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Issue 1

# Insight:

## Correctional Rehabilitation Research Bulletin

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Hong Kong Correctional Services



# Insight:

## Correctional Rehabilitation Research Bulletin

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## Foreword



Evidence-based practice is the cornerstone of internationally acclaimed correctional services. I am very pleased to witness the continuous development of the research work in our Department. The establishment of the Correctional Rehabilitation Research Unit on 26 February this year certainly marked an important milestone in our research work.

It is the great pleasure of the committee of the new Unit to introduce the first issue of *Insight -- Correctional Rehabilitation Research Bulletin*. Through this publication, we would like to share meaningful insights drawn from the research conducted in different parts of the world for guiding the strategic planning of our rehabilitation work. We look forward to presenting our research findings through this bulletin in the future.

To kick off, we would like to discuss “*What Works: How Research Can Help in Offender Rehabilitation*” in this first issue. It is our great honour to have the Research Consultant of the Unit Dr. Frank Porporino to share with us his insights into how research contributes to finding “what works”. Besides, we will discuss insights drawn from the findings from both overseas and local research in three areas. We will introduce “Rehabilitative Security”, a new concept in penal management, and discuss how it works. We will also discuss what works for male and female persons in custody, and introduce the benefits brought by sports for males and those by psycho-art and psycho-drama for females.

I hope this bulletin will inspire discussions within our Department and promote professional exchanges with our counterparts for continuous enhancement of our rehabilitation services.

Dr. Judy HUI  
Senior Clinical Psychologist  
Coordinator of Correctional Rehabilitation Research Unit  
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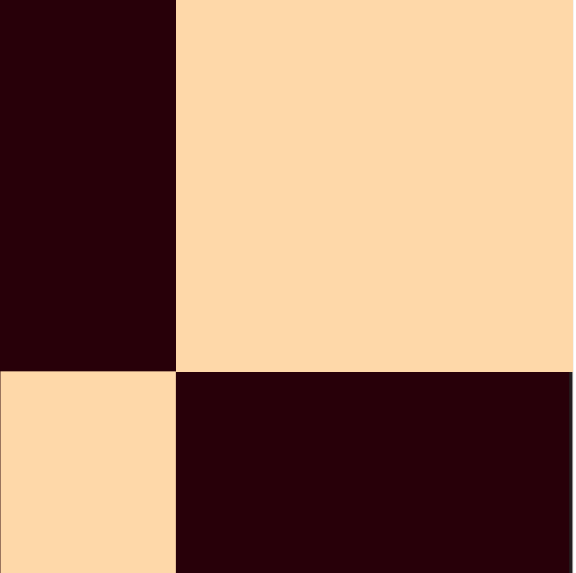


**Dr. Patrick W. L. LEUNG**

# The First Research Consultation Meeting



The first online research consultation meeting with our esteemed consultants Dr. Frank Porporino and Professor Patrick Leung on 19 March 2024 was attended by Deputy Commissioner (Rehabilitation and Management), Dr. Leung Kin-ip, and clinical psychologists. There was insightful and thought-provoking discussion on using the latest theoretical model and research for strategic planning and formulation of evidence-informed rehabilitation policies, setting a research agenda with social impact that contribute to crime prevention and the society as a whole, evaluation of rehabilitation programmes with both outcome and process variables as well as methodological issues in the local desistance research that investigate factors supportive of desistance from crime in Hong Kong.



# **What Works?**

## **How Research Can Help in Offender Rehabilitation**

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## Article 1

# Research Should Help Us Both Find and Implement What Works



**Dr. Frank J. PORPORINO**  
**Research Consultant,**  
**Correctional Rehabilitation Research Unit**

The hallmark of excellence in any field is that we should understand what works, and should be able to differentiate what works from what doesn't. This applies in fields as varied as medicine or education, in social policy more generally, in business and even in politics. It certainly also applies in criminal justice, where public safety is the ultimate aim and where prisons and correctional agencies should therefore exercise their duty to adopt the most recent and most promising research-informed practices in the field. The alternative is that correctional agencies will often waste resources and lose their credibility over time in doing what doesn't work. Of course, it needs to be acknowledged that there are often practical, political, financial and social-cultural considerations that may impede successful implementation of good practice. But a correctional agency with a tradition of respect for research evidence can try to avoid these obstacles and pitfalls. Correctional administrators and policy makers will always welcome new evidence that can enhance their effectiveness, or even evidence that simply points to what they are already doing well but could do even better.

Effectiveness in corrections is enhanced when there is integration and continuity of approaches that ultimately improves the quality of service delivery to offenders and the degree of public safety corrections can provide through a consistent focus on rehabilitative efforts, and not just through the punishing and warehousing of individuals. Modern correctional agencies need to assess the merits of an increasing number of potential innovations (e.g., adopting new technology or new prison design), or changes in existing practice (e.g., assessment, case management, intervention, or other service-delivery frameworks). There are critical decisions to be made in terms of whether new policy

or practice can improve performance ... is there strong enough evidence to support the change in the context of other agency priorities and approaches, would the new approach be feasible to implement, how much can it be expected to improve performance, where has it been tried successfully, and are there alternatives or options ... etc.? These are all basic research questions that can keep an agency doing what works best in their particular circumstances. Unfortunately, without research to serve as a guidepost, many attempts at change in corrections can end being based on guesswork, true in the end more 'on paper' than in practice, or even more often, fragmented or superficial without having much meaningful impact.

