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Issue 4

# Insight: Correctional Rehabilitation Research Bulletin

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Hong Kong Correctional Services





# **Insight:**

## **Correctional Rehabilitation Research Bulletin**

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Ms. Shirley NA

## *Foreword*



In the pursuit of cutting-edge, evidence-informed rehabilitation services and policies, conducting local correctional research and drawing on insights from international studies and practices reinforce the Department's enduring commitment to desistance from crime, crime prevention and the promotion of public safety.

“What Works: How Research Can Help in Offender Rehabilitation” remains the theme of this issue. We begin with Hong Kong's first comprehensive local research on desistance from crime, which explores the pathways and contributing factors to desistance. Expert opinions from Dr Frank PORPORINO (Research Consultant), Dr Kenneth LEUNG (Honourary Advisor and former Deputy Commissioner) and Professor Patrick LEUNG (Research Consultant and Collaborator) offer valuable perspectives on the research implications. This issue also presents findings from a local Video Visit Survey, which provides objective evidence supporting family connections in rehabilitation – an emphasis echoed in contemporary desistance theories. In addition, two articles summarise insights from recent international conferences, namely “Evidence-Informed Drug Rehabilitation and Prevention Workshop” and the “15th Asian Conference on Psychology and Behavioural Science”, highlighting emerging approaches to substance use rehabilitation and the integration of artificial intelligence into human service interventions.

I hope these two local studies, alongside global insights featured in this bulletin, will foster synergy for future research initiatives, professional exchanges and knowledge transfer—furthering our collective dedication to correctional excellence.

Dr. Yvonne LEE

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Coordinator of Correctional Rehabilitation Research Unit

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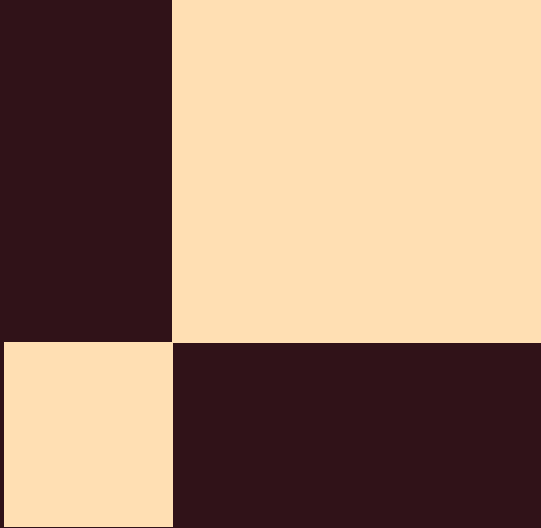
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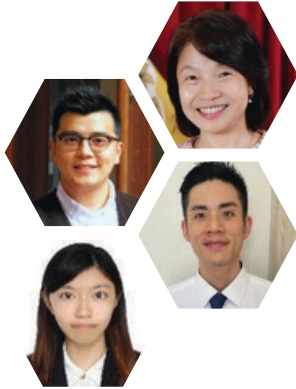
# **What Works?**

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

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## Article 1

# Desistance from Crime in Hong Kong: Pioneering Research on What Works



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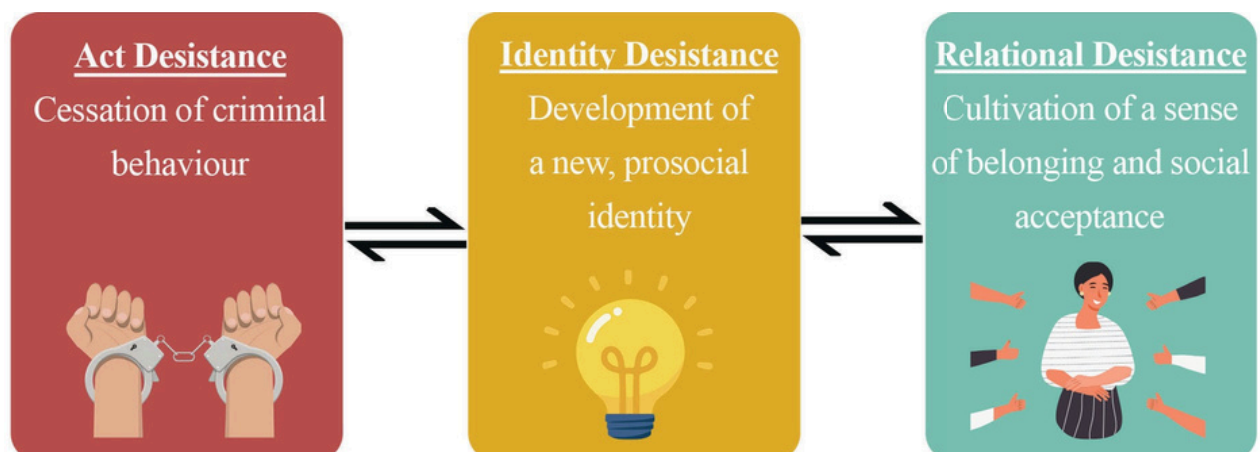
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## Introduction

In a landmark initiative promoting evidence-informed rehabilitation services and policies, a pioneering study on desistance from crime in Hong Kong — conducted in collaboration with The Chinese University of Hong Kong (The CUHK) — was successfully launched and completed in July 2025. As the first comprehensive investigation of desistance within the local context, this research offers valuable insights into how individuals disengage from criminal behaviour and how correctional systems can more effectively support their reintegration into society. Desistance theory, now widely recognised as a leading framework in criminology and rehabilitation, emphasises that moving away from crime is not a single event but a dynamic, long-term process. It comprises the following three interrelated dimensions, offering an understanding of how individuals transition from offending to becoming contributing members of society:





## Key Findings from the Hong Kong Study

Using a triangulated qualitative methodology — including in-depth interviews and focus groups with 60 persisters and 51 desisters — the study adopted a developmental psychopathological lens to trace the desistance journey. Several key findings are as follows:

**1. Mapping the Desistance Journey.** The research constructed a comprehensive narrative of the desistance process, beginning with early life vulnerabilities, progressing through offending and incarceration, and culminating in community re-entry. Notably, some individuals not only rebuilt prosocial identities but also reached a stage of generativity — mentoring others and engaging in community services as a way of giving back.



