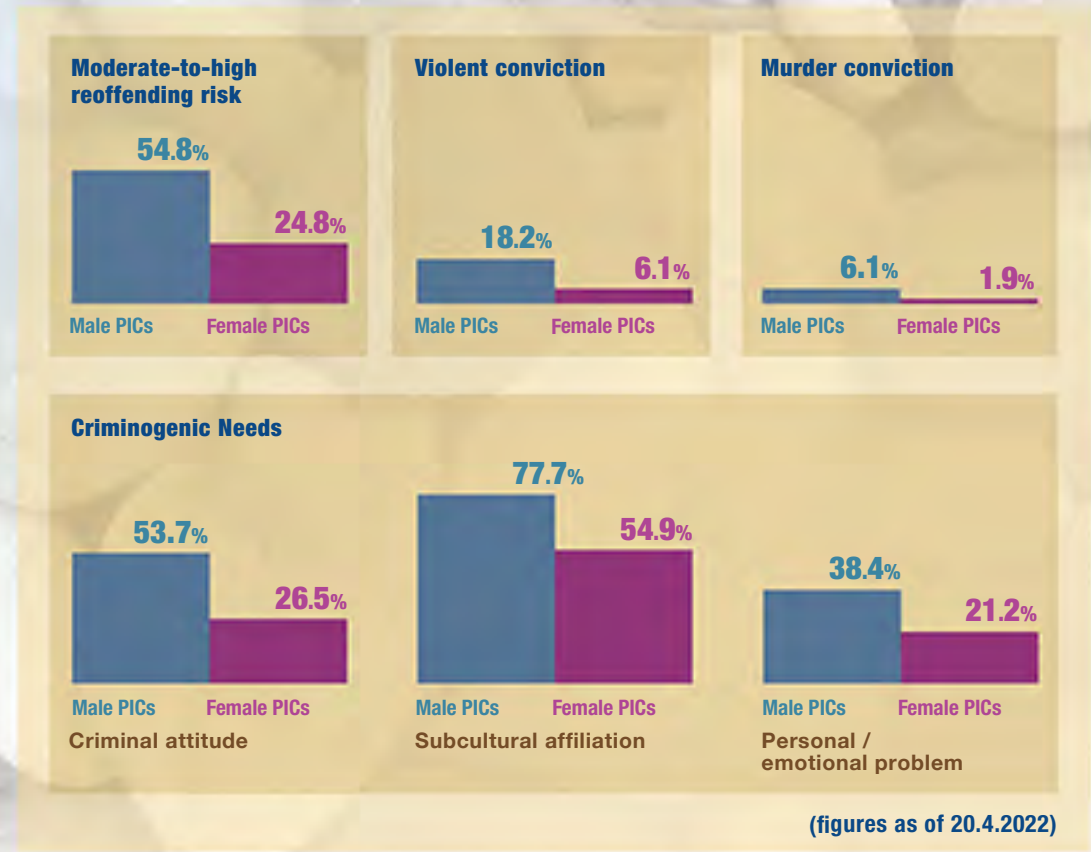
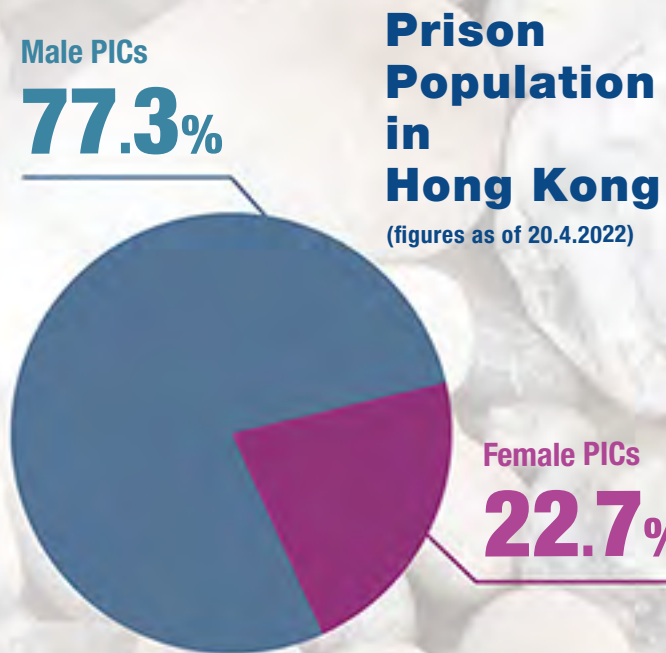


