mode, staff gain a tremendous amount of information about goings on in the unit by visual observation. Good visibility was uniformly praised and poor visibility decried where they were perceived to exist. Of course, if staff are not limited to a fixed vantage point from a control booth, the geometry of the unit becomes less important. With staff moving about, the openness of a direct supervision dayroom (if there are not significant blind spots or hidden areas)

appears to suffice. Interestingly, administrators of direct supervision facilities rated their facilities as better on ability to survey the setting than did those from indirect supervision. Thus, visibility from a fixed control station is all important in indirect supervision facilities.

The provision - or not - of an **enclosed control booth** (assumed for indirect supervision facilities) does seem to be quite critical in direct supervision facilities. While many indirect supervision systems appear to believe that the booth is needed for security or as refuge, it is clear from observations and interviews that it is possible to do without it very successfully (e.g., at Contra Costa, Ross and Lieber). On the other hand, several staff at a direct supervision facility which has a booth (Pima) felt that its presence was a benefit as a refuge (for paperwork and potentially for emergency escape). In direct supervision facilities with control booths, the challenge is to manage staff so that they do not "hang out" in the booth, rather than circulating through the unit. This problem seems to be magnified when more than one staff is assigned to a unit (see discussion of overcrowding below).

The comparison between the two New Jersey prisons is particularly interesting with regard to the control booth, since the housing units are essentially identical except for the degree of enclosure at the officer station. Each prison has two officers assigned to a pair of living units, and at each one an officer remains at the station while the other roams through the two units. At one, however, both officers are in contact with inmates. An inmate can contact the desk officer by simply leaning over the desk and talking to him or her. At the other, however, the stationary control officer is within a glassed-in booth and functions only to operate the control panel, provide limited visual surveillance of living units through glass panels, and, if needed, provide back-up to the floor officer.

Inmates were clearly aware of this distinction, and rated the former as a direct supervision facility, and the latter as an indirect supervision facility. Interestingly, officers rated the latter as a direct supervision facility, apparently focussing on the time they spend "on-tour" in the living units.

Is One Mode Safer Than The Other For Inmates or Staff?

While objective, comparative measures of safety such as numbers of physical and sexual assaults, suicide attempts, and escapes were impossible to obtain, there is considerable evidence that direct supervision facilities are seen as safer than indirect supervision ones. From our mailout survey, we found that direct supervision administrators rated their facilities as better on variables of safety and reported fewer incidents of violence (at borderline significance levels) than did indirect administrators.

The evidence from the case studies is less clear and appears to have been distorted by extreme overcrowding at two of the direct facilities. However, when crowding (in the form of double bunking) at the prisons is controlled for, inmates appear to feel considerably safer in direct supervision facilities. Among jails, even the crowded direct supervision ones perform better than the lower density indirect supervision one, according to both staff and inmates. Inmates at the indirect supervision jail feel less well protected by officers and more exposed to sexual assault, and officers, too, feel less safe (even with their control booths).

A clear differentiation is seen in terms of staff response time to a fight or emergency. The direct supervision facilities were seen by inmates as providing an acceptably quick response (under a minute), while the indirect supervision facilities were felt to have unacceptably long response times (in the 3 to 5 minute range).

Perceived inmate safety relates to their perception of the officers' location. Where the officer is seen as mainly being in the housing unit rather than away (in a booth), inmates feel better protected and even in less danger from the officers themselves.

How Do Staff and Inmates Interact In the Two Modes?

Our data provide considerable, but not complete, support for some of the assumptions which underlay the

operation of direct supervision facilities The observations of staff and inmate interaction showed that officers in direct supervision facilities do indeed spend their time within the living units and largely in interaction with inmates In the indirect facilities this was much less so In the indirect jail, not only did officers stay outside the living unit, but the data also show their interactions to be largely with other staff at their stations inmate contacts were brief, limited, and at the unit entrance

The interview comments also reflect some of these differences Direct supervision officers, for example, were more likely to see their job as involving counseling, and regularly spoke of "stopping problems before they start" Inmates who had experienced both types of supervision contrasted the difficulty of talking with the "guy in the booth" in other facilities with the ease of simply approaching the officer in the dayroom "if something comes up, you can just talk to him"

Who is In Control of the Institution?