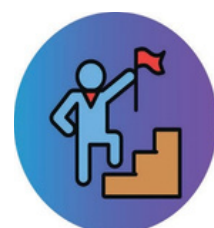
**2. Incarceration as a Turning Point.** Contrary to the common perception of incarceration as purely punitive, the study revealed that imprisonment can serve as a catalyst for change. When paired with structured rehabilitation programmes, incarceration offers a period for self-reflection, discipline and personal growth. It can interrupt cycles of addiction and expose the betrayal of criminal peers, thereby motivating individuals to pursue a different path.



**3. Meeting the Need for Love, Affection and Belonging.** The research underscored the critical role of emotional connectedness — particularly within the Chinese cultural context. Rebuilding relationships with family, romantic partners, mentors and prosocial peers emerges as a cornerstone of sustained desistance. Restored familial bonds not only provide emotional support but also reinforce accountability and a renewed commitment to a crime-free life.



**4. Fulfilling the Need for Competence, Control and Autonomy.** Beyond relational needs, the study highlighted the importance of psychological empowerment. Opportunities to develop skills, exercise personal agency to make choice in life fulfilment and achieve meaningful goals were found essential for maintaining long-term desistance. These elements foster a sense of purpose and self-efficacy that supports continued prosocial behaviour.

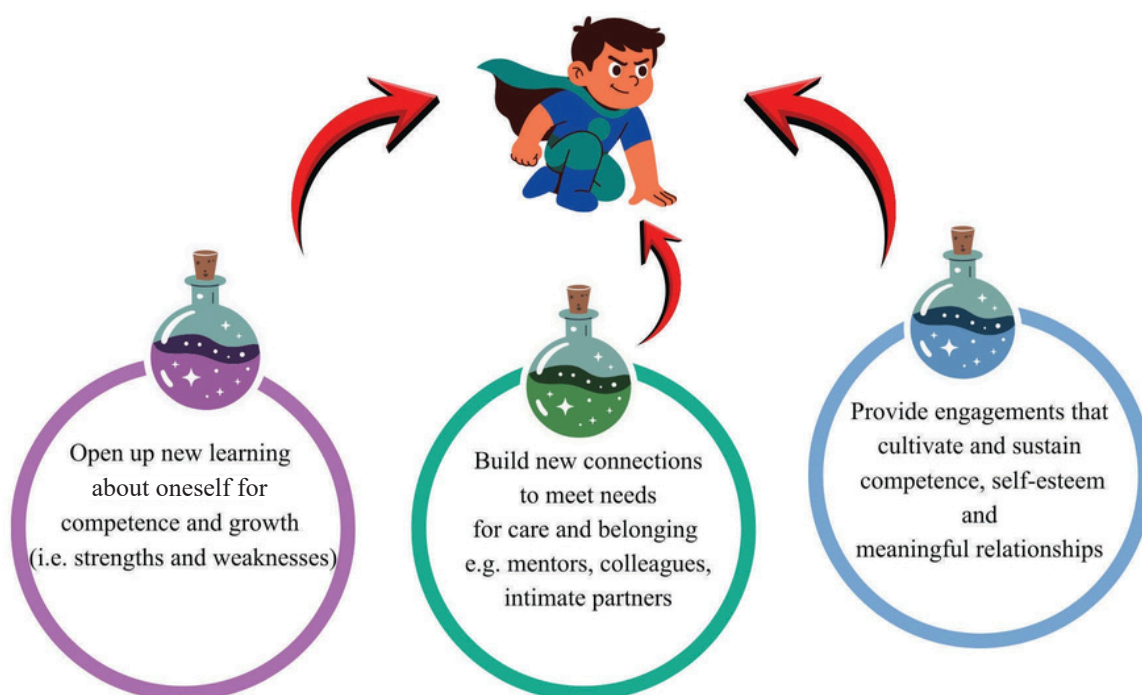




*Professor Patrick LEUNG, Research Professor of The CUHK disseminated the research findings at the Professional Seminar*

## ***From Research to Practice: Catalysts for Change***

To facilitate desistance and meaningful turning points, the study identified the following three broad categories of transformative experiences that correctional services can proactively consider in the provision of rehabilitation services:



## ***Recommendations on Rehabilitation Policy***

Building on these findings, the study offered several strategic recommendations to strengthen rehabilitation efforts in Hong Kong:

- 1. Adopting Strength-based Rehabilitation Strategies:** Rehabilitation should move beyond deficit-focused models and instead emphasise individuals' strengths, interests / hobbies and personal aspirations. Activities such as sports, arts and other hobbies—alongside academic learning, vocational training and spiritual exploration—can foster personal growth and meet the needs for competence and autonomy.
- 2. Strengthening the Role of Rehabilitation Facilitator:** Frontline custodial staff play a pivotal role in fostering a rehabilitative environment through supporting positive changes in daily interactions with persons in custody (PICs). Providing counseling skills training and institutional support is essential for fostering a culture where prosocial behaviour is encouraged, modelled and reinforced.
- 3. Ensuring Continuity through Throughcare Models:** Effective desistance requires seamless support from custody to community. Effective use of the five Multi-purpose Family and Rehabilitation Centres helps implement the throughcare models through offering consistent guidance, resources and opportunities for engagement among the supervisees. Supporting persons in desistance to participate in volunteering, community service and mentorship not only benefits society but also reinforces their prosocial identities and a sense of belonging.



*Research Consultation Meeting with overseas and local research advisers*





The Correctional Rehabilitation Research Unit held a research consultation meeting on 15 October 2025, engaging in substantive discussion on the research findings and their implications. The followings are the key highlights:



**Dr Frank J. Porporino, Research Consultant**

“I thought your very well executed qualitative research was able to outline an excellent and very helpful Desistance Pathway Model for Hong Kong. I can see it offering guidance for programme development for many years to come. We know that for rehabilitative services to be effective, we have to respect desistance as a *process* and support the PICs in their continued desistance journey — from Act (support in ceasing re-offending as per the Risk-Needs-Responsivity paradigm), to Identity (cultivating a new pro-social self), and ultimately to Relational Desistance (fostering a sense of belonging within society). The INCARCERATION experience should serve as a transformative opportunity for rehabilitation and positive change during which PICs begin to learn and see the benefits of adopting NEW pro-social attitudes and behaviours, while developing competencies, agency and self-esteem within a pro-social world. Prison settings that offer customised rehabilitative regimes can support the *beginning* of the desistance journeys for all PICs — regardless of gender or age. That beginning then needs to be reinforced with further support and acceptance in the community after release.”