Chapter 6

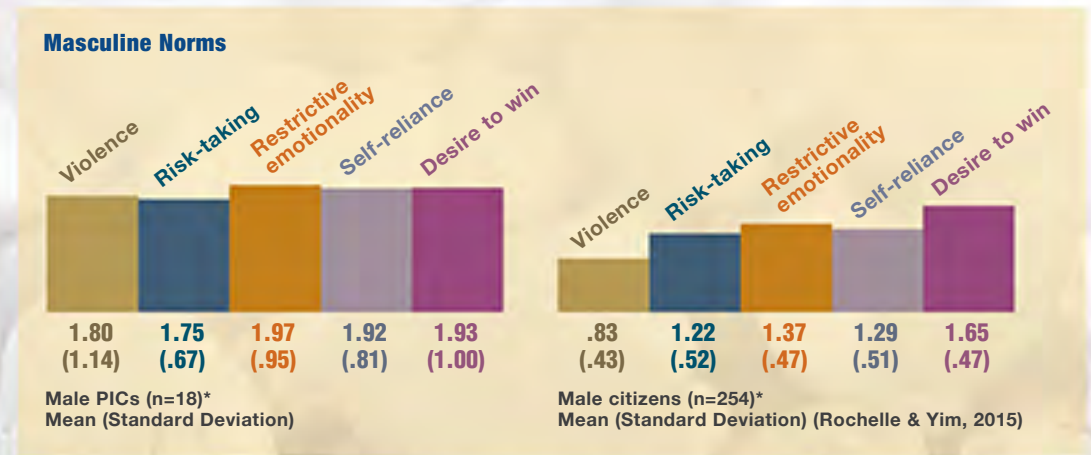
LIFE GYM: Pioneering a male-responsive psychological programme through the lens of masculinities

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Predominantly, male persons-in-custody (PICs) are considerably more antisocial and violent, with more criminogenic needs, than female PICs in Hong Kong (Hong Kong Correctional Services Department, 2020).



Preliminary data on the Chinese Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory-46 showed that male persons-in-custody (PICs) in LIFE GYM were found to be more violent, emotionally restricted, self-reliant, and with higher risk-taking attitudes than Hong Kong's general male citizen population.





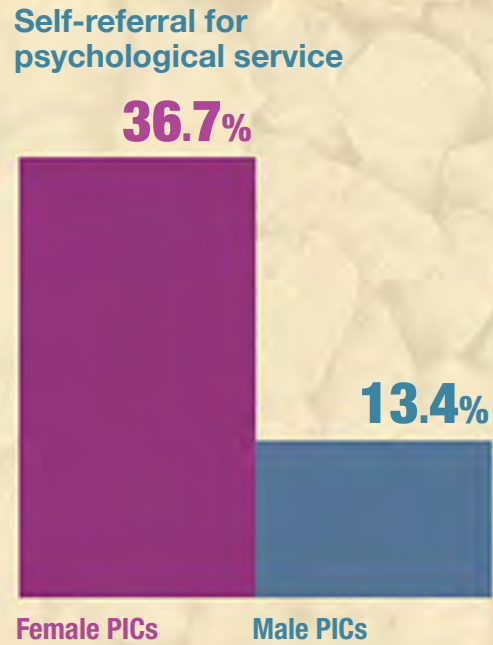
Males account for **77%** of penal population