A recent focus on Implementation Science in the broader field of human services points clearly to 'what works' in implementation (Fixsen et al., 2005). Following a systematic approach that remains grounded in research, from beginning to follow-through post-implementation, can assist both in deciding upon and successfully adopting evidence-informed change in corrections.

Implementation success requires attending purposefully to organizational and leadership drivers of change, but also important are some key principles supported by research:

- Implementation should always be planned, executed, monitored and evaluated carefully.
- Addressing practical challenges and impediments at an early stage is more likely to lead to success at a later stage.
- Adequate time and resourcing should be allocated to support implementation. Rushing through implementation or attempting to do 'too much' with insufficient resourcing (human and/or financial) is more likely to lead to failure.
- Implementation is more likely to succeed if it progresses through a set of sequential stages.

*Exploration and Adoption* – where agencies should develop some level of in-house capacity for assessing the available research evidence, systematically examining options, looking at the 'fit' with existing policies or practices, determining feasibility, and actively seek to share knowledge with and/or request technical assistance from other correctional agencies, local universities, the non-government sector, expert consultants and professional associations;



*Preparation* – which includes encouraging buy-in from staff and managers/supervisors, engaging external partners where necessary, creating new operating policies and procedures, arranging for a range of organizational supports ... etc.;

*Initial Implementation* – including ensuring that all of the necessary organizational supports are in place to manage and problem-solve as implementation unfolds, staff have been provided appropriate levels of training to enhance their skills, post-training coaching is available, efficient monitoring processes are introduced ... etc.;

*Full Operation* – where staff are feeling competent, further development is encouraged, and the new program or practice is introduced system-wide and fully integrated with agency practice;

*Sustainability* – where there is a continued focus on peer-supported learning, management attends to measures of fidelity of implementation and efforts are made to secure funding for future years;

*Innovation* – where research monitoring and evaluation may suggest some improvement or innovation that could enhance effectiveness – and where the process is then re-sequenced beginning with preparation.

There is an abundant and ever-growing amount of research evidence to support change in practice in corrections. But correctional services have to ‘mind the gap’ they face in going from research to practice. There are many issues in the field of corrections that remain unresolved and deserve more research attention (Ward et al., 2022). Challenges are faced routinely, for example, in the scaling up and/or targeting of programs, in striking a good balance between program integrity and local adaptation, in measuring implementation quality, in garnering broad-based support from front-line staff, and in working towards program sustainability... etc.

Correctional services around the world have marched steadily towards greater acceptance of evidence-informed practice in the last several decades. Most advanced jurisdictions would claim that they are at least trying to implement good practice. But the jurisdictions who have perhaps been most successful in achieving and sustaining results are those that have remained grounded in research, remaining alert and nimble so as to take full advantage of new developments as they arise. The formula to follow is to go from good research to new practice that brings sustained impact.

## *Insights*

1

Modern correctional agencies need to assess the merits of an increasing number of potential innovations and possible changes to policy, procedures or practice to improve performance. **Research** is the indispensable guidepost to ensure decisions are not based on guesswork.

2

Implementation of evidence-informed change in correctional practice is more likely to succeed if it is carefully monitored and supported by a **research** informed sequence of steps.

3

Correctional agencies who will be most successful in achieving and sustaining results are those who remain grounded in **research** so as take full advantage of new developments as they arise. The formula to follow is to go from good research to new practice that brings sustained impact.

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## Article 2

# What Works in Rehabilitative Security: Reducing Institutional Violence, Self-Harm Behavior and Staff Sick Leave



**Dr. Yvonne K. S. LEE<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Elise S. W. HUNG<sup>2</sup>,  
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### ***What Is Rehabilitative Security?***

***“Security and rehabilitation are most effective when they work together.*** When we have a secure prison where people feel safe, it gives them the headspace to make changes in their lives” (Bennett, 2021). On the other hand, persons in custody (PICs) with positive rehabilitative changes tend to follow prison rules. As such, security and rehabilitation are *enablers of each other*.

### ***Can Security and Rehabilitation Work in Parallel? Should Security Measures Make People Feel Punitive? Will A Rehabilitative Culture Be Too Soft?***

It is a myth that there is inherent conflict between security and rehabilitation. Security does not necessarily require a punitive approach with toughness and aggressiveness as this can create resistance and challenges that undermine security; and a rehabilitative culture does not mean being soft and indulgent. ***Rehabilitative security sets clear boundaries and maintains fair, respectful use of authority, thereby fostering cooperation, rule compliance, a sense of safety and rehabilitative changes among PICs.***

### ***Why Is Rehabilitative Security Important? What Research Tells Us?***

Rehabilitative security, which lays the foundation for a rehabilitative culture, can be a “tool” to achieve the departmental mission of “ensuring a secure, safe, humane, decent and healthy custodial environment”. ***It benefits both staff and PICs who work and live in prison*** (Mann, Howard and Tew, 2018):