**Dr LEUNG Kin-ip, Honourary Advisor**

“First, peer counselling and mentoring constitute a particularly promising avenue in desistance-oriented practice. Empirical research has demonstrated that individuals who have successfully desisted from offending can make substantive and positive contributions to society. Their sustained commitment to a law-abiding lifestyle offers a compelling model for PICs, fostering hope and reinforcing the belief that personal transformation is attainable. Owing to their shared life experiences, desisters possess a unique capacity to empathise with PICs, providing both emotional support and credible insight into the multifaceted challenges encountered across the stages of offending, sentencing, incarceration and community reintegration. Naturally, adequate preparation and structured training are prerequisites before a desister can undertake a peer counselling role. A prudent starting point would involve pairing desisters with clinical psychologists and other professional service

providers, enabling them to participate meaningfully in rehabilitation programmes while developing the requisite skills and professional boundaries.

Second, I fully concur that access to meaningful learning and development opportunities is integral to the desistance process. While not all PICs may be inclined towards academic or vocational pursuits, sport-based interventions often hold particular appeal. The integration of structured physical training into rehabilitation frameworks can be highly beneficial, as it promotes discipline, self-efficacy and a sense of mastery through pro-social engagement. Moreover, accredited sports programmes may create formal pathways for PICs to attain recognised qualifications as trainers or coaches, thereby facilitating sustainable employment prospects and social reintegration upon release.”

**Professor Patrick LEUNG, Research Consultant**



“The desistance journey is best understood as a gradual and long-term process of personal transformation, during which individuals move beyond offending behaviour and begin to construct new, prosocial identities. Central to this process is the fulfilment of two fundamental psychological needs: belonging, care and affection, alongside competence, control and autonomy. Importantly, desistance is not a passive experience of merely receiving support. As individuals mature, they increasingly seek opportunities to provide care, guidance and expertise to others. This shift from being recipients to becoming contributors

reflects a deeper stage of identity reconstruction, where giving back becomes as fulfilling as receiving. Meeting these psychological needs, together with basic physiological requirements, lays the foundation for addressing a core spiritual dimension: the search for meaning and purpose in life.

Correctional rehabilitation services play a pivotal role in facilitating this transition by offering structured opportunities for contribution. Engagement in activities such as volunteering in elderly care, participating in community fundraising on Flag Day, or supporting youth organisations like the Boy Scouts enables individuals to experience achievement, compassion and social recognition. Through these acts of service, persons in desistance cultivate a renewed sense of purpose while solidifying a prosocial identity and strengthening community ties.”

# *Insights*

## **1. Incarceration as a Positive Turning Point**

Incarceration, when paired with structured rehabilitation programmes, offers reflection, discipline and growth while disrupting addiction cycles and motivating change through disillusionment with criminal peers.

## **2. Sustained Desistance through Belonging and Competence**

Sustained desistance involves fulfilling two core psychological needs: (1) belonging, care and affection; and (2) competence, control and autonomy - through prosocial relationships and meaningful engagement in community life.

## **3. Rehabilitative Security as a Catalyst for Desistance from Crime**

As “rehabilitation facilitators”, frontline custodial staff foster positive change by creating safe and structured environments, building trust with persons in desistance, giving constructive feedback, supporting change and modelling prosocial behaviour.

## Article 2

# Video Visit Survey: What Works to Reconnect Persons in Custody with Their Families



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## *Introduction*

Separation from loved ones is doubtlessly devastating to anyone. A vast amount of correctional literature illustrates that supportive family relationships are critical determinants of successful rehabilitation (De Claire & Dixon, 2017; Christian et al., 2015). Contemporary desistance theory further emphasises the pivotal role of social connections in enabling individuals to transition from offending to a law-abiding life. On the concept of “relational desistance”, McNeill (2006) asserts that desistance is deeply embedded in social contexts, requiring engagement with families, communities and broader civil society. The first local study on desistance in Hong Kong reinforces this perspective, highlighting that family support emerges as the primary motivating and sustaining force behind individuals’ initial commitment to change and their ongoing efforts to desist from crime in Chinese society (Hong Kong Correctional Services Department, 2025).

In recognition of this, our department has leveraged modern technology to enhance social visit services. The introduction of online video visits (VV) at the five Multi-purpose Family and Rehabilitation Services Centres (MFRSCs), located across different regions in Hong Kong, provides a more convenient, accessible and family-friendly environment for maintaining family connections. This Video Visit Survey aims to investigate the psychological benefits of VVs for visitors (family members) as well as their overall user experiences.







*Video visit facilities in the Shau Kei Wan MFRSC*

## Methodology

A 10-item quantitative survey was designed with reference to previous VV studies, encompassing transportation cost and time, perceptions of the VV environment, emotional experiences of visitors and persons in custody (PICs), relationship quality and rehabilitation outcomes (Flynn et al., 2020, Murdoch & King, 2019). Responses were collected using a 5-point Likert scale, under which the lowest score is 1 (strongly disagree) and the highest is 5 (strongly agree). Two reverse-scored items were included for validity check. For example, participants were asked to respond to the item “VV is not as satisfactory as an in-person social visit”, which is apparently against VV. Responses inconsistent with the rest of the survey were deemed invalid and excluded from the analysis. At last, an open-ended question was included to solicit the participants’ suggestions regarding VVs. 116 visitors who have attended VV sessions at the five MFRSCs voluntarily participated in the survey between April and June 2025. Of the 116 survey forms, 11 were removed from the study due to invalid responses to the reverse-scored items. The remaining 105 survey forms were analysed through calculation of frequencies of scores and comparisons across various visitor relationships (e.g. parents) and the five MFRSCs.



## Results

### Demographic Data

The survey covered 66 females and 38 males, with one participant not indicating his/her gender. The average age was 56.06 years. Most survey forms (43) were collected from the Mong Kok MFRSC. Regarding the relationship to the incarcerated persons, visitors were mostly their parents (59), followed by 11 siblings.