Staff, rather than inmates, appear to be in control of direct supervision facilities Staff and administrators feel positive about this Inmates appreciate the safety it gives them, but some miss the "old days" (in other facilities) when they ran the institution With officers having so much knowledge and control (and an absence of more serious incidents), some inmates complain that even petty rules are enforced (which would be overlooked in other institutions) An inmate might get written up in a direct supervision facility for not having a clean room, where it would take something much more serious in an indirect supervision facility

Does Supervision Mode Have an Impact on Coping With Overcrowding?

Crowding (occupancy above design or rated capacity) has been mentioned several times above as having a negative or distorting effect on the results at direct supervision facilities It is important to recognize that crowding is part of a complex set of effects, including physical and social density, number of inmates assigned to sleeping rooms, and living unit size, among other factors

In our case studies, we found some ratings of institution safety, for example, where direct supervision facilities did not rate as well as some indirect supervision facilities This seems to be related to the level of overcrowding in the direct supervision facilities, to the sheer numbers of inmates on living units, and to staff-inmate ratios In fact, the direct supervision housing units were much larger than the indirect supervision - and far more over capacity

For example, one of the direct supervision jails in our sample has two correctional officers for 100+ inmates on one living unit designed for about 45 inmates The indirect supervision jail, by contrast, has 3 officers to supervise 56 to 60 inmates and is operating at design capacity These inmates are in 8 distinct, very small pods of 7 to 10 beds Similar contrasts in crowding and living unit size exist for our prison sites

There are several conclusions which seem fair about crowding in direct supervision facilities First, the direct supervision sites seem to hold up fairly well under what in some cases is extreme overcrowding For some factors, the overcrowded direct supervision facilities are operating as well as - and in some cases as or better than - the indirect supervision facilities

Yet direct supervision clearly provides no immunity against problems There are warnings in our data of potential problems from continued crowding And in some ways, the crowding seems to strike at the foundation of the principles of direct supervision For example, one sees officers are spending more time with other officers and at their desks than the direct supervision model would propose Officers also indicate that they are increasing unfamiliar and out of touch with inmates

One issue at the heart of direct supervision problems with crowding comes from adding extra officers on the living unit as population increases At one direct supervision facility, officers explicitly stated that adding an extra officer does not compensate for dealing with additional inmates For example, one officer may be able

to reasonably deal with 60 inmates on a direct supervision unit and be able to know their names and problems. However, if the population doubles, neither of the two officers can know 100 inmates as well as one can know 60. The nature of the job and the form of interactions with inmates change.

Adding a second officer provides limited help, and may be a hindrance in some ways. Many inmates will remain anonymous to each officer. If an inmate asks one officer for something and is not satisfied with the response, he can make the same request to the other one, perhaps playing them off against each other. An added problem is the understandable temptation to spend more time with a colleague at the officer desk, and less time in inmate spaces. At our overcrowded direct supervision jail, we observed this phenomenon, as unit officers "retreated" to each others' company.

Of the facilities in our sample, the indirect supervision jail had the smallest number of inmates in its living units. This smallness is helpful in reducing social density, there are fewer other inmates for each inmate to deal with, thus potential for conflict may be fewer. There is also less competition for telephones, televisions, or food. The smallness of the housing units, in fact, probably accounts for most of its positive ratings. Unfortunately smallness comes at the expense of direct officer contact, which appears to have negative effects. And at current staffing levels, the officer-to-inmate ratio is the highest of all the institutions studied, making it the most expensive to operate. Cost forecloses the possibility of having enough officers to constantly supervise all inmate areas, and the design makes such supervision impossible with current staffing.