Around the world, prison is a male-dominated environment. Similar to overseas jurisdictions, male persons-in-custody (PICs) are over-represented in Hong Kong's correctional institutions, accounting for approximately 77% of the penal population. In addition to the significantly higher rates of offending and re-offending behaviours, male PICs accounted for more violent and serious convictions, and reported more criminal attitude, subcultural affiliation, as well as personal/emotional issues compared to their female counterparts (Hong Kong Correctional Services Department, 2020). From a public protection viewpoint, effective offender rehabilitation programmes, especially for male PICs that reduce recidivism, is central to building a safer society. In 2018, the Hong Kong Correctional Services Department set-up its first specialised male treatment unit, LIFE GYM: Positive Living Centre for Men, after the successful launch of Psychological Gymnasium (PSY GYM) for female PICs – this has launched a new era of gender-specific rehabilitation services in Hong Kong. LIFE GYM, by incorporating a masculinities perspective, has been a pioneer in Asian jurisdictions for innovative male-responsive treatment strategies with the aim of helping male PICs develop a prosocial lifestyle and cultivate positive masculinities.

Male Persons-In-Custody (PICs) and Masculinities

Male PICs' disproportionately higher propensity for physical violence, anger, irritability, substance abuse problems, and antisocial behaviour is related to the collective social norms about what is meant to be a man – that is, masculinity playing a critical role (Gerdes & Levant, 2018). Masculinity is a set of attributes, behaviours and roles associated with men and boys, shaped by gender socialisation and biological predisposition. In male psychology literature, men are socialised to avoid recognising and expressing negative emotions, and thus develop a tendency to externalise their experience of emotional distress and symptoms of depression into the above acting-out behaviour (Lynch & Kilmartin, 2013). Besides, men who conform to societal expectations of masculinity are supposed to be strong, self-reliant, and manage problems on their own (Pollack, 1995), thereby showing greater resistance to seeking help (Wimer & Levant, 2011). It has been documented – across countries, ethnic groups, and age ranges - that men, compared to women, are half as likely to seek help for mental health concerns (Seidler et al, 2016).

The number of male PICs' self-referral for psychological services is significantly lower than the female PICs



Male-Specific Psychological Programmes

Clinical psychologists have integrated both male psychology literature and correctional research in developing systematic psychological assessment and treatment programmes for LIFE GYM. Based on the empirically validated risk-needs-responsivity model (Bonta & Andrews, 2017), which is the highest benchmark in offender rehabilitation, LIFE GYM participants first join the **Orientation Programme** for risk assessment and programme matching purposes. Those assessed with moderate or high re-offending risk will be arranged to participate in the 8 to 10 months Intensive Programme on a voluntary basis. Upon completion of the **Intensive Programme**, some participants will be discharged from prison and those remaining will attend the **Maintenance Programme** to sustain their treatment gains.

The multi-modal Intensive Programme has dual objectives of reducing re-offending and cultivating positive masculinities. The programme consists of cognitive-behavioural group therapy with special emphasis on skills-training. LIFE GYM participants attend a weekly three-hour treatment group led by clinical psychologists and a two-hour homework session every other week.

This lower willingness to seek psychological services might be explained by male PICs' tendency to be more conforming to traditional masculine norms than males in the general population, in terms of solving personal problems on their own and restricting expressions of emotional distress despite the elevated rates of violent and risk-taking behaviour on the Chinese Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory (Rochelle & Yim, 2015). This underlies the importance of adopting a masculinity perspective when designing institution-based psychological programmes delivered in LIFE GYM, with particular emphasis on addressing male-specific treatment needs and devising male-responsive treatment strategies to enhance motivation for psychological services among male PICs.



Reducing Re-Offending

To reduce re-offending among the male PICs, the **Intensive Programme** addresses male-specific criminogenic needs, namely criminal attitudes (Bonta & Andrews, 2017), anger and other negative emotions (Kelly, Novaco & Cauffman, 2019), impoverished problem-solving abilities (Antonowicz & Ross, 2005), assertiveness deficits (Maiuro, Cahn, & Vitaliano, 1986), behavioural addictions (Vaughn, Salas-Wright & Reingle-Gonzalez, 2016), and, negative family and social relationships (Nagin, Farrington & Moffitt, 1995) with the following treatment modules:

1. Re-offending reduction
2. Challenging criminal thinking
3. Anger and other mood management
4. Problem-solving training
5. Assertive communication training
6. Managing behavioural addiction
7. Promoting positive family and social relationships

For serious violent offenders serving a life-sentence, the Violence Prevention Programme (VPP) is tailored to their specific treatment needs, with the aim of reducing future violence and protecting public safety (see Lee, Wong & Kung, 2017 for more details).



