

Article 2

What Works: Improvement in Rehabilitation-related Psychological Attributes among Participants of a Systematic and Recognised Post-tertiary Education Programme Provided in the Ethics College in Adult Correctional Institutions by the Hong Kong Correctional Services Department



**Dr. Elise S.W. HUNG¹, Mr. Paul P.M. LING²,
Ms. Joey O.Y. CHAN³, Mr. Jeremy C.M. MA³**

¹Senior Clinical Psychologist, CSD

²Officer, CSD

³Research Assistants, The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Objective

The Ethics College provides a one-year full-time Diploma of Applied Education programme for voluntary enrolment by adult persons in custody (PICs). Life-wide learning activities covering career development, sports and arts and national education were carried out, with an aim to help them cultivate positive values and obtain accredited qualifications to prepare for their reintegration into society. This study examines whether the Ethics College would improve participants' psychological attributes in favour of rehabilitation among adult PICs. Measurement includes self-report, staff observations and institutional behaviour (i.e. number of disciplinary violations).

Part I: Self- reported Psychological Attributes

Target variables were selected based on recent literature on offender rehabilitation, which include:

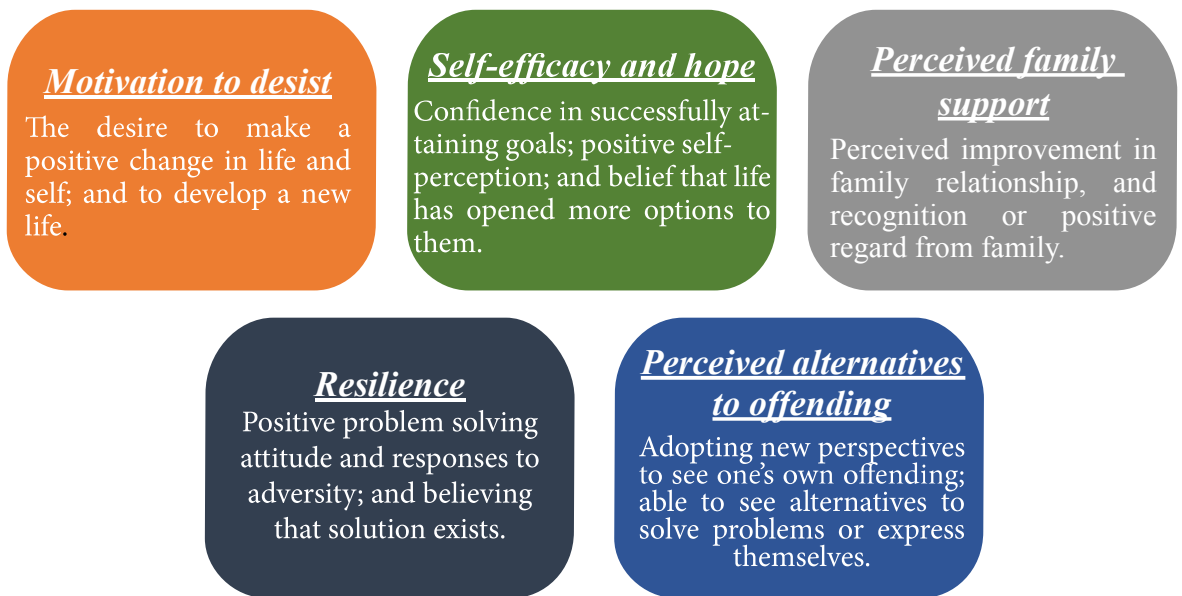


Figure 1. Variables of self-reported psychological attributes among participants

Methodology

The survey form consists of 15 items tapping participants' subjective perception of whether there have been any changes in their psychological attributes after studying in the Ethics College. The responses were tapped with a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from point 1 (this does not describe me at all) to point 5 (this describes me well). Responses with 4 ("this describes me" representing "agree") or 5 ("this describes me well" representing "strongly agree") were classified as an orientation to positive changes.

The survey form was administered to all 72 participants of the Ethics College in Pak Sha Wan Correctional Institution and Lo Wu Correctional Institution. From the survey forms collected, one participant was found to have provided duplicating scores on one item, which was then treated as missing data and was replaced by the mean of other item scores to avoid influencing the results.

Results

Among the 72 participants who completed the survey, there were 57 (79%) males and 15 (21%) females. The mean age was 30.3, ranging from 23 to 58. Simple frequency counts showed that a vast majority reported subjective improvement in all of the five psychological variables under measurement. Among them, 92% reported having a higher motivation to desist, 91% reported higher self-efficacy and hopefulness about the future, 92% reported improved resilience against adversity, 89% perceived higher positive regard and recognition from family, and 89% perceived more alternatives to offending.