Are There Differences in Cost Between the Two Modes?

There is evidence that direct supervision facilities may cost less to build and operate than do indirect ones. Nelson (1988) has discussed the contributing factors at some length. However, our mailout survey was inconclusive, finding no difference in construction cost per bed (639,500 versus \$41,700). Among contributing factors, direct supervision facilities were somewhat (although not statistically significantly) more likely than indirect supervision facilities to use porcelain versus stainless steel toilets, wood versus metal or barred doors, swinging versus sliding doors, and manual versus remote or motor driven locking mechanisms. Indirect facilities also reported greater concerns and problems with conditions of confinement lawsuits than did the direct supervision facilities.

The case studies, though less generalizable, show more striking differences in cost. The two more normalized, direct supervision prisons cost far less than the two indirect/hybrid facilities to build (about \$42,000 versus \$73,000 per bed), to staff (about \$11,000 versus about \$17,000 on a per inmate per year basis), and to run (about \$4,200 versus \$6,700 per year per inmate). The same contrast holds for the jails in our sample, where the direct cost less than the indirect to build (about \$44,000 versus \$59,000 per bed), to staff (about \$28,000 versus about \$42,000 on a per inmate per year basis), and to run (about \$11,000 versus \$16,000 per inmate per year). While we caution against drawing conclusions from these figures, they may lend support to arguments others have made about relative costs.

How Do Managers Choose a Supervision Model?

Given the currency of the debate within the corrections field concerning direct supervision (and endorsements from some professional associations), it may be difficult for a correctional system to avoid facing a conscious choice of supervision modes when planning a new facility. With considerable (even if inconclusive) evidence pointing to benefits of direct supervision (and little or no evidence that alternative models are superior), why do some systems select direct supervision while others consider and reject it?

Perhaps because direct supervision facilities (and especially the softer facilities like Contra Costa and the recent federal facilities) may not be consonant with their deepest feelings about what a correctional setting should be like. These facilities may be seen as being too nice for inmates, who after all are supposed to be punished. Until the Tombs in New York City was built, direct supervision might have been argued against as incapable of use for tough urban inmates.

Again, the Supervision mode may not represent what some see as being expected of an officer (interaction, communications, inmate management). If the impression of the supervision model runs counter to deeply held feelings or beliefs, it may be rejected no matter how much objective evidence is marshaled on its behalf.

Direct supervision requires very considerable change for a system which is operating by indirect supervision. This change may be perceived as unnecessary risk taking by decision makers, who may feel that they will be blamed if it fails, or ostracized even for suggesting it. Changing to direct supervision requires overcoming considerable resistance within the system. Some officers feel that indirect supervision is a superior approach, and a number of these officers do not successfully make the transition to direct supervision, probably leaving for other positions.

Direct Supervision Requires a Commitment to Make It Work

As part of the decision to operate under direct supervision, there must be a commitment from top management that it works and contributes to the organization's mission. Management must believe that it is viable and effective, in order to bring the balance of their Organization along with them. But believing in direct supervision is not enough, management must also make a commitment of resources, manpower, training, public relations, and so forth. An effective classification system to screen inmates and alternative settings for those inmates who cannot succeed in a direct supervision unit are also essential.

There has even been a concern expressed that, with many systems planning new direct supervision facilities, one or more will put the officer in the housing unit without the training and the classification of inmates required to make the direct supervision system work. This could lead to a real problem (such as an officer being killed).

We observed some situations in which officers were in open contact with inmates without the benefit of a management commitment to direct supervision or the kind of training and support which accompanies that philosophy. An example is RSP. Where officers work in a system which looks very much like direct supervision (no barriers to contact), but felt in danger because of their openness, and desired an enclosed station. In striking contrast is the ease with which officers in direct supervision facilities handle open contact and do not express a need for an enclosed station.