Cultivating Positive Masculinities

Clinical psychologists believe that one does not have to sacrifice masculine identities to reduce the risk of reoffending. **LIFE GYM** has a new initiative promoting positive masculinities, so that male PICs feel that participating in the residential treatment programmes is compatible to their male identity and retaining a 'strong man' image. Following evidence-based character strengths intervention procedures (Niemi, 2019), psychologists help participants identify their prominent positive masculinities, examine their possible underuse and overuse of these healthy masculinities, in addition to fostering the use of male strengths by setting adaptive goals. With reference to the Positive Psychology Positive Masculinities framework (Kiselica & Englar-Karlson, 2010), the following eight positive masculinities are introduced to LIFE GYM participants.

Positive Masculinities	Tagline
Self-reliance	Owning responsibilities in life's challenges and leveraging input from others
Eagerness to help	Helping wisely according to the needs of others and one's capabilities
Rising above difficulties	Overcoming challenges with perseverance and formulating ways to move forward
Worker-provider	Embracing family responsibilities without hesitation by being a breadwinner and carer for loved ones
Humor	Making use of humour to ease stress and in socialising while not losing sight of problem-solving
Group orientation	Banding together to achieve common goals
Caring in action	Showing care above and beyond words with empathetic actions
Courage and daring	Striving with courage to meet goals for career, family, and other pursuits

Male-Responsive Treatment Strategies

The responsivity principle of the offender rehabilitation model suggests that the mode of intervention should match an individual's characteristics, such as gender, age, and intelligence – which all affect one's ability and motivation to learn. Working on the responsivity principle which is sometimes labeled the 'neglected R' (Duwe & Kim, 2018), the design of LIFE GYM's psychological programmes focuses on masculine characteristics to effect positive change. Referencing cutting-edge male-friendly intervention strategies in male psychology literature (American Psychological Association, 2018; Robertson et al., 2015; World Health Organization, 2018), LIFE GYM has introduced five innovative male-responsive treatment strategies tailored to the learning style of the male PICs with a view to boosting their treatment motivation.

Virtual Reality (VR) Training

Men are often attracted to innovative technology. LIFE GYM has been pioneering VR-assisted psychological treatment since its establishment, as embracing technology in treatment can potentially enhance male participants' motivation to receive treatment. VR technology creates simulated, computer-generated virtual environments incorporating three-dimensional visualization that allows user interaction through transmission devices (Ticknor & Tillinghast, 2011). It has the benefit of enabling participants to practise psychological skills in a safe, controlled, and immersive environment. This is especially valuable because VR provides LIFE GYM participants with exposure to community scenarios that are otherwise not accessible while in custody.



Treatment with VR has been shown to be effective with psychological issues commonly associated with offenders, e.g. anxiety (Maples-Keller et al., 2017), anger (Miyahara et al., 2010), substance abuse (Segawa et al., 2020), etc. Currently, a set of localized VR stimuli specially developed by the Hong Kong Correctional Services Department are in use for training anger management skills and relapse prevention skills in LIFE GYM. It should be emphasised that VR training is additional to our existing treatment rather than its replacement. During VR anger management skills training, the participant is exposed to VR scenarios depicting various forms of provocation that is often encountered in the workplace. He is then required to respond to the provocation in an assertive manner. During training of relapse prevention skills, the participant is faced with a VR scenario about running into a criminal peer (a VR character) in a common Hong Kong street. The character repeatedly tempts the participant to join him in an illegal operation, and the participant is asked to maintain his desistance from crime by rejecting the invitation. In both types of training, the responsible clinical psychologist varies the response of the virtual character according to the participant's responses, with the goal of facilitating skills practice. Feedback is then provided to the participant after training so that he can have a better understanding of his strengths and weaknesses in terms of mastery of skills.

Consistent with our expectations, almost all LIFE GYM participants who have undergone VR training find it appealing due to its novel and immersive nature. They find the VR scenarios helpful in enriching their skills practice as well as their preparation for community reintegration, as they may encounter similar high-risk situations after release.



