



## JUVENILE PROBATIONERS ADJUDICATED OF VIOLENT AND NONVIOLENT OFFENSES IN HONG KONG: ARE THEY PSYCHOLOGICALLY DIFFERENT?

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Limited is known about Hong Kong juvenile offenders who are put on probation. This study consists of 109 male juveniles (aged 14-20 years) who served their probation sentence in a community transitional housing. Of the sample, 34 juveniles are adjudicated for committing a violent offense, while the remaining 75 juveniles are found guilty of a nonviolent offense. Six psychometric measures assessing eight psychological correlates (self-esteem, life satisfaction, social bond, positive affect, negative affect, impulsivity, pro-offending attitudes, and self-perceived life problems) are administered. Four offending history variables (onset age of delinquent behavior, age of first adjudication, number of prior adjudication, and frequency of self-reported delinquency in the past 12 month) are also studied. For exploratory purpose, univariate and bivariate analyses of these two groups (juvenile violent and nonviolent probationers) are first computed. Ordinary Least Square (OLS) regression analyses indicate that several static (offending history) and dynamic (psychological correlates) risk factors are predictors of the juvenile violent and nonviolent probationers' self-anticipated re-offending risk. Limitations of the study are outlined.

### Acknowledgment:

The research project described in this paper was fully supported by a grant offered to the second author by the Research Grant Council of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (Project Number: HKU 442208H).

### INTRODUCTION

- The annual juvenile and youth crime arrest rate in Hong Kong has been in an upsurge trend since more than 3 decades ago with its peak in the late 1980s and early 1990s.
- However, a steady decline is evidenced in the past 10 years (Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department, 2010).
- Nonetheless, not all arrested and subsequent adjudicated juvenile offenders were placed in closed detention facilities in Hong Kong.
- A proportion of these juveniles, mostly committed less severe offenses, were adjudicated to serve on a probation order.

### The Probation System in Hong Kong

- The probation service has been a widely used noncustodial sentencing option in Hong Kong for juvenile offenders aged 10 and above who are adjudicated for committing less severe offenses (Chui, 2008; Chui & Chan, 2011a, 2011b).
- The operational key objective of the probation service is to reduce the offenders' recidivism risk and to facilitate their community reintegration process upon the completion of the probation order (Chui, 2006).
- Juvenile offenders are targeted for this noncustodial sentencing option since the inception of the *Juvenile Offenders Ordinance of 1933*, which was later superseded by the *Probation of Offenders Ordinance of 1956* to extend the probation service to adult offenders (Chan, 1996).

- To date, the *Probation of Offenders Ordinance* (Chapter 298) is the existing legislation that requires adjudicated juvenile offenders aged 10 and above to be placed under statutory community supervision of an assigned probation officer for a period of 1 to 3 years depending on their index crime severity.
- A violation of probation order conditions (e.g., work and residence, submission of a urine sample for drug tests) can result in caution, fine imposed, or re-sentence of the index crime.

## PRESENT STUDY

- This study is among the first few in Hong Kong to investigate the relationship between the offending history and psychological properties of juvenile probationers who were adjudicated of a violent and nonviolent offense.
- According to Hong Kong criminal law, violent delinquent/criminal behavior classified in this study includes crime of robbery, serious assault, indecent assault, police assault, wounding, and blackmail.
- In contrast, nonviolent delinquent/criminal behavior includes property crimes such as burglary, snatching, pickpocket, shop theft, criminal damage, and deception; and other non-property crimes like vice/brothel keeping, sexual procurement/abduction, illegal sexual activity, fighting, illegal possession of weapons, illegal possession of illegal drugs, resistance to police arrest, admission of being a member of a triad society, a member of a triad society, violation of probation order, use of other's identity, and public disorderly conduct.
- In addition to descriptive statistics and bivariate analyses of juvenile probationers by their index crime, this study further aims to use a multivariate statistical approach to explore the effect of different offending history and psychological correlates in predicting the juvenile probationers' self-anticipated propensity to reoffend.

## METHOD

### Participants and Procedure

- The participants recruited for this study were 109 juvenile male probationers aged 14 to 20 years ( $M = 16.97$ ,  $SD = 1.44$ ) who were serving their probation order in a juvenile residential home.
- A 90% of participation response rate was documented.
- For the purpose of this study, these juvenile probationers were divided into 2 subgroups: juvenile who were adjudicated of a violent offense (termed as juvenile violent probationers;  $N = 34$ ; 31%) and those who were found guilty of a nonviolent offense (termed as juvenile nonviolent probationers;  $N = 75$ ; 69%).