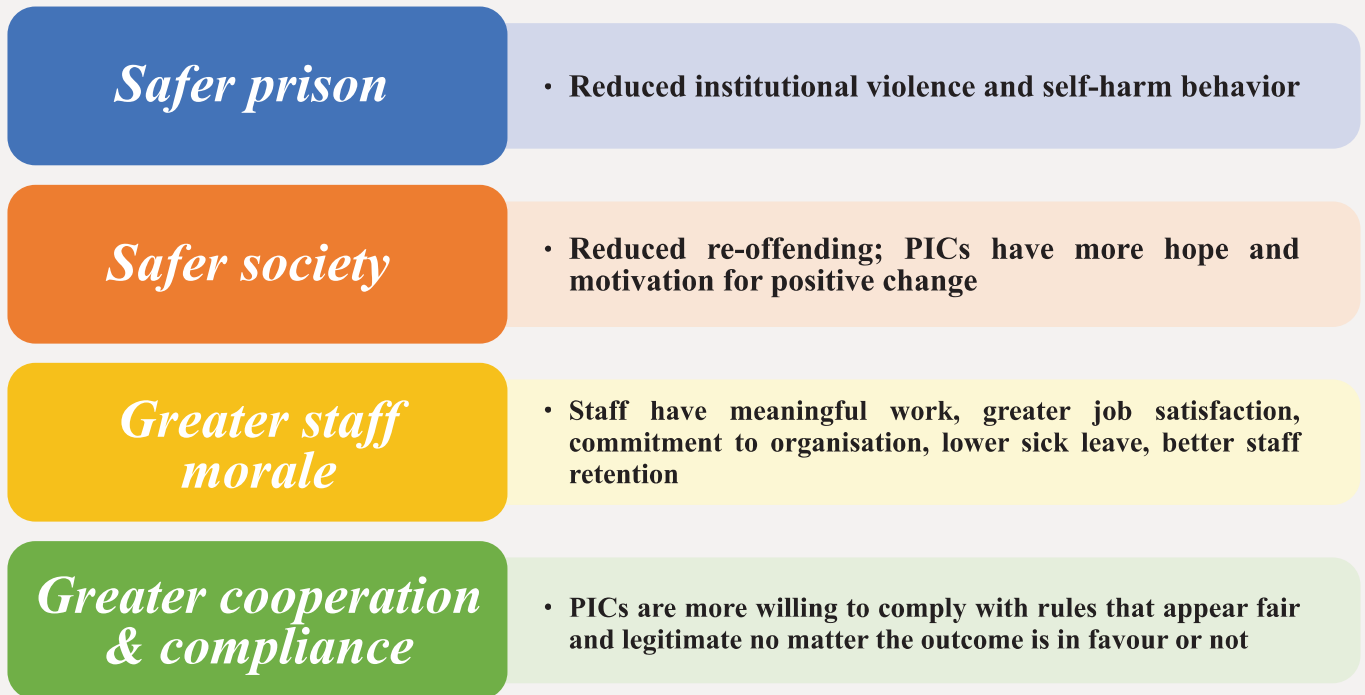


Figure 1. Importance of rehabilitative security

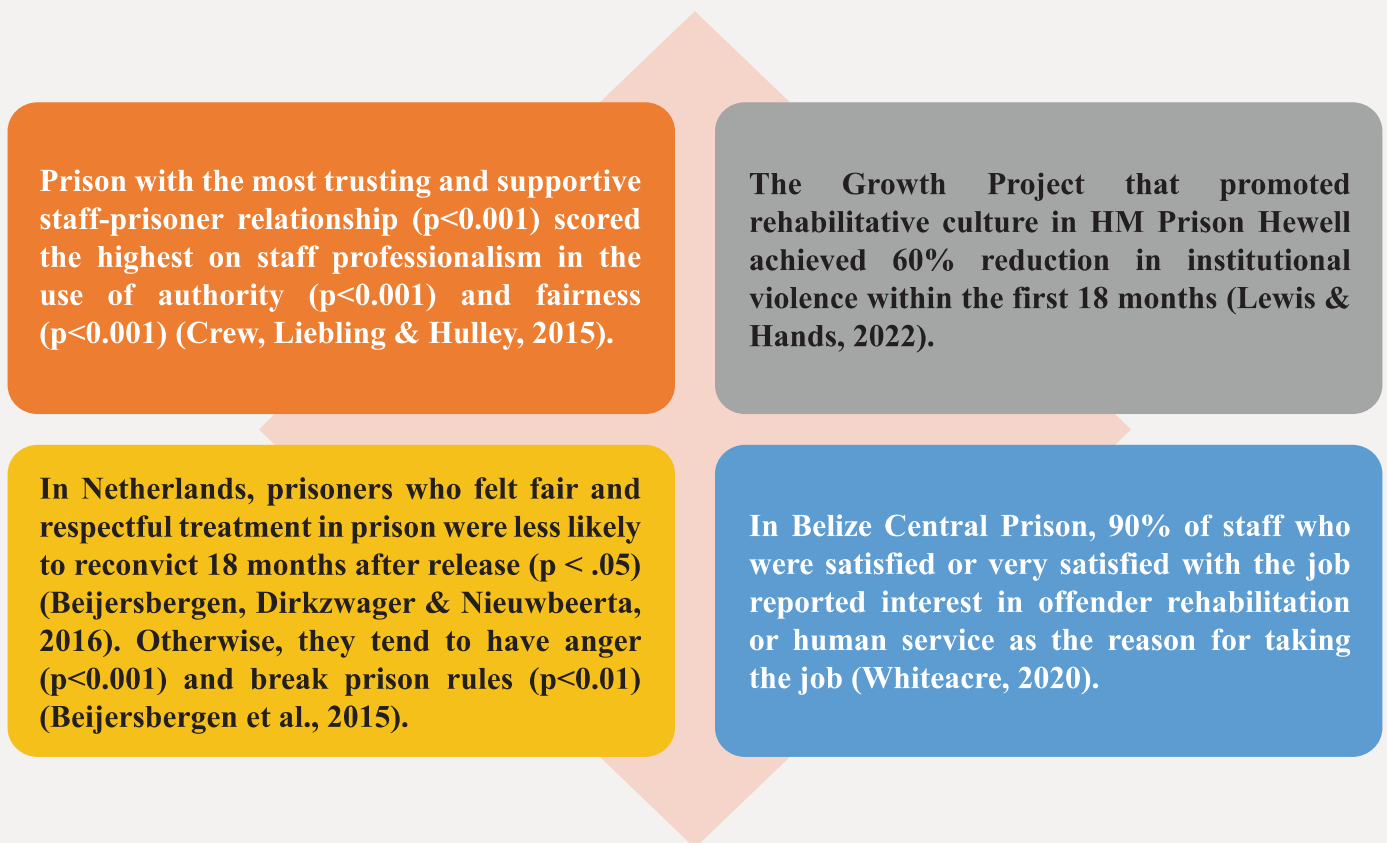


Figure 2. Effectiveness of rehabilitative security

## ***How to Practise Rehabilitative Security in Daily Work? (UNODC, 2015)***

The following three dimensions of security work together to balance security measures and rehabilitative efforts in correctional institutions:



Physical security utilises locks, gates, fences, surveillance cameras, etc. to ensure safety.



Procedural security involves rules, procedures and protocols like background checks, inmate counts and risk categorisation to guide prison operation.



Dynamic security emphasises staff-inmate interaction that promotes professional and positive relationships, as well as a regime engaged with purposeful, rehabilitative activities as a way to create an environment where safety is maintained through cooperation and trust with minimum tension and idleness in correctional institutions.

## ***How Does Staff Training Promote Rehabilitative Security?***

The following two training areas equip staff with the core evidence-based ‘tools’ or ‘skills’ to promote rehabilitative security (HMPPS, 2022):



***Procedural Justice*** (PJ) is about *how authority is used and decisions are made, with the goal of ensuring fairness to be felt*. Following the four PJ principles namely neutrality, voice, respect and trust, staff practising PJ will explain why the cells are being searched, treat every PIC consistently without bias, listen to and allow PICs to “tell their stories”, explain the principles of incentives schemes and reasons for disciplinary reports, etc. When **PICs** feel that decisions are made in a fair and just way, they ***are more likely to respect and cooperate with authority figures, and comply with the rules***.



***Five-Minute Intervention*** (FMI) enables correctional staff to *transform the often-brief everyday conversations with PICs into rehabilitative opportunities to encourage changes or growth*, boosting the outcome of rehabilitative activities. FMI is not about having more conversations; it is about making those conversations more purposeful and effective. Having equipped with the 10 FMI skills, staff will ask thought-provoking questions like “what will happen if you do not proceed to the classroom”, tell PICs “you have the strengths to overcome challenges”, etc., thereby helping PICs to reflect on themselves, learn from experience and empower for positive change.