### User Experiences

In general, the participants expressed high satisfaction with the VV. Over 95% of participants agreed that the VV saves transportation time and cost, increases their willingness to attend visits, entails convenience to parents with children, enhances their awareness of the Correctional Services Department (CSD)'s rehabilitation efforts, fosters closer connections and improves PICs' moods. Moreover, about 94.3% and 89.5% of the participants agreed to the items "VV allows family members to render support to PICs which promotes desistance" and "VV eases the feelings of missing my incarcerated relative." respectively. Regarding the reverse-scored items, 25.7% of the participants reflected that the VV is inferior to physical social visits, while 6.7% agreed that the VV incurs more conflicts. For details, please refer to the following table.

S/N	Survey Item	Min	Max	Mean (Average)	Standard Deviation	Agree or Strongly Agree
1	Save Time and Cost	3	5	4.62	0.51	99.10%
2	Willingness to attend visits	3	5	4.52	0.56	97.10%
3	Convenience to parents	1	5	4.54	0.73	96.20%
4 (Reverse)	Inferior to in-person visit	1	5	2.7	1.17	25.70%
5	Sense the goodwill of the CSD	2	5	4.56	0.57	98.00%
6	Desist from crime	3	5	4.45	0.60	94.30%
7 (Reverse)	Incur more conflicts	1	5	1.77	0.87	6.70%
8	Reduce pain of missing PICs	1	5	4.2	0.83	89.50%
9	Closer Relationship	2	5	4.27	0.71	86.70%
10	PICs' mood improves	3	5	4.38	0.63	92.40%



### Comparisons among Demographic Groups and MFRSCs

No significant differences were detected across demographic groups (e.g.

gender, age or relationship to the incarcerated individual). Comparisons across the MFRSCs were computed using one-way ANOVA and significant differences were found in item 2,  $F(4,100) = 4.99$ ,  $p < .01$ , item 3,  $F(4,100) = 6.17$ ,  $p < .01$ , item 5,  $F(4,100) = 3.41$ ,  $p = .012$ , item 8,  $F(4,100) = 4.23$ ,  $p < .01$  and item 10,  $F(4,100) = 5.71$ ,  $p < .01$ . Post hoc analyses were performed using the Bonferroni post hoc test for pairwise comparisons between the centres. In sum, significant differences were only found between Mong Kok MFRSC and Sheung Shui MFRSC, with Mongkok MFRSC outperforming in the following aspects: greater visitor willingness to attend VVs (item 2), greater appreciation of the CSD's rehabilitation efforts (item 5) and reduced emotional pain related to missing the incarcerated PICs (item 8). Additionally, VVs at Mong Kok MFRSC outperformed both Sheung Shui and Shatin MFRSCs in improving the mood of incarcerated PICs. In terms of convenience, Mong Kok MFRSC was regarded as a more convenient location than Shatin MFRSC.



*Mong Kok MFRSC outperforms Shatin and Sheung Shui MFRSCs in 5 aspects*

## Qualitative Analyses of Additional Suggestions

As mentioned, an open-ended question allowed participants to provide any suggestions on the current VV services on a voluntary basis. Among the 12 participants who provided written feedback, many reiterated the need to increase the frequency and duration of VV, while a smaller number expressed their satisfaction with the VV services, particularly the family-friendly environment and staff support. Details are shown in the following table.

S/N	Feedback(CHI)	Feedback(translated into ENG)	Frequency
1	希望可以 <u>延長</u> 時間	Hoping to extend the duration	2
2	沒有，很方便，可以帶小朋友到來，較 <u>輕鬆環境</u> 。	Convenient, children-friendly, more relaxed environment	1
3	沙田服務中心的職員很helpful友善; 如視像探訪的 <u>次數</u> 可以增加會更好，因為除了我外，還有另一名親屬是不便到監獄親身探訪; 亦 <u>感謝懲教署</u> 有提供視像探訪服務!	Staff in ShaTin MFRSC was helpful; Hope the frequency could be increased since there is another relative with accessibility needs, appreciate CSD for providing the service!	1
4	非常 <u>滿意</u> 服務態度	Very satisfied with the service	1
5	時間可以 <u>再久</u> 一點	Extend the duration	1
6	時間可以 <u>增加至30分鐘</u> 一節	Extend the duration to 30 mins	1
7	探訪時間 <u>增長</u> ，探訪日子加多每月 <u>最少2次</u>	Extend the duration and increase the frequency to 2 times per month	1
8	視像探訪每月次數可以 <u>去到2次</u>	Increase the frequency to 2 times per month	1
9	想增加 <u>多一次</u> 視像探訪	Increase one more video visit	2
10	滿意	Satisfied	1
Total			<u>12</u>

## ***Conclusion***

The findings of this Video Visit Survey confirmed a high level of satisfaction with the VV services among the participants (family members), highlighting the value of more convenient locations and a family-friendly environment in fostering meaningful connections with the families, which are fundamental to the journey of desistance from crime. As the first local desistance research indicates that incarceration can serve as a turning point for positive life transformation (Hong Kong Correctional Services Department, 2025), leveraging digital technology to facilitate family connections with incarcerated PICs through online VV offers a cost-effective means of supporting rehabilitation and ultimately fostering a safer society.

## ***Insights***

### **1. Video Visits Strengthen Family Connections**

Video visits allow visitors to see their incarcerated relatives without the stress arising from commuting and travel, long waiting time and other logistics challenges, enabling stronger relationship bonds.

### **2. The More Video Visits the Better**

According to the findings of this survey, visitors are generally satisfied with the video visits services and express a strong demand for more frequent and longer video visits.

### **3. Location Location Location**

Despite being the centre with the longest history, the Mong Kok MFRSC outperforms other centres, indicating that physical convenience plays an important role in delivering community-based rehabilitation services, including the selection of video visits venues.

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## Article 3

# Insights from Evidence-Informed Drug Rehabilitation and Prevention - Workshop 2025: What Works for Drug Abusers



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### *Introduction*

In May 2025, the Correctional Services Department (CSD) joined the Evidence-Informed Drug Rehabilitation and Prevention (ERP) Workshop in Singapore, which brought together correctional professionals from the Asia-Pacific region to share knowledge and experience in substance use rehabilitation. The workshop gathered global agencies to exchange best practices for improving drug rehabilitation and prevention strategies. This article summarises key literature and regional lessons from the workshop, aligning them with Hong Kong's latest data and experience to facilitate policy and programme development for the CSD and its partners.