Therapeutic Sports Activities

Men tend to enjoy sports activities more than women (Tsai et al., 2015). Exercising is an effective emotion regulation strategy, through the regulation of hormones such as adrenaline, cortisol, and endorphin (Yeung, 1996). Sports also serve as a context for socialisation among men. With continued sports practices that improve physique, stamina, and skills, one also improves his self-esteem through adolescence and adulthood (McAuley et al., 1997). In general, **sport is seen to be associated with better mental health (White et al., 2017), possibly via improved social support and self-esteem (Babiss & Gangwisch, 2009).**

LIFE GYM takes a ground-breaking step to integrate sports activities into psychological treatment. Clinical psychologists collaborate with triathlon and body-weight training coaches from a non-profit sports organization to provide weekly systematic sports training with PICs. Various sports equipment, for example smart bikes, cordless jump ropes, and medicine balls are introduced to arouse participants' interest. Leveraging modern technology, smart bikes are provided to enable participants to 'virtually' ride in simulated tracks outside prison. One major characteristic of this partnership with non-profit sports organisation is that coaches can render through care from custody to the community for participants. It is envisioned that, by increasing PICs' interest in sports activities and building their habit of exercising within the correctional institution - and linking them to coaches operating sports courses in the community - **a new avenue of positive living with prosocial support networks could be opened up. Sport and exercise would replace the maladaptive habits that had had such a negative influence before their incarceration.**



LIFE GYM, in an initiative to make sports therapeutic, is piloting "Sports+", a manualised series of modularised psychological skill practices embedded in sports training. During their sports training and with guidance, PICs made use of what they learnt in goal-setting, strength-spotting, and social skills training. "Sports+" is expected to facilitate the benefits of sports training and consolidating PIC's learning in psychological treatment.

Our therapeutic sports activities successfully engaged LIFE GYM participants, who seized opportunities by using the smart bike for training during their exercise time; some devised and implemented training plans under the guidance of coaches. Other participants explored the possibility of volunteering with their coaches upon discharge.

Activity-Oriented Treatment

Considering that most men are extroverted, active, and enjoy competition, LIFE GYM has incorporated a wide range of games, such as **educational video games and board games** into the treatment regime, with the aim of providing participants with opportunities for active experiential learning and continuous skills practise beyond conventional talk therapy. Our staff unanimously agrees that the activity sessions, during which the participants tend to be more relaxed, are an **excellent chance to observe participants' behaviour and treatment gains, which include problem-solving skills, impulse control, rule compliance, social and communication skills, etc.** Psychological officers are responsible for leading the activities, providing participants with in-session skills coaching, as well as post-activity group debriefings. During debriefing, the skills involved in gameplay will be highlighted, and participants discuss such topics as how the skills have helped them in gameplay, how they can better utilise the skills in daily life, etc.

LIFE GYM participants are clearly attracted to this mode of learning due to the competitive and stimulating nature of games. Literature shows that games, whether digital or analogue in nature, offer an alternative learning environment ingrained in gameplay, with potential to facilitate players' cognitive and behavioural changes (Bayeck, 2020; Granic, Lobel, & Engels, 2013; Zagal, Rick, & Hsi, 2006). Our observations during the activity sessions revealed a similar impression. Through **repeated coaching and debriefing**, LIFE GYM participants often manage progress from a haphazard, self-focused gaming approach, to a more systematic, collaborative team approach that involves **joint planning and decision-making**. They also **learnt to cope with negative emotions** arising from the games (e.g. frustration and disappointment) and approach game tasks with more flexible strategies. We therefore believe continuous participation in such forms of activity-based learning would be beneficial to participants' internalisation and generalisation of skills.



Treatment-In-Action

Men are practical and prefer action over talking. Apart from individual and group treatment, LIFE GYM participants are provided with opportunities to lead a prosocial life in the institution, put into practice their positive masculinities such as “caring in action”, and consolidate the skills learnt from treatment. **Intergenerational Life Review (ILR)** is a highlight of such opportunities. During ILR, under the guidance of staff, young PICs interviewed elderly PICs to elicit their positive memories at different stages of life. They transcribed the elderly's episodes and produced individually designed storybooks that matched the latter's life stories.