Self-reported psychological attributes of participants after studying in the Ethics College

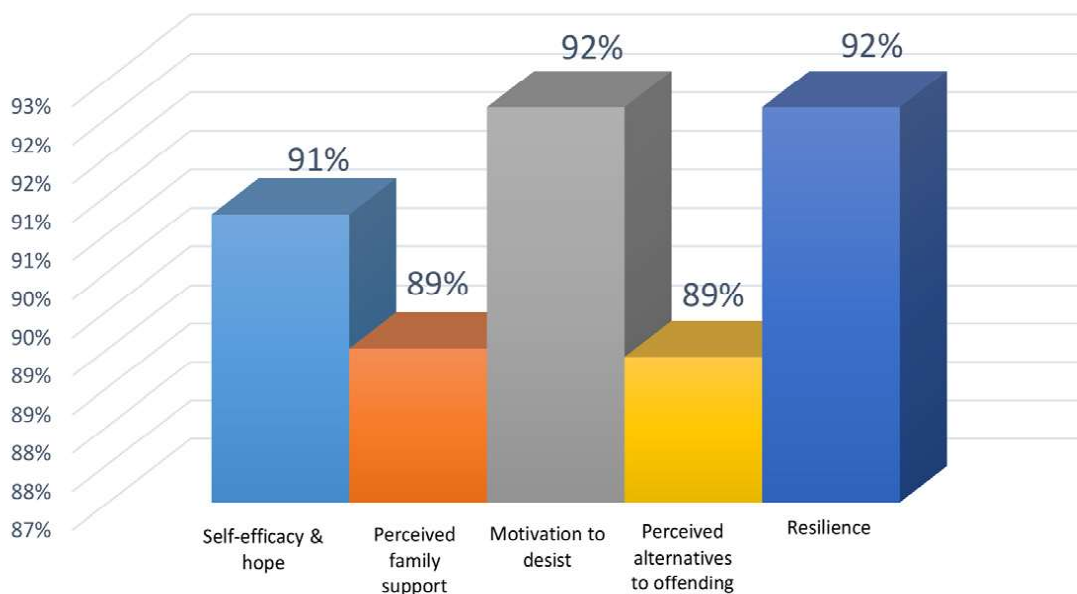


Figure 2. Subjective psychological attributes of participants after studying in the Ethics College

Part II: Staff's Observations and Satisfaction

Methodology

A total number of 13 correctional staff of the Correctional Services Department and educators from the Hong Kong Metropolitan University (HKMU) ("staff") have completed a survey on staff's observations on and satisfaction with participants' improvement after studying the programme. The survey form, consisting of six items, was administered to three class-teachers, three deputy class-teachers, three disciplinary staff members and four educators from the HKMU. Among the 13 staff members, 9 (69%) of them were males and 4 (31%) were females. The responses were tapped with a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from point 1 (strongly disagree) to point 5 (strongly agree). Each item measures a different aspect of staff's perceptions of:

- Participants' **learning attitudes** towards the curriculum of the Ethics College;
- Improvement in participants' **discipline and demeanour**;
- Participants' **gratefulness** for having the opportunity to enrol in the programme;
- Participants' aspiration for further **education and employment** in the future;
- **Staff's job satisfaction** in beholding participants' completion of the programme; and
- Improvement in participants' **connection with family**.

Figure 3. Measures from staff's perspective in evaluating the Ethics College

The point 4 ("agree") or point 5 ("strongly agree") given for the items were classified as an orientation to a positive impression of the programme.

Results

Results showed that all (100%) staff agreed that the participants had an enthusiastic learning attitude and were more optimistic about their further education and employment opportunities. Besides, 92% agreed that the participants' discipline and conduct had been improved; and 92% agreed that there was improvement in participants' connection and relationship with their family members. Moreover, 92% agreed that the participants were grateful for having joined the programme, and all staff reported greater job satisfaction upon participants' successful graduation.