## ***Which Leadership Style Promotes Rehabilitative Security? What is the Experience in Hong Kong?***

A total of 16 Retreat Workshops for institutions for young PICs involving 168 correctional staff were jointly conducted by Clinical Psychologist (Staff Service), Rehabilitation Units 1 and 2 in March and April 2024. The interactive and lively workshops featured with games, self-reflection exercises, relaxation practice



and mutual sharing in pursuit of self-improvement at work and in personal life have enabled the staff to widen their perspectives on job satisfaction and mental well-being, as well as learn and experience psychological self-care tips in a relaxed and mutually supportive atmosphere. With senior managers' ***sharing, modelling, connection and co-creation with staff of all***

***levels***, the top three characteristics of “ideal institutions for young PICs” co-created by all the participating staff are “a safe, decent and human workplace with sufficient manpower” (28.5%), “cross-level and cross-institution communication” (13.8%), “a positive, supportive and collaborative culture” (13.4%). Other characteristics include “care for and transform young offenders that can take pride of”, “good balance of rehabilitation and supervision” and “work-life balance”.



## *Insights*

1

Rehabilitative security which effectively balances rehabilitation and security measures helps reduce institutional and self-directed violence, staff sick leave and PICs' re-offending, benefiting correctional staff, PICs and society as a whole.

2

For staff professionalism, staff training on “procedural justice” and “five-minute intervention” facilitates the practice of rehabilitative security in daily operation.

3

Leadership style that facilitates sharing, communication, connection and co-creation benefits correctional staff and PICs who work and live in correctional institutions.

