

Research Assessment Exercise 2020

Impact Case Study

University: **City University of Hong Kong** |

Unit of Assessment (UoA): **27 - Sociology and Anthropology** |

Title of case study: **Better Responses to Youth-at-Risk** |

(1) Summary of the impact

The applied and interdisciplinary research of Wing LO and Dennis WONG has aided the governments of Hong Kong, Macau, Singapore, and Guangzhou in responding effectively to the service needs of at-risk youths. The welfare and restorative solutions proposed in this pioneering research have been implemented in partner regions through blueprints, government policies, and practice models such as the Service Blueprint for At-risk Youth in Macau, Youth and Children's Home Policy in Macau, whole-school restorative practice models in Hong Kong, and Youth GO in Singapore. Tens of thousands of young people, their families and teachers have benefitted from the new practices in the RAE period, and hundreds of practitioners have undergone training devised and delivered by the research team that has enhanced the quality of the service they provide. |

(2) Underpinning research

LO and WONG's research into welfare and restorative solutions to youth offending suggests these are effective alternatives to court intervention and institutionalized sanctions (3a, 3d, 3f). Welfare solutions involve counseling and community support, and are based on the theory that young offenders can be categorized as "problematic" people who require treatment and supervision by social work professionals. Restorative responses include measures to fully involve young people in community life. Such responses emphasize the importance of family, and limit the involvement of professionals in decision-making. The youths are then "decategorized" and empowered through taking responsibility for their offences, and the involvement of law enforcers is limited. Lo's focus has been on the welfare responses to street youth, and Wong's has been on restorative responses for school delinquents. Thus, their research is complimentary.

Lo found that street youth are "Triadized" through three main channels. First, the Triads' web-like structure draws young people in; second, the characteristics and knowledge of Triads are transmitted via routine activities; and third, the tacit but strongly enforced norms and controls of a youth gang lead its members to conform to Triad commands and assimilate gang values. Thus, these new recruits strengthen Triad societies (3b). Lo and Wong has advocated outreach work and community support service as a welfare response to youth gangs and street delinquents (3c), whereby workers reach out to the youth in the ganglands controlled by the Triads (3b). The relationships are based on trust, and programs that are tailored to their psychological and social needs can then be developed. To induce changes in the target youths, the youths' energies are channeled toward more constructive goals and they are empowered by participating in volunteer services in the community, which can provide them with an alternative sense of belonging and achievement (3c).

To address the problem of at-risk youth becoming street youth after dropping out of school, Wong and Lo jointly developed the "Restorative Whole-School Approach" (RWSA) (3d). The RWSA integrates re-integrative shaming theory that advocates the use of tolerance and acceptance but simultaneously shows appropriate social disapproval of delinquency and mediation tactics in a new intervention approach for dealing with school bullying issues. It is contended that negative shaming practices in schools force some misbehaved students to feel being abandoned and seek recognitions from peers in the gang. Key ideas underlying the protective factors of delinquency are continuous forgiveness and acceptance of misbehaved students by the school authorities and the self-motivated respect that the students generate for parents or teachers. The development of restorative goals, clear instructions, team building, and good relationships among students, parents, teachers, and other stakeholders is emphasized. A quasi-experimental, longitudinal design across four schools was developed in their RWSA research, and a significant reduction in bullying, increased empathy, and

higher self-esteem were reported (3e). Wong and Lo identified the factors of risk and protection in school delinquency, as well as effective intervention approaches that can help resolve conflicts among young people. The restorative practices and innovative approaches they recommend for addressing bullying in schools have informed social workers, teachers, parents, and criminal justice professionals when tackling youth violence (3a, 3d, 3f). |

(3) References to the research

- 3a) **Lo, T.W.**, Maxwell, G., & **Wong, D.S.W.** (2006). Diversion from youth courts in five Asia Pacific jurisdictions: Welfare or restorative solutions. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 50 (1), 5-20.
- 3b) **Lo, T.W.** (2012). Triadization of youth gangs in Hong Kong. *British Journal of Criminology*, 52, 556-576.
- 3c) **Lo, T.W.**, **Wong, D.S.W.**, & Maxwell, G. (2006). Community support and diversionary measures for juvenile offenders in Hong Kong: Old legacy, New age. *Asian Journal of Criminology*, 1(1), 9-20.
- 3d) **Wong, D.S.W.**, & **Lo, T.W.** (2011). The recent development of restorative social work practices in Hong Kong. *International Social Work*, 54, 701-716.
- 3e) **Wong, D.S.W.**, Cheng, C.H.K., Ngan, R.M.H., & Ma, S.K. (2011). Program effectiveness of a restorative whole-school approach for tackling school bullying in Hong Kong. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 55(6), 846-862.
- 3f) **Wong, D.S.W.**, Lo, D.P.P., **Lo, T.W.** & Ma, S. K. (2008). School bullying among Hong Kong Chinese Primary Schoolchildren, *Youth and Society*, 40(1), 35-54. |