### *Situation nowadays*

The contemporary evidence base for correctional rehabilitation rests on a set of complementary models. The Risk-Needs-Responsivity (RNR) framework prioritises interventions according to individuals' criminogenic risks and needs, delivered in a manner tailored to their responsivity profiles. In parallel, the Good Lives Model (GLM) reorientates programming towards the acquisition of capabilities and prosocial goals that foster a meaningful life less compatible with offending. Desistance theory further emphasises that a sustained change is often catalysed by identity shifts, strengthened social bonds and access to conventional opportunities — elements that correctional systems can scaffold before, during and after release.



*The ERP Workshop brought together correctional professionals from over 14 jurisdictions around the world for meaningful collaboration and rich knowledge sharing*

Consistent with these frameworks, the ERP Workshop presentations stressed “Psychology-based Correctional Programmes” (PCPs) alongside “Transformational Environments” — institutional cultures and settings optimised for rehabilitation and behaviour change. As one presenter summarised, “Group Psychology-based Correctional Programmes were delivered to enhance motivation for change and to address thinking patterns related to offending. A holistic mix of emerging, soft and vocational accredited skills training was also offered to enhance inmates’ employability upon release.”

The literature converges on a set of high-yield components: cognitive-behavioural treatment aligned with RNR, vocational and educational training linked to labour market demand, family engagement, peer mentorship by persons with lived experience, and structured throughcare bridging custody and community.

The role of community networks is especially salient. Research and practice both indicate that strong post-release social networks and multifaceted community support are crucial for sustainable recovery and reintegration. This underscores the importance of formal partnerships connecting correctional agencies with non-governmental organisations (NGOs), employers, health services and volunteers — approaches mirrored in regional initiatives such as Singapore’s Yellow Ribbon community mobilisation and desister networks.

## ***Regional practice and workshop highlight***

The Singapore programme provides a cohesive case study of a throughcare system integrating institutional and community components. During the workshop, site visits were made to Selarang Park Complex Institution S1 and several halfway houses, where teams observed a pipeline of interventions integrating PCPs, skills training and structured step-down placements. The emphasis on lived-experience leadership was notable, with presenters highlighting personal journeys in which peer mentors played vital roles in desistance and personal transformation.

Community-based supports are indispensable to the continuity of care, therefore strong community partnerships are considered essential for fostering environments that support offering second chances for individuals reintegrating into society. The integration of volunteer mentors, desister networks and family services within supervision schemes forms a protective lattice that complements statutory oversight and reduces practical barriers to desistance.

At the Asia-Pacific Forum Against Drugs (APFAD) held on the second day of the ERP, keynote messages emphasised the dual public health and public safety dimensions of substance use, especially among the youth. Policymakers and practitioners warned that new psychoactive substances and synthetic compounds complicate prevention and treatment, requiring agile responses in education, law and service provision, an agenda highly relevant to Hong Kong's current landscape.

## ***Hong Kong context: data and programmes***

Hong Kong's treatment ecosystem spans statutory and voluntary interventions, including compulsory placement, methadone maintenance, residential rehabilitation and community-based services. Within the CSD, Drug Addiction Treatment Centres (DATCs) provide structured and mandatory rehabilitation with a post-release statutory supervision period, offering courts an alternative to imprisonment for eligible cases. Facilities such as Hei Ling Chau Addiction Treatment Centre serve as hubs for disciplined therapeutic routines, vocational activities and reintegration preparation, which are consistent with the throughcare philosophy.

Recent official data show mixed signals. The number of overall reported drug abuse cases decreased by 4% in the first half of 2025, from 3 055 to 2 919 cases,



with heroin, cocaine and methamphetamine being the most common drugs among the general population (Hong Kong Government, 2025). However, vigilance is required regarding youth indicators. The number of reported young drug abusers aged under 21 in the first half of 2025 increased from 453 to 457, with etomidate, commonly known as a “space oil drug”, being the most common substance among reported youth abusers, followed by cannabis and cocaine (Hong Kong Government, 2025). Authorities have taken actions to regulate etomidate and its analogues so as to strengthen targeted prevention, underscoring a dynamic threat environment.