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## Article 3

# What Works for Male Persons in Custody: Rehabilitation through Sports



**Ms. Backy H. Y. TONG<sup>2</sup>, Dr. Judy S. H. HUI<sup>1</sup>,  
Mr. Ivan H. K. MA<sup>2</sup>, Ms. Stacey T. W. YEUNG<sup>3</sup>**

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### *Are Sports Programmes Rehabilitative?*

Based on the Risk-Needs-Responsivity model of offender rehabilitation, the responsivity principle suggests that the mode of intervention should maximise an individual's ability to learn from a rehabilitation intervention, taking into consideration of one's attributes such as age, gender, ability, etc. As intervention with a goal-focused and action-oriented structure is one of the important male-specific elements in providing engaging treatment for men (Seidler et al., 2018), sports can be considered a male-friendly strategy to enhance positive changes in male individuals (Tsai et al., 2015).





## ***Can Sports Improve Our Psychological Well-Being?***

While there are various long-known benefits of sports on physical well-being, an updated systematic review (Eather et al., 2023) showed that sports participation is beneficial to overall mental health and social outcomes among adults, and is also predictive of better psychological well-being and lower psychological ill-being over time.



*Figure 1. The benefits of sports on mental and psychological well-being*

# Can Sports Improve the Adjustment of Persons in Custody (PICs) and Penal Management?

The importance of sports in improving the well-being of prisoners is increasingly recognised by the correctional system. The latest findings (Penado Abilleira et al., 2023) which align with previous studies demonstrated that physical activities are advantageous in improving both physical and mental health indicators.

## 1. Improving Mood and Mental Health

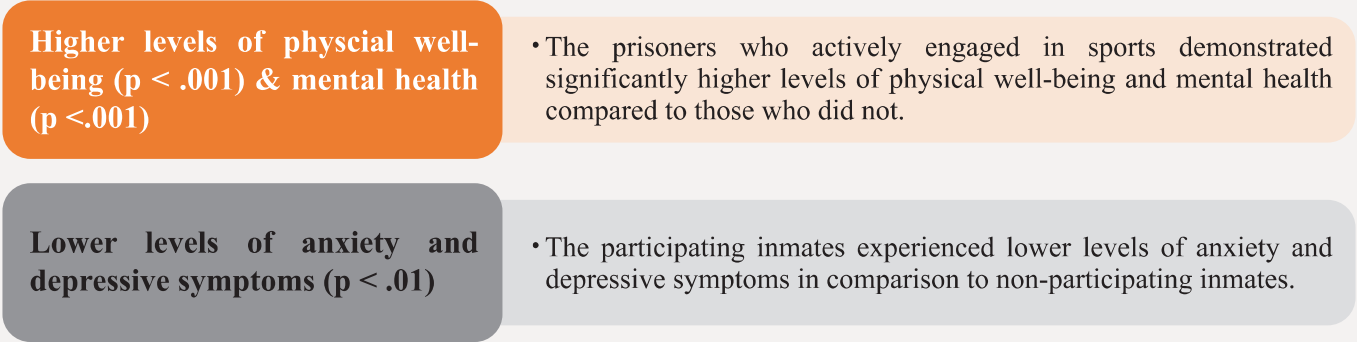


Figure 2. The effectiveness of sports on physical and mental health

Another experimental study (Obadiora and Adebayo, 2019) examined how active participation in sports affected the perceived psychological health of inmates in Ilesa Prison Yard in Nigeria, where 140 inmates were selected to participate in a 10-week Prison-based Sports Programme.