We interpret this distinction as being directly connected to the overt presentation of a direct supervision philosophy, training and supervision. It is the lack of training and management commitment that makes RSP officers uncomfortable, not an inherent danger of being in direct contact with inmates.

Is One Mode Better Than the Other?

To summarize, direct supervision facilities appear to cost less or the same as indirect supervision ones to build and operate, require less or the same level of staffing, and achieve desirable outcomes in terms of meeting their missions, reducing stress, improving safety and security, and so forth. If there is a drawback to direct supervision facilities it is that they may take more effort and commitment to plan, train for, and manage.

On the other hand, and even with the apparent advantages of direct supervision, it must be stated that some of the indirect supervision facilities in our surveys performed quite well in many ways. Well managed, well designed indirect supervision correctional facilities must not be looked down upon, particularly since so many of them are hybrids with partial direct supervision characteristics. Such facilities would appear to be within an acceptable range in terms of critical outcomes.

Two factors which could account for the lack of stronger differences between direct and indirect supervision in our findings must be noted. First, the direct supervision facilities were uniformly overcrowded, and experiencing double bunking at moderate to severe levels. The indirect supervision facilities were largely at

capacity with single bed cells. The direct supervision facilities were, then, operating at a disadvantage unrelated to supervision mode. One might presume that the questionnaire scores would have been more positive at lower population levels. This seemed most clear at CCC and LCI where overcrowding was most severe, and problems in this area were picked up in comments and interviews.

Second, the indirect supervision facility case studies suggest that they may be operating well in rather than because of, their design and management philosophy. Indirect supervision design and operation seem clearly to make the officer's job more difficult, and at times seem to have required increased staffing. At RCJ, for example, both staff and inmates indicated that the lack of clear and constant staff observation of inmate living spaces makes operations difficult. At RSP, officers spend too much time at the station, talking with one another, and too little time in the dayrooms.

Thus, while our research shows clearly that direct supervision does work and can work very well (especially when crowding is limited), it does not demonstrate that indirect supervision does not work, only that it presents certain obstacles which must be overcome. Our conclusions, however, must be considered tentative for the reasons outlined above and in the next section.

AN ASSESSMENT OF OUR RESEARCH

Several aspects of, and limitations on, the research methods and approach used here have become clear. We focussed on two main approaches: a broad mailout survey plus relatively few in-depth case studies. It has become obvious that, in spite of our careful attention to selection of case study sites, the results are not (and cannot be) a simple comparison of direct versus indirect supervision. Differences in supervision style clearly existed and appeared to have an impact, but facilities also differed in significant ways such as unit size, degree population was over capacity, and staff-inmate ratios. They undoubtedly also varied in other important but more subtle and more difficult to measure ways on policy issues, programs, procedures, staff training, etc. Of course, no field study of settings as large and complex as prisons or jails could ever be as controlled on one issue, such as supervision, as one might want. Our ultimate approach has been to view these sites as a series of case studies and to look for similarities and differences. It would be an error to look for or expect a finely controlled experiment here. On the other hand, the behavior tracking data is quite powerful in describing effects directly related to supervision.

There are other limitations on the generalizability of our findings. We only looked at relatively new, medium security, adult male institutions. Because of the problems of "hybridization" we were only able to have a limited sample of indirect supervision prisons. We have been careful, however, not to compare prisons with jails.

We have also concluded that problems in collecting archival data (sick call, incidents) are serious and inherent. Variations in the way these are collected and recorded by the institutions themselves are so great that the sites were hardly comparable. Thus, we rejected the archival data and have not reported on it here. The problem of having to use data on such outcomes as incidents or sick call rates, which are collected idiosyncratically among correctional systems and even facilities, will remain until a more uniform reporting mechanism is established. It would require another study at least the size of this one focussing on those variables alone to gather reasonable data of this type. We recommend consideration of a "prospective" study which would collect these data as events occur, rather than relying on historical records.

PART V: REFERENCES

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