## 按年齡組別及普遍吸食的毒品種類劃分的呈報吸食毒品人士

Reported drug abusers by age group and common type of drugs taken

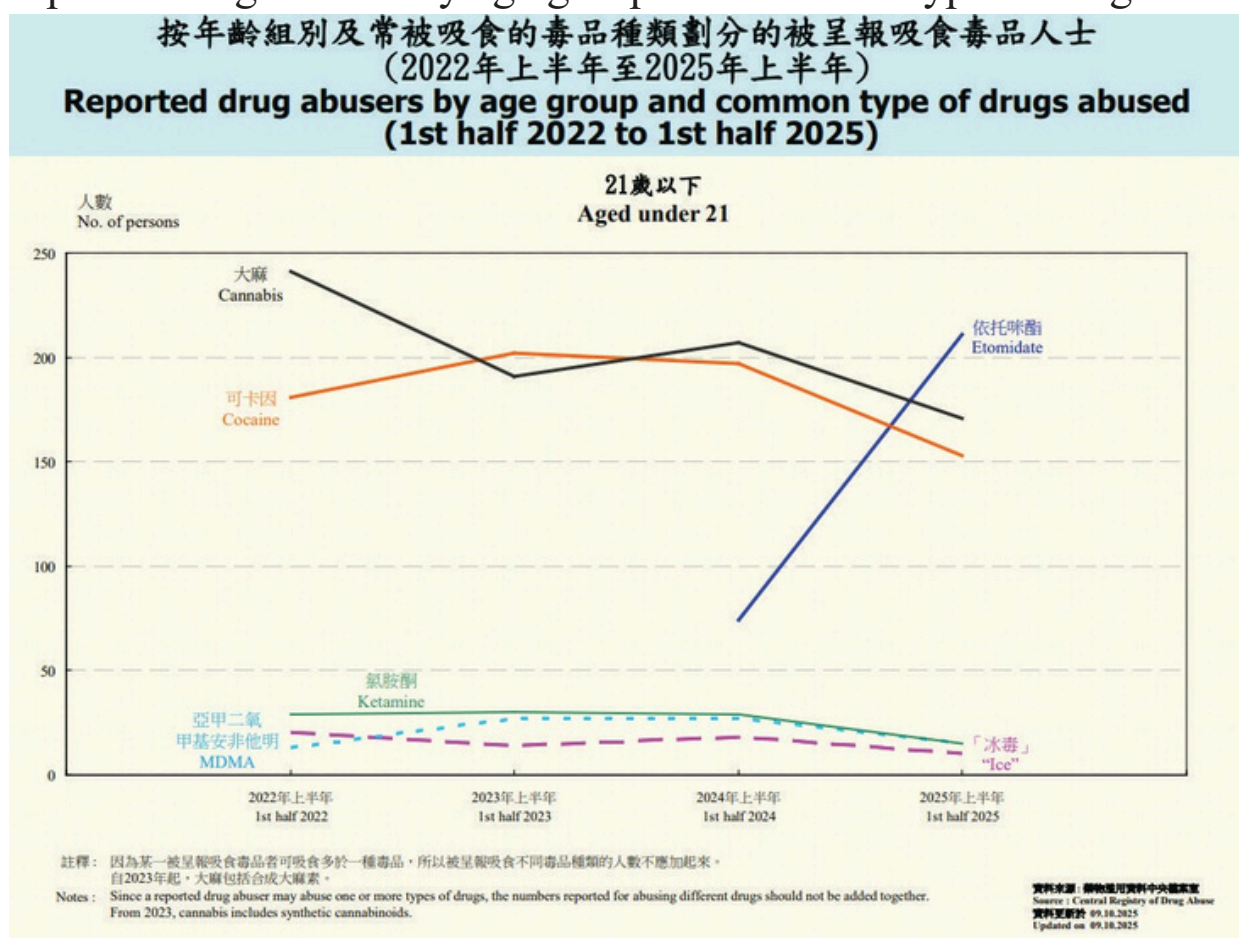


Figure 1. Prevalence of common drug abuse from 1st half of 2022 to 1st half of 2025.

Source: Central Registry of Drug Abuse (CRDA), Narcotics Division, Security Bureau. HKSAR Government

Within the CSD’s remit, reintegration success indicators are encouraging. In the first half of 2025, the success rate of the Drug Addiction Treatment Centre Programme, defined as completing statutory supervision without reconviction and remaining drug-free, rose to 74.7%, up from 66.4% in 2024. Several supervision schemes, including Rehabilitation Centre Programme, Detention Centre Programme, Supervision After Release Scheme and Pre-release Employment



Scheme, recorded success rates at or near 100% in the same period, reflecting strong case management and compliance outcomes. This trajectory suggests that aligned, multifaceted interventions are translating into measurable reintegration gains even amid evolving drug-market risks. Having said that, complementary sources illuminate system pressures. An audit of a major NGO's residential services found high readmission proportions across five years, highlighting relapse as a common feature of chronic substance use and reinforcing the importance of extended aftercare and relapse-prevention support in the community (Audit Commission, 2025). These findings align with international literature and argue for continuous quality improvement in both rehabilitative and community-based components (e.g. NGOs' services) (Legislative Council Panel on Security, 2025).

### *Local practice: innovations and challenges*



*Partnered with NGOs, the CSD has arranged various talks on drugs prevention at our community centre.*

The CSD has expanded efforts in peer support, employability pathways and family counselling, echoing lessons from the ERP Workshop. The Department has strengthened aftercare and supervisory mechanisms and explored technology-enabled support to maintain engagement during the critical post-release period. Partnerships across government and civil society contribute to a braided approach, enhancing coverage and continuity. Regional best practices observed

at the ERP Workshop resonate with the Department's emphasis on desistance pathways and community integration. Persistent challenges include psychiatric comorbidity, stigma, and the need to sustain youth engagement amid shifting drug trends. Legislative and preventive measures regarding etomidate and analogues, coupled with targeted education, are timely but must be matched by front-line capacity in screening, dual-diagnosis treatment and youth-specific programming (Hong Kong Government, 2025). From a desistance perspective, bolstering family systems, prosocial identity formation and real labour market attachments are essential to mitigate relapse risk and consolidate early gains from in-custody interventions.



*A range of systematic and evidence-based therapeutic programmes have been developed to enhance inmates' understanding of drug addiction problems*

## ***Conclusion and Implications***

The ERP Workshop 2025 in Singapore offered critical insights into effective, evidence-based strategies for drug rehabilitation and reintegration. Organised by the Singapore Prison Service, the workshop showcased structured harm prevention models with strong focuses on throughcare, community collaboration, and the meaningful involvement of individuals with lived experience. Highlights included the success of Psychology-based Correctional Programmes, employability-focused vocational training, and the



impact of peer-led support in lowering recidivism. The APFAD Conference underscored the value of regional cooperation, prioritising youth-focused prevention and community education. Rehabilitation centres also illustrated Singapore's comprehensive approach, integrating in-custody work with community reintegration.

Looking ahead, CSD aims to enhance its rehabilitation strategies by adopting these international best practices while addressing local challenges. The ERP Workshop 2025 ultimately reinforced the vital role of correctional agencies in promoting safer, drug-free communities.

## *Insights*

### **1. Partnership is Key**

Effective drug rehabilitation in corrections depends on robust partnerships among correctional agencies, community NGOs, families and people with lived experience.

### **2. Evidence-informed and Individualised Services Serve Needs**

The most effective strategies are evidence-informed and responsive to the diverse needs of offenders.

### **3. Sustained Aftercare Prevents Relapse**

Expanding peer-support groups, family involvement and practical employment initiatives has a measurable impact, particularly for young and high-risk abusers in Hong Kong.

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## Article 4

# Exploring the Future of Psychological and Behavioural Science: What Works in Advancing the Field



Ms. Shirley NA, Clinical Psychologist, CSD

### *Introduction*

From 24 to 29 March 2025, I attended the **15th Asian Conference on Psychology and Behavioural Science (ACP2025)** held in Tokyo, Japan. This global event attracted **829 delegates from 60 countries**, giving over 600 presentations on diverse psychological topics. As a clinical psychologist, I gained a deeper understanding through this conference of the emerging trends and was offered valuable networking opportunities.