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### Measures

#### *Self-Esteem*

- The Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (RSES; Rosenberg, 1965) was used to assess participants' self-acceptance and perception of self-value.



- Based on a 4-point response format (1 = *strongly disagree*, 4 = *strongly agree*), this scale contains 10 items (total score ranged from 10 to 40) with higher score indicates higher self-esteem.

## *Life Satisfaction*

- The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) was utilized to measure the participants' cognitive evaluation of quality of life.
- This 5-item scale was measured on a 7-point response format (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*), whereby the overall score was determined by the summed of all items scores (ranged from 5 to 35).
- High SWLS score indicates more positive self-evaluation of subjective well-being.

## *Social Bond*

- Based on Hirschi's (1969) social bonding theory, the 24-item Social Bonding Scale (SBC; Chapple, McQuillan, & Berdahl, 2005) was adopted to measure the participants' conventional social bond with attachment to parents, peers, school, and the society; and also their self-reported delinquent conducts.
- Out of the 24 scale items, 6 items of the self-reported delinquent conducts (3 items each for theft and violent delinquency) were measured on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = *never*, 4 = *many times*).
- An overall score for each delinquency domain (ranged from 1 to 12) was obtained with higher score denotes greater delinquency rate.
- Aside from the SBC-T and SBC-VC items, the remaining 18 items were developed to assess five social bond elements (SBC-SB) on either a 4-point (two items; 1 = *never*, 4 = *many times*) or 5-point (16 items; 1 = *strongly agree*, 5 = *strongly disagree*) response format.
- The scores for these 18 items were subsequent summed (total score ranges from 17 to 88), with higher value signifies greater social bond.

## *Affect*

- The positive affect (PA) and negative affect (NA) subscales of the 20-item Positive and Negative Affect Scales (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988) were used to assess the participants' positive and negative emotions based on common mood descriptors.
- The PA and NA subscales each consists of 10 items that allows the participants to rate their affective feeling on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *very slightly or not at all*, 5 = *extremely*).
- The overall score of each subscale was determined by summing the scores of all PA and NA items, independently (ranged from 10 to 50 for each subscale), with higher PA and NA scores denote higher positive and negative affective feelings, respectively.

## *Impulsivity*

- The Impulsiveness Scale-Short Form (IS-SF; Li, Ko, Weng, Liao, & Lu, 2002) was adopted to measure the motor impulsiveness of the participants.
- Modeled after the Barratt Impulsivity Scale (BIS-10; Patton, Stanford, & Barratt, 1995), this 15-item impulsivity measure was scored on a 4-point response format (1 = *very few*; 4 = *almost always*).

- The overall impulsivity score was the summed of all 15 items (ranged from 15 to 60), with higher score indicates higher impulsivity.

#### *Pro-Offending Attitudes and Self-Perceived Life Problems*

- The CRIME-PICS II (Frude, Honess, & Maguire, 2008) that is widely used in the UK probation services consists of 4 attitude scales (20 items) and a problem inventory (15 items), was used in this study.
- The 4 attitude scales were measured on a 5-point Likert response format (1 = *strongly agree*; 5 = *strongly disagree*) to assess the participants' general attitudes toward offending: (a) general attitude to offending (scale G), (b) anticipation of re-offending (scale A), (c) victim hurt denial (scale V), and evaluation of crime as worthwhile (scale E).
- On the other hand, the problem inventory (scale P) was scored on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = *big problem*; 4 = *no problem at all*) to assess the participants' perception of their current life problems.
- Items for each subscale were summed to obtain the overall score for each attitude domain and the inventory on perceived problem areas (scale G ranged from 17 to 85; scale A ranged from 6 to 30; scale V ranged from 3 to 15; scale E ranged from 4 to 20; scale P ranged from 15 to 60).
- For the purpose of this study, 20 pro-offending attitude items and 15 problem inventory items were subsequent totaled to obtain a single pro-offending attitudes score (ranged from 20 to 100) and self-perceived life problems score (ranged from 15 to 60), independently.
- Higher pro-offending attitudes score denotes higher favorable attitudes toward offending, whereas higher self-perceived life problems score indicates that the participants have life problems in many areas.

## RESULTS

### Psychological Characteristics of Juvenile Violent and Nonviolent Probationers

- Juvenile violent probationers were found to have significantly higher level of self-esteem (RSES;  $t = 2.385, p < .05$ ), life satisfaction (SWLS;  $t = 1.698, p < .10$ ), and positive affect (PAS;  $t = 1.384, p < .10$ ) than their nonviolent counterparts.
- Juvenile nonviolent probationers, in contrast, were reported to differ significantly from those who were adjudicated of a violent offense by having higher level of self-reported theft delinquency (SBS-T;  $t = -2.004, p < .05$ ) and tendency of victim hurt denial (CRIME-PICS II-Scale V;  $t = -4.162, p < .001$ ).