Staff's feedback on participants of Ethics College

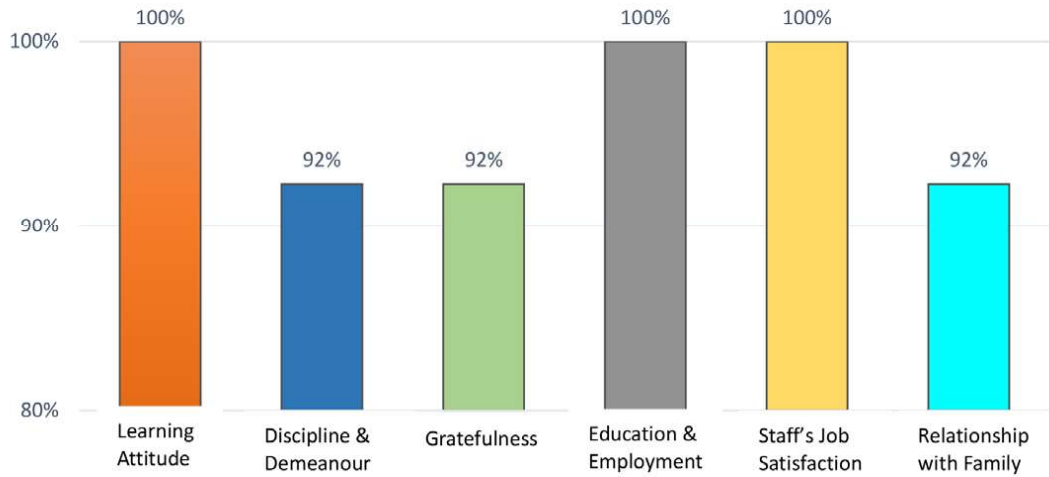


Figure 4. Subjective psychological attributes of participants after attending the Ethics College



Part III: Institutional Behaviour

Methodology

Disciplinary records of the 72 participants prior to their participation in the programme (i.e. February 2023 to November 2023) and during the programme (i.e. December 2023 to August 2024) were retrieved from the iCRMS and were compared against each other.

Given that the collected data was not normally distributed, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test, a non-parametric statistical test, was used.

Results

Statistical analysis revealed that the frequency of disciplinary violations was significantly lower during the programme in comparison to that before they joined the programme ($Z = -2.858$, $p = 0.004$). The median scores of such frequencies before and during the programme were .28 and .093 respectively.

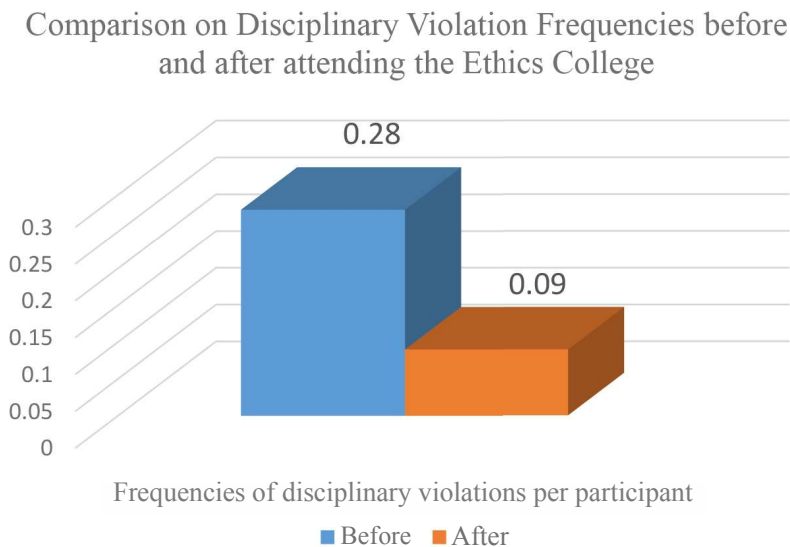


Figure 5. Comparison on disciplinary violation frequencies before and after attending Ethics College



Summary and conclusion

The present survey indicated that the Ethics College was well received by the participants who considered it favourable to their psychological condition. A vast majority of them agreed to its positive effects on their motivation to desist from offending, self-efficacy and hopefulness about future success in desistance, resilience against future adversity, perceived family support and perceived alternatives to offending. Almost all staff involved in the programme reported observing positive changes in the participants' attitude and behaviour, which in turn produced job satisfaction in staff. The significant reduction in overall disciplinary violations suggested that the improvement in their psychological condition had also been manifested in the participants' institutional behaviour.

As the five selected psychological attributes are regarded as having face validity in predicting the rehabilitation potential of PICs in general, the perceived improvement in these attributes was important for anticipation of success in their path to desistance according to recent literature on offender rehabilitation. A survey on the staff's observations and comparison of the numbers of disciplinary violations before and after implementing the programme confirmed that the participants' self-rated positive changes in their psychological

condition are highly likely to be a reliable reflection of their real improvement.

In conclusion, the Ethics College, apart from its important educational value and provision of a chance of upward mobility in conventional career pursuit, was also effective in enhancing the rehabilitation potential of its participants through improving the rehabilitation-relevant psychological characteristics in the participants.

Insights

1. Recognition from Staffs and educators

An accredited tertiary educational programme, the Ethics College, is unanimously agreed among staffs involved to have induced positive changes in adult PICs, including enthusiasm towards learning, optimism about future, discipline and behaviour, and connectedness to family.

2. Power of Education on Psychological Attributes of PICs

An over-whelming majority of participants reported that they have got higher motivation to desist, greater hope and self-efficacy to succeed, more resilience against adversities, perceived having more alternatives to offending, and received greater recognition from family after they have completed the programme.

3. Rules Compliance and Developing a Pro-social Character

Behavioural indicators have testified the above subjective reports from staff and participants, as there is statistically significant reduction in disciplinary violations among the participants after the programme in comparison with before.