The conference covered a wide range of topics, including general psychology, mental health, ageing and educational psychology. Among the highlights were **keynote speeches, panel discussions and interactive research presentations**. Of particular note was the conference's thematic focus on technology and its intersection with psychology, especially the growing role of **artificial intelligence (AI)** in shaping social behaviour, education and mental health outcomes.

### *Key Learnings*

#### **1. AI and Psychology: A New Frontier**

Discussions surrounding AI's implications for psychology were particularly enlightening. A standout keynote, titled “*Social Robots for All Stakeholders in Elderly Care*”, examined how AI-powered robots are being developed not only to assist with physical tasks but also to support the emotional and social well-being of older adults. The speaker, Mr. Hidenobu Sumioka, showcased “Hiro-chan,” a robot designed to alleviate loneliness in elderly individuals with dementia. Another keynote, “*Global Citizenship Education: Human and Artificial Intelligence*”, addressed the intersection of AI, education and identity development, followed by

the discussion of the challenges in fostering resilience and empathy as AI becomes more prevalent.

In addition, the panel discussion on “*Human vs Artificial Intelligence: Psychological Threats and Opportunities*” sparked deep reflection on the potential dangers posed by the rapid integration of AI into daily life. The panel focused on a range of emerging concerns, including the neurological impacts of prolonged interaction with AI-driven technologies, the risks of over-engagement with AI tools in everyday routines, and the broader socio-economic consequences such as increased unemployment due to automation. The discussion also explored the psychological and emotional toll of diminished human interaction, highlighting how increasing reliance on AI systems may contribute to social isolation, reduced empathy and shifts in collective emotional norms.

These discussions raised important questions for me, a psychologist working with incarcerated individuals: How might AI tools be responsibly leveraged to support the rehabilitation and mental well-being of persons in custody in correctional settings? Could virtual therapeutic agents be integrated into the existing services to supplement limited clinical resources while maintaining ethical and professional standards?

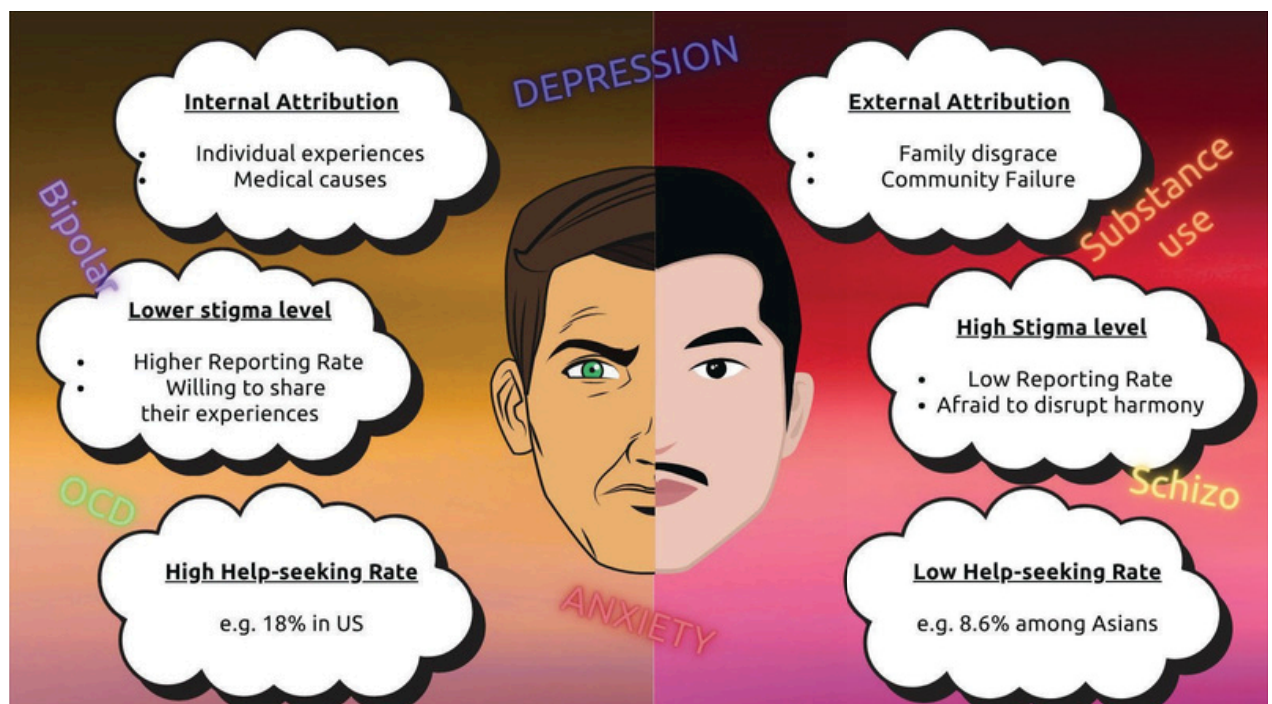


*A brief exchange with the speaker from Japan, Mr. Hidenobu Sumioka with his AI product, “Hiro-chan”, which renders companionship to elderly with dementia in care homes*



## 2. Cross-cultural Trends in Psychological Practice

Insights into diverse psychological practices emphasised the importance of cultural sensitivity. For instance, survivors of intimate partner violence in Asian cultures may perceive and process trauma differently from their Western counterparts. In Asian societies like the Philippines, strong familial and societal expectations can lead survivors to minimise or internalise their trauma, often delaying help-seeking or leading to feelings of shame and guilt. Presentations from countries such as Thailand and India also illustrated culturally specific approaches to mental health. For example, transgender individuals in India face multifaceted challenges shaped by cultural stigma, legal frameworks and community support systems, which require a nuanced therapeutic approach distinct from Western settings. In traditional Asian families, where the mother is typically the primary carer and the father assumes the role of breadwinner, children's attachment patterns may develop in ways that affect their self-compassion and conflict coping.





These cross-cultural perspectives reinforced the importance of **cultural competence in psychological practice**, especially in correctional settings where individuals come from a wide range of cultural backgrounds. Understanding these differences is critical to providing ethical, effective and person-centred rehabilitation programmes that truly meet the needs of persons in custody.