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### Self-Reported Offending History of Juvenile Violent and Nonviolent Probationers

- Nearly half (48%) of the juvenile probationers admitted to have involved in both violent and nonviolent delinquency, followed by those who reported to have committed only nonviolent conducts (43%).
- Interestingly, more than half (59%) of juvenile nonviolent probationers were admitted to have committed only nonviolent delinquency in the past year.



- Juvenile violent probationers, conversely, were mostly involved in both violent and nonviolent delinquency (77%).
- These findings were significant ( $\chi^2 = 23.70, p < .001$ ) and the model effect size was considerably strong (Cramer's  $V = .47$ ).

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## Interrelationship of Static Factors of Juvenile Violent and Nonviolent Probationers

- As opposed to dynamic factors (i.e., attributes that are amenable to change through rehabilitative and therapeutic interventions; van der Put, Stams, Hoeve, Deković, Spanjaard, van der Laan, et al., 2011), static factors in this study were referred to variables that are historic and cannot be changed (van der Put, Deković, Stams, van der Laan, Hoeve, & van Amelsfort, 2011), such as onset age of delinquent behavior, age of first adjudication, number of prior adjudication, and frequency of self-reported past year delinquency.
- As expected, juvenile violent probationers' onset age of delinquent behavior was positively correlated with their age of first adjudication ( $r = .626, p < .01$ ) and was negatively associated with their frequency of self-reported past year delinquency ( $r = -.595, p < .01$ ).
- Similarly, the onset age of delinquent behavior of juvenile nonviolent probationers was positively related to their age of first adjudication ( $r = .395, p < .01$ ), but was negatively correlated with their number of previous adjudication ( $r = -.272, p < .05$ ) and frequency of self-reported past year delinquency ( $r = -.285, p < .05$ ).
- Juvenile nonviolent probationers' number of prior adjudication was also found to positively correlate with their frequency of self-reported past year delinquency ( $r = .462, p < .01$ ).

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## Self-Anticipated Reoffending Risk of Juvenile Violent and Nonviolent Probationers

- In terms of the juvenile violent probationers' static risk factors, early onset age of delinquent behavior ( $B = -.346, SE = .175, p < .05$ ) and early age of first adjudication ( $B = -.453, SE = .296, p < .10$ ) were found to be significant predictors of future offending behavior.
- Frequency of self-reported past delinquency ( $B = .258, SE = .124, p < .05$ ) was significantly regressed on the juvenile violent probationers' self-anticipated re-offending risk.
- With regard to the dynamic risk factors, juvenile violent probationers who were less socially bonded ( $B = -.124, SE = .067, p < .05$ ) and more impulsive ( $B = .135, SE = .066, p < .05$ ) were significantly more likely to involve in future delinquent acts.
- Pertaining to juvenile nonviolent probationers, number of previous adjudication ( $B = .364, SE = .148, p < .01$ ) and frequency of self-reported past delinquency ( $B = .108, SE = .063, p < .05$ ) were found to be significantly regressed on their self-anticipated risk of recidivism.
- Additionally, juvenile nonviolent probationers who have lesser positive affect ( $B = -.071, SE = .050, p < .10$ ) were more likely to engage in future offending behavior.