During ILR and making use of what they learnt in cognitive-behavioural therapy, the young PICs enquired of their elders about specific details in each episode covering thoughts, emotions, and behaviour. Through these interviews, **young PICs polished their communication skills and perspective-taking skills** (Knight et al., 2014). Some reported improved confidence in communicating with their parents and older relatives. Through these interactions with younger PICs, the **elderly PICs came to have better social connections in the institution** and could better appreciate themselves by having inspired younger PICs with their strengths and experience.



Residential Treatment Unit

Given the group orientation of males, LIFE GYM is specifically designed as a residential treatment unit. Participants are assigned to this discrete unit where the therapeutic atmosphere fosters mutual support and personal growth through communal living. They practise newly learned psychological skills in their daily life to gear themselves toward positive living. Being male-sensitive in decorating the treatment facility, the male-friendly industrial design gives a vibrant, modern, and refreshing ambiance and also helps create an optimal therapeutic environment for male participants.

Preliminary Programme Effectiveness

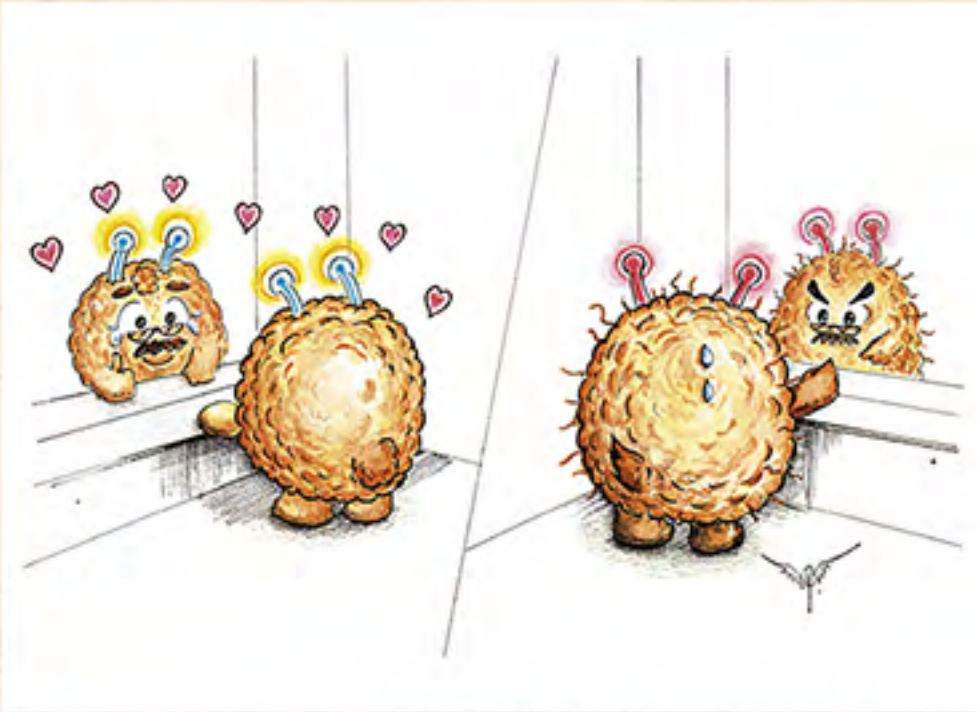
The pre- and post-test comparisons of LIFE GYM participants' self-reported psychological measures and the staff-rated Behavioural Observation Scale reveals significant treatment progress upon completion of the Intensive Programme, with the effect size ranging from medium to large (see Table 1). Participants showed improvement on emotion regulation, impulse control, interpersonal relationships, relapse prevention knowledge and a self-improvement orientation with less hostility, criminal attitude, and physical aggressive behaviour. Further, among the nine participants released back into the community for a period of one to thirty-three months, two gained early release from the Pre-Release Employment Scheme due to their satisfactory rehabilitation progress with none having re-offended up till now.