Moreover, the presentations highlighted the **universal rise in mental health awareness**, especially in post-pandemic contexts. Issues such as anxiety, depression, loneliness and trauma were common themes, emphasising the global nature of psychological distress and the shared responsibility of the international community in addressing them.

### **3. Networking and Collaborative Opportunities**

The conference provided an invaluable opportunity to **network with international scholars and practitioners**. Engaging in conversations during poster sessions and coffee breaks allowed me to share experiences from Hong Kong's correctional system while learning about other countries' approaches to forensic psychology, prisoner rehabilitation and mental health support. These exchanges affirmed the **shared challenges** we face despite geographical differences — overcrowded facilities, limited mental health resources, and the need for innovative rehabilitation models. Engaging with professionals from Australia and Singapore, for example, opened the door to potential cross-border knowledge exchanges and future collaboration.



*Networking with international experts for professional knowledge exchanges in psychological practices*

#### 4. The Importance of Evidence-based Practice

Many of the presentations emphasised the growing focus on **evidence-based and data-driven practices** in psychology. Research showcased at the conference demonstrated how empirical findings are being translated into real-world interventions — whether in schools, hospitals or institutions. This reaffirmed my commitment to grounding clinical decisions in scientific evidence. In the context of correctional services, it reinforced the importance of **evaluating the effectiveness of rehabilitation programmes**, conducting regular outcome assessments, and integrating psychological research into institutional policies.



*A speaker from China gives a presentation debriefing on his scientific findings on self-harm among adolescents*

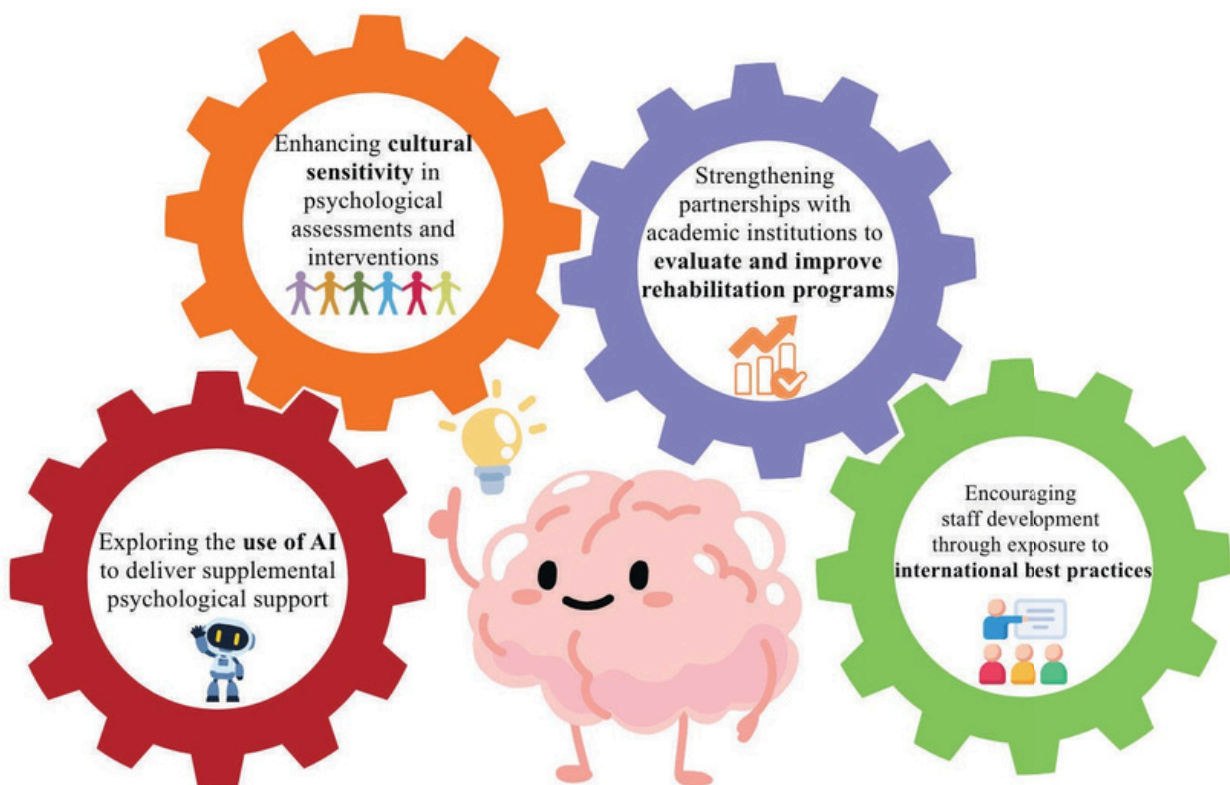
### ***Reflections on Professional Development***

Attending this conference was not only intellectually stimulating but also personally and professionally enriching. It reminded me of the **dynamic and evolving nature of psychology** — a field that increasingly intersects with technology, ethics, law and global health. I left the conference with a renewed sense of purpose and curiosity. In particular, the discussions on AI stimulated me to think beyond traditional clinical frameworks and consider how emerging

technologies might transform the way we deliver psychological services in the future. Furthermore, I gained a deeper appreciation for the **importance of international collaboration** in advancing psychological science. The diversity of voices and experiences at the conference underscored that solutions to mental health challenges must be both **locally relevant and globally informed**.

## *Implications for Practice in Correctional Services*

Several takeaways from the conference hold direct relevance for my current work at the CSD:



*Main takeaways from ACP2025. These directions aim to better support the mental health and rehabilitation of persons in custody, ultimately contributing to safer reintegration and reduced recidivism.*

## Conclusion

The 15th Asian Conference on Psychology and Behavioural Science was a rewarding experience that broadened my understanding of contemporary psychological issues. It underscored the significance of engaging with global trends, embracing innovation, and fostering cross-cultural dialogue. Conferences like ACP2025 are essential for learning, collaboration and transformation in the field of psychology.

## Insights

### 1. Integration of AI in Psychology

- The potential of AI to enhance therapeutic practices must be explored ethically and responsibly, especially in correctional contexts.

### 2. Cultural Sensitivity

- Understanding diverse cultural perspectives is crucial to effective psychological practices, particularly in rehabilitation settings.

### 3. Networking for Innovation

- Engaging with international professionals can lead to innovative solutions and improvements in mental health support and rehabilitation strategies.

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