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## DISCUSSION

- The nature of the delinquency/crime and etiological history of the offender can vary greatly (Gerstein & Briggs, 1993). The findings of this study suggest that juvenile violent probationers were having more confidence, satisfaction with their current quality of life, and positive emotionality than nonviolent probationers. Juvenile nonviolent probationers, conversely, were having higher victim hurt denial tendency than their violent counterparts. Juvenile nonviolent probationers were also found to engage more theft conducts in the past year than violent probationers. Overall, these findings appear to indicate that juvenile violent probationers were having higher level of positive self-perception and emotionality than their nonviolent counterparts.
- In this study, findings show that juvenile nonviolent probationers were largely specialists (59% involved in only nonviolent delinquency in the past year) whereas juvenile violent probationers were mostly generalists (77% engaged in both violent and nonviolent delinquency in the past year) in their offending patterns. Consistent with previous findings reported in regards to the specialization in nonviolent offending trend, repeated involvement in similar offenses was found in the categories of property crime (Kempf, 1987) and status offense (Rojek & Erickson, 1982).
- Consistent with previous findings (e.g., Bacon, Paternoster, & Brame, 2009), early age of initial involvement in delinquent behavior was related to higher frequency of delinquency involvement for both juvenile violent and nonviolent probationers. In addition, early onset age of delinquent behavior was also found to relate to early age of first adjudication for both types of juvenile probationers, and higher number of prior adjudication for nonviolent probationers. Juvenile nonviolent probationers who reported to have engaged in more delinquent conducts in the past year were likely to have more prior adjudications.
- High frequency of self-reported past year delinquency was found to be a strong predictor of both juvenile violent and nonviolent probationers' perceived high recidivism risk. Early onset age of delinquent behavior and early age of first adjudication were significant predicting factors of self-anticipated re-offending risk for juvenile violent probationers, whereas higher number of previous adjudication was a robust self-perceived recidivism risk factor for juvenile nonviolent probationers. These findings were consistent with previous studies where criminal recidivism was found to be significantly predicted by the juveniles' onset age of delinquent behavior, age of first adjudication, number of prior adjudication, and self-reported frequency of delinquent conducts (e.g., Ang & Huan, 2008; Cottle, Lee, & Heilbrun, 2001; Mulder, Brand, Bullens, & van Marle, 2011).
- Consistent with previous studies (e.g., Ge, Donnellan, & Wenk, 2003), findings in this study indicate that social bond and impulsivity correlates were the only two significant re-offending risk factors for juvenile violent probationers. In contrast, the positive emotionality of juvenile nonviolent probationers, consistent with past findings (e.g., Caspi, Moffitt, Stouthamer-Loeber, Krueger, & Schmutte, 1994), was found to be the only significant predictor for their self-anticipated recidivism risk.

## LIMITATIONS

- First, this study only sampled juvenile probationers who served their probation order in a residential home. Juvenile probationers who were not mandated to serve in the probation home were not included in this study.



- Besides, juvenile offenders put on probation were generally found guilty of nonviolent offenses. Even some of these juveniles were adjudicated for committing offenses classified as violent crimes, the nature of these offenses were considered less severe to imminently threaten the societal social stability.
- With regard to the predictability of the tested offending history variables and psychological correlates, the effects of these risk factors were limited by the use of self-reported data. Juvenile offenders have the tendency to underreport their delinquent behavior and to normalize their perceptions regarding delinquency (Breuk, Clauser, Stams, Slot, & Doreleijers, 2007). Nevertheless, the use of official data as the benchmark for the recidivism rate also involves the inherent risk of underestimating the actual nature of the juveniles' delinquency involvement, which is usually under-registered in the official systems (van der Put, Stams, et al., 2011).
- Furthermore, the present study was cross-sectional, and as such, presents difficulties in examining the short- and long-term reoffending risk for these juvenile probationers.

## CONCLUSION

- Regardless of the limitations, the present study nevertheless has offered an important step to better understand juvenile probationers in Hong Kong, collectively and separately according to the nature of their offense.

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#### Legislation Cited

Probation of Offender Ordinance (Chapter 298)



Table 1. Demographic characteristics of Hong Kong male juvenile probationers by index crime ( $N = 109$ )

Variables	Violent Crime ( $N = 34$ )		Nonviolent Crime ( $N = 75$ )	
	Number of Cases	Percentage (100%)	Number of Cases	Percentage (100%)
Age	( $N = 34$ )		( $N = 75$ )	
14	-	-	1	1.3%
15	5	14.7%	7	9.3%
16	14	41.2%	21	28.0%
17	8	23.5%	23	30.7%
18	4	11.8%	5	6.7%
19	3	8.8%	10	13.3%
20	-	-	8	10.7%
Length of Probation Order	( $N = 34$ )		( $N = 74$ )	
12 months and below	10	29.4%	32	43.2%
13 – 24 months	21	61.8%	41	55.4%
25 months and above	3	8.8%	1	1.4%
Self-Reported Onset Age of Delinquent Behavior	( $N = 33$ )		( $N = 74$ )	
Age 12 and below	7	21.2%	20	27.0%
13 – 15 years	18	54.5%	31	41.9%
16 – 18 years	7	21.2%	20	27.0%
19 – 20 years	1	3.1%	3	4.1%
Age of First Adjudication	( $N = 34$ )		( $N = 75$ )	
Age 12 and below	3	8.8%	2	2.7%
13 – 15 years	17	50.0%	30	40.0%
16 – 18 years	13	38.2%	33	44.0%
19 – 20 years	1	3.0%	10	13.3%
Number of Previous Adjudication	( $N = 34$ )		( $N = 75$ )	
None	4	11.8%	20	26.7%
1 or 2	19	55.9%	31	41.3%
3 and above	11	32.3%	24	32.0%
Frequency of Self-Reported Delinquency in the Past 12 Months	( $N = 34$ )		( $N = 70$ )	
1 to 5 times	28	82.4%	51	72.9%
6 times or above	6	17.6%	19	27.1%