Feedbacks from LIFE GYM Participants

(Illustrations by 汀樂)

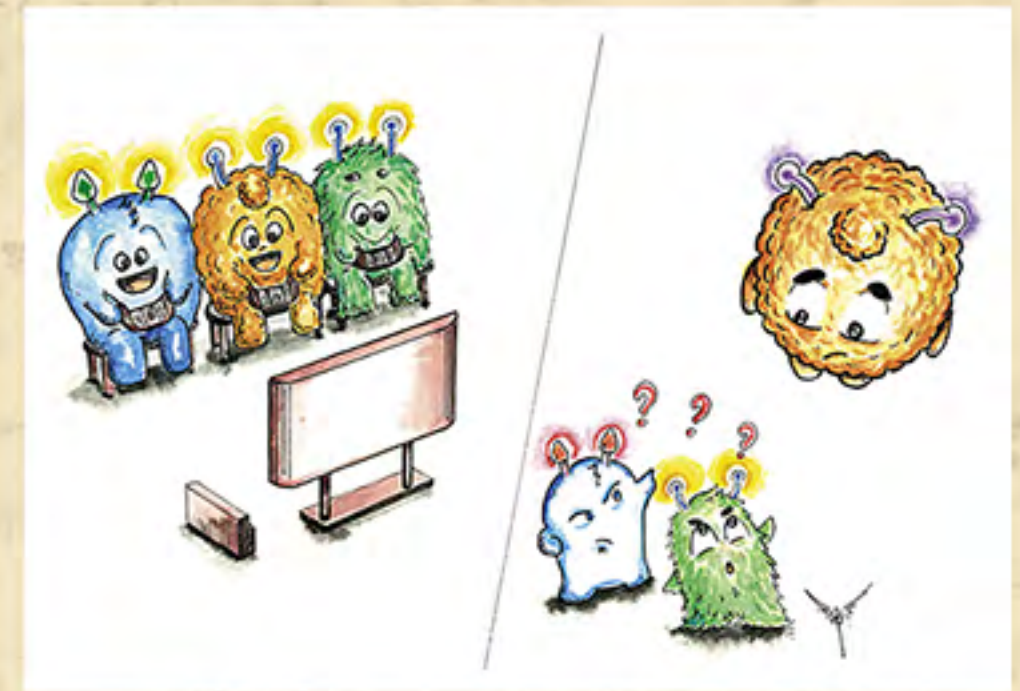
Sam:

The psychologist of LIFE GYM advised me to spend time listening to my father, instead of getting angry with him right away. If I don't understand what he means, I can ask for elaboration calmly. I used to have poor relationship with my father, but the above communication skills have improved our relationship. My father is now the pillar that supports my rehabilitation. Now I would like to work on self-improvement, and look after my father after release.



Fan:

I used to relate to the world in a detached manner, as if I were observing the world from above. After coming to LIFE GYM, I have realized that this relationship style can only lead to superficial relationships. In order to better understand myself and others, I have tried to mingle with other PICs. Through playing board games and video games, as well as chatting with other LIFE GYM PICs, I have learnt to get along and communicate with them. I no longer force others to take my views. I hope I could do better in terms of interpersonal relationship in the future.