(4) Details of the impact

4.1 Policy and Service Impact: Development of Service Blueprint and Practice Models

4.1.1 Welfare Responses to Youth Offenses

Macau: Lo and Wong were invited by the Macau Government to study youth problems in Macau, and they developed a **youth service blueprint** in 2005 with the following welfare aims: (1) to prevent street and gang delinquency through Community Youth Work Teams (**CYWTs**); (2) to enhance the efficacy of school youth and their families through Integrated Youth and Family Service Centers (**IYFSCs**), and (3) to help police-cautioned youth through the Community Support Scheme (**CSS**) (5.1). These three services were first implemented by the government in the mid-2000s and a follow-up study in 2014 confirmed that the services were effective. It showed a reduction in delinquent behavior and drug abuse (mean differences = -.16, $p < .001$; & -.04, $p < .001$, respectively) in a sample of 2,755 secondary students, and same reduction (mean differences = -.78, $p < .05$; & -.24, $p < .001$, respectively) in a sample of 422 delinquent youth (5.9, p.71). The government accepted the study's recommendation that they became permanent measures. In 2015, **30** social workers and **30** police superintendents were trained to work with police-cautioned youths in the CSS. In 2018, about **13,000** service recipients benefited from the CYWT and **53,000** from the IYFSC (see 5.1). The research team was again invited to assess youth problems in Macau in the same year, and by examining their internet, drug, and gambling addictions, were able to provide the Macau Government with invaluable information at the end of the project in July 2019, enabling them to develop strategies for youth services (5.1).

Family breakdown and the subsequent removal of children into care are regarded as a main cause of delinquency. In 2007, Lo worked with the Macau Government to develop the Youth and Children's Home Policy in which the concept of the "small family group home" was proposed to replace the larger residential youth homes. The implementation of the concept was exemplified in the physical design of a new home built in 2015, and in improvements in the designs of older homes. In 2018, Lo developed self-assessment mechanisms to ensure the homes adhered to internationally recognized service standards, and trained **100** home workers to apply the assessment criteria. Since 2015, the service has benefitted about **200** youths with special residential needs per year (5.1).

Singapore: Lo also played a significant role in the formation of **Youth GO** (outreach work) in Singapore. The Central Youth Guidance Office invited Lo to advise on setting up Youth GO and trained 40 outreach workers in his techniques for working with gangs. One of Lo's trainees was awarded the Promising Social Worker Award in 2018 for his contribution to the development of street outreach work in Singapore. Lo and Wong also facilitated a collaboration between Youth GO and Hong Kong outreach workers, enabling them to share their knowledge and co-organize international conferences. By 2019, Youth GO had assisted between **200** and **500** at-risk youth (5.2).

Guangzhou: In 2016, a Hong Kong NGO invited Lo to assist the Guangzhou Communist Youth League in reviewing the service model of **Youth Zone** (outreach work) for at-risk youth. His recommendations for modifying the service model were accepted and fully implemented by the League. He trained **200** outreach workers in 2017-18 and invited them to collaborate with Hong Kong workers. The service benefited **19,600** young people in 2019 (5.3, 5.4).

Greater Bay Area: CityU's outreach work model was incorporated into a Policy Discussion Paper on Youth-at-risk Service Development in the Great Bay Area, which was presented at the **13th National People's Congress** in March 2019 (5.4).

4.1.2 Restorative Responses to School Delinquency

Based on his and Lo's research (3a, 3d, 3f) into the Restorative Whole-School Approach (RWSA), Wong worked with the Centre for Restoration of Human Relationships (CRHR) in developing training programs and packages for preventing bullying. Under the "Quality Education Fund Thematic Network (QTN) Student Support" project aimed at building a positive discipline-oriented school support network and cultivating an anti-bullying culture among youth, Wong directly supervised CRHR social workers for six years, from September 2011 to August 2017, funded by government grants amounting to approximately HK\$14.5 million. The project published over 10 reports as well as practitioners' guidelines and tools. It offered extensive activities promoting positive discipline-oriented education among teachers and parents, and assisted **14,945** students, **2,369** parents, and **2,851** teachers in total over the six years. The average satisfaction rating with the services was 8.4 out of 10 (5.5). Working manuals and guidelines for preventing and tackling bullying were shared with around 800 primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong, and feedback from the education sector has generally been positive. The Chairman of the Association of Principals of Secondary Schools found that the approaches of the RWSA were extremely useful, and the research has had a substantial impact on the containment of school bullying and the development of innovative school disciplinary practices among 27 secondary schools under the Association (5.6). This observation is in line with the results found in an evaluation study that the RWSA approach did not focus on short-term punishment but on building a long-term positive school environment to prevent bullying (3e). The two-year longitudinal study involved a sample of 1,176 high school students coming from 4 sampled schools. These students were successfully matched for within-subject pretest–posttest comparison. It was found that 49.9% of students who had bullied others at the RWSA school had reduced their bullying behavior. Oppositely, 51% of students at the non-RWSA school had increased their bullying. The results proved that the group which received full RWSA treatment exhibited a significant reduction of bullying, higher empathic attitudes, and higher self-esteem in comparison to the partial intervention group and the control group (3e).