Table 2. Means and standard deviations for the observed variables of juvenile probationers by index crime (N = 109)

Psychometric Scale	Violent Crime (N = 34)		Nonviolent Crime (N = 75)	
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.
Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES)	28.64**	4.64	26.16	5.18
Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS)	22.47*	5.31	20.37	7.22
Social Bonding Scale – Social Bonds (SBS-SB)	50.38	7.20	52.48	8.46
Social Bonding Scale – Theft (SBS-T)	1.94	1.91	2.89**	2.45
Social Bonding Scale – Violent Crime (SBS-VC)	3.76	2.35	3.08	2.45
Positive Affect Scale (PAS)	32.94*	6.53	30.90	8.16
Negative Affect Scale (NAS)	26.91	7.94	28.92	8.84
Impulsiveness Scale – Short-Form (IS-SF)	37.82	7.31	36.27	8.25
CRIME-PICS II – General Attitude to Offending (Scale G)	41.32	7.08	43.03	8.15
CRIME-PICS II – Anticipation of Re-Offending (Scale A)	13.85	2.88	13.99	3.45
CRIME-PICS II – Victim Hurt Denial (Scale V)	6.24	2.22	8.41***	3.12
CRIME-PICS II – Evaluation of Crime as Worthwhile (Scale E)	9.50	2.43	10.23	3.03
CRIME-PICS II – Problem Inventory (Scale P)	30.91	9.61	33.75	9.38

\*  $p < .10$ , \*\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Table 3. Self-reported offending history in the past 12 months of juvenile probationers by index crime (N = 109)

Offending History	Violent Crime (N = 34)		Nonviolent Crime (N = 75)		Total (Percentage)	
Violent delinquency only	5		5		10	
Column percentage	14.7%		6.7%		9.2%	
Nonviolent delinquency only	3		44		47	
Column percentage	8.8%		58.7%		43.1%	
Violent and nonviolent delinquency	26		26		52	
Column percentage	76.5%		34.7%		47.7%	
Total	34		75		109	
Column percentage	100.0%		100.0%		100.0%	

$\chi^2(2) = 23.70$ , Cramer's  $V = .47$ ,  $p < .001$

Table 4. Pearson correlations among static factors of juvenile probationers by index crime ( $N = 109$ )

Index Crime: Violent Crime ( $N = 34$ )						
Static Factors	Onset Age of Delinquent Behavior	Age of Adjudication	First Adjudication	Number of Adjudication	Prior Adjudication	Frequency of Self-Reported Delinquency
Onset Age of Criminal Behavior	1.00					
Age of First Conviction	.626**	1.00				
Number of Previous Conviction	.092	.004	1.00			
Frequency of Self-Reported Delinquency	-.595**	-.146	-.092	1.00		
Index Crime: Nonviolent Crime ( $N = 75$ )						
Static Factors	Onset Age of Delinquent Behavior	Age of Adjudication	First Adjudication	Number of Adjudication	Prior Adjudication	Frequency of Self-Reported Delinquency
Onset Age of Criminal Behavior	1.00					
Age of First Conviction	.395**	1.00				
Number of Previous Conviction	-.272*	-.187	1.00			
Frequency of Self-Reported Delinquency	-.285*	-.086	.462**	1.00		

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

Table 5. OLS regressions of self-anticipated re-offending risk of juvenile probationers by index crime ( $N = 109$ )

Predictor	Violent Crime		Nonviolent Crime	
	B	SE	B	SE
Onset age of criminal behavior	-.346**	.175	.023	.150
Age of first conviction	-.453*	.296	-.320	.211
Number of previous conviction	.279	.277	.364***	.148
Self-reported delinquency frequency	.258**	.124	.108**	.063
Social bond	-.124**	.067	-.036	.048
Positive affect	.061	.077	-.071*	.050
Impulsivity	.135**	.066	.026	.049
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.160		.308	
VIF	1.174 – 3.687		1.417 – 1.843	
N	34		75	

Note: No significant findings were yielded for self-esteem, life satisfaction, negative affect, and self-perceived life problems.

\*  $p < .10$ , \*\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*\*  $p < .01$