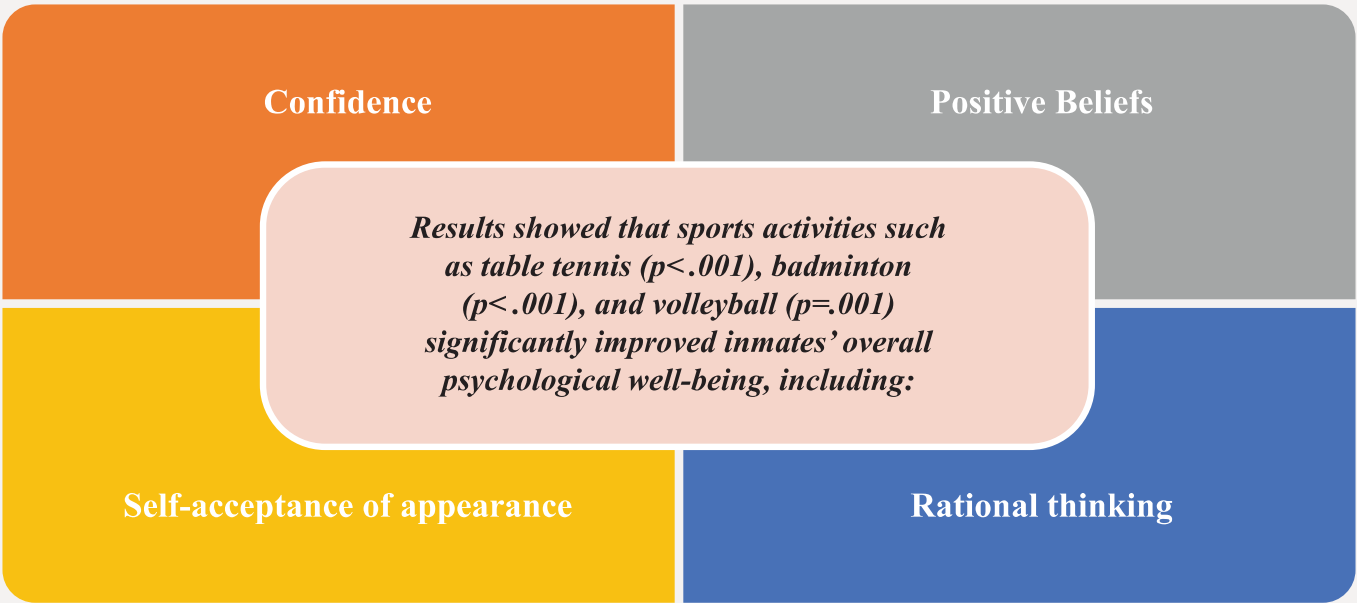


Figure 3. The effectiveness of sport activities on psychological well-being

A study compared the daily activities in prison between PICs with insomnia and without insomnia. It found that PICs without insomnia have an average higher number of sports activities.

PICs without insomnia reported significantly more often exercise on muscle building ( $p < .001$ ) and walking ( $p < .001$ ). (Elger, 2009)

## ***2. Reducing Violence in Prison***

Different studies have demonstrated the effects of sports activities on reducing violence in prison, which have meaningful implications for penal management. Some of the underlying reasons are as follows:

Diverting attention from stressful circumstances (Psychou et al., 2019).

Serving as a solution to channel aggression and temporarily alleviate fears towards the penal environment (Mutz and Müller, 2023).

Fostering conflict resolution and improving relationship among prisoners as well as that between prisoners and staff members (Meek and Ramsbotham, 2013).

Enhancing emotion regulation by venting anger and frustration effectively (Obadiora and Adebayo, 2019)

## ***What Have We Done?***

Various sports programmes with therapeutic purposes have been implemented as an intervention for enhancing the psychological well-being and facilitating the rehabilitation of PICs in correctional institutions. With the establishment of the first specialised treatment centre for males “LIFE GYM: Positive Living Centre for Men” in Stanley Prison in 2018, therapeutic sports facilities such as smart bikes, cordless jumping ropes and medicine balls have been introduced. These sports activities serve as a kind of psychological treatment strategy to enhance the participants’ self-esteem and their motivation to change.





In recent years, therapeutic sports programmes of newly emerged sports and high-intensity interval training have been introduced to PICs with mental illness and those with a sex offending history in Siu Lam Psychiatric Centre. To be in line with the Good Lives Model (GLM) of offender rehabilitation (Ward et al., 2006), the participants are motivated to set their own goals and exercise plans.

As a pilot study on the efficacy of sports on the participants, several variables including psychological resilience, self-efficacy, and sleep condition were measured to determine if there was any positive impact of sports on psychological well-being. Duration of participation in the sports programme ranged from six months to one year, according to the participants' length of sentence. An improvement trend in the three variables was shown in Figure 4, with a significant positive change in psychological resilience ( $p < .01$ ) and self-efficacy ( $p < .01$ ). Despite being a preliminary study, the positive results are encouraging for the continuous implementation of therapeutic sports programmes in prisons.

The Effects of Sports on Psychological Well-being

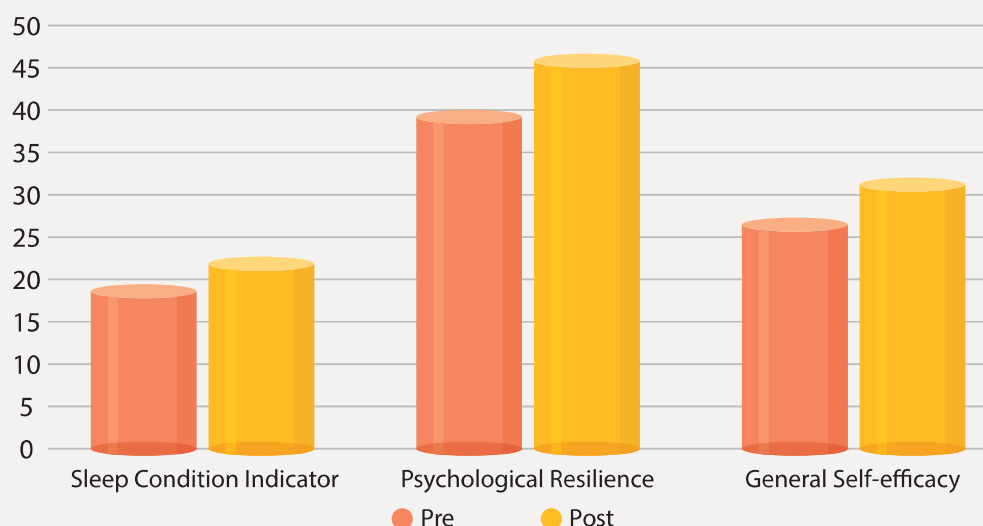


Figure 4. The effects of sports on psychological well-being

## *Insights*

### **1. Sports improve mood, adjustment and penal management**

Scientific researches evidently showed sports programmes would not only enhance physical health, but also improve mood, reduce violence and improve sleep and overall psychological well-being of male PICs.