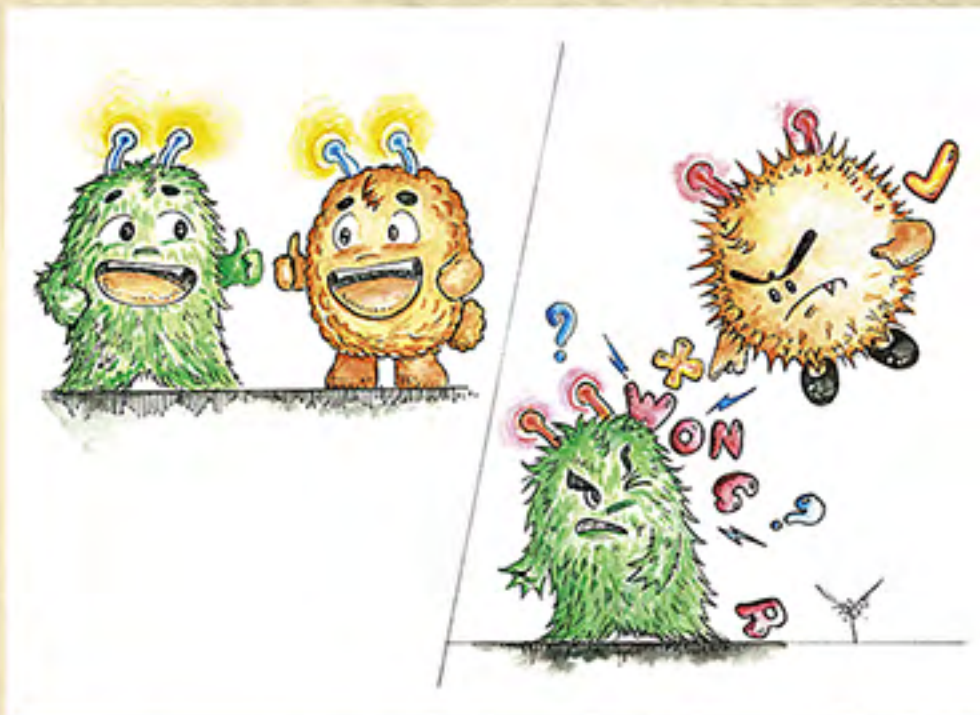


Ho:

The psychologist of LIFE GYM always listens to me attentively, without forcing me to make any choice. This has helped me realize that other people do not always object to my views, so that I don't have to protect myself by being defensive. Instead of perceiving everything in extremes, I have learnt that there is a middle ground between giving and accepting advice. I now have less conflicts and better communication with others.

Kit:

I used to be avoidant of problems. After coming to LIFE GYM, I have tried to open up to others. I have discovered that as long as I am willing to share my problems with others, I will be given advice and be able to find solutions. Being with other PICs in LIFE GYM gives me the courage to keep moving forward.



Future Directions

Table 1

Pre-post comparison on psychological measures and staff observation

	Pre-Test	Post-Test	t-value	Effect size
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)		Cohen's d
Criminal Sentiments Scale (CCS-M)	28.93 (19.66)	13.93 (13.04)	3.29**	0.85
Law, Court, Police	19.80 (13.01)	10.20 (9.03)	2.87*	0.74
Tolerance of Law Violations	5.53 (4.91)	2.53 (3.07)	2.62*	0.68
Identification with Criminal Others	3.60 (2.41)	1.33 (2.09)	5.31***	1.33
Aggression Questionnaire (AQ)	74.13(27.04)	61.07 (18.59)	2.63*	0.68
Physical Aggression	20.07 (9.40)	15.80 (5.23)	2.89*	0.75
Verbal Aggression	14.60 (4.63)	14.47 (4.56)	0.14	0.04
Anger	16.47 (7.18)	12.93 (4.54)	1.88	0.48
Hostility	23.00 (8.69)	17.87 (6.70)	4.04**	1.04
Social Problem-Solving Inventory (SPSI)	182.40 (48.43)	206.07 (46.08)	1.89	0.49
Barratt Impulsivity Scale (BIS-11)	35.73 (15.08)	37.66 (19.19)	2.10*	0.54
Relapse Prevention Questionnaire (RPQ)	12.60 (6.66)	18.73 (5.57)	4.52***	1.21
Staff Behavioural Observation Scale				
Emotion regulation	5.37 (0.72)	6.13 (0.58)	3.83***	0.99
Interpersonal relationships	15.80 (1.68)	18.23 (1.71)	5.09***	1.32
Self-improvement	21.33 (2.30)	24.73 (1.89)	5.97***	1.54

*p <.05; **p < .005; ***p < .001 (two-tailed)

The initial positive treatment outcomes show promise for the innovative approach integrating male and correctional psychology in LIFE GYM. Aspiring to an evidence-based approach to advancing the male-responsive psychological programmes, an empirical study to investigate culture-specific, culture-free masculinities in the Hong Kong penal population as well as its relationship with criminogenic factors and offending behaviour is now being carried out. As technology-delivered correctional programmes - which are particularly appealing to males - are an emerging trend in the digital era, a new customizable VR treatment platform together with digitalized psychological programmes will be launched to allow psychological skills learned in an interactive, multi-media and self-paced mode. The Positive Living e-Programme in a tablet computer will be enhanced with enriched content, and, more extensive use of the smart bike will be explored.



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