4.2 Knowledge Impact

4.2.1 Promote Community Awareness and Participation in the Rehabilitation of Offenders

Lo and Wong co-organized the annual **NGO Forum** with the Correctional Services Department (CSD) over 12 years (2007-2018) to raise public awareness and involve NGOs in the community reintegration of offenders. About **1,500** NGO volunteers, practitioners, and CSD staff attended the events, focusing on a different theme each year, between October 2013 and 2018. An evaluation study of a sample of 139 participants in 2018 suggested that the forums broadened the participants'

perspective toward offender rehabilitation and community reintegration. Those who attended multiple forums reported higher positive changes in their perspectives. The forums facilitated exchange between CityU, CSD, and NGOs, and enhanced the quality of services the NGOs provide (5.7).

4.2.2 Hosting International Conferences on Outreach Work

Lo and Wong's pioneering work has enabled youth justice practitioners in Asia to share and disseminate best practices in working with youth-at-risk. They co-organized the first and second **International Outreach Work Conference** in Asia in 2015 and 2019 with the Correctional Services Department and 23 NGOs from Hong Kong, Macau, Singapore, and Guangzhou. Over **300** youth workers attended the conferences, and the themes were chosen to address the various youth-at-risk issues in the region, with the first conference focused on issues such as gangs, female delinquency, and violence and the second addressing drug abuse, hidden youth, and signature programs.

4.2.3 Influencing Practice through Invited Talks to Practitioners (selected examples)

Lo and Wong have inspired over 2,000 participants to further develop innovative and effective models to address youth issues through sharing their research at the following events.

- **U.S. Department of Defense** (2015): Lo trained 50 U.S. Department of Defense officials, career military officers, and foreign area officers serving in different regions to familiarize them with the basic parameters and implications of criminal networks in China (5.8).
- **Vietnam** (2015): Lo trained 100 youth work practitioners in Hanoi and another 100 in Ho Chi Minh City at the eight-day International Social Work Capacity Building Workshop.
- **Singapore** (2015, 2016, 2017, 2018): Wong and Lo were plenary speakers at conferences hosted by the Singapore government, NGOs, and the National University of Singapore.
- **Taiwan** (2017): Lo was invited to speak at the International Symposium on Ex-Drug Offenders' Re-entry/Transition organized by the Taiwan After-care Association and attended by 250 after-care officers.
- **Guangzhou** (March 2019): Lo was invited to speak in a symposium for 300 community correction workers organized by Morning Light Social Work Centre.

4.2.4 Invitation for Interviews by Local and International Media

Lo and Wong's research has been widely disseminated locally and globally, and they have frequently appeared in the media. Google Search returns over 18,000 results for profiles and reports referring to Wong by his Chinese name. Lo has also frequently been invited by the international media to share his research into Triad gang activities (5.10), including 37 invitations from national (Russia, Germany, France, Australia, USA, UK, Norway, Portugal, Italy, Japan, Belgium) and international media, and 6 invitations from local and specialist press. |

(5) Sources to corroborate the impact

- 5.1) The Social Work Bureau, Macau Government
- 5.2) The Ministry of Social & Family Development, Singapore Government
- 5.3) HKPA - Guangzhou
- 5.4) The Greater Bay Area
- 5.5) The Centre for Restoration of Human Relationships
- 5.6) The Association of Principals of Secondary Schools
- 5.7) The Correctional Services Department, Hong Kong Government
- 5.8) The U.S. Department of Defense
- 5.9) Lo T.W. et al. (2014) *Follow-up Study Report on Youth Problems & Youth Services in Macau SAR: A Blueprint for the New Millennium*. Macau Government. (in Chinese), available online at: http://www.ias.gov.mo/wp-content/themes/ias/tw/stat/download/AdolescentInternetAddictResearchReport_20150429.pdf
- 5.10) Selected International Media Interviews with Wing Lo |