### **2. Positive findings in our correctional institutions**

In recent years, sports programmes have been introduced in various institutions for male PICs for rehabilitation purposes. Preliminary data demonstrated that there was improvement in psychological resilience and self confidence among PICs.

### **3. Future direction**

There is room for more integration of sports and rehabilitation in penal settings. Incorporation of the rehabilitative element into the current sport activities for the benefit of both PICs and effective penal management can be considered.

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## Article 4

# What Works for Female Persons in Custody: Rehabilitation through Expressive Art



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The topic of differences between males and females has been extensively discussed throughout history, and it is widely acknowledged that men and women have distinct needs. Similarly, there are gender-specific risks and needs among persons in custody (PICs). To facilitate a more effective rehabilitation process, it is essential to address the specific needs of female PICs. Salisbury and Van Voorhis (2009) have identified five gender-specific risk factors for women in custody, including experiences of abuse and trauma, serious mental health issues, substance abuse problems, dysfunctional and abusive intimate relationships, and parenting stress.

From the data compiled by the Hong Kong Correctional Services, it is evident that the population of female PICs has been increasing from 1,556 in 2019 to 1,799 in 2023. In contrast, although the male penal population has also been on the increase, it went from 6,181 in 2019 to 6,698 in 2023 (HKCSD, 2023). The percentage changes in the penal populations of different genders showed a significant difference, with a 16% increase in female population compared to an 8% increase in male population. This highlights the need for designing and exploring new directions for more effective rehabilitation programmes tailored specifically for female PICs.

### ***What We Did?***

In our clinical sessions, we observed that women tended to be more expressive compared to men. Consequently, they are likely to benefit more from the participation in art-related therapies. Over the past few months, we have incorporated therapy and expressive arts into our programmes, particularly Psycho-art (「淺嘗 正向藝術」) and Psycho-dance (「心靈舞蹈」).

## ***What Are Psycho-Art and Psycho-Dance?***

### **Psycho-art**

Art serves as a powerful medium for communication and self-expression, with extensive applications in psychotherapy, counselling and rehabilitation. By encouraging clients to express their emotions and thoughts non-verbally, art activities provide PICs with a valuable outlet to release pent-up emotions and acquire techniques to reduce aggressive thoughts and anger (Liebmann, 1994). Moreover, art facilitates self-reflection, offering individuals a safe and supportive space to delve into their inner world, and fostering personal growth and exploration (Gussak, 1997).

### **Psycho-dance**

Dance has been revered as a healing ritual since the earliest days of human history, and in the 1950s, it gained recognition as a formal therapeutic approach (Chodorow, 1991). The American Dance Therapy Association (ADTA) defines dance therapy as the “psychotherapeutic use of movement to promote the emotional, social, cognitive and physical integration of the individual, with the purpose of enhancing health and well-being” (ADTA, 2018). This therapeutic modality harnesses the power of movement to foster a comprehensive sense of well-being, encompassing emotional, social, cognitive and physical aspects.

## ***How They Went?***

### **Psycho-art 「淺嘗 正向藝術」**

The “Psycho-Art” programme, implemented at Lo Wu Correctional Institution, combines art with positive psychology. The programme incorporates Zentangle, Pastel Nagomi Art and English Calligraphy as artistic mediums. Its primary aim is to encourage PICs to approach the art creation process mindfully, allowing them to relax and focus on their minds. PICs participating in the programme exhibited a high level of expressiveness when sharing the meaning behind their artwork with fellow PICs, demonstrating empathy and support while listening to each other’s stories. After the group sessions, the artwork becomes a catalyst for further exploration and discussion during individual sessions, enabling a deeper exploration of their concerns, worries and traumas through the art they have created.





### Psycho-dance 「心靈舞蹈」

Under the guidance of an experienced dance instructor from the Hong Kong Christian Kun Sun Association, PICs participated in the programme with sessions centred around specific themes such as “Love,” “Forgiveness” and “Hope”. Throughout the programme, PICs were reassured that their ability to dance skillfully was not a requirement for self-expression. The dance instructor taught them simple body movements that enabled them to convey their thoughts and emotions effectively. Each session was conducted with the presence of a clinical psychologist, allowing participants to find personal meaning in the process while simultaneously learning how to navigate and regulate their thoughts and emotions through appropriate body movements.



### Psycho-art 「淺嘗 正向藝術」

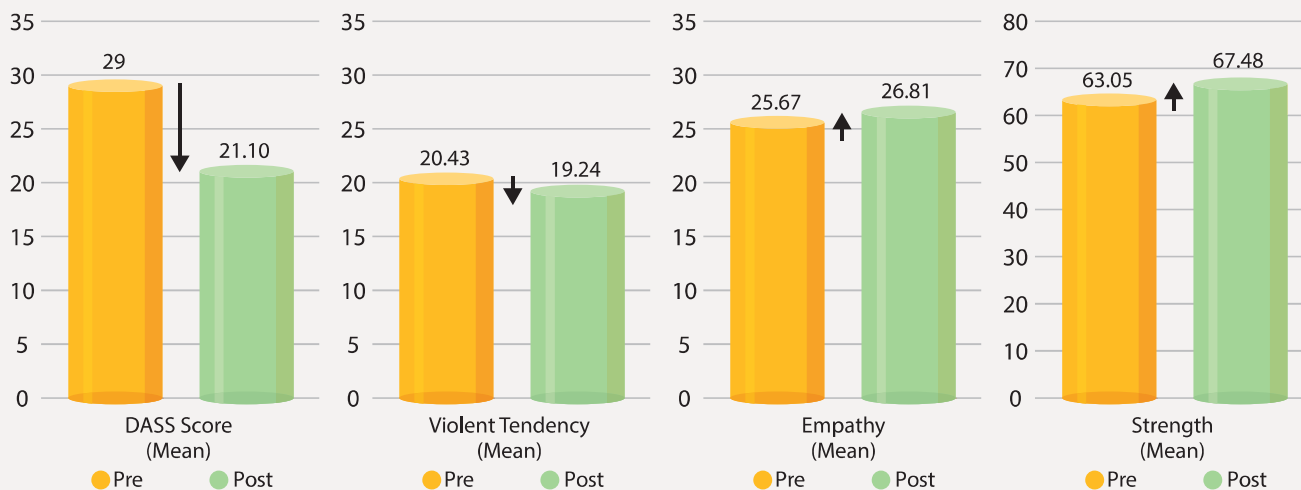


Figure 1. Scorings before and after the Psycho-Art

The results indicated a significant decrease in depression, anxiety, and stress scores comparing pre-intervention with post-intervention ( $p < .001$ ). There was also a significant decrease in violent tendency scores across pre-intervention and post-intervention ( $p < .05$ ). Besides, the results showed a significant increase in empathy scores across pre-intervention and post-intervention ( $p < .01$ ). A significant increase in strength scores was also observed across pre-intervention and post-intervention ( $p < .001$ ).

## *Psycho-dance* 「心靈舞蹈」

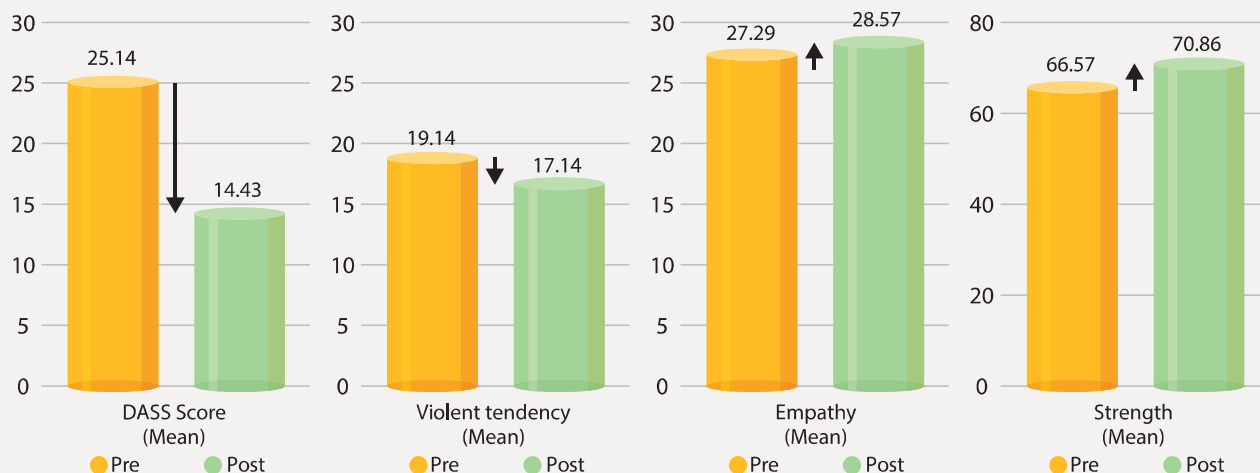


Figure 2. Scorings before and after the Psycho-Dance

As for Psycho-dance, the results indicated a significant decrease in depression, anxiety and stress scores comparing pre-intervention with post-intervention ( $p = .01$ ). However, a decrease in violent tendency scores was not statistically significant across pre-intervention and post-intervention ( $p = .11$ ). Meanwhile, the results showed a significant increase in empathy scores when comparing pre-intervention with post-intervention ( $p = .03$ ). Nonetheless, an increase in strength scores was not statistically significant across pre-intervention and post-intervention ( $p = .056$ ).

## **Results**

Remarkable advancements were noted in the mental well-being of PICs participating in these programmes, evidenced by a reduction in violent tendencies and an enhancement of empathy and personal strengths. Additionally, their interpersonal relationships with other PICs exhibited noticeable improvement, as they became more open to share their life stories through their art creations. The success of incorporating art into rehabilitation programmes has motivated further exploration of diverse art forms as a means to enhance the rehabilitation process. As such, efforts are being made to identify a suitable art form that can effectively facilitate the rehabilitation programmes for male PICs. However, delving into that topic is best suited for another discussion.

## *Insights*

### **1. Gender Specific**

Female PICs have unique needs that differ from the needs of their male counterparts. It is essential to develop interventions specifically designed to address these needs, as this tailored approach is pivotal in achieving improved outcomes for female PICs.

### **2. Expressive Arts**

Female PICs often exhibit a greater inclination towards expressing themselves. By incorporating expressive arts into their rehabilitation programmes, female PICs are provided with a platform to freely explore and process their emotions. This creative outlet not only fosters personal growth but also contributes to their overall rehabilitation